



Book of Life

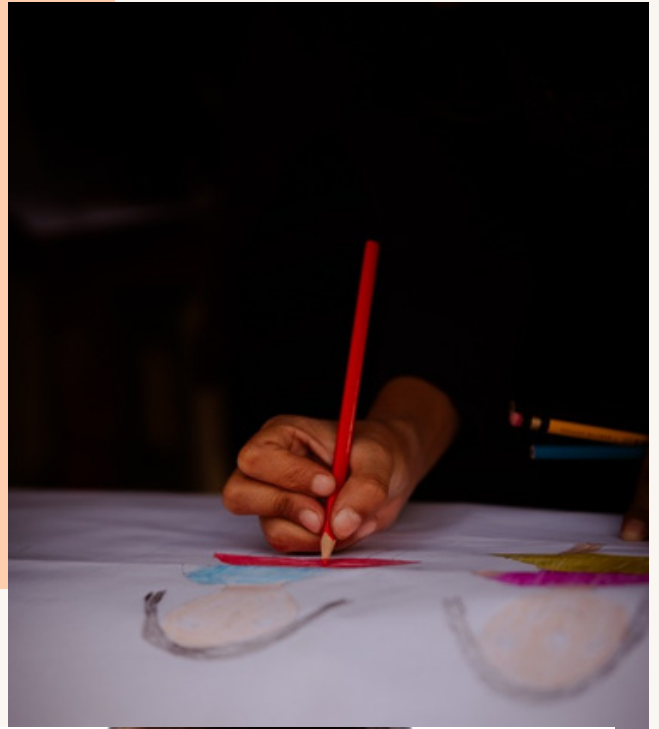
Translation by Phoebe Hadlington & Edited by Aideen Landers



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Book Of life

Weaving stories and
building a future
together with everyone



We make dreams come true

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PREFACE



Here at AMRIS we want to share with you the stories and diverse experiences of the Mam women who come from the municipality of San Sebastián Huehuetenango. We want to share how we have participated with these women politically, culturally, economically and socially.

We have dedicated this 'Libro de Vida' (The Book of Life) to present our most relevant areas of work. We want to show what has been made possible and how we have formed new developments in the municipality. We want to show how we have worked to shape the community's principles and values in order to work towards everyone having a better quality of life – something which we all deserve.

Thanks to the hard work of many women and the support of various donors, we can safely say that we have significantly contributed to improving the quality of life for many rural Maya women and their families, in spite of all the difficulties they face. In this 'Life Book', we share the journey that we have taken and continue to take; we present our vision for today's projects and show how our journey cannot stop here: we must continue to work together relentlessly. We thank you for joining us from the beginning to today and for allowing us to progress together to achieve a better future.

WHO ARE AMRIS?

AMRIS is a civil, non-profit, non-political and non-religious association that supports women from different communities in the municipality of San Sebastián Huehuetenango, Huehuetenango, Guatemala. Our projects are based on agriculture and production, the environment, education and health.

MISSION

We are an association of women dedicated to improving our lives, working together to create social and political change to guarantee gender equality and full rights for women.

VISION

To promote the well-being of women and their families by strengthening their integration in all aspects of life, including social, educational, economical, cultural and health domains.



HOW AMRIS STARTED

'I still remember when we first met on **1st February 1999**. We started with 30 women and this initial meeting motivated the women to raise awareness about the importance of the organisation.

The first problem that came up for the women was the need for a nixtamel (corn) grinder. In order to grind the maize, women were either having to travel large distances or, for those that could do it at home, it was really difficult to grind the maize with stone. In addition, they faced other obstacles such as not knowing how to read or write, whether their husbands would give them permission to participate and spend their time in the meetings, and also not having experience in how to execute projects etc.

I remember with María Pablo, Lucia Velásquez and other members, we started to raise funds for the women. The first office we set up was **ONAM** (National Office for Woman). Together we started to hold training workshops and through this we established the women's office at department level. We were involved in this space until we managed to strengthen our organisation.

We began to train women in topics that we felt were most relevant, such as: women's rights, peace agreements, self-esteem and others. **The first group** that received direct support was that of **Twisaqpon**, which belongs to the Piol Village

Feeling encouraged, we began searching for more organisations to support us with our local needs. We risked travelling to the capital of Guatemala, without knowing how to get there and how to get around this huge city. We arrived at the **Ministerio de Trabajo (MinTrab)** (the Ministry of Work) to request funding for individual businesses. We were successful and they approved our proposal.

Anastacia Velásquez
Founder

THE FIRST WOMAN



Anastacia Velásquez was born in 1964 in San Miguel Uspantán – a town of mainly Maya people – in Quiché, Guatemala. She was the eldest of six sisters. When she was nine years old, her family moved to the north, to the city of Ixcán, in an attempt to move away from extreme poverty. Anastacia and her mother sold tamales both at home and on the street; as the eldest daughter, she held the responsibility of supporting the family.



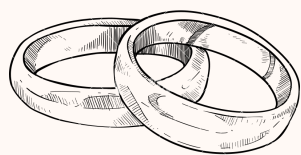
In 1981, Anastacia and her family had to leave Ixcán in an emergency due to the civil war. At this time, the conflict was particularly intense which meant Anastacia could only study until fourth grade (around aged 10). In January 1982, her mother and two twin sisters were kidnapped by the army, separating the family indefinitely.



Thankfully, Anastacia, her father and her other three sisters managed to escape. Fearing for their lives, they sought refuge in the mountains where they lived for three months. Access to health, education and particularly to food was extremely limited. So much so, her father decided to take them to Chajuli, in Chiapas (México).



