



HIGHLAND SUPPORT PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT 2015

...BUILDING COMMUNITY

CONTENTS

Message From Chief Operations Officer

GUADALUPE RAMIREZ



“ CORN CANNOT GROW ALONE.”

Community. A simple word. One that we often take for granted. Some visitors to Tejutla, SanMarcos, my birth community, are amused by the sense of self-importance in this small mountain town. They smile at the audacity of our pageants, processions, and nocturnal festivals. I am often humbled by the thought of generations spanning thousands of years who lived in those hills creating unique traditions that form our identity.

I've had the opportunity to live in different cultures as well as experience rapid and profound changes in my own. Through this lens, I'm able to appreciate the importance of community and the deep impact that it has in supporting our spiritual, emotional and physical health.

Over the last year, we have supported midwifery training for rural women and provided many valuable workshops concerning diagnostics techniques and maternal care. What I consider being of greatest value was a lesson learned from older participants concerning the importance of community. They shared the simple lesson that corn cannot grow alone.

A significant issue in women's health is postpartum depression. In our workshops, participants shared how there used to be a great deal of mutual support for expecting mothers. Family members, as well as neighbors, were always visiting to help with chores, provide a meal and share any burdens. After the birth, mothers were bathed in attention and support as the community

Many visitors to our communities believe that we are kinder or more loving than other people. I can assure you that we have our issues. I think what they are perceiving is the impact of community. Academics say that we Indigenous people of the Americas value relationships above all else. Many of our cultures begin prayers with the invocation "to all our relations". What I see in this is the importance our ancestor's placed in the community. A teaching of sacred importance about how to best achieve the good life. A healthy, safe and sustainable life with meaning and dignity.

Many development experts concern themselves with water, capacity building or access to health services. What most of them miss is the importance of a community. When community is lost, you begin to see all the indicators that these patches address.

When I return home, I feel nostalgia for something lost. A sense of belonging to a group where everyone knows my name. A sense of security that no matter what bad luck encounters me or poor decision I make, I've got people who will make sure that I come out of it alright.

I am excited to be part of an organization that prioritizes community building as its primary mission. I invite you to join our community of activist, scholars, homemakers and reverends in achieving the good life.

THE "GOOD LIFE" IS A TERM WE'VE LEARNED FROM OUR PARTNERS CONCERNING WHAT THEY DEFINE AS THE GOAL OF DEVELOPMENT. A HEALTHY, SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE LIFE WITH MEANING AND DIGNITY.

AS HSP CONSULTANT AUDOLINDO SAC DESCRIBES IT, " DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT ENABLING PEOPLE TO LIVE WELL WHERE THEY CHOOSE TO LIVE AND IN THE WAY THAT THEY DESIRE."



“IN 2015, 6,225 MAYA LIVES WERE DIRECTLY IMPROVED AND 11,450 INDIRECTLY IMPACTED BY HSP AND ITS PARTNER PROGRAMS.”

“\$179,500.00 in program grants were distributed an estimated \$120,000.00 of income generated for Maya partners. ”

Message From Chief Operations Officer

BEN BLEVINS



“The foundation of our theory of change is that we achieve the “good life” through relationships”.

As a child growing up in rural Virginia, I witnessed the lasting remnants of segregation in the poorly funded public schools and distinct communities that rarely interacted. My mother, an independent-minded preachers wife, worked in the predominantly African American schools and our family spent many weekends attending various fundraisers she organized for this or that need in the community. I often spent days in dilapidated homes of school friends who lived in small clusters of houses very similar to the cantons of Guatemala I would later frequent.

In Westmorland County during the early 1970's, the African American community was largely excluded from public establishments and most of the jobs had been lost to mechanized agriculture. Many of my friend's parents had migrated to the city or joined the military leaving them with their grandparents. The most exciting day of the week was Saturday when folks would return for big cookouts. There were baseball games in the field behind the row of houses nestled down a dirt road few people outside of the community ever ventured down.

My fondest memories of childhood were the hours playing with dozens of kids as extended families joked, danced and shared everything in their cupboards. There was a spirit present in these communities forged over decades of shared experience and traditions. I'd often walk down the path from one of my friend's houses to a spot in the woods with a dozen tables and old logs cut in half with checker boards burned into the tops. My friend explained that the men could not go to bars or restaurants at night, so they all came out to these woods behind the houses. You did not need to call or make plans, everyone you knew would be there waiting for you to show up.

