

# HEALTH IN ACTION

Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet Newsletter

Summer 2024



In this edition:

## Guatemala in focus

**Plus:** Nutrition in Indigenous Maya communities, drug policy and climate change and more...

**HEALTH  
POVERTY  
ACTION**

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the latest edition of your newsletter, Health in Action. My name is Silvia Vasquez and I work as a Project Coordinator for Health Poverty Action in Guatemala. In my role, I oversee our work with predominantly Indigenous Maya communities that are home to the Mam people, my own ethnic group.



Alongside my colleagues, our partners and communities across Guatemala, we're committed to supporting people's health and wellbeing – whether improving access to healthcare, challenging discrimination, helping women empower themselves, or sharing vital knowledge.

In this edition, you can read about our work with communities to improve maternal and child health. You can learn how our sister organisation, Find Your Feet, is contributing to work with Indigenous Maya women around nutrition. We also spotlight our work alongside activists globally to address the climate crisis.

As we launch our 'Guatemala in Focus' appeal, you can contribute to the work that Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet are doing to support healthier, more prosperous communities globally.

On behalf of all the people we work with, thank you for your committed support. I hope you feel inspired by seeing how our collective efforts are making a real impact.

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Front cover: Traditional Birth Attendants gather in the western highlands of Guatemala

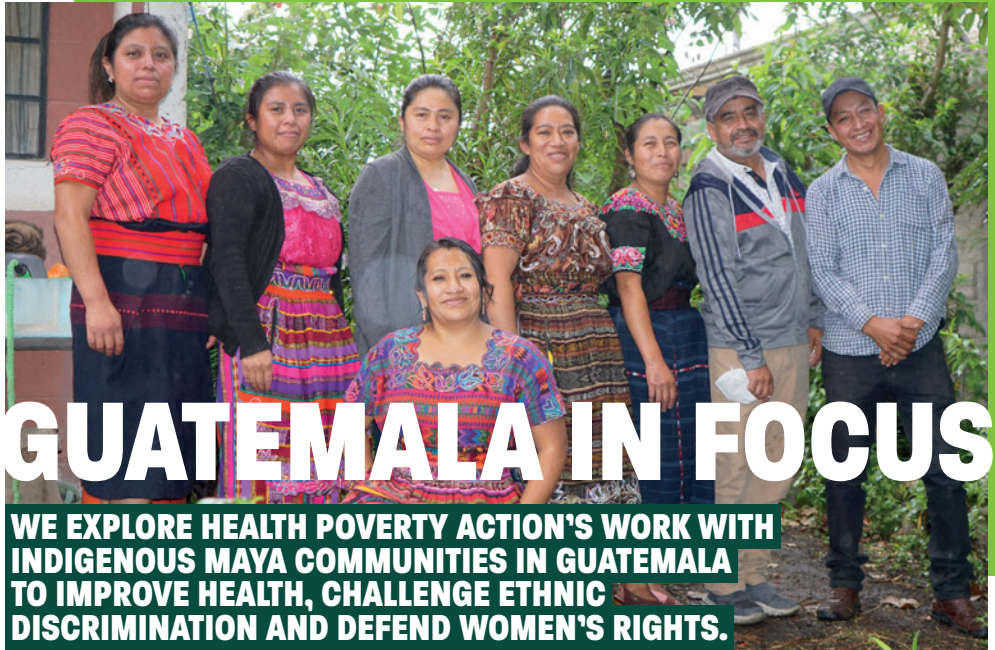
Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet share resources and expertise so we can better support marginalised communities to enhance their health, livelihoods and wellbeing.

## JOIN THE MOVEMENT – HEALTH FOR ALL IN A JUST WORLD

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Health Poverty Action (HPA) has been working in Guatemala since 1995, specifically in the western highlands, primarily with two Indigenous Maya communities – the K’iche’ people and the Mam people. The impact of Spanish colonialism in Guatemala has left Indigenous Maya people suffering from marginalisation, with health outcomes, job opportunities and socioeconomic indicators being much worse for these communities.

