EQUATOR INITIATIVE

UNDP

ASOCIACIÓN DE FORESTERÍA COMUNITARIA DE GUATEMALA UTZ CHE'

Republic of Guatemala

Equator Prize Winner

Equator Initiative Case Studies

Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

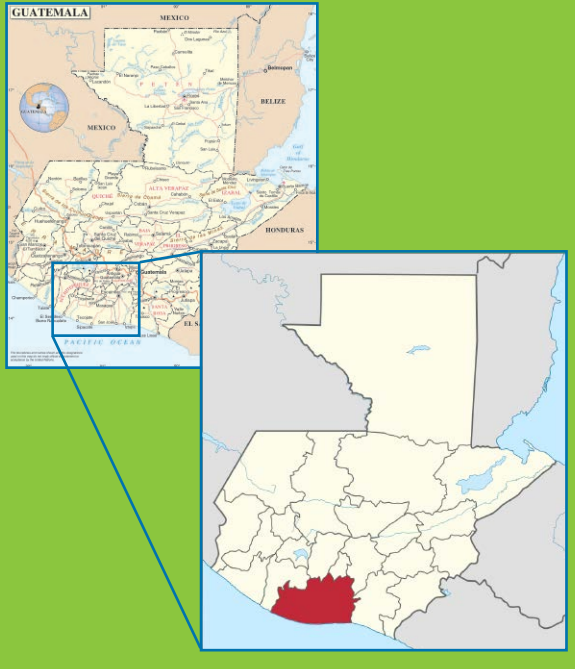
Local and Indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative. The Equator Initiative aims to fill that gap.

The UNDP Equator Initiative, supported by generous funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), awarded the Equator Prize 2020 to 10 outstanding Indigenous and local communities from 10 countries. The winning organizations showcase innovative nature-based solutions (NBS) for tackling biodiversity loss and climate change. Selected from 583 nominations from more than 120 countries, the winners were celebrated at a high-profile virtual event on 29 September 2020. The event was held in conjunction with the UN Biodiversity Summit and the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly, both also held virtually. The winners are sustainably protecting, restoring, and managing forests, farms, wetlands, and marine ecosystems to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, help communities adapt to climate change, and create a green new economy. Since 2002, the Equator Prize has been awarded to 255 initiatives.

The following case study is one in a growing series that describes vetted and peer-reviewed best practices intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to scale nature-based solutions essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Asociación de Forestería Comunitaria de Guatemala Utz Che' is a network of more than 40 Indigenous and local communities as well as farmers' associations that own communal lands and forests, with cultural, ethnic, and organizational diversity. The network represents some 200,000 people throughout Guatemala, 90 percent of them Indigenous. Member communities collectively own and protect more than 74,000 hectares of forest. Supporting its members in the sustainable management of their resources, mainly forests in areas of high water recharge, the organization guides efforts in strengthening community governance, valuing ancestral knowledge and Mayan worldview, promoting training and learning exchanges between communities, strengthening livelihoods, and defending their rights. The network promotes the conservation of local agrobiodiversity, the use of native species, and the application of best practices in community forestry. The livelihoods of 33,000 families have been improved through the creation of family farms using organic farming techniques, ecotourism, and community agriculture and livestock enterprises. Utz Che' emphasizes democratic inclusion, financial transparency, and a strong representation of women in leadership positions.



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KEY FACTS

Equator Prize winner

2020

Founded

2006

Location

Palín, Escuintla, Republic of Guatemala

Beneficiaries

100,000 beneficiaries

Thematic areas

Land rights and tenure security; Sustainable agriculture and food security; Preservation of Indigenous or traditional knowledge

Fields of work

Agroforestry; Plant nursery or seed bank; Policy, regulatory, or legal advocacy

Sustainable Development Goals addressed

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

EQUATOR PRIZE 2020 WINNER FILM

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

> ***Utz Che' is born out of the need of communities to join forces in the struggle for the defence of their territories, the respect and the recognition of their own ways of organization . . . Utz Che' represents the voice of the people in community forestry. We have accomplished the passing of laws that favour the communities. We have accomplished a deduction of land debts in some communities of the south coast, as well as the return of lands to Indigenous communities. It's also been a platform for defending community leaders who were criminalized for protecting their natural resources . . . Utz Che' represents collective action for the protection of the environment, the defence of human rights, and the promotion of agroecological practices in community forestry.***
>
> — María Pedro de Pedro, Leader and Spokesperson of Utz Che'

From the coast to the highlands of the Republic of Guatemala, the ecosystems and landscapes preserved by the community organizations of the Asociación de Forestería Comunitaria de Guatemala Utz Che' (Utz Che' Community Forest Association) reflect the great biological and cultural diversity of the country.

According to the 2018 National Census, more than 43 percent of Guatemala's population of 14.9 million people identify as Indigenous people, mainly Mayan, Xinka, or Garífuna; or as being of African descent. The rest of the population is of mixed Amerindian or Spanish descent called *mestiza* in Guatemala.

Guatemala is considered one of the megadiverse countries on the planet. Its territory encompasses the Mesoamerica Biodiversity Hotspot, one of 36 global hotspots identified by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). In Guatemala, this biodiversity hotspot is noted for 251 species of mammals, 708 species of birds, 231 species of reptiles, 112 species of amphibians, and 8,681 species of plants.

Trees with declining distribution in the region include classic timber species, such as Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*) and big leaf mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), both classified as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Several bird species stand out in the Mesoamerica Biodiversity Hotspot, including the horned guan (*Oreophasis derbianus*), in danger of extinction, and the resplendent quetzal (*Pharomachrus mocinno*), an emblematic bird of Guatemala classified as near threatened.

According to the IUCN Red List, threatened mammal species include Geoffroy's spider monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi*) and the Yucatán black howler monkey (*Alouatta pigra*), both of which are endangered. Reptiles in the region include four of the seven species of sea turtles living in the world: the critically endangered hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), the endangered green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), the vulnerable olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), and the vulnerable leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*).

Origin and structure

Utz Che', which means 'good tree' in the Mayan K'iche' language, was established in 2006 by 16 communities. Together, these communities were inspired to join forces to defend their rights to their ancestral lands, all of them communal or under mixed schemes of collective and individual rights. Currently, Utz Che' helps conserve 74,280 hectares of natural forests. The group represents 42 community organizations that encompass some 200,000

people throughout the country, 90 percent of them Indigenous.

Utz Che' is a national network of various community, Indigenous, and farming groups with cultural and ethnic diversity. These groups seek social inclusion, fair and sustainable development, and respect for the human and territorial rights of different peoples of Guatemala. The groups associated with Utz Che' have different forms of organization, such as *parcialidades*, cooperatives, Indigenous communities, Associative Peasant Companies (ECA by its acronym in Spanish), and farmer associations of *mestizos*. The groups represent 11 Indigenous Peoples: Mam, Poqomam, Pocomchí, Popti', Achí, K'iche', K'aqchiquel, Q'eqchi', Chorti, Q'anjob'al, and Xinka.

The objectives of Utz Che' include:

- Strengthening the unique forms of social organization of Indigenous communities.
- Ensuring the State's recognition, respect, and protection of their collective rights of land tenure, their own natural resource management scheme, and their territory.
- Supporting the efforts of partner organizations in the protection of forests and water sources.
- Promoting and facilitating the full and effective participation of Indigenous, peasant, forestry, and fishing communities, through their own forms of organization, in the definition of local, national, and international public policies.
- Promoting sustainable economic alternatives for the families, communities, and territories of member organizations.