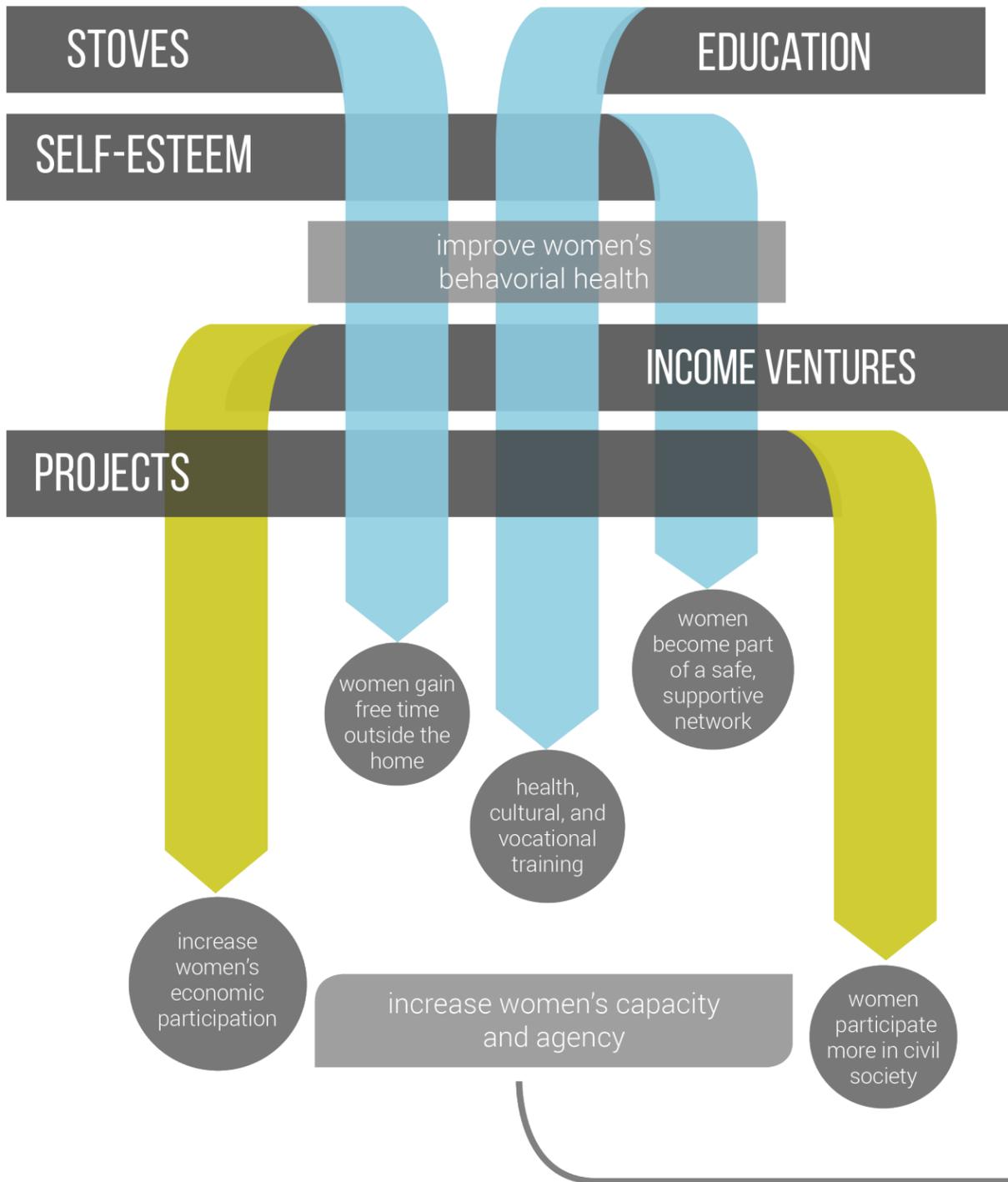
Over the next few years, more of my friends joined their parents in the city and the gatherings were a little less lively after each one moved. Eventually, I would be one of them and found myself living in suburbia Richmond, Virginia. It was a saddening culture shock to leave a place where everyone shared for a place where alienation and isolation were the norms.

The greatest lesson I learned from this experience was the importance of community for a happy life. One may find a better economic situation, but it comes at a very steep cost. In a community, you have a sense of emotional and financial security.