In 1983, Anastacia started to work as a supporter for a children's education in Chajuli, a role for which she was selected by the local community, despite her lack of formal education. After some time she felt she had to return to Guatemala to try to find out what had happened with her mother and sisters who were kidnapped.



When she returned to Guatemala, she enlisted in the Guatemala Revolution and met her husband, Tomás López. A while later, they returned to Mexico and took refuge in Ejido Reforma Agraria (Agrarian Reform), where she worked as a teacher in COMAR (Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados - Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance). This led the pair to Quintana Roo, where Anastacia first started to form women's groups. She helped to establish MADRE TIERRA (Mother Earth); its first group consisted of 20 women and was successful in improving women's life conditions. It taught women how to read and write, how to look for support to improve their children's health and to reduce malnutrition, and how to manage food supplies.



In 1995, Anastacia and her husband returned to Guatemala and founded a branch of Madre Tierra in Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez, in which she served as Regional Coordinator and helped to establish many projects that still benefit women in the southern coast of Guatemala today, including in some shops, mills and farms.



THE PAST

From the creation of the first women's group in Twisaqpon in 1999 to the 20 groups that make up AMRIS today, the organisation's journey has been filled with successes and challenges and lessons have been learnt.

AMRIS started with one woman with great compassion and a vision and commitment to making this world a better place: for more than 20 years, Anastacia Velázquez has invested her time, energy and passion into improving the life of Maya-Mam women of San Sebastián Huehuetenango and its community in general.

"Through the last 21 years working as the founder of AMRIS, I have been empowered as a woman; I have been made more aware of my rights, I have developed my skills and I have shared my experience with many women and girls with the aim to tackle the poverty, discrimination and domestic violence that women face every day.

Anastacia Velásquez, founder de AMRIS



I remember that among the errands we were doing, I had to travel to the departmental capital of Huehuetenango and, whilst travelling there, the car broke down and I had to take a truck to continue my journey. There, I met a woman called Josefa Lorenzo Sales (a health promoter). We began chatting and I told her of our organisation with women. A week later, she phoned me and wanted to support us in our organisation with women and fundraising. This is how the second group was organised, in the hamlet of Talpetate. Some time later, my sister-in-law, Basilia Hernández and companion, María Martín, came up with the idea to create another group of 20 women called La Laguna

When we already had 3 groups formed and organised, we decided to travel to the capital city and seek funds from Derechos en Acción (Rights in Action), which linked us with a Catalan (Spanish) organisation called Acción Solidaria (Solidarity Action). They approved our project with the 'molino de nixtamal' (the machines to grind maize), donating 3 to us at the same time.

We put our all into it, with each group working hard to construct a house and install the nixtamal grinders. Building the house was physically challenging for everyone, given that we had to collect wood from the forest, make the adobe, and load the sand to make the mixture to construct the house.



It is important to highlight that the husbands at first did not support us in the construction of the house, since they claimed that it was a waste of time. On December 14, 2000, we inaugurated our nixtamal mill project, which gave us an incentive to continue fighting with our social development projects.

Of the 3 organised groups of women, we formed ourselves as the organising team. We looked for leaders in other communities and invited them to join us. In a short time, we managed to onboard another community, Sipá, led by Mrs. Rosa Argueta.

With the four groups formed, we discreetly started to routinely have meetings, initially in central parks in the town of San Sebastián H. On other occasions, we met under trees, on the patios of one of the AMRIS workers, in the street or wherever it was best for us.

This then made us think we should have a more suitable space to talk about our needs more formally. We decided we should have our own office which would be better for us, as well as those visiting. It was also necessary that our institution was to be legally registered.

Whilst we were getting this legalised, Acción Solidaria supported us by paying for our office space for a year, meaning we did not have to meet elsewhere. During this period, a woman named Saira Villatoro Herrera approached us asking if she could work for us. In a short time, she supported us to form another group of women.

We also thought it was necessary to write out our strategic plan and have an accountant to manage our funds more efficiently. In 2001, we were able to hire our first accountant, Mr. Jairon Mendoza. Some time later, other administrators joined: Mario Cardona, Orlando Mendoza, Adonis Salazar and Mario Rene García (current administrator of AMRIS)."

LEGALISING AMRIS



In February 2003, the association was legalised, with its name as AMRIS, Asociación de Mujeres Río Isquizal (Association of women from River Isquizal). We wanted this name due to the river Isquizal flowing below the town and our offices, which means 'dawn'.

Since then, each group that has been organised and is part of AMRIS is legalised through a formal act and entry application. The first women to receive positions in legal representation during these years were Saira Yadira Villatoro, Josefa Lorenzo, María Velásquez, Anastacia Velásquez, Joaquina Vásquez, Odilia Jiménez and Lucia Velásquez.

Thanks to donations from the Derechos en Acción (in Cataluña) we were able to inaugurate our house/office construction at the end of 2003, where we built the first two floors. In 2011, with the help of INTERED - an organisation from Spain - we managed to construct the third floor, which consists of a large room to host assemblies and larger meetings.

After many years of work, the first groups that were organised separated (**Talpetate, Sipá y La Laguna**) but the other groups formed. Currently, we have 20 groups of women, whom are working to improve women's rights.

OUR HOUSE/OFFICE





OUR HOUSE/OFFICE



CHRONOLOGY

FORMING THE FIRST GROUPS

Twisaqpon was the first group with 30 women, with support from ONAM. Talpetate was formed shortly after, with the support of Josefa Corenzo Sales. Then La Laguna was formed with 20 women.

