



FACES OF HUNGER IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Food and nutritional insecurity in the Dry Corridor as a consequence of the hurricane season, drought, and Covid-19

For many households in the Central American Dry Corridor, hunger is their daily bread. The extreme droughts that give this Corridor its name, along with the tropical storms and hurricanes in 2020, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the steps taken to contain its spread will make hunger pangs a common feeling in 2021.

This document presents the findings of a research study conducted in the four countries that make up the Dry Corridor: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The Consortium of Humanitarian Organizations used a survey to measure the food security and nutrition status of 3,800 households in the region, based on internationally-recognized indicators. The analysis casts a special focus on vulnerable groups such as women and indigenous families.

The study considers the impact of extreme weather phenomena and the pandemic to present projections for the coming months. Reducing structural vulnerability and building disaster preparedness and response capacity with a gender lens and an inclusive approach are the essential ingredients to change this dangerous diet.

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Cover photo: [Farmer from San Antonio del Mosco, El Salvador] Photo: OXFAM / Alfredo Carias



European Union
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1. INTRODUCTION

The basic elements in the formula for hunger all mix in the Central American Dry Corridor: structural poverty, government indifference, and vulnerability to the effects of climate change.¹ The Dry Corridor, which covers a broad swath of Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, derives its name from the extreme droughts that can stretch into the weeks when the rainy season would normally begin, affecting agricultural production.² Deforestation, extractive industries, pollution, soil erosion, and inappropriate agricultural practices further harm soil quality.³ Subsistence farming is the predominant livelihood in the region, making land access fundamental for small farmers' households to plant and grow food staples.⁴ Land degradation and adverse climate conditions reduce farming families' yields, especially affecting the poorest households.⁵

Climate change is a serious threat for the developing world and an important obstacle to continued gains in poverty reduction (Jacobs, 2006), and its effects in the Dry Corridor are stark. Droughts in 2018 and 2019 led to crop losses and a severe food security crisis that affected the 10.5 million people living in this part of the region (FAO, 2016). 2020 saw a record number of tropical storms and hurricanes in a single season. Tropical storms Amanda and Cristobal, and Hurricanes Eta and Iota caused flooding, landslides, and damages to homes and crops.⁶

The pandemic and the steps taken to curb the spread of the virus also had a negative impact on farming families' production dynamics, on informal workers, and farm laborers. The governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala distributed foodstuffs, vouchers, or cash to affected households. In general terms, however, the social policies have been insufficient.⁷ On top of this scenario, a hegemonic patriarchal and discriminatory culture keeps large sectors of the population such as women, indigenous people, people with disabilities, children, and older adults in even more critical situations.

The existing inequality is aggravated by climate drivers and social phenomena such as violence and the growth of criminal groups, especially gangs. The combination of these elements causes displacement and migration.

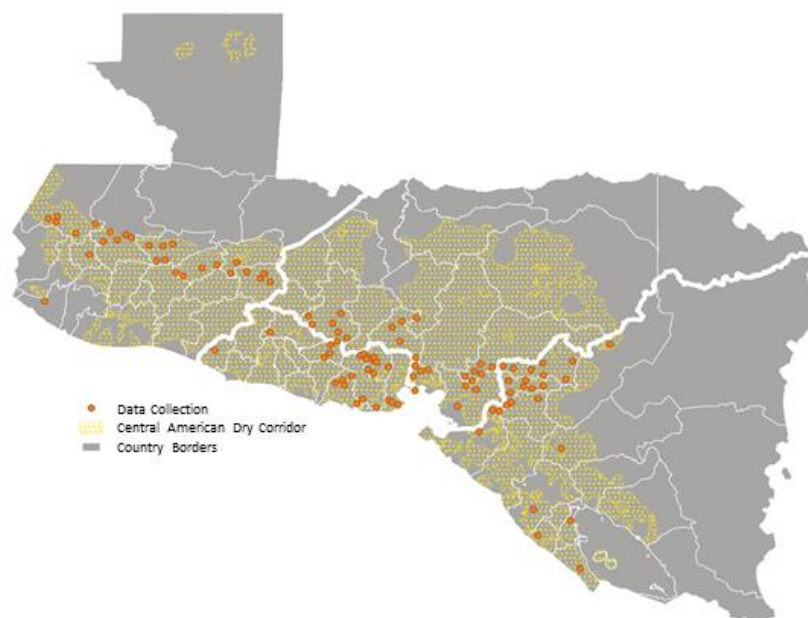
This document produced by the Consortium of Humanitarian Organizations working in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua with support from the European Union, made up of Oxfam, Acción Contra el Hambre, COOPI, Trócaire, and We World-GVC seeks to anticipate a focalized humanitarian response to reduce vulnerability, and improve preparedness and response by populations exposed to internal and external factors through an inclusive approach. To this end, the study monitors and evaluates food security in the Dry Corridor and explains the vulnerability in the region, based in families' voices and offering estimated figures for the population facing food insecurity, that is, the population living with hunger each day.

