

ABSTRACT

THESIS: An Exploration of Impoverished Belizean Female Farmers' Lived Experiences in Producing Food for Their Families and Communities

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Despite the progress that has been made toward reducing worldwide hunger and malnutrition, around the globe, and particularly in developing countries, people continue to experience food insecurity. Latin America and the Caribbean are no exception, especially in the rural agricultural regions where poverty is most widespread and severe. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and U.S. Government Feed the Future Initiative (FTF) all agree that agricultural growth, led by rural women, could reduce world hunger significantly. But, due to socially determined gender roles that are shaped by a number of cultural factors, women tend to encounter financial, legal and cultural barriers that prevent them from expanding their agricultural production. The overarching goal of this research study is to help inform the literature regarding the challenges that impoverished women face in attempting to contribute to the reduction of global hunger.

This qualitative phenomenological research study employed interviews to yield a thick, rich description of impoverished Belizean female farmers' lived experiences in producing food for their families and communities. The primary data collection – unstructured interviews with

eight female farmers – took place over the course of one week, in January 2017, in the Maya and Garifuna ethnic villages in the Toledo District of Southern Belize. The study found that the female farmers experience nine barriers to producing food for their families and communities: 1.) seasonal hardships; 2.) incessant pests; 3.) lack of resources; 4.) lack of finances; 5.) lack of knowledge and/or fear about financial loans; 6.) lack of access to lucrative markets; 7.) lack of education; 8.) lack of supportive resources; and 9.) high educational fees. The final products of this research study include a list of recommendations for the key stakeholders (e.g. the national Belizean government, policy and research institutions, international development agencies, and traditional and/or micro finance institutions, among others) that, if implemented, will lessen the impact of the identified barriers, and a conceptual framework that can be evaluated for accuracy and precision in later research.