FIRST ACCOUNTANT
Mr. Jairon Mendoza

CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSE/OFFICE

With support of Derechos en Acción

WOMEN'S TRAININGS

Topics include domestic violence, empowerment, entrepreneurship, human rights, leadership, etc

DONATION OF CHICKENS AND PIGS

OPENING OF THE SAFE SPACE IN THE HOUSE/OFFICE

A space to receive women and girls, with services from a psychologist and a social worker

1999

2000

2001

2003

END 2003

2011

2021

2022

2024

CORN GRINDER PROJECT

With support of Acción Solidaria

FORMATION OF THE FOURTH COMMUNITY, SIPA

LEGALISING THE ASSOCIATION

The association is officially named AMRIS.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE THIRD FLOOR

Construction of the room for meetings and the computer room with support from the organisation INTERED (Spain).

DONATION OF SHEEP

128 sheep distributed following "pase de cadena" methodology

VALUES



The values that guide us to bring this vision to life are the following

Respect

We respect the rights that we all hold, taking others' opinions into account. This includes members of AMRIS and those in our surrounding community.



Tolerance

We promote a peaceful coexistence, solidarity and ethical values



Solidarity

We live and work together according to our shared ideas and values, striving to contribute to the common good.



Transparency

We work with honesty and loyalty in the accounting and registration processes,, respecting the provisions of the association.



Patience

We stay calm and controlled in our actions.



Responsibility

We carry out our assigned roles in a punctual and diligent way to meet women's needs.



Honesty

We are committed to working authentically and truthfully.



Equity

We recognise the right for women to access conditions for a better quality life, homing in on gender equality, particularly from an indigenous woman's perspective.



Sisterhood

At AMRIS we treat each other as friends, as united sisters in the fight for our empowerment. We form a network of support and together we drive change in our communities to strive for equality between men and women.



THE PEOPLE BEHIND AMRIS

The progress we have already made would not have been possible without the people who have invested their time and energy in the work of AMRIS. Therefore, we want to dedicate these pages to introduce the people who make up AMRIS.

EMPLOYEES

AMRIS has 7 permanent employees who have been vital to the success and development of the organisation. We are also grateful that we are able to provide temporary work to some people through the projects. Here we present the permanent employees of AMRIS:



Anastacia is the founder and leader of the organisation. She organises women's groups and manages projects to benefit and improve women's lives. Anastacia also manages national and international resources.



Julia is the coordinator and supports Odilia in the organisation and administration of the training workshops in the communities. She also provides fundamental support in the administration of the building and helps ensure that all activities carried out by AMRIS are well-resourced.



Odilia is the facilitator who plans and teaches 18 workshops a month in the communities. The workshops address various topics, such as women's empowerment, leadership, human rights, violence, entrepreneurship, etc. These aim to improve the living conditions in rural areas, providing women with more information on how to become autonomous.



Mario is the general administrator of AMRIS. He manages both volunteers and finances, liaises with donors and carries out several other tasks for the organisation.



Carlos oversees the domestic production projects for the 20 women's groups. He provides technical assistance with sheep, fruit trees, and fertiliser production through red coquette worms.



Cristina is a social worker and is part of the Safe Space working group. She is available within the association's operating hours to provide assistance to women and girls who need support, such as in cases of gender-based domestic violence.



Yoselin is a psychologist and is part of the team with Cristina in the Safe Space. Her door is open to provide psychological support to any woman or girl who needs it, whether it is related to violence-based cases or other needs.



Evelin is an educator and is the face of the institution: she is the first person to receive anyone who visits or contacts the home/office and provides support and information about AMRIS.

VOLUNTEERS

Since 2022, AMRIS has welcomed volunteers from many different countries and backgrounds in order to help achieve objectives, whereby volunteers offer up their skills and bring new ideas and perspectives to improve the functions and operations of the association.

Tasks include:

- Fundraising
- General organisation
- Teaching English to the local community
- Taking photos for social media platforms
- Participating in AMRIS educational workshops with Odilia
- Helping maintain the upkeep of the building at AMRIS
- Painting murals
- Workshops in primary schools

Depending on the time of year, volunteers may help to harvest coffee or carry out other tasks when they visit the communities.

For volunteers, AMRIS is a place of cultural exchange and a home where they are guaranteed to improve their Spanish. The volunteers stay in the building at AMRIS and are required to speak Spanish every day.

Some former volunteers continue to participate in the organisation. AMRIS long-term goal is to have “cross-country ambassadors” in order to increase the organisation’s visibility internationally, which will in turn increase funding opportunities.



VOLUNTEERS



WOMEN'S GROUPS

We currently have 20 women's groups and we are working to improve the rights and quality of life for more than 300 women (with this figure likely to increase).

