



**FOOD FOR
THE HUNGRY**

GUATEMALA

MID YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

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Translated by **Ingrid Delgado**

Prepared by **FH Canada**



INTRODUCTION



Communities:

- Acul (Nebaj): 1**
- Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II: 3**
- San Juan Cotzal: 8**



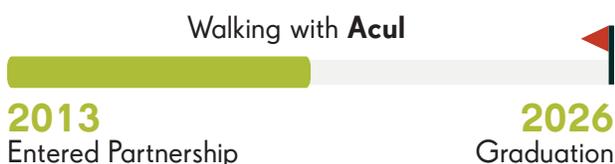
Families:

- Acul (Nebaj): 684**
- Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II: 721**
- San Juan Cotzal: 2,447**



Population:

- Acul (Nebaj): 3,252**
- Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II: 3,496**
- San Juan Cotzal: 12,534**



RE-EVALUATING GRADUATIONS

Due to ongoing challenges from COVID-19, FH Guatemala is re-evaluating graduation timelines for partner communities that were due to graduate by 2023. An assessment this August of the impact of the pandemic on each community will determine their new, individual graduation dates.

Food for the Hungry (FH) walks with communities in the Nebaj and San Juan Cotzal Regions of Guatemala. With an emphasis on improving child nutrition, boosting community health, multiplying livelihood opportunities, and strengthening local leadership, your support empowers FH Canada’s work with 3,852 families on their daily journey out of poverty. In the Ixil region, FH continues the journey with Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, and Villa Hortensia II. The eight new communities located in San Juan Cotzal are now in their second year of the journey.



“A highlight for me this year has been the effort and unity of our partner communities in the face of two major hurricanes plus a pandemic. When the hurricanes hit, they didn’t wait for the government to help them; they were proactive and cleared the roads so relief supplies could be delivered. This came at a time when families and communities were struggling through a pandemic. They continue to stand up, to organize, and refuse to break down.

In the communities you find people with so much hope, even though they are aware of the real challenges they are facing. I have seen how the facilitators and volunteers work hand-in-hand to keep working through the challenges. This is truly resilience, and we are honored to walk with these communities.”

— Ingrid Delgado, Donor Accountability Coordinator, FH Guatemala

INTRODUCTION



COVID-19 UPDATE

The COVID-19 situation in the country has improved, however, many who lost their jobs did not get them back. Gatherings are still restricted to 30 percent of normal capacity and masks are required. Vaccines have started to roll out, but slowly. Thank God that cases have been minimal and community leaders have been equipped to handle the situation!

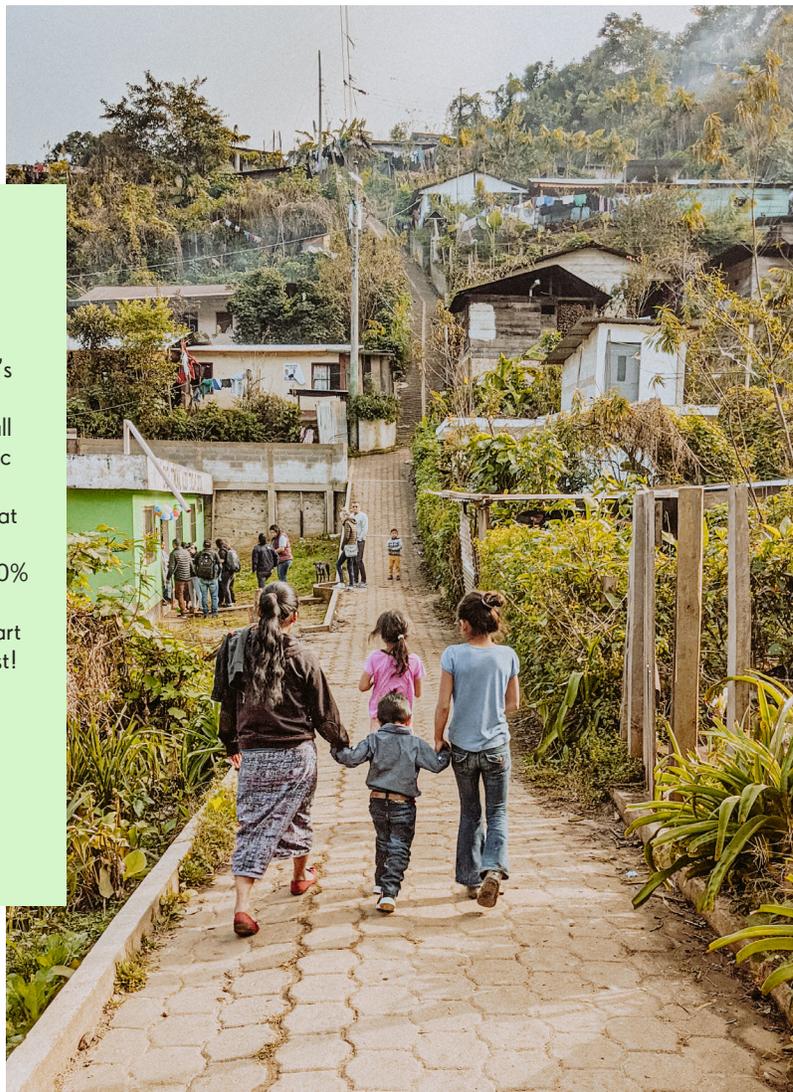
“Over the past year and a half, I have been blown away by the dedication, creativity, and patience of the FH Guatemala team. They have adapted to a very challenging situation by creating new channels of communication and incorporating new strategies. They endured the stress of disconnection, rolled out new systems, and continued to be a source of support for partner communities. Time and again, they leaned on God and each other for strength and grace. We are so blessed to partner with this incredible team!”

