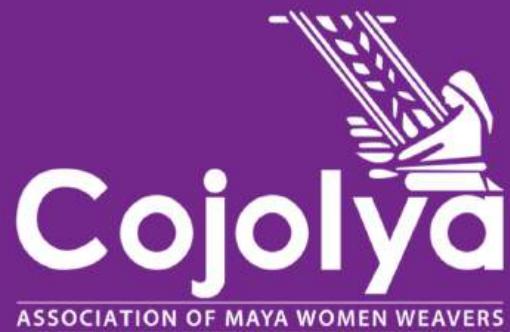




Cojolyá



MANO A MANO
para el Desarrollo
Hand in Hand for Development



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Hand in Hand for development

Social Program Overview

Our social program, *Mano a Mano para el Desarrollo*, was established in 2017 to address the **specific needs of our artisans and their families**, with the goal of promoting both professional and personal development. The program emerged from an in-depth research project conducted from 2016 to 2017, where Cojolya's team gathered qualitative data through numerous interviews with Mayan artisans within our association. This research allowed us to identify the key challenges faced by the artisans—primarily the **lack of economic opportunities** and **limited resources to support their family development**.

Most of our artisans come from low-income families where the wages they earn are primarily allocated to **meeting basic household needs**, leaving little for education, professional training, or additional forms of personal growth. Understanding this, *Mano a Mano para el Desarrollo* was designed to **contribute to the holistic development of our artisans and our community**.

Since its inception, the program has expanded significantly, evolving into a comprehensive initiative supported by **five key pillars: Education, Health, Professional and Personal Development, Economic Empowerment and Ethical Tourism**.



Each pillar **addresses key aspects of our artisans' lives**, providing essential support and opportunities to encourage personal growth, professional development, and sustainable progress. This empowers them to build a brighter and more stable future for their families. By doing so, **we contribute to the UN SDGs by reducing poverty** (SDG 1) through sustainable income, advancing **gender equality** (SDG 5), promoting **decent work and economic growth** (SDG 8) through our Fair Trade certification, and ensuring **responsible production** (SDG 12) through sustainable resource use. In addition our products are fairtrade certified.

In the following overview, we want to shed light on the different pillars of the social program and their **direct impact on the lives** of the mayan weavers, celebrate **achievements** as well as inform about **ongoing hardships**.



Breaking barriers in Education

In Santiago Atitlán, many children face significant barriers to education, particularly due to **financial challenges** and **limited support**. Girls are especially affected, as **traditional gender norms** often prioritize the education of boys. As a result, we observe **high dropout rates**, with fewer students returning each year. This issue is exacerbated by a lack of academic resources and indigenous mentors, both inside and outside the classroom, in our predominantly mayan community. At Cojolya, we believe that **education is essential** for all students and strive to address these obstacles.

School supplies, academic support and more

The longterm goal of the education program is to **build an academic center** that provides complete **financial assistance for school supplies, personal development workshops, and academic support** for the children of Cojolya. We currently support 9 children, 5 girls and 4 boys, with this program. We offer all families with children **initial** financial support at the beginning of the school year to buy school supplies, as well as **monthly support** for the ongoing costs of education. Furthermore we guarantee internet and computer access at the organization, so they can complete digital assignments without additional costs. We are also able to offer the students **academic tutoring** and **group learning activities**.

Thriving professionals

Since launching the program, we have **successfully supported 20 to 25 children** in continuing their education, enabling them to **achieve both intermediate and professional degrees**. Among them, four have completed the intermediate level, and six have graduated with professional qualifications. We are proud to see them now thriving as accountants, teachers, and even a doctor. Currently, two girls are **on track to complete** their studies in the coming years.





Addressing unattended health issues

Many girls in Santiago **start weaving on the backstrap loom as young as 10 years old** and continue working in this physically taxing craft their entire lives. Without proper support and healthcare many weavers will **develop chronic health issues**, the most common ones being arthritis and chronic back pain. Many of the **artisans neglected their own physical health over decades** because they couldn't afford the necessary medicine or to go to the private hospital here in Santiago. And even if they would have gone to public health centers, they would have received limited or low-quality care.

Financial and medical support

We set out to guarantee that our artisans will receive basic healthcare in our **local private hospital** and/or can **buy the medicine they need in the pharmacies** here in Santiago Atitlán. In the beginning of every year every member of our health program receives their **health card**, which has a **dedicated amount** they can use for healthcare expenses, like basic check-ups or buying medicine. Cojolya also offers **additional financial support in case of medical emergencies**.

Increasing long-term wellbeing

We have already grown our health project from 37 to **42 beneficiaries** since its initiation in 2021. The health of our weavers is fundamental for them to **keep working in their profession**. With access to proper healthcare we can ensure the **long-term health and overall wellbeing** of our artisans so they can keep working for a long time and enjoying their quality of life. That's why it is crucial to maintain and **further strengthen this pillar** of our social program, ensuring our weavers stay healthy and thrive for years to come.