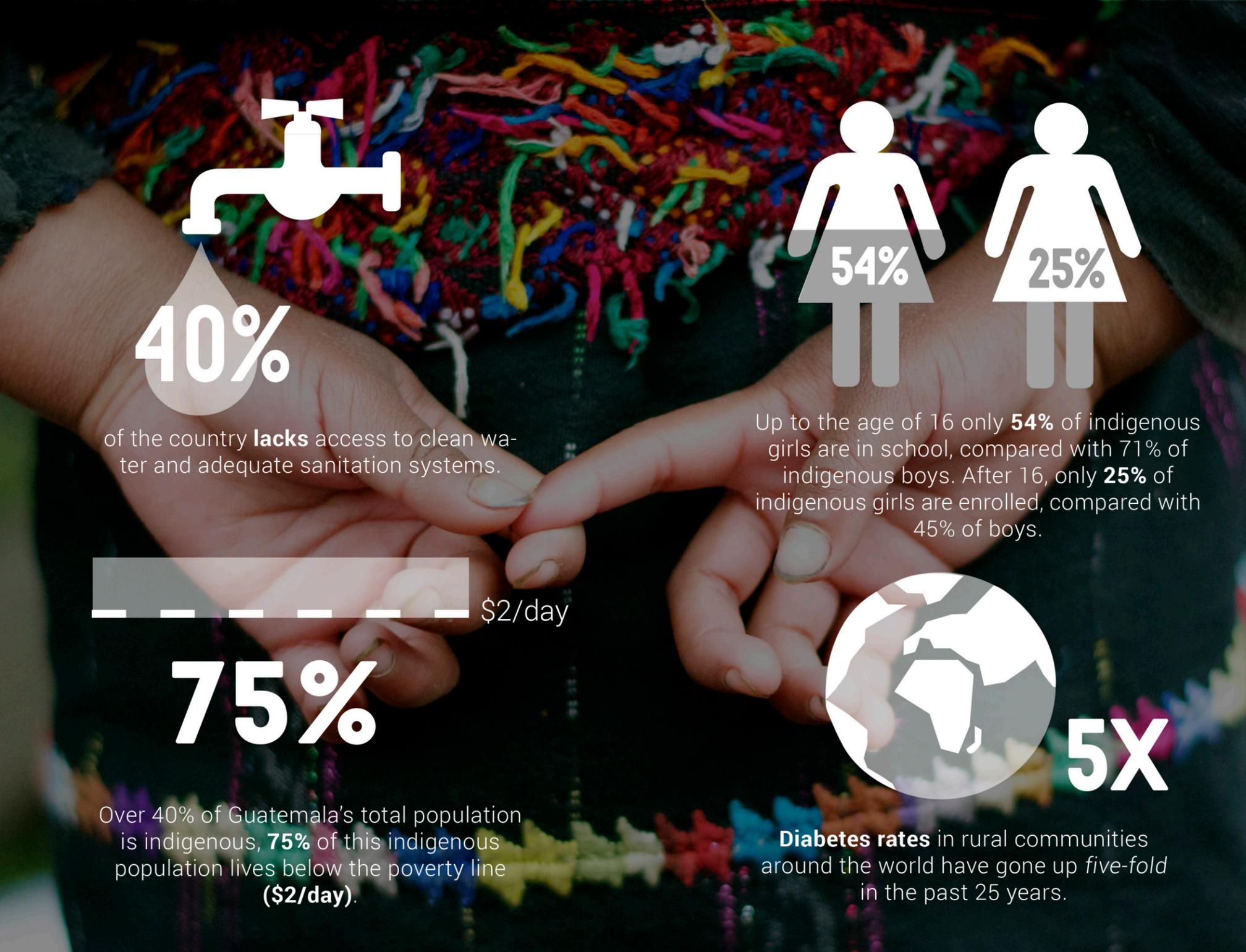
We work to assist Indigenous people to stay on their land, in their community, and with their culture. The foundation of our theory of change is that we achieve the "good life" through relationships. The social capital present in these communities, many of them thousands of years old, is an essential resource in constructing a more just, sustainable and pleasant world.

SOCIAL CAPITAL
/'sô-she\ 'ka-pe-tll/
noun

The network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behaviour, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation.



HIGHLAND SUPPORT PROJECT'S
'THEORY OF CHANGE'
 ...a model for achieving long-term impact.



40%

of the country **lacks** access to clean water and adequate sanitation systems.

\$2/day

75%

Over 40% of Guatemala's total population is indigenous, **75%** of this indigenous population lives below the poverty line (**\$2/day**).

54%

25%

Up to the age of 16 only **54%** of indigenous girls are in school, compared with 71% of indigenous boys. After 16, only **25%** of indigenous girls are enrolled, compared with 45% of boys.



5X

Diabetes rates in rural communities around the world have gone up *five-fold* in the past 25 years.



WHY THE HIGHLANDS?