— Patty-Leigh Thielmann, VP of International Programs, FH Canada

PARTNERSHIP UPDATE: LOS ANGELES

For partnerships to succeed, it's critical that both parties (FH and the community) are all in. Although initially enthusiastic to work with FH, it became clear after much interaction that Los Angeles—a new San Juan Cotzal community—wasn't 100% sure they wanted to start their development journey. As we part ways, we wish them all the best!

*Contact partnerships@fhcanada.org to learn more about the FH partnership process.



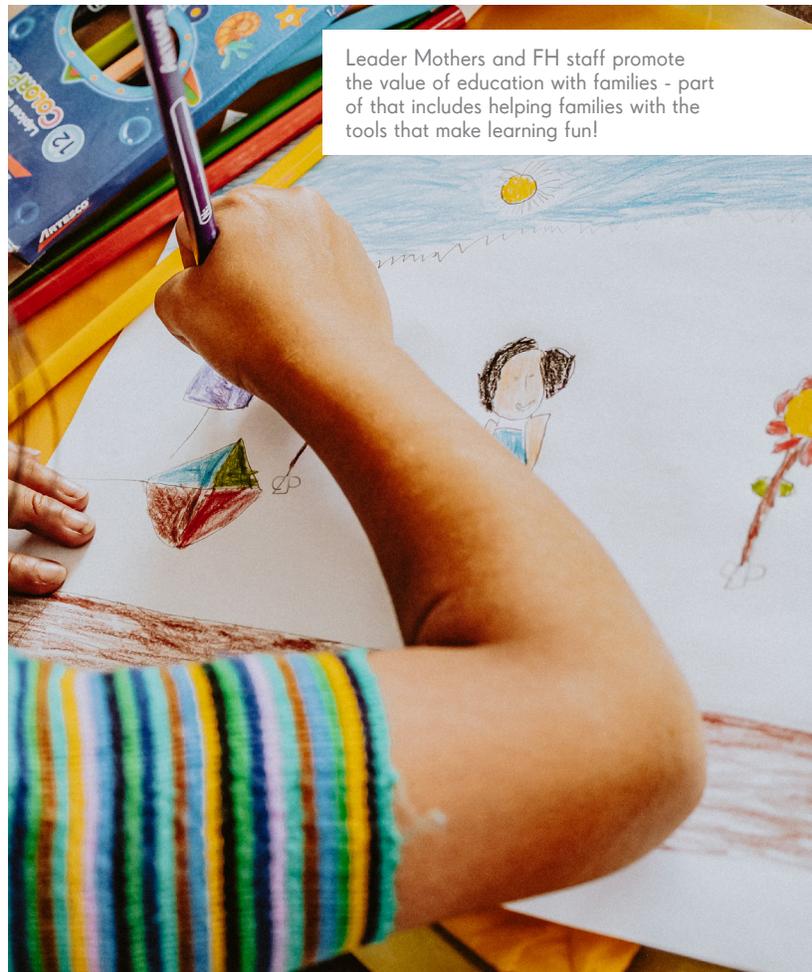
COMMUNITY GOAL

To improve the academic development opportunities of children, adolescents and youth.

During COVID-19 lockdowns, schools in Guatemala closed. Children were expected to learn at home, which presented huge challenges not only for the learners, but also for the parents. Not all parents have had a formal education themselves, so it can be difficult to help the older children. In addition, they are busy surviving the pressures of the pandemic and struggle to visit the schools twice a month to drop-off and pick-up their children's school work. When schools reopened briefly from March to the end of April this year, some students returned, some started going a few days a week, and others simply stayed home.

