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NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2020

ALDEA and ABPD Respond to COVID-19 Challenges in Guatemala



May 2020—My name is Leydi Janeth Lares and my husband's is Jorge Antonio Cutzal. We live in Panabajal, Comalapa, and we have been married for 7 years. We have two children: Gabriel, 6, and Reyes, 4. Gabriel is in kindergarten at the public school in the village. Every day, while having breakfast, he says he wants to go to school. He is very

sad. As parents, we are concerned about his education. My husband Jorge and I are worried because we are not prepared to lose our jobs and continue feeding our children. He is a day laborer, and before the pandemic he helped farmers grow fruits and vegetables every day in our community, and my job was to weave hüip-iles (traditional blouses) to sell in town.

We are very grateful to ABPD for providing us vegetable seeds, so now we have beets, chard, and hierba mora (a local nutritious green). We had hierba mora yesterday from our garden, we eat the leaves and it's very helpful, because the more you cut its leaves, the more they grow. My son Reyes reminds us every day about hand washing, he would come with me to the ABPD trainings, and he remembers the staff always say this when we start to handle the vegetables.



The coronavirus pandemic reached Guatemala in mid-March, and since then ALDEA and our sister organization ABPD have been working to adapt our regular development programs and respond to our partners' emergency needs within this new and challenging context. As of this writing there have been very few confirmed COVID-19 cases in the rural villages where we work, but daily new case numbers for the country as a whole are still on the rise. Over the last four months isolation measures and transportation restrictions, job losses and other economic effects, and fear of the disease's potentially devastating impacts have all taken a toll on our partners in the rural Department of Chimaltenango.

As the first COVID-19 cases were confirmed in Guatemala, we suspended in-person programming with our partner

Continued on page 4



Dear Friends and Supporters,

We're facing a number of intense challenges as a global community right now. The coronavirus pandemic, struggles for racial justice, and widespread economic uncertainty are testing all of us to some degree. These crises have forced many of us to return to our core values for guidance in making decisions we never thought we'd have to make. This is certainly true of ALDEA as an organization and our partners at ABPD in Guatemala. Our core values build on the principles of our founder, Dr. Carroll Behrhorst, which have seen ALDEA through a number of different challenges in our 53-year history. Because our shared values provide such an important foundation for what we do, especially now when implementing our regular approach is not possible, I want to emphasize them here:

» **Partnership with Communities:** Working in partnership with Mayan communities in the Guatemalan highlands toward their own goals is an important pillar of ALDEA/ABPD's work.

» **Community Empowerment & Mobilization:** The mobilization and empowerment of the entire community is an important aspect of all ALDEA/ABPD's programs and approaches.

» **Strategic Alliances:** An essential part of the approach is for ALDEA/ABPD and the communities and their local development committees to form strategic alliances with a range of actors including municipalities, national governmental entities, and other NGOs working in the area that can complement our work.

» **Evidence-Based Interventions:** ALDEA/ABPD's work is evidence-based, drawing on documented national and international research about what works best. This also means that we will periodically document and evaluate our work.

» **Sustainable Development:** ALDEA/ABPD strives to ensure that development activities are sustainable and cost-effective.

» **Learning and Knowledge:** ALDEA and ABPD are learning organizations. We will develop and test innovative approaches with our partner communities and continually engage in evaluation processes to determine what works. We will phase in new ideas, taking into consideration the conditions in each community, and base our support on what is happening on the ground.

As you read in this newsletter about how much of our work has changed recently in response to the pandemic, you'll also see evidence that these core values remain the same. We're doing our best to support families and communities with the tools they need to forge their own path through this crisis while also recognizing that sometimes the resources currently at their disposal just aren't enough to meet their basic needs.

I've been so grateful for the thoughtful dedication of my fellow ALDEA and ABPD board members, our staff, and especially our donors to continuing our mission of supporting the health and well-being of our Mayan partners during this difficult time. It's been an honor to witness the incredible level of generosity and trust you all have shown ALDEA as we take on the challenge of adapting our work within the context of this unprecedented crisis. On behalf of all of us at ALDEA and ABPD, thank you so much for standing with us through this—with your financial and also your moral support. It's an honor to share these values with you.

