



María, Villa Linda, Guatemala



In the Agros community of Villa Linda, in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, the Community Bank continues to work with Agros to form a sustainable way for women to start and invest in new business endeavors through access to credit.

María is one such woman participating in the community bank. Like many, María was hesitant at first to take part in the bank for lack of experience and fear of going into debt. Until about a year ago, after first seeing the successes of the other women in her community, María decided to join in by taking out a loan to start an animal project. Now she is raising two pigs and chickens. She will sell the pigs in the local market and she sells eggs each week. María not only has access to loans through the

Agros program but training as well so that she and other entrepreneurs can learn business basics and how to maximize profit.

The twelve women participating in the community bank in Villa Linda received between \$120 and \$125 USD to invest in their various small businesses in the village.

Since the completion of the most recent loan cycle, María has already seen success earning \$37 and putting away \$16 to put towards the bank's savings. She is using this money to buy clothes for her family and send her oldest child to high school and her younger three in elementary school; an opportunity she never had during her childhood and that is unfortunately still difficult in rural Guatemala. She is making a difference for her children's future, ending the cycle of poverty in her family and being a strong female role model to other women in Villa Linda. When asked what she thought of the community banks, she shared, "It's good to take the risk to learn how these projects work. I'm so grateful to Agros for the great opportunities we've received."

Community banks first started in Agros communities in Guatemala, but the idea has spread to the other four countries where Agros works. Over the next several months with support from our partners, Agros is providing training and support to start at least nine community banks benefiting 120 additional women and their families in other Agros communities in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras. Agros believes gender equality is a key to sustainable community development and through community banks, women have a chance to make a difference in their lives and the lives of their families, community and region. María's only regret, she shared with a smile, has been "that more women aren't yet involved!"