



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**

**ANTICIPATORY ACTION
GOOD PRACTICE**

Protracted crises

Anticipatory action interventions to mitigate the effects of drought and migration on food security in Colombia

Protecting livelihoods and boosting social cohesion between Venezuelan migrants, Colombian returnees and host communities in the department of La Guajira

Context

Colombia's northern neighbour Venezuela has slipped into a deep economic crisis that has sent 5 million people across borders in search of food and stability. It has been the fastest movement of people in Latin America's recent history and it has affected Colombia more than any other country in the region. As of December 2019, almost 1.8 million migrants from Venezuela registered in Colombia. Many have settled in bordering areas like La Guajira, where communities have opened their doors to Venezuelan migrants and Colombian returnees alike, sharing homes and meals. Some households have grown to over 30 persons and many families are still expecting the arrival of more relatives in the months to come. This is not only putting a strain on individual families but also on locally available resources, like land and water.

La Guajira is the driest and one of the poorest provinces of Colombia and struggles with a history of chronic food insecurity and malnutrition, even before the current migration crisis. The frequency and intensity of recurrent droughts is also increasing due to climate change. The impact of drought on food security has affected especially indigenous people like the Wayúu, who make up a third of the population in this part of Colombia and who frequently lack access to public services. Rearing sheep and goats is a mainstay for Wayúu families. But lately, the need to feed more people has driven many to start selling or eating their productive animals – one of many negative coping strategies families resort to in times of crisis. Across communities on the Venezuela border, the influx of people has also resulted in a workforce oversupply, which has driven down wages and put additional pressure on communities.

Key facts



Geographic coverage
La Guajira, Colombia



Conforms to UN Colombia map, March 2016



Target group

1 003 vulnerable households, mostly composed by indigenous Wayúu, about 7 000 beneficiaries (37 percent Colombian residents, 33 percent Colombian returnees and 30 percent Venezuelan migrants).



Type of shocks

Mass migration and drought



Methodological approach

1. Early warning for anticipatory action

Three main early warnings triggered anticipatory action in La Guajira:

- The results of a food security and nutrition needs assessment conducted in June 2018 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the departments of La Guajira, Arauca and Norte de Santander;
- Precipitation forecasts released in June 2018 by the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) of Columbia University; and
- The risk analysis on the potential impact of the Venezuelan crisis carried out by FAO as part of the forward-looking *Early Warning Early Action Report* (July-September 2018).

In June 2018, a multi-agency needs assessment was carried out by FAO, WFP and UNICEF in the rural areas of the Colombian departments of Arauca, La Guajira and Norte de Santander. The assessment goal was to obtain primary information on the main food security and nutrition needs of Venezuelan migrants, Colombian returnees and host communities in areas where migration was increasing.

The assessment showed that the migration crisis was exacerbating the structural socioeconomic and environmental problems in the rural areas of the three departments. In particular, the three agencies found that migration had caused a significant increase in the size of families in La Guajira and the communities overall, increasing pressure on the already limited resources and services available in the rural areas of the department.

Important data on the impact of the influx of large numbers of migrants into rural border communities was used in conjunction with food and nutrition security related data in order to ascertain current and predict future pressures on host households receiving migrants, and the community at large. Relevant data included both qualitative (focus group discussions and interviews) and quantitative measurement of household increases due to migrant arrivals, predictions of future migrant flows into rural communities, measurement of intended lengths of stay, and plans to migrate to other locations in Colombia or elsewhere, and ascertaining what conditions may trigger the return of migrants to Venezuela in the future. Collection of such information **serves as an important evidence source to trigger anticipatory actions, in contexts experiencing increased migration flows/mass displacement.** Furthermore this information has the potential to anticipate future impacts on food and nutrition security and pressure on local resources.



2. Anticipatory actions

Using a participatory process, communities and families were consulted on suitable anticipatory actions to protect local livelihoods. La Guajira indicated boosting food production among host communities through water system rehabilitation and other agricultural support as a priority. Eventually, the following actions were selected and implemented:

- Establishment of inclusive **community production centres for rapid crop production**;
- Distribution of drought-tolerant seeds and agricultural tools to individual households;
- Animal health campaigns and distribution of animal feed and supplements;
- Rehabilitation of water infrastructure; and
- Trainings on agronomic practices, livestock management and nutritional education.