La Laguna 1	La Laguna 2	La Semilla	Las Flores	Mirador
Capilla	Relámpago	La Bendición	Mujeres Hacia un Futuro Mejor	T'uisaqpon
Escuela	Las Estrellas	Aguacatal	Grupo de Mujeres Unidas	La Esperanza
Nuevo renacimiento	Nueva creación	Nueva Generación	Nuevo Amanecer	Las Rosas

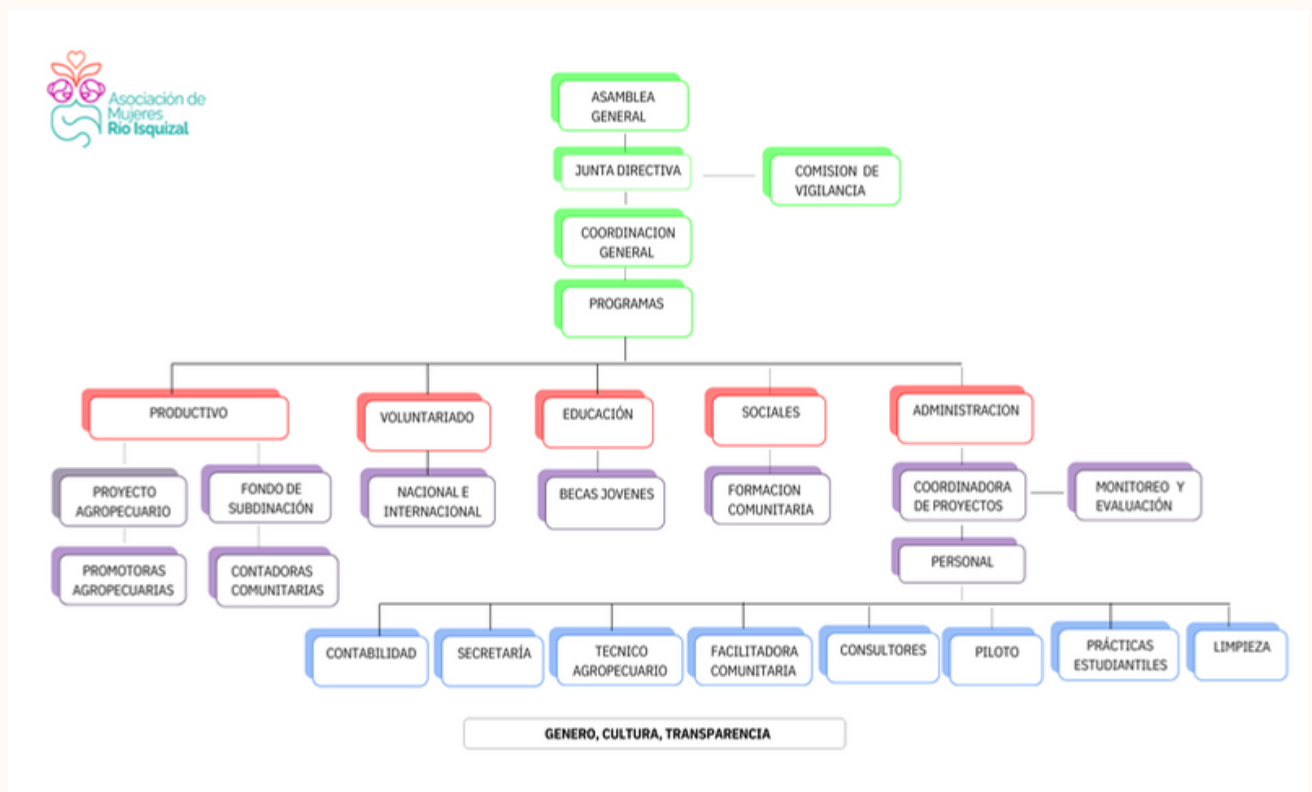
These groups of women have formed in various communities around San Sebastián de Huehuetenango to be part of AMRIS.

Different projects are carried out in these groups where the women organise themselves. In the workshops they meet up and learn about different topics such as domestic abuse, their human rights, leadership, entrepreneurship, empowerment, economics etc. Each group is represented by a woman from the board of directors, who meet once a month in the AMRIS office. This way we ensure that all groups have a voice within the organisation. More information about the board of directors can be found on page 49.

HOW THE ORGANISATION OPERATES

Organisation structure

The organisation is structured in the following way:



CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR MAM WOMEN IN SAN SEBASTIAN



HISTORY OF GUATEMALA

Guatemala suffers from widespread poverty, child malnutrition and violence, stemming from a long history of civil conflict and political unrest.

The Guatemalan Civil War was a long armed conflict fought between 1960 and 1996, which had an enormous impact in economic terms. The conflict ended in 1996 after the signing of the Peace Agreement.

Guatemala is a country rich in indigenous culture and history. There are two main ethnic groups, the Maya and the Ladinos, who make up the majority of the indigenous population.



GENDER INEQUALITY, MISOGYNY AND THE NEED FOR AUTONOMY

Guatemalan women face tough challenges every day regarding equality and misogyny. The country ranks 112th out of 135 countries in gender equality, making it the most unequal in Latin America. Data shows that gender-based violence has reached epidemic levels, with Guatemala ranking third worldwide for murders against women.



Women's lack of autonomy is evident amongst indigenous women. Typical examples of gender roles and relationship norms between Guatemalan indigenous men and women include:

- Girls having to clean and take care of the children, whilst being denied the right to play with a ball or drive a car. Boys are expected to help their fathers in the fields and get up later.
- Women work to support their families, but they are not considered in the same way as men when making important decisions within families.
- Even if women work outside the home or have their own businesses, they are also expected to be the main caregivers for their children and parents, among others. This is not expected of men.
- In social and political organisations, it is usually men who occupy positions of community responsibility to make social or political decisions and some believe that women do not have the capacity to do so.

