



# ANNUAL REPORT 2022



**BUENA  
SEMILLA**

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**We continue to  
practice the wisdom of  
our ancestors and  
ancestors, we share our  
words looking into  
each other's eyes,  
thinking with our  
hearts and feeling with  
our minds. Together we  
can heal the world.**

**Yaluor, Tz'utujil grandmother**

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# **SOUTH-NORTH: UNITED TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD**

Dear friends, colleagues, and community:

Together we have traveled through the year that recently ended and we feel honored with your presence in each of the steps we took. We work with hundreds of people from the Mayan peoples of Guatemala, the Mam of San Juan Ostuncalco and the Tz'utujil of Santiago Atitlán.

The work that we carried out in 2022 is but a taste of the bridges that can be built between the south and the north to generate encounters, solidarity, sisterhood, and transformation of current realities.

We concentrated in allowing the seeds that we have sowed together grow. This past year, almost 400 women and 25 men in more than 15 communities directly benefited from our work. More than 4,000 children, young people and elderly benefited indirectly, as were their communities, for when a woman rises, she lifts everyone else around her up with her.

We together wove collective spaces of reflection, trust, sisterhood, and transformation, where it was possible to share experiences, wisdom, and dreams about the simplicity of living life in harmony, with one another, our families, our communities, and our Mother Earth, in a world of much violence, greed, inequity and division.

Many participants were able to overcome debilitating sadness, anxiety, headaches and body aches, and feelings of not being able to continue, each inspiring the other, or encouraging the other, to pick up the pieces of their lives to plant a new seed, a new dream, a new reality for themselves and their families and communities.

In each gathering we hold, we strengthen our own voices and roots, and our ability to be resilient. Being a community and understanding that we are all catalysts for individual and collective well-being and empowerment strengthens us and motivates us to continue gathering yet more women and men, more Circles, in more communities, and to dig deeper into our own roots to remember, reclaim the wisdom, practices, dignity and vision carried by our Maya ancestors.

We deeply appreciate your hope and confidence in our work, and look forward to all that we can continue to weave into the future,

Buena Semilla (Good Seed) Team

# WHO WE ARE

Buena Semilla is a Grassroots Collective based in Guatemala that supports marginalized Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and their communities in their quest to reclaim their voice, wellbeing, self-authority and self-determination – as roots to a full and dignified life rooted in community, well-being, equilibrium, and connection with Mother Earth.



Our MISSION is to co-create transformational spaces where historically oppressed individuals & collectives who live in broken, post-conflict contexts may remember who they are, heal, dream, and together reweave the fabric of their lives and communities.

We believe in the power of the community to collectively heal wounds, overcome adversity, envision new realities, and create transformational change.

## WHY

Indigenous Maya peoples make up almost two-thirds of the population of Guatemala. Despite their majority, they face ongoing oppression, ethnic discrimination, political violence, and displacement.

A recent 36-yr armed conflict ending in 1996 - in effect a genocide against the Maya - destroyed the social fabric of entire families and communities and contributed to pervasive feelings of mistrust, hopelessness, and distress. Substance abuse, especially in the form of alcoholism, is common among men.

Women in Guatemala additionally experience one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world - a legacy of colonialism, deeply patriarchal structures, and violence against women as a weapon of war. Intersecting discriminations and continuing violence in and outside the home significantly impact women, especially those of Mayan descent.

# SANTIAGO ATITLÁN

(Site of Buena Semilla activities since 2017)



Santiago Atitlán is a town located in the middle of nature, surrounded by three volcanoes and sitting on the edge of a beautiful lake. The vast majority (98%) of its population is of Tz'utujil Maya origin.

The Tz'utujil population since before the arrival of the Spanish and until today name their territory in their Mayan language as "Tz'quin Jaay", or "House of Birds", based on this concept, the Tz'utujil of Atitlán recognize that they cohabit in a territory where there are many expressions of life, which are an important part of their well-being; the oldest of the community hold that the Tz'utujil are people who cohabit with birds and nature with respect and in harmony.

