

RESILIENCE



A Publication of Project Harvest

Winter 2023-2024

Dear Friends and Supporters

This year, **Project Harvest** celebrates a number of successes. As you will read, men in several communities have learned to build the valuable SCALs, or rain water catchment systems. The men have used these skills to find employment near to their own communities, while a side effect has been a noticeable increase in social solidarity.



The Impact of Project Harvest's Development Model



Another success has been the increase in the number of women who are able to put money aside to buy good quality seeds and organic inputs as they become increasingly independent. At the same time, women are growing in their understanding of their rights and how to stand up for them.

Sadly, Guatemala is in the midst of a democratic crisis, as the election results are opposed by Guatemala's ruling elite who are behind what is being called a "slow motion" coup to unseat the president-elect from power before he is even inaugurated.

I am proud to be a supporter of **Project Harvest** and hope you will join us in our work.

Sincerely,

Nancy Willson
Chair of the Board

PROJECT HARVEST - GUATEMALA
EMPOWERING RURAL SUBSISTENCE COMMUNITIES

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The Power of Rural Women

Indigenous people in Guatemala have historically faced racism as they are dispossessed and colonized. Indigenous women have been further isolated and made invisible, leading to very precarious lives.

One might ask, where do women find the time and energy to become leaders, when a woman's day is already so full of responsibilities?

Part of the essential work of **Project Harvest** is to provide leadership training for rural women so they can have the knowledge and skills to become community leaders and begin to address these challenges.

Taking on a leadership role has its complications. Women who go out of their community, leaving behind their domestic duties even for a short time, come under criticism, especially if positive results are not immediately apparent. So, it takes a special woman with a lot of chutzpah and the desire to serve her community to step forward. It is not for everyone, but for some it is an extraordinary experience of growth and discovery.

Recent examples are Elena Rosenda from Casa Blanca and Roberta Garcia from Pitahaya who attended the **Third International Indigenous Women's Summit** in Guatemala City - an important international gathering of Indigenous women from across Latin America. It provided Elena and Roberta with a valuable opportunity to meet with other women who share a common lifestyle and who are also working for women's empowerment.



Project Harvest Summit participants included: Arlen de Leon, Elena Rosenda, Roberta Garcia and Yenifer Garcia

Elena and Roberta came to the Summit knowing that the challenge of organizing themselves as women continues to be an uphill struggle because Indigenous and peasant women have been marginalized, without access to resources such as land, health care and education.

Furthermore, they have never been recognized as political subjects capable of promoting change.

But as Roberta said about the delegates at the Summit, "These compañeras are like us, from rural areas, and that did not prevent them from becoming elected representatives. It is not something impossible to do. I did not think there were women like us in positions of power".

Yenifer Castro, **Project Harvest's** formation officer, characterizing her years of experience working in rural communities said in an interview, "Over the years, I've noticed how women's empowerment begins with participation and increases as women make decisions, guide their local groups, and collaborate with other organizations. This is the path we are taking in **Project Harvest**: empowering women in rural communities to make decisions about the type of development they want. Last year, we knocked on the doors of public, private and business organizations, speaking out about the hunger crisis in the countryside and looking for some possible solutions".

"In 2024, we will take this campaign a step further and go to Guatemala's Congress to present the demands of rural women, both Ch'orti' and K'iche. This experience requires enormous courage on the part of women leaders, since it means stepping into an unknown space. However, the women are determined to put into practice, once more, the skills and training they have received through **Project Harvest**."

Democracy on the Brink of Collapse?

In Guatemala, democracy is under siege. A power structure made up of the Attorney General of the country, some corrupt judges of the Supreme Court and the President of the Republic refuse to accept the popular will expressed in the general elections held on August 20, 2023. The progressive Bernardo Arévalo, the son of Juan José Arévalo whose presidency in the 1940's is remembered as the start of a democratic spring that brought Guatemala into modernity, won the vote with a large majority.

The coup perpetrators, however, control almost all the power structures of the country and they are using it arbitrarily so that the judges can annul the results of the elections and continue governing. That is to say, they have become a tyranny in order to maintain their impunity from any prosecution and continue acting corruptly.

So far, this slow-motion coup has been stopped by a powerful movement led by the Indigenous peoples of the department of



Indigenous peoples have been at the forefront of defending democracy and have taken a prophetic stand to stop a "slow-motion" coup.

Totonicapán, through a historic struggle that has been going on for more than 40 days. Their main demands are the respect for democracy and the resignation of the main characters that make up the coup structure.

Or

Faced with the dismantling of social organizations, the continued repression by the state against defenders of the environment and human rights, journalists and fair and honest judges (many of whom are exiled), it is the Indigenous peoples who are pushing to recover the little that remains of democracy in Guatemala. With their ancestral organization, they are leading a civic struggle that is unprecedented in the recent history of Guatemala. They are sending a message to the rest of Latin America that says, we believe in democracy and we fight for it to be respected.