2. METHODOLOGY

Faces of Hunger in Central America presents a panorama of the food security and nutrition (FSN) situation in the Central American Dry Corridor, considering the seasonal hunger period, the Covid-19 pandemic, and other phenomena that have further impoverished families in the region, especially the most vulnerable households. The study was conducted as part of the *project to maximize the impact of humanitarian aid in the Central American Dry Corridor, improving the generation and dissemination of food security and nutritional data*, implemented by the Consortium of Humanitarian Organizations working together with local partners in Northern Central America.

The research is focused on the countries that are part of the Central American CA-4 Border Agreement: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The food security and nutritional analysis for the sector was based on a sample of 100 municipalities in the CA-4 countries. Surveys were initially planned for a total of 3,700 households; 3,859 interviews were ultimately conducted, representing a total of 452,806 families. This report, however, focuses-in on data from 75 municipalities for which there were sufficient surveys conducted to ensure a statistically representative sample. The interviews were conducted from October 20 to November 13, 2020, to understand the perceptions of Dry Corridor inhabitants on the impact of tropical storms and hurricanes, and how these phenomena affected their households and livelihoods.

The research measured food security in the sector through an analysis of indicators recognized by the World Food Program (WFP) and the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance (FANTA) project, in collaboration with the FAO. The data collection and analysis allowed the Consortium of Humanitarian Organizations to estimate the percentage of the population facing food security, that is, the number of people in the Dry Corridor without enough to eat properly.



Map 1. Data collection areas Source: Produced internally with data from IICA

3. VULNERABILITY TO MULTIPLE HAZARDS

Recurring droughts in the last decade have given the Central American Dry Corridor its name. These droughts are the climate causes of one of the most lamentable expressions of inequality: seasonal hunger. This type of hunger is preventable. It is possible to predict how many people it will affect, and where. Nonetheless, state mitigation efforts are limited. Seasonal hunger is cyclical, recurring, and avoidable. Corruption, limited access to quality public services, and unemployment all aggravate the situation.⁸

The precarious living conditions for the residents of the Dry Corridor feed growing social discontent, which has been a driving force behind phenomena such as the migrant caravans that formed beginning in 2018. Other social trends such as violence continue to plague the region: Over 8,000 homicides were reported in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua in 2020.

On top of these multiple hazards, Covid-19 has impacted health and the economy of the region. To slow the spread of the virus, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras imposed strict lockdown restrictions starting in March 2020. These restrictions had a negative impact on people in the region who depended on their daily labor to earn enough to eat and meet their other needs.⁹ Most of the people in the Dry Corridor fall into this category. In contrast, the Government of Nicaragua adopted a less restrictive policy, but one that was also less prudent.

As a result of these trends, the countries that make up the Central American Integration System (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize, and the Dominican Republic) lost 8.3 million jobs due to Covid-19.¹⁰ The unemployment rate will likely leave the families in the Dry Corridor deeper in poverty. The levels of extreme poverty in Guatemala could grow from 19.8% to 22.7%; from 18% to 22.8% in Nicaragua, from 18.7% to 22.8% in Honduras, and from 7.4% to 11.9% in El Salvador.¹¹ These conditions suggest that a significant number of people will seek informal employment in 2021, without social or healthcare benefits, or seek other alternatives to generate the revenue they need to meet their basic needs and provide for their families.¹² These options may focus on irregular migration or other activities that could put families fundamental rights, dignity, and lives at risk.

Even the lockdown restrictions have not been able to avoid infections and deaths from Covid-19. As of February 1, 2021, the CA-4 countries had reported over 336,000 people infected and over 11,000 deaths.¹³

Extreme climate conditions have also impacted the Dry Corridor in the past year. The *La Niña* phenomenon in 2020 led to a particularly heavy rainy season.¹⁴ The rainfall that could have been a positive occurrence in this drought-stricken region coincided with a record hurricane season that brought the highest number of tropical storms through the region since tracking began for such data. Tropical Storms Amanda and Cristobal and Hurricanes Eta and Iota led to widespread crop losses and damage to the other livelihoods of the most vulnerable population.¹⁵ In May and June, Tropical Storm Amanda affected El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, impacting 457,000 people and causing 34 fatalities.¹⁶¹⁷ In October and November, Hurricane Eta affected Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, impacting 2.5 million people.¹⁸ ¹⁹

Extreme rain affected poor households all across the region. According to estimates by UNICEF, the tropical storms and hurricanes affected 4.6 million people in Central America. These storms damaged crops and productive lands in the Central American Dry Corridor, as well as livestock and aquaculture assets and infrastructure, causing a critical reduction in

food and income sources in the short and medium term.²⁰ These impacts could extend the seasonal hunger period into August 2021.

The pandemic in the communities of El Salvador: When it rains, it pours.

Imagine living in Tacuba, the municipality in Ahuachapán with the highest rates of extreme poverty and malnutrition in El Salvador. 70% of the inhabitants depend on agriculture production that has been severely limited for years due to the droughts. Job opportunities in Tacuba tend to be fleeting, and in rural areas where the droughts have hit the hardest, work was already scarce.

That is where Rosa Soriano lives. She survives without a steady job - much less with social welfare protections or health insurance - and tries to get different jobs each day: cleaning houses, caring for children, or working in the fields. All of this on top of caring for her own family, of course. When the pandemic hit, Rosa found herself under lockdown measures, and the fear of infection kept her and many other women from her community from continuing to work.