***"The song of the birds and the sound of the water help us heal. The song of the birds helps us connect with ourselves."***

Dolores Quievac Sapalú,  
tz'utujil Women Circle leader

# SAN JUAN OSTUNCALCO

(Site of Buena Semilla activities since 2013)

The municipality of San Juan Ostuncalco is located in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, in Quetzaltenango; 86% of its population identifies as Maya Mam. The history of the town is thousands of years old, before the Spanish it was known as "Chixicul" and between 1524 and 1526 it was named and founded as San Juan Ostuncalco.

In the Maya Mam language, "Ostuncalco" means place where there are caves, and the population explains that the municipality is known as "In the houses of the caves or caverns", some attribute this to the large number of rivers and springs of water that exist there.

***"I always bring my son with me. It is important that he learns from a young age to listen to and recognize the presence of women."***

Soraya, Women Circle participant in SJO

# WOMEN'S CIRCLES

Inspired by the ancient circles of wise grandmothers, our Women's Circles are spaces where women of different ages share their experiences with one another. They are spaces of remembrance and transformation where women can reclaim who they are, heal, dream, and together reweave the fabric of their lives and communities.

Women participants meet in circle every one to two weeks. In this safe space - as few others exist in their lives and communities - women experience the importance of lifting each other up in a context where they are often isolated and invisible, even from each other. They build support networks, share difficulties and solutions, and reinforce their self-esteem and their capacity for action.

No one woman is superior to the other, and each becomes a source of support, empowerment, and change, for themselves and others. Collective and individual wounds are healed, and a new world is woven in everyone's hands.

Many women this year again were able through this space to overcome debilitating sadness, anxiety, headaches and body aches, and feelings of not being able to continue, each inspiring the other, or encouraging the other, to pick up the pieces of their lives to plant a new seed, a new dream, a new reality for themselves and their families and communities.





# IMPACTS IN 2022

## WOMEN'S CIRCLES



### **385 women committed to the project**

In 2022, we had the active participation of 191 women from the Mam people of San Juan Ostuncalco and 194 women from the Tz'utujil people of Santiago Atitlán – a nearly threefold increase from the previous year.



### **437 Women's Circles held**

In 2022, we held a total of 288 women's circles in San Juan Ostuncalco and 149 in Santiago Atitlán 149, with an average participation between 6 and 24 women.



### **23 communities involved**

This year, our activities involved 12 communities in San Juan Ostuncalco and 11 communities in Santiago Atitlán.



### **16 women leaders holding Circles in their communities**

Every year our team gets stronger, grows. In 2022 we trained 9 new leaders for a new total of 16 leaders who accompanied and guided hundreds of others women with wisdom, love, dedication and responsibility.



### **77 workshops for women leaders**

Throughout the year, we accompanied 16 women leaders in their training and development, providing tools for them and for the women they accompany. Themes included the feminine, sisterhood, gender equity, our relationship with Mother Earth, trauma healing, and collective empowerment.



### **1 Casa Alegria (House of Joy)**

Throughout the year, the leaders of San Juan Ostuncalco implemented the Casa Alegria project (see next page).



## CASA ALEGRÍA

On a cold morning in January 2022, when the 9 leaders of San Juan Ostuncalco were meeting, one of them, Baudilia Romero Méndez, shared that part of her tasks to graduate as Community Mental Health Promoter was to formulate and execute a social project in her community.

Baudilia had been chosen as the winner at the Quetzaltenango level of a scholarship to study a diploma in Community Mental Health with Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team (Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial, or ECAP).

Baudilia had never had any kind of formal education, she taught herself to read and write, so winning the scholarship was already a success, not only for her, but for all local women, as an inspiration for her decision and courage to study for the first time in her life.

That afternoon, moved by Baudilia's proposal, the leaders chose to formulate a project together, to establish a community space for and by local women; a place where there would be what everyone seeks in one way or another when attending the Women's Circles: "joy" and seeing the solution and change to violence in a new way. And then and there, "CASA ALEGRÍA" was born.