To help families cope with these unprecedented expectations, FH provided "game bags" to elementary school-aged children who did not return to school. These bags included creative learning tools like memory games, tangrams (wooden, geometric puzzle), and blocks to help motivate young children to continue learning at home. FH supported middle school students by regularly phoning them to find out how they were getting along with their schoolwork, listen to their struggles, and encourage them to stay engaged.

Remote learning poses risks to children whose families struggle with poverty. Older children can be sent to work to help fill the financial gap created by COVID-19 economic pressures, while younger children can be kept busy at home with extra chores as their parents focus on how to feed the family. It is FH's hope that during these rolling lockdowns, efforts like the game bags and phone contact will encourage families to not give up on education and stay committed to sending their children back to school when in-person learning resumes.



Leader Mothers and FH staff promote the value of education with families - part of that includes helping families with the tools that make learning fun!

ACTIVITIES

68 families of elementary-age students received visits and **learning game bags** from FH staff.

5 middle school students phoned and encouraged in their remote learning.



HEALTH

“During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the quarantine and curfew, I had fears about COVID-19. I thought I would never see my loved ones again. I was very afraid because the news reported deaths from COVID-19 in all parts of the world. It was like living through the 1981 civil war, all over again. My family was affected and my children suffered psychologically. I am deeply thankful to God that now my children are well as things have almost returned to normal. And I thank FH for the mental health support they gave us with the text messages.”

—Silvia Villatoro Terraza, [Leader Mother](#)

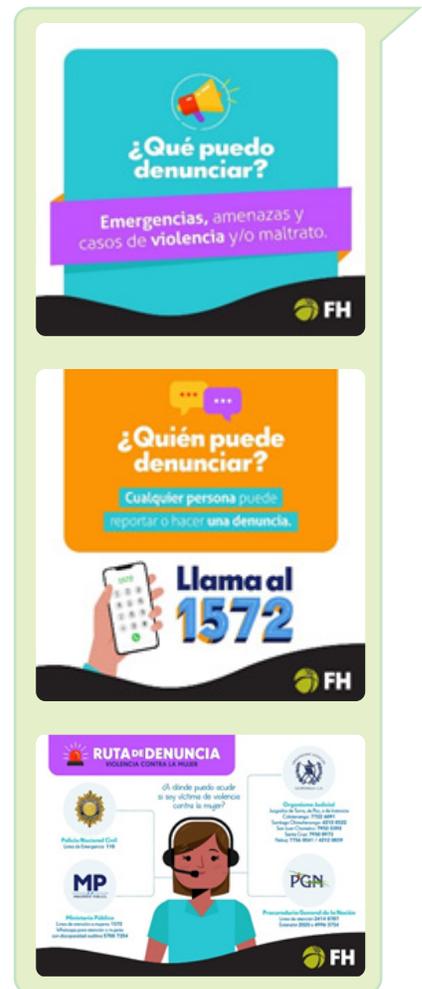
COMMUNITY GOAL

To improve the physical and mental health of families in partner communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

FH Guatemala partnered with the non-profit ChildFund to air COVID-19 prevention messages on two local radio stations in Cotzal and Nebaj. The messages were broadcast from December 2020 - March 2021 three times a day from Monday to Friday.

In addition to public awareness campaigns, FH equips Cascade health group leaders (Leader Mothers) and Growth Monitoring and Promotion teams to prevent the spread of the virus in their communities. In March, FH provided the leaders with hygiene kits and posters showing COVID-19 prevention hygiene practices (like handwashing). With these resources, Leader Mothers share critical health information with their neighbours through personal visits and chance encounters.

FH staff used phone messages to strengthen Leader Mothers’ capacity to teach on mental health topics. This teaching improves the wellbeing of community women physically, relationally, and intellectually. Obstacles to this method of communication included poor telephone signal and the reality that some Leader Mothers do not own smartphones. Thankfully, the leaders who did receive the messages shared them with those who did not, and the training went forward.



