

The Forix Foundation Grant Summary and Evaluation

Adopt-a-Village in Guatemala, Inc.

The primary objective of the grant was to provide training to mothers in Mayan villages that would help them become self-sufficient in vegetable production, thereby giving them a measure of control in determining the outcome of their children's nutrition and health.

Recap of Work Accomplished

- a. A demonstration garden was created at the organization's Maya Center as noted in the Fundraising Request B(2).
- b. As the first step, the Center's students were trained in soil management, composting, drainage, and methods of organic fertilization. Several soil mixtures were used, and the most successful was chosen as the base for the villages' gardens.
- c. Once training was completed, student groups traveled to villages to participate with mothers in building seed beds, digging drainage areas, planting, weeding and thinning.

Challenges

- a) The primary challenge was bad weather. From the time the gardens were planted to the final harvesting, it rained incessantly. In May, the deadly tropical storm Agatha struck, causing havoc throughout the country. Guatemala was to experience the most disastrous weather in 60 years, which negatively affected the project.
- b) The second challenge was transportation relative to bad weather. Mudslides, blocking access to villages, meant that the organization's vehicle was not able to get through with students to outlying villages as scheduled.

Outcomes

- a) Despite the weather issue, there were many successes, some unexpected. First of all, the level of enthusiasm and eagerness of the families to learn and work in the gardens was extremely high. Families took great pride in their gardens, fencing them by whatever means they could, and keeping them weed-free. The project was primarily designed for women, but in many cases, their husbands also participated.
- b) The interaction between the high school students and the mothers provided each group with benefits. The students were able to exercise their developing leadership skills by organizing groups of women, scheduling work parties, and teaching their recently learned skills. The villages' families were able to experience firsthand the benefits that a local community training center could bring to them and understand that the education offered at the center was for everyone.

- c) In spite of Mother Nature not cooperating, many families were able to grow crops to completion, and some sold their excess vegetables. For instance, one of the participants, a widow with four young children, earned half a day's pay in a few minutes by selling just a few bunches of the cilantro she grew.

Lessons Learned:

- a) It is possible to extend the growing season; i.e., growing three crops instead of the normal two, by using low-cost rain-protective plastic housing.
 - a. A simple collapsible plastic housing made from lightweight tree branches and plastic placed over crop beds areas will protect plants during the night rains. Warm weather continues during this time and there is good plant growth if plants are protected from heavy rain.
- b) The student community service project in which students worked with families in their gardens was highly successful. Students, who come from rural communities, experienced the benefits of the gardens and took the concept to their individual villages.
- c) The project generated great interest regionally. Our organization has been asked to initiate the project in five additional villages in the new year.

Sustainability:

- a) Families' extreme poverty and need for food will ensure that this program will continue.
- b) Using organic methods of gardening is a low-cost way of growing vegetables. Village people see they can afford to have gardens and understand that this is a self-sustaining opportunity for them.

Summary:

At completion, our organization identified this project as one of the most significant and far-reaching that it has undertaken over the years. With the looming food shortages in Guatemala, it has become imperative that families seek to become self-sustaining in food production. They will need to grow their own food to survive. Mayan families in these villages are hardworking and resourceful. They are willing and eager to produce food for their children. They have demonstrated a strong desire to have the project continue.

Moreover, this project has illuminated the great need for Adopt-a-Village to continue this important work. Self-help programs have been the basis of our organization. Our mission is to empower through education so that people can develop health and social improvements in their villages. Plans are now on the drawing board to build a community nutritional training center at the Mayan Center campus to serve families of outlying villages. Training will be offered in soil management, organic fertilization, nutrition, how to best use vegetables when cooking, and how to build low-cost rain protective housing for home gardens.

ADOPT-A-VILLAGE IN GUATEMALA

Fundación Para el Desarrollo Comunal de Huehuetenango



COMMUNITY GARDENS FOR THE MAYA

Providing training and resources to Mayan families
to help them become self-sufficient
in food production

PHASE I

Building skills for students to take to their communities



Phase II

Classes begin. Organic fertilizer is delivered



Phase III
Garden preparation and seeding
Students and mothers work together



Phase IV Reaping the Harvest

