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SUCCESS STORY

USAID HELPS IMPROVE SAFETY IN GUATEMALAN NEIGHBORHOODS

With USAID support, Project Concern International developed an urban disaster risk reduction model that is helping transform more than 17 vulnerable neighborhoods in Guatemala Department into more resilient, safe, and healthy communities.



Photo by Irene Gago, USAID

In 2012, women and children of Los Cipresales painted a colorful mural that reflects how they wanted their neighborhood to look. During the following three years, residents championed their community's progress through the *Barrio Mio* project and now enjoy living in a healthier and safer place.

"PCI gave us all the training and construction materials, and we worked as a team, digging and installing the new infrastructure. Each neighbor had an assigned task, and those who could not work during the day came to work from 7:00 pm until midnight."

- Julia León, Los Cipresales community leader



Photo by Irene Gago, USAID

Barrio Mio beneficiary Rosalba Ayala is grateful for her newly reinforced home and appreciates having a clean, upgraded neighborhood, where children can play safely, free of mud and wastewater that used to collect in the streets.

With USAID support, Project Concern International (PCI) initiated a project that is reducing disaster risk in hazard-prone neighborhoods in Guatemala by improving urban infrastructure, housing, and livelihoods.

This prototypical project, named *Barrio Mio*, which means "My Neighborhood," was successfully piloted from 2012 to 2015 in two neighborhoods of Mixco municipality, a densely populated urban area located on a hillside that is at risk of landslides, flooding, and earthquakes and that faced water, sanitation, and hygiene challenges. Through a process that featured the active participation of the beneficiary communities and the collaboration of public, private, and academic actors, the project upgraded the communities' water and sanitation systems; installed an innovative wastewater treatment plant tailored to the steep slopes of the area; reinforced housing structures; and constructed rainwater drainage infrastructure, stairways, and retaining walls.

Women were the mainstay of *Barrio Mio*, as they assumed a leadership role and were deeply involved in all of the project's initiatives. Rosalba Ayala, beneficiary and community leader said, "We started with a group of 10 women, who helped motivate other neighbors to join what we called the "ant plan", because we worked in rows, hauling down sandbags, pipes, and other materials. As part of the project, we also organized women's savings groups to build savings either for our children's studies or to purchase medicines; each member has a different aim to save."

Since 2015, PCI has helped the Government of Guatemala (GoG) to replicate this neighborhood-based disaster risk reduction model in more than 15 communities throughout Guatemala Department, where recent research conducted by the GoG National Emergency Commission (CONRED) revealed that more than 750 communities live under flood- and landslide-prone conditions. The extension of *Barrio Mio* helps mitigate the impact of disasters in some of these communities.