**Contribution submitted by**

**Franciscans International[[1]](#footnote-2)**

in response to the call for inputs for the report on

“**Impact of the Covid-19 on the right to food**”

by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food

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**Introduction**

Guatemala has been facing a food security crisis for several years. [[2]](#footnote-3) This crisis was exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic due to weak institutions, and the socio-economic impacts of restrictive and discriminatory policies that benefited extractive and agribusiness corporations. As developed below, in its recovery plans, Guatemala has not prioritized initiatives designed by indigenous communities and civil society. Many of these initiatives were raised prior to the pandemic, and may have served to mitigate its impacts.  Although this contribution is focused on the impacts of the pandemic on indigenous peoples and peasants in Guatemala, many of these issues are replicated in other countries. We hope that this information is useful to understand some of the overarching structural deficiencies present before and during the pandemic in order to guarantee the right to adequate food.

***Combined response to questions 1,2 and 3 on challenges and impacts on the right to adequate food during the Covid-19 pandemic***

In recent years Guatemala has frequently used curfews and declarations of states of emergency to legitimize excessive use of force and to put limits on various human rights. The contexts of these declarations include the containment of migration flows[[3]](#footnote-4) and peaceful protests.[[4]](#footnote-5) The Covid-19 pandemic was no exception; the Guatemalan government imposed curfews and states of emergency in order for families, communities, and entire municipalities to “self-isolate” as an aim to minimize the spread of the virus. These measures caused the temporary closure of small and medium-sized enterprises, which led to more than 100,000 formal jobs being terminated by July 2020.[[5]](#footnote-6) The restrictions also had an impact on the functioning of small businesses, particularly in the agricultural sector, which led to thousands of producers losing their crops and not being able to complete their production circles.[[6]](#footnote-7) During this period, the State did not support independent produce sellers, and instead allowed large corporations the opportunity to capture more of the food market as they were the only ones allowed to move within the country**.** There were occasions when peasants and communities had to protest in order to allow for passage of their food.[[7]](#footnote-8) Women were forced to carry produce, often times while also caring for their children, in order to reach the few remaining nearest open markets during the restrictions.

As a result of these measures, indigenous peoples, minorities, self-employed individuals, street vendors, and rural peasants and producers were negatively affected. The Guatemalan government failed to provide assistance to further aid these populations affected by the pandemic. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has recognized similar patterns globally and has called on States to support smallholder farmers.[[8]](#footnote-9)

It was also observed that during the pandemic, acute malnutrition almost doubled in one year as a direct effect of the restrictions imposed during the pandemic. Also, according to the Secretariat of Food and Nutritional Security (SINASAN), by September 2021, 22,417 cases were registered, and 39 children under 5 years of age died from hunger.[[9]](#footnote-10)

***Response to question 4 on beneficial or counter-productive measures that have been deployed nationally and locally in the aftermath of the pandemic***

Indigenous peoples and peasant communities were not consulted in the creation of government decrees and programs during the pandemic, nor in the recovery plans and measures in the aftermath of the pandemic.

One major overarching concern identified by partners is the failure of the government to have a medium to long-term vision in regard to supporting the right to adequate food; programs often only contend with immediate needs as welfare programs. This is partly a result of the current government’s dismantling of institutions that were established under the 1996 Peace Accord. This includes the Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs, which deals with agrarian conflicts, and the Ministry of Peace, which should monitor human rights. Other entities have remained stagnant or ineffective, such as the Land Fund, which has not led to real access to land for peasant communities. In addition, instead of strengthening the Support Program for Peasant Family Agriculture (PAFEC), the government terminated it during the first year of the pandemic. Partners have more generally also underscored the failure of the government to fully implement programs during the Covid-19 pandemic which could have a positive impact on the right to an adequate standard of living, and on other economic and social rights of indigenous peoples and peasants.

On one hand, although family and peasant agriculture provided almost 50% to 80% of the food for the population[[10]](#footnote-11) before the pandemic, there is no prioritization of initiatives designed to strengthen peasant nor indigenous family agriculture or the dynamics of local trade and commerce. This includes initiatives designed by indigenous communities and civil society, which encompasses: a) supporting and strengthening local sellers, peasants' markets and cooperatives that would contribute to  self-sustained, healthy and adequate food in accordance with traditional and culturally appropriate conditions; b) agroecology and product labeling to support “the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances”; and c) the consideration and approval of the draft law on biodiversity and traditional knowledge drafted and supported by civil society. These initiatives are key as they contribute to a self-sufficient, healthy, and culturally appropriate diet, and aim to achieve food sovereignty. We note that many of these initiatives were raised prior to the pandemic, and may have served to mitigate its impacts.

