



Adult Education: Coffee Cultivation Classes

In addition to corn and beans, coffee is one of the most important agricultural crops grown by the AMIDI farmers. Corn and beans are kept for home consumption, but a percentage of each coffee crop is sold. Over a year ago an expert from the National Coffee Federation, Anacafe, gave AMIDI members a class on best practices for coffee cultivation and harvesting. It was a hands-on course to teach them how to care for coffee throughout the year: detecting diseases, pruning, creating shade, caring for the mountain slope to prevent erosion, when to harvest for the best crop, which varieties to plant.

The class was so popular and the results so encouraging that a year later the expert is returning once a month to give lessons on these topics. He also teaches how to grow seedlings and therefore, in time, to increase production.

All 54 AMIDI members attend these classes; attendance is mandatory. The leaders of AMIDI have, by design, created an association that requires active participation from each of its members. If an AMIDI member cannot attend one of the coffee sessions, it is her responsibility to send another family member who is engaged in tending the family's coffee trees (including male and female relatives). It is advantageous for the men to attend class as they help their wives and mothers care for the coffee trees. There is a division of labor between men and women when it comes to agriculture. For example, the men care for the soil. Should the men have any questions about their role in growing coffee, attending a class gives them the chance to learn directly from the expert.



The seedling project has been so successful that they have increased the number they will raise. So far each woman has received 25. In May of this year AMIDI was honored with the visit of a high ranking official from Anacafe, the sponsors of the coffee classes. To commemorate the occasion they planted-out some of the young trees.

Since coffee is such an important national crop, Guatemalans celebrate Coffee Producers Day on May 7th. A large event was held in the old capitol, Antigua, the center of a famous coffee growing region. Because they are recognized as coffee producers, six AMIDI members were invited to attend. It was an honor.

Students are served traditional soup during class break. The fuel efficient stove is one donated by our project.

Maltiox, pronounced mal-ti-osh, is a Kakchiquel Mayan word that means "thank you". Kakchiquel Mayan is the language spoken by our scholarship students, and the sentiment is theirs.

Learning to Have a Voice, and Using It

Founded in April 2000, AMIDI began as a group of nine Mayan women determined to improve their standard of living, address the lack of women's rights, and advance the health and nutrition of their community. This was a big agenda for a small group of indigenous women from a tiny village in Guatemala.

Never discouraged by their lack of formal education (few completed elementary school), they have pursued and embraced every opportunity to learn about farming, justice, health, and nutrition. Their outlook and influence has impacted others – from Ministers in the national government to Mayan groups across the country.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

AMIDI learned about a comprehensive course on the rights of women. Convened three consecutive days each month for three months, the workshop was located in the capitol, Guatemala City – as much as a four-hour bus ride from the village. Although there was no tuition cost, transportation, food, and lodging expenses were prohibitive.

Motivated by the desire to learn and involve younger women (some who have received our scholarships), the AMIDI leadership forged forward. They convinced the workshop administrators to schedule sessions in a town near Pachay las Lomas, their home village. Ten AMIDI women attended and completed the course. Our scholarship fund covered bus fare and lunches during class days.

SCHOOL LUNCHES

Energized by the course on women's rights, AMIDI decided to pursue a school lunch program for local schools. They identified a potential sponsor and survived the bureaucratic application process. Through their unrelenting efforts, the students in two local schools now enjoy lunches provided by SHARE, an organization run by the United Nations. Previously these schools did not have lunch programs, and some children went without food during the school day.

MIDWIFERY

Late this spring, AMIDI leader Ana Maria Chalí Calán was honored with an invitation to meet with the Minister of Health in Guatemala City. An experienced midwife, she was representing the concerns of midwives throughout the country. In her humble yet commanding manner, she presented the issue of discrimination, not racial but professional discrimination.

When a midwife sees that a home delivery is beyond her capabilities, she helps arrange for the mother's transportation to a nearby, affordable clinic or hospital. And she accompanies her. The personnel at the medical facility routinely dismiss the midwife, disconnecting the close, supportive relationship developed during the mother's pregnancy. In her conversation with the Minister of Health, Ana Maria clearly stated that the midwife wants to be part of the team that tends the birth, sharing pertinent information to ensure the best outcome and follow-up.

