



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Colombia



Saving lives through early action

**Food security and social cohesion in La Guajira,
on the front line of the migration and extreme drought crisis**

Summary and key figures

In response to the humanitarian emergency in Colombia's La Guajira Department caused by the migration and extreme drought crisis, the country office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) implemented a series of actions in five municipalities, which had a rapid and undeniable impact on food security and social cohesion, benefitting more than 7 000 men, women and children: for each dollar invested, the participating families were able to generate income

of USD 2.60 and increased their resilience. The La Guajira project is part of FAO's Early Warning Early Action System (EWEA), and was co-financed by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) through FAO's Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA), as well as by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

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| Implementation period: | September 2018 - June 2019. |
| Location: | Colombia, La Guajira Department, Uribia, Maicao, Manaure, Albania and Riohacha Municipalities. |
| Number of participants: | 1 003 families with a total 7 021 members. |
| Executor: | FAO. |
| Funders: | FAO Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA) with resources provided by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), and CERF (UN). |
| Partnerships: | World Food Programme (WFP); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Save the Children; Pan American Development Foundation (FUPAD in Spanish); United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF); Colombian Agricultural and Livestock Institute (ICA in Spanish); Colombia's National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD in Spanish) and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR in Spanish). |
| Investment and benefits: | |
| Total project amount: | USD 1.4 million |
| Direct subsidy to each participating family: | USD 528 |
| Income generated by each participating family: | USD 1 351 |
| Return on investment: | USD 2.60 for each USD 1 invested |
| Key words: | Early action, migration, drought, resilience, food security, Wayúu indigenous people. |



Extreme drought and migration crisis aggravates food insecurity

Venezuela's on-going deep economic crisis has triggered the migration of more than 4 million people in search of food and stability, constituting the fastest migratory flow in the recent history of Latin America. This phenomenon has particularly affected Colombia, where immigration has reached 1.4 million people in the last five years.

This situation has become extremely complex and serious in the department of La Guajira — located in the northernmost region of the country — which has already received more than 165 000 migrants. In fact, this area, together with having the highest rates of poverty and malnutrition at the national level, is characterized by being the country's most arid zone, with high temperatures, low rainfall and periods of drought that have become increasingly frequent in recent years.

The local communities have opened their doors to Venezuelan migrants and Colombian returnees, sharing their homes and food. As a result, households have grown — nine family members on average, and some with more than 30 members — and many still await the arrival of more family members in the near future. The inhabitants of these communities have struggled with a history of food insecurity and chronic malnutrition, even before the current migration crisis. This has been particularly true for indigenous

peoples, such as the Wayúu, which represent 30% of the population in this department and 95% in Alta Guajira. The raising of sheep and goats, in a collective system of land tenure, constitutes the economic pillar of the Wayúu families. However, lately, the need to feed more people has led many to start selling or eating their farm animals, which is a negative strategy that is common in times of crisis. This is occurring in a scenario where extreme drought has caused an 80% decrease in sheep and goat herds, a reduction in planting and yields of traditional crops, and growing difficulty in accessing water, even for human consumption.

In response to this humanitarian emergency, and supported by FAO's Early Warning Early Action system (EWEA), FAO Colombia — with resources provided by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) through FAO's Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) and also by the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) — has implemented a series of actions in five municipalities of La Guajira, achieving a rapid and undeniable impact on food security and social cohesion, while benefitting more than 7 000 men, women and children.

La Guajira: structural vulnerabilities

- GDP per capita is half the national average.
- The proportion of people with Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) varies between 50% and 100% in Riohacha and Uribia municipalities, respectively (2010).
- In the last eight years, 4 770 children have died from malnutrition.
- Frequency of agricultural droughts: every one to five years.
- Of the total population in La Guajira, 30% are from the indigenous Wayúu people, and a significant proportion is unregistered without access to basic services.

FAO's Early Warning Early Action System (EWEA)

A new approach: early action

Natural threats linked to climate change, as well as conflicts, are becoming more frequent and intense – today, natural disasters occur almost five times more frequently than 40 years ago. Therefore, in a context of insufficient resources and growing needs, new tools are needed to ensure smart and effective investments to help mitigate the impact of disasters. FAO's Early Warning Early Action System (EWEA) links alerts with early actions to reduce the impacts of disasters. EWEA provides: i) a quarterly global report that identifies the risks of humanitarian

emergency and recommends early actions before a disaster has occurred or reached its maximum expression; ii) a Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA) that was created in 2004, in order to improve FAO's ability to respond quickly and flexibly to emergency situations.

