



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Home Gardens Improve Nutrition, Empower Women In Rural Guatemala



USAID

Sheny holds a vegetable from her home garden.

In Guatemala, one out of every two children suffers from chronic malnutrition, leading to high levels of stunting and poor cognitive development. In the country's rural, western highlands, however, indigenous women are beginning to empower their neighbors to grow and sell their own foods and prepare healthy, nutritious meals to improve the well-being of their families.

USAID and Catholic Relief Services have partnered to change behaviors related to health and nutrition across Tonicapán, Guatemala, through a [Food for Peace](#) project. Guatemalan mothers learn to build home gardens filled with chard, spinach, carrots and other crops, and practice improved health and nutritional behavior to ensure their children will grow up healthy and strong.

Before the project, mothers throughout the community had struggled to grow many crops and mainly spent their money on staple rice foods. Since the project began, mothers have seen significant improvements in their home gardens, including increased access to nutritious foods and improved soil conservation.

Catalina*, one project beneficiary, did not know much before about growing vegetables and maintaining soil. "We didn't know a lot of things before," she said. "Now we have home gardens and grow spinach, beets, carrots and other vegetables. Our children eat better now."

Catalina was trained by the project to be a volunteer promoter, and now teaches other women in her community proper agricultural techniques such as contour farming and irrigation to replicate in their own home gardens. She also had difficulty paying her children's school fees, but now uses the money earned from selling vegetables to help her son go to school.

"Before, we only ate vegetables if we had the money to buy them. But now we can get them from our home gardens. Our land has changed a lot with the program," said Sheny*, another project beneficiary and mother of four. She now has a home garden with 14 different kinds of vegetables.

By integrating agriculture and nutrition, families can improve their agricultural production and dietary diversity to decrease rates of malnutrition among children. The project uses a unique community participation model of farmer field schools that integrates health and nutrition teachings. Through this model, promoters hold training sessions to teach groups of 25 to 30 mothers how to grow wholesome, nutritious foods.

From October 2013 to September 2014, more than 10,000 households received support in establishing home gardens. Families planted seeds of chard, spinach, carrot, beet, radish and other native plants.

As a result of the project, mothers in Totonicapán have recognized their value and potential as strong, influential leaders in their communities. In addition to learning new agriculture and nutrition practices, many community members attribute the success of home gardens to a strong belief and confidence that positive change in their family's overall health and income is possible.

"Before, we didn't think we were any good or useful because we didn't study. Now we know we have value. I was always shy to speak in public but now I am proud to talk," said Catalina.

The program, which runs from 2012 to 2018, aims to sustainably improve food security for approximately 23,500 rural families living in poverty in San Marcos and Totonicapán.

**Full name not available.*

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