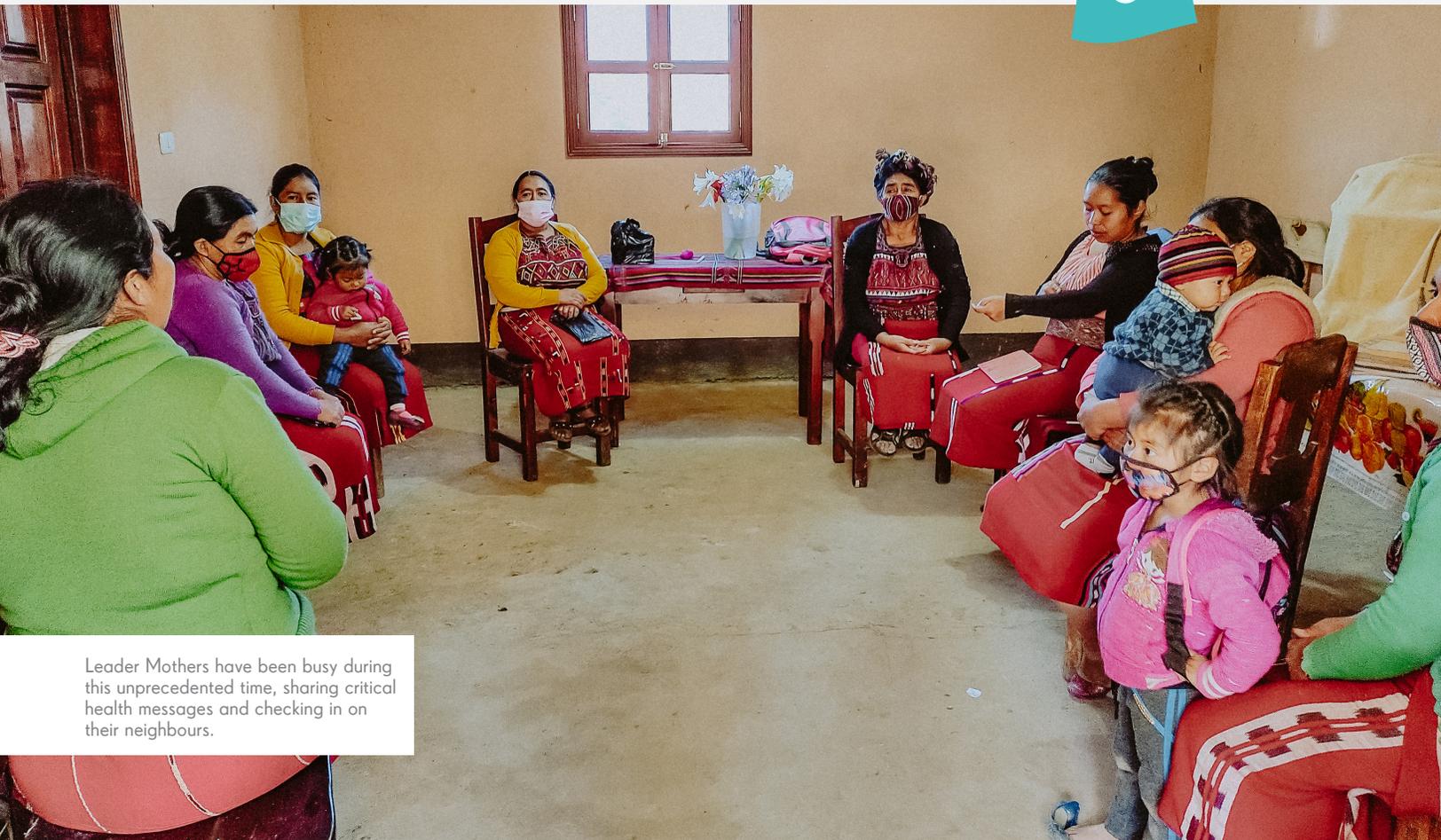


ACTIVITIES

17 different COVID-19 **prevention messages** recorded and broadcast on the radio in Cotzal and Nebaj; messages aired 3 times a day, 5 days a week, for a period of 4 months.

187 COVID-19 **prevention hygiene kits** and posters distributed to Leader Mothers (containing a sanitizing alcohol spray, antibacterial gel, a reusable mask, and two Ziploc bags).

317 phone calls, text messages, or in-person conversations initiated by FH staff on **mental health** strengthening.



Leader Mothers have been busy during this unprecedented time, sharing critical health messages and checking in on their neighbours.



LIVELIHOODS

"I have always liked to grow my own vegetables to support my family and take advantage of my resources, but I have not had sufficient finances to make my own garden. Now, thanks to FH, I can make my dream come true! Thank you for the seeds and compost."

—Maria Ixcoy

COMMUNITY GOAL

To (1) improve the food security of the most vulnerable families through home gardens and (2) improve the economic security of families through Savings and Loans groups.