- When it comes to distributing inheritances, even in the best of cases, women receive less than men, because men are thought to be the "heads" of their families. In the worst cases, women are not considered to receive any inheritance.
- For women to earn respect, they are required to do housework, get married and become mothers, work outside the home and be obedient. This is not required of men.
- One of the strongest gender-based expectations is for both men and women to marry and have children in order to fulfil the heteropatriarchal societal norms.
- Women are restricted in their freedom to have friends, travel and study, whilst men are given more freedom in these aspects of their lives.

AMRIS works to encourage women to question these imposed gender roles to create a greater sense of autonomy so that women can have their own voice, sources of income, land, education, resources, etc.



EDUCATION

For the majority of children in Guatemala, especially girls and children who live in remote areas, access to quality education continues to be a challenge. One of the major obstacles for indigenous children in particular, is the lack of intercultural and bilingual education. According to Guatemala's Peace Agreement, the education system should promote the use of indigenous languages and should allow children to read and write in the language of their community. However, this is still a pilot project and the education system continues to be in Spanish, resulting in discrimination towards indigenous children.



Approximately 71% of boys and 54% of girls from indigenous communities receive an education to the age of 12, in Guatemala. Once these children reach 12 years of age, those that attend schools diminishes drastically, with 45% of indigenous boys and 25% of indigenous girls attending school.

The increased risk to girls' safety and cultural norms that prioritise boys' education contribute to high illiteracy rates among girls in Guatemala (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

HEALTH

Guatemala has the highest rate of chronic malnutrition in all of the Latin American and Caribbean region and the fourth highest rate in the world. According to the Programa Mundial de Alimentos (PMA) (World Programme of Food), nearly half of Guatemalan children less than five years old suffer from chronic childhood malnutrition. Chronic malnutrition is two times more likely to affect indigenous children (ALDEA, n.d.).

Indigenous women are faced with various barriers to accessing health care, such as discrimination, accessibility, the lack of quality health care in rural areas and language barriers – the majority of health professionals speak predominantly in Spanish. Due to the lack of translators and bilingual health professionals, indigenous women are unable to communicate their symptoms and health issues (Cultural Survival, 2018).



ABUSE.

In a post-war society which has endured 36 years of armed conflict, systemic violence and other abuse against women and children has tripled in the last ten years. Women are more vulnerable to physical, economic and sexual violence as well as femicide. Between 2015 and 2020, the national rates of teenage births in Guatemala for girls between 15 and 19 years was 77% (UNICEF, 2021). The majority of these pregnancies are a result of sexual violence.

A Rapid Analysis of Gender was carried out by UN Women y CARE in Guatemala in 2021, which indicated that 69% of women were victims of psychological abuse, 55% of physical violence and 47% of financial abuse. According to official data from the Public Ministry, from 2022 until August 2022, they had registered 45,996 reports of gender-based violence, where 65% were classified as violent cases against women, 13% of sexual violence, 10% violence against girls and teenagers and 2% other crimes against women, including femicide. The Grupo de Apolo Mutuo (GAM) (The Mutual Support Group) reported that between January and May 2022 they had registered 376 femicides in Guatemala, an increase of 48% in comparison with the same period a year before.



WATER

Access to drinking water and sanitation in Guatemala continues to be a challenge. In rural areas, 47% of the population do not have access to basic sanitation services (UNICEF, 2022). In San Sebastián, water is a huge problem for the population. Many homes do not have access to running water or drinking water, causing many health problems for those most vulnerable.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Waste management is a huge problem in Guatemala and in particular, the area of San Sebastián Huehuetenango. On a daily basis, waste disposal includes burning in open holes, illegal dumping, disposal in rivers and littering on the streets. These waste disposal methods create huge environmental problems, such as toxic contamination of rivers and pollution, as well as health problems among humans and wildlife.

In Guatemala, waste is only collected and taken to the landfill when households pay for this service. The pressing problem in this area is that many households cannot afford to pay for this service or finances are prioritised for other things such as health and/or food. Unfortunately therefore, the only solutions available for disposing of waste are the street and nearby rivers, etc. In addition, many people do not know how to recycle or dispose of waste in a way that does not harm themselves, others, or the environment.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION

Guatemala is rich in natural resources, but unfortunately, it has not always had control over these resources. This is both a historical and current issue.

The rate of inflation in Guatemala increased drastically towards the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023. In February 2023, the rate of inflation rose to 9.92%.

This is a critical situation since the average legal salary in Guatemala is around 400 USD (agriculture), and this is not enough to cover basic expenses. Many people in rural areas live on even less than this and have several jobs to cover basic food expenses. Every month the Quetzal loses value.

Many people are looking to emigrate to other countries to work and to then send money to their families. After the pandemic, everything became more expensive.

Poverty and inequality in the country continue to be consistently high – indigenous people remain particularly disadvantaged. The lack of education and work opportunities contribute to the high levels of poverty.

The rate of infant malnutrition is amongst the tenth highest in the world (data from World Bank).

Resources: Inflación | Banco de Guatemala (banguat.gob.gt)

ACHIEVEMENTS: AMRIS PROJECTS TO DATE

We can proudly say that, despite the challenges, we have contributed substantially to improving the quality of life of many rural Maya women and their families, giving our all to promote changes at varying levels.

At AMRIS, we have worked with adult women, elderly women, youth, widows, single women and married women. We have worked with women who cannot read or write, who do not know the Mam language and women who are bilingual.

