“The Northern Triangle”, made up of the Central American countries El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, has made significant progress since the 1980’s, when the region was ravaged by civil wars fueled by Cold War politics. But the region now faces new challenges. While many countries in the region have experienced economic growth over the past decades, too many people are still being left behind. Extreme weather threatens a variety of critical agriculture sectors, from small farmers to export industries, as well as puts the region at increased risk for natural disasters. Finally, migration has risen to prominence, with increasing numbers of people in the Northern Triangle seeking out better lives in urban areas, or making the dangerous trek north to the United States.

In addition to the above, drug trafficking has sparked extensive violence, driven by criminal gangs that have exploded in size and scope, has led to one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Aside from the purely human cost in terms of lives lost, this violence dramatically impacts other aspects of society, creating a negative feedback loop and stifling economic growth, undermining local government institutions, and helping drive people away from their homes and migrate. Increasing migration has led to a human trafficking crisis, with criminals taking advantage of people’s desire to travel to find work or safety has led a trade in human beings. All of this has led to a general breakdown in social trust and cohesion, which makes it even more challenging to address any of these issues and build lasting, sustainable solutions.

Since 1985, Global Communities, an international non-profit formerly known as CHF International has been working in the Northern Triangle, bringing a community focused development model to the region as it has undergone these dramatic changes. During this over 30 year period, Global Communities has partnered directly with civil society organizations and communities, helping them take the lead on a variety of issues ranging from disaster relief, housing, public health, youth, and economic development. Global Communities has developed an expertise in several areas that are of increasing importance to the region: economic development, with a focus on workforce development; stability, safety, and social cohesion; and fighting human trafficking.

Economic Development

Economic development remains one of the most important aspects any development program must work on in the Northern Triangle. This lack of economic opportunity exacerbates other issues such as violence and migration. At the same time, continuing pressures such as urbanization and a changing climate are altering traditional economic sectors that have been used to provide livelihoods.

Since the beginning of our work in the Northern Triangle, Global Communities has understood the importance of fostering long-term, sustainable, economic growth. Our first programs built on...
our history as a developer of housing cooperatives, creating not only much needed homes, but also providing jobs and institutions capable of fostering further development. This focus on economic development continued in the wake of Hurricane Mitch, when Global Communities worked to help effected regions in El Salvador rebuild from the flooding and damage caused by the storm. Through the *Mitch Integrated Reconstruction Activity (MIRA)*, which ran from 1999 to 2001, over 200 communities received critical assistance in rebuilding homes and schools, as well as improvements to disaster preparedness by using improved environmental practices. While this immediate response to the disaster was important, the program also helped some 5,000 farmers boost agricultural production, which when combined with increased infrastructure spending to facilitate the movement of goods, helped dramatically improve the livelihoods of beneficiaries.

Other programs included *Youth Engagement for Advancing Hope (YEAH)*, a program funded with support from the Alcoa Foundation that aimed to counteract the consequences of youth unemployment. Through vocational training courses and job creation programs, the project worked to create employment opportunities in the private sector, thus facilitating the rapprochement of young people to legitimate and sustainable activities, and away from violence and gangs. Partnering with the organization Junior Achievement Honduras to help improve social integration and job placement, by the end of the three year program in 2010, over 300 young people with limited resources had received vocational training in the areas of industrial electricity, industrial mechanics and clothing technology, allowing them the opportunity to enter a private sector job and provide a livelihood for themselves and their families.

Recognizing the vital role played by farmers and agriculture in creating livelihoods and economic growth, Global Communities is currently building and expanding the Cosecha project, a water harvesting programs that has received both the Actions in Water and Climate Change Adaptation Prize from the Americas Climate Change Dialogue and The National Environmental Award from the Honduran Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. As adequate irrigation is critically important, especially in Honduras’ dry corridor, the program creates rainwater reservoirs to collect rainfall in the rainy season, and then drip irrigation systems to ensure access to water can last throughout the dry season. This additional water doesn’t just mean a longer growing season; farmers are able to diversify their crops adding melons, beans, and vegetables to traditional staples like corn. Additionally, the program includes a research component, using a randomized control trial to measure the cost and effectiveness of the programming, helping inform best practices for similar projects and ensure they have the maximum impact on farmers’ livelihoods.

**Stability and Cohesion**

By far, one of the largest challenges facing the countries in the Northern Triangle is the ongoing lack of stability brought about by a staggeringly high level of violence. Adequately addressing the roots of this violence, and creating sustainable networks for peacebuilding is vital for the long-term development of the region.

