UN Volunteer Maija Laitinen (left) during a training session about food and nutrition security organized for mothers and children in Totonicapán. (UNV)

Sensitizing about nutrition

Guatemala City, Guatemala: I have been working as a UNV Nutritionist with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Guatemala since February 2009. I fell in love with Guatemala - its people and extraordinarily beautiful landscapes - already 16 years ago, and I have been living here since then.

I am very grateful to my home country, Finland, for funding my assignment as a UN Volunteer. I feel privileged to be able to share all the knowledge I acquired in Finland and to help other people have more opportunities in life.

Many Guatemalan families don’t have the things that I always took for granted in Finland: three meals a day, well equipped health centres, drinking water or a floor in the house. At the moment we are more than 30 national and international UN Volunteers working
together with the government, national and international NGOs, universities, research institutes and private sector to guarantee these to all Guatemalans.

My main responsibility has been to maintain the Guatemalan Nutrinet portal by writing, editing and publishing web content. Nutrinet is a network created by the WFP which provides information resources regarding nutrition (with special emphasis on child and infant nutrition) in the Latin America and Caribbean Region.

The Nutrinet portal is a very rich source of information, providing its users with various information categories, and in various forms: a digital library, events, a roster of experts, and recipes, among others.

One of the challenges I overcame during my assignment was finding a new receptor for Nutrinet. This year the Guatemalan portal is functioning independently from the WFP. Last year the portal was transferred to the Ministry of Health’s Food and Nutrition Security Programme (PROSAN in Spanish) which is now managing it.

I am also the focal point for activities related to HIV/AIDS and nutrition. I have helped elaborate educational materials for health care providers in order to strengthen nutrition counselling in HIV clinics. I also participate in activities aimed at preventing micronutrient deficiencies: prepare educational materials, workshops and training sessions about micronutrient supplementation.

My work in the WFP has been very interesting, challenging and rewarding. It has been interesting because I have met and worked with so many wonderful and talented Guatemalans and people from other countries, and I have had the opportunity to travel all over the beautiful countryside. This job has been challenging because there is still so much to do. Guatemala has one of the world’s highest rates of chronic under nutrition in children below the age of five. My work has been rewarding because our efforts do have an impact.

I am very proud to belong to the WFP family and I feel very privileged to have such professional and hardworking colleagues. I feel that the work of the UN Volunteers is an important contribution to Guatemala and to the UN system. I really hope that we are more volunteers in the future!