Without a daily income there is no food for families in Tacuba, a very serious problem in a city where child malnutrition is the leading cause of death among children. Despite this uphill battle, her family is able to procure some basic food: tortillas, beans, rice, and eggs. It is a diet based on carbohydrates without much of a nutritional balance.

“If we have a pound of rice (almost 500 grams), we use half for one meal and half for the other, because we have to be careful with our food. Otherwise, we will have nothing left to eat. We have had to assess what we have available. I think: If I don't have enough for today, how am I going to make it through tomorrow if things stay the same”.



Even though Central America is responsible for only 0.5% of the global greenhouse gas emissions, the region is among the most affected by climate change.²¹ According to the Germanwatch Climate Risk Index, Guatemala was the most affected country from the region from 2009 to 2019, sitting at number 16 overall on the list. Next comes El Salvador in position 25, Nicaragua at 38, and Honduras at 42 on the index.²² The hazards driven by climate change intersect with structural poverty in the region. And the consequences? More fragile economies, deeper inequality and poverty, growing socio-political instability, and increased levels of already-high social violence.

4. VOICES FROM THE DRY CORRIDOR

The 3,859 households interviewed for this research were drawn from 100 municipalities in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua in the Dry Corridor in Northern Central America. The families surveyed had an average of four members. Nonetheless, 17.6% of the families were made up of five people, and 11.7% of six. Many other households have more members, living in poor homes with parents, children, or other relatives to feed, care for, and support.

Most of the respondents work in agriculture: in some cases this is subsistence agriculture for their households and in other cases as fieldworkers, almost always as temporary farmhands. Although all of the respondents are in a vulnerable situation, indigenous communities and women bear a greater burden.

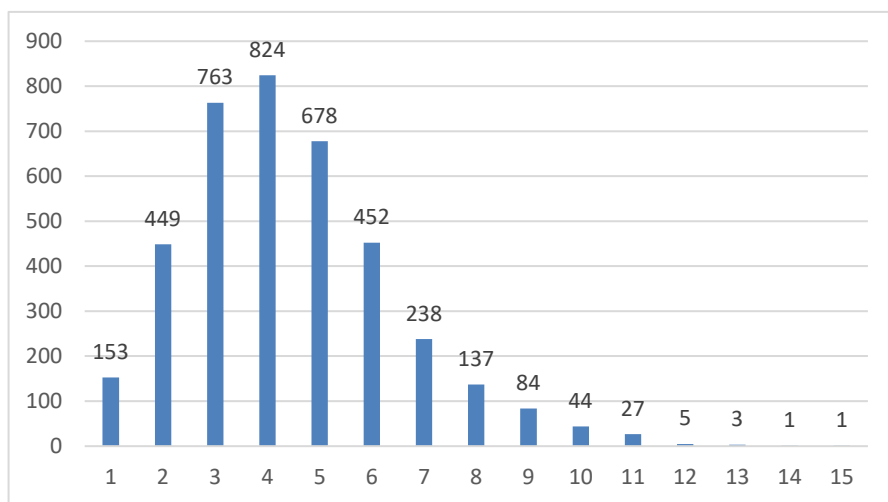


Figure 1: Number of people per household. Source: Produced internally.

27.2% of the households surveyed report identifying as indigenous peoples. This sector included the Quiché peoples in Guatemala, Chorotega in Nicaragua, and Lenca in Honduras. The rest of the households reported that they did not identify as indigenous, identified as mestizo, or did not respond. Another 0.5% of respondents in El Salvador report having had to migrate and leave their places of origin due to security fears or in search of new job opportunities.

Women also play an important role and face greater vulnerability than other members of the family. Of the total number of respondent households, 2.6% include at least one pregnant woman, and 9% are home to at least one woman who is breastfeeding. Women take responsibility for raising children and for many other daily household tasks. 48.8% of the families report that head-of-household responsibility is shared between both parents, dividing responsibilities between men and women. In 26.6% of the cases, respondents reported that men are the decision-makers in the household, and 24.6% of the households responded that women play this role. Examining who is responsible for domestic and household work reveals a much more unequal distribution. These responsibilities fall exclusively to women in 69% of households, while 28% of respondents said that the work was shared, and only 3% reporting that men perform this work.



73%

Non-indigenous people



27%

Indigenous peoples



1%

Migrants

15.5% of families reported having a household member with a physical or mental disability.

“Going hungry” in Nicaragua so that children can eat

In the rural community of Mamel in the municipality of Totogalpa, in the department of Madriz in Northern Nicaragua, the weather gets hot in the dry season and a bit cooler in the rainy season. Drought has been a frequent visitor in recent years and has destroyed agricultural harvests: there is no food and no work.

This is where Martha Inestroza López lives. She is 20 years old and a single mother of two children. Martha and her sons share a home with her father, mother, siblings, and nephews, 10 people in all. Martha’s father is the main breadwinner for the household. On a good day, his work as an agricultural laborer will bring 130 córdobas (4 dollars) home to feed 10 mouths. This poses quite a statistical challenge for the extreme poverty threshold of 2 dollars per person per day, according to the World Bank.

