

Change Story

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Shagras for life, from traditional home gardens to ancestral, agroecological and more nutritious shagras

Por: Cristian Moreno,¹ Alejandra Álvarez,¹ Nathalie Ospina,¹ Alexandra Bastidas,¹ Claudia López,¹ Paula Melo,¹ Teresa Mosquera,¹ David Cuéllar,¹ Sara Del Castillo¹

1. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, sede Bogotá.

Key messages

- *The Shagras for life* methodology boosted the traditional shagra and home garden in places that integrate an agriculture sensitive to nutrition with socio-cultural processes and environments that contribute to achieving the right to food.
- The collective work in *Shagras for life* is a dialogue of knowledge between community, social and institutional actors.
- In order to promote healthy life habits within the families, *Shagras for life* focused on three pillars: agroecological food production, retrieval of the community's alimentation memory and diet diversity.
- One of the impacts of *Shagras for life* is evidenced by the increase of the diversity of the cultivated and consumed food.

Context

Communities in Southern Nariño have low diet diversity associated with difficulties in accessing fruits, vegetables, meats and eggs as well as unawareness of the importance of foodstuffs the diet.

More Nutritious Potatoes project found out that 78% of the homes were in the “Low diversity of Diet” category whilst 3% were in the “No diet diversity” category. Although many of these households have space to cultivate food for self-consumption, they do not use said space. Others who grow crops or raise small animal species do not consume the produced food. Fortythree percent of the households having difficulties in diet diversity do not have space to cultivate food for self-consumption.

In order to contribute to the improvement of the diet diversity of the homes, a training process was conducted. It started by seeds recovery to proceed to grow them and to consume rich nutrient food like more nutritious yellow potatoes, vegetables and native fruits, and cuy and chicken farming, thus, contributing to enhance the nutritional situation of boys and girls involved in the project (Table 1).

Table 1. Chronic malnutrition and overweight in 0 to 4 year-old children in 2013, in Nariño.

Municipality	Chronic malnutrition (%)	Overweight (%)
Pasto	32.6	13.4
Túquerres	42.4	11.3
Cumbal	44.1	12
Guachucal	37.5	9.1
Carlossama	32.9	6.8

Source: Adapted from Castillo *et al.*, 2014. Food and Nutrition Sciences No. 5: 1521-1528

The training process embraces the *Shagra's* ancestral space, which comes to be a food autonomy space; as well a space for food, medicinal plants and ornamental plants provisioning throughout the year, which is part of the population culture. In this space food diversification and responsible consumption to care about the nutrition of home members, were promoted (Figure 1).

The *Shagra* and home garden were transformed in a meeting point for families and neighbors, where the elderly and the new generations share knowledge about the *Shagra's* medicinal and nutritional properties. The *Shagra* is also a place to reflect on the importance of woman's role and get to know practical tools to make decisions and assertively make choices, having as framework food security and sovereignty of the communities.

Work meetings approached the following topics: a) food groups, cultivation plan, and moon phases; b) seeds conservation and clean seeds communitarian banks, c) communitarian analysis for an agrochemical-free soil, d) decision of growing fruits, vegetables and farming small native animal species, e) preparation of more nutrition traditional culinary recipes and f) consumption of ancestral preparations for a diverse and healthy diet.



Figure 1. Participants rescuing culinary ancestral memory and learning about food usages and preparation with traditional cooks.

Methodological fundamentals

Shagras for life as a common space in its corresponding territorial contexts, made possible communitarian dialogue between indigenous and peasants.

Three pillars of the methodology, which is based on respect for the communities, trust building through the recognition of their own values, and dignification of communitarian dynamics that claim their culture and ancestral practices are:

1. Agroecological food production: Productive practices were strengthened, thus, favoring ecosystemic solidarity diversifying its composition and cultivating under agroecological principles to obtain nutritious, innocuous, and healthy food for family (Figure 2).
2. Ancestral memory: Ancestral knowledge was recognized, valued and rescued, particularly, production ways, access and consumption of food culturally appropriated for their life styles. This pillar stimulates dialogues that interlace the lessons introduced by scientific knowledge with sensitiveness and the participants' knowledge.