Both host and migrant families received a dozen types of short-cycle, drought-tolerant crop seeds, including vegetables, staples like cassava, maize, and different bean varieties. Direct food assistance from WFP covered immediate needs and ensured that families would plant and harvest their seeds, not cook them.

Animal health brigades were dispatched to improve the condition of livestock and increase their number. They visited participating communities at regular intervals to vaccinate herds, treat sick animals and distribute vitamins. FAO distributed animal feed and supplements, as Wayúu families were using funds on food for their households rather than their animals.

For these activities to succeed, access to water was critical. That is why FAO rehabilitated 18 local water supply systems, with the support of Action Against Hunger. The rehabilitated wells were connected to micro-irrigation systems that supported efficient water management at times of drought in the **Community Production Centres (CPC)**, following the **rapid food production model** devised by FAO Colombia with the Colombian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the National Disaster Risk Management Unit. CPCs allowed both host and migrant families to exchange experiences on production techniques and apply good practices for rapid and diversified crop production in consultation with FAO technical teams, incorporating their traditional knowledge and preferences.

Finally, FAO worked with local agronomists and animal health workers to provide **ongoing training to beneficiary families**. The trainers, community members who spoke the Wayúu language, combined community practices with new techniques to increase crop yields in harsh weather and take better care for their animals. Many of these workshops took place at CPCs, where beneficiary families would come together to produce food on test plots and put new knowledge into practice.

Anicia, a Colombian returnee, came to the community of Montelara because being Wayúu she had family members living here. She said, *“Our world fell apart, so I had to leave Venezuela. I am a farmer, but I had never learned to cultivate the land. Now I have learned to plant vegetables organically. I already know all the stages of production, from preparing the land, to sowing, applying fertilizers, irrigation, and harvesting. We are learning to live together, cultivating together in the CPC.”*



Integrating rural migration indicators into project planning, design and response



Integration of rural migration data collection into a La Guajira food security and nutrition needs assessment in 2018 in rural communities in Colombian border regions, allowed FAO to predict the arrival of large numbers of long-stay migrants in the following 12 months, which would have increased the burden on the already stretched resources of host/migrant households and communities. This, together with the food security and nutrition data collected, provided the evidence-base needed to enact an anticipatory action intervention.

Inclusion of ongoing rural migration data collection into monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans of country offices (including in baselines, needs assessments, end lines etc.) can ensure FAO has the evidence-base to respond quickly to rapidly emerging or changing crisis contexts. The following are examples of indicators that can be used to monitor rural migration (via household survey and/or focus group discussions) and assist in planning for rapid humanitarian responses in times of crisis:

- Number of expected arrivals of family members of host/migrant households (e.g. in next 6-12 months)
- Number of recent migrant arrivals (e.g. past 12 months)/growth in number of household members
- Intended length of stay of migrants in rural community/displacement camp/settlement and plans to migrate elsewhere
- Origin country “push factors” causing migrants to move to destination country/community
- Intention to return to origin country, and under what conditions this is most likely to occur

NOTE: the above indicators are examples used in the Colombian/Venezuelan context. All indicators should be adapted to the particular context/crisis.



Impacts

- **Animal health brigades and early feed distribution contributed to reduce animal mortality, improve animal body conditions, and enhance animal productive and reproductive capacity.** The value of animals saved were sufficient to purchase 11 goats or sheep. This is especially crucial among vulnerable Wayúu communities, which are heavily reliant on small stock for their livelihoods.
- **Larger portions of agricultural land have been cultivated in beneficiary communities.** The support provided for planting and growing crops in arid lands had an important impact on boosting food production and promoting crop diversification.

