



**SPOTLIGHT:**

# Central America Emergency Food Relief and Resilience Project



**The COVID-19 pandemic compounded economic and social challenges across rural communities in Central America.**

Responding to these deepening challenges, particularly food insecurity and corresponding health declines, Episcopal Relief & Development created the Central America Emergency Food Relief & Resilience Project through generous support from the S.L. Gimbel Foundation, a component fund of The Inland Empire Community Foundation, and a private donor.

Launched in 2021, the project partnered with the [Episcopal Diocese of El Salvador](#), the Episcopal Church of Guatemala’s Diocesan Development Office, the [Anglican Agency for the Development of Honduras of the Episcopal Church of Honduras](#) (AANGLIDESH), and the [Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua](#) (CEPAD), to procure and deliver **4,468,610 meals to 28,430 people** within **6,649 households** through **20 food distributions** across El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

Implementing partners leveraged existing volunteer networks and long-standing relationships in project communities. As distribution began, partners quickly realized the extent to which these relationships were essential to their work, the project’s success and its tremendous impact. Partners in all four countries reported a significant growth in trust and cohesion between staff, volunteers and stakeholders because of the intense, engaged and prolonged interactions the project generated.

ABOVE: Alex Segura (right), the Field Coordinator for the Dioceses in Guatemala, works in communities in Oratorio to distribute food.

**2021 BY THE NUMBERS**

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OVER  
**4.4M**  
MEALS DELIVERED

TO  
**28K**  
PEOPLE

WITHIN  
**6.6K**  
HOUSEHOLDS

Country	# of Volunteers	Type of Community Contributions	Role(s)
El Salvador	39	Clergy, local church members, diocesan staff, health promoters	Food procurement, packaging, registration and distribution
Guatemala	85	Local church members (clergy and lay) and some savings group members	Surveys, registration, distribution, receipt confirmations
Honduras	175	Local church members (clergy and lay)	Surveys, registration, distribution, receipt confirmations
Nicaragua	175	Local community leaders, pastors and youth members of CEPAD's Community Development Committees	Support coordination of food relief registration and distribution.
<b>Total # of Volunteers</b>	<b>474</b>		

Episcopal Relief & Development's Program Officers closely supported implementing partners and local staff and volunteers as they engaged in the arduous task of data collection and data entry for every household as well as data from the baseline (pre-distribution) survey of select households. Episcopal Relief & Development invested in "virtually" bringing together all four partners through a webinar aimed at training staff on household registration, effective monitoring and reporting, as well as available project tools. Episcopal Relief & Development's analysis of baseline and endline data centered on three key indicators to measure household change (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1**

### **Impact of Emergency Food Relief: Beyond Alleviating Hunger**

**Household expenditure patterns:** Household food expenditures decreased at endline in all four countries by an average of **33%** and total household expenditures fell by an average of **13.3%**. Household expenses such as **education (25%), health (9%), fuel (8%) and farming (23%) increased** in all countries. Project qualitative survey responses suggest this increase is due to households' reduced food expenditures.

**Household saving patterns:** At project close, monthly household savings increased in all four countries by an average of **163%**. Partners reported participants had been able to save in food procurement and use the savings to purchase planting supplies, buy medicines, pay for school fees, buy clothes and shoes for their children and repair their houses.

**Household patterns of coping with scarcity:** At endline, food recipients felt their households had enough food or enough money to buy food. At project close, implementing partners expressed the need, in 2022, to continue with food distribution efforts alongside traditional savings and health-focused development programs, in the hope of targeting a larger number of vulnerable households following the same selection criteria and expanding to new locations.

Data analysis revealed both the benefits of the food distribution as well as the perils of households' continued food insecurity. As the 2021 activities drew to a close, implementing partners in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador expressed the desire and need to continue with another year of food distribution alongside their traditional savings and health-focused development programs while our partner in Nicaragua determined that they are prepared to transition programming exclusively towards more widespread resilience efforts.