Our team in Guatemala is drawn from predominantly Indigenous Maya communities. Olga de Leon, one of our former K’iche’ Community Facilitators explains: “We speak the same language as these communities; we’re part of the community. We are trusted within the community, so can find out more about additional

issues. This means we can provide much more holistic support than those who aren’t embedded in the community.”

Ethnic discrimination makes it harder for Indigenous Maya people to access employment, healthcare and governance structures. Indigenous Maya women also face gender discrimination, with restrictive norms and a prevalence of domestic abuse affecting their communities. Widespread corruption and underfunding in the public sector have a great impact on these communities, with health services particularly stretched in rural areas. Guatemala also has one of the highest rates of chronic malnutrition in the world and this is even worse among Indigenous Maya people.

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▲ We collaborate with staff at health centres to ensure that people can benefit from better healthcare

Together with activists, health workers, public officials and ordinary people, we've been working to find sustainable ways to address the challenges facing these communities.

Much of the team's recent work has focused on maternal and newborn health. Specifically, we've been working with the Ministry of Health to improve the quality of antenatal and postnatal care. This is an area where Indigenous Maya women have historically received poor treatment, with service providers being abusive, dismissive and unable to communicate in their languages.

In addition to supporting health workers to provide culturally appropriate healthcare, we've also been helping them to collaborate with Indigenous Maya Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) to ensure that pregnant women can give birth safely. Another element of this work has been teaching expectant mothers about nutrition and helping them develop vegetable gardens, so their families can benefit from a better diet (see page 6).

Angela Antonieta Pérez Vicente, one of the TBAs we work with, is enthusiastic about the impact we're having together: "Now, with the HPA project, we're getting more training... We learn about danger signs in pregnancy...the importance of antenatal care...diet and nutrition, and what an [obstetric] emergency plan is.

We've seen that communication has improved with nursing staff... now they know me, they know my work, and they support me. They call me with information, and we go together to visit high-risk patients, or those who haven't gone...for a check-up."

Consuelo Juárez Pu, our previous Project Coordinator, agrees: "We've been able to ensure that Indigenous Maya people receive respectful, culturally appropriate healthcare. Together, we've improved access to antenatal services for pregnant women...maternal mortality rates are steadily decreasing."

# GREETINGS FROM GUATEMALA

Olga de León, formerly one of our K'iche' Community Facilitators, shares a little about her country, her people and their history: "Guatemala is known as the 'Country of Eternal Spring'. Historically, the population belonged to the Maya culture, great astronomers and mathematicians. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish invaded, and stole our country's wealth. Since then, we have been divided, and the indigenous population discriminated against by the Mestizo (mixed) population.



In the twentieth century, we lived through an internal conflict between the Guatemalan army and revolutionary guerrillas, in which up to 200,000 died, around 90%...at the hands of the army. There was widespread displacement, and many have never returned to their communities."

She continues: "Climate depends on region, with lowlands very hot,


including jungle, and highlands, where HPA works, very cold. Our communities are in the west of the country, and are largely Maya K'iche' and Maya Mam. The majority are subsistence farmers, with most producing maize and black beans.

To try and acquire land, many seek to earn cash; but because there are so few work opportunities, many migrate; some to the capital, but many more make the journey to the US.

Those who make it to the US spend at least their first year there paying their debts to the people smugglers...while those who fail to make it across the border end up with large debts and no way to pay them off. The economic situation has contributed to a country with high levels of extortion, kidnappings and crime.

Family is...very important to people. Families share good times and bad...triumphs and problems, happiness and sadness alike."

## Donate now:

Give to our Guatemala in Focus Appeal and support communities and health workers as they challenge discrimination and build healthier lives. To donate today, please visit:  <https://bit.ly/3BPRfkx>



## STEPS TOWARDS BETTER NUTRITION IN GUATEMALA

Find Your Feet (FYF) has been working with our local partner Health Poverty Action in Guatemala since 2022. In collaboration with community members and health care workers, FYF is supporting nutrition projects aimed at Indigenous Maya women and children in the western highlands.