Despite many challenges, during the rest of the year the project was jointly planned, and steps were taken to establish this wonderful space full of hope and love for women.



On May 27, 2022, CASA ALEGRÍA was inaugurated.

The leaders, together, summoned more than 150 women participating in the Women's Circles, community authorities and religious leaders, to publicize this dream come true and co-created with love and courage.

Thanks to the concerted work of all in Buena Semilla, and since August 2022, CASA ALEGRÍA has carried out training workshops and cultural, agroecological and collective activities, which provide well-being and motivation to the women involved in this collective dream – empowering women, but above all rediscovering the strength that lies within each and every one, from their very core, and from all that is creative and supporting of life systems.

There is still a long way to go, and the collective dreams continue – amongst them, for a community library, training workshops, recreational activities, the recovery of ancestral practices, the establishment and equipment of temporary support accommodation for women experiencing forms of domestic violence.



# IMPACTS IN 2022

## MEN'S CIRCLES

In the wisdom of indigenous peoples, all expressions of life are related and interconnected, and a small action carried out by one person affects the other. To talk about gender from this life perspective, it is necessary to talk about identity and values and recognize the basic principles that govern and order the rules of coexistence in their communities: complementarity, reciprocity, mutual aid, and the need to live together in harmony and balance. In the indigenous worldview, women and men are opposites, and complement one another.

Buena Semilla, addressing this collective need, last year generated a process of methodological strengthening to work side by side with the male population in Santiago Atitlán in the recovery of their historical memory about their ancestral ways of life to be in harmony and complementarity with women, thus contributing to reducing violence and achieving greater gender equity.

Our side-by-side steps with the men last year achieved the following impacts:



### **51 Men's Circles held**

In 2022 we were able to strengthen our methodology to work on processes of healing and recovery of ancestral and historical memory about their rules of coexistence.



### **24 men committed to the process**

During the past year, more than twenty men actively participated to endorse and strengthen the work methodology in coherence with their cultural and spiritual principles.



### **3 focus groups guided by 2 leaders**

For a closer understanding of the ancient wisdom of indigenous men, three focus groups were organized, led by two young men from the same community.



### **5 communities involved**

For a better ecology of knowledge, male participants were invited from five different communities, with differences in age and economic activity.

# COMMUNITY ACTION 2022

We generated activities that directly mobilized more than 450 people and contributed to improving living conditions and environments within their communities.

Actividad	Ubicación	Resultados
Community forest reforestation	Santiago Atitlán	600 trees planted
Mural "seeds of resistance"	Santiago Atitlán	A mural measuring 4x2 meters that represents life cycles of the tz'utujil peoples.
Community meetings	Santiago Atitlán	2 community meetings with the participation of more than 300 people, sharing their reflections and wisdom
Planning and execution of the community project CASA ALEGRÍA	San Juan Ostuncalco	1 Casa Alegria, based in the community, center for training, community events, art and the recovery of ancestral practices; demonstrative organic garden.
Capacity-building workshops	San Juan Ostuncalco	3 workshops given to more than 150 participating women from the 12 circles - proposed, managed and facilitated by the leaders.
International Poetry Festival	San Juan Ostuncalco	Casa Alegría hosted the Quetzaltenango International Poetry Festival, where the leaders also participated, promoting healing through the written word and art.
IEExchange between women from the "South" and "North" - "I offer you my heart"	Virtual (zoom, with simultaneous translation)	2 Virtual Women's Circles (one opening and one closing) and 5 interviews from the voices and life experiences of indigenous women from Guatemala, held over one week. Attended by 70 women from the "Global North" and 20 indigenous women of Buena Semilla.



## MURAL PAINTING

In November 2022, we painted a mural named: "Seeds of Resistance" in one of the spaces we use to meet in Santiago Atitlán.

Seeds of Resistance was the result of four months of work, which implied cultural and historical explