



INSIDE: Supporting rural women in Belize

www.shareagfoundation.org

A SLIGHTLY SKEWED VIEW OF THE WORLD (I THOUGHT THAT I KNEW)

BY MARK CULLEN

Over the past 10 years or so that I have been the Honorary Patron for SHARE Agriculture Foundation, I thought that I had learned enough about the organization and our history to be able to say that I really knew what we are about.

However it took a long delayed trip to Belize, this January, with our loyal volunteer project manager for Central America and monitor, Les Frayne, for me to understand what I really didn't understand about SHARE and the people that we serve. I was lucky enough to travel with my 21 year old daughter, Heather, and this was a treat for me as I don't get to see much of her now that she's at the University of Guelph [Landscape Architecture]. Plus, having Heather's interpretation on what she and I saw and heard that week added a whole new dimension to the experience for this middle-aged, average Canadian guy.

First of all, Belize is a beautiful country. People are not starving in the streets but there is a world of need here. Children are clean and their school uniforms are smartly pressed, white socks immaculate – regardless of the fact that many, if not most of them, live in shacks that make my garden tool shed look pretty good. Heather: "Students were very respectful of their teachers and visitors. Something that seems to be slipping in Canada. Students would take a moment to acknowledge and greet us."

The work that SHARE does – and the

accomplishments that we have achieved over the years – is most evident when you visit the many projects that we have supported. We visited with one farmer, Francisco Herrera, who, through the resources offered by SHARE over 10 years ago, has succeeded in getting his farm into a profitable position. He is a local success story thanks to SHARE. Heather: "I realize how far our help can go when we visited Eden High School. It was evident that they appreciated the work that SHARE does through our scholarship program when they shared their stories [nervously], poems, and songs with us. There was a sense of genuine

grace and thanks from the 13 students that we support there and from their teachers and principal."

I learned that Canadians and the people that we support in developing countries live in very different worlds. Making a meaningful difference in their life takes more than a gift of money.... It takes an understanding of their needs and desires in combination with the resources that

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A SHARE scholarship student shows of vegetable garden used for agricultural training at Belize School of Agriculture.





ABOVE

Maria Ana, ANTA worker in El Salvador, receives a sewing machine and materials from SHARE.

LEFT

When asked what their needs were the El Salvadorian people asked for literacy training and micro enterprises. Here several graduates show off their certificates.

Observations from El Salvador

BY LEW ROBERTS

SHARE's southern partner, ANTA is an established agricultural organization of approximately 10,000 very small landowners in El Salvador. None of their members own a tractor and are the poorest of the poor on small plots of marginal land.

El Salvador has a very stratified society which has existed in various forms for generations. The poor are exploited by the establishment and foreign companies as a source of cheap labour. The authoritarian rule leads to dissent. Maintenance of the status quo will always be a hard sell with the poor of society. There is a visible presence of soldiers, high walls and thick gates.

ANTA has made a difference in the lives of many small landowners by targeting aid to areas of need and to individuals who are willing to work and better their lot in

life. Money and support from SHARE allows ANTA to greatly increase its impact in many ways. ANTA field people monitor the projects continually and are the all important coaches.

On our recent awareness trip, my wife and I observed many projects in progress, including small herds of cattle being established, and passing on the off spring

MONEY AND SUPPORT FROM SHARE ALLOWS ANTA TO GREATLY INCREASE ITS IMPACT IN MANY WAYS.

to others in the community. Projects are varied involving chickens, rabbits, many fruits and other crops. By generating more production than the family can consume allows them to have a source of income as well as a better diet. Other projects involve

water, cooking stoves or other things. Sewing machines and supplies of cloth and thread have allowed many women to enjoy becoming very skilled and productive.

Because education is not universal, many children and adults have missed out on basic schooling. Basic literacy programs are very much needed and are appreciated. These small *classes* at the end of the road are well received. Basic reading and math skills are an absolute necessity for everyone.

To pretend that one knows much about a society and their needs after a short visit is folly. I do however have personal images, memories and am better read than a short time ago. The people and the country are both charming and most interesting. Will it be possible for both to evolve in the years ahead?

Lew and Jean are former dairy farmers from near Woodstock, Ontario.

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SHARE patrons have to offer. That is where "Mr." Les and Bob come in. They are our link to meaningful relationships with the people that we wish to support. Heather has the last word on this

topic: "Meeting the people that are being helped made me realize the importance of these connections and trust. I can only imagine the difference between receiving money or resources from a caring organization like SHARE and actually

getting to meet the people behind the mission. That is where our monitoring trips make such a difference."

INTERESTED IN TRAVELING TO CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICA WITH SHARE? PLEASE CONTACT US.

SHARE's "Hand Up" Working Throughout Belize

Impressions of Canadian
University of Guelph
Students of SHARE's work



Guelph student Heather Donkers and Claudia Dominguez.

For the second time students from the University of Guelph's agricultural communication class toured Belize on the study week in February with Professor Owen Roberts and SHARE project manager Les Frayne. Students were impressed with the variety of ways SHARE works in Belize. The students were initiated into the Belizean culture and agricultural ways as well as introduced to SHARE's work.

The following examples of SHARE's work were taken from the students' blogs of their trips. (Check out their entire blog on line at www.belize2007.canact.ca).