The word 'highlands' is more than a topographical description. In the Americas, it has great cultural significance as the location for both ongoing Indigenous resistance, and the largest concentrations of First Nations Peoples in the western hemisphere.

Socio-economically, highland communities generally rank lowest in quality of life indexes, life expectancy and access to basic services. They also tend to have the highest rates of political violence.

Colonial histories have led to entrenched patterns of poverty and dependency in highland communities of the Americas.

We work with communities to break these vicious cycles, and achieve agency, independence and prosperity – however they are defined by each community.

“THE RUGGED TERRAIN AND LACK OF ROADS HAVE KEPT RURAL COMMUNITIES REMOTE FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, AND CENTURIES OF ISOLATION AND NEGLECT HAVE RESULTED IN CHRONIC POVERTY”

WWW.RURALPOVERTYPORTAL.ORG



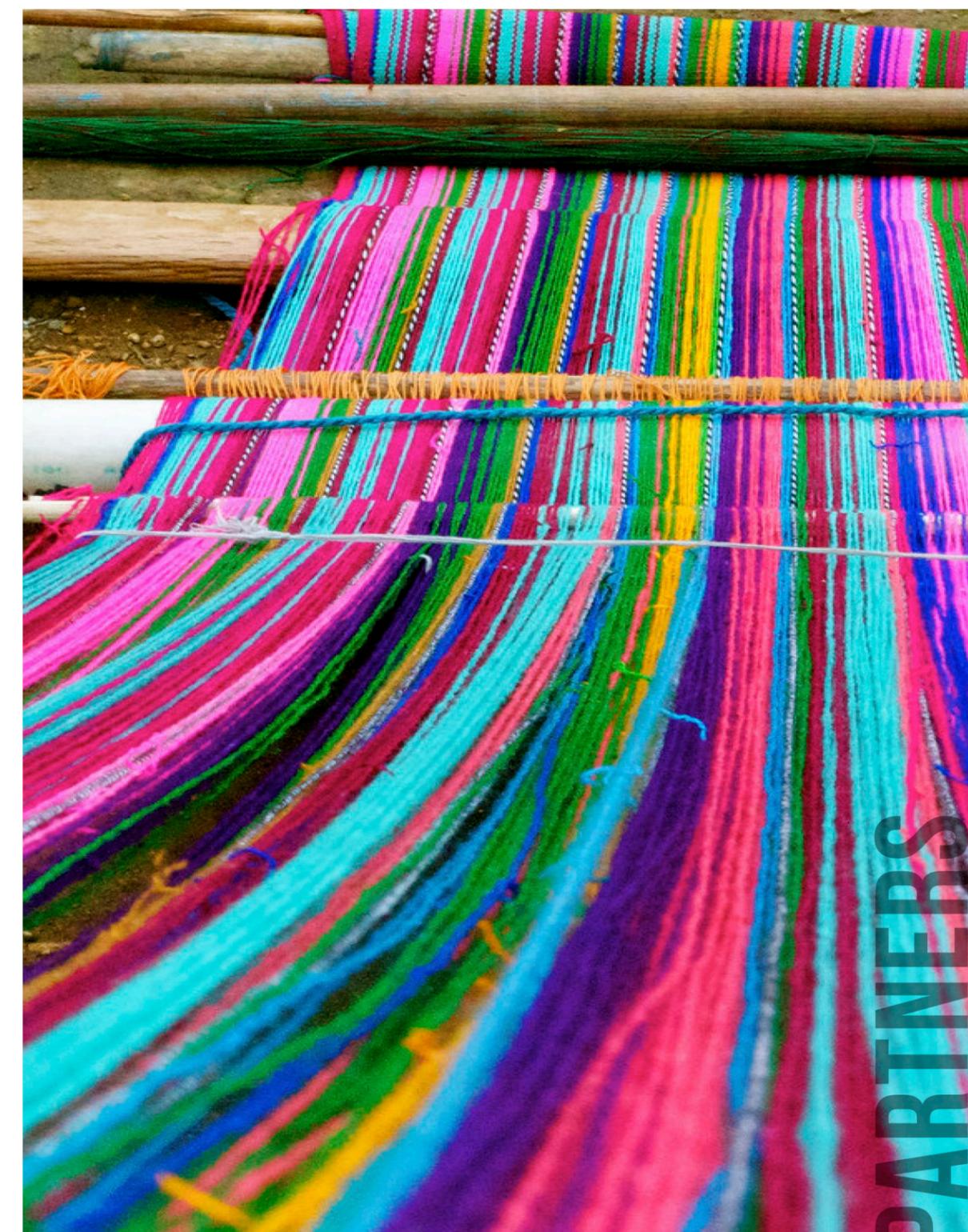
HIGHLAND PARTNERS

A New Model of Collaboration

Highland Partners is a joint initiative of the Highland Support Project (HSP) and Asociación de Mujeres del Altiplano (AMA). This locally-run, collaborative platform is all about facilitating partnerships to support Maya communities to develop their own voices, agency and leadership.

