

## Disaster Risk Reduction

Guatemala is one of the most environmentally vulnerable countries in the world. Disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tropical storms and drought have devastating impacts on the poor rural population, heightening their economic and social vulnerability and increasing their poverty levels. This situation means that any progress made in improving the livelihoods of the rural and indigenous poor is fragile and can be reversed instantly. The Guatemalan Disaster Risk Reduction programme has responded to this situation by ensuring that in the areas of highest risk appropriate measures are taken to reduce the risk of disasters and to improve capacities to prepare for and respond to disasters.



Trócaire has been working with AMI (Integrated Medical Attention) San Lucas, a local NGO based in the department of Sololá since 2009 on disaster preparedness and response in one of Guatemala's most high risk regions. The communities of Sololá have endured the onslaught of multiple natural disasters including Hurricane Stan in 2005, Ágata in 2010, the 12A storm of 2011 and the earthquake of November 2012 which caused massive landslides and the destruction of many homes.

The community of Paquip, Sololá is highly vulnerable to landslides. Trócaire and AMI San Lucas have supported them in the formation, training and accreditation of their COLRED (Local Coordinator for the Reduction of Disasters). The COLRED now has 10 members, three of whom are women. Each member has a specific responsibility, for example: coordinator of the refuge, first aid, search and rescue leader etc. They have actively participated in first aid and search and rescue trainings. They have been provided with equipment such as helmets, radios, flashlights, a stretcher and first aid kits. Although the community has not experienced any natural disasters recently they were able to put into practice their search and rescue skills when a young girl from the community went missing last year.

Juan Arturo Velasquez Pac describes how the COLRED dealt with the situation: *"when the girl went missing the community called the COLRED immediately. We formed committees to search for her and contacted the local authorities. We found her by night time. The community knows us well now and they know they can contact us for emergencies."* When the earthquake struck in November 2012 the COLRED mobilized immediately to assess the damage. There were no casualties but six houses were damaged and these were reported directly to the local authorities. Santa Marta González Pérez and Rebecca Sacquik Vázquez coordinate the management of the emergency shelter. They said *"no, we're not scared when an emergency happens because we know what to do. We are proud we can serve our community."*



Trócaire and AMI San Lucas will continue to work with the communities of Sololá that are most vulnerable to disasters over the next five years building capacity of the communities to prepare for and respond to disasters through community risk assessment and mapping, community and school response plans and the implementation of agro-ecological practices that reduce the likelihood of landslides as a result of erosion and poor land management.