Time will tell if Ana Maria's plea produces results. She spoke her mind with confidence, serving as a role model for all the villagers.



Master weaver Francisca Javiera Bonon took the class on women's rights.

The Conquest



The Spanish conquest of Guatemala began in 1523 when Hernando Cortes sent Pedro de Alvarado with 120 horsemen, 300 foot soldiers, and several hundred native Mexican allies into the highlands of Guatemala. Alvarado took advantage of hostilities between Guatemalan tribes and persuaded the Kakchiquel nation, the nation to which the AMIDI members belong, to join forces with him against the other Mayan groups. It didn't take long for the Kakchiqueles to recognize the cruelty of the conquistadores who enslaved the Mayans and forced them to mine gold and precious stones. The Kakchiqueles withdrew their allegiance to the Spaniards, and the long history of subjugation unfolded.

To this day names like Alvarado and Cortes are kept alive, in part because children learn about their history in school and in part because the conquest is memorialized in dance performances, parades, and ceremonies. Many of the indigenous villages and towns have their own enactment of the conquest. The performance can be more or less elaborate depending on the economic resources of the community.

In some places the costumes cost thousands of dollars. In Pachay las Lomas, a poor village, the garments are humble. Whether elaborate or simple, all depict the Spaniards with blue eyes, blonde hair, fair complexions, and refined clothing. The costume always includes a mask, often hand carved of native hardwood pine. The total effect is much like the look of the 12- inch-tall dolls in the photograph above. These dolls were gifts presented to a group of scholarship donors at an annual celebration in Pachay las Lomas. As part of the ceremony, young students performed their version of the dance of the conquerors.



(Above Left) Dolls from Pachay las Lomas that represent the conquistadores.

(Above) Conquistadores costumes worn by AMIDI scholarship recipients.

Another Invader

Until recently the coffee plants in Guatemala's highlands seemed immune to coffee rust, a fungus that struck farms in low-lying areas. The highlands' cool temperatures deterred the disease. The weather has changed, and a warming trend has encouraged the spread of coffee rust throughout Central America. The rust has created a national emergency in Guatemala with as much as 70 percent of the crop affected. To date there is no cure. Because coffee is their cash crop, AMIDI members are deeply involved in learning practices to curtail the disease.

The Vital Role of Music

Although none of the music prior to the Spanish conquest has survived, there is substantial evidence supporting the vital role music played in the lives of the early Mayans. Ancient wall paintings depict court orchestras divided into two sections – percussion and wind. In the 16th century the Spanish began to document information about the local, indigenous music.

During the times of the ancient Mayans, theatrical events, public rituals, ceremonies, and, at times, warfare were accompanied by music. Trumpets, some with resonance chambers, were used to announce the arrival of dignitaries. The music conductor was an esteemed member of the community.

The earliest records of Mayan music include flutes that were made of wood, bone, clay, or reed. To this day, the wooden flute is one of the most popular instruments among the Mayans, and it is often the dominant sound in a musical performance.

In this photograph the men are performing on traditional handmade instruments at a ceremony honoring scholarship donors. According to archeological evidence, the drum in the photograph is similar to those used by the classical Mayans who lived over 1,000 years ago.

All those who attended this ceremony agree that the music (and dancing) enhanced the festival – a sentiment that has held true over the centuries.



A Word of Thanks from the AMIDI Members

In a recent telephone conversation the leader of AMIDI made the following comment:

“Between Slow Food and AMIDI we have done so much. When others ask how we accomplished all of this, I say that Slow Food never stopped extending their hands to us.”

To Make a Donation

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to the AMIDI scholarship fund, please make your check payable to Global Community Works, a local 501(c)3 non-profit that manages the funds at no cost. Please send the check to:

Slow Food Sonoma County North
P.O. Box 1494
Healdsburg, CA 95448

Thank you!

Also visit www.amidiguatemala.org.