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Reducing Chronic Malnutrition in Totonicapán, Guatemala

UNICEF Canada Proposal



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Overview

Many children in Guatemala face shocking levels of vulnerability, remaining largely invisible to the rest of the world and excluded from basic rights entitled to every child. About one half of all Guatemalan children under 18 years of age – 3.7 million – live in poverty. Conditions are dramatically worse for indigenous children and adolescents, some eight out of 10 of whom are underprivileged. The nutritional health of children is equally dire: one half of all Guatemalan children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition, lacking the adequate food and nutrient intake needed for normal growth.

Caused primarily by insufficient food intake, malnutrition can irreversibly damage a child's physical and cognitive development. It is often referred to as an invisible emergency because the full force of its threat lies hidden from immediate view. A chronic state of undernourishment cripples children's growth, renders them susceptible to disease, dulls their intellect, diminishes their motivation and saps their energy.

Guatemala's soaring levels of chronic malnutrition rank sixth highest in the world and social investment within the country continues to be one of the lowest in Latin America. Conquering malnutrition involves targeting its underlying factors – inequitable access to essential foods, infectious and parasitic diseases, a lack of basic health care and poor sanitary conditions. It also involves addressing root causes such as low investment in basic public services.

Chronic malnutrition affects Guatemala's indigenous children disproportionately, and is highest among children in Totonicapán, one of the country's most rural and indigenous provinces. The majority of families in Totonicapán live in extreme poverty, and with low household incomes, families struggle to meet the basic needs of their children, including providing basic food and nutrition for their growth and development. With little public investment in Totonicapán, families are left without the basic public services that would help reduce child malnutrition, such as prenatal care for pregnant women, nutrition education, complementary food, and immunization.

The Government of Guatemala has recently committed to changing this situation and improving children's health and wellbeing, allocating resources under a two-year plan to reduce chronic malnutrition among children in Totonicapán. Working in partnership with the government, UNICEF aims to help break the vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition affecting tens of thousands of children in Totonicapán. The plan works to strengthen the comprehensive care provided to children and mothers in Totonicapán by integrating existing programmes and services available to them. It's designed to promote lasting improvements in food and nutrition, helping local governments strengthen and sustain food and nutrition programmes, enabling communities better access to sufficient and nutritious food on a regular basis.



Reducing Chronic Malnutrition Programme

With more than half a century of expertise in nutrition programmes, UNICEF is well positioned to help reduce chronic malnutrition among children in Guatemala.

Through this programme, UNICEF aims to improve the nutritional health of 26,600 children under three in Totonicapán's eight municipalities by improving nutrition and comprehensive health care, and increasing nutrition and hygiene education for families. UNICEF's support will help provide much needed micronutrients to chronically malnourished children in Totonicapán, support treatment of the most acutely malnourished children, and help parents in the community understand how to improve care for their children through key dietary nutrients and healthy hygiene practices.

This immediate support is expected to decrease chronic malnutrition rates among Totonicapán's children by five to 10 per cent within a two-year period. Equally important, this support will also strengthen essential municipal programmes to continue improving the long-term health and nutrition of children long after the completion of the programme.

Key Programme Components and Activities:

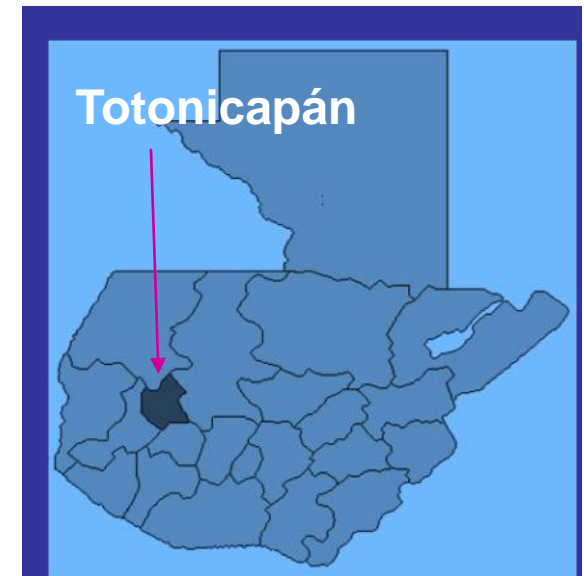
1) Strengthening comprehensive care for children

Providing vital food supplies for the urgent treatment of the most severely malnourished children

Acutely malnourished children require special nutritional support in order to recover and regain their strength. Without urgent nutritional recovery including nutrient-rich therapeutic and supplementary food, many children are at risk of suffering long-term physical and cognitive damage, or death. UNICEF will provide food supplies for the nutritional recovery of 950 severely malnourished children under five in Totonicapán.

