

Winter 2023



Community development promoters present a group project at their annual conference.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

PROMOTES SELF-ESTEEM, FAMILY PLANNING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

By Norma Baján,
ABPD Executive Director

In partnership with ALDEA, Asociación BPD (ABPD) supports the development of women leaders, who we call “promoters,” to gradually take ownership of our integrated development program. Elected by their peers when we begin our work in a community, these women play a fundamental role throughout our program as our direct contacts on the ground. Eventually, they become responsible for the continued reduction of children’s chronic malnutrition into the future.

This November, for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, ABPD was able to hold our annual promoters’ conference...

Continued on page 2

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE PROMOTES SELF-ESTEEM, FAMILY PLANNING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Continued from cover

... in Chimaltenango, bringing together nearly 70 women from eight of our current partner communities. For two full days they got to know each other, shared their experience, participated in workshops focused on self-esteem and family planning, engaged in wellness activities, and provided feedback on the program.

As part of the self-esteem session, we challenged participants to ask themselves about their origins and identity. Many answered with powerful statements like:

- ***"We are Kaqchikel Mayan women,"***
- ***"We are women who fight and work for our communities," and***
- ***"We are a group of hardworking, kind women, with the desire to continue improving ourselves and supporting our communities to leave a positive legacy for future generations".***

Because it is rare for women in our partner communities to take time for themselves, we led them through a guided meditation activity and encouraged them to practice this type of self care at home.

On the subject of family planning as a human right, we emphasized that women have the right to make decisions affecting their own bodies, including those related to the number and spacing of their children, their medical care, their sexual education, and their access to family planning methods and counseling. Participants expanded their knowledge on this sometimes difficult subject and can bring what they learned back to their communities.

We also took advantage of the conference space to ask for an evaluation of our program. The promoters gave suggestions and feedback on the work that ABPD does in their communities and how the interventions can be improved, as well as the challenges they have encountered in their working groups. They reflected on their own growth and shared some valuable insights that we will incorporate in our next training cycle.

Meeting together at this annual conference was a meaningful step on our promoters' journey as changemakers in their communities. Thank you to our donors who made this opportunity possible.

Community development promoters take part in an individual exercise at their annual conference.





Community members participate in a sustainable agriculture workshop.

AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

By Norma Baján, ABPD Executive Director

Guatemala's unique geography makes it one of the countries most severely impacted by climate change in the world. ALDEA and ABPD's comprehensive development program enables communities in rural Chimaltenango to help fight climate change while also supporting them to adapt to the challenges it brings.

Our efforts to address climate change are most evident in our sustainable agriculture programs. For many years our programs have addressed food security issues by providing family gardens, dairy goats, fruit trees, meat rabbits, and laying hens to ensure our participants have reliable, local, and diverse sources of nutrition.

More recently ABPD has added a second agronomist to our staff to help improve our focus in the area of basic grains and crop farming. This part of our program provides training and demonstrates practices that benefit local subsistence farmers and contributes to fighting climate change. For example, instead of burning what's left in the fields after a corn harvest—which leads to the release of carbon dioxide, loss of soil fertility, and forest fire risk—ABPD trains producers to combine the corn “stubble” with other organic matter to make compost. We also promote soil conservation techniques and minimal-tillage planting systems that prevent soil erosion. In this way farmers avoid the use of costly chemical fertilizers, and much less carbon is released into the atmosphere.

ALDEA and ABPD's integrated program also promotes community awareness of the importance of reforestation to ensure the long-term sustainability of their natural resources. By preventing erosion, planting trees can help protect the water sources that supply the potable water systems we install while contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gases. One of our program participants, Catalina Sirin, explained what this means to her:

“We are planting trees in order to reforest our springs and to get fresh air, as well as to combat climate change. We want to plant a lot of trees so that tomorrow we can have a better future.”

NORMA BAJÁN TAKES ON EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROLE AT ABPD

By Arianne Peterson,
ALDEA Executive Director

ALDEA's partner organization Asociación BPD in Guatemala is under new leadership! Please join us in welcoming Norma Baján Balán, who took over the Executive Director role in June following the departure of longtime Executive Director Paco Enríquez. Norma brings with her a wealth of skills and experience working to empower rural indigenous communities in Guatemala (see her letter of introduction on the next page for details). Already during her first months of work, she has demonstrated her passion for advancing ALDEA and ABPD's mission and her dedication to the success of our programs.

In addition to overseeing the continued implementation of our programs, one of Norma's first steps was to take the ABPD staff for a retreat to Panajachel, a town on the shores of beautiful Lake Atitlán. This was an opportunity for her to get to know the team as they reviewed the joint ALDEA-ABPD strategic plan, evaluating our indicators of success and assessing the impact of our integrated program.

Norma also led the staff in further defining their criteria for selecting potential partner communities and creating a theory of change to guide the organization in the year ahead.

Following Guatemala's August presidential election, Norma and ABPD Empowerment Coordinator Virginia Cum had an opportunity to attend an event held by the Indigenous Women's Platform in honor of International Indigenous Women's Day. They brought their perspective on development issues to a discussion on the theme of "Indigenous Women: Stitching Our Thoughts on A Blooming Democracy" and even had the opportunity to meet with Vice President-elect Karin Herrera and famed indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchú.