AMRIS's projects to date include:



Participation

- Citizen participation
- Participation in forums and more



Education

- Education
- Student grants/scholarships



Economy

- Grain mixers
- Shops for basic needs
- Cattle and Sheep fattening
- Community food banks



Organisation and competencies

- Project management
- Practical workshops

Our projects are geared towards sustainability in order to achieve long-lasting change. With the help of our projects, we have already contributed in changing the life of Maya Mam women of San Sebastián in several different ways:

- Providing women with financial knowledge; this not only benefits the women themselves but also the economic situation of their families.
- Providing literacy and teaching the women about their rights in the workshops; this enables them to make political, social and economic decisions.
- Developing knowledge and understanding of experiences related to the promotion of gender equality in order to exercise women's rights. This enables women to express themselves and develop a new way of living.
- An increase in women's participation in other areas (COMUDE and COCODE - local community/municipal groups).
- Boosting women's self-confidence to recognise, call out, and fight against domestic abuse.

As an organisation, we have achieved structural change in legal, political, economic and social domains. We have also trained young women to take leadership positions in their groups.

There have been many changes and we have gained a wealth of experience and learned a lot together. Perhaps the most important message of all we have stuck to is: "Yes, we can! We ourselves as women are capable of making a change!"

AMRIS TODAY

The initial idea that started in 1999 has not changed, where we continue to pursue the same mission: to improve the living conditions of women in the municipality of San Sebastián H. and to promote their participation in local development to help them to propose, manage and carry out development projects. Today, we are holding workshops that focus on productive projects, education, entrepreneurship and housing. This benefits the members, their families and thus the communities.

To achieve these objectives, we are currently working on the following projects:

1. Facilitating participatory development for Maya Mam women: Comprehensive Project
2. Safe Space
3. Women's Network of Santa Barbara
4. AMRIS Women's Health Volunteer Funds



OUR PROJECTS

DOMESTIC PRODUCTION COMPREHENSIVE PROJECT



AMRIS is supporting women to improve food security, family income and resilience to improve productivity and leadership skills. This project, focusing on domestic production, started in September 2020 and is currently in process.

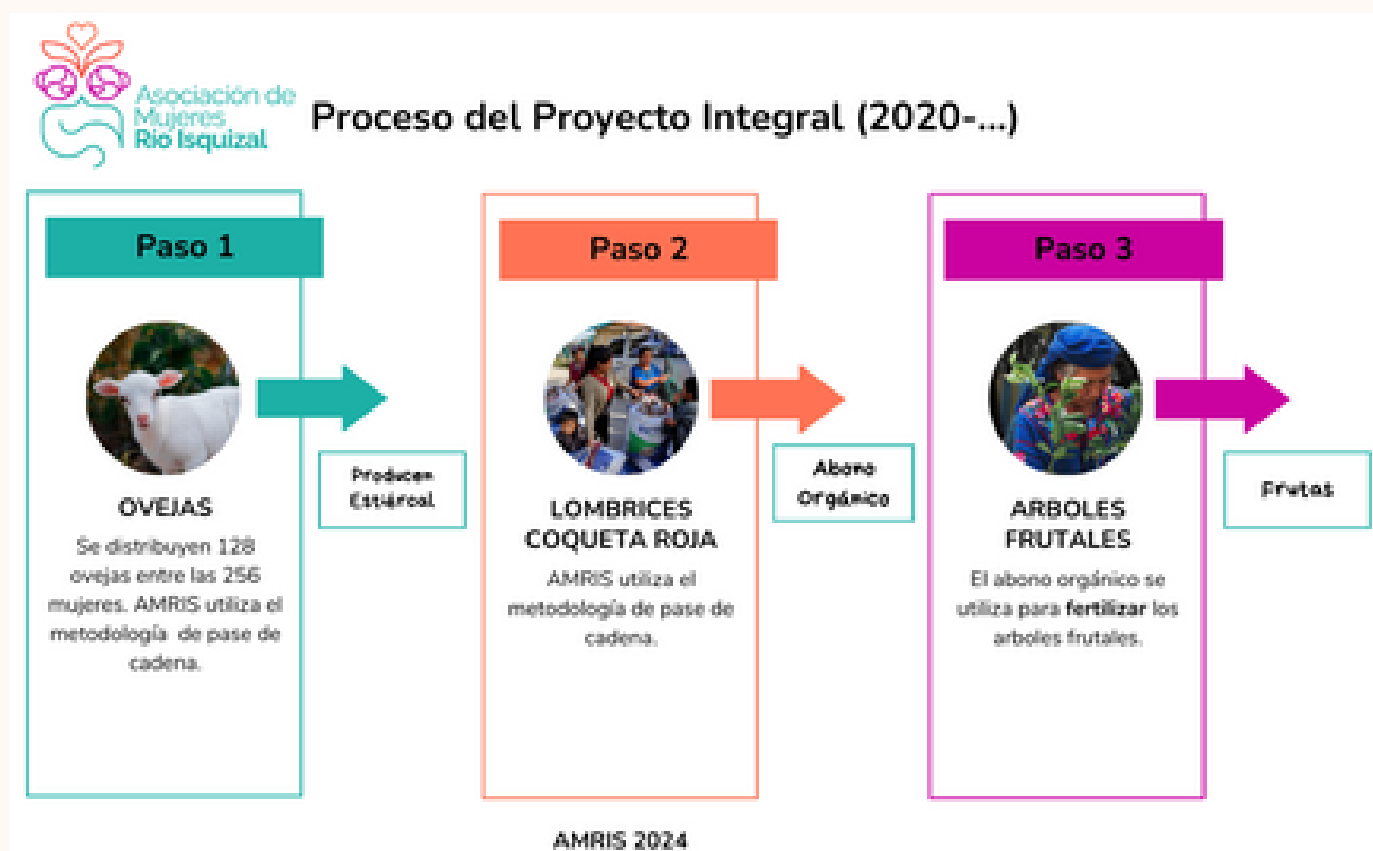
Inter-American Foundation (IAF) activities include:

1. The production of small livestock (sheep), fruit trees and worm composting to produce organic fertiliser
2. Strengthening and expanding a sub-grant fund to support productive activities;
3. The preparation of young women for leadership positions in local associations and in their respective communities.

