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# “EXPANDING OUR HORIZONS”

FORMATIVE RESEARCH ON ASPIRATIONS  
AND FAMILY DYNAMICS RELATED TO  
SANITATION AND NUTRITION

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*Together we prosper, we dare, we move forward*

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## Acronyms

<b>CCP</b>	Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs
<b>HC3</b>	Health Communication Capacity Collaborative
<b>SBCC</b>	Social and Behavior Change Communication
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WHIP</b>	West Highlands Integrated Program

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **BACKGROUND**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Guatemala invited the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Program's (CCP) Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (HC3) to provide technical assistance to meet the objectives of the West Highlands Integrated Program (WHIP). Part of this technical assistance consists of supporting the development of a social and behavior change communication (SBCC) strategy that will contribute to positive change in existing norms and key behaviors related to chronic malnutrition. As part of this task, a literature review was conducted that revealed gaps in information on the motivations and family strategies that influence the adoption and continuation of adequate sanitation and nutrition practices in Guatemalan homes and at the level of children under two years of age. This formative research study is an attempt to fill in some of those gaps and identify motivations, actions and windows of opportunity for the design of a communication strategy that will help reduce chronic malnutrition and improve the development of minor children in the Western Highlands. This report includes only the results of the first phase of the study, generated through focus group discussions and interviews. The second phase, namely the collection of data in the field, will include the observation of feeding, care and sanitation practices in a sample of homes with children under two of normal size and homes whose children show a lack of growth.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The overall objective of this investigation is to identify the normative and behavioral factors influencing infant nutrition and feeding and sanitation practices in the Western Highlands region. Specifically, the investigation seeks to identify the aspirations, motivations and attitudes regarding nutrition and sanitation, as well as the strategies and dynamics at the household level that have been effective in bringing about the adoption of adequate nutrition practices for children between the ages of six and 23 months and improving sanitary conditions at the individual and family levels.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study is being carried out in four communities, selected in conjunction with four WHIP partner projects: two of them covered by food aid programs (Title II: Paisano and Segamil) and the other two by income generation projects (Rural Value Chains: Anacafé and Agexport). The communities are (1) San Juan Bullaj, Tajumulco; (2) Flores Pajales and Pozo Verde, Cunén; (3) La Pista, Nebaj; and (4) Xequemeyá, Momostenango. The field work and data collection for this study took place between August 22 and September 8, 2016.

In accordance with the study design, the following groups of people participated in each of the four communities:

- Fathers aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 40 with children between the ages of six and 24 months
- Mothers aged 18 to 34 with children between the ages of six and 24 months
- Grandmothers aged 30 to 55 with grandchildren between the ages of six and 24 months
- Volunteers or promoters in the partner programs
- Community leaders
- Fathers with a history of international migration

## KEY FINDINGS

### LIVELIHOODS

In the four communities studied, both changes and continuity were observed. The greatest changes seemed to be in the area of better service delivery, in that populations that had been living a precarious and abandoned existence within two generations were able to get better access routes, schools, running water and electricity. The introduction of these services has made their lives less difficult, enabling them to aspire to something more than an arduous struggle simply to survive. In general, the study participants tended to feel optimistic, believed that their quality of life had improved and that they were living at a time of greater opportunity. The exception was San Juan Bullaj, where there was less optimism due to the abandonment they felt over the lack of public services and the decrease in their income caused by coffee rust. Agriculture is still prevalent, whether basic grains (La Pista and Xequemeyá) or cash crops (coffee in San Juan Bullaj, beans and other vegetables in Cunén). The study observed an increased use of technology in agricultural production in both Cunén and San Juan Bullaj, with a resulting improvement in income, although less so in the latter, due to the prevalence of coffee rust. Non-agricultural work and self-employment were scarce in all the communities studied.

### BREAKTHROUGHS, CHANGES AND ASPIRATIONS

The changes that have taken place in the past few decades, in both structural conditions and norms, have opened up greater opportunities for the younger generations. Improving “opportunity structures”<sup>1</sup> has opened up “the space of the possible”<sup>2</sup> for the new generations in the Western Highlands region. From the grandmothers’ limited concept of possibilities for their quality of life, reflected in individual states of despair, pain, fatalism and aspirations that barely reached the level of survival, in homes without support and affection, these communities have now transitioned to a place where children are more valued, and their families try to improve conditions so that their children will not suffer the same hardships they experienced. This new context offers a favorable environment in which interventions aimed at improving sanitation and nutrition will be better received because they coincide with people’s real aspirations for their children and grandchildren.

### TRADITION AND CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS

The discourse on gender relations shows that tradition coexists with new ways of thinking and acting that are perceived as desirable, but ambivalence about change creates doubt. Tradition appears to prevail when it comes to the division of labor between men (public sphere, maintenance of the home) and women (domestic sphere) and to the expectations and mobility of women, especially when married. Despite the attachment that people have to these traditions, changes were observed in the interactions within families and couples, such as the new roles of women and men. A new role for men is emerging, as the spouse who supports his partner in looking after the children (sanitation and nutrition), motivated by his aspirations for new opportunities for his children.

