



## GUATEMALA

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## ▶ BACKGROUND

The Mayan civilization flourished in Guatemala during the first millennium A.D. and its culture remains prevalent. After almost three centuries as a Spanish colony, Guatemala won its independence in 1821. During the second half of the 20th century, it experienced a variety of military and civilian governments, as well as a 36-year civil war. In 1996 the government signed a peace agreement formally ending the conflict, which left more than 100,000 people dead and created 1 million refugees.

Guatemala is the largest and most populous of Central American countries, with a per capita income of \$4,900. The economy is driven by agricultural exports, which account for half of Guatemala's jobs. The distribution of income remains highly unequal, with 56% of people living below the poverty line.

## ▶ WATER &amp; SANITATION

According to official government statistics, a solid majority of Guatemalans have access to improved water and sanitation. But those working on the ground in rural areas would argue that these numbers are inflated and that the situation is much worse.

Guatemala is divided into 21 departments, similar to states. Water For People concentrates almost all of its efforts in one of these—the Department of Quiché, northwest of Guatemala City. According to 2002 census data, 29% of people in Quiché did not have access to a piped water supply and 38% lacked access to a latrine. However, these statistics do not accurately portray Quiché's water and sanitation problems.

For example, water systems in even larger towns function only intermittently and people must often obtain water from tanker trucks. Fortunately, rural Quiché is blessed with numerous hillside springs that, with the help of organizations like Water For People, can be converted to safe community water supplies. Most of the urban areas in Quiché have sewer systems, but there is no sewage treatment and the raw wastewater is dumped directly into streams. In rural areas, sanitation is limited to latrines.

Improved water and sanitation services alone will not break the cycle of water-related disease. People must adopt improved hygiene practices, such as hand washing, and learn the connection between hygiene and health.

## ▶ WATER FOR PEOPLE IN GUATEMALA

Water For People began working in Guatemalan communities in 1992 and now supports approximately 10 rural communities in the Department of Quiché each year. Water For People works in small rural villages, primarily in the municipality of Nebaj, where most of the people are Mayan descendents.

Led by Water For People country coordinator, Edgar Fajardo, Water For People—Guatemala maintains an office in Santa Cruz de Quiché with three staff members.

In 2006, Water For People—Guatemala. The organization managed nine projects, directly benefiting 23,457 people with safe drinking water and/or improved sanitation, more than doubling its impact from 2005.

A typical Guatemalan project includes a protected spring and a gravity-fed water system, including a storage tank, underground distribution system, and tap stands at each household. Water For People also works with partners to construct latrines and is piloting rain catchment systems. In all projects, community members contribute their ideas, labor, and cash, and provide funds for ongoing maintenance. All projects in Guatemala include a hygiene education component.

Water For People works with five Guatemalan partner organizations, including municipal governments and nongovernmental organizations. Consistent with Water For People's model, partners manage the projects and gain valuable experience and the skills to help them develop future water systems independently.

Working closely with its in-country staff, Water For People has developed an aggressive work plan to make a more meaningful impact in meeting the water and sanitation needs in Guatemala between 2007-2011.

## GUATEMALA

## Background Information:

**Population:** 12,293,545

**Languages:** Spanish  
and Mayan dialects

**Per capita income:** \$4,900

**Life expectancy:** 69 years

**Under-five mortality rate:**  
43/1,000 live births

**Source:** *World Factbook*  
and UNICEF

## WHERE WE WORK IN GUATEMALA:

Nebaj, Quiché  
Santa Cruz del Quiché, Quiché  
San Pedro Jocopilas, Quiché  
San Bartolomé Jocotenango, Quiché  
San Antonio Ilotenango, Quiché

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