The highest authority within Utz Che' is the General Assembly, which is composed of the 42 grassroots community organizations that make up the Association. Specific functions are delegated to the Board of Directors to directly lead and manage the Association, or by selecting and hiring executive management and additional personnel to carry out actions in the field. In addition to the Board of Directors, the Women's Council is the body in charge of promoting and ensuring the participation of women in all spaces and processes developed by the organization. Finally, the Audit Commission is in charge of ensuring the proper execution of the funds, overseeing accountability and transparency within the organization. Together, the Board of Directors, Women's Council, and Supervisory Commission are responsible for making decisions that directly affect the Association.

The integration of women in dialogue, reflection, planning, and training has allowed them to strengthen their capacities and recognize themselves as subjects of rights, capable of making proposals and demanding improvements in the conditions of their livelihoods. Since 2017, the Utz Che' Women's Council has been fully recognized with an organic structure. The Women's Council also provides an additional vote for women's groups in the General Assembly, guaranteeing the voice and equitable participation of women in decision-making, as well as gender parity in management positions.

"How did we, women, get involved in the organization? We brought our leadership background as well as our ideas on how to mobilize the community, while looking out for the needs of women."

María Ángela Ajbal Tubac, Leader and Spokesperson of Utz Che'

LOCAL CHALLENGES

Inequality in rural areas

In rural areas of Guatemala, several realities create challenges for Indigenous and multicultural communities to administer and manage their territories in a collective and comprehensive way. These include a marked gap in the distribution of wealth, high levels of food insecurity, climatic and environmental vulnerability, and social marginalization. There is also a high prevalence of chronic child malnutrition in communities that base their livelihoods on agriculture. There is still a long way to go to guarantee the full participation of Indigenous and rural communities in decision-making; their inclusion in the formulation of national laws, agreements, or policies; and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in accordance with the provisions of international conventions.

Deforestation

As a result of population growth and the advance of the agricultural frontier, groups or individuals carry out illegal logging for the sale of firewood, which is used for food preparation in most communities. Strong demand and the economic crisis further motivate this practice. Likewise, fires have been a constant in the communal forests during the summer season. With the State lacking capacity to directly fight fires, the communities themselves are in charge of putting fires out without major equipment and professional preparation. In response, the communities have organized themselves into crews or commissions to prevent and control fires.

Monocultures

The southern coast of Guatemala is one of the country's most affected areas by the oil palm, sugar cane, and banana agribusinesses, which monopolize river water and contaminate water needed for human consumption. This harms the communities located in the lower river basins, since the negative impact ranges from lack of water for irrigation of family farms to the drying out of families' artisan wells. The situation is compounded by long periods of drought, which threatens the livelihoods, health, water, and lives of families in affected communities. In May 2019, more than 30 representatives of communities on the southern coast requested the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) regulate the aerial spraying of ripening chemicals and agro-poison used for sugarcane. They also called on the ministries to discontinue the use of glyphosate, an herbicide that has raised heath concerns.

Land tenure

The community rights claimed today are the product of Indigenous Peoples' permanence on the lands they have historically and ancestrally occupied and managed through deeply ingrained customary norms. However, national policies and regulations are often contrary to the practices traditionally carried out by community organizations.

Communal forests have been particularly vulnerable to external threats, such as mining, power stations, electricity

transportation, illegal branching from communal lands, illegal logging, and wildfires. This forest vulnerability is compounded by the lack of legal certainty on land tenure and the State's minimal recognition of ancestral land tenure and management schemes. This situation undermines property and tenure rights to communal lands, while threatening the conservation of natural resources.

Communal tenure in Guatemala includes collective rights that correspond to the community as a whole, such as access to forests, water sources, ceremonial sites, and pastures. The rules of access and use are distributed exclusively among the members of the group through mechanisms based on responsibility and collective participation. For example, to obtain rights to harvest forest products, people must have contributed to completing tasks and responsibilities within their community. The Parcialidades de Totonicapán in western Guatemala provide a good example where community organizations of the Maya K'iche' people practice the K'axk'ol. This is an unpaid ancestral community service to protect their forests and water sources. For one year, everyone over 18 years of age provides different services for the benefit of their natural resources.

LOCAL RESPONSES

Strengthening the network and community organizations

One of Utz Che's main lines of work is the permanent strengthening of the network and its community organization. In this way, Utz Che' defends its own forms of governance of its territories before the State of Guatemala and its different policies and regulations to restore the community social fabric and manage institutional sustainability. As part of this work, Utz Che' seeks to reduce the inequality gap between men and women, while guaranteeing the participation and inclusion of women in the work of the Association.

To that end, the Association permanently provides its members with training opportunities, such as workshops on community governance and land governance, focused on Indigenous Peoples, gender, and conflict management issues. The Association has also generated training opportunities with women community leaders to strengthen their decision-making spaces, enhance their economic empowerment, and gradually change power relations.

Likewise, community organizations have benefited from strengthened organizational, managerial, administrative, and accounting capacities. Utz Che' has also promoted the development of social audits to oversee the public administration and learn about the budgets and investment of resources for the benefit of rural populations.

The Women's Council promotes the full participation of women in decision-making spaces both at the grassroots organization level and at the network level. To that end, regional meetings and a national women's meeting are held annually to discuss collectively the situation of women in the local and national context. During these meetings, participants analyse mechanisms and alternatives that allow greater empowerment, participation, and improvement of their livelihoods.

Open Tenure

In 2014, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched a pilot project to implement Open Tenure. This free software supports communities document formal and informal forms of land tenure in a communally managed land environment by allowing the registration and visualization of area boundaries.

The objective was to support community organizations in their planning and analysis of the territory, focusing their actions on organizations that have communal lands. After a selection process, the first Open Tenure field tests began in November 2014 in one of the organizations in the Utz Che' network. After the application was translated into Spanish, the group conducted data collection exercises, installed the community server, and documented the governance of the territory of 48 families. Collaboration for the development of this application continues today.

"But I kept fighting for this land because I had nowhere to live."

Cristina Juárez, Member of Utz Che'

KEY IMPACTS

Strengthening the network and community organizations

- Fifteen grassroots community organizations have organized women who promote women's rights and the defence of the territory.
- Since 2016, more than 16 representatives of community organizations have been trained as mappers and users of the Open Tenure application.
- More than 45 people from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Cambodia, among other countries, participated in exchange workshop on territorial management and local governance organized by FAO, Utz Che', and the University of San Carlos in 2016.

Rights and political advocacy

Utz Che' seeks to influence politically before the State institutions for the recognition of collective rights, biodiversity conservation practices, adaptation to climate change, and knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples for the defence of their communities' territory. Utz Che', delegated by the Indigenous Bureau of Climate Change of Guatemala, acts as the focal point in the National Steering Committee of the Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous People and Local Communities (IPLCs), a mechanism of the World Bank's Forest Investment Program. As part of their participation, Utz Che' helps define eligibility criteria for projects to facilitate full and effective participation by IPLCs.

Another important recent achievement was the 2021 incorporation of the Executive Director of Utz Che', Yovani Alvarado, as head representative of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) related to natural resources and the environment before the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP). This position of representation positions and represents the Guatemalan community forestry sector within CONAP with the objective of safeguarding, defending, and maintaining the principles of this sector, especially made up of local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

Along with other Major Groups, Utz Che' presented three demands at the United Nations Forestry Forum: greater recognition of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in sustainable management of forests and climate change; recognition of land tenure rights; and adequate financing for IPLCs and the implementation of global forestry objectives. In coordination with organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Afro-descendants, criteria were defined for the identification and self-identification of local communities and the exercise of their rights. In this way, the groups demanded to participate and integrate the rights of local communities in the United Nations climate and biodiversity agenda.

Additionally, one of the great concerns expressed by the community organizations that make up Utz Che' is that their native and creole seeds are threatened due to the Technical Regulation of Biosafety of Living Modified Organisms, or transgenics, for agricultural uses, which they are currently trying to stop before the Constitutional Court. According to Utz Che' and other organizations, "none of the biosecurity measures [are] safe to avoid genetic contamination and the undervaluation of our biodiversity, as is the case of corn that represents the basis of our diet."

Utz Che' has promoted legal actions to defend the human right to water, food, health, and life of the communities, especially on the southern coast of Guatemala. In this area, extractive activities and monocultures of sugar cane, oil palm, and bananas have been developed, affecting the life of the communities by depriving them of the water from the rivers and the subsoil.

KEY IMPACTS

Rights and political advocacy

- In 2015, Utz Che' achieved the recognition of the right to accreditation of historical and ancestral land tenure as a mechanism for accessing the PROBOSQUE forestry incentive program, which has opened the doors for participation in the program to all Indigenous Peoples and communities in Guatemala.
- In 2018, the Chuamazan Partiality entered its forest areas into the PROBOSQUE forest incentive program, proving its historical-ancestral land tenure. This process is not limited to the approval of a forestry incentives project, but, rather, involves recognizing the way in which Indigenous Peoples and communities can hold the historical and ancestral tenure of their lands, the way in which they manage their territories, and their way of organization.
- In 2019, the Constitutional Court restricted the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources' (MARN's) powers over the use and exploitation of waters that sought to legitimize water grabbing in favour of agribusinesses.

Natural resource management and community forestry

Another important area of work for Utz Che' is the strengthening of the collective management capacities of natural resources of its grassroots community organizations. The network of organizations that make up Utz Che' collectively protects 74,280 hectares of natural forest featuring diverse ecosystems on communal lands distributed in various territories. Implementing their own ways of governance, communities avoid forest loss by preventing and controlling forest fires, as well as controlling and monitoring illegal logging while conducting reforestation campaigns.

The communities employ various strategies for their reforestation campaigns. Some maintain nurseries, while others focus on having native seed banks. These actions involve the entire community, ensuring that the communal forest maintains and strengthens its biodiversity. In addition, seed banks of native or creole seeds used for agricultural and forestry activities help guarantee the continuity of the genetic and cultural wealth, especially given the communities' concern for the Technical Regulation of Biosafety of Living Modified Organisms. These initiatives contribute to conserve the native seeds of each of the regions through the recovery of their collection and conservation practices.

Utz Che' has also incorporated new technologies to monitor the territories, such as the use of drones to collect updated information to understand the dynamics of the forests and monitor the different pressures they face, mainly the pine weevil plague, forest fires, and illegal logging. Thus, it has been possible to capture images of certain areas and identify specific characteristics of the forests, such as their plant health, information that cannot be measured through other methods.

Community forestry

To promote community forestry, Utz Che' permanently conducts training workshops and exchange of experiences on the care and collective management of forests, seed collection, identification of forest pests, and maintenance and monitoring of nurseries. Likewise, the Association advises processes and campaigns for the reforestation, care, and protection of native species. Community organizations are guided, and their capacities are strengthened so they can gain access to the forestry incentive program.

KEY IMPACTS

Natural resource management and community forestry

- The Association has protected more than 74,000 hectares of forests, benefited more than 900 families, and continues to reduce poverty through the sustainable management of natural resources in the face of drought.
- At present, 12 community organizations benefit from the PROBOSQUE forestry incentive program, which spans 3,500 hectares. Four of these communities are exercising the right to re-incentive their communal forests and two are exercising the right to the accreditation of ancestral historical tenure
- Utz Che' has trained more than 750 farmers across the country in the collection of native seeds, the adoption of insect repellents and natural biofertilizers, and rainwater harvesting.
- Together, the Utz Che' communities maintain 17 nurseries and 4 seed banks.
- During 2019, a certificate called 'Community Forestry and the Recognition of the Ancestral Property of Communal Forests in Guatemala and its Limitations' was developed. Participation included 33 men and 16 women from institutions linked to forestry and environmental issues in Guatemala, as well as members of organizations that advise communities that manage community forests.

Improvement of community economy

Utz Che' promotes the economic autonomy and the productive capacity of farming, forestry, and fishing communities. This is achieved based on diversified, agroecological, equitable, and sustainable practices of cultivation, fishing, forestry, and community tourism, as well as healthy consumption patterns.

The Association promotes cultural practices in planting to improve economic, food, and nutritional security through the diversification of family farms and gardens. At the same time, the aim is for families to increase the supply of products from family farming and to be able to join the School Food Program run by the Ministry of Education to improve the nutritional quality of school snacks. The program includes purchasing products from family agriculture. Utz Che' perceives this as a public policy instrument to contribute to the enhancement of food security, family agriculture, and economic reactivation in rural areas.

Meanwhile, other communities have supported sustainable livestock production, delivering female pigs and goats under the 'chain pass' methodology. Using this approach if a group receives an animal, it can provide 'services' to another group. There can also be a rotation system, in which the animal enters a chain and is passed from group to group for reproductive purposes. Another way to contribute to the community economy is the establishment of gardens. In 2020 alone, 43 agricultural gardens were established. Capacities for the transformation of products were also strengthened, generating knowledge for the use of the products available in each locality. Some communities have also created grain banks to guarantee all families can have the necessary amount of food. Thus, this initiative ensures the access and availability of corn and beans, staple foods in the diet of rural families.

KEY IMPACTS

Improvement of the community economy

- More than 200 farmers have been trained in various projects of economic activities, from beekeeping to diversification of agriculture.
- More than 1,500 clean stoves manufactured locally in Guatemala have been installed to cook efficiently, with responsibility for fuel consumption and sustainable forest management.
- More than 50 productive enterprises have been developed (poultry farms, pork production, apiaries, and diversified orchards) to strengthen the community and family economies. These enterprises are mostly led by women.
- In 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, 10 grain banks were established that have benefited more than 500 families.

POLICY IMPACTS

National policy impacts

Utz Che's work has influenced policies at the local and national levels. The Association has participated in the formulation of proposals and advocacy for them to be adopted by the State. It has also participated in the legal defence of the rights of the communities it represents. One of Utz Che's main achievements is the recognition of the right to accreditation of historical and ancestral land tenure as a mechanism for accessing the PROBOSQUE forestry incentive program, which was approved in 2015 and covers government actions with a 30-year horizon between 2017 and 2046.

Until then, the previous forestry incentive program only benefited users with legal certainty about their land. However, during the PROBOSQUE discussion, Utz Che' succeeded in having the State recognize communal or collective land tenure and the community organization schemes for forest management. This opened the doors for the participation in the program of all Indigenous Peoples and communities in Guatemala.

Utz Che' also managed to move the Constitutional Court to restrict the competencies of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) over the use and exploitation of water. Thus, it halted the legitimization of the capture of river water for the monoculture agribusiness.

Contributions to the global agenda

At the global level, the efforts of Asociación Utz Che' support the implementation of several multilateral agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. In addition, the Association's work contributes to the achievement of numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

Overall, Utz Che's activities contribute to achieving the goals related to life on land (SDG 15). More specifically, activities to strengthen the network and community organizations and to defend rights and have political influence support the SDGs related to gender equality (SDG 5) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). In turn, activities to defend rights and have political influence and those of natural resource management and community forestry also support the objective of climate action (SDG 13), while activities to improve the community economy contribute to the responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) goal.

These initiatives also support ILO Convention 169, which establishes the right to traditional property (articles 14 and 16) and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) (articles 6, 16, 27, and 28).