Foto: ©Bartay, More Nutritious Potatoes

Figure 2. Women cultivating the *Shagra* and producing healthy and innocuous food for both self-consumption and sale.

3. The diversity of diet: nutritious qualities that have to be fulfilled for a healthy and appropriate nutrition were recognized and related to the availability of diverse food provided by the *Shagra* or home garden. Different preparations were sought to take diversity to the table in order for the family members to enjoy food (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Improvement of diversity of diet. Food traditionally consumed by communities (on the left). New aliments and preparations made by the communities based on the products produced in their *Shagras* (on the right).

Impacts

The impact of *Shagras for life* became evident in the increase in the diet diversity of homes and families. Diversity was measured by using the Diet Diversity Index. Results show that after implementing this methodology, the frequency of households reporting “Low diversity” decreased, and those with “Appropriate diversity” increased from 6 to 18 (Figure 4). These results suggest that the variety of the food consumed in households improved.

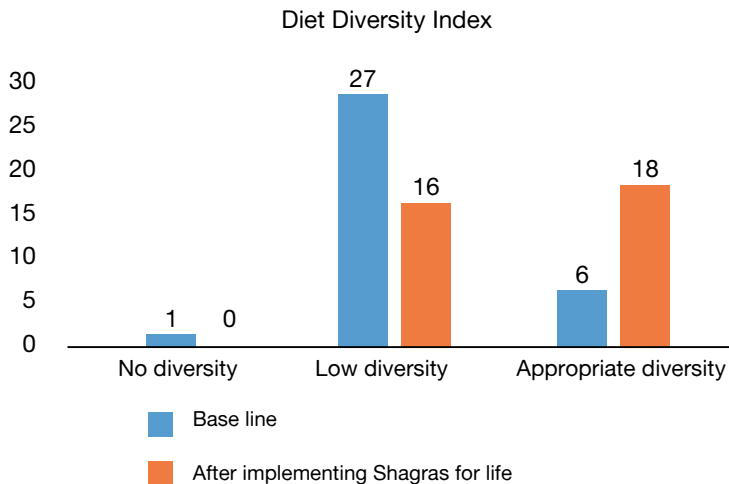


Figure 4. Frequency of diversity categories of households’ diet associated to the project More Nutritious Potatoes. Shagras for life implementation had a duration of nine months.

The food group corresponding to fruits was among the least consumed before implementing *Shagras for life* methodology, its intake increased at the end of the implementation. On the other hand, most of the households cultivate varieties of more nutritious yellow potatoes in their Shagras, which contributes to the diet diversity of homes connected with the project.

Shagras for life facilitated physical and economic access to food of important nutritional value that is part of the population’s basic diet, and essential to overcome nutritional deficiencies that affect these communities.

Conclusions

Shagras for life is a methodology with meetings carried out monthly. Said meetings are characterized for a warm and respectful environment that gives value to self-consumption from a focus of diversity.

The methodology raised awareness of the agroecological aspect of healthy food production, availability and oportune and fair access regarding alimentation as well as of nutrition evidenced in training for responsible consumption of diverse food. The educational process approached in a holistic way food security and nutrition and facilitated entrepreneurship initiatives of families and communities.

Communities reactivated solidary logics of seeds and plants exchanges in inclusive commercial spaces. These spaces gave place to the creation of a collective garden of medicinal plants, where plant material is shared and participants dialogue about the usages and benefits of the material.

In *Shagras for life* men and women of different ages work together, this promotes gender equity, as it rescues the inter-generational perspective, this also brings closer new generation to their grandmothers and grandfathers worldview, thus, ensuring continuity of the scope of these initiatives. These spaces promote childhood and youth formation by strengthening ancestral beliefs to maintain culture and connections with the “Pacha Mama”, which constitute them “*Shagras for life*”.

In *Shagras for life*, perspectives of environmental, food and nutritional diversity gave place to the creation of a complementarity view between the aforementioned perspectives, leading to a holistic educational process that produced entrepreneurship initiatives of families and communities.

References

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Contacts:

Sara Del Castillo Matamoros: sedelcastillom@unal.edu.co

Teresa Mosquera Vásquez: tmosquerav@unal.edu.co



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