



Seeds for a Future
Creating Better Lives - Today!



**A Community Development
Model for Sustainable
Food Security**

SeedsforaFuture.org

A Community Development Model for Sustainable Food Security

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Agricultural Development and the Rural Economy

For generations, rural Guatemalans have endured a vicious cycle of hunger, poor nutrition, food insecurity, and poverty. These conditions have hindered the ability to work effectively and produce sufficient food, which furthers the cycle for generations to come.

Food insecurity, hunger, and poor nutrition are entwined in the agricultural sector, each shaping the other's outcomes and impacting rural livelihoods. Consequently, the most beneficial outcomes in rural development are achieved when agriculture and the non-agricultural rural economy mutually support each other.

With this context in mind, Seeds for a Future developed a comprehensive, integrated "Rural Development Program," described below:

Seeds for a Future's Program fosters rural community development that integrates permaculture, nutrition education, and micro-business opportunities. Based on coaching and mentoring families to provide the skills and materials they need for success, the Seeds self-reliance model also fosters the development of "home-grown" leadership, facilitating the Program's spread throughout the community.

The concepts and methods used by Seeds for a Future can be successfully applied in rural communities worldwide if proper attention is given to local environmental, cultural, and community factors. The Program has enjoyed great success. As of early 2024, over 4800

families in Guatemala have completed the Program in 19 communities, and it continues to grow as new families enroll.

Community Benefits

Families throughout the central-western coastal region of Guatemala are currently benefitting from their participation in this program. A critical factor in the program's success is the sense of fulfillment and satisfaction participants feel in their significant achievements for themselves and their families. This sense of self-confidence and agency is crucial to the sustainability and expansion of the program throughout a community and a region. After 12 months of knowledge-sharing and accompaniment by our extensionists, participants successfully carry on their work, fostering economic benefits for their families and encouraging neighbors to join the program. They have observed and experienced improved production, both in their crops and livestock, and recognize the potential for a better future. This better future signifies an improved quality of life, synonymous with progress for their families.



Project Director Armando Arstoga Introducing the Seeds Program to a new Community.

Implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Program

This section of the document details the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Program over more than a decade in the northern regions of Guatemala's Suchitepéquez and Retalhuleu departments. Over time, all practices were refined, enhanced, and broadened as we discovered alternative approaches, new possibilities, different needs, and fresh perspectives on rural development.

The Program primarily targeted rural areas but also extended to urban and semi-urban zones in several municipalities. These include San Pablo Jocopilas (where the Chocó Agrarian Community, the program's base, is situated), Santo Tomás La Unión, Samayac, San Antonio Suchitepéquez, San Bernardino, Mazatenango (all in the department of Suchitepéquez), and San Felipe in the department of Retalhuleu.

In each municipality, a range of activities was conducted: after an initial analysis of opportunities, needs, and resources within each community, knowledge and skills were shared on a weekly face-to-face basis, and results were evaluated.

The Program was carefully adapted to each local area. We also conducted small group discussions and field days; demonstration centers were established, and technological innovations were defined and shared. Other activities included experimentation and research, organizing community members, and documenting progress, among others. These activities serve as the foundation for a program aimed at agricultural development and family farming that can be implemented across the country.

Over more than ten years of engagement in rural community development, we have identified several **key factors to be considered for successful rural development**. These include:

1. **What are the goals we seek to achieve, and with whom?** Clearly, the primary focus is on community members and their families. The objective is to foster their continuous growth, especially via the capacity-building opportunities offered to them. This allows them to maximize the potential of their homes or properties and the resources they already possess, while encouraging a forward-looking mindset. Providing individuals with knowledge and skills is a positive foundation

for advancing rural development. The program allows families to make the most of their existing potential.

2. **What is the key service being provided?** The program focuses on fortifying human capital and providing essential technical assistance, ensuring that families are equipped to organize independently to establish security and sustain outcomes. The model seeks to minimize the community's dependence on the organization through the program's development of these skills in the population.
3. **Why is working with participants and from within local communities crucial?** Communities are strengthened by the sense of responsibility and initiative that has been nurtured by the program. Utilizing the local community as the basis for developing viable solutions contributes to community advancement and makes programs more effective in the long term.



Planting a New Mandala Style Permaculture Garden.

4. **What skills will families acquire?** When family bonds are fortified, interpersonal trust is enhanced, and decision-making improves. Families become more dynamic and, by extension, so do communities. Each skill imparted contributes to a forward-looking and positive outlook among participants and boosts confidence in their ability to improve their lives. Families become empowered through improved standards, a sense of responsibility, and flexibility within their households.
5. **What level of investment is required for significant development results?** Families are encouraged to view the backyard farm as an opportunity to produce and facilitate, akin to investing in a business, thus discarding the mindset that accepts (or seeks) ongoing paternalism. Participation in the program and investment therein create new socioeconomic opportunities, ultimately positively impacting the family.
6. **How can teaching and learning be made more accessible, considering existing levels of education?** Acquiring knowledge by traditional methods, such as providing written resources, can be challenging in communities with low literacy rates. The community development program, through hands-on capacity building, offers the opportunity to gain knowledge in practical ways. When technical assistance and knowledge transfer activities employ a learn-by-doing methodology, participants learn both best practices and the necessary know-how to overcome unexpected adversities.
7. **Can the methods implemented be effective as learning tools?** A suitable methodology, originating in one's own territory and continuously evolving, fosters local buy-in. This is vital to ensure that agricultural development outreach is viewed as a guiding opportunity and that family farming is seen as a holistic means of improving participants' lives.



Providing Hands-on Training for Small Animal Husbandry.