To make their voices heard, the indigenous Ancestral peoples decided to organize an **Indefinite National Strike** with different types of demonstrations in which some **Project Harvest** members and other popular groups have participated. They organized themselves at the family level and distributed roles among their members. Some assumed responsibility for the daily tasks (taking care of the cornfields and domestic animals, preparing the food for the demonstrators) and two people per family went to the demonstration. The decision to defend the popular vote and confront the coup d'état was taken at the level of community assemblies, which is an expression of a democratic community.

Finally True Hope for a Better Future?

BY THE
NUMBERS
IN 2023

PROJECT HARVEST - Guatemala

Food Produced in a Year in an Average Family Garden*



Value of Food Produced / Family



*Data from 72 families in three communities. ** These amounts in Guatemalan currency (GTQ) are equivalent in Canadian dollars to \$72.00, \$298.00, and \$370.00 respectively. This represents a significant savings and income for poor families who live on US\$2.00 a day.

How does Project Harvest Contribute to Real Change in Rural Communities?

There are three key elements which **Project Harvest** develops to make its work sustainable and to have a lasting impact.

Organization for Change

The first element is organization. **Project Harvest** supports families to organize themselves into social and working groups. This allows them to reap the benefits of a holistic formation program rooted in horticulture and community solidarity.

In the period of a year, a group of families working together on marginal land can have a previously, unimaginably abundant harvest. They put food on their tables and regain their self-confidence.

Formation – A Transmission of Knowledge

This second element is the transfer of know-how. **Project Harvest's** promoters accompany a group of families and pass on critical knowledge: new horticultural techniques in vegetable production, how to analyse and solve problems with infertile soil and pests, how to protect and care for the natural and human environment, and the importance of good quality seeds.

In addition, participants learn about marketing their vegetable surpluses, soliciting other development projects and joining common alliances to protect and demand their civic, social and economic rights.

Infrastructure Development

The third element is the provision of durable infrastructure which is critical for adaptation to climate change. **Project Harvest** promotes the construction of **rainwater catchment systems** or SCALs. These systems allow for the storage of up to **16,000 liters of water** to be used in times of drought and throughout the dry season.

Project Harvest promotes these three elements by way of integrating them into a phased roll out that generates solidarity among the project's participants with positive and sustainable results at the community level.



Organization: **Project Harvest** members have organized themselves at a community and department (provincial) level and have elected representatives to study, advocate and promote their interests and concerns.



Food: Simple gardens, designed to contribute to a family's food and nutritional security, provide the equivalent of up to **25% of a family's food** and **20% of a families additional subsistence income** (that is **Q2,035, equal to 51 days working on a plantation** earning Q40 a day). (See page 5 for details)



Infrastructure: SCALs provide security to grow food with the one crucial necessary ingredient that is abundant in the rainy season but scarce at other times when it is needed: **water**.



Social Solidarity in Action – Construction of Rainwater Harvesting Systems (SCALs)

Solidarity is a value inherent to the community of **Peña Blanca** but it has to be cultivated. It is born from the fruit of a common struggle to overcome a harsh reality and improve life in the community. **Solidarity** happens when families put their individual needs to one side and work with fellow community members for a common good.

As a community member stated: *“We communally take advantage of opportunities offered to us. We take care of these rare instances, value them, and are grateful. That has been the case since Project Harvest came to the community.”*

Obeniel Vasquez López, a young Ch'orti' farmer from a neighboring community, saw what was happening in Peña Blanca and asked to become part of a SCAL construction team. Later, he reflected on his experience:

“At the beginning I had no idea of what to do. But a Project Harvest community leader came to teach us. All the work was done as a team, from the measurement of the land needed to the distribution of materials. We organized ourselves and made decisions together. We divided the tasks and so, slowly we advanced. We did the work with all our heart because it was for the families of the community. We wanted to do a good job. We made a special effort so that each SCAL would be well constructed. We all felt good about our collective work. It was a joy to experience how the families received us and thanked us by providing us with food. ”

Camaraderie is a key factor in maintaining an organization. Cindy Julissa Zacarias, a PH promoter, teacher and native of the community says, *“We not only worked, but we also talked about life, about the work of the organizations, about our reality and we told jokes.”*



The methodology and the approach of **Project Harvest** seeks to contribute organization, cohesion and **solidarity** to the fabric of a community. It also promotes autonomy, urging development of local capacities which allow people to believe in themselves and to have the necessary knowledge to replicate their work.



“When the construction of the SCALs culminated we had a party and celebrated the leadership, dedication, enthusiasm, initiative and self-organization of the work teams. The party was our way of expressing our joy and gratitude for the Project. Each family contributed food for everyone to share as a symbol of our thanksgiving.”

"It has been hard for us to recover, we are still worried because we cannot earn a few cents to buy corn, everything has gone up in price, some are lucky because they have relatives who send them money, but there are others who have nothing."

