



The Impressive Achievements of AMIDI

In the Guatemalan Highlands, most Mayan women have limited access to education and little experience outside their villages. They live in a male-dominated culture where they clean house, care for children, wash, cook, and work alongside their husbands in the corn fields. And they weave, as time allows.

In contrast, AMIDI members are expanding their expectations and acquiring skills. Through opportunities and success, the women have realized that their illiteracy is not a roadblock to learning. Below is a list of this year's classes.

- All AMIDI members grow coffee. Some have as few as 50 trees; others have as many as 300. Anacafe, the Guatemalan National Coffee Association, gave a course to 40 of the AMIDI members on improving the health of their coffee trees to ward off a devastating and encroaching disease called rust. Using native plants gathered near their village, they learned to make a compost tea for foliar application.
- Two of the AMIDI members, who have demonstrated skill with bees, will attend a two-day course on beekeeping in the northwestern part of Guatemala. This means travel and exposure to a wider group of people interested in bees. The women were invited by their local cooperative because of their aptitude and accomplishments.



- Once a month all of the AMIDI members attend a class on climate change. They learn about water conservation, reforestation, erosion, and how to take care of Mother Nature on their mountainside in these changing times.

- Eleven women took a training course in natural disaster preparedness and received national certification to take charge in their area should a disaster occur again. The unexpected, devastating mudslides of 2010 and the constant seismic activity motivated the women to train and form a working committee.

The AMIDI leadership headed by Ana Maria Chali, front row on the left.

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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.

Achievements of AMIDI continued

- Five women are attending an ongoing class to assess environmental risks (e.g. erosion) in their mountainous region. They will work hand-in-hand with the natural disaster preparedness committee to develop a safe evacuation plan. A reforestation plan will also be part of their charge.
- The Ministry of Agriculture is giving monthly classes in sewing to all of the AMIDI members. The focus is on needle work. They are also learning to use two recently-donated sewing machines.

As an extension of the class in traditional Mayan medicinal plants funded by donations, all AMIDI members are required to grow at least 10 medicinal plants in their home gardens. The plants' curative properties cover a wide range from anti inflammation to milk production in nursing mothers. The women make teas and tinctures for their own use, and are happy to have plants that connect them to their Mayan ancestors.

AMIDI has also developed a farmer to farmer program. Five to ten AMIDI members visit other villages to exchange ideas and agricultural tips. In this way they demonstrate roles that women can hold in a culture that is dominated by men.

This is an impressive list of activities. These women certainly deserve recognition and continued support.

Gifts for AMIDI

Over the years many people have been drawn to AMIDI's story of courage in the face of poverty. They have responded by giving monetary donations. As a result, each year 36 students from kindergarten to college receive scholarships. In addition the AMIDI members, now numbering 55, use the funds to attend adult education classes.

Gifts are also donated to AMIDI. Silk weaving thread, fruit trees, sewing machines, eye glasses, cooking utensils, wood-burning stoves, laptop computers, a community kitchen remodel, heirloom seeds and so much more have made their way to Pachay las Lomas, the home of AMIDI.

This year the AMIDI project received a unique gift – an impressive collection of 55 old Mayan weavings comprised mainly of *huipiles*, the traditional blouses worn by Mayan women to this day. The weavings were purchased in the 1970s by a man who was an anthropology professor at UCLA. Some pieces come from Palin, a village where the women no longer weave. Others were woven for ceremonial use. One piece contains a green dye that dates it to the 1950s. The collection will be sold, and all proceeds will be used to benefit AMIDI.

Some of the donated weavings.



The Virgin of Guadalupe

December 12th is especially important in Pachay las Lomas: it is the day to honor and celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe, a Roman Catholic icon of the Virgin Mary. The AMIDI families pray to her daily and always keep her visually present; a symbol of the Virgin is woven into their *huipiles* (traditional blouses).

Surrounded by light, the Virgin first appeared on December 9, 1531 before Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, an Aztec convert to Christianity, near the present location of Mexico City. She spoke to him in his native language, Nahuatl, and told him that there should be a shrine built in her honor on the hill where they stood.

Juan Diego rushed to tell the Spanish archbishop, but the cleric said that The Lady needed to prove her identity in the form of a miracle before he would take any action. The Virgin reappeared on the same hill and told Juan Diego to gather an armful of red Castilian roses even though they are not native to Mexico and would not bloom in cold December temperatures.

Nevertheless, the roses bloomed by the dozens. The Virgin helped him arrange them inside his traditional peasant cloak. On December 12, in the presence of the Archbishop, Juan Diego opened the garment. The rose petals fell to the floor revealing the image of the Virgin imprinted on the inside of the cloak.

As word of the miracle spread, the indigenous people tended to embrace the Virgin since she had appeared before one of their own, spoken their language, and appeared in clothing redolent with images and color sacred to the Aztecs. In 1746 she became the patroness of all of New Spain, an area that included Guatemala.



The Virgin surrounded by roses and light.



The symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe depicted in weaving.

From Soup to San Francisco

While brainstorming new sales opportunities for AMIDI weavings, the Slow Food AMIDI committee chose a new direction that led to the retail world. The challenge was to find a buyer who would appreciate the exquisite, practical, and durable qualities of the weavings as well as the back story: Mayan women determined to preserve their backstrap weaving tradition while improving their economic lot.

The ideal placement came from the owners of March, a store in San Francisco. The store sells lovely items for the kitchen, hearth, and home; Martha Stewart recently gave it her thumbs up. March, on Sacramento Street, placed a much appreciated, large order for oversized 25" x 25" napkins.

The AMIDI board of directors selected weavers for the March order based upon the quality of their weaving and active participation in AMIDI. Elvia Aracely Jacobo, in the photo on the left, was chosen because she is a master weaver and the leader of a successful pilot livestock project in Pachay las Lomas. During AMIDI celebrations, she prepares food. In the photograph she is serving a traditional Mayan soup at a celebration honoring donors and entities such as Slow Food and March that support AMIDI's vision.



Elvia Aracely Jacobo is on the right.

Accounting

Thank you to all of the generous donors from around the country. Since October 2012, the beginning of our last fundraising drive, you have contributed \$12,777.00 for scholarships. This October you will have another chance to give.

Newsletter

The Maltiox newsletter is written and produced by Marilee Wingert, Barbara Bowman, Bill Bowman, and Anya Glenn. No donations to AMIDI are used to fund this newsletter.

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 and Facebook under AMIDI: Mayan Women Who Farm and Weave.