Early action is crucial since, in the short term, it can save lives and protect livelihoods from the impact of disasters, while in the long term it protects development achievements by increasing the resilience of local communities.

Why did FAO call for immediate action in La Guajira?

1. The migratory flow to Colombia shows no signs of diminishing. FAO and other members of the humanitarian community foresaw a deterioration of the economic situation in Venezuela and an increase in the migratory flow. This led FAO to request immediate action in its EWEA Report for third quarter 2018 (July-September 2018).
2. During the same period, it became more likely that the drought was going to affect the next planting season in the area. The International

Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) published several weather forecasts, which indicated that La Guajira would probably experience below-average rainfall and high temperatures that would affect crop growth. Without support, another crop failure was likely.

3. This suggested that border communities would soon be in a dramatic situation where they would have to feed more people with fewer resources. FAO was certain that food security in the area was already declining and would continue to do so under the expected increase in migration pressures.

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Challenges

Promoting food security and social cohesion

The project faced a triple challenge: 1. Promptly promote local food production through the establishment of resilient productive systems, in order to improve the food and nutritional security of the participating families; 2. Help families protect the assets they still had to strengthen their resilience and curb the humanitarian crisis; 3. Contribute to strengthening social cohesion among resident Colombians, returnees and Venezuelan migrants to promote collaborative practices that maximize the use of resources.

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Target participants

Nineteen communities with people from three different cultures living together

Participants include members of the Wayúu ethnic group, Colombian returnees and Venezuelan migrants.

- » Nineteen Wayúu ethnic communities located in five municipalities (Uribia, Maicao, Manaure, Albania and Riohacha).
- » A total of 1 003 families comprised of 7 021 people: 36% Colombian residents, 34% Colombian returnees, and 30% Venezuelan migrants.
- » Main sources of income:
 - » Agricultural activities, mainly raising goats and sheep – La Guajira is home to 61% of the country's goats and 46% of its sheep – and small plots with low yields of corn, cassava, beans, bananas, and other fruits.
 - » Fishing, handicrafts and informal work.
- » Prioritization criteria: High degree of vulnerability, significant current and projected migration flows, and proximity to informal border crossings.



According to the Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis (DANA) conducted by FAO, WFP, and UNICEF in 2018, 65% of returnees and Venezuelan households surveyed in Alta Guajira faced high economic vulnerability, allocating more than 65% of their income to the purchase of food. In addition, of this group, more than 70% ran a very high risk of food insecurity, with expenditure on food representing more than 75% of their income.

Water, rapid recovery of food production, resilience generation

As a result of a participatory process with the communities, FAO designed a strategy comprised of four lines of action that made an immediate difference in La Guajira, and integrated elements of the model for the rapid recovery of agricultural production and strengthening resilience,

which had been developed together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Colombia's National Disaster Risk Management Unit in previous years.

Main actions

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| 1 | Rehabilitation of water infrastructure: starting point of the intervention and catalyst for other actions. Water wells powered by wind or solar energy. Water for basic needs of family hygiene and micro-irrigation. | 18 water rehabilitation systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 270 000 liters/day (USD 3 000 at market price). » 8.5 ha with micro-irrigation. |
| 2 | Establishment of Community Production Centers for rapid food production: model for rapid recovery of agricultural production and strengthening resilience. Community agreement to define the production and capacity development plan. "Learning by doing". Participatory technical exercises. Collaborative capacity development. Agroecological practices. Climate adapted agriculture. Traditional practices. | 17 Community Production Centers (CPC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 8.5 ha (USD 46 000 of production). » 32 200 kg of fruits and vegetables (13 varieties). » 26 600 kg of forage (three species). » 18 warehouses for inputs and equipment. » 325 theoretical-practical workshops in agriculture and food education. |
| 3 | Distribution of seeds and farming tools to individual households: replication at the individual level of what has been learned in the CPC. Short cycle (3 months) and drought tolerant crops. Diversification. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Delivery of seeds and toolkit to each family. » 714 families replicate the rapid recovery of food production model (16 ha). » 60% of families diversify their diets. |
| 4 | Improving animal conditions: animal health, feed, animal management. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 12 500 animals cared for by three animal health teams. » Development of animal management capacities in extreme conditions. » Continuous veterinary support. » Distribution of corn silage and mineralized salt. |

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Results

Increased productivity, better diets

The impact assessment conducted by a team from FAO's EWEA program in June 2019 identified and analyzed the project's results.