Around 256 women in 16 community groups in the municipality of San Sebastián Huehuetenango are benefiting from the project, which will also indirectly benefit an additional 1,280 people.



Here you can find a schematic representation of small livestock production and the project process:



This project provides women with sheep so that they can raise and sell them and thus can benefit economically to meet their needs. AMRIS has already purchased approximately 128 female sheep to distribute to families and 16 male sheep have been shared among all households.

During this process, there are four actions that we help with women with:

1. Training workshops on agricultural promotion
2. Domestic visits and technical assistance
3. Monitoring and evaluation
4. Solidarity and resource sharing according to *Pase de Cadena* methodology

We carry out workshop training for the raising and reproduction of sheep domestically and address topics such as adequate shelter (sheepfold), feeding, deworming, reproduction and financial management. For example, one workshop is about how to make the most of organic fertiliser for the



production of red worm compost and the development of fruit trees. The workshops are held for half a day each month. In order to also receive assistance with training and monitoring, the technician coordinates with other institutions, such as the Ministry of Agriculture.

In addition to this, women meet to have workshops with Odilia and talk about other topics. These include:

- **Domestic violence:** discussions about violence within the family. Women are divided into two groups and have to draw pictures of a happy family versus a family with domestic violence. AMRIS raises awareness of the consequences and impact violence can have on women.
- **Women empowerment:** Providing women with knowledge to access and manage money, time and materials.
- **Entrepreneurship:** women learn how to sell items that allow them to be independent of their husbands, for example selling sausages or sheep.
- **Human rights:** providing tools for the women to be able to take political, social and economic decisions.
- **Leadership:** allowing women to recognise the influence they can have, whether individually or as a group, as a means to lead and work together as a team.

THE WOMEN'S NETWORK IN SANTA BARBARA

More than 200 women meet and form into 7 groups. They integrate together to discuss decisions in the community and the municipality.

VOLUNTEER FUNDS FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH AT AMRIS

Since March 2024, volunteers have been providing funds to women so they can go to the doctor and receive the medicines they need. Two women benefit from the funds every month.



SAFE SPACE

In Guatemala, many women and children are victims of physical and psychological abuse. The most shocking statistics show that violence against women has dramatically increased in recent years. The Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) (The Mutual Support Group) state that between January and May in 2022 there were 376 femicides in Guatemala, an increase from 48% in comparison with the same period a year previously. It's evident that these problems are particularly frequent in the area surrounding Huehuetenango and this must be stopped.

As part of its long-term goal against domestic violence, AMRIS has been striving to provide economic support, helping women to recover and become economically independent. But we believe that financial assistance is not enough. It is with great pride – and many thanks to the joint effort with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) – that we were able to open the **Safe Space** in 2024. This is an area of our office which is strictly open to women only and aims to provide a space where they feel empowered, supported to make decisions about their safety and well-being, and also as a key entry point for specialised services for survivors.

Safe Spaces for Women and Girls (ESMN) aim to provide a space where women and girls feel empowered and supported to make decisions about their safety and well-being. The project develops four important methodologies: a) Establishing exclusive spaces for women and girls; b) the Women Rise methodology on mental health for women and girls; c) Raising awareness among the population through information sessions on gender; and d) Supporting gender-based violence case management services.

Safe Space



We have a psychologist and social worker present in the **Safe Space**. They are available to help any woman or girl who needs support with any problem, whether they are at risk of abuse or simply need someone to talk to and a space in which she feels comfortable in doing so.

THE FUTURE

Future projects

We have big dreams and as long as there are women in need in Huehuetenango, in Guatemala and in the world, our ambitions will not cease. At the moment, we have two main objectives:

- Expand our outreach and involve more people
- Delivery our services in more areas of need

Expanding our outreach

We want to outreach to more women in San Sebastián Huehuetenango and inspire them to create new work groups. We are looking for women leaders in other communities to improve the living conditions of the population of this area. We want to promote the participation of women in local development, to propose, manage and execute projects that will develop and benefit communities.



Deliver more services in areas of need

In the communities, there is a lack of basic services, largely due to the lack of income to pay for these but also as sometimes there can be a lack of supply in the region. In the women's groups, these needs were identified and four new areas of action for AMRIS are as follows:

- Support in access to health
- Support in access to education
- Support in access to a decent housing
- Facilities for victims of gender violence



1. Access to health

Our priority is healthcare, as it is one of the biggest barriers for women. Currently, at least 30 women in the organisation suffer from serious health problems, such as uterine or stomach cancer, brain tumours, etc. Due to the high cost of chemotherapy treatment, many women cannot afford these high costs of treatment.



2. Access to education

According to the Ministry of Education in Guatemala, in the department of Huehuetenango the gross school enrolment rate was 55.92% in 2023 – this is the lowest department rate in all the country. Opportunities to study are scarce because overlapping needs often prevent education to be prioritized. That is why we want to be able to contribute with scholarships in the long term so that girls and adult women who wish to continue their studies can do so.