The diet for Martha and her family is similar to the rest of the families in her community: beans, corn, and rice. However, the price of some of these basic grains has risen to the point of being inaccessible, and the household has to substitute other products in their place.

“In the dry season, if there is a drought, the children ask for food and I have to tell them we have nothing. My father tries to find something, at least for all of the children in the family, to be able to have something to eat. The adults in the family try to suppress our hunger to prioritize children; they are growing and it’s not their fault that we are in this situation.”



Aid during the pandemic

Most of the households in the Central American Dry Corridor interviewed for this study do not have any regular supplemental income or food aid. Only 7.2% of the households surveyed receive family remittances. Nonetheless, stakeholders and actors in the area have been working to offer different types of support since the start of the pandemic to mitigate the impact of the movement restrictions in place to reduce the spread of Covid-19.

Nearly one-third of the respondents in the study report having received some sort of aid from their municipal government, non-governmental organizations, the central government, churches, or other entities.

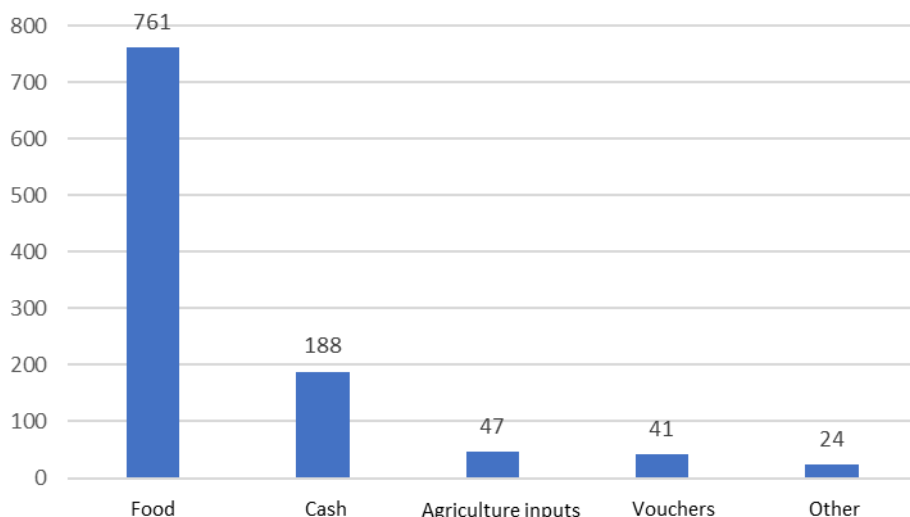


Figure 2: Aid received by the respondent households
Source: Produced internally.

Most of the aid is in the form of food distribution, especially in El Salvador. Cash transfers come in second place, organized by governments in coordination with United Nations agencies and civil society organizations. In Nicaragua, the most widespread aid format used was distribution of vouchers for food products.

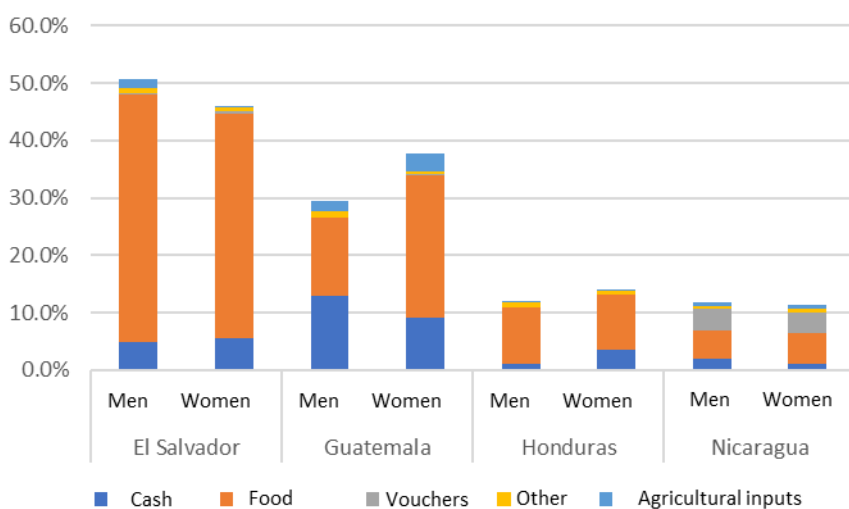


Figure 3: Type of aid received in each country, by respondent sex. Source: Produced internally.

This analysis by country reveals that the highest percentages of aid coverage was in El Salvador, where 43% of the households received food aid. Guatemala is in second place at 22.7%. In Honduras, 9.7% of the respondents reported having received food aid. Nicaragua closes that list at 5.2%.

Some municipalities stand out in food aid distribution. Higher numbers of people received aid in the department of Baja Verapaz in Guatemala, with 81% in the municipality of Granados, 51% in Cubulco, and 39% in El Chol. In the municipality of Retalhuleu, 85% of the respondent households had received agricultural inputs. In El Salvador, 65% of the population in the municipality of Nueva Concepción in the department of Chalatenango reported receiving food aid. Vouchers were used more widely in municipalities such as

Ciudad Antigua in Nicaragua, where 19% of the population received these transfers, and in Ciudad Darío, where 15% of the population also received vouchers.