### WATER AND SANITATION AND DESIRES TO PROTECT THE CHILDREN

The discussions on sanitation revealed that water and sanitation conditions have improved, and that the participants had a better appreciation of the risks of illness for their children caused by contact with the ground and with excrement from domestic animals. The wide range of options that the participants proposed for avoiding this contact and the interest that many of them had in learning how to build corrals or cradles suggests that there is a good opportunity to encourage the practice of protecting minor children and keeping

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1 Fischer, E.F. (2012). *The Good Life: Values, Markets and Wellbeing*. Working Papers Series No. 14, Open Anthropology Cooperative Press; Vanderbilt University.

2 Ibid.

them out of the dirt and from putting dirty objects in their mouths. The attributes of a clean house and a clean person coincide with elements of cleanliness that are difficult to attain in households in the area covered by the study, whether because of lack of infrastructure (drainage, garbage collection) or because of insufficient space in some homes for keeping the poultry in corrals. Moreover, the belief that free range birds give more eggs creates a dilemma for homes that are trying to protect their children better without compromising the freedom of the poultry.

## **COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING**

Thanks to the capacity building work of various programs, the inhabitants of the communities in the study have learned about the benefits of better nutrition, both during pregnancy and in the first years of life, but formidable barriers to achieving a more diversified diet remain. The budget earmarked for food is directed and controlled by the man of the house; only in neolocal<sup>3</sup> homes is it under the control of the mother. Nevertheless, even the patriarchal man of the house appears to have a greater concern for providing better nutrition to the minor children. In many homes the grandmother is watching over the feeding of her grandchildren and sees to it that the parents buy nutritious food, while the fathers are trying to get a little more involved and support their wives in the care and feeding of the children. In addition, grandmothers believe that complementary feeding practices have changed, due in part to the better education of their daughters-in-law and the training they have received; moreover, they are opposed to the consumption of junk food.

## **PERCEPTION OF INFANT MALNUTRITION**

Infant malnutrition has become more visible, but it tends to be associated with emaciated children and not with children of small size. In some places, they deny that there are malnourished children in their communities. Infant malnutrition is blamed on the mother's bad diet during pregnancy, on the lack of sanitary food and on the consumption of junk food. Children of a good size are considered tall, prepared, "are more stacked," and do better in school; short children are considered to have the opposite characteristics. Given their aspirations for better education for their children and grandchildren, these attributes could be incorporated into the communication strategy as motivation for giving more attention to size.

## **CARE DURING PREGNANCY**

Both husbands and mothers-in-law know that a pregnant woman needs to have a varied and substantial diet, but they do not seem to be very proactive, with the exception of those in La Pista, where the husbands said very emphatically that it was their responsibility to see that their wives were well fed. With the mothers-in-law, HC3 researchers discussed the possibility of the pregnant woman having an additional snack. They were not opposed to the idea, and thought that *atoles*<sup>4</sup> were the best option. Fruit was considered an ideal snack, but not very doable, due to its high price and scarcity. The same idea was presented to the promoters in the various programs. They said that, although they made an effort to improve the diets of pregnant women, any improvement was necessarily diluted by being shared with the whole family, especially when they live with their extended families. They affirmed that it was considered an affront to cook for just one person, whether that person was pregnant or not, and as a result, trying to give an additional snack becomes a problem of access to and availability of food. It was thought that a healthy pregnant woman could perform all household chores except for the heaviest, such as lifting certain objects or washing the bedding. As a matter of pride, a pregnant woman tends not to ask for help, and if a health care provider recommends that she not exert herself too much, she will ask for help from her husband first. The husband will decide whether to ask his mother to give her a hand or hire someone to help her. There was no mention of men taking charge of the heavy chores.

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3 Neolocal is a residence pattern where the family lives away from either parent.

4 Beverages typical of Mexico and other areas of Central America made with cooked corn, ground and diluted in water or milk and boiled to give it a certain consistency.

## PERCEPTION OF THE PROGRAMS

Mothers mostly valued three aspects of the programs: the donated food; the training received; and other handouts, such as filters, irons, wood-burning stoves and vegetable seeds. Fathers valued the agricultural training (especially that provided by Anacafé and Agexport), as well as learning infant care. Various participants mentioned that the training “awakened the mind.”

In the four communities, they have established family gardens that have two limitations: space for cultivation and water for irrigation. The programs have provided seeds, and the vegetables that each family plants vary even within the same program. Although the period of production may only be four months out of the year, the families appreciate the vegetables produced in their gardens.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this formative research have enabled us to identify certain motivations and windows of opportunity for the design of the communication strategy.

