



Women Farmers

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Women are critical leaders across SHI's programs. 50% of SHI's program staff are women, and 41% of SHI family partnerships are led by women. In an effort to recognize the important role of women as farmers and advocates for healthy food systems, we sat down this month with three SHI field trainers—Consuelo Hernández, Indira Patt, and Daysbeth López—and several participant farmers to discuss their experiences.

In celebration of the International Day of Rural Women, we are lifting up the voices of these women farmers. Here are their words, raw and unfiltered.

**CONSUELO HERNANDEZ,
SHI FIELD TRAINER**
Siguatepeque, Honduras

I was born to a family of farmers. As a child, I supported my mother in planting vegetables... When I returned [from the city] to the country, I found that [SHI] had come to the community and selected me as a participating family. I think that my fond childhood memories came to mind so I started to get involved in what the organization was doing. Believe me, I was fascinated by it. I was really doing what I wished to be doing all the time. I got so involved supporting our field trainer and I learned so much that they gave me the opportunity to work for SHI. Now here I am doing what I love most, working with people to teach them what I learned, and continuing to learn.



SHI field trainer Consuelo Hernández (right) grinding coffee with SHI board member during the board trip to SHI-Honduras in April 2019. Before she was hired as an SHI field trainer, Consuelo and her family were participant farmers in SHI's 5-phase program.

I entered [SHI] as a participant family in 2009. In 2012, before I graduated [from the program], I was hired as an employee... Being involved with families is



something very important for me because I understand how to improve families' quality of life. I was in their place once. Every time I do something, I put myself in their place and try to do my absolute best, as if I was doing it for myself.

From the moment [SHI] selects a family as a participant, we take into account the whole family—husband, wife, and children. The wife knows that they play a very important role, and, from the beginning, we hold trainings in which women are involved and participate. At first, it can be difficult to involve both husband and wife because their custom is that the wife stays in the house and does not leave. But now they are so involved that they do field activities, and both men and women go as a pair to participate in field activities.

In addition to supporting their husbands in agriculture, women are the ones in charge of knowing what they need in their kitchen... [They] cultivate their garden, they process the food, they have to take care of the animals, they have to take care of their children.



[Women farmers] have a vision of the future with their family, they not only think about growing crops now but they are thinking in the future about a better quality of life in adding value to what their husbands produce.

Another very important role for women is to promote the organization of the rural banks in the communities. They are the motivators for any activity carried out by the bank. These funds are distributed in credits among themselves and used for agriculture. They are promoting agricultural development in their communities and the improvements are quite remarkable.

INDIRA PATT, SHI FIELD TRAINER

Corozal, Belize

SHI field trainer Indira Patt distributing pineapple seedlings with SHI-Belize. Indira was raised by her grandmother in the district of Corozal and began farming while in high school. In addition to working as an SHI field trainer, Indira is finishing up her degree in Agricultural Engineering.

Since the moment I began high school, I took agriculture classes which made me very excited to keep learning. It was very interesting to learn how to produce my own food. It motivates and inspires you in the work that you do to help raise awareness of



the importance of being food sovereign and in doing your part to contribute to the well-being of the environment.

At the beginning [of the SHI 5-phase program], we give group or individual trainings in aspects of regenerative agriculture so that [both women and men] can help with feeding their homes. What we are looking for is the empowerment of women. I think there is still a lot of work to be done but at least a number of the [women I work with] are carrying out the project by themselves. They serve as an example for the rest of the community to follow.

DAYSBETH LOPEZ, SHI FIELD TRAINER
Penonome, Panama

I was involved in agriculture from a very young age since my grandparents and parents cultivated the land. They sowed in the traditional way. I went with them and watched them harvest rice, corn, yuca, plantains, beans. When I was young, I studied conventional agriculture, which allowed me to know more about its interaction with human beings. But it was not until I started working with the SHI-Panama program that I understood that we must cultivate the land, taking care of our mother nature so that she can continue to sustain us, giving fruit to current and future generations.

My motivation in my work is to be able to help participating families understand that we must take care of our environment, to improve the soils so that they can sustain the crops and incorporate techniques that will work forever. My inspiration is to see when these families harvest to put food on their tables every day, when they sell some of what they produce, and when, little by little, they improve their living conditions in a holistic way.

