

Long Way Home: Report Survey 2012

Ophélie Pluquet

Executive summary

This document had been created with the intention to understand and express information about life in San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala. Long Way Home, Inc. is an organization which desires to bring the population the ability and opportunity to find a job and break the cycle of poverty in the town. The Técnico Maya Vocational School is an alternative construction project. Tires, trash bottles and bags of dirt are the materials used for foundations instead of usually material like blocks.

In order to collect further information regarding life in Comalapa, 25 interviews have been taken from the population about different aspects of their lives and also about their personal opinion on the difficulties of living in Guatemala. With this report and the 8 modules it contains, the NGO could see which sectors have to be improved and if the organization is doing a good job.

Economic conditions in Guatemala*

With a population of 13.8 million, Guatemala is placed on the 117th position in the report about human development of 2005. The population is characterized by a majority of autochthone Maya people, who live in essentially rural zones. The country has a level of poverty very high in Latin and Central America, and some of social indicators are very low.

The Civil War (1966-1996) left the country in a very difficult economic situation. Indeed, a great rate of unemployment and also a diminution of productivity were recorded. Villages were destroyed and the country experienced a massive loss in human capital: 100,000 dead and 1,000,000 refugees. Throughout the war there were violations of the Human rights, social inequalities, and persecution of the autochthone population. The 1996 Peace Accords meant the end of the War. But even today there are sequels of the Civil War in the life of Guatemalans.

There are many causes for poverty in Guatemala, and according to the World Bank these main problems are: education, health, and inequalities like geographic isolation and ethnic exclusion.

Indeed, education is not accessible to everybody in Guatemala; until 1945 only men and non-indigenous people were allowed to follow instructions. Now, there is still 31% of the population who are illiterate and a lot of young who don't go to the school. Education is also a problem for the poor who cannot pay and who have to work instead of receiving

education. We can see from the survey that many young girls work at home instead of going to school.

It is difficult for Guatemalans to have health care because of both the cost and because of the distance when people live in the countryside. Often, they have to go to the capital or to a big city to have health care.

For many years, the indigenous peoples have been maltreated and excluded from jobs and education. There are a lot of people who live in rural zones and have no access to basic utility services.

Because of these factors, in 2009, 51% of the population was poor and 15% lived in extreme poverty. Poverty is predominantly rural; 81% of the poor and 93% of the extreme poor live in countryside. Also, indigenous people are on average poorer than the non-indigenous. If the Government wants to eradicate the poverty in Guatemala, these are the problems that must be resolved.

A large part of the economy in Guatemala is based on agriculture and represents 15% of the country's Gross Domestic Product. The population and especially the poor population (87%) work in the sector of agriculture. The main source of income is cultivation of corn and beans.

* Sources: *Poverty in Guatemala*, February 20th 2003, World Bank
Document de Stratégie Pays - Guatemala, 2007-2013, Commission Européenne
Rapport économique Guatemala, Ambassade de Suisse au Guatemala

Objective of the survey

Long Way Home, Inc. wants to help the community of San Juan Comalapa which is composed by 97% Kaqchikel Mayan and 3% Ladinos. To succeed and to be able to meet people's needs in the best way, the NGO needs to know more about the life in Comalapa.

The objective of this survey is to understand what the conditions of life are for the population in San Juan Comalapa, and to identify what the priorities are for those people. Through the data collected here Long Way Home can ascertain whether the organization has a positive impact on the population's lives.

Analysis of the modules

Using a sample of 25 people living in San Juan Comalapa, the results of interviews can show us the conditions of life in the town and can also show what can be improved.

The interviews were divided in 8 modules, some of which are also indicators of poverty: form, housing, health, education, employment, civic participation, culture and hopes.

By the different modules and questions, the goal was to show in which areas the population of Comalapa has difficulties.

- **FORM:** The demographic form shows how families are composed, how many people are educated, and how many people have a job. It also shows how much each family earns and through what source of income. The form is completed with data surveying only persons living in the house.
- **HOUSING:** The housing module shows if the houses are secured, if people are owners or renters, how many bedrooms and other rooms they have, if they have electricity, and if they have sanitary latrine.
- **HEALTH:** The health module shows which type of water the population drinks, if the food is varied, the principal illnesses, what are the difficulties of health care, how is their dental hygiene, and if the kids are vaccinated.
- **EDUCATION:** The education module shows how important school is to parents and if they are able to meet difficulties paying for school. It also shows if the children have difficulties getting to school.