With gratitude,

Sonya M. Fultz
ALDEA Board President

Dear Friends of ALDEA and ABPD,

Like so many others throughout the world, here in Guatemala we have been suffering through the COVID-19 pandemic for more than four months. We decided early on not to risk bringing the virus with us into our partner communities, especially as confirmed case numbers there in these remote areas remain very low. However, by keeping in touch virtually, we have been able to conduct regular surveys to identify our partners' needs and provide a targeted emergency response. Despite the recent challenges preventing us from working with communities in person, we still have been able to achieve most of what ALDEA and ABPD had planned to accomplish together this last year.

Since October, we have supported more than 1,700 families from 11 communities in Comalapa and Tecpán through our integrated approach combining programs in community mobilization, nutrition and agriculture, and water and sanitation infrastructure. Together we have reduced rates of chronic malnutrition among children under two by 15 percentage points in our second-year communities and by 4 percentage points in our first-year communities. Women are more aware of the importance of a good nutrition for their children, and 99 percent of them now exclusively breastfeed their babies during the first six months of life. Also, 96 percent of babies between 6 and 23 months are breastfeeding while being introduced to appropriate weaning foods.

We have completed 4 potable water projects, providing nearly 7,000 people with access to clean drinking water. In one of these, we were able to install a solar-powered pump, reducing the community's ongoing maintenance costs and exposure to diesel exhaust. We also installed 677 gray water filters, 789 latrines, and 539 efficient stoves to further improve home health and hygiene.

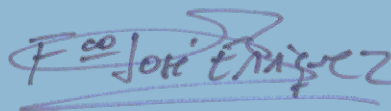
Empowerment is the core of our approach, and our programs are designed to ensure all community

members have their voices heard and develop their leadership skills. Through our work, we have seen women taking on more and more leadership roles. When we started working in our current second-year villages, only 3 percent of women in our programs took part in community committees. Now, 28 percent of women have taken on these decision-making roles. In our first-year villages, so far the number of women participating in committees has risen from 3 percent to 8 percent. Men continue to engage in learning about new masculinities and respecting the rights of women and youth, and community authorities are realizing the value of supporting projects designed by the youth groups organized by ABPD—such as the Xecoxol youth garden featured in this newsletter. One community, Palima, has now elected their second female mayor since ALDEA and ABPD began our work with them in 2018. In some cases, men have seen so much value in our work that they have stepped in to participate in our women's trainings on days when their wives are unable to attend—a level of support we've never seen before.

We have seen increased use of regular family planning methods and more interest every year in long-term or permanent options, including among men. We are working hard to ensure our deliveries of family planning methods continue without interruption during the pandemic—along with other critical supplies like prenatal and children's vitamins and garden seeds.

All of this would be impossible without your support. Thank you so much for continuing to change lives together with us in the Department of Chimaltenango. I hope all of us can see an end to these difficult times soon.

Muchas gracias,



Paco Enríquez
ABPD Executive Director



April 2020—My name is María Paula Mux Elías, I am 28 and am part of a group that works with ABPD in Xiquín Sanahí, Comalapa. I am very worried about all that is happening with the pandemic, it is scary. My family still has food for the next couple weeks, but I am afraid we will run out soon. I normally weave and sell my crafts in the market, but nobody is buying my products now. My husband helps a mason, but the owner of the house they are building said they are going to stop the construction, he has no money and cannot get the construction materials to the community, so my husband will lose his job. This is my main concern now, I cannot think about anything else, I am so worried... I don't know how I will feed my children. Another concern is we are not ready for this disease in the community, we have no medicine and only two masks that our whole family shares. I hope all this will end soon.



As part of the ABPD group we learned how to grow vegetables in a family garden, but we had a big hail storm that badly damaged my plants, and I could only save the quilete (a local plant rich in iron). I am very sad, but I am feeding my children with the quilete, and I am using the recipes we learned during the trainings. We are planting more vegetables now, and hopefully we will even be able to sell some of them and use the income to buy other food.