On the other hand, the Guatemalan government favors a ‘food security’ policy which impedes the ability of communities to decide on their food, and has threatened biodiversity and native seeds through the introduction of transgenics. Because of the government’s food security policy, the presence of agro-toxics have caused harmful effects on the soil as well as on human health. In addition, the Guatemalan government has issued negative measures and laws, such as the use of intellectual property to the detriment of communities or the Technical Regulation on Biosafety of Living Modified Organisms for agricultural uses, which involve the introduction of transgenics or hybrids that threaten biodiversity and native seeds.

The government of Guatemala needs to propose a long-term plan of how to mitigate and end the damage being done to agriculture and its populations, and to change the institutional structural deficiencies prior to the pandemic.

***Response to question 8 on initiatives that have been autonomously implemented by small-scale food producers, food workers, women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and social group***

Despite the fact that indigenous peoples have not been consulted in the creation of government decrees and programs in the territories of indigenous peoples, there are ancestral practices and experiences related to food, Mayan spirituality, education and agricultural science that indigenous communities have implemented to address the pandemic.

Regarding food programs, the communities have resorted to self-sustainable planting of corn, beans, chili and other produce. In towns and communities, women and children are the ones who produce food for both self-consumption and local communities. However, they have not received any type of state support to transport their products following the suspension of public transportation service and the closure of their markets.

There are also programs for food sovereignty run by civil society organizations and, likewise, the Q'eqchi indigenous communities have implemented strategies to practice its ancestral forms of agriculture. However, these community associations and communities are not supported by the Executive Branch, and during the pandemic, the media often indirectly blamed them, as the population that "does not stay at home," for the spread of Covid-19, . This sought to generate an idea that self-employed or itinerant vendors were the main source of contagion, even though it was large maquila, agro-industrial, mining and commercial companies who did not stop their activities for a single day during the pandemic.

1. This submission is based on statements and information that our partner organizations in Guatemala provided us for the Commission on Population and Development <https://franciscansinternational.org/fileadmin/media/2021/UN_Sessions/Other/UNCPD54.pdf>; and the and the Commission for Social Development, <https://franciscansinternational.org/fileadmin/media/2021/UN_Sessions/Other/CPD54_Item3.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. According to 2022 Global Report on food crises, Guatemala was the second largest food crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean with 3.73 million people in these phases through March 2021, p. 55 <http://www.fightfoodcrises.net/fileadmin/user_upload/fightfoodcrises/doc/resources/GRFC_2022_FINAl_REPORT.pdf>, *See also* World Food Programme, “WFP Guatemala – Country Brief”, July 2019, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000107554/download/?_ga=2.164506047.1000216272.1567593462-1685453576.1566896779>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. # Aljazeera, “Guatemala issues emergency decree as new migrant caravan reported” 30 March 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/30/guatemala-issues-emergency-decree-as-new-migrant-caravan-rumored>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. This was demonstrated in October 2021, against the Q’eqchi community in El Estor, Izabal by the National Civil Police and the Army [Indigenous mine opponents targeted in raids during state of siege in Guatemala (mongabay.com)](https://news.mongabay.com/2021/11/indigenous-mine-opponents-targeted-in-raids-during-state-of-siege-in-guatemala/?msclkid=8a0195d0b67711eca1891ce98609e739) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. # Castañeda, José Miguel, “Más de 100 mil empleos se han perdido por pandemia, según el Cacif”, 14 de julio de 2020, https://www.soy502.com/articulo/covid-19-mas-100-mil-empleos-han-perdido-guatemala-63338

   [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Colectivo Social por el Derechos a la Alimentación de Guatemala, “El derecho a la alimentación de la población guatemalteca es violado por el Gobierno de Alejandro Giammattei”, October 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/RedsagGt/photos/pcb.4427421337313483/4427420960646854/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. # Bolaños, Rosa María y Juárez, Raul, “Pobladores de Totonicapán bloquean carreteras contra el toque de queda por el coronavirus”, 16 de Mayo de 2020,

   <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/totonicapan/con-bloqueos-de-carreteras-en-totonicapan-pobladores-piden-que-se-quite-el-toque-de-queda/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “A battle plan for ensuring global food supplies during the COVID-19 crisis”, <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1268059/icode/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. In the same month the figure was 9,783 in 2018, 12,467 in 2019 and 20,211 cases in 2020. *Cfr.* “Sistema de Información Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional” in https://www.siinsan.gob.gt/siinsan/desnutricion-aguda/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Agricultura familiar sensible a la nutrición, pieza clave para combate a la desnutrición”, 10 october 2018, https://www.fao.org/guatemala/noticias/detail-events/es/c/1156881/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)