## ► Key Learnings and Adaptations

**Price variability and the unavailability of some commodities:** With the COVID-19 surge and relative restrictions across the region, implementing partners had to cope with commodity availability issues and/or price variations. Implementing partners reported significant fluctuations in the availability of key food bag items such as corn, milk, vegetable oil and salt. This was mostly due to the pandemic's secondary impacts on global markets that caused shifts in key agricultural items (i.e., fertilizers, fuel, etc.), impacting food production and costs. Despite national economic fluctuations, the established relationships with local supermarkets facilitated continued commodity procurement. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, pre-signed agreements with local vendors ensured price stability, while in Guatemala, when availability was a challenge, the partner adapted by substituting oatmeal for corn flour, or beans for a corn and soy mix.

**Slow recovery and persistent food insecurity:** Spikes in COVID-19 cases and the lingering housing challenge triggered by the 2020 hurricanes continue to impact households' ability to feel food secure in the long term. Implementing partners recognize their newly acquired capacities and deeper stakeholder/volunteer relationships and will build on this foundation as they expand their food relief distribution efforts in 2022. Specifically, Guatemala and Honduras will increase the quantity of food in each bag, enabling households to access more meals and, in El Salvador and Guatemala, the partners will promote household gardens and possibly use deaconry land for shared household cultivation.

**The 2022 project anticipates providing food inputs for over 5 million meals to 20,000 people across 5,600 households** with the focus on meeting two or more of the following vulnerability criteria: job/economic loss due to COVID-19 and/or the 2020 hurricanes; single parent and female-headed or senior-headed household; caring for individuals with health problems or disabilities; and/or relying on principal earnings from the informal economy.

## Improvements in children's health

The food relief project is positively impacting targeted households' child health and overall household diet with results that often exceeded partners' expectations. In rural El Salvador where the project operates, the majority of marginalized communities lack diversity in their diets. The food distribution project not only provided balanced and nutritious food bags to each participating household but Dr. Daniella, the project's lead physician, seized the opportunity to raise awareness among the population around the need for varied and nutritious diets to improve overall health outcomes.

As such, the partner made it a point to ensure that at least 204 children under 12 were screened at baseline and endline. The endline showed that severe malnutrition had dropped from 3% at baseline to zero at endline, while moderate malnutrition decreased by 7%. Items such as milk were included in the meal bag as they are too expensive for at-risk households to buy, yet constitute a key item for healthy development of young children. One of the food recipients, a mother of three young children said: "I'd love to give my children milk, but it is too expensive. I don't usually have money to buy it. My children usually drink coffee for breakfast because it is cheaper than milk." Dr. Daniella added: "As a doctor, I am proud to hear how communities are better off as a result of this project. School principals are testifying on the improvement seen in school results, and as a physician seeing the level of malnutrition decrease is very impactful."

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**MY CHILDREN USUALLY  
DRINK COFFEE FOR  
BREAKFAST BECAUSE IT  
IS CHEAPER THAN MILK.”**

**Strengthened relationships with and within communities and networks:** Partners witnessed growth in trust and cohesion between staff, volunteers, participants and stakeholders because of the prolonged interactions the project generated. In Guatemala, at project start, collection of household data was not easy with staff encountering refusals when asking families to provide copies of information related to their households and land, but by project close, the partner reported an increased sense of ease with participants engaging willingly in project surveys and placing their trust in the process.



ABOVE: Members of the Guatemala-based Oratorio Savings with Education (SwE) group receive their household food distribution. SwE groups provide savings-focused, relevant and high impact training in small business, finance and health.



ABOVE LEFT: Angel traveled by mule from an isolated mountain village of El Jasmin in Nicaragua to receive a food bag for his mother, father and siblings. The meals helped Angel's family save money to rebuild their farm, which was destroyed during the 2021 hurricanes, and cover urgent household expenses such as medicine and clothing. ABOVE RIGHT: Women displaying the harvest—chayote, a gourd vegetable—from their community garden (El Salvador).