- **Beneficiaries consumed more diversified food and more frequently than non-beneficiaries.** The largest differences in consumption are for meat and vegetables, possibly indicating a positive impact of livestock-related and crop diversification anticipatory actions. None of the beneficiary households had a poor food consumption score.
- **Beneficiary households adopted negative coping strategies less frequently than non-beneficiaries did.** Specifically, beneficiaries were better able to avoid limiting the portion size of meals and to avoid reducing the number of meals eaten in a day.
- **Each child under five consumed an additional half litre of milk per day thanks to the effect of anticipatory actions on animal productivity.** This corresponds roughly to 21 percent of daily calorie requirement and 54 percent of daily protein requirement of a five-year-old child.
- **Beneficiaries of the anticipatory action project are more resilient than non-beneficiaries.** FAO's Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA) was used to estimate household resilience to food insecurity and it shows that beneficiaries performed better than the control group in Adaptive Capacity and Assets (both productive and non-productive assets), the main determinants of resilience in the region. The differences in productive assets as well as in agricultural and livestock output are likely to have been influenced by the anticipatory actions.
- **Social cohesion:** Anticipatory actions in La Guajira made a positive contribution towards improving the social cohesion between host and migrant households targeted by the project. Seventy-four percent of interviewed beneficiary households claimed that their relationship with other groups in the community had improved compared with the previous year. This improvement is significant when compared to control households, where just 39 percent stated their relationship with other groups had improved. This observed improvement in intergroup relationships was corroborated through qualitative data collected during focus group discussions with host and migrant/returnee community members.



Emilia Armas said that Afro-descendants, Wayúu and Venezuelan migrants are now working together. She says that with the intervention of FAO they have learned to work as a team. Thanks to what they have learned in the CPCs they already know how to classify the seeds better, that working together in the garden has made each of the participants feel part of something, part of a community.

Sustainability

The interventions proved effective in safeguarding and rebuilding productive assets of the most vulnerable, at-risk people. The resumption of productive activities in these arid and isolated areas brings benefits beyond the short-term boosting of food production. Communities demonstrated self-confidence in their capacity to continue agricultural activities (e.g. CPCs) beyond the timeframe of the anticipatory action project. In this regard, the strong emphasis put on trainings and knowledge transfer alongside the provision of inputs and technical support was a crucial enabler of change, supporting the sustainability of this intervention over time. Many suggested to expand CPCs to reach more families, and to establish new ones in other communities.

Anticipatory actions and social cohesion between different communities



© FAO/Justine Texier

Information on the impact of anticipatory actions on social cohesion between Venezuelan migrants, Colombian returnees and host communities was derived through qualitative (focus group discussions) and quantitative data (perception-based household survey questions), which were also integrated into the overall impact assessment. Perception-based questions included questions in relation to level of improvement of relationship between the host community households and migrant/returnee households over the previous 12 months, covering the duration of the project, as well as questions relating to trust levels between host and migrant/returnee households. This was corroborated with qualitative data collected through focus group discussions, where both host and migrant/returnees were asked to characterize any impacts of the project on intergroup relations and changes in perceptions of relations, as well as levels of trust and belonging.

Fidelia, 61-year-old, has always lived in Guayabal and will continue to stay, especially after FAO's arrival. "One of my daughters has returned, she had moved to Venezuela a few years ago, but with the crisis she returned to the community with her two children. She walked along the border. At first it was difficult because she had nothing, but of course my whole family provided support. And now she's working with us at the CPC." Of the support the project provided, the animal health intervention was particularly valuable to her, says Fidelia. The extra animal feed they received did a lot to make her livestock stronger and fitter, and thanks to new skills she learned from the FAO veterinarian, she is now able to provide basic healthcare to her livestock when needed.

Replicability and upscaling

Many factors suggest a continuing increase in future migration to the rural communities of La Guajira. The complex situation in Colombia (i.e. the ongoing peace process, high numbers of migrants and internally displaced people, and challenges related to the presence of unlawful armed groups in some rural areas) confirms the relevance of FAO's ongoing work at community level and the importance of further investing in FAO's contribution to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Focus groups raised challenges and insights for future anticipatory action and resilience programming in La Guajira and/or in similar contexts. Some include:

- The project may have represented a limited pull factor for migration. Some participants said that new families arrived from Venezuela after they became aware of the FAO project.
- Participants who did not own land expressed concerns that owners would claim back their land after realizing the increase in productivity and value brought by project interventions.
- Most participants, especially Venezuelan migrants with limited or no income, recommended distributing more food at initial project stages to sustain their families until the first harvest.
- Suggestions for future interventions included support to establish micro-enterprises to add value to agricultural products and poultry production and aquaculture for livelihood diversification.

What were the main anticipatory action interventions to mitigate the effects of drought and migration in the department of La Guajira, Colombia?



