

MALTIOX

News for Donors to the Association of Indigenous Women for Holistic Development (AMIDI)

Number 8

Winter 2012

MAYRA, HER DIPLOMA, AND HER DREAMS

Several years ago a Sonoma County couple generously offered a full university scholarship to a deserving student. Selecting Mayra Gricelda Jacobo Chali de Atz as the recipient was the easy part as her leadership skills and dedication to her Mayan community were already very apparent. In 2011 she received her diploma for the completion of a three-year degree in social work from one of Guatemala's most respected universities, Rafael Landivar. Mayra is a trail blazer. Her success has inspired other students to strengthen their dedication to education and their community. She continues to study social work with the goal of earning a five-year degree, one similar to a masters degree in the United States.

Below is the translation of a message she recently sent. It is filled with her far-reaching dreams.

Hello,

I hope that you are all well. I send my best wishes that you are enjoying successes. In this occasion I write to you in order to greet you and to let you know that we are constantly involved in the struggle to improve our community. For myself, I have dreams for future projects for my community. Well, I have quite a few projects in mind . . .

1. Build a hospital putting an emphasis on natural medicine in combination with chemical medicine and with equipment for midwives to attend to births in an adequate manner.
2. Develop a program to help youth understand and avoid problems with vices.
3. Design and implement a training program for youth and adolescents who have not attended school.
4. Create employment opportunities within our community in such areas as weaving, carpentry, and others.
5. Construct a building to safeguard and exhibit sacred Mayan artifacts in order to strengthen our culture. [Pachay los Lomas is the site of an ancient Mayan obsidian mine where priceless artifacts are found from time to time.]

I do have many dreams.



With affection and gratitude, Mayra

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.



CLARITY OF VISION

Over time several donors have sent a gift to AMIDI members that is greatly appreciated—reading glasses. When we presented the glasses to the women last December, the room filled with merriment. Much like teenaged girls trying on prom dresses, they laughed with one another as they tested the glasses for fit and strength of the prescription. Behind their jovial spirit was gratitude. Clarity of vision is a great gift; for master weavers who have developed their skills over a lifetime, good eyesight means they can continue their delicate and much loved work of weaving

ADULT EDUCATION

When our relationship with AMIDI began ten years ago, the scholarship program supported education for the children of its members. At their suggestion, we have expanded the program to include adult workshops on farming topics such as beekeeping, organic coffee growing, and medicinal herbs. Some of the AMIDI members have had no schooling and had never before attended a class of any kind. The hands-on nature of these adult courses makes them accessible and relevant for all.



As proof of their enthusiasm, all 50 members of AMIDI attended the class in the photo. Here the women are learning to make compost tea from locally available resources. The tea contains aged rabbit, goat and cow manure, ash, and composted plant material such as fallen leaves from native trees. After aging, the tea will be used as a foliar application.

