



Newsletter

SPRING, 2025



Agros

Land . Hope . Life



 Transforming Communities Through Women-led Businesses

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"She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come."
Proverbs 31:25



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Dear Agros Friends,

As we celebrated International Women's Day on March 8th, we were reminded of the strength and resilience of women entrepreneurs who are driving change within their communities. A cornerstone of our work is the Women Entrepreneurship Program (WEP), which, along with the Weavers of Hope project, plays a vital role in transforming communities by empowering women entrepreneurs. Investing in women-led businesses is crucial for eradicating poverty, as it taps into new sources of wealth and employment generation, positioning entrepreneurship as a lever for economic and social transformation.

In Guatemala, for instance, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2023-2024 reports one of the highest rates of female entrepreneurship globally, with 28.8% of women engaging in recent business ventures. However, this promising statistic does not fully reflect the challenges faced in rural areas, where obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure and limited access to financing are more pronounced.

Only 14% of Guatemalan women have access to land ownership, limiting their ability to expand agricultural enterprises.

(Source: UN Women, GEM)

In Guatemala, rural women constitute 23.6% of the population, and indigenous rural women represent 13.5% of the total population.

(Guatemala Population and Housing Census 2018)

It is precisely in these areas that Agros' WEP becomes essential, providing the necessary support and resources to help women overcome these barriers and thrive. As we journey through another year of growth and transformation, we are excited to share the latest developments of this program and the strategic partnerships we are building to deepen its impact. You will also read about our plans to move forward with the launch of the Agros Resourcefulness Project in 2025.

Our Spring Newsletter proudly features the incredible story of the Women Entrepreneurs of La Pista in Guatemala. We are thrilled to continue supporting these inspiring journeys and invite you to learn more about our initiatives and the incredible individuals who are making a difference.

Warm regards,

The Agros Team





KRISTI WITH HER HUSBAND AND DAUGHTERS AT TIERRAS DE VIDA GALA.

A message from Kristi Drake,

CHAIR OF THE BOARD, AGROS
INTERNATIONAL

Dear Agros families, donors, and friends,

My journey as an entrepreneur was a surprise to me at first. Growing up on a dairy farm, I fell in love with food and its integral role in our daily lives. With a degree in Food Science and Nutrition, I began my career managing the classic French bakery that I now own.

In those early days, I not only learned classic French baking techniques and the language itself, but I also embraced the healthy and wonderful attitudes about food from the French perspective—eating with the seasons and savoring foods that taste good, enjoyed in the company of others.

This philosophy is what we promote at the bakery, striving to bring that joy to our customers. It has helped create a beloved local brand that everyone at Le Panier can be proud of and I'm thrilled that both of my daughters have joined the business, bringing their own passion and creativity to our work.

Additionally, I am an advocate for organizations in the Seattle area that promote nutrition education and the importance of healthy ingredients.

Becoming a Board member of Agros International was a natural extension of my commitment to community empowerment. I have had the privilege of traveling to Nicaragua and Guatemala, where I have witnessed firsthand the incredible work being done to build sustainable communities for and by these resilient families. As the Chair of the Board, I am deeply committed to the transformative power of entrepreneurship and I am particularly passionate about helping women overcome barriers to success.

Through our programs, we've supported hundreds of women in starting and growing their own businesses, and it's incredibly inspiring to witness their journeys. Knowing that I am part of a movement fostering a sweeter, more equitable world for all is truly fulfilling.

I invite you to read the inspiring story of Margarita, Lucía, and Juana—three Guatemalan women weaving resilience and hope in La Pista. Their journey exemplifies the strength and determination that Agros aims to support and celebrate.