Global Communities is no stranger to peacebuilding actions that can lay the long-term foundations for peace and stability.
Following the end of Guatemala’s 36 year civil war in 1995, Global Communities began working on reconciliation and rebuilding, improving self-reliance and dignity among participants that helped foster long term stability in an area that was once rife with conflict. Our work took place in the region near the border with Mexico, where the situation was incredibly volatile in the aftermath of the conflict. The area was host to a large number of refugees who had fled the fighting in other parts of the country, returnees who were traveling back to their original homes, and families that had never left. This large influx of newcomers, coupled with a huge diversity in ethnicity with over 15 different indigenous groups in the region, as well as people being on opposite sides of the conflict, placed a huge strain on local resources and ultimately created tension. To help address this issue, Global Communities partnered with local organizations, including Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchu Tum’s Foundation, to help improve conditions through a variety of projects ranging from infrastructure improvements, to sustainable agriculture, to women-led banking groups. All of these programs were led by community based councils, strengthening these institutions, and helping mold communities where previously there had been only conflict. In one dramatic example, two communities on opposite sides of a river that had fought on different sides in the war had lost a bridge that had connected the two as a result of the fighting. Through the community engagement processes, the two sides were able to reconcile and come together to build a new bridge, linking the two communities, which now freely travel between one and other.

In Honduras, Global Communities is reaching out to youth to help them take the lead in forging strong and peaceful communities. Taking the lessons learned from our Youth Local Councils in the West Bank, we have launched a similar program in the municipalities of Tela and La Ceiba in the north of the country. Bringing together youth aged 15-25 from a variety of backgrounds into local councils, the program aims to encourage active participation in local development, government, and civil society organizations. Partnering with local governments, these youth councils are a two-way street, allowing youth a voice in local government and helping them learn about important issues to young people, while participants learn about good governance.
and effective ways to exercise their rights. At its core, the Youth Local Councils work to empower youth and make them feel like they have a voice, helping creating a sense of belonging and preventing them from turning to crime and violence that can be so attractive to young people.

**Migration**

Addressing the challenges posed by a lack of economic development and stability can also help tackle one of the other major issues facing the Northern Triangle: migration, and especially human trafficking. In marginalized communities, the individual promising a secure job in the city, or even passage north to the United States, often seems preferential to a life with minimal opportunities. The reality, of course, is that these individuals are taken advantage of; forced to work in order to pay off debts they have no hope of ever repaying, a form of debt slavery. Economic development and peacebuilding program play a critical role in helping remove some of the drivers that lead to trafficking, but sometimes a more direct approach is needed.

Global Communities, with support from the U.S. State Department, partnered with the Honduran Office of Migration and Foreigners of the Ministry of Governance on a program to help tackle this problem. In the first phase, the program had two key components: promoting awareness among Honduran citizens, and helping increase capacity of local government and NGOs in assisting victims. The awareness campaigns utilized a variety of media to both warn about the risks of human trafficking as well as promote places where victims could receive vital support services.

The second phase of the program, from 2012 to 2015, saw Global Communities shift to a more behind-the-scenes role, acting as facilitators for the creation and ongoing mission of CICESC (Comisión Interinstitucional Contra La Explotación Sexual Comercial y Trata de Personas de Honduras). This commission had existed in the past, but primarily functioned to combat sexual exploitation. After a change in the law in 2012, its mission was expanded to include human trafficking. Its work is often daunting, especially with scarce resources. Today, CICESC is successfully lobbying the government of Honduras for support and action, coordinate long-term campaigns, and helping overcome institutional barriers. Global Communities work on human trafficking in Honduras came to an end in 2015, with partner organizations like CISEST continuing the fight, assisting victims, prosecuting traffickers, and raising awareness to help prevent at-risk populations from becoming victims.

The countries in the Northern Triangle undoubtedly face a host of challenges, many of which will only become more prevalent has time passes. However, through programs like these, underpinned with the knowledge that comes with over thirty years of experience working in the region, we are seeing the beginnings of a foundation on which shared prosperity can be built. Whether it's the farmers who now can grow crops year round, youth who now have a voice in their local government, or groups now equipped to fight against human trafficking, individuals and organizations, through partnerships with Global Communities, have been able to bring about sustainable, impactful change.

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Global Communities is an international non-profit organization that works closely with communities worldwide to bring about sustainable changes that improve the lives and livelihoods of the vulnerable. Development is not something we do for people; it is something we do with them. We believe that the people who understand their needs best are the people of the community itself.

Please visit our website at [www.globalcommunities.org](http://www.globalcommunities.org) for more information.