I also have a goat from ABPD, and I am very happy to say she gave birth already, so she is producing milk that has been so helpful for my children! I expect to have to buy corn and beans from June until December. I am very concerned we will not have enough resources, so we may have to reduce the number of meals we eat in a day. I don't want to think about what our situation would be like without ABPD's support.

communities to help stop the spread of the coronavirus and comply with government mandates. Our local ABPD office remains closed, and staff are working from home. They reach out to community leaders and health promoters regularly by phone and are working continuously to assess their needs with regular surveys and interviews. They share information about the virus and lockdown measures and provide support to make sure people know how to access resources. ABPD program experts have recorded video trainings in nutrition and agriculture, and we are distributing tablets and internet hotspots so communities can access these resources remotely. The ABPD staff are working toward a goal of delivering our more interactive programs—like women's empowerment, youth development, and men's engagement—over live video feeds.

Our Initial Response

The first phase of our emergency response, at the end of April, was focused on meeting smaller-scale targeted needs and ensuring some of our vital existing supports continued. We distributed a three months' supply of family planning methods, prenatal and children's vitamins, and treatments for pediatric diarrhea. In one community that does not yet have a water system, rain barrels were going dry and they could not wash their hands as recommended, so we committed to trucking in water for a few weeks until the rainy season started. Another community lost their vital family gardens to a hail storm, so we provided new seedlings. We also delivered more than 13,000 masks and 100 gallons of hand sanitizer to our partner communities in Tecpán and Comalapa, as well as our recently graduated communities in Santa Apolonia, to help them comply with government orders and minimize the potential spread of the coronavirus.

Meeting Critical Food & Hygiene Needs

In mid-May, our local ABPD staff completed a larger survey of families in our nine current partner communities. The results showed a critical need for support based on widespread loss of income, isolation due to lockdown measures, and rising food prices. At this point, the ALDEA and ABPD Boards worked with staff to make the significant decision that we would provide emergency relief

Continued on page 6

Youth Garden Initiative Provides Produce for Families

Project Stems from Partnership with SERES

Young people in Xecoxol, Tecpán, have designed and implemented their own garden project to help improve nutrition in their community. They began their initiative in the fall of 2019 through leadership development programs offered by ALDEA/ABPD and our partner organization SERES. The group of 39 youth worked together to establish a shared plot where they grew produce like beets, cabbage, broccoli, onions, quilete (a local plant rich in iron), and amaranth. They sold their first harvest at a reduced price to other community members, increasing access to healthy foods while earning enough to reinvest in another planting. Participants also took produce they grew home to help support their own families. *“ABPD told us about chronic malnutrition in children, and we realized that they need vegetables, so we decided to do this community garden,”* said project participant Juan Fernando Mejía Guantá.

Every year, youth participating in ALDEA/ABPD’s empowerment programs have the opportunity to attend a special “Congress” offered by SERES. They come together with other young leaders from the area for an intensive week-long training designed to inspire them to see themselves as catalysts of change in their communities. At the Congress, each group develops a proposal for improving their community that they bring back home and share with other youth. As part of the SERES program, they also must present their project to local authorities and community members for approval. *“SERES is a great organization to work with on youth leadership because their goals align very closely with ours,”* said ABPD Executive Director Paco Enríquez. *“We provide training in topics like self-esteem, family planning, and nutrition, and SERES is the perfect match because they provide leadership training in a different way, focused on developing plans and strategies. SERES helps the youth design their own future plans, and we help them make those plans real.”*

ABPD Field Supervisor Johanna Cap added, *“Youth are empowered through the SERES trainings. They gain new skills and learn about sustainable devel-*

opment in a culturally pertinent way and with a focus on gen-

der equity, which helps advance ABPD’s mission.”

About 10 youth from Xecoxol attended the SERES Congress in November 2019, then came back and presented their action plan to the community. The rest of the youth working with ALDEA/ABPD got on board, and they began implementing the project with support from ALDEA/ABPD. Already, the youth have made improvements to the project based on initial challenges they faced. *“The land we used at first for the garden is very dry, but we have changed its location to a place where irrigation is easier for us,”* Mejía Guantá reported.

“Insects and diseases affected our garden, but our moms have learned how to make natural insecticides through the ABPD trainings, and they have shown us how to make these. We also fertilized the new garden we planted using compost,” Anabela Lorenzo shared. She added that the COVID-19 pandemic has limited their ability to work together and caused them to shift their focus. *“What we harvest this time will be shared among the group of youth, because of the food shortage.”*

The Xecoxol garden project is one of many youth initiatives that have arisen out of ALDEA/ABPD’s partnership with SERES over the last five years. Other groups have worked to improve their communities through projects related to food production as well as reforestation, recycling, and sanitation. While ALDEA/ABPD offers a small amount of seed funding to help get successful proposals off the ground, many projects—like the Xecoxol youth garden—are designed to be self-sufficient from the beginning. During trainings, ABPD also prepares men, women, and local authorities to support and encourage youth as their community’s future leaders.