- EMPLOYMENT: The employment module shows the population's monetary status, if they have a bank account, credits, and savings, and if they can meet their family's needs.
- CIVIC PARTICIPATION: The civic participation module shows whether they are involved in the politic life.
- CULTURE: The culture module shows how important the Kaqchikel culture is and which parts of their culture they want to preserve.
- HOPES: The hope module shows what people want for their kids for the future and also what they want them to learn now at school.

Results survey

The results of the interviews show that the principal problems and difficulties for the population are:

- Employment, access to the job market, and salary
- Cost of the health care and medicines
- Cost of education

To have a view of conditions of life in Comalapa and to understand more about the problems in the town, this is the summary of the interviews, organized by modules.

- **FORM:** 25 persons between 24 and 53 years old were interviewed for the survey. Some were chosen using a random sampling method in the streets, and some parents of the students from the Técnico Maya Vocational School were interviewed in their homes. In total: 21 women and 4 men, 7 persons single and 18 married, 3 without children and 22 with children. Families are composed, on average, of 4 or 5 persons, with 1 to 10 children living in the same house.
- **HOUSING:** 88% of interviewed people own their homes. The majority of walls are made in adobe and roof in lamina. Latrines are drained and 92% the houses have electricity. The houses have bedrooms and sometimes a living room and a ventilated kitchen. For the majority of houses, however, the kitchen is outside and people cook with wood. The results show that the houses and their foundations are not very secure.
- **HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT:** 28% of interviewed persons drink non-potable water, principally from the municipality, and do nothing to purify the water before drinking it. People do not have enough water and often have to walk for it. The food is not really varied and 40% of people eat principally herbs, rice or beans. 52% say they have separated garbage between organic and non-organic waste, but they throw the non-organic garbage in the big ravine of the municipality. This is the cause of a lot of

pollution. When people are sick, they go to the health center. It is too expensive to go to a private doctor. Also, it is very difficult for people to pay for medicine so if they do not go to have health care it is because of the money. 95.5% of the children are vaccinated against required vaccines like tuberculosis, tetanus, polio, and measles. With a non-varied food and non-access to potable water, people often get sick at a rapid rate.

- **EDUCATION:** 12% of the parents cannot read and write, 16% have difficulties reading and writing and 4% can read and write but not fluently. 62% of the parents stopped studying and going to school after primary (6th grade). Parents prefer that the children go to the school instead of work; they find school more important even if it is very difficult to pay and sometimes to go. 21% of the kids between 5 and 18 years old are working and not receiving an education, it is very common for the kids to stop going school and go to work to help their parents. Education is very important for the community. People make a lot of concessions to offer the possibility for their kids to go to the school.
- **EMPLOYMENT:** A vast majority of people work at home or in the market and have no stable employment. Some people grow food but are not the owner of the fields they grow on. They have no bank account, and most are not able to save money. 76% have no credit. It is very difficult for people to meet their family's needs because life is really expensive for the population. When people have a salary they earn between

47 and 267 US Dollars (350 and 2000 Quetzals) a month. For the majority, however, the salary is flexible and it is very frequent that people have no salary. 90.5% of the interviewed persons have no fixed salary to live. Employment is the largest difficulty for people. The job market in Comalapa is not varied and does not offer a lot of choice for job seekers. Agriculture is the principal activity in the town and does not provide a salary for the workers.

- **CIVIC PARTICIPATION:** People find it very important to vote because they are citizens and this is a citizen's obligation. People are pleased to live in a democracy.
- **CULTURE:** Kaqchikel language and clothes are very important and the traditions must to be preserved. People can speak Kaqchikel and Spanish and they want their kids to learn Kaqchikel at school.
- **HOPES:** People want a better future for their children than theirs. They want their kids to graduate, and that their kids will learn a lot of languages and that they find a job that bring enough money to live correctly.
- **DIFFICULTIES TO LIVE IN SAN JUAN COMALAPA:** After asking people about their own opinion, we can say that, according to them, the difficulties to live in Guatemala and particularly in Comalapa are to find a job and to have a decent salary; to have the

opportunity to go to school; to have access to health care and medicines; to have access to potable water and sometimes just to have access to water; the expensive cost of life; and finally, poverty in general.