Highland Partner's programs create rich, intercultural experiences for its partners – be they service trip volunteers, interns or other valued contributors - while championing empowerment and resilience in indigenous communities.

All Highland Partners' activities – including project management, personnel selection, needs assessments and organizational planning – are determined and directed by local people.



HIGHLAND PARTNERS

WOMEN'S CIRCLES SUPPORT AND GROWTH

Our development process begins with women's circles in western highland communities.

We empower...

We listen...

AMA
WOMEN'S
CIRCLES:

ARE GRASSROOTS

IDENTIFY URGENT AND
LONG-TERM COMMUNITY NEEDS

ENABLE LOCAL EDUCATION,
HEALTH, CIVIC AND
ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING

ARE INSPIRED BY UNITED
METHODIST WOMEN GROUPS

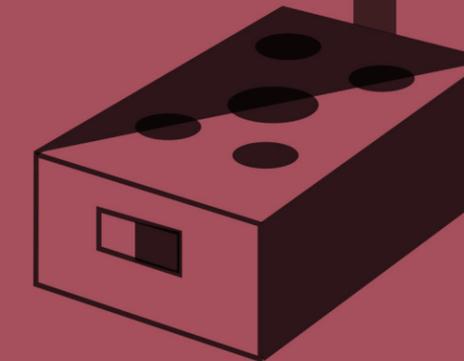
MOBILIZE COMMUNITY
RESOURCES TO REALIZE HSP/
AMA PROJECTS.

ARE COMPRISED OF INDIGENOUS
MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND
GRANDDAUGHTERS

IDENTIFY FUTURE LEADERS AND
CREATE A TRAINING FORUM



THE STOVE PROJECT



The HSP-AMA Stove Program is an essential component of our Health Program. We started providing stoves in the early 1990s and, since that time, have facilitated the installation of around 10,000 improved, indoor cookstoves in the western highlands.

Each family helps construct and contributes a subsidized amount towards the costs of their cookstove, with the remainder covered by service trip contributions.

Our culturally-appropriate cookstoves are designed with the family tradition of socializing around the cooking source in mind. They are made from familiar and economic materials, with the crucial addition of a chimney to evacuate smoke from the home.

Improved cookstoves have dramatically improved the health and wellbeing of over 10,000 Mayan family homes, which often house more than one generation. This is due to a reduction in indoor smoke, and injury due to burns and bending. An additional benefit is that improved cookstoves free up women's time to participate in other economic and recreational activities.

PROJECTS



Our Maya Arts Program is improving curriculum in Maya schools through the delivery of ambulatory art lessons in village classrooms.

By focusing on traditional Maya themes and philosophies, MAP builds cultural knowledge and pride. By exposing children to new arts-based learning activities, the program is also fostering critical and creative thinking skills that are often neglected in the standard Guatemala curriculum.

Recently, the MAP program was expanded to include training days for highland teachers, teaching them how to use art education techniques in broader curriculum learning.

MAP's ultimate goal is to empower youth to become change makers in the world by enhancing curriculum, improving educational infrastructure, training teachers and exposing students and teachers to reach cross-cultural exchanges, all in conjunction with the Guatemalan Government's Education Ministry.

Pixan

Spirit of Fashion

Pixan Design House is a fair trade textile workshop in Guatemala's western highlands, an association of indigenous artisan weavers, expert in the ancient techniques of back-strap and pedal loom weaving and embroidery.

While the Pixan project has been running since 2011, the seed that it grew from was planted in the mid-1990s when many of the fathers and husbands of highland women were tragically murdered in Guatemala's 36-year civil war. These women had traditionally been reliant on the earning power of their men, and so, were forced to find new sources of family income with very limited access to opportunity and resources.

Recognizing these immense challenges and the fact that most highland women begin complex weaving at a young age, Asociación de Mujeres del Altiplano (AMA) founder, Guadalupe Ramirez, took action in the 1990s to enable professional textile production in the some of the most vulnerable communities.



Ramirez bought high-quality thread for the highland women and set up a network of community womens' circles. She then



developed a transformational training methodology that focused on self-esteem, education, civic participation and free enterprise development.

THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF AN AMA INITIATIVE TO ENABLE PROFESSIONAL TEXTILE PRODUCTION AND SALES THROUGH NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES AND THE NEARBY CHICHICASTENANGO MARKET.

Two decades after buying thread for highland weavers, Ramirez and AMA staff met with representatives of the, now strong, highland women's circles. Their goal was to map a joint proposal for the Pixan workshop and project. The group agreed that Pixan would be a cooperative vehicle for accessing broader markets and operate according to 'fair trade' principles, in the most authentic and traditional sense of the term.



ONE PARTICIPANT NOTED,
“MY ENTIRE LIFE HAD BEEN
A STRUGGLE. NOW THIS
ORGANIZATION, PIXAN, IS
TAKING MY HANDS AND
SHOWING ME HOW TO
USE THEM FOR A FUTURE
OF SUCCESS.”

Today, true to its founding values, the Pixan model champions fair pay and work conditions, high quality artisanal work and direct trade relationships. The latter removes the need for middlemen and their fees and allows professional direct trade relationships to flourish between talented highland artisans, and individuals and businesses from around the world.

“THE WOMEN WERE VERY EXCITED ABOUT THE THOUGHT OF BEING BUSINESSWOMEN, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF SELLING THINGS AS FAR AWAY AS EUROPE”
JUANITA HERNANDEZ, PIXAN'S PROJECT COORDINATOR

In 2010, Pixan's growing impact was recognized with a three-year grant from the Inter American Foundation (IAF). This funding has enabled us to develop the technical and marketing abilities of the workshop artisans and for Pixan to become a sustainable program.

New skills have allowed participating women to improve their products and create direct trade marketing strategies for their product lines, which include a beautiful range of naturally dyed scarfs.

Pixan employs **150** women artisans from **9** highland communities in Solola and Quetzaltenango and partners with businesses in **London, Copenhagen, New York** and other parts of the world.

PROJECTS

A TOWN FINDS ITS IDENTITY



Sandra Marleny Carreto Alonzo, daughter of Silverio, the secretary of the Community Development Committee of Twi'Ninwitz expressed pride in the work of her father.

Twi'Ninwitz is a squatter community located in the Mam-speaking region of Western Guatemala. Each afternoon clouds from the Pacific Ocean collide with the Americas irrigating the fields of potatoes and corn labored over by her residents.

Before the HSP funded community organizing project, the village was known as " La Cumbre" or the top of the hill. Her residents are predominantly recent arrivals in search of land pushed higher as urban sprawl and African palm plantations continue to displace subsistence farmers. Many inhabitants expressed uncertainty about their identity. They knew they were not European or American but did not realize the cultural value in their clothing, religious practices or language. The only identity that they recognized was as poor peasants.

Agency /'ājənsē/



noun

The ability to understand, adapt and act in the world. Agency is formed by capacity, belief and circumstances.

PROJECTS

A member of the community had gone as far as Northern Virginia to find opportunity. Vicky Alonzo has labored as a domestic servant and developed friendships with folks from Vale United Methodist Church. She approached Guadalupe Ramirez from the Highland Support Project to build a school in her community with the hope that other girls would not have to make the perilous journey to the United States.

In 2013, Maya anthropologist Audelino Sac conducted a cultural and organizational study of the community that formed the foundation of a community-building plan. One poignant moment occurred during a meeting when elders recounted the years of violence that terrorized the region a mere decade ago. It turned out to be a transformational moment as younger members gained an appreciation for why they lived with so little organization.

After workshops and organizing meetings, the town adopted the Mam name for the region Twi’Ninwitz. Since Vale UMC supported the construction of the first classrooms, the community has been able to put their new-found organizing skills to pressure elected leaders of the municipality to assist them to build additional rooms.



Before the construction of the final classrooms, teachers like Vilma Odilia Marroquin Garcia had to share crowded rooms with students from different grade levels which often complicated instruction. The new rooms allow her to decorate her room specifically for the age and curriculum.

While many consider the building to be the indicator of success, we are excited to witness a community developing its agency to create opportunities and solve problems. Today, the school is also used to host a variety of trainings including a midwifery program. Under Guatemalan law, a town must have a registered midwife to become incorporated. An obstacle that they are well on their way to solving together.



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROGRAM



A Team Member Perspective

Laura Catania joined the HSP team in July of 2015. She became inspired to learn Spanish and dedicate herself full-time to serving the organization after participating on a Partners in Service team. She has served as the Outreach Coordinator and provided translation services for our volunteers as well as assisting Pixan’s marketing team. Laura has played a vital role in our direct aid model by facilitating communication between donors and our grassroots partners.