April 2020—My name is María Adelina Tubac Calicio. I am 33 and am not married, but I have a beautiful child. I am an ABPD health promoter in Xiquin Sanahí, Comalapa, and a woman leader, supporting the women's group in my community. I love travelling and working with women from other villages. I am a very outgoing person who is usually never at home.

The pandemic situation totally changed my life—my life plans and projects—and I was not ready for this change. I was concerned about not being able to work with the groups of women or leave my community, and this made me fall into a depression. I could not stop asking myself, “And now, what?” I was following what was happening in developed countries and I thought, “Most of the time we do not even have enough money to buy a pill that costs less than Q1 [\$0.13],” and this worry was in my head all day. I felt I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up again; this depression has been very hard for me. But then I started to think, “I am a leader in my community, and if I want to face this situation we are going through, I have to give something to my village, I have to help other people.” I remembered all the trainings we have received from ABPD and that being a promoter and an empowered woman, I am more than capable of doing something for others. I looked at what we had at home and thought about how to encourage children to wash their hands all the time in a fun way. A friend helped me film a video about how to wash your hands using only things you can find at home. It went viral on social media, and even the national TV showed it. Many people have sent me photos of themselves doing what I showed on the video.



ger. Interviews with families were yielding serious concerns—for example Odilia Guantá Rucuch, a mother of three from our partner community of Chajalajjá, told our staff: **“The disease is not going to kill us; if we die it will be because of poverty and hunger.”** (We’ve included more perspectives from community members, translated from their own words in Kaqchikel and Spanish, throughout this newsletter.)

As with everything we do, our approach to distributing emergency aid was carried out through a very intentional process. In early June, we started with a pilot distribution to the community that our initial survey had showed was in the

for those families in need through the distribution of food and hygiene kits.

This is a short-term, emergency departure from the way we normally work. Our empowerment-based programs have been carefully designed over many years for long-term sustainability, and our approach is to support our partners as they build their capacity to lead their own development initiatives. But careful review of the situation showed that the large scale and ongoing nature of this crisis had the potential to prevent us from implementing our regular programs in the years ahead if we did not act to mitigate its impacts. Some families have been faced with the need to sell tools, land, and other vital resources just to address the growing challenge of hun-

ger. Interviews with families were yielding serious concerns—for example Odilia Guantá Rucuch, a mother of three from our partner community of Chajalajjá, told our staff: **“The disease is not going to kill us; if we die it will be because of poverty and hunger.”** (We’ve included more perspectives from community members, translated from their own words in Kaqchikel and Spanish, throughout this newsletter.)

As with everything we do, our approach to distributing emergency aid was carried out through a very intentional process. In early June, we started with a pilot distribution to the community that our initial survey had showed was in the greatest need. ABPD staff developed very specific criteria to ensure our food aid packages would go to the families who truly needed them most. Then, the women working as health promoters in our programs drafted a list of the families in the community they felt met the criteria and needed support. The list was posted in a public space, and community members had time to review it and contact the ABPD staff about any concerns. Once everyone was satisfied with the list, we distributed a month’s supply of corn, beans, and oil to the families in need. We also provided hygiene kits, seeds and seedlings for family gardens, and agricultural inputs needed for planting corn crops to a wider range of community members. After evaluating and making small improvement to this methodology, we repeated it for the rest of



our partner communities throughout the month of June. All in all, we supported more than 400 families with direct food aid and distributed more than 56,000 garden seedlings during this phase of our emergency response.

The May survey also showed a need for mental health support, as many of our partners have struggled to deal with the significant economic stress, isolation, and fear of the disease itself brought by the pandemic. In June ABPD brought in a mental health professional for a week-long virtual training to provide their staff with tools they can use to support our partners during this difficult time, including how to identify warning signs of more serious cases and where to refer them.

Following the June emergency food distribution, ABPD conducted another survey and found a need for continued support. During the second half of July they repeated the process for a second round of food and hygiene aid scheduled for early August delivery to 550 families.