Aid distribution also varies in between men and women in the four countries. More women than men reported receiving aid in Guatemala and Honduras, while men outpaced women in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Overcoming drought with hope gardens in El Salvador

Orbelina Guevara is 43 years old and lives with 10 relatives in the village of El Chilamo, in the municipality of San Antonio del Mosco in the department of San Miguel. During prolonged drought season, crop losses reached up to 90%, a nearly lethal blow for the families in the community.

In 2018, the drought season wiped out the bean and corn harvest for Orbelina and her family. They ended up having to buy these staple products from others, at higher prices.

Recently, Fundación Campo, a local Oxfam partner organization, trained Orbelina and other women in her community to plant alternative crops that are more tolerant of the difficult climate conditions in the area. Thanks to this training, Orbelina has been able to begin to save the money that she was spending on food and transportation. These savings were essential in the pandemic, allowing her to avoid going to the market to buy food.

“We go hungry when there is a drought, but we can also lose our crops when there is too much rain. Both extremes are bad for us. Having my own garden at home has been a great idea and it has been so beneficial for us.”



5. HUNGER IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN DRY CORRIDOR

86% of the households in the Central American Dry Corridor start and end each day hungry. Severe droughts in the region in 2018 and 2019 undermined the livelihoods of the population that was just beginning to recover from the droughts in 2014 and 2015. By August 2019, the droughts had triggered moderate or severe food insecurity for 72% of the subsistence farmers. The surveys conducted for this study show that matters grew worse in 2020 and hunger worsened.

The results of this report reveal how ethnic and gender identities also condition access to rights for some inhabitants in the Dry Corridor. Women and indigenous peoples are more prone to facing hunger, as they have fewer reserves or a greater family burden; when crops fail, poverty for these households is especially critical.

Without water for food or cleaning in the pandemic

Honorita, her husband and their nine children live in the village of El Chocal, Malacatancito, in the department of Huehuetenango in Guatemala. Honorita is 44 years old and makes her living cleaning homes; her husband has a lung disease that limits his ability to work. She also helps to support her parents by selling small livestock and poultry.

Corn is the main staple for the family and used in different preparations in combination with beans, rice, and eggs.

Honorita's home has never had running water. The nearby well and rivers were abundant in the past, but the well has nearly run dry, a sign of the impact of climate change on Honorita's life. The arrival of the novel coronavirus pandemic caused food shortages in the area, and Honorita does not even have clean water to perform the recommended hygiene practices. The family has a vegetable garden and grain, but it has been difficult to maintain these crops without sufficient water.

"Our crops dry up when there is no rain and not enough water. There used to be water here, it rained more in the past. Now in March and April the well runs dry. The rains might only start in May. Everything is harder when it is so dry."



Precipitation from the 2020 rainy season in the Dry Corridor improved the soils for crops, suggesting that family food security conditions may begin to improve. But the impact of the pandemic and the measures to contain its spread prevented households from procuring the agricultural inputs needed for the yearly planting season (May-August). The effects of these limitations appeared in June 2020, when the percentage of the population in severe food insecurity jumped from 10% to 22%.²³

In addition, Tropical Storms Amanda and Cristobal tore through the region from May 31 to June 2, affecting 44,086 people in Guatemala and leaving 330,000 people in severe food insecurity in El Salvador.²⁴

The data collected for this document by the Consortium of Humanitarian Organizations in 75 municipalities of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua offer a statistically representative sample that describes the following situation for food security:

- **Families are eating less and worse.** Data on the quantity and variety of the family diet in the week leading up to survey show that 23.2% of the households have a poor or borderline food consumption score. 19.9% of the respondent households consume fewer than five out of seven food groups, revealing difficulties in access to food and severe nutritional limitations.
- **Money is short and there is just enough to eat... sometimes.** Food expenses account for over 65% of household spending, in 64.9% of the households surveyed. This indicates that these households are very vulnerable to any reduction in their income or productions. These families' cash revenue is insufficient to bolster their livelihoods or deal with any future crisis.
- **Families are holding on, but sacrificing their futures.** Given their subsistence economy model, 86.2% of the households surveyed have had to resort to coping strategies to try to meet their basic needs. These strategies are not sustainable, and they limit families recovery capacity. A significant number of families have adopted these crisis strategies: 25.4% of households have consumed the seeds that they had set aside for planting, and 25% have reduced their spending on agricultural inputs. Another 19.7% have had to use emergency strategies: 11% of families have sold reproductive livestock, and 5.1% have had to sell their homes or part of their land.
- **Over three-quarters of the population living with hunger.** Based on these indicators, 64% of the respondent households are in mild food insecurity, 19% in moderate food insecurity, and 3% face severe food insecurity. Altogether, 86% of these households are hungry.