- **WHAT TO DO:** To have better conditions of life, people want to have more opportunities and infrastructure in San Juan Comalapa. They want to improve the economy, the health sector, the job sector, increase the salary, and build more schools, particularly High Schools and Universities that not exist until now.

Table

The attached table below is a working tool that can show easily what the biggest problems in San Juan Comalapa are. With a scale of color, the table is composed by the principal questions that are the causes or the consequences of poverty.

For a better comprehension, this is how some points of the table should be interpreted:

- **HOUSING:** The question about separated bedrooms is just separated bedrooms between the parents and the children, not a bedroom for each person. Another room is a room with walls and roof: outside kitchens are not recognized as a room. If the kitchen is outside, it cannot be a ventilated kitchen (with a chimney).

- HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT: Potable water to drink is “Agua Pura” or water boiled, even if basically it is not potable water. They have varied food if they eat twice a week meat and/or chicken, and if they eat very often fruits and vegetables. The variety of the food is also calculated according to their personal preference based on the question “what foods do you eat most frequently?”
- EMPLOYMENT: The domestic jobs and jobs in the market are not recognized as stable employment. Stable employment is considered employment which included a fixed salary, or at least a minimum wage.

	Odilia (0001)	Eduj (0002)	Adelinaa (0003)	Alma (0004)	Cristina (0005)	Maria C (0006)	Heydi (0007)	Maria El (0008)	Masta (0009)	Olivia (0010)	Maria G (0011)	Oscar (0012)	Valeria (0013)	Juanita (0014)	Ofelia (0015)	Indiana (0016)	Maria F (0017)	Vidalia (0018)	Maria Es (0019)	Francisca (0020)	Ilda (0021)	Marian (0022)	Maria S (0023)	Juan (0024)	Maximilian (0025)										
Housing																																			
Owner																													12%	0%	0%	88%			
Security of the house																															36%	24%	36%	4%	
Separated bedrooms																															29,2%	0%	0%	70,8%	
Other rooms																															48%	0%	0%	52%	
Drainage latrines																															0%	0%	0%	100%	
Electricity																															8%	0%	0%	92%	
Ventilated kitchen																															60%	0%	0%	40%	
Module Total																										27,6%	3,4%	5,1%	63,9%						
Health & Environment																																			
Potable water to drink																															28%	0%	0%	72%	
Varied food																															40%	8%	28%	24%	
Go to a doctor or health center																															25%	4%	0%	71%	
Separated garbage																															48%	0%	0%	52%	
Glasses																															40%	0%	0%	60%	
Children vaccinated																															4,5%	0%	0%	95,5%	
Brushing teeth every day																															0%	4%	4%	92%	
Module Total																										26,5%	2,3%	4,6%	66,6%						
Education																																			
Educated through 6 th grade (primary)																															62%	0%	0%	38%	
Capacity of reading and writing																																12%	16%	4%	68%
Children more than 12 educated through 6 th grade																																14,3%	0%	14,3%	71,4%
Importance of the school																																0%	0%	27,3%	72,7%
Module Total																										22,1%	4%	11,4%	62,5%						
Employment																																			
Stable employment																																76%	0%	0%	24%
Fixed salary																																90,5%	0%	0%	9,5%
More than one source of income																																56%	0%	0%	44%
Exterior financial help																																96%	0%	0%	4%
Bank account																																96%	0%	0%	4%
Saving																																100%	0%	0%	0%
Credit																																76%	0%	0%	24%
Module Total																										84,4%	0%	0%	15,6%						
Civic participation																																			
Voted in the last elections for the first time																																12%	0%	0%	88%
Voted in the last elections for the second time																																32%	0%	0%	68%
Module Total																										22%	0%	0%	78%						

Culture																													
Speak more Kaqchikel than Spanish	Red	Grey	Red	Grey	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red	Green	47,8 %	0%	4,4%	47,8 %
Wife wears the traje (traditional clothes)	Green	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	12%	4%	12%	72%
Daughter wears the traje	Green	Orange	Grey	Grey	Green	Green	Grey	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Grey	Orange	Green	Yellow	Green	Grey	Grey	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	5,3%	15,8 %	10,5 %	68,4 %
Module Total																							21,7 %	6,6%	9%	62,7 %			
TOTAL																							34%	2,7 %	5%	58,3 %			

Legend:

0 – 25%	Red
26 – 50%	Orange
51 – 75%	Yellow
76 – 100%	Green
Data not communicated	Grey
Not Applicable	White

Long Way Home, Inc.’s work

Long Way Home’s mission is using sustainable design and materials to construct a self-sufficient school, the Técnico Maya Vocational School, which promotes education, employment and environmental stewardship. Long Way Home, Inc. wants to break the cycle of poverty in San Juan Comalapa. Indeed, the NGO would like to teach the young population to have an entrepreneur’s aptitude and to give them the possibility to participate in the job market. The Técnico Maya Vocational School can give the young people of Comalapa the tools they need to be competitive in the local job market.

Long Way Home, Inc., directly or indirectly, can improve or completely resolve some of the difficulties the local population faces. The NGO's presence in Comalapa has a direct effect on education, employment, and environment.

One of the biggest problems for the population of San Juan Comalapa is employment. Indeed, with the table, we can see that 76% of the people interviewed have no stable employment and 90.5% have no fixed salary. The salaries are very low in contrast with the number of hours they spend at work. Because of that, they have difficulties to live decently. They don't have the opportunity to save money and cannot make plans for the future and their children. The NGO, by teaching entrepreneurial skills, offers the population the opportunity to expand employment options. After graduation at the Técnico Maya Vocational School, students will have capacity to be employed in a large variety of jobs because of their education and, in consequence, have a stable employment with a fixed salary. With a stable employment and a better salary, they gain the opportunity and ability to meet their family's needs, to save money, to have access to or create infrastructure, to have better conditions of life, and finally to break the cycle of poverty. Improving the employment sector is a big deal for the population and the principal goal which needs to be resolved to break the cycle of poverty in San Juan Comalapa.

In regards to education, the project offers the possibility to study from primary school (6 years) to High School (18 years). One of the requests from the population is to have more schools in the town including a High School. Through the construction of a high school, Long Way Home, Inc. is replying to the community needs and when completed will aid the young

in completing an education in their home town. The organization thus creates educational opportunities.

By using environmentally-friendly construction methods, Long Way Home, Inc. teaches to the population a new kind of building and how people can recycle and use trash and waste materials. Those methods work to help the pollution in the town and affect the population's well-being. Indeed, if people adopt the trash bottle techniques, they reduce the amount of waste and improve the level of pollution. If the level of pollution is diminished, it has a good influence on the non-potable water from the municipality that people drink and on the health. And if health improves, people save money they would have had to spend on medicine and can use it for something else. They can also integrate the new construction methods and use it for their houses which are not very secure.

Population's needs can be met by the work provided by Long Way Home, Inc. When the deficiency in the job market sector is resolved, it has positive effect on the other sectors. When the young people have graduated and learned marketable skills, they can be employed easily. Long Way Home, Inc. wants to deal with the root of the problem of poverty: employment. That is exactly what has to be done to eradicate poverty in San Juan Comalapa.

More information

At the beginning of the interview, some questions about Long Way Home's project were asked. Those questions were asked to gain an understanding of how the project is seen by the population and what exactly people know about Long Way Home's work.

Unfortunately, people from Comalapa do not know what happens at the site of Paxán. They are not informed about the construction. When they do know information its rumors they've heard or peoples talking. If the NGO wants to eradicate poverty in Comalapa, they have to inform the population who will benefit. The project can be a great success only if it is aided by the population.

When we asked people about the project, they were very interested in it and wanted to know more about the work realized by the NGO. They find the methods of construction of the school beneficial for the population because it can teach to people new approaches of building that can be better for their health and improve the life in San Juan Comalapa. It is a great help for the community. But, there are also some reticent people (29%) who think that the project has no affectation on life's population because they know nothing about what is taking place in their town.

Conclusion

With this report, Long Way Home, Inc. is able to see if the work their organization is doing is really helping the community. After analyzing the results of the survey, we can see that people in San Juan Comalapa have difficulties to live decently, particularly in the employment sector, as we can see with the table. With the exterior help provided by Long Way Home, Inc., those difficulties encountered by the population can be resolved. The organization seeks to directly affect the source of the main problem, as mentioned before. That is why the work done, by Long Way Home, Inc. can break the cycle of poverty. Everything is linked: when we act on a sector, it has a positive effect on another one. And by effecting education, the organization also indirectly effects employment.