Moving Forward as Guatemala Reopens

On July 26, Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei announced that the country would begin reopening, though COVID-19 cases are still on the rise. While this may mean that ABPD could legally resume in-person programming in the near future, the health and safety of our partners and staff remains a top priority. We will continue working closely with local leaders and surveying families to determine the best way forward. While reopen-

ing may ease the economic burden many families have been bearing, it could also lead to an increase in COVID-19 cases in these rural areas. Anticipating this, we began working with local leaders in early July to develop a guide to help families and communities deal with mild to moderate cases, as hospital resources will need to be reserved for those who are very ill. We plan to distribute this resource widely as soon as it's ready.

While we are not certain what the months ahead will bring, when we'll be able to get back to in-person work, or how we'll need to adapt our

Continued on back cover

June 2020—My name is José Isabel Tartón Chacach. I am 28 and live in Pavit, Comalapa. I have a 7-year-old daughter and a 5-year-old son. I am an agriculture day laborer and my wife weaves belts and hñipiles. The disease has affected my family in different ways. We are not able to go to town to buy food, and it is hard to find it in the village; it has also been difficult to buy corn, as well as fertilizer for our corn and vegetable crops.

I cannot work all day because of the restrictions from the authorities. Because of the curfew, we cannot look for jobs outside the community and have not made any progress planting our corn. My wife can weave, but she can't sell her products.

I have been pleased with the [ABPD/ALDEA] trainings. At the very beginning we thought it would be a waste of time, but this has not been the case. I have tried to put what I learned into practice, maybe not everything, but while we learned about electricity we also learned to better understand ourselves as humans and as our wives' partners. These trainings have helped me in many ways with my family, and we have realized that if we focus on the positive things, we benefit. I have not forgotten ABPD made the commitment to support us, and I wish this disease would end so we could recover the lost time. I want ABPD to share more experiences and ideas with us about family. The gardens have also helped us as we do not need to go to the market to buy vegetables and herbs, and we always have something to eat.



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programs going forward, we do know that the need for our grassroots development programs is as strong as ever. While we have been unable to conduct our regular evaluations measuring chronic childhood malnutrition in our partner communities, a recent nationwide study found as of the end of May, 15,000 cases of acute malnutrition had been reported in Guatemalan children in 2020—a highly concerning number that already exceeds the total for the entire year 2019. While many families are still enduring hardship, the pandemic has also demonstrated the vital importance of our agriculture and nutrition programs—including dairy goats and family gardens—to support food security. It's also clear that our water and sanitation infrastructure, as well as hygiene trainings, have helped people maintain the healthy home environments that are especially critical right now. And though none of us expected to be dealing with a global pandemic, our community mobilization and empowerment programs are designed to support communities in coming together to face challenges. While this crisis is significant, it is not the first one ALDEA has endured during our 53-year history. Rural Mayan communities have remained resilient through generations of extreme hardship, and we intend to stand with them through this difficult time as well.



ALDEA and ABPD, along with our Mayan community partners, want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the generous donors who have stepped up during this difficult time and made it possible for us to respond to these emergency needs. Thank you.

May 2020—My name is Glenda Magali Otoy, and I am from Simajuleu, Comalapa. I participate in the ABPD youth programs. I feel sad about the pandemic. I almost never leave home, and I miss preparing atol (a creamy corn drink), spending time with my friends, and going to church. I must admit I don't like wearing a mask.

I normally spend most of the day weaving, but now I go with my dad to collect firewood all day. Because of the pandemic nobody wants to buy my weavings. I am used to helping my dad, I have done it since I was a child and it is nice, you can watch nature and forget about all that is happening for a while. I have not been to Comalapa for weeks, and I used to go every Sunday to attend classes at church. I miss that so much as well as seeing my friends there. Nobody knows when everything will get back to normal.

When I first heard the pandemic hit Guatemala I did not feel anything, but when I learned it was near my community, it did affect me. I realized we were not going to leave our homes and would stay inside, nothing was going to be the same, and after several weeks the situation has not changed. We have a COVID case in Comalapa, and I feel sad because we cannot go out. I don't think I am scared, I know we will all die one day—I just feel sad. We wash our hands all the time to prevent the disease, do everything the President says we have to do, and wear masks. That is all we can do, while we hope all these problems will be over soon.