Training community facilitators to monitor children's growth and strengthen care

UNICEF will help train 144 community facilitators to provide crucial community outreach throughout Totonicapán's eight municipalities. Community facilitators play an important role in surveying children's nutritional health and monitoring growth levels to identify if a child is growing adequately and to take actions to treat a malnourished child. They act as a liaison between families and health facilities — identifying the nutritional status of children enables comprehensive care at health centres to be provided to those who are most in need. Surveying children's nutritional health and monitoring their growth enables community facilitators to effectively respond to malnutrition and to help communities better understand and access sufficient food and nutrition in the future.



Located in southwestern Guatemala, **Totonicapán** is one of Guatemala's most rural and indigenous provinces, and one of the areas in the country with the least access to government services. It has a population of approximately 430,500, and some 98 per cent of people are of indigenous Quiché origin. Approximately 70 per cent of children under five in Totonicapán are affected by chronic malnutrition, and the number of children suffering from acute malnutrition is dangerously high – more than double the national average in Guatemala.

Providing essential vitamins and minerals to pregnant women and children

UNICEF is helping to provide vital micronutrients to 26,000 children under three in Totonicapán by distributing *Sprinkles* – micronutrient-filled sachets that can be used to fortify any home-made food with essential vitamins and minerals. *Sprinkles* help nourish vulnerable children and help them regain adequate levels of health and nutrition. UNICEF is also helping to reduce anaemia among pregnant women in Totonicapán by supporting the distribution of iron and folic acid tablets.

2) Increasing knowledge and skills among parents and communities

Promoting food and nutrition education

UNICEF helps organize social networks at the local level, especially women's groups, where community members learn how to take a more active role in the healthy care of their children and families. Trained by nutrition educators, participants gain knowledge about adequate feeding practices, health and nutrition for their family, and hygiene education. UNICEF will provide training materials to 953 women's groups to help facilitate participative sessions. Training materials include printed educational pamphlets used with families, cooking tools to demonstrate adequate nutritional combinations of locally available foods, dolls that can help to demonstrate position and tips for adequate breastfeeding, and writing tools.

Promoting safe water and hygiene education

Safe water, sanitation and hygiene are primary ways to prevent waterborne-diseases that can exacerbate malnutrition in children. UNICEF will provide promotional and training materials to promote hygienically safe water and basic sanitation among households and communities throughout Totonicapán.

Raising community awareness

Awareness-raising materials in communities, such as banners and audiovisual spots, will help inform families of care options that are available to them. These will also help strengthen families' understanding of their right to adequate health care for their children.

3) Improving municipalities' ability to manage and reduce chronic malnutrition

UNICEF aims to strengthen municipal and local capacities in Totonicapán to ensure community members can access adequate nutritious food on a regular basis in the future. This plays a critical role in ensuring the continuity and sustainability of nutrition initiatives. UNICEF will help promote municipal participation in food and nutrition initiatives, supporting the development and management of food and nutrition plans in Totonicapán's eight municipalities.

Sprinkles: Life-saving vitamins and minerals



Sprinkles are micronutrient-filled sachets used to fortify food with essential vitamins and minerals, helping to keep children adequately nourished.

The multi-micronutrient powder was developed collaboratively by UNICEF, health researchers and businesses to address childhood anaemia.

Sprinkles are given to children less than five years of age and are simple to use; the powder is mixed with any home-made food without significantly changing its taste, texture or colour. One *Sprinkles* sachet each day helps keep children nourished by providing them with daily requirements of iron and other micronutrients.

Programme Beneficiaries

Municipalities of Totonicapán	Children 6 - 36 months old	Pregnant women	Breastfeeding mothers
Momostenango	8,156	3,507	1,633
San Andrés Xecul	1,940	834	389
San Bartolo Aguas Calientes	836	359	167
San Cristóbal Totonicapán	2,490	1,071	499
San Francisco El Alto	4,330	1,862	867
Sta. Lucía La Reforma	1,327	570	266
Sta. María Chiquimula	3,193	1,373	639
Totonicapán	4,330	1,862	867
Total	26,602	11,438	5,327

Total Programme Cost (2 years): CAD \$690,000

Sample Costs:

- Sprinkles micronutrient-filled sachets for 10,860 children: CAD \$50,000
- Vital food supplies to treat 471 acutely malnourished children: CAD \$20,000
- Training for four community facilitators: CAD \$1,050

Impact

A child's nutrition and wellbeing is the foundation of a healthy, productive society. This programme will empower families and communities in Totonicapán to become agents of change in overcoming childhood malnutrition, and ensuring children receive the essential vitamins, minerals and care needed to grow up healthy.

We hope you will consider investing in these vital nutrition initiatives that will help save lives and provide a healthy start to life for more children in Totonicapán.

Children from the municipality of Santa María Chiquimula in Totonicapán