Families across all communities continue to grow home gardens, including 220 new families in San Juan Cotzal! These gardens raise household food security by providing nutritious food for their children all year round. Community agricultural volunteers give technical support to gardening families and deliver FH-provided inputs like seeds. In February, health centre staff helped FH identify families with children under the age of five that have low weight or delayed growth. FH prioritized these families to receive fertilizer, seeds, and seedlings to grow beets, cilantro, carrots, nightshade vegetables, cabbage, onions, and more! The families are grateful for this support as they believe the future vegetables will improve their children's health.

FH staff phoned agricultural volunteers and gardening families to provide technical support as some had difficulty with insect plagues and flooding caused by the rainy season. They were encouraged to apply organic pesticides and dig ditches and furrows to improve crop drainage.

Each newly formed Savings and Loans group in Cotzal received a "Piggy-Bank" kit with a secure lockbox and personal savings books and leader training from FH. To help groups function safely during the pandemic, FH also provided face mask washing kits that include a large bucket, liquid soap, and personal towels. Members learned the value of following COVID-19 protocols so they can continue to move forward with their Savings group goals.

FH is working with Savings group members to turn their new business ideas into realities. The participants have been enthusiastically working through a four phase process to hone their plans and realize their dreams.



Members of the women's group, "The Platform" in the greenhouse where they produce seedlings for sale.

PITCHING A BUSINESS PLAN

- 1** FH staff present Savings and Loans groups with the opportunity for members to pitch their business plans and receive free, expert consultation.
- 2** A group member presents their business idea to FH reps who provide feedback on how to improve the plan.
- 3** The revised business plans go to an FH committee that selects the best projects to move to Phase 4.
- 4** When the business plan is sharpened and completed, the entrepreneur launches their new venture and receives free consultation from FH reps for three months.



LIVELIHOODS

ACTIVITIES

450 family gardens cultivated! 270 of these gardens are brand new, including 220 in the new San Juan Cotzal communities.



17 agricultural volunteers each received a hoe as a special thanks.

4 business plans selected for incubation and support (one each in Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, and Villa Hortensia II).



20 Savings and Loans groups active - 10 continuing and 10 brand new!

NEW! SOCIAL VENTURE PROJECT: BETTER COFFEE, BETTER LIVES



FH Canada will support a new Social Venture Project called **Better Coffee, Better Lives** to empower smallholder coffee farmers to improve their income, quality of coffee production, and food security. FH Guatemala recently surveyed coffee growers in partner communities and discovered their farms are only producing 35 percent of the expected yield. Through technical training and support, Better Coffee, Better Lives will equip coffee farmers to increase the quantity of coffee they grow, improve the quality of their beans, and withstand climate shocks. With these changes, smallholder coffee farmers will grow sustainable livelihoods.



LEADERSHIP

“Thank God, in the community [of Rio Azul] there is no positive case of COVID-19. We continue to comply with the measures established by the government such as the proper use of the mask, application of gel [hand sanitizer], physical distancing, and proper handwashing.”

—Don Miguel, Community Leader in Rio Azul

COMMUNITY GOAL

To (1) strengthen community resilience by reducing the risk of contagion of COVID-19 and (2) reduce domestic violence.

FH has continued to stay in close contact with community leaders. Through regular phone calls, FH staff have kept their finger on the pulse of community life. They’ve been encouraged that families are staying healthy, community meetings are going forward, and churches are holding in-person services while complying with COVID-19 safety protocols.

FH equipped community and church leaders, Leader Mothers, and Growth Monitoring and Promotion teams by regularly texting messages and resources on leadership and health. Phone calls were made to those leaders who do not own smartphones and/or do not read so they could also benefit from the information FH provided. In other cases, staff sent WhatsApp voice notes to keep leaders up-to-date on the latest pandemic information.

Whenever a community hears of new cases of COVID-19, local leaders double down on their efforts to emphasize wearing masks, frequent handwashing, physical distancing, and alcohol sanitizers to stop the spread of the virus.

FH shared key messages with community and church leaders to clarify the process for reporting incidents of domestic violence, which have been on the rise since COVID-19 began. The leaders in each of the communities shared these messages with community families. Together, they all now know who to go to and how to report incidents. The leaders expressed gratitude for the messages as they are ready to put this life-changing process into practice.

ACTIVITIES

72 check-ins conducted with community leaders.

72 text messages on reducing domestic violence sent to community leaders.



WOMEN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Acul

“We will continue to unite more women to our group and together we will make more changes in the community. As a Women’s Platform, our vision is to have an office where we can create jobs for girls and boys in the community.”

— Member of Women for Sustainable Development

Women for Sustainable Development is a group of hard-working, forward-thinking women from six different Savings and Loans groups. After receiving training and a greenhouse from FH five years ago, they have been working together to increase their social, economic, and political empowerment.