“Since my first week working with HSP, I’ve always heard that Espumpuja’s women circle was the model of results sought by our Theory of Change,” said Laura.

“The excitement of Espumpuja obtaining this fantastic opportunity based on their hard work was infectious and inspiring, and their success is an example of the type of empowerment we hope to accomplish. In HSP, we see success when our partners achieve on their own.”

HSP initiated a modest tree nursery with this community over a decade ago to collect seeds from old growth forest to maintain the genetic diversity. HSP has purchased trees providing a modest income for their small enterprise that, under their initiative, grew to provide other agencies with seedlings. This year they received a grant from FOCAEP, a program of the Dutch development agency HIVOS, to expand their enterprise to include fruit trees.

MEET A MAKER

Elvia of Llanos del Pinal



MEET ELVIA CHICHĚ

“WHAT I HAVE LOVED MOST IS DISCOVERING A PART OF MYSELF THAT I DIDN’T KNOW EXISTED AND ACHIEVING THINGS THAT I DIDN’T THINK I COULD. I LIKE THE FREEDOM TO BE ABLE TO USE MY IMAGINATION TO CREATE NEW ITEMS AND PLAY WITH THE COLORS AND PATTERNS TO FIND GOOD COMBINATIONS. I ALSO LOVE COLLABORATING WITH MY TEAM, WITHOUT A TEAM NOTHING IS POSSIBLE. I ENJOY JOKING AROUND WITH THE OTHER SEAMSTRESSES IN A HAPPY ENVIRONMENT. I AM THANKFUL TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE MY COMPUTER SKILLS. I NOW KNOW, IF I SET MY MIND TO IT, I CAN ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING.”



Elvia has worked her entire life helping her mother support her seven siblings. While she always wanted to go to school, her parents were never able to afford the fees. When her sister became pregnant, she took over her sister’s job cleaning HSP’s volunteer house and AMA’s offices.

Elvia was fascinated watching Pixan’s sewing shop through she was intimidated by the Industrial machines. “I wanted to learn, but everything I made turned out ugly and crooked,” said Elvia. Elvia worked feverishly to finish her cleaning duties early so that she could have time to learn new skills. In a little over a year, her skills had improved to the degree that she qualified for a job in the Pixan workshop.

“Dilma, who was my mentor, told me something that stuck with me, to want to do something is to be able to do something. I was thrilled that my initiative paid off when, in 2015, I was promoted to manage the Pixan workshop.”



GROWING A FIRST NATION COOPERATIVE IN ARIZONA

The Chaabito Organic Produce Cooperative

McNary is a community marooned by the changing tides of economic growth. It grew as a company town, completely dependent on logging, so when this industry collapsed, McNary was set adrift with inadequate political, economic and social capital to help it adapt.

In 2014, HSP partnered with Apache Behavioural Health Services to investigate ways to increase the social capital of this community, which is located on the White Mountain Apache Reservation. After extensive interviews and community engagement, HSP agreed to support the establishment of a community garden, then a co-operative, to encourage community organization.

The primary resource requirement for this initiative is land, and the McNary reservation currently has a significant amount of it that is under-utilized due to the logging industry’s collapse. Organic farming also aligns well with the strengths and weaknesses of the McNary community, as it is labor intensive rather than capital intensive .

We believe the cooperative model paired with the growing, organic market, constitute a viable and culturally-appropriate organizational model for resilience-building in McNary. To date we have hosted tribal member visits to Guatemalan cooperatives to demonstrate the organizational model.

Through this partnership and cooperative we hope to realize a number of benefits for the McNary community.

OUR SPECIFIC PROJECT GOALS ARE TO

BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

INCREASE THE MEAN INCOME FOR FAMILIES IN MCNARY, ARIZONA

IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

FOSTER THE GROWTH OF ENTREPRENEURIAL VISION

REINFORCE CIVIC VIRTUE, PARTICIPATION AND IDENTITY

CREATE A CENTRAL TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNITY SPACE

PROJECTS

PARTNERS

Here are some of the tangible benefits enabled by our projects in 2015:

Currently **13** women's circles, comprised of **325** women and **10** men, operate in **15** communities in the Western Highlands. Each women's circle member benefits from a broad suite of training workshops, which cover behavioural health, self-esteem, civic participation and entrepreneurship. Each journey begins with a clean indoor cookstove.

170 improved cookstoves were installed in western highland communities last year. These stoves improved the health and wellbeing of **1020** individuals.