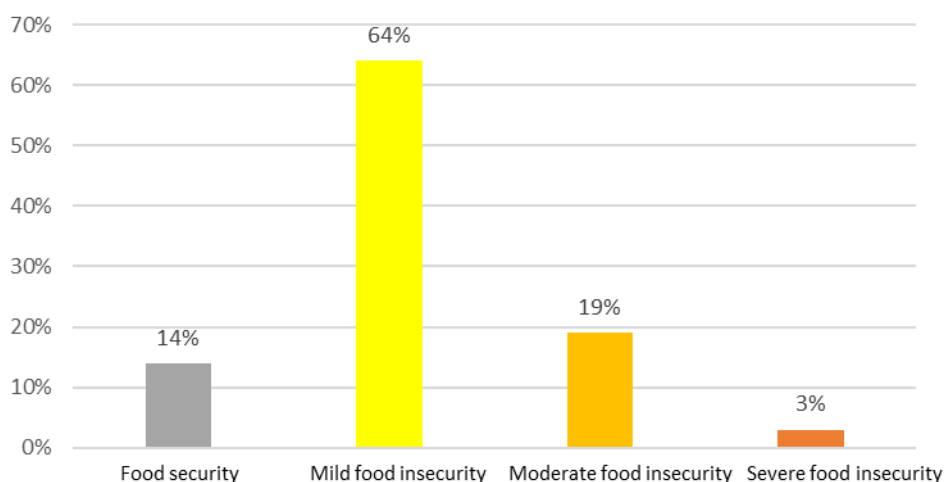


Figure 4: Percentage of people in food insecurity Source: Produced internally.

Although these findings are based on surveys conducted in 75 municipalities, they are statistically representative to allow an estimate of 102,436 households (86%) living in food insecurity across the Central American Dry Corridor. In the disaggregated numbers, Guatemala and Nicaragua have the greatest number of hungry households, at 31% of the recorded cases in each, followed by Honduras at 25% and El Salvador at 12%, approximately.

The municipalities with the highest percentage of the population in severe food insecurity are located in Nicaragua: 56% of the population in Macuelizo and 20% of the population in San Fernando are in severe food insecurity, as well as 20% of the households in Jocotán, in Guatemala. These households have trouble meeting their basic food requirements, and need urgent humanitarian aid to help them survive.



102,436
Households
in food
insecurity

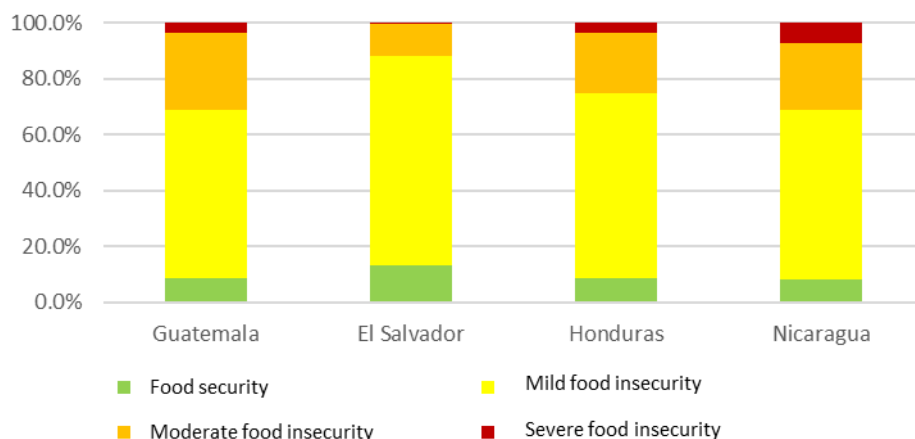


Figure 5: Percentage of people in food insecurity, by country Source: Produced internally.

The gender of the head of household also influences family food security. In households led by both spouses, 2.8% of the families are facing severe food insecurity. This ratio can be compared to the total number of households, in which 3.3% of families with male heads of households and 4.1% of families with women heads of households face severe food insecurity.

Women are more vulnerable in contexts such as the Dry Corridor. Their socially-assigned roles prevent them from meeting their basic needs, and these burdens are exacerbated in situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Women are caring for families, children, older adults, and the sick. When it comes time to eat, women and girls are the last to be served; boys and men are given priority. This situation is the result of cultural factors and is one of the coping strategies of hungry households looking to protect the households "labor force".

Indigenous families are even more exposed to facing hunger as a result of their historic exclusion, discrimination, and institutional neglect. 5% of the households in indigenous communities live in severe food insecurity, compared to 3% of non-indigenous households. An analysis by country shows that the percentage of indigenous families in food insecurity in Honduras reaches 7%, compared to 5% in Guatemala and 3% in Nicaragua. These data were not available in El Salvador, given the low presence of diverse ethnic groups.



7 of 10
Single-parent
households face
severe food
insecurity

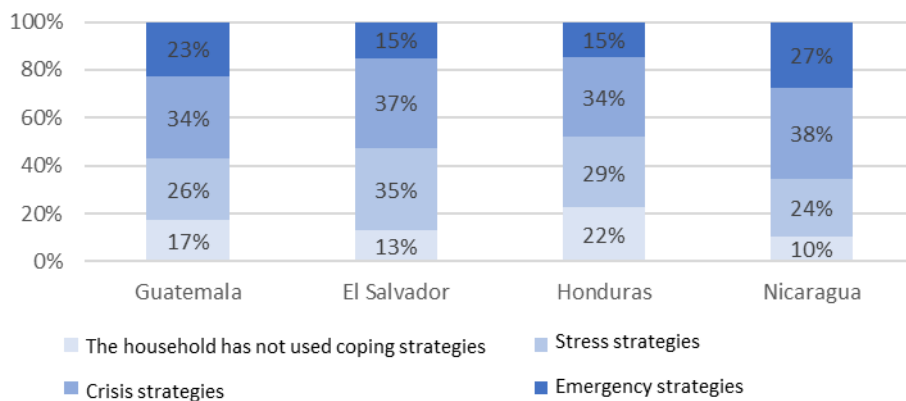


Figure 6: Livelihood coping strategies by country
Source: Produced internally.