They generate a sustainable income by running a chair rental service and producing and selling vegetable seedlings which they deliver to surrounding communities and NGOs. The representatives of each individual Savings group are responsible to coordinate activities, manage new spaces, and promote their seedling business.

The women work daily to grow a variety of crops including onion, cabbage, broccoli, chili pepper, jalapeño pepper, chard, and cauliflower. They are planting all kinds of seedlings (pilons) so that families can have a variety of vegetables on their dinner tables. In the beginning, it was difficult for them to transport their products since the road to the greenhouse was narrow. So they worked together to widen the road and now easily move their products with hired transport trucks.

Before joining Savings and Loans groups, the women didn’t really participate in organized groups of any kind. In Acul, usually only men





work in organized groups while women stick to caring for their individual homes and families. Some women even thought groups were simply a waste of time. FH's work in the community equipped women to step outside their comfort zones and begin participating in more community activities. Due to FH-facilitated motivational talks, self-esteem training, and leadership development, women are now more active in community meetings and decision-making.

As a result, Women for Sustainable Development is having a great impact! The members work to create new Savings and Loans groups, strengthen existing groups, support the development of micro-enterprises that improve their profits, promote and deliver seedlings that improve family health, and partner with FH to reduce childhood malnutrition. "Working for the families of the communities is a blessing. Losing fear and being able to manage is one more step [forward] in our life. Being part of a group means to continue making ourselves known and opening spaces for participation and intervention."

Through growing and delivering vegetable seedlings, the Women for Sustainable Development have supported many families throughout their community (and beyond!) to plant family gardens. They've seen changes in Acul at social, infrastructural, economic, and political levels. Women have businesses, children are studying, and more women's committees are being formed. "We love the work and we do it with great enthusiasm. The program that FH has implemented has been a great blessing for our lives. We will continue to unite more women to our group and together we will make more changes in the community. As a Women's Platform, our vision is to have an office where we can create jobs for girls and boys in the community and save our children from bad influences."

DON'T FORGET PLAYTIME!

Villa Hortensia II

"Before, I didn't have much time to play. Sometimes we would play for a while with my brothers, but we didn't have toys to have fun. With the toys that FH gave us, I feel very happy to be able to play with my little brothers and sister."

— Petrona, **nine years old, Grade 3**

When schools and children's clubs closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, children like Petrona lost their spaces for learning and playing. With few toys and no games at home, Petrona quickly abandoned learning and took up her role as the eldest of five siblings. At just nine years old, she was responsible to look after her younger brothers and sister and help her mother with chores.

It wasn't all work, though. Petrona did enjoy occasionally kicking a soccer ball around with her brothers to keep them occupied. But while essential for gross motor skills development, these games didn't help her with counting, problem solving, or a host of other critical skills.

Petrona's parents, however, weren't concerned. "I didn't know about the benefits of games in the lives of our children," her mother Juana explains, "I thought it was a waste of time. I could not finish my studies in school; I only studied up to Grade 2 then I had to work in the fields and support my parents." In addition to play not being a priority, Juana and her husband Antonio simply didn't have the money to buy games and toys for their five children. While Antonio works hard and provides the necessities for his large family - a home, nutritious food, clothing, education, and health care - there simply isn't disposable income for non-essentials.

Having been present in the community of Villa Hortensia II for several years, FH staff were



keenly aware of the educational crisis unfolding alongside the pandemic. They began to look for creative solutions to support parents and keep children engaged during the rolling lockdowns. For children Petrona's age, they decided to deliver game bags containing memory tools, tangrams, puzzles, and blocks.

The game bags were a huge hit! "I want to have fun and play with my little brothers and sister; that makes me feel happy!" exclaimed Petrona when asked how she liked the learning pack. Her little sister, Maria, was also enthusiastic, "I really like the toys that FH gave us - I like the colours and shapes!" Petrona is happy to share with her siblings and friends and enjoys learning new games through the puzzles and blocks.

Her parents now give each of their children more time for play and even join them in doing some of the puzzles. "In the past, we thought games were a waste of time for children and didn't know the importance or benefits of play. Now we support their playtime."

"I hope that the other parents can also understand and give space for the children to play and have fun because, many times, we think it's a waste of time, but it's a change for the lives of our children," Antonio comments. Juana adds, "I feel very happy and blessed that FH came to our community. Now, thanks to God, I can help my children so that they have a better development and can continue their studies."

THE POWER OF A FAMILY GARDEN

Rio Azul

“Through the sale of surplus vegetables from my garden, I generate a source of income for my family that I save.”