REPLICATION, SCALABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Replication

Due to its national nature, Utz Che' is permanently replicating production and governance models according to the needs of the organizations that comprise it. Even more significant effort and progress has been seen is in the integration of women in managerial positions. This has not been an easy task, as women must coordinate many tasks in order to give themselves the time and space to train and participate in leadership roles.

Around 2009 and 2010, two conditions related to gender empowerment were identified; there was minimal active participation by women and women leaders needed to be trained. During this time, women began to wonder how to make themselves known on boards of directors and in decision-making, as well as how to defend their rights. Women began to prepare themselves through courses, for example, on self-esteem, law, and community economics. One of the goals was to overcome external and internal barriers because women realized they were being discriminated against both externally and also internally by themselves. For example, it is noted that some women initially expressed concerns about their own abilities, by saying, for example: "I cannot occupy that space, I cannot occupy that position, I am not good enough for a board of director." Women also were faced with coordinating the logistics of who would take care of their children, housework, and animals.

Over time, women organized themselves to be able to leave home and go to other departments, because they also had to exchange experiences. In doing so, they learned how other organizations and other women work, and other women learned from them as well. Women now set out to reach women who are even in the farthest corners of the country. They go to see them to encourage them and also to sensitize men. Where there are no women on the boards of directors, they open dialogue with men, explaining that women can also be in those spaces.

Thus, Utz Che' now has a total of 42 organizations, 15 of which have organized women's groups. This has allowed them to work in decision-making, mobilizing in the community, tending to the needs of women, and uniting the work of men and women to be able to raise families.

Scalability

Scalability is at the heart of the Utz Che' Association, which grew from have 16 to 42 member organizations during 15 years. With each expansion of the Association's network, the model is scaled as well. Currently, they are present in 13 of the 22 departments of Guatemala.

Utz Che' has the possibility to further scale its model thanks to its participation in the Steering Committee of the Dedicated Grant Mechanism (DGM) for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) of Guatemala. This initiative is part of a global DGM project that includes 12 national pilot projects, each adapted to its particular national context, as well as a Global Learning and Knowledge Exchange Project (the DGM Global Project) to facilitate the strengthening of knowledge exchange between countries and other key stakeholders at the regional and global levels.

Sustainability

According to Utz Che's partners, sustainability is guaranteed with the organization's decentralized membership model and its focus on building community resilience and self-reliance. The provision of resources and training is the first step to improve institutional capacity, which the members of Utz Che' have defined as a necessary organizational objective. The Association also takes management very seriously and is financially transparent and administratively adept at handling large grants and programmes on a national scale.

FUTURE PLANS

In the future, Utz Che' hopes to create a comprehensive community training centre for the development of capacities, and the empowerment and leadership of community organizations in Guatemala with an emphasis on community forestry. The Comprehensive Community Training Centre (CFIC by its acronym in Spanish) will allow members of the communities to learn in an environment that is in harmony with their surroundings. In addition, people who have been able to develop a skill can exchange their knowledge, such as crafts with different materials (wood, leather, metal, fabrics), artisanal food transformation, agricultural and organic diversification, and appropriate technology to replicate in their own communities.

The CFIC will also be a space to facilitate dialogue and exchange of experiences between Utz Che' grassroots organizations and other networks of community-based organizations. Further, the CFIC will provide opportunities to promote consensus on proposals and advocacy actions with State institutions of Guatemala, through regional meetings and community assemblies, in favour of sovereignty over water, food, forests, and energy.

SOURCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Equator Initiative acknowledges with gratitude Asociación de Forestería Comunitaria de Guatemala Utz Che', particularly Yovani Alvarado for their insight and support. All photos courtesy of Asociación de Forestería Comunitaria de Guatemala

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Suggested citation
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 'Asociación de Forestería Comunitaria de Guatemala Utz Che', Republic of Guatemala.' *Equator Initiative Case Study Series*. 2021. New York, NY.

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