



## More than calories: Food diversity and improved health for Maya children in Santa Cruz La Laguna

### Project Background

In the village communities of Jaibalito and Santa Cruz La Laguna, over 70% of indigenous infants are malnourished. Families have unbalanced diets because of a lack of knowledge about what a healthy diet is. Many children also suffer from diarrhoea due to poor hygiene conditions. They can't get enough nutrients from the limited amounts of food. Malnutrition and undernourishment, especially during the first three years of life, have severe effects on future cognitive and physical development and thus have lifelong consequences.

### Our approach

150 families learn in culturally adapted and practical workshops how they can widen the range of their diet with important foods by growing fruit and vegetables in their gardens. We make them aware of healthy nutrition and hygiene and create a basis for changing behaviour. By building latrines and improving the quality of drinking water, we counteract the widespread incidences of diarrhoea. Thus, we lay a foundation for age-appropriate cognitive and physical development for 300 indigenous children under the age of 5 and 450 of their older siblings.

### Project goals

1,050 people from 150 families in the village communities of Jaibalito and Santa Cruz La La-

guna have improved their nutrition.

- 150 families with 1,050\* individuals apply the principles of healthy eating and provide their children with a balanced diet. Further 5,500 people receive information about age-appropriate diets, its connection to malnutrition as well as hygiene via regular radio broadcast.
- 150 households with 1,050\* individuals have improved their sanitary infrastructure and follow adequate hygiene measures.
- Municipal health stations have improved their performance in preventing chronic malnutrition.

### Project activities

#### Awareness campaign healthy diet

In workshops, the project team raises awareness among the village communities on malnutrition and age-appropriate diet. Families learn in a playful manner about nutrients and which foods contain them. In regular cooking workshops, women learn how to combine the ingredients into existing dishes, try out new recipes and eat the cooked meals together. In addition to the 150 families, we also reach a wide audience via radio broadcasts. We provide information on age-appropriate nutrition, malnutrition and hygiene in an entertaining and practical way.

### Project Background

Village communities Jaibalito and Santa Cruz La Laguna, Atitlán highlands, municipality of Sololá, Guatemala

### Topics

Food security, hygiene, awareness raising, support towards self-help

### Vivamos Mejor Programme

"Food and Water"

### Duration

2023-2025

### Project costs

CHF 718,491

### Vivamos Mejor

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## Impact

Malnutrition and under-nourishment, especially during the first three years of life, affect the children's future physical and cognitive development and exacerbate the poverty spiral. This has consequences for health and well-being in adulthood and hence also for society's development as a whole. Conversely, an improvement in dietary conditions can lead to significant developmental successes with modest investments. Scientists are therefore calling for priority to be given to fighting malnutrition and under-nourishment.<sup>1</sup>

Between 2017 and 2022, Vivamos Mejor carried out the first project to combat malnutrition in children under 5. The intervention consisted of three components: advice about nutrition, enhancing cultivation and improving the sanitary situation. An external evaluation showed the positive effects of the project on the nutritional and health situation of the families.

Further information on the impact of our project work can be found at

[www.vivamosmejor.ch/en/impact](http://www.vivamosmejor.ch/en/impact)

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com>

## Our mission

With our "Food & Water" programme, we provide the rural population with the necessary expertise and empowerment for the future. Thanks to modern, sustainable agriculture and water resource management, they can grow their products in harmony with their natural resources and are able to feed themselves as well as their environment.

## Our vision

Our vision is for rural areas to provide future generations with a sustainable environment thanks to future-proof development.

Our actions are guided by the UN's 2030 Agenda. With this project, we contribute to the achievement of the following SDGs:



End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.



Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

## Agricultural advice

Families in the project region have no land available for subsistence farming. But in their backyards, they have small spaces which can be used as vegetable gardens. An agronomist and indigenous social workers support the families with advice and small materials to plant fruit and vegetable gardens, using local and nutrient-rich products. Families learn to combine various plants in a suitable way, prevent soil fatigue and maintain soil fertility. Furthermore, we show them how to improve their storage and their poultry farming.

## Improving hygiene habits

Indigenous social workers work with the women on behavioural changes of their hygiene habits. Using playful techniques, the parents and children practise regular hand-washing, using latrines and tooth-brushing. Where necessary, we provide families with sinks and latrines. Together with the village communities, we also look for suitable ways to improve the quality of the drinking water, through chlorination, the exploration of better sources or the use of water filters.

## Training for health staff

The local health facility staff is insufficiently qualified, lack of background knowledge on the types, signs and identification of the various forms of malnutrition. Every year we therefore train employees. Their task is to identify and prevent malnutrition within the first three years of the children's lives.

## Project impressions



Many parents are not aware that malnutrition can have lifelong consequences for their children.



Thanks to agricultural advice, the families know how to make the best use of the soil in their gardens.

## Target group

Direct: 1,050 individuals from 150 families; a further 5,500 people via radio broadcasts and 3,900 individuals using health centre services  
Indirect: an additional 7,500 people

## Costs

The planned project costs to be borne by Vivamos Mejor amount to CHF 718,491. To cover the costs, we are applying for support from cantons, municipalities, companies, foundations and parishes. The project is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, as part of the international programme contribution.

## Local contributions

The total costs do not include own contributions and local contributions totalling CHF 105,850 as well as contributions from third parties amounting to CHF 87,907. Families contribute 20% of the infrastructure costs to improve hygiene conditions on their farms and provide free labour throughout the project.

## Local partner

Our project partner is the legally independent, grassroots Guatemalan NGO "Asociación Vivamos Mejor Guatemala". It employs only local staff and is very familiar with the context of the local culture. The person in charge of the project team is Bryan Reyna, the director is Dr Eduardo Secaíra. Our partner has 30 years of experience and proven competencies in strengthening grassroots organisations with a special emphasis on women's empowerment, implementing education projects, integrated water management and strengthening food security.



The families can plant small gardens around the house and provide their families with fruit and vegetables.



At workshops, the families receive knowledge on how to improve their hygiene habits.