Warm regards,

Kristi Drake

AGROS CHAIR | OWNER, LE PANIER BAKERY



A beacon of hope

Nestled in the upper highlands of Guatemala, just a short drive down a dirt road outside Nebaj, Quiché, lies the vibrant community of Ak' Txumbal, also known as La Pista. This small village is bordered by a 1,200-meter gravel and dirt airstrip, a stark reminder of the region's turbulent past during the armed conflict of the 1980s and 90s. Today, La Pista is a testament to resilience and hope, embodied by women like Margarita Ramírez de León de López.

Margarita, now 61, grew up in La Pista, watching her mother weave güipiles—the traditional blouses worn by indigenous women. Sitting by her mother's side, Margarita learned each step of the intricate art, a skill that would later become her lifeline.

Life took a harrowing turn when violence swept through her village.

As a young mother, Margarita fled into the forest with her firstborn, Juan, in her arms, escaping the chaos and bullets that threatened their lives. For years, they lived in hiding on the slopes of Q'osonib' Mountain, enduring unimaginable hardships.

"We had no food or clothes," Margarita recalls. "We used plastic bags on our feet instead of shoes. I would carry my son to the River Xajal to collect water, covering his mouth with my hand to silence his cries and avoid detection by soldiers."

After the conflict, Margarita returned to the ravaged remains of La Pista. Her mother, who had fallen ill and died on the mountain, left behind a legacy that

Margarita was determined to honor. She initially worked picking coffee, saving enough to buy a small plot of land.

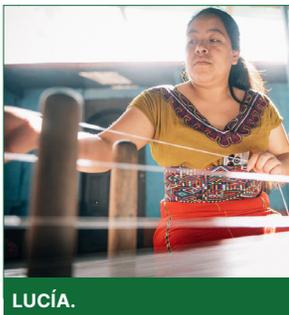
There, she began weaving güipiles and rebozos, carrying on her mother's craft.



TWO YEARS AGO, MARGARITA JOINED THE AGROS PROGRAM, receiving financial support and training that transformed her business. She learned to manage credit for the first time, saved investment capital, and expanded her customer base. Her monthly income, once \$195, has grown in both savings and number of clients, and she now supports her family, including her husband Vicente and two granddaughters, ages 9 and 7.

Margarita is also a collaborative member of her church group, contributing to the community's social and cultural revival. Her journey from the depths of adversity to a beacon of hope exemplifies the resilience and perseverance of La Pista's women.

Margarita's daughter, Juana, learned to weave at her mother's side, just as Margarita had with her own mother. Together with her sister Lucia, Juana creates güipiles and rebozos that sell for thousands of Quetzales, preserving the cultural identity nearly lost to the conflict. *"The güipil, the rebozo, and the cinta are part of our traditional dress,"* Juana explains. *"By wearing them, we help retain our identity as a people."*



LUCÍA.

Today, Margarita and her daughters are weaving a vibrant tapestry of hope and faith, transforming their tragic past into a future filled with promise for themselves and their community. Through their artistry and determination, they are central to La Pista's reemerging identity, embodying the spirit of resilience that defines their people.

These women are part of the La Pista Group, a collective of 12 entrepreneurs who joined Agros programs two years ago and have distinguished themselves as leaders in their field. Their success has been remarkable compared to the standard of the more than 1,000 weaver entrepreneurs in the area. They have improved the quality of their products, invested in modernizing their production processes, and enhanced their business and financial skills. Their achievements are a testament to what can be accomplished with determination, support, and a shared vision for a better future.

A special thanks to John Harrison, an Agros friend, for capturing the beautiful pictures and sharing the story of Margarita, Lucia, and Juana with us. His work helps bring their inspiring journey to life, allowing us to connect more deeply with their incredible resilience and hope.



JUANA.

- **Güipil:** a handwoven, embroidered blouse. It reflects the community and personal identity through its colors, patterns, and symbols.
- **Rebozo:** A long, rectangular shawl used for warmth, carrying goods (or even babies), or as a fashion accessory.
- **Cinta:** A woven or embroidered ribbon worn around the head, often wrapped in braids or styled in elaborate headdresses. Cintas can be symbolic, denoting marital status, community, or personal style.





Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

Our Women Entrepreneurship Program (WEP) aims to empower women by providing essential credit services and technical assistance, enabling them to achieve financial independence.

The WEP provides financial resources, mentorship, technical assistance and training opportunities to women-led startups and businesses, with the goal of diversifying household income, promote business entrepreneurship and foster local opportunities for economic growth.

One of the key differentiators of the WEP is its focus on addressing the specific challenges faced by women in business. It recognizes the systemic barriers that hinder women's access to capital and markets and seeks to actively dismantle these barriers through targeted investments and support programs.

By integrating women into a formal market strategy, the need for a middleman is eliminated, allowing women to retain more of their earnings and enhance their economic independence.

Furthermore, the WEP provides support to improve the quality of life for these women by helping them upgrade their home workspaces. Many women initially work in inadequate conditions—poor lighting, lack of ventilation, cluttered spaces, and frequent interruptions due to shared areas. With WEP support, they can create more conducive work environments, which not only boosts productivity but also contributes to their overall well-being.

In 2024, the initiative successfully supported over 912 women in starting savings, managing credit, and launching their own market-oriented production ventures.



Strategic Initiatives for Financial Education

Agros is proud to engage experts in the field, including REDCAMIF, the Central American and Caribbean Microfinance Network, which was established to advance the microfinance industry in the region. By working with this organization, we are committed to promoting financial literacy, small business planning, and capacity building among our beneficiaries.

By integrating an educational approach into our Rural Entrepreneurism initiatives, we empower small business owners with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate financial systems confidently. This effort not only enhances their ability to manage credit, avoid over indebtedness, promote a culture of savings and equip them with the tools to make informed business decisions, thereby fostering sustainable economic growth and resilience within their families and communities.

■ JOIN US IN EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS!

At Agros, we recognize that providing credit is just the beginning. Our mission extends beyond business support to improving the living conditions of women entrepreneurs, ensuring they have the environment needed to be truly productive. Many women are unable to dedicate full time to their businesses because they are overwhelmed with other responsibilities. We need to make every available minute count, and this is an area of great need!

Help us expand our services to create meaningful impact. By contributing to our initiatives, you can be part of a transformative journey that empowers women to balance their roles and thrive. Together, we can build a future where women have the resources and support to succeed both personally and professionally.



Take action today and make a difference!



Building Resilience and Resourcefulness

Our families are not only building wealth through hard work, training, and investment, but they are also embracing new opportunities for spiritual and psychological growth. We believe in fostering positive, forward-thinking mindsets that propel individuals toward prosperity. In line with this vision, Agros is working on the basis of launching its Resourcefulness Project. This groundbreaking initiative deepens our mission by nurturing resilience and resourcefulness as core outcomes for the families we serve.

We invite you to explore the full article about how the Family Resourcefulness Project will work by scanning the QR code included in this newsletter.





Leading Change in Monitoring & Evaluation

Ana Karina López Durán joined Agros in January 2024, driven by the desire to take on new challenges, share her experience, and contribute to community development. Originally from Nicaragua and with a background in Social Work with an emphasis on applied statistics, she found in Agros a space for growth and learning.

We are excited about her leadership and the impact she will continue to have at Agros!

After a welcoming and dynamic integration process, she now serves as Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Manager, where she leads the adoption of technological tools to enhance decision-making and accountability. Her biggest challenge is ensuring that regional teams incorporate these tools into their daily work.

What motivates her most is the opportunity to innovate and contribute to Agros' mission. Looking ahead, she aims to build a strong, committed regional team dedicated to serving communities.

In her free time, she enjoys reading scientific texts and watching movies.



Land . Hope . Life

Join us in our mission to provide access to land ownership, creating opportunities and incentives for entire communities and regions across Central America to thrive and prosper in their homeland.



Take action today!