— Maria

During the initial pandemic lockdowns, Maria’s garden was a lifesaver. Due to government regulations restricting the movement of people and goods, Maria and her family were not allowed to go out to buy food. This made it difficult for them and their neighbours to get the vegetables and supplies they needed at home. Through Maria’s garden, however, she had access to readily available food in the form of the vegetables she grew herself. She was able to feed her family and support her neighbours by selling what she produced. This experience drove home to Maria just how essential her work is, and how important it is for the entire community to be able to produce their own food.

Before starting her garden, Maria kept busy with the monumental task of caring for six children and keeping a home. Her husband, Jose, and their oldest son, Jacinto worked in agriculture to earn an income for the family. But it was never quite enough to do things like diversify their diet or accumulate savings. They ate corn and beans and lived day-to-day.

About five years ago, however, Maria attended FH agricultural workshops and joined Las Rosas, a local Savings and Loans group. She learned how to manage a year-round garden and how to leverage small loans and regularly put money away for her family. “Through the sale of surplus vegetables from my garden, I generate a source of income for my family that I save.” Maria also took culinary classes with FH to learn new recipes that incorporate the nutritious (but often

new-to-their-diet) vegetables into their daily meals in a way her family loves!

Maria’s garden not only improves her family’s health, generates income, and provides fresh produce to her community, it also helps support her work with the women’s board at the local church. She’s eager to continue expanding her vegetable production and passing down her knowledge to her children, “teaching them to save, manage a family garden, produce their own food, and invest their money.”



GROWING IN COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

Xonca

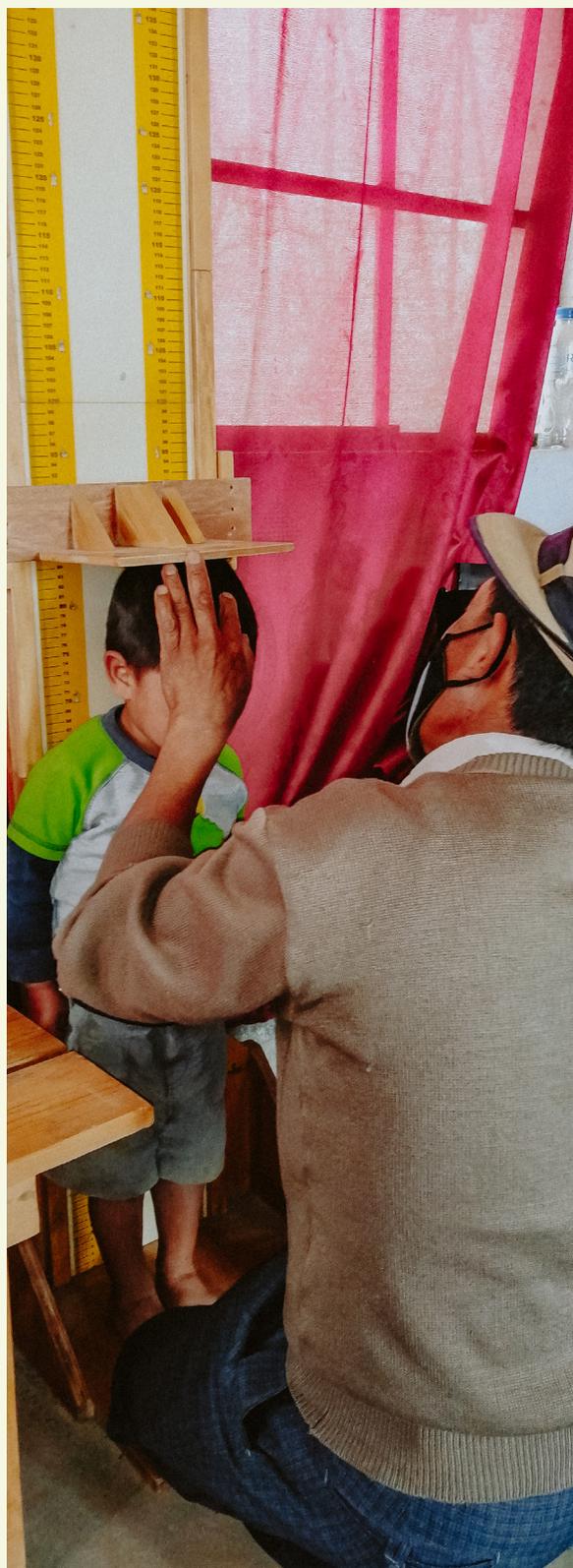
"I thank FH for supporting my community, for the ideas they have shared with mothers, families, children, and young students and for the training developed with the leaders. They have been a great blessing for [the families] now they are putting into practice what they have learned."

