

Our female power trio Phidel, Bimala and Daniela get inspired by international meeting in Egypt

Phidel, Bimala, and Daniela aren't afraid to challenge the status quo in their communities — nor to challenge their perceptions of how to change it.

Hailing from rural farming communities in Kenya, Nepal, and Ecuador (respectively), in 2018 each female leader attended an intensive 10-day training in her country, hosted by Rare, to learn how to use and apply the [principles of behavior-centered design \(BCD\)](#) to social and environmental challenges facing her community. The training equipped each woman with a global theory of behavior change, social marketing tactics, quantitative and qualitative research techniques, and effective campaign design for her local challenges.

Following the training, Rare selected these three local leaders to join its delegation at the 14th global United Nations Biodiversity Conference (a.k.a., CBD COP14) held in Egypt in November. By training local leaders and bringing them to global forums to share first-hand experiences, Rare encourages and empowers local 'disruptors' to lead the changes they seek for their communities. In attending the 14th CBD COP, the local female leaders capitalized on the opportunity to share their local challenges — and their solutions — with a global audience (consisting mostly of government representatives alongside civil society, business, indigenous and local communities, youth, and others), and enhanced their networking, public speaking, and storytelling skills.

At the conference, Phidel, Bimala, and Daniela shared the proverbial stage with the launch of the [Farming for Biodiversity report](#), published by Rare and IFOAM-Organics International, which unearths results of 338 community-led solutions to connect agriculture and biodiversity, sourced from across the world. In the foreword to the report, the UN Assistant Secretary-General, CBD Executive Secretary Dr. Cristiana Pasca Palmer stresses the importance of engaging local leadership in making change happen: "Community-led solutions that work on the ground and can be scaled and replicated elsewhere are at the heart of this change."

Following the conference, we asked the local leaders to share what they plan to do with these new skills back home, and importantly, help us envision what a good life they help to create looks like. Here are their answers.

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Phidel Hazel Arunga

Phidel Hazel and YPARD-Young Professionals' Platform for Agricultural Development are making agriculture attractive to young people in Western Kenya. By introducing rural youth to entrepreneurial and environment-friendly farming practices, Phidel is opening doorways to employment opportunities and easing pressure from rural-to-urban migration — all while protecting the planet.

(On what she takes home with her): The training and event changed me. At the COP, I saw people sitting around a table, making decisions that will affect you directly. And I realized that if you don't take part in these decisions, then your challenges and ideas won't be implemented. [These events] reinforced my confidence, in myself and my work. I came away very confident in understanding an audience and targeting a message. One thing I took away, is that to believe in something, you have to follow it through... I now know that I can do this — I can believe in me.

(On how she envisions a better life): The future I want to make happen looks like this: youth have proper representation and seat at the table; and at the same time, create their own jobs, and their personal wealth, in a perfect environment. Even if I help to build a small community that can have that kind of life, that is an achievement — and it can have a replicative effect. Success attracts success.

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Bimala Acharya Dahal

Seizing on the growing global trend to "go organic," Bimala left her career in business and turned to organic farming. Catering to Kathmandu's growing market for healthy products, she is growing the urban organic movement by offering trainings on rooftop farming. Now, Bimala is going national: By encouraging farmers in remote areas of Nepal to obtain organic certification, she is helping them tap into new income opportunities.

(On what she takes home with her): The training energized me to work with the local community, which I hadn't thought to work with before. Before, I just thought about my work — my farmer's market, my rooftop garden, my women's group. Now, I want to replicate what I am doing in Kathmandu with rural farmers. I came back from the training, and event, and people start to look at me differently — with respect. Now they believe in me and what I am doing. This is a kind of behavior change.

(On how she envisions a better life): Recently, I read a UN report stating that small-scale farmers can feed the world. I believe that where there is no farming, there is no life. A better life is that the young people stay in Nepal and grow everything the Nepalese need. By building a system that values organic farming, I can then rejoice in the respect they deserve and the income from organic agriculture that will make them, and the world, rich and healthy.

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Daniela Borja Kaisin

Daniela Borja is part of a rescue campaign for Ecuador's indigenous seeds. On the producer side, the group supports farmers to act as "Guardians of the Seed," increasing the number of available seeds. On the consumer side, Daniela and her team facilitate the development of a vibrant gastronomy based on traditional food products. With her Farming for Biodiversity campaign, Daniela is on a mission to make traditional crops the next big thing among the housewives of Quito.

(On what she takes home with her): Being surrounded by influential people, organizations, ideas, and decisions at the CBD COP, I was initially nervous and intimidated — I didn't know how/if coming from a small organization I could contribute. But slowly, throughout the week, I realized that we are all humans, concerned about similar environmental issues and that it's really important for decision-makers to hear about our experiences and practices at the local level. I left feeling empowered, knowing that my work is important and that what I learned from the training will make my work more effective and impactful. It gives me hope. I'm so inspired that I'm spreading the word about the training and sharing my learnings with everyone!

(On how she envisions a better life): I dream of an awakened community of people, who together care about our surroundings and each other. Conscious consumerism — urban gardeners are growing their food, communities are planting trees and protecting their water, networks of seed guardians are spreading throughout Ecuador and the world...and generally speaking, people are connected, partnering for good, and dreaming together of a better life, regardless of how far apart we may seem.