Participating Families



Non-Participating Families

Main production outcomes

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| Higher production and more diversified agriculture | Each family: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five types of crops • 115 kg more than in the previous season • Cultivated area/total area: 49% | Each family: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.6 types of crops • 35 kg more than in the previous season • Cultivated area/total area: 28% |
| Lower animal mortality (Animal mortality rate %) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goats: 10.0% • Sheep: 13.1% • Cattle: 8.9% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goats: 19.6% • Sheep: 23.7% • Cattle: 25.2% |
| Improved herd fertility (Animal pregnancy rate %) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goats: 8.1% • Sheep: 12.3% • Cattle: 19.8% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goats: 4.2% • Sheep: 7.5% • Cattle: 13.7% |
| Higher milk productivity (Liters of milk per animal per day) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goats: 0.8 l per animal daily • Sheep: 0.3 l per animal daily • Cattle: 2.1 l per animal daily | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goats: 0.6 l per animal daily • Sheep: 0.2 l per animal daily • Cattle: 1.3 l per animal daily |

Main dietary outcomes

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| More diversified diets (Number of days when households consumed at least 1 food from the following groups in the last 7 days) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits: 3 days • Vegetables: 3.5 days • Milk: 3.3 days • Meat, fish, eggs: 5.5 days | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits: 2 days • Vegetables: 2.5 days • Milk: 3 days • Meat, fish, eggs: 4.2 days |
| Improved food rationing strategies (Number of days when households adopted rationing strategies in the last 7 days) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portion reduction: 3 days • Reduction in number of meals: 3 days | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portion reduction: 4 days • Reduction in number of meals: 4 days |

Each dollar invested generated income of USD 2.60 for each participating family

Economic impact:

The project's actions helped to avoid damages and losses of **USD 1 351** for each participating family, as follows:



Crops

- USD 145 increasing cultivated area
- USD 76 adding community production
- USD 40 avoiding yield losses



Animals

- USD 669 improving the condition of the animals
- USD 305 decreasing animal mortality
- USD 83 increasing milk productivity
- USD 33 increasing the birth rate

Nutritional impact:

- » Of the participating families, 97% reached an acceptable level of consumption.
- » The additional milk produced in each family corresponds to 21% and 54% of the daily calorie and protein requirement, respectively, of a 5-year-old child.

Impact on resilience:

- » Participants exhibit a Resilience Capacity Index (RCI) 12% higher than that of their peers in the control group, which is explained by the fact that the participating families obtained better scores in both Adaptive Capacity and Assets.

Impact on social cohesion:

- » Of the participating families, 75% declare that their relations with the "others" (residents, returnees, Venezuelans) have improved in the last year, compared to only 39% in the control group.
- » The project had positive effects on the community, uniting Colombian and Venezuelan families around a common goal. The Community Production Centers became spaces for learning and the exchange of ideas, and participants shared different skills with their neighbours beyond the scope of the project. As a result, and also due to the fact that families are expected to gradually specialize in crops that grow best in their plots, it is reasonable to expect production to increase in the future.



Impact assessment in La Guajira: methodological aspects

- » 325 interviews at the household level (159 participants; 166 non-participants, control group).
- » 17 focus group discussions.
- » Collection of human-interest stories.
- » Topics evaluated: 1) agricultural production; 2) food and nutritional security; 3) resilience; 4) social cohesion; 5) participant perception.
- » Measurement of the Resilience Capacity Index (RCI), which includes five dimensions: 1) access to basic services; 2) assets; 3) social security networks; 4) awareness; 5) adaptive capacity.

Social participation, rapid results, and interagency collaboration

- » A process of social participation and community collaboration at all stages of the project, which is coordinated through the Community Production Centers.
- » The implementation of a strategy for the rapid recovery of food production and strengthening resilience adapted to each situation.
- » A community-based methodology of "learning by doing".
- » The permanent presence in the communities of the project technical teams, including some members from the Wayúu ethnic group.
- » Interagency collaboration that helps to mobilize greater resources and competencies.
- » Promoting coordination and synergies between numerous actors.
- » An alliance with local and central governments.