— José

José López Gallego, is father to four adult children and a member of the Health Committee in Xonca and a volunteer on the Monitoring and Growth Promotion Team. These FH initiatives help fight malnutrition in his community.

José lives in a typical Xonca house with a metal sheet roof and wooden walls. They have electricity and their own latrine, which helps with sanitation and a healthy lifestyle. As a farmer, José grows corn and beans for his family but also herbs and flowers which he sells in the market in Nebaj. In addition to farming, he raises cattle, operates a local corn mill, and runs a small pharmacy in his community. His wife, Maria, helps serve customers in the pharmacy and the mill. Through these ventures, they both serve their neighbours and generate daily income for their family.

For the past five years, José has participated in FH workshops that equip him to be a health volunteer focused on supporting the growth of children in his community. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Guatemala, he assisted in monthly sessions to measure the growth rate (height and weight) of children under the age of five. As he worked with children susceptible to malnutrition,





his compassion grew. Their vulnerability moves him to action and he encourages parents to follow the advice of the FH health workers.

“I feel motivated by the work that FH carries out in my community,” José shares. “The staff has been very empathetic with me and others to better facilitate learning about development topics. This has contributed to our participation. Now I am an ally motivating people in my community to learn.”

José has become an exemplary leader in promoting behaviour change in the homes of his community. “I want the mothers in my community to have the knowledge they need to care for their children; I want them to understand the importance of monitoring the weight and height of their children. This is the only way to identify if they are in good health, and if not, they are advised to change their behaviour. I hope my leadership will inspire others in my community to also promote behaviour change.”

Due to pandemic restrictions, José’s community has temporarily suspended in-person monitoring sessions, however, he continues to support the Ministry of Health and FH staff in whatever ways they need.

“I thank FH for supporting my community, for the ideas they have shared with mothers, families, children, and young students and for the training developed with the leaders. They have been a great blessing for [the families] now they are putting into practice what they have learned.”

SAVING FOR CHANGE

Vichibala, San Juan Cotzal

“I would like to see women leading in the community where they are members of a committee, and if God allows me, I can be one of those women to contribute my bit in my community.”

— Encarnación

Encarnación Sambrano Poma is a trained teacher but currently stays home with her one and a half-year old daughter, Catarina. Because her husband Moises and father-in-law Andres are able to grow much of their own food, they no longer spend as much at the large market in San Juan Cotzal. Instead, they cultivate crops for sale in their local market and in San Juan Cotzal, including blackberries, leaves and tips of güisquil, chard, potatoes, carrots, peas, beans, and corn.

When Food for the Hungry (FH) began its relationship with Vichibala, Encarnación was especially interested in Savings and Loans groups. While she earned a bit of money selling vegetables, she was never able to set aside money for emergencies. She hoped that Las Estrellas (the stars) could help her with that - and they did! Since joining the Savings group in February, Encarnación has learned new techniques for managing their household income and saves Q. 10.00 each week. This has been a huge relief as she was previously afraid to take loans from the banks in an emergency because of the unpayable high interest rates.

Even though Encarnación is only 25 years old, her group recognized her potential and trusted her to be one of the members responsible for the group’s accounting book. “From the beginning I was afraid to fill the books and get confused about balancing the money, but with everyone’s help I encouraged myself to move on, this great





advance makes me feel useful within the group,” she explains.

Through continual FH training, Encarnación’s numeracy steadily improved, strengthening the future autonomy of the group. “It is a privilege to work with people in the community, they have a lot of potential to develop, and you learn a lot from them; they have many ideas, the only thing that limits them is the fear of what they will say and the lack of intentional advice from a mentor,” FH facilitator Keyla Asicona, comments.

Before FH began walking with their community, Encarnación and the other women were afraid to work outside their households and didn’t gather in organized groups. But all that has changed. They’ve learned that they are made in the image of God and have great capacity. “The participation of women is now active, they have

acquired new knowledge to save and undertake,” Encarnación explains. “I feel blessed because God is opening doors for me through the support that FH is providing to the community through its methodology. It helps me be of service to the participants of my group and to other families.” I am sure that in the group I can find the support I need to start my own business and that I am interested in supporting the household expenses. My wish is to graduate from university to give my daughter a better life and to be an example to follow. I know that everything can be done in this life with the help of God.”

Thank You

FH Canada, FH Guatemala, and the families of Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II, and San Juan Cotzal thank you for your continued support of their unique development journeys! Your gifts are helping children learn, growing nutritious family gardens, empowering entrepreneurs, and equipping leaders to transform their communities.