Professional and Personal Development



Professional Development

At Cojolya, we consider the empowerment of our members through their artisanal work as a means to **honor their expertise**—not merely as a historical relic, but as a viable **source of income and professional growth**. However, our artisans often struggle to sustain themselves when confined to a single technique or part of the production process, which limits their earning potential and overall economic security. To help **diversify their skill sets** allowing them to access other areas of our production, we collaborate with organizations around Lake Atitlán to host **workshops on specialized techniques**, such as the traditional art of dyeing threads for weaving (**jaspe or ikat**) and training artisans in **using sewing machines**. This enables them to **manufacture and sell their own products** outside of their work with Cojolya.

Our workshops empower members to **develop new skills and gain confidence**, allowing them to expand their professional horizons. Looking ahead, we aim to **expand these workshops** to reach more artisans at Cojolya, bringing in local professionals to cover a broader range of techniques while **deepening community engagement**.



Personal Development

Cojolya members have expressed a **desire to educate themselves** on personal issues such as **gender inequality and labor rights**. Our workshops **empower members to develop new skills and gain confidence**, allowing them to take on **leadership roles** in the community. In the past workshops have been covered by professional volunteers, but in the future we aim to expand these workshops by **involving local professionals** to cover a broader range of topics and deepen community engagement.



Most of our weavers create Cojolyas' beautiful fabrics from their homes, but many **live in unsafe or unsuitable conditions**, characterized by **leaking roofs, broken doors, and lack of electricity**. These living conditions pose significant mental load and physical risk, adversely affecting both their personal and professional development.

In 2022, we established our **housing project, Vivienda**, to improve the living situations of our artisans. A **safe and comfortable environment is essential**, especially for those who work primarily from home. In 2023, this project benefited **16 of our 36 families** by constructing kitchens, bedrooms, staircases, installing new doors, and providing electricity to their homes. We observed that these changes have significantly **enhanced their overall well-being**. With continued support, we hope to **further improve the living conditions of other Cojolya families** as well.



Breaking Barriers to Market Access

Mayan weavers in Guatemala **encounter significant obstacles** that threaten their traditional textile art, an essential part of the country's cultural heritage and identity. Many artisans **struggle to generate sales**, particularly those in remote areas far from city centers, which limits their visibility and market access. While **intermediaries often profit** from their work, weavers receive only a fraction of the income generated, leaving them with **low wages and insufficient financial support**.



We believe that empowering women through their artisanal work is a truly precious way of giving their **ancestral expertise the recognition it deserves**, not only as an historical relic, but as an **economically viable source of employment** for our women weavers.

Empowering Mayan Artisans Through Fair Opportunities

To address these challenges, Cojolya focuses on **empowering our Mayan weavers inside the organization** while also **supporting grassroots groups** to help them expand economically and increase their visibility. Through professional development, artisans can **enhance the quality of their products and diversify their techniques**, enabling them to open local shops to meet community demand. In the last years some artisans have successfully **established traditional clothing shops** in markets or small spaces in their homes, creating an additional source of income.



Moreover, we motivate organized artisan groups to continue their crafts and **showcase their products in Cojolya's local store**. Here, customers can find unique items from

Artesanos Compartiendo Sueños, Asociación de Mujeres Vida y Esperanza, Tejiendo un nuevo futuro ADEMVE and Mujeres de Maíz.

The impact of this **collective effort** is significant, as collaboration among organizations generates sustainable job opportunities for artisans and **strengthens the community's economy**.



Maximize tourism's benefit

Santiago Atitlán, situated in a vibrant touristic region of Guatemala, showcases the **rich cultural heritage of the local community**, particularly through the artistry of women weavers. However, these artisans often serve as a marketing image for Guatemala's tourism, yet they are **not the primary beneficiaries of the economic opportunities** that tourism can create. This disconnect highlights the need to address the challenges associated with mass tourism, particularly regarding **gender equality and the empowerment of women**. Ethical Tourism serves as a guiding framework to help maximize tourism's benefits on the society, environment and economy while **safeguarding cultural integrity and fostering social equity**.



where women weavers can practice their Spanish, showcase their art, and preserve their cultural heritage. The organization is **widening its guided tours offers** to highlight the handicraft, ethical practices and community values while offering **workshops in traditional weaving techniques**, providing artisans with additional income.



Connecting through Fair Trade

Cojolya, a **Fair Trade certified organization** since 2012, is committed to promote **ethical and eco-sustainable tourism** in Guatemala. By educating visitors about the **principles of Fair Trade** and the importance of a **safe, child labor-free environment**, Cojolya aims to create a meaningful connection between tourists and local artisans. Through creating a space where **artisans can share their craft and connect with other cultures**, Cojolya fosters an environment

Expand offering and visibility

Cojolya has successfully created a supportive space for **artisans to share their skills and engage with tourists**, benefitting both the local community and visitors. Through weaving classes held at our facilities, which are actively promoted online, and live demonstrations, artisans not only **generate additional income** but also **preserve their art as a vital expression of their culture**. This initiative **empowers women to express themselves freely**, fostering a deep sense of pride in their work and heritage. Looking ahead, Cojolya **aims to expand its educational offerings for tourists**. By strengthening this pillar of the social program, Cojolya seeks to enhance the **visibility and appreciation of artisan work** while continuing to **uplift women and promote sustainable practices** within the tourism industry in Guatemala.

THANK YOU

Our most sincere thank you for your consideration,
The team of Cojolya




Cojolya