



# Matiox

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

## An International Coffee Buyer Visits AMIDI

In January a specialty buyer from Ritual Coffee Roasters in San Francisco visited the AMIDI members in Pachay las Lomas. Aaron Van Der Groen had heard about their coffee project, was impressed by their dedication and hard work, and volunteered to share his expertise with them. He spent two nights in the village, graciously hosted by two different families who treated him to delicious, traditional food. He spent the days with the women, inspecting their trees, looking at their harvesting/drying practices, and discussing their marketing strategy.

Aaron returned to San Francisco with a coffee bean sample from one of the members. Using strict professional standards he roasted and graded the coffee, and it showed potential for international commerce as a mountain-grown specialty. Encouraged by the test results, he prepared a detailed, step-by-step guide to improve the quality and marketing of their coffee. Aaron said, “I really do want to help them get to the point where they’re past farming for subsistence, working toward sustainability, and even

toward profit to reinvest in the community. It will be a lot of work, but I do think if any group of people can do it, Pachay, with the leadership of AMIDI can do it.”

This year they continue to take monthly classes from the national coffee institute, *Anacafe*. Each hands-on class is geared to the coffee trees’ particular growth stage during that specific month.

*An AMIDI member harvests her organically grown coffee.*



Matiox, pronounced ma-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.

## Home Vegetable Gardens

In 2016 20 AMIDI members took a series of classes called *El Buen Vivir*, focused on developing organic home vegetable gardens, including harvesting and saving seeds. In the photograph of their freshly picked produce, there is a lighted candle signifying the spirituality inherent in Mayan farming.

A cornerstone of AMIDI's philosophy is the notion that participants in their various projects serve as *multiplicadores* or multipliers. They pledge to serve as role models to inspire and teach others what they have learned. Because there is a strong agricultural tradition of growing corn, beans, and coffee in Pachay las Lomas, the women are hopeful that home vegetable gardens will become a popular, natural extension of their subsistence farming. Already 10 additional AMIDI members will join the project during the next rainy season.

This year the AMIDI members are taking follow-up classes offered by a nutritionist at the AMIDI Community Center. They are learning about the nutritional value of each plant they grow and how best to prepare produce to maximize the health benefits.

*(Above) AMIDI members display some of the harvest from their home gardens.*

*(Below) A local NGO, ASECA- an association of community health services for the Mayans- donated waterproof seed saving containers and wooden stands to each of the 20 AMIDI participants.*



## Carmelina Atz Castro, a Scholarship Recipient

Carmelina Atz Castro, a 13-year-old eighth grader, receives our scholarship support. She lives with her parents, grandmother, and eight siblings about 40 minutes by foot from the AMIDI Community Center. The homes of many AMIDI members are spread out over the mountainside, adjacent to their agricultural fields.

At home Carmelina helps care for the chickens, pigs, and doves along with her other farming chores. Carmelina's mother is on the AMIDI board of directors and is actively involved in both the coffee and home vegetable garden projects. The family also grows traditional crops: beans and corn.

In step with the goals of AMIDI, Carmelina is being raised to honor her heritage, one that she embraces. She speaks her native language, *Kakchiquel*, with her grandmother and has become an accomplished weaver with the skill to weave a *huipil* like the blouse she is wearing in the photograph. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer girls in Guatemala are learning this time honored art.

At school, a 10 minute walk from her home, she especially enjoys studying natural science, reading about history, and playing soccer. She dreams of going to high school and studying bookkeeping. There are 20 students in her class and each morning they divide into two groups. One sweeps the school yard and the other, her group, cleans the classroom. An exception to the rule in Guatemala, the students are not required to wear uniforms and are allowed to wear Mayan traditional dress.

When asked what she thinks is important in life, she responds, "It's important to help others." She extends the conversation to include the donors by conjecturing that they must feel good to be helping the AMIDI students. With a family of her size and economic standing, she would not be in school without her scholarship. She sends her gratitude.



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## Previous Scholarship Recipients

Our scholarship program supported Norma Adlaida Chalan Chali through the middle grades and high school. She is now married, the mother of two children, and the secretary of the AMIDI board of directors. A strong leader, she has the full support of her husband in maintaining her role in AMIDI, a unique relationship in a male-dominated culture. Norma is also an accomplished backstrap weaver, a traditional art she perfected as a teenager.

In his spare time teacher Dimas Atz Mejia, a former scholarship recipient who majored in education, is now giving marimba music lessons in the local market town. He successfully petitioned the mayor to use a room free of charge in one of the municipal buildings and now has 26 students that he has organized into six groups. Each group has mastered 15 marimba pieces. The marimba is a traditional instrument, much like a xylophone, with an uplifting sound often featured at Mayan celebrations. Dimas' last name, Atz, means the spirit of music in his native language, *Kakchiquel*.

# The Mayan Way of Building with Adobe

Adobe is one of the world's oldest, continuously used building materials. To this day about half of the AMIDI members, the poorest and those who live the longest distance from a road, live in homes they build from adobe.

The best time to make bricks is January through March because the soil is still moist from the rainy season and there is no threat of rain to interrupt the drying process. Clay soil, the type needed to make adobe bricks, is abundant in the Pachay las Lomas area. The brick's organic ingredient, air-dried pine needles collected from the ground under *macho* pine trees, is also readily available. This particular pine has needles that are both long and strong.

The brick making process begins with a large mound of earth that is watered, then covered with pine needles. It rests for three days. On the fourth day the ingredients are blended by foot. When the mixture reaches a sticky consistency, the brick makers press it into 8" by 16" wooden frames and leave them to dry in the sun for three or four days. Once dry enough, the workers use machetes to trim the top and bottom of each brick, creating flat surfaces that stack easily to create walls that reach a height of eight feet. Each brick weighs about 20 pounds.



*A house made from natural adobe.*

## Learn More About AMIDI

Should you prefer to receive an electronic version of Matiox, please sign up at [www.amidiguatemala.org](http://www.amidiguatemala.org).

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

The Matiox 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 Slow Food Sonoma County, a 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

Or visit [www.amidiguatemala.org](http://www.amidiguatemala.org) to donate via Paypal.