Women farmers in the communities where I work play an important role. Usually their husbands go out to work far from their homes so they are in charge of maintaining the crops they have around their homes. They are dedicated, persevering, enthusiastic, and work with much love for the land.



SHI field trainer Daysbeth López standing in front of the SHI-Panama office in Penonome. Daysbeth has a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture Business Administration. Growing up with parents who were traditional farmers, Daysbeth aims to make an impact in agriculture without negatively affecting the environment. Her dream is to own a piece of land that she can farm through regenerative agriculture, growing enough food for her husband and two kids.



ORFA MARIN, SHI PARTICIPANT FARMER

San Luis, Belize



“Because of the [Covid-19] curfew, they were telling people to not go out. My food was what was in the garden—spinach, ocoro, chaya, avocados, chile, cilantro... That was what helped me.” – Orfa Marin

Orfa lives with her husband, Teodoro Marin, and their four children. She tends to the family’s home garden and prepares the family’s food. She prides herself on

making sure that the family has plenty of nutritious food. Orfa is currently in phase 2 of SHI’s 5-phase program.

MARIA SANTOS, SHI PARTICIPANT FARMER

Patchakan, Belize

“It used to be difficult for me to get food because things were expensive, but now that I practice planting, it is easier... [Now] we are learning to plant with my children. There are no chemicals in [the food] and they are learning from a young age to plant their own healthy food.” – Maria Santos

Maria Santos is a single mother of six children, three boys and three girls. In addition to her vegetable garden, she raises chickens for sale, an important source of income for her family. Since she began growing her own food, she has seen an important decrease in her family’s expenses. She’s also thrilled that the children are learning how to grow food and that their food is chemical-free. Maria is currently in phase 2 of the SHI 5-phase program.





NOLVIA SUYAPA MATUTE, SHI PARTICIPANT FARMER
San Francisco Ocampo, Honduras

“I try to help my compañeros and other members of the household with drying the basic grains and storing them to guarantee food all year round... [Producing our own food] is important, thank God, because it guarantees us food security and allows us to have better nutrition.” – Nolvía Suyapa Matute

Suyapa lives with her husband, Modesto Castellano, and her three children. Suyapa manages her family’s garden, prepares the family’s food, and assists with the harvest. So that her family has a guaranteed source of food all year round, Suyapa is in charge of drying and storing the family’s harvest of basic grains.

SANDRA MEZA, SHI PARTICIPANT FARMER

Santa Cruz del Dulce, Honduras

Sandra lives with her husband, Leonidas Canales, and their six children. During the annual bean and corn harvest, she works with her husband in the fields and also makes sure all are well fed. Since she knows exactly what her family needs, she makes sure to grow everything they’d want in their home garden. While the land around her house used to be a garbage heap, she has regenerated the land so that it is now the source of their food. With easy access to food, she’s diversified her family’s diet with nutritious and chemical-free food. She happily reports that the family no longer needs to spend the money or the time traveling into the city to buy food. Moreover, her veggies are much tastier than anything she’s found at market!





NITZIA REYES, SHI PARTICIPANT FARMER
La Pedregosa, Panama

“With my family’s help, we work on growing a variety of crops such as grains, roots, legumes, and broiler chicken so that we can eat our own food... We now are able to consume a greater variety of food that is family-produced and cared for by our own hands and efforts.” – Nitzia Reyes

Nitzia lives with her husband, Adán Castillo, and her three children. In addition to growing the vegetables, grains, and roots in her family’s garden, she dedicates herself to raising broiler chickens, both for family consumption and for sale.

EDITH ARIAS, SHI PARTICIPANT FARMER
La Candelaria, Panama

Edith lives with her husband, Carlos Ruiz, and their six children in La Candelaria. The community depends on subsistence farming and intermittent work at nearby commercial poultry and orange farms. While her



husband works as bricklayer, Edith takes care of the children and tends to the plants and animals on their land. Since partnering with SHI, she’s improved the fertility of the land with organic fertilizers (including the fertilizer from her very own composting latrine!) and now boasts of an enormous variety of crops, including rice, corn, beans, pigeon peas, yuca, yam, banana, soursop, papaya, tomato, cucumber, celery, parsley, and peppers. She’s raising chickens and pigs, too! In addition, she’s been using some of her corn to make tamales and buns that she sells in the nearby communities. Sales from extra produce, livestock, and baked goods have been an important source of extra income, especially during Covid-19.