



INTERNATIONAL FOOD
POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

sustainable options for ending hunger and poverty



GUATEMALA

THE COMMUNITY DAY CARE CENTERS PROGRAM

IFPRI evaluated the Government of Guatemala's Community Day Care Centers Program to determine its effects on children's nutrition and on their mothers' wages and employment opportunities.

Women who live in marginalized urban areas are under increased pressure to work outside the home in income-generating activities. The scarcity of child care alternatives can be a severe constraint to their household's livelihood, food, and nutrition security. In 1991 the Government of Guatemala created the Community Day Care Centers Program (Hogares Comunitarios Program, or HCP) as a means of providing a nontraditional child care alternative. In this program a group of parents select a woman from the neighborhood and designate her as the care provider. She then provides care, hygiene, and food to up to 10 children in her own home in return for a small stipend provided jointly by the parents and the program administration. The program also provides cash to care providers to purchase food for beneficiary children, which is complemented by food donations from the World Food Program.

Beginning in 1998 IFPRI carried out an evaluation of HCP. The evaluation included an assessment of both the program's operation (process) and its impact. It was carried out in urban slums of Guatemala City, which at the time hosted approximately 25 percent of the program's day care centers. Data collection for the study concluded in 1999. Data analysis started in 2000 and is ongoing.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND KEY FINDINGS ON OPERATIONS

Project Leader: Marie Ruel

IFPRI evaluated the program's implementation and operation in approximately 200 day care centers in three zones of Guatemala City. The research approaches included semistructured interviews with care providers, eight-hour structured



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observations in the day care centers, and focus groups with beneficiary parents and child care providers. Key findings of the operations evaluation included the following:

- The program is generally well designed and well appreciated by its users (beneficiary families) and its main implementers (the day care providers).
- The quality of implementation at the level of the day care centers is acceptable overall, but large variations exist between care providers.
- Care providers are generally satisfied with the program and appreciate the opportunity to work at home while taking care of their own children. However, they feel overwhelmed and insufficiently trained and remunerated.
- Beneficiary parents are very pleased with the program and report that the program is affordable and provides them with highly needed support. Low parent participation in program activities is widespread.



The IFPRI team made several recommendations for strengthening the program's implementation and operations:

- Develop activities to promote greater participation of parents and communities.
- Consider hiring specially trained staff to assist care providers in their work and to strengthen the psychopedagogical activities.
- Include a health component in the package of interventions to promote overall child health, development, and well-being.
- Strengthen the training and retraining of care providers to ensure high-quality services and responsible caring behaviors.

In early 2000 a new administration took over the program, and it has used findings from the operational evaluation in particular to help develop a four-year action plan to strengthen the program.

RESEARCH AND KEY FINDINGS ON IMPACT

IFPRI carried out its evaluation of impact in one zone of Guatemala City and included both a case-control study of approximately 250 beneficiary children matched with control children, and a random sample of approximately 1,400 households with children zero to seven years of age.

This research revealed that the program appears to be reaching its targeted audience—families of working parents with poor resources and particularly families where mothers are the main income generator.

- The program is having a positive impact on children's nutrient intake and dietary diversity: children participating in the program consume on average 20 percent more energy and 50 percent more of some key micronutrients than control (nonbeneficiary) children.
- Beneficiary mothers are more likely to receive work-related social and medical benefits than are working mothers using other child care arrangements to work in the formal sector. The income of beneficiary mothers is 30 percent higher than that of the other working mothers.
- The program is one of the cheapest child care arrangements available in the area, even compared with informal alternatives involving household members or extended family members.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The government-sponsored day care program in Guatemala provides affordable and reliable care for extended hours, thereby providing needed support to vulnerable households—namely female-headed households.
- Evidence from IFPRI's evaluation suggests that this type of program removes an important constraint to women's participation in the labor force in urban areas and improves children's nutrition. Expanding and strengthening this type of program could be an important strategy to reduce food insecurity and poverty among vulnerable urban households.

COLLABORATORS

- Hogares Comunitarios Program of the Secretary of Social Works of the First Lady of Guatemala (SOSEP)
- Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP)

DONORS

- U.K. Department for International Development (DFID)
- U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

PUBLICATIONS

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"Operational Evaluation of the Hogares Comunitarios Program of Guatemala," by Marie Ruel (IFPRI, Washington, D.C., 2001), mimeo.

"Does Subsidized Childcare Help Poor Working Women in Urban Areas? Evaluation of a Government-Sponsored Program in Guatemala City," by Marie T. Ruel, Bénédicte de la Brière, Kelly Hallman, Agnes Quisumbing, and Nora Coj, *Food Consumption and Nutrition Division Discussion Paper* 131 (IFPRI, Washington, D.C., 2002).

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