3. Access to decent housing

Many homes are open-plan, where the bedroom, the bathroom and the kitchen are in the same place. It's known that this layout increases the risk of serious illness, which can include cancer. By building kitchens and bathrooms separate from the main dwelling would be an effective method of preventing diseases.

Other households lack basic infrastructure, such as a bathroom or kitchen, so we look to seek funding to build these facilities to improve living standards.

4. Facilities for victims of gender-based violence

In cases of emergency, women sometimes come to our facilities looking for a place to stay. Although we have rooms to accommodate volunteers, they are sometimes occupied and in any case are not suitable for providing shelter for families for a long time. In the long term, we aim to find a solution to accommodate women in situations of violence and their families.

DETAILS OF THE ORGANISATION

Board of Directors (2024-2025)

The Board of Directors is made up of 18 women, one representative for each women's group. The structure includes Anastacia Velásquez as general coordinator and Mario Rene García as administrator. They meet once a month to plan and coordinate monthly activities. In addition, their assembly is held annually and the Board of Directors changes every two years. The current Board of Directors and AMRIS support committee are made up of the following women:

Maria Ludivina Fabian Garcia	Vidalia Velasquez Gregorio	Ana Gladys Velasquez Sales	Yaquelin Maria Cardona	Fabiana Hernandez Velasquez
Maria Magdalena Fabian Garcia	Maria Florinda Hernandez Matias	Juana Cardona Velasquez	Roselia Matias Hernandez	Marina Elizabeth Hernandez
Maria Martin Pablo	Carmen Sales Pablo	Rosenda Maria Mendez	Consuela Mata Martin	
Magdaly Velasquez Hernandez	Teresa Sales Sales	Yolanda Hernandez Sales	Lázara Gomez	

Supervisory Commission (2015-2024)

The Surveillance Commission is composed of one woman. She is supporting the Board of Directors and is supervising the activities, to ensure that everything runs smoothly. Lucia Velásquez was the first female member of the Surveillance Commission in 2015, followed by Roselía Fabian in 2018 until today.

Grupos actuales formados por AMRIS

AMRIS is a women's association that is currently made up of 20 groups from 5 communities, all belonging to the municipality of San Sebastián H., department of Huehuetenango, with 300 members. The women's groups and beneficiaries are represented on the following page.



General Assembly 2023

Community	Women's Group	Number of direct beneficiaries
Tzabal	Mujeres Hacia un Futuro Mejor	16
Palajachug	Nuevo Renacimiento	24
	Grupo de Mujeres Unidas	20
Quiajola	La Esperanza	10
Piol	Escuela	18
	Nueva Generación	18
	La Laguna 1	12
	La Laguna 2	10
	Aguacatal	12
	Capilla	16
	El Mirador	16
	Relámpago	16
	T'uisaqpon	24

Piol	La Bendición	10
	Las Estrellas	16
	La Semilla	13
	Las Flores	22
	Nuevo Amanecer	14
	Nueva Creación	13
Total		313

Table 1. Group of beneficiaries. Each group is formed and organised through a legal committee through AMRIS.

OUR DONATORS

No.	Donator	Year	Project
1	Derechos en acción	2000	Office equipment
2	Acción solidaria	2000	Grain mixers
3	TINAMIT UE	2003	Strengthening of civil society in Guatemala
4	Acción solidaria	2003	Construction of the House/Office
5	War on Want	2002 - 2004	Study grants for young women
6	MOLINOS A.S.	2006	Food security
7	IGMAN -Acción solidaria-	2007	Training and institutional strengthening
8	Fondo Solidario Global FUND FOR WOMEN	2007	Empowering women
9	IGMAN -Acción solidaria-	2008	Creation of an information and documentation centre for institutional training
10	Intercambio y solidaridad INTERED	2008	Diagnosis and educational proposal for rural indigenous communities of Kakchiquel and Mam languages in 02 municipalities of Guatemala

No.	Donator	Year	Project
11	Comunidad MADRID	2008	Everyone counts
12	INTERED Foundation (Ávila Provincial Council)	2009	Improving the educational level of indigenous Maya youth with limited resources in the municipality of San Sebastián H., Guatemala
13	INTERED Foundation (Ávila Provincial Council)	2010 - 2011	Improving the organisation and education of indigenous women for institutional strengthening
14	GIPUZKOA	2011	Improving the organisation and educational of indigenous women for institutional strengthening
15	INTERED Foundation (Ávila Provincial Council)	2012	Improving the organisation and education of indigenous women for institutional strengthening
16	GLOBAL FUND FOR WOMEN	2013 - 2015	Institutional strengthening
17	GLOBAL FUND FOR WOMEN	2016 - 2017	Institutional strengthening and productivity

No.	Donator	Year	Project
18	ENTREMUNDOS	2021	Artisanal production of vermicompost using solid waste from small livestock
19	INTER-AMERICAN Foundation (IAF)	2020-2025	Facilitating participatory development for Mam women in the Municipality of San Sebastián Huehuetenango, Huehuetenango.
20	USAID/OTI Central America Regional Initiative (CARI) Creative Associates International	2023-2024	Creating a Women's Network in Santa Bárbara Huehuetenango
21	International Rescue Committee (IRC)	2024-2025	Comprehensive prevention to help people effected by forced displacement to reestablish and rebuild their lives
22	Vibrant Village Foundation	2025	Institutional development through the renovation of spaces and empowerment of women's groups through productive agricultural projects and seed funds.

Table 2. Donators (2000-2025)

SUPPORT OUR PROJECT

[Donate Here](#)