6. PERSPECTIVES FOR THE COMING MONTHS

Households in the Dry Corridor faced multiple hazards in 2020 that caused losses to livelihoods, family and community assets, and even human lives. In addition to the extreme droughts that have affected the area for years and caused seasonal hunger in the region, Tropical Storms Amanda and Cristobal and Hurricanes Eta and Iota impacted around 9.6 million people in the four countries.

The surveys conducted for the study do not reflect the impact of these weather phenomena on the population. Nonetheless, calculations based on OCHA reports on the impact of these tropical storms and hurricanes in the study countries suggest that at least 600,000 hectares of farmland for basic grains and commercial production were affected for the second-cycle (*postrera*) harvest. The *postrera* harvest usually occurs in November and is an opportunity to recover from any shortfalls in the first harvest. Many farmers in the Dry Corridor have begun to wait for this harvest cycle to plant their crops as a climate change adaptation, as these rains tend to be more predictable. This harvest cycle has become their main source of staple grains for several months.



61%
Without food reserves

Country	People affected	Homes affected	People in shelters	Hectares of crops lost
Guatemala	2 million	6,000	56,000	No data
El Salvador	150,000	No data	13,000	3,000
Honduras	4.5 million	65,000	92,000	569,000
Nicaragua	3 million	43,000	No data	37,000

Table 1. Main damages as a result of the hurricane season in the CA-4 countries. Source: Produced internally with OCHA data.

61% of the households surveyed for this study report that they have no food reserves, while 24% reported that they had food reserves for up to three weeks. This means that 85% of the

households were banking on the *postrera* harvest to for food and resources to meet their other needs.

The decision to wait for the *postrera* harvest cycle in 2020 left poor families poorer.

The considerable crop losses in the *postrera* cycle increase the risk that these households will not be able to meet their basis food needs, and the seasonal hunger period in 2020 (April-August) could stretch into August 2021.

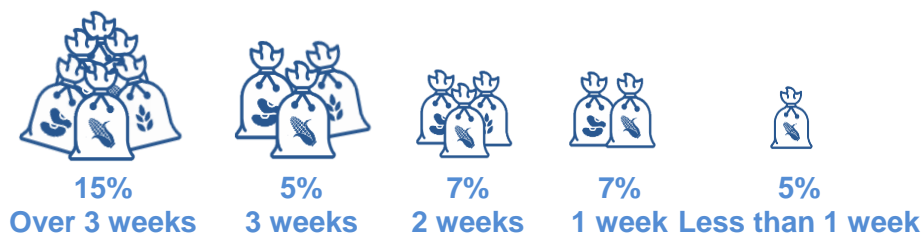
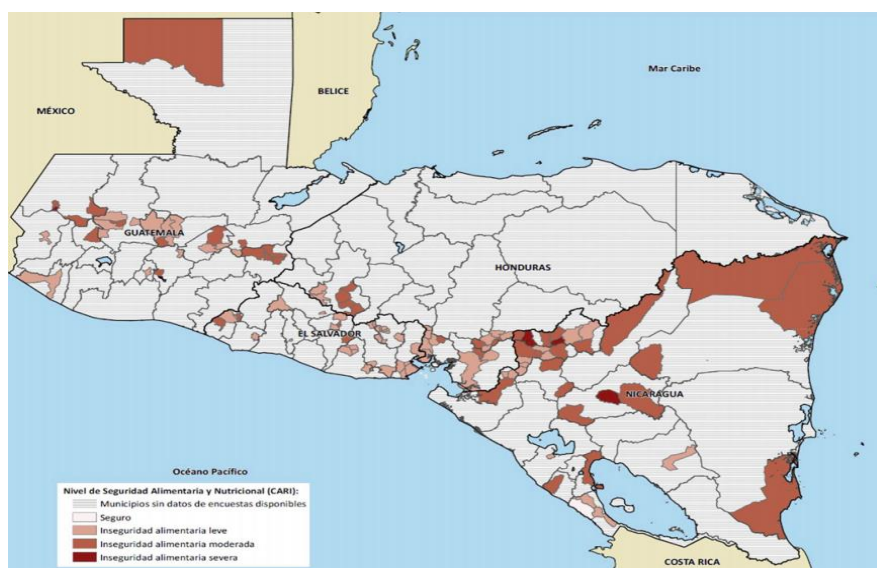


Figure 1: Duration of food reserves Source: Produced internally.

Considering the impact of the hurricanes on subsistence livelihoods and food access, and the fact that 64% of the inhabitants in the area were already facing mild food insecurity, it is likely that a large swath of these families will begin to experience moderate or severe food insecurity, deepening the hunger that they already face.