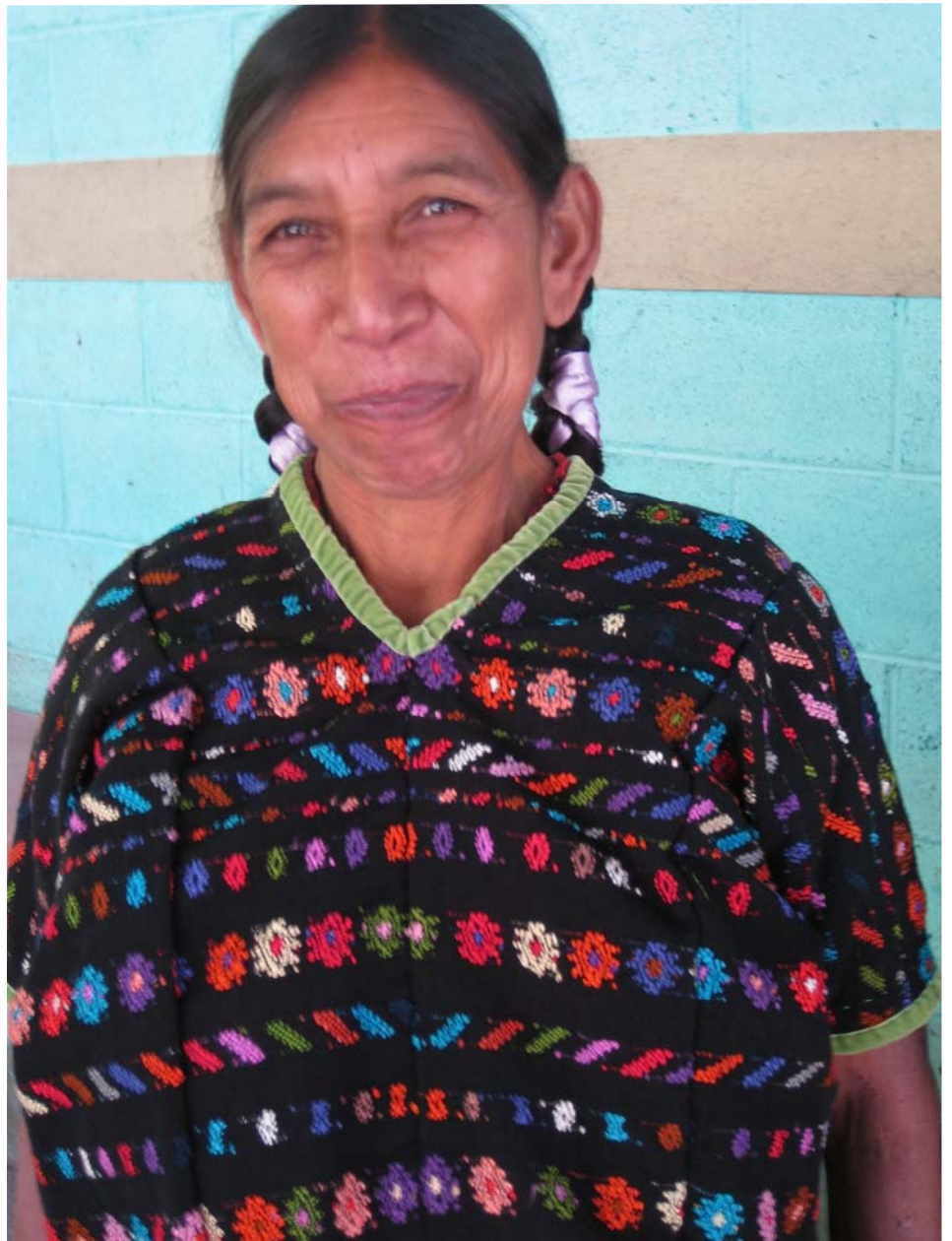
SILK RETURNS TO THE LOOM

Our donations to AMIDI take different forms. A year ago two donors presented the AMIDI board of directors with skeins of beautiful silk from travels in Thailand and from the collection of an artist who taught Textile Design at the University of California, Berkeley. The donors expressed their wish that the silk be used for personal garments, to restore the Mayan tradition of weaving silk into their *huipils*.

The AMIDI board members quietly huddled around the skeins and spools and carefully touched the silk. A week later, they met and decided by consensus that each of the seven board members would weave a *huipil* for herself, using some of the donated silk. To honor Mayan tradition and connect to the spirit of her grandmother, Nemicia Atz, board member and master weaver, used her allotment to create a *huipil* inspired by historic design. (Nemicia and her *huipil* are pictured at right.)

Mayans wove with wild, native silk before the Spanish conquest. When Spain governed Guatemala and Mexico, it protected its lucrative trade with China (silver from South America for silk from Asia) by prohibiting the indigenous development of a silk industry. The only silk available was imported and costly. Nevertheless, Mayans have always valued its special qualities and, when it was available, even in small amounts, the weavers would incorporate silk accents into their work.

Silk appears in many Guatemalan textiles from the 1940s, and these pieces are highly valued by collectors. AMIDI weavers remember their grandmother's garments adorned with silk detail, but until last year none of today's weavers had worked with silk yarn.



ACCOUNTING UPDATE

Fundraising last fall was successful due to the generosity of the donors and despite the economic downturn. In December, \$14,071 was presented to the AMIDI board of directors for both scholarships and stoves. Thank you donors!

The sales of AMIDI weavings have also been successful. The latest shipment of table linens included new designs and color combinations that were well received. Besides the annual holiday weaving sale in Healdsburg, we were invited to sell at the Golden Glass event sponsored annually by Slow Food San Francisco. The combined proceeds came to \$3,469 for sales and special orders. The grateful weavers send *mil gracias* to those who bought the weavings.

CHANGE

Despite the success of our various programs with AMIDI, the women still face the challenges of poverty. Change comes slowly. It will take a while before there is a solid generation of educated youth with earning power in the village. The new coffee trees will take time to mature. The marketing of their heirloom-quality weavings takes time to develop. Your support through this process of change is appreciated.



THE MAYAN BANK ACCOUNT

AMIDI has a bank account that holds the funds for our scholarship program but individual members do not rely on banks. Should they be fortunate enough to have money to save, they opt to buy and raise piglets, chicks, and/or calves. When the need for cash arises, they sell an animal.

AMIDI leader Ana Maria Chali Calan lost her pigs to a mudslide in 2010. She was able to buy 2 replacement piglets with disaster funds we raised for the village at the time. These piglets have matured and the healthy female in the photo has given birth, increasing Ana Maria's "bank account."

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!

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
THIS PROJECT
PLEASE VISIT OUR
WEB SITE AT
www.amidiguatemala.org.