Guatemala has among the highest childhood malnutrition and stunting rates in the world, almost half of children show signs of malnutrition. However, among indigenous populations health outcomes are significantly worse.

In recent years the price of basic food and protein sources rose by around 25-30%. Stagnant wages and inflation compound this issue, meaning people have even less to spend on food.

The climate crisis has brought about more challenges; extended dry periods have affected planting dates, and sudden bouts of heavy rainfall often destroy crops. Many families grow maize, beans and squash to eat and sell, so this has affected people nutritionally and economically.

### Our Approach

Our nutrition project involves close collaboration with Ministry of Health (MoH) staff and Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). This ensures that the projects are engaging, accessible, culturally appropriate, and promote long-term behaviour change. Together, we've engaged 148 pregnant women, 219 new mothers, 40 MoH staff, and 67 TBAs in discussions about the importance of nutrition during pregnancy. This has created an enthusiasm for change and knowledge-sharing.

## Interactive education and discussion

Our local partners engage pregnant women and new mothers in interactive, activity-based sessions, emphasising the benefits of being well-nourished and the dangers of malnutrition, especially during pregnancy and for children. They also address areas of health misinformation.

Project staff work closely with MoH staff and TBAs on how to advise and advocate around nutrition, covering issues such as breastfeeding and supplements.

## Demonstrative gardens

Our partners also establish vegetable gardens at health posts. Involving the community in every stage, from composting to harvesting, and teaching easily replicable skills for their home. Those without land receive guidance on container gardening, ensuring everyone can participate.



▲ People learn ways to prepare tasty meals with nutritious vegetables at cooking demonstrations

Community workers provide seeds and plants for home cultivation, focusing on nutrient dense, weather resistant plants and climate adaptive techniques. People have been enthusiastic about diversifying their own gardens, often discussing this among themselves.

## Cooking Demonstrations

Project staff hold cooking demonstrations using the vegetables and herbs they've grown. These sessions show families innovative ways to integrate vegetables into their meals. They involve the MoH in these efforts, so they can find ways to make their own nutrition programmes more effective.

## Hear from Project Coordinator, Silvia Vasquez

We love hosting “cooking demonstrations in communities, using our home-grown vegetables”. A hit is our “veggie fritters with NutriNiños, a supplement provided by the MoH that is notoriously difficult to get children to eat.” Initially met with scepticism, especially from mothers struggling to get their children to consume vegetables, “by the end of the day, we always have many happy children and parents. People go home inspired to recreate them at home”.

**Your contributions mean we can work alongside communities around the world, helping them improve people’s nutrition and livelihoods. To donate today, please visit: <https://bit.ly/45UDgZ3>**



# MISSING LINKS

AS PART OF A GLOBAL COALITION OF ACTIVISTS WE HIGHLIGHT THE IMPACT OF DRUG POLICY ON CLIMATE JUSTICE





Health Poverty Action facilitates the International Coalition for Drug Policy and Environmental Justice, made up of scientists, academics and activists. Their first report pulls together emerging evidence to demonstrate how the prohibition of drugs is a barrier to climate action and calls on the environmental movement to take decisive action.

Drug prohibition pushes drug production and trafficking into key areas of biodiversity, including some of the planet's largest carbon sinks. These areas are key to our planetary health. Here, profits from the trade are reinvested into other environmentally harmful activities like illegal mining, land grabbing and logging.

The report reveals how drug policy creates the underlying conditions for environmental devastation. Mapping how prohibitionist laws have empowered and enriched organised and violent criminal groups, creating a powerful shadow economy that has destabilised state architecture, leaving officials to legislate in the interests of organised crime rather than people and planet. Making drugs illegal has driven up their prices, making drug traders rich and powerful, leading to the rise of multibillion-dollar unregulated trade networks. At the top of these networks are violent

organised criminal organisations that wield the power to control entire states, through bribes or threats.