Coordination and synergies

Enlisting the support of rural development institutions

- **WFP:** delivery of food baskets for three months while the families work to harvest the first crops in the framework of the rapid recovery of food production process (avoids the consumption of seeds).
- **UNDP:** talks on security and coexistence issues, as well as campaigns to reduce xenophobia.
- **UNHCR:** delivery of school kits and support for migrants to complete the documentation needed to obtain the special residence permit.
- **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC):** legal orientation sessions (mainly in Majayura).
- **UNFPA:** actions related to issues of sexual violence and promotion of the use of contraceptive methods, delivery of feminine hygiene kits to girls and adolescents.
- **Save the Children:** toiletry kits for boys and girls.
- **FUPAD:** participation in sessions to provide legal orientation and reduce childhood violence.
- **UNICEF:** delivery of water purification filters (95), reducing domestic violence through protective equipment.
- **ICA:** management of rabies, poultry production guidelines.
- **UNGRD and MADR:** agroclimatic risk management.

Strengthening resilience and multi-stakeholder collaboration

Strengthening the resilience of the communities should contribute to the sustainability of the impacts, along with an approach that, since the beginning of the project, has sought to mobilize resources and competencies that allow rapid action under a holistic approach. However, given the high vulnerability of the territories involved, a longer

period of support is needed to consolidate the initiatives implemented and strengthen the skills and capacities of the communities to manage the risks to which the livelihoods of their members are exposed.



Project serves as a catalyst for greater support

The FAO/Sida project, with financing from the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) and CERF, served as a catalyst to launch a broader resilience program in La Guajira, which is co-financed by FAO (USD 500 000) and the European Union (USD 2 million, of which USD 1.7 million was spent in Colombia and USD 300 000 in Venezuela). This new project helps to strengthen the support

for the families already involved, as well as to increase the coverage to a total of 45 communities, including 2 093 families comprised of 11 950 men, women and children, over a period of 15 months (June 2019 - September 2020).



Seven key conclusions

- » **Supporting agriculture makes a difference:** timely support for agriculture can protect assets and increase food security for families with difficulties. And it does so in ways that avoid future interventions that would be more expensive and reduces the dependence of households on humanitarian aid.
- » **Protecting livelihoods can generate social cohesion:** acting early to protect agricultural livelihoods can improve relationships between different groups of community residents.
- » **Early action can mitigate the impact of mass migration:** it is possible to anticipate and soften the blow of disruptive events, such as mass migration, when organizations have strong EWEA systems.
- » **Permanent monitoring** allowed FAO to identify the rapid change in the situation in Colombia and the region, both in terms of drought and migratory flows. The experience in La Guajira showed how important it is to study the links between climate-related events and socio-economic changes.
- » **Identifying the “trigger” indicators for action** is key to timely support.
- » **The protection of livelihoods** helps strengthen resilience over time.
- » **Collaboration** between various agencies and institutions generates synergies that allow a multidimensional approach.

Multiple funding sources and impact assessment

- » The first stage of the project is funded by three different agencies, which will catalyze a second stage with new funders.
- » The impact assessment identifies and analyzes the achievements of the project, showing a positive return on investment.

Gender

- The whole family participates in the training workshops and works in the CPCs.
- Men participate in workshops for the preparation of adequate and safe food.
- Farm tools are provided that are adapted to the physical capacities of women (lighter, smaller).

Social inclusion

- Prioritization of the most vulnerable communities.
- Equal participation of the three population groups (Wayúu indigenous people, Colombian returnees, Venezuelan migrants).

Social participation

- Participatory diagnosis and prioritization of needs.
- Community agreement to define the production plan, commitments and responsibilities, and the content of the training program.
- Participation in supervision and monitoring.

More information:

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Bogotá, Colombia.
- **Documents:** [Colombia - Impact of Early Warning Early Action](#) (2019); [Evaluación de daños y análisis de necesidades \(EDAN\) en seguridad alimentaria y nutrición, áreas rurales de los departamentos de frontera Arauca, La Guajira y Norte de Santander](#) (2018)
- **Press:** [Semana Rural, Con gotas de agua, enfrentan el hambre](#); [Reuters, Drip irrigation, sun and solar do 'God's work' and a Colombian desert blooms](#); [Latinamerican Post, Como si se tratara de la gracia de Dios, en Colombia hay un desierto que floreció](#)
- **Video:** [Con gotas de hambre enfrentan el hambre en La Guajira](#)



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