- The perception of change and improvements in the quality of life expressed by the majority of the participants in this study offer an opportunity to strengthen and amplify such changes, mainly with regard to parents’ aspirations for their children and grandchildren, so that the latter will benefit from better sanitation and nutrition in their homes.
- This new context offers a favorable environment in which interventions aimed at improving sanitation and nutrition for minor children will be better received because they coincide with people’s real aspirations for their children and grandchildren.
- Young families aspire to investing more in their children, the numbers of which have gone down because of greater access to family planning methods. Investment in children usually takes the form of giving them more schooling and better care; currently, children are more valued, and both grandmothers and parents are trying to better their conditions so that their children will not suffer the same hardships that they experienced.
- The traditional division of labor by gender persists, although with less rigidity, and men are beginning to get more involved in caring for their children, although they must deal with a certain amount of social criticism aimed at men who do “women’s work.” For the communication strategy, these incipient changes are an opportunity to validate and reinforce the new role of men as the spouse who supports his partner in looking after the children (better sanitation and nutrition), motivated by his aspirations for new opportunities for his children.
- Finally, the association of good size with intelligence, given parents’ aspirations for a better education for their children, might be a motivating factor for giving more attention to the size, and not just the weight, of children.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS				
	GRANDMOTHERS	FATHERS	MOTHERS	LEADERS & PROMOTERS
<b>GENERATIONAL CHANGES</b>				
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great poverty</li> <li>• Little access to or availability of food</li> <li>• Great effort needed just to survive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life no longer as difficult; better access to markets and services</li> <li>• For some, better work options at the local level (agriculture, services)</li> <li>• Institutional presence: capacity building in nutrition, care, sanitation and agricultural production</li> </ul>		
<b>Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few schools</li> <li>• Few roads</li> <li>• Isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary school, secondary education through distance learning in some villages, better roads, better contact with the municipal head, presence of radio and, later, TV</li> </ul>		
<b>Family life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large families</li> <li>• Forced marriages</li> <li>• Women submissive</li> <li>• Very little affection for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire for fewer children</li> <li>• Women less submissive, but still subject to authority of husband and mother-in-law</li> <li>• Desire to reverse unaffectionate relations with children and gender discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner relations more horizontal, "youth with a different mentality"</li> </ul>	
<b>ASPIRATIONS</b>				
	<p>When young:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despair</li> </ul> <p>Now:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More schooling and better life for grandchildren who aspire to become professionals</li> <li>• There are new opportunities, and want grandchildren to be able to take advantage of them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That their children do not suffer as much as they did, and that they become professionals</li> <li>• There are better opportunities, and they want to facilitate them for their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As girls, they wanted to study</li> <li>• Now sons and daughters aspire to become professionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young fathers want the greatest advancement for their children: more school, better employment opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>GENDER ROLES</b>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigid</li> <li>• Men were breadwinner</li> <li>• Women were responsible for childcare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less rigid, although still well defined</li> <li>• Women less restricted, and more are generating income</li> <li>• Continue hoping for early marriage and immediate procreation</li> <li>• Some men collaborate on domestic chores and childcare</li> <li>• "Man collaborating" means loving his wife and children</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships less authoritarian</li> <li>• Men more understanding</li> </ul>

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS				
	GRANDMOTHERS	FATHERS	MOTHERS	LEADERS & PROMOTERS
<b>SANITATION</b>				
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Running water and latrines in almost all homes</li> <li>Appreciate the training provided by the programs</li> </ul>			
<b>Concepts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better appreciation of the risks of having babies in contact with the ground</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cleanliness associated with beauty, and being more prepared and active</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Know the recommendations regarding hand washing and bird keeping</li> </ul>
<b>Perceptions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zoc: traditional way of keeping the child off the ground</li> <li>Use of walkers and corrals</li> <li>Sanitation of children is mother's responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's excrement less dirty: allowed to defecate outdoors, little care for disposal of diaper feces</li> <li>Desire to keep children off the ground: back, zoc, walker, corral</li> <li>Dilemma of free range poultry: they make things dirtier but lay more eggs</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uncomfortable with bad smell of latrines</li> <li>Beginning to have flush toilets</li> </ul>
<b>COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING</b>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the ones who buy the food in extended families</li> <li>Obligated to guide their daughters-in-law</li> <li>Say they buy vegetables, fruit and herbs for their grandchildren</li> <li>Complementary feeding starts at 6-7 mos., gradual introduction of soft foods</li> <li>Grandchildren better fed due to better food and access to education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His role is that of provider; few are directly involved</li> <li>Some have learned the recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person most responsible</li> <li>Practices fall between tradition and the programs' recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have received programs' training; know recommendations</li> </ul>
<b>PERCEPTION OF MALNUTRITION</b>				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Associated with bad feeding, bad care, many children, lack of sanitation</li> <li>Associated with low weight, not small size</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Associated with a thin child more than with a small child</li> </ul>