Anticipatory action interventions included:

- The establishment of inclusive community production centres for rapid crop production;
- The distribution of drought-tolerant seeds and agricultural tools to individual households;
- Animal health campaigns and distribution of animal feed and supplements;
- Rehabilitation of water infrastructure; and
- Training on agronomic practices, livestock management and nutritional education.

Overall objective: The intervention's goal was to allow the rapid recovery of food production, protect livestock and prevent a potential food crisis due to a forecast increase in migration from neighbouring Venezuela, compounded by the negative effects of a forecasted drought. Increasing food production would also soften the impact of more people arriving in the months to come, alleviate resulting tensions in the community, and prevent the humanitarian crisis from becoming worse.

Triggers: Three main early warning triggers have activated anticipatory action funds in La Guajira in September 2018. These are:

- The observed and projected increase in migration from Venezuela to vulnerable rural communities, and its expected impact on food security;
- The forecast of below average precipitation potentially affecting the planting season in September-October 2018; and
- The risk of continued large-scale emigration from Venezuela and call for immediate action in the *Early Warning Early Action quarterly report July-September 2018*.

Timeliness: The activities were implemented between September 2018 and June 2019. The intervention has been implemented on time ahead of the forecast disaster. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) acted in two stages. First, its Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA) quickly released USD 400 000 for anticipatory action to support 600 households in the municipalities of Manaure, Albania, Maicao, Uribia and Riohacha in La Guajira. The Fund was key to releasing this initial money quickly. The number of households was later increased to 1 003, some 7 000 people, thanks to extra funds from the United Nation's Central Emergency and Rehabilitation Fund (CERF) and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency.

Cost-implications and risk levels: For every USD 1 FAO spent on anticipatory actions in La Guajira, beneficiary households had a return of USD 2.6. Such direct benefits derived from:

- Improved animal body conditions, and consequent avoided loss of animal value;
- Reduced livestock mortality;
- Increased milk production;
- Increased number of animal newborn;
- Increased crop production due to increased size of cultivated land;
- Avoided crop losses; and
- Increased crop production in community production centers.

Partners

Resource partners

- Brazilian Cooperation Agency
- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) through the Early Action Window of the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA)
- The United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)

Technical partners

- Action Against Hunger
- Civil society organizations
- Departmental and municipal authorities
- United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- World Food Programme (WFP)

Key learning

- Signs of deteriorating food security conditions triggered the timely implementation of anticipatory actions.
- The significant difference in findings between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries indicates a **positive contribution of the anticipatory action interventions to social cohesion**.
- **Community-level work** contributed to **strengthening the social cohesion between Colombian residents, Colombian returnees and Venezuelan migrants**. All groups worked together to boost food production for an expanding local population.
- **The integration of rural migration data in country-level M&E plans is an important evidence source** to anticipate impacts on food and nutrition security and pressure on local resources, in contexts experiencing increased migration flows/mass displacement. This, together with the food security and nutrition data, can provide an evidence-base to enact anticipatory action.

Bibliography

FAO, WFP, UNICEF. 2018. *Multi-agency needs assessment for food security and nutrition in the rural areas of the Colombian departments of Arauca, La Guajira and Norte de Santander*. 46 pp. (also available at www.data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/70515)

FAO. 2019. EWEA mission in Colombia. In: *FAO Resilience* [online]. Rome, Italy. [Cited 7 June 2019]. www.fao.org/resilience/news-events/detail/en/c/1197215/

FAO. 2019. *Impact of Early Warning Early Action in Colombia*. Rome, Italy. 27 pp. (also available at www.fao.org/3/ca6818en/ca6818en.pdf)

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the maps featured in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of FAO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries. Dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union through the partnership agreement contributing to strengthen the Global Network Against Food Crises. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of FAO and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

This product was developed with the support of FAO's Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience (KORE) and is available on its online portal. FAO's knowledge management and normative work, through KORE, aims at generating learning and disseminating evidence-based knowledge to support decision-making, resource allocation and programming processes. This work falls under the Global Network Against Food Crises, an alliance taking concerted steps and promoting sustainable solutions to food crises.

Contact

Office of Emergencies and Resilience

Early Warning Early Action (EWEA)

eweaa@fao.org

Conflict and Peace Analysis Unit (CPU)

Conflict-Peace-Analysis-Unit@fao.org

KORE – Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience

KORE@fao.org

www.fao.org/in-action/kore/