Norma brings a fresh perspective and new ideas for further improving our programs, and we look forward to sharing more updates with you as this new chapter for our organizations unfolds.

Guatemalan Vice President-elect Karin Herrera (left), Norma Baján (center), and Virginia Cum (right) meet at a conference held for International Indigenous Women's Day.





A LETTER FROM ABPD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NORMA BAJÁN

Hello, my name is Norma Baján Balán.

I'm originally from San Lucas Tolimán, Sololá and I identify as Maya Kakchiquel. I have a degree in Business Administration from Rafael Landívar University and completed studies in auditing. I am a graduate of the Asociación de Liderazgo in Guatemala and was selected for a fellowship in Central America. I have 25 years of experience working for non-governmental organizations in education and microcredit programs, focusing on women's empowerment. On two occasions, I have been invited to the White House in recognition of my work with women and girls.

In 2022 I founded KOWIN, an initiative that seeks to connect talent with opportunity, focused on training recent high school graduates and connecting them with job opportunities through strategic alliances with organizations and companies. I am also Co-Founder of MAIA's Colegio Impacto – The MAIA Impact School is the first high school in Central America designed specifically for Mayan girls in rural Guatemala and has won several international awards. In addition, I am a founding member of E-Club Rotario Lake Atitlán.

I have published several pieces in the Global Press Journal and Nómada Guatemala to provide a voice to indigenous women who do not have one, by writing articles that disseminate the reality of many women in Guatemala regarding inequality, human rights violations, lack of equity and poverty.

These are some of the awards I have received and publications I've authored:

- Winner of the 2018 Women Have Wings Leadership Award from the Colorado Women's Foundation.
- Published Author (2020): Vocal Empowerment Curriculum for young Maya Guatemalan women/Currículum de empoderamiento vocal para jóvenes mayas guatemaltecas.
- 2019 winner of the Nómada and UNFPA 2019 Social Transformer Award.
- Featured in LOOK magazine, 2018.

I look forward to working together with you to sustain and grow ALDEA and ABPD's vital programs. Thank you for all you do to support the health and well-being of rural Guatemalan families!

Norma Baján Balán

"VAMOS FOR VILLAGES" ENGAGES 15 TEAMS IN SUPPORTING GUATEMALAN FAMILIES

By Arianne Peterson,
ALDEA Executive Director

Recognizing that (before our interventions) many families in ALDEA's Guatemalan partner communities must walk several miles each day to collect water, during the month of October we challenged our supporters to engage in a physical challenge fundraiser. The response was nothing short of inspiring, with 15 teams from around the globe challenging themselves to walk, run and hike over 300 miles in support of ALDEA's "Vamos for Villages" campaign.

Board members, Advisors, and donors took part in the challenge from the across United States and as far away as the United Kingdom and Iceland. The staff of our partner organization ABPD also answered the call. Together with women serving as health promoters from our newest partner communities, they climbed Guatemala's San Pedro Volcano. Each team's challenge was unique, ranging from daily walks in the neighborhood and running on the track to descending canyons and scaling mountains. No matter how big or small their challenge, every participant played a huge role in the success of this campaign, which shattered our goal and raised over \$52,000! This was fully matched by our generous ALDEA and ABPD Boards and Advisors, for a total of \$104,000.

ALDEA calculates that it costs us about \$1,600 for an average family to complete our three-year development program, meaning that Vamos for Villages raised enough to support 65 families on their journey toward a healthier future. This includes the construction of water systems that will bring potable water directly to homes, installation of sanitary latrines, provision of efficient vented cookstoves, as well as capacity-building trainings that form leaders committed to community development. These workshops cover topics from women's rights, empowerment, and leadership to nutrition, sustainable agriculture, family planning, and beyond.

We would like to thank everyone who came together to make "Vamos for Villages" a resounding success. Your contributions of time and resources make our work possible, and we truly value your commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of families in rural Guatemala. Here's to you!

ABPD staff and supporters celebrate at the summit of San Pedro Volcano.



Make a difference for generations to come by including ALDEA in your will or estate plan.

To learn more, visit aldeaguatemala.org and click "Get Involved," or contact us at (929) 274-3098 or aldea@aldeaguatemala.org



Dr. Carroll Behrhorst
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There is still time to contribute to ALDEA's important work in rural Guatemala this year. Use the enclosed envelope to mail your gift, or visit us at aldeaguatemala.org/donate.

Below are some examples* of the impact your gift can have:

- > \$1,600** can support a family through our full, three-year integrated development program.
- > \$1,000** can provide clean drinking water, a gray water filter, a sanitary latrine, and a vented, efficient cookstove to help a household stay healthy.
- > \$300** can buy a dairy goat (along with the vitamins, basic medicines, and shelter it needs) so young children can benefit from its nutritious milk.
- > \$100** can support nutrition training sessions addressing topics like breastfeeding, appropriate weaning foods, food safety, and recipes made with fresh garden produce.
- > \$50** can provide empowerment training for women and youth to become change agents and emerging leaders in their communities.

* Gifts made to ALDEA contribute to our entire mission, and we apply your donations where they are needed most to support our long-term goals. These estimates are approximate as prices and exchange rates are constantly changing.

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