Guatemala has one of the most dynamic economies in Central America, but it also boasts great inequality. A historical exclusion of indigenous people, especially women, means they lack access to education, health services, political participation and land.

- 42% of people in Guatemala are indigenous, yet the national budget allocated to indigenous people is little more than 1%.
- More than 1 million indigenous people (Maya, Xinca and Garifuna) live in extreme poverty, and most of them are women.

Guatemala is rich in natural resources and productive opportunities, but these benefits stay in the hands of a few people. For example, although in the last years the country has become the largest produce exporter in Central America, these benefits are not translated into benefits for producers. And, while corn growers generate more than half the national production of corn, the country is the most malnourished in Latin America and sixth most malnourished worldwide.

The effects of climate change have made food less secure. For example, the 2010 rainy season destroyed 30% of agricultural products – the main source of food and income for farming and indigenous families. This forced communities to use their food reserves, which made the food crisis worse.

Women’s participation in politics in Guatemala has traditionally been weak. During Álvaro Colom’s administration, only 12% of the total seats in Congress were occupied by women, and 2% by indigenous people.

Young people in Guatemala also have limited representation, which discourages their participation in social and political activities. Though 50% of the female population only speaks an indigenous language, state-provided services are only available in Spanish.

Left: A woman washes her beans in the river that runs through the Txe’l community.

*Direct beneficiaries for the period 2010-11
Guatemala is among the top 10 countries at high risk of natural disasters. For nine months of the year Guatemala is affected by hurricanes and storms that cause flooding and landslides, placing its 11 million inhabitants at risk of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and droughts. The high degree of vulnerability and poverty, and limited preparedness in communities and Government, increases the impact of these disasters. Women are among the most vulnerable groups because they are socially marginalised, despite contributing the most during disasters and preparedness activities.

Oxfam also works to influence public policies aimed at rural areas and work with governments to allocate more public resources to providing quality technical assistance, agricultural credit, and other services to benefit growers.

In May 2010, tropical storm Agatha caused strong winds and intense rains affecting 21 of the 22 areas in Guatemala. It caused severe floods, landslides and considerable damage to agriculture, roads and bridges. Almost 163,000 people were affected. Oxfam, with the support of the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) carried out different humanitarian responses and risk reduction projects, especially in water and sanitation, helping more than 18,000 people.

"I am very happy. Now our water tank is looking very good, even if it rains; the road..."