The community of Xeabaj II obtained a new retaining wall and drainage system to protect the foundations of the school and the playground constructed by former HSP partner teams.

The Maya Arts Program hosted **4** training workshops for primary schools attended by **65** teachers. The materials included art projects coordinated with the national curriculum that features Maya culture with a focus on developing creative and critical thinking skills.

HSP hosted **18** service trips, comprised of 320 volunteers, last year, through its organizational partners these volunteers provided 9,600 hours of direct service in the construction of 170 stoves, two schools, six garden beds.

Service trip fee revenue has employed **3** indigenous cooks (who cater for groups) five community masons and one master mason. provided financial support for four Indigenous intellectuals that lecture for groups, two community facilitators and two young Maya professionals working in Administration.



Since the inception of these service trip programs in 1994, we have hosted between **300** and **500** volunteers each year. Thus the same number of, generally North American, volunteers have broadened their understanding of poverty, its causes and remedies, and partaken in rich, often transformative, cross-cultural exchanges.

Our Preventative Health program provided 2 diabetes workshops attended by 57 women, 1 medicinal plant workshop attended by 30 participants, 16 nutrition and cooking classes attended by 192 women; 8 midwifery training courses attended by 33 women and implemented a hygiene education campaign reaching 3500.

HSP's direct aid textile project, Pixan, saw **145** women earn income of at least **\$100** per month in fiscal year 2015. These women reported that this new income will go towards their children's school, food, clothes, shoes and health care.

Pixan introduced the Rio Dulce handbag line at New York's premier boutique tradeshow.

HSP sponsored the showing of Gold Fever at **3** Universities in Virginia. **1** Maya community leader visited **5** college campuses and HSP lectured on development concerns to **26** academic and civic organizations.

HSP supported the development of the Contame Design studio to provide a digital lab for 2 Maya women to learn digital marketing and video production skills. Contame produced on contract three videos for the Inter-American Foundation

2 Apache women traveled to Guatemala to learn about cooperative organizational development. HSP also sponsored **1** master gardener to provide workshops on seed saving.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015

ASSETS

Cash	94,352
Accounts receivable	125,174
Total fixed assets	960
Total Assets	220,485

LIABILITIES

Current liabilities	19,230
Long-term liabilities	0
Total Liabilities	19,230

ACCOUNT BALANCE

Balance	220,485
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STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015

REVENUES

Contributions and grants	57,334
Program service	648,382
Total Income	705,692

EXPENDITURES

AMA	124,949
FNRI	1,200
Apache Outreach	5,273
Highland Partners	611,678
Support services	35,710
Total Expenditures	778,810

Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	-57,760
Net Assets- beginning of the year	278,245
Net Assets-end of the year	220,485

THE HIGHLAND FELLOWS PROGRAM

The Highland Fellows program is another strong manifestation of the Highland Support Project's commitment to providing direct opportunities for individual participation in grassroots projects. In 2015, HSP crafted over a dozen fellowship experiences for students and young professional, locally and internationally.

Two international fellows of 2015 include Laura Catania and Juliana Hinton, both graduates of Virginia Commonwealth University, with interest in social justice and digital media made a significant impact in supporting HSP's direct aid platform. Guided by HSP staff, their highland fellowship involved developing video content and social media content to promote community directed projects. We invite you to review their work on VIMEO at: <https://vimeo.com/highlandpartners>

WE THANK ALL OF OUR DONORS FOR THE GENEROUS GIFTS IN 2015. IN PARTICULAR, WE SEND BIG THANKS TO:

- Our account, David Berry, who generously does our taxes pro bono.
- Dr. Jonathan Wright for his two decades of service on our board.
- Trish Vaughn, our dynamic Board President, for her leadership to increase funding levels.
- Guadalupe Ramirez for many months spent away from her family to lead volunteer teams implementing infrastructure project.
- Sam Dulik for his support and leadership with Deloitte's D2i program.
- VCU Institute for Women's Health for support of our Midwifery program.
- Continued benevolence support from the generous congregations of River Road, Fredericksburg, Doe Hill, Saint Paul, and Calvary UMC. Richmond Mennonite Fellowship and Westminster Presbyterian
- VCU Nurses without Borders continued participation in preventative health programs.
- A big thank you for the continued support of our annual donors Robert and Lucy Pryor, Stephen Tallman, Raymond W. Arritt Sr. Loreta Walker, Laura Veatch, Karen Cheslock, Holly Harris, Debra Miller, Ben Blevins, Arthur D. Long and Ann Neeley.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