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic is an important challenge for families in the Dry Corridor, especially in areas where lockdown restrictions limit people from traveling to agricultural work sites or informal employment opportunities that are the most common forms of work in this zone. The health situation will extend into 2021. Although vaccination processes are underway in many countries in Central and South America, there is a high probability that new strains or outbreaks will continue to affect the economic and production dynamics in the region. Poor families, as always, will be hit the hardest.

64%
of households
are at high risk of
a deteriorating
food security
situation due to
the impact of Eta
and Iota



Map 2. FSN situation on a municipal level Source: Produced internally.

Honduras: Storms that wash everything away, even hope

Honduras was one of the countries hardest-hit by Hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020. Data from early 2021 reported over 3,000 homes destroyed and 6,000 with other damages. Extreme rains and flooding also produced crop losses in 569,000 hectares of land. This figure represents 70% of the total crop estimates by the Agriculture and Livestock Secretariat (SAG).

Estimates suggest that there are still 88,000 people in shelters as a result of the hurricanes. Many of these people have lost their homes and find it difficult to rebuild their homes and recover their subsistence crops. For many of the women still in the shelters, finding food for themselves and their families is a difficult task.

This is the case for Delmi Ortega, a 22-year-old pregnant woman. She and her husband are in a temporary shelter in Chemelecón. Since this is not an official shelter site, it offers physical refuge but does not have any basic services beyond a small outdoor bathroom that is constantly backed-up.

Delmi and the other residents in the shelter have to fend for themselves to find food and water, and they often trek to a nearby refugee camp with the hope of finding independent passers-by handing out food.

“We are desperate. We lost everything. There is nothing left in our small house. To be honest, we have no plans. Nobody has come to help us. We feel hopeless. But we are grateful for this place, because at least now we are not out in the cold.”



A HOPEFUL NOTE: WHAT DROUGHTS AND FLOODING CANNOT ERODE

The drought, tropical storms, and hurricanes in 2020 have produced damages that far exceed the damage from Hurricane Mitch that tore through the region in 1998. Images from the destruction wrought by Mitch were sent around the world and brought around 6 billion dollars in aid to the region.²⁵ The recent climate phenomena have wiped away 20 years of progress in the region. As was the case with Hurricane Mitch, the rain destroyed lives, livelihoods, and dreams.

This time, aid has not been proportional to the scale of the disaster. To the contrary, Central America has been rendered invisible, and it is difficult to put the situation on the global agenda.

Compared to previous events, the tropical storms and hurricanes from 2020 caused far fewer fatalities than in 1998. This difference in the death toll is a result of investments that are less visible: community training and disaster preparedness, work done by the communities to understand their surroundings, and resilience built by living under constant threat.²⁶

This report is an example of these gains. The research presented here has been made possible thanks to the capacity of the people and organizations in these territories, that have rigorously collected the data needed to measure the food security and nutritional context for households in the Dry Corridor, with the hope that by clearly demonstrating the situation that these families face, they can take steps to reduce hunger. Their resilience, humanity, and commitment are stronger than any drought or storm.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

For donors:

- Position the Central American Dry Corridor on their working agendas, considering the availability of this food security and nutrition data that meets internationally-recognized standards.
- Strengthen local humanitarian leadership by working with actors present in the municipalities and communities in the Dry Corridor to generate accurate humanitarian responses that help save lives, engaging with local and national authorities and United Nations System agencies.
- Allocate additional funds for medium and long-term efforts in the Central American Dry Corridor. The impacts of climate change will continue to be part of life for the most vulnerable inhabitants in this region. This reality means that it is necessary to work to build resilience that can allow families to overcome the impacts of these natural phenomena.

For the governments of the region:

- Strengthen civil protection systems at all levels, from central operations to a community level, and establish coordination mechanisms to effectively tackle the phenomena that affect the most vulnerable people.
- Strengthen food security monitoring, especially in times of crisis. States have the fundamental responsibility to ensure people's human rights. To uphold this duty, they need accurate local information to adopt the right measures as they are needed.

- Improve the engagement between central governments and local governments and other actors in the territories. This improved engagement can generate important synergy to facilitate coordination in emergencies and strengthen local development processes.
- Connect with the work of social protection networks that play an essential role in preventing food insecurity, and promote the dissemination of the positive outcomes from their interventions, especially in cases in which important investments have been made.

For local governments:

- Generate participatory community and municipal spaces for disaster preparedness and response, incorporating a gender lens into inclusive efforts for disaster risk reduction.
- Establish monitoring systems and contingency plans to mitigate the impact of slow-onset crisis on food security.
- Promote temporary employment plans to offer opportunities for income generation for the most vulnerable families while improving and restoring community infrastructure.

For civil society organizations:

- Strengthen transformative women's leadership to include feminist principles and an inclusive approach to disaster risk management.
- Raise awareness on the importance of preparedness for disaster risk reduction.
- Highlight the structural vulnerabilities of the communities in the Dry Corridor and the hazards that they face.

For the inhabitants of the communities in the Dry Corridor:

- Demand participatory spaces to express the views of the communities, their priorities, and their needs.
- Engage and work with local governments and other organizations present in the area to build their capacity for disaster risk reduction.
- Play a leadership role in the work in their own communities. To build comprehensive risk management processes, a local vision is essential to identify alternatives and promote locally-rooted development processes.

NOTES

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