A "HAND UP" TO WOMEN IN BELIZE

BY PATRICIA DICKENSON

Working with social worker, Claudia Dominguez, of the Ministry of Human Department and Women in the District of Cayo, SHARE has found ways to support the rural women of Belize. Claudia teaches basic life skills by organizing classes for women in gardening, cooking, sewing and jewellery, increasing self-sufficiency and quality of life for their families. SHARE has supplied Claudia with several sewing machines and hockey bags full of quality sewing materials and supplies collected from many SHARE supporters. Claudia says that SHARE's help has been very valuable to her programs allowing her to give women the means to help themselves and giving her the opportunity to work in a variety of ways with families in her district. As she makes contact with the

women and offers them classes and skill development she can also counsel women on family and social matters such as family abuse. SHARE's sewing supplies give her an opening for other work with the women.

* * *

The University of Guelph student travellers heard an impressive endorsement of SHARE's work in the rural refugee settlement near Spanish Lookout. "We are wealthy beyond our dreams because of SHARE's help," said hostess Marvin. Several years ago the women of this group were given a corn grinding machine for their community and their families received 3 calves to start a dairy herd. Their "wealth" has grown into a small dairy herd of 30 providing nutrition and milk sales, enabling these families to fund their children's education; supplying what would seem to us to be a basic living.

SHARE News

 In January, an Organic Growers Conference was sponsored by SHARE, and over 120 people travelled from as far away as 26 hours drive to attend the conference. This year's conference was hosted by a community of organically certified coffee producers. Many of the SHARE projects in Brazil involve agricultural technical training. Participants at the conference share information, and then return to their communities to share their new found skills and knowledge.

 Over 400 people are participating in the literacy component of SHARE's project in El Salvador. One teacher of a remote adult literacy group walks over an hour from the village, crosses a river on stepping stones, climbs a steep hill to reach the shack where he teaches his group for the afternoon. ANTA will give some of the graduates a micro enterprise to manage upon completion of the courses.

 The SHARE supported poultry projects in Brazil with 133 families are doing well. They have built poultry shelters, and with Bob Thomas, SHARE's Project Manager in Brazil discussed various means of feeding to reduce feed costs. To avoid their selling at a loss, time was spent assisting them to calculate costs of production for the flock of 152.

 The micro credit for small enterprises in El Salvador is managed by SHARE's southern partner ANTA. Repayment might be done with produce, "pass on" or cash if possible. These subsistence level farmers would be unable to get credit from a bank.

 The revolving fund in Pernambuco, Brazil now totals approximately \$75,000 and consists of micro credit funds in four areas. This was initiated with SHARE support. It remains well managed with minimum losses and, to augment the fund, it is also now accepting deposits from outsiders and pays 6% interest.



Heather Cullen
and her dad
Mark Cullen.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

In February, Mark Cullen, joined Les Frayne and others on a SHARE Monitoring trip to Central America and his reaction to what he witnessed There was, "What more can I possibly do to help?"

Mark has done a lot for SHARE over the years but after seeing the need, after seeing how efficiently SHARE could meet those needs, Mark felt compelled to do more. Among his many other talents, Mark is a writer and his seventeenth book, *A Sandbox Of A Different Kind: Personal Reflections On The Canadian Gardening Experience*, has been kindly dedicated to SHARE. \$1 from the sale of each book is being given to help

Mark Cullen has issued a challenge to SHARE, if we can raise an additional \$50,000 in donations he will meet that amount by his own efforts.
★ What can you do to help?

SHARE improve the lives of those whom Mark saw on his trip. Mark has shown us that we can always do more.

When we take the time to think about it, and when we're properly motivated to do so, there is no limit to the positive effects that we can have on the lives of others. It's thanks to our motivated donors and volunteers like Mark that SHARE has been able to help so many people to live better lives.

In Memoriam

SHARE was saddened to learn about the recent death of one of our founding directors Bob Bell.



Bob was the Ag Rep for Peel County and worked for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food for many years and was instrumental in setting up the structure of SHARE. He held many positions in SHARE including secretary and treasurer. SHARE owes a deep gratitude to Bob and we will miss his continuing support.

SHARE News is produced in cooperation with the agricultural communication program at the University of Guelph.

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PRIVACY POLICY: Your privacy is important to us. To view our privacy policy, visit our website at www.shareagfoundation.org.

SHARE NEWS IS PUBLISHED TWICE A YEAR
BY: SHARE Agriculture Foundation,
14110 Kennedy Road,
Caledon, ON. L7C 2G3
Tel: 905-799-1135
or toll free at 1-888-337-4273
fax: 905-799-2722
BN: 13150 7428 RR0001

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S.H.A.R.E. AGRICULTURE FOUNDATION COMING EVENTS 2007

May 3 – Fundraising Dinner
Copetown Community Centre
by the Lion's Club
7.00 pm For tickets (\$25.00)
call John @ 905-529-1971

May 5 – Fundraising Concert
Melville United Church, Fergus
Tower and St. Andrews Sts. Fergus

**May 20 – Victoria Weekend
Professional Fireworks Display**
Huttonville

**June 2 – Sharing Hands Ladies
Plant Sale** 14409 Credit View Road,
Cheltenham 9 am - Noon

July 16 – Golf Tournament
Guelph Lakes Golf and Country Club,
Call Craig at 1-905-702-8543 or
Hume at 1-519-824-0799

**Sept 9 – Corn Roast in aid of
SHARE scholarship Fund**
Harmer Farm, Burlington
call 1-905-335-3730 for details.

**Nov 3 – Annual SHARE Dinner
Dance**, 6.30 pm Speranza Banquet
Hall, Call 1-905-799-1135 for details

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT
A DIRECTOR OR CHECK THE WEBSITE
WWW.SHAREAGFOUNDATION.ORG