Doña Carmelina, from the community of La Ceiba, summer 2023

The lasting impacts of COVID-19 in the rural communities where Project Harvest works are multiple and intertwined. Reports of escalating acute and chronic malnutrition exceed the already severe pre-pandemic conditions*. Three years after the onset of the pandemic a perfect storm persists of drought and floods, inflationary costs for basic foods and fertilizers, and a lack of jobs.

Ravaged Education - *"The schools were closed for two years."*

The teachers left weekly work guides for the students, which required the support of a parent or tutor**. One parent, Doña Isabel reflected on it saying, **"I feel sad for my child because I could not help him in his work, I cannot read and write, so I could not help him."** All the children were promoted by decree and now, with the return to school, the pandemic's impact is evident. For example, the children in the 2nd and 3rd grades still cannot read and write. These deficiencies will inevitably have long term consequences.



Communities have reported many elderly members passing away during the last three years.

Imaginary Health Care - *"We are still not vaccinated!"*

At first, 90% of the families with whom Project Harvest works rejected getting vaccinated. A wave of misinformation or little information about the content and purpose of vaccines permeated the communities. Today, only one in three people have been vaccinated, but only with one dose, and almost no one has had a second or third dose except for midwives. Many people were infected. In rural communities Health Centers are still without sufficient personnel or medicines (private health services are financially out of reach for the majority of families). Long COVID symptoms and malnutrition all add to the difficulties communities face.

Parcels of Hope - *"Without the gardens what would we have to eat?"*

"I am happy because I have learned to plant vegetables, some of which we eat at home and some of which I sell and use the money to buy other supplies for the house".

Doña Leti of Paracana, summer 2023

The role of the gardens has been important these three pandemic years. Families have expanded their area of vegetable production. Women and children have embraced their family garden. They see it as a space that generates food and money. Many women have expressed their gratitude for learning how to grow vegetables as they transition to producing or buying their own seeds and seedlings.

Structural Change

As much as family gardens provide an immediate, tangible support for participating families, **Project Harvest** knows that the structural problems which keep communities poor pre-existed COVID -19. It is for this reason that **Project Harvest** has a second dimension to its work which supports communities as they work to address public policies in order to improve their overall wellbeing.

Community Leaders Meet with Deputies-Elect to Discuss Rural Priorities of New Government



25 leaders from five communities where **Project Harvest** works met with three newly elected Congressional Deputies to present proposals the new government should implement to address rural problems. They centered on public policies which support greater food production, the distribution of emergency food aid in climate disasters and ending a corrupt practice of clientelism.

Welcome to new members of the Board of Directors



Devon Wilson joins the Board with lots of know-how from working with a number of Guatemalan organizations. She has studied social anthropology and international development and has experience in communications, human resources and fundraising. She recently had a case study on climate change resilience in Guatemala published in a book focusing on agriculture and food systems.



Joshua Garcia-Barrios who started as our Volunteer Communitons Coordinator is now a member of the Board. Joshua is studying public health at the Waterloo University. He has experience with projects encompassing environmental research and is currently working on a MSc focusing on water contamination and health in a rural Western Highland community in Guatemala.

Project Harvest - Guatemala / Financial Statement 2022	Totals 2022	Totals 2021
ASSETS - December 31, 2022		
Current Assets: cash & cash equivalent: Project Harvest Program Funds, CCAMRE Regular Program, Rotary Club Grant for Regular Program	140,738.20	124,813.34
Accounts receivable	3,039.05	7,819.63
Capital assets outside Canada (pick-up truck)	4,309.90	5,305.59
Total Assets	148,087.15	137,938.56
LIABILITIES - December 31, 2022		
Accounts payable - Guatemala	721.66	307.84
Amounts owing - Canada	-0.09	-0.08
Total Liabilities	721.57	307.76
Total Net Assets (Represents starting balance for Jan., 1, 2023)	147,365.58	137,630.80
REVENUE - January 1 to December 31, 2022		
Donations from Individuals	73,099.49	67,235.97
Donations from Institutions / Interest income	2,057.81	12,200.50
CCAMRE Grant for Regular Program	35,608.08	20,911.29
Rotary Club Grant for Regular Program	-	44,910.46
Exchange Gain or Loss	(2,213.36)	(935.35)
Total Revenue	108,552.02	144,322.87
EXPENSES - January 1 to December 31, 2022		
Regular Programs: Project Harvest, Rotary Club, CCAMRE	99,700.26	88,440.01
Management & Administration in Guatemala & Canada	3,003.72	8,128.94
Interest and bank charges	1,585.08	1,199.67
Fundraising in Canada	986.93	800.04
Total Expenses	105,275.99	98,568.66
Net Assets at the beginning of year - January 1, 2023	137,630.80	89,607.31
Adjustments of year end currencies revaluation	2,032.03	398.58
Increase in Net Assets at the end of year - December 31, 2022	7,702.75	47,624.91
Total Net Assets (Represents starting balance for Jan., 1, 2023)	147,365.58	137,630.80

Please Donate!
Become a
Monthly Donor!

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