## ANNEX A:

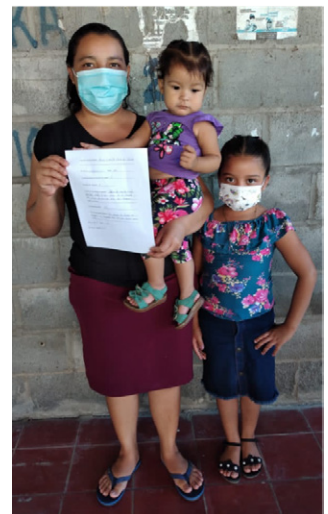
# Voices from the Region



While the food relief project was successful in alleviating hunger in vulnerable communities, stories emerging from the field also show that food relief efforts have contributed to unlocking resilience at the household level. At project start, households reported that on average 50% of their monthly expenditures went to food. At project end, households reported only spending on average 39% on food, or an overall average monthly saving per household of \$16.80. Through these savings, households found the means to meet other necessities such as education or health care, as well as engage in economic recovery and resiliency-building entrepreneurial activities.

### El Salvador

- ▶ **Maura** is 27 years old and lives with her husband and two children in Salinas del Potrero, El Salvador. When the 2020 hurricane hit her community, Maura's household experienced a significant loss in agricultural livelihood income. During endline administration, Maura expressed appreciation for the months of food assistance that enabled her to significantly save as her family's resources were not spent exclusively on the household's sustenance. Specifically, Maura was able to purchase a blender for \$75. With her new blender, she has started a small business making and selling fruit drinks. Maura's new business is currently supplementing her husband's reduced agricultural income and helping her household to recover.
- ▶ **Ana** is 42 years old and also lives in Salinas del Potrero, El Salvador. Ana currently lives with her son and her mother. Following the death of her only brother, Ana became the primary caretaker of her mother who lives with chronic kidney disease, hypertension and asthma. The additional caretaking responsibilities put a strain on household resources as her husband was the main provider. As a recipient of the food distributions, Ana declared that



ABOVE: Maura with her two daughters (El Salvador).

she was finally able to start saving. She proudly states that she was able to start her own small business, making and selling tamales, a traditional Salvadoran dish. Last month, Ana's husband tragically passed away due to COVID-19 complications. The small business started because of the food relief support became a true resiliency safety-net for Ana and her family. Her small entrepreneurial initiative has helped her to cover the expenses of her late husband's funeral and is now the main source of income for her household.

## Nicaragua

- ▶ **Juana** is a widow living in Jamaica, a village in the Matagalpa Department in the central part of Nicaragua. Given the community's location, there are limited sources of employment available. Juana explains, "I work with a few other women for a farmer by tending to herbs on his land. I wash and pack them for him to sell at the market...many of us work one day a week now that COVID-19 has impacted the market." When she works, Juana earns 90 to 120 córdobas per day (equivalent to \$2.50 to \$3.50). In addition to supporting her household, she is also grandmother and primary caregiver to her 11-year-old grandson named Cristiam, who was born with severe physical and mental disabilities. He is unable to walk or talk and needs constant attention and medical care.
- ▶ **Cristiam's** father abandoned the family and earlier this year, his mother fell seriously ill and passed away after suffering a stroke. "I think she had COVID-19, but without any testing here, we do not know for sure...Now, I have to work harder, I am taking care of my grandson, I feel committed to take care of him and myself." With limited access to employment opportunities and additional caregiving responsibilities, Juana faced difficult decisions in terms of how to allocate her limited resources. "The food project came as a great blessing from God, since in those precise moments my daughter had just passed away and I was left helpless. I feel very grateful...I have no words to express my gratitude, other than to give thanks to God, and pray our brothers from the CEPAD program and the brothers abroad who very generously share with all of us."

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I WORK WITH  
A FEW OTHER  
WOMEN FOR  
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Episcopal  
Relief & Development

For over 80 years, Episcopal Relief & Development has been working with supporters and partners to create lasting change around the world. Each year the organization facilitates healthier, more fulfilling lives for close to 3 million people struggling with hunger, poverty, disaster and disease. Episcopal Relief & Development leverages the expertise and resources of Anglican and other community-based partners in the organization's work with women, children, climate and disaster response to deliver measurable and sustainable change.

To learn more about the Central America Emergency Food Relief and Resilience Project, contact [Emily Bloom](#), Director of Institutional Partnerships at Episcopal Relief & Development.