The report is a plea to the environmental movement to embrace one crucial idea:

Drug prohibition is a key driver of organised crime, corruption and state capture in ecologically fragile regions. Addressing the climate emergency requires urgent, coordinated action by the environmental and drug policy movements, to replace prohibition with regulation that supports people and the planet.



## **DRUG PROHIBITION PUSHES DRUG PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING INTO KEY AREAS OF BIODIVERSITY.**



In November 2025, Brazil will host the world's key climate change conference, COP 30. Host to the largest section of the Amazon, Brazil is key to our climate future. In the lead up to COP 30, the coalition will research, agitate and advocate to expose the ways in which prohibition is a barrier to climate justice, and demand that drug policy is on the climate agenda.

**You can read and download the report entitled 'Revealing the Missing Link to Climate Justice: Drug Policy' here:**

<https://bit.ly/3VfOXUX>



# A GIFT IN YOUR WILL HELPS FAMILIES ACROSS AFRICA, ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA CONTINUE TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR OWN LIVES

Stand with the communities, campaigners and health workers who've been taking a **different approach** to tackling poverty and hunger for over sixty years.

Find Your Feet was founded in 1960 and originally focussed on supporting Eastern European refugees. Today, because of our committed supporters, we are able to work with communities across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

**To find out how even a small gift in your will can make a huge difference, please contact [fyf@fyf.org.uk](mailto:fyf@fyf.org.uk) or tick the relevant box in the response form and send it to us for free.**



# GET INVOLVED



There are many ways to support the work of Health Poverty Action and Find Your Feet. Here are just a few ways, and you can find more on our websites at [www.healthpovertyaction.org](http://www.healthpovertyaction.org) and [www.findyourfeet.org](http://www.findyourfeet.org).



## Overseas challenges

If you've always wanted to visit the countries we work in, why not tackle a challenge abroad? Explore the vibrant landscapes of Cambodia, Vietnam, or Kenya through our overseas challenges. Join #TeamHPA with colleagues or friends for a guided trek that promises not just adventure, but also meaningful experiences.

## London Marathon 2025

Join #TeamHPA and take on the world-famous London Marathon in 2025. This year boasts the highest ballot entry rate on record, making securing entry more challenging than ever before! Guarantee your space today with a £100 refundable deposit and work towards raising a minimum of £2,000 to support our work.

## DIY Fundraising

If high-adrenaline adventures are not your thing, then check out our DIY Fundraising opportunities to craft your own fundraising event. Our fundraising packs are available for you to download today. From bake sales and curry nights to raffles and crafternoons, our A-Z Fundraising Ideas will ignite your creativity and make a difference.

## Get involved!

For more information and to get involved in any of these opportunities, email Tabitha at [tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org](mailto:tl.jarsdel@healthpovertyaction.org).

**We can't wait to hear from you!**



# GUATEMALA IN FOCUS

**WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE HEALTH, SUPPORT WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, AND CHALLENGE ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION**

▲ **Communities are coming together to share knowledge and address key issues**

Like many countries around the world, Guatemala is still dealing with the consequences of colonisation – from economic exploitation to ethnic discrimination.

The communities we work with in Guatemala, which are primarily populated by Indigenous Maya people, face many challenges to people's health and wellbeing. These challenges – from lack of access to healthcare, to chronic malnutrition, to restrictive gender norms – are compounded by the marginalisation they suffer within their own country.

We have been collaborating with health workers, activists, public officials and community members to support people's health and defend their rights – whether improving access to healthcare, challenging discrimination, helping women empower themselves, or sharing vital knowledge around key issues such as nutrition.

**Please give whatever you can to our Guatemala in Focus appeal and support community members, health workers and activists as they challenge injustice, ignorance and marginalisation.**

## How to donate:

**Web:** [www.healthpovertyaction.org](http://www.healthpovertyaction.org) | [www.find-your-feet.org](http://www.find-your-feet.org)

**Email:** [fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org](mailto:fundraising@healthpovertyaction.org) / [fyf@fyf.org.uk](mailto:fyf@fyf.org.uk)

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