8. **Do families recognize the program as important and meaningful for their own development?** Each family member plays a role in the program, and buy-in from all parties is essential. Success is achieved when all family members understand how their role contributes to the family's plan for achieving better nutrition and improved food security. Similarly, family members gain a better appreciation for the roles they each can play in the community's organizational process.

9. **What is the broader desired impact?** By engaging in the program, participants learn much more about their community's history and culture, the advantages of producing one's own food, new crop cultivation and animal husbandry practices, and the opportunities provided by entrepreneurial activities. This understanding develops further through additional activities, such as training sessions, advisory services, field days, etc.



Families with surplus crops are encouraged to share their excess or sell it at market, generating additional household income and enhancing economic opportunities. Here is shown cacao ready for harvest.

10. **Has the program developed by Seeds for a Future been significant?** Participation has led participants to develop the autonomy required for achieving sustainable outcomes. As the program is implemented locally, often within previously unproductive spaces, participants come to possess the tools necessary to overcome their challenges in a clear and confident manner.

Types of Impact

Throughout its evolution, Seeds for a Future has identified and measured the various impacts evident within the scope of the Comprehensive Rural Development Program, under which the Backyard Farm program is a central component. Among these impacts, the following stand out:

1. **Personal Impact:** Noteworthy here is personal growth resulting from capacity-building efforts aimed at enabling participants to articulate their opinions and make decisions in diverse circumstances.

The engagement of women is also significant as they begin to view themselves as productive and creative contributors to their families and communities.

Worth mentioning is heightened practical knowledge and improved gender relations, as both men and women receive training on numerous topics. While many may already be familiar with local agricultural methods due to their involvement in planting crops like corn and beans, the nutritional education on certain vegetables and fruit trees, combined with animal rearing, imparts crucial knowledge otherwise unobtainable. This is an essential social service that the agricultural development outreach system must consider.

- 2. Community Impact:** Enhanced group and social cohesion are fostered; community associations or organizations are established; self-governance is encouraged; and interpersonal relations are improved. Consequently, participants can enhance communication with and assistance from development institutions, agricultural schools, data institutions, agricultural institutes, municipal authorities, and government entities.

Community impact is achieved through increased integration within families and within the community as neighbors work together and share knowledge. They establish agreements, improve their communication, assume responsibilities, apply their skills and abilities, and may engage in collaborative work, thus improving their relationship with other community members.

- 3. Social Impact:** Greater family integration is achieved as training-acquired information is shared among family members and neighbors. Interpersonal relationships are improved as community members get to know one another and exchange various types of information. Teamwork is enacted (after participants establish organizations or associations) by jointly undertaking many of the Backyard Farm activities. Often, the harvested products, which are primarily organic, are shared among community members. School gardens are better utilized, and community members actively participate in capacity-building discussions and educational workshops on topics such as soil management, environmental care, garden and animal pen creation, utilizing their resources, and seed production.

Families further learn by trial and error, and can share this knowledge with their neighbors and other community members.

Another important aspect of social impact is the improvement of the family's economic situation, not only concerning food consumption but also in relation to living conditions.

The program can indirectly foster democratic activities as outstanding community members have the opportunity to elect and be elected to the community organization. However, some challenges arise in this regard, as they have other commitments (including religious ones), leading to frequent absences from meetings or joint activities.

4. **Family Impact:** The impact on the family is most noticeable through the active participation of family members within the program. Working as a family is crucial. Occasionally, informal family counseling is provided, facilitating discussions on important issues or decisions. The entire family's involvement enhances critical thinking and analytical skills, and helps acquire new knowledge, particularly when confronting adverse situations or harmful gender norms.
5. **Gender Impact:** Prevailing *machismo* in the communities typically relegates productive tasks to men while women are expected to perform domestic chores and childcare. The technologies developed in this project are for the entire community and can be utilized by both men and women. Similarly, there are training topics specific to the family unit, enabling both men and women to confidently discuss these topics when participating. This leads to a shift in attitude on several fronts, particularly among men, as they can now carry out activities they wouldn't normally perform, such as childcare, homework checking, and housekeeping, among others.

A crucial point to note is that women are permitted, even encouraged, to participate in discussions and workshops. This is a fundamental step to ensure the entire family's involvement in any development program.

Other key questions that any institution developing agricultural outreach programs should ask include:

- a) Is the program meeting basic and non-basic needs?
- b) Is the program promoting or achieving the necessary conditions to improve participants' living and working standards?
- c) Is the program creating, strengthening, or consolidating efforts at community organization? Is it fostering community entities, forms of expression, and organized association and participation?
- d) Is the program fostering positive changes in attitudes, conditioning factors, aptitudes, behaviors, and mindsets in a manner that transforms the perceptions and actions of social actors, including both individuals and groups?
- e) Is the program modifying and adjusting the level and degree of formal structuring and institutional responses aimed at achieving the desired social impact?
- f) Is the program taking into account the environmental context (economic, political, cultural, technological, etc.) in which the policies, programs, and projects are implemented? Impacts will reflect changes or variations in demographic, social, economic, cultural, technological, and ecological variables, among others.

Effective agricultural development has far-reaching impacts extending beyond garden productivity or agricultural outputs. Therefore, Extensionists must act as agents of technological innovation, social change, and personal transformation. It's crucial to consider fostering a "new generation of Extensionists" with a unique vision, different attitudes, and a deep interest in the field of agricultural development, who fully embody the role of a community advocate. Extensionists must possess a distinct perspective concerning their work and, most importantly, a more humanitarian outlook.

The concepts and methods which underpin the flexibility and success of program design, in concert with a well-trained and dedicated field team, create the opportunity for increased self-reliance of individuals, families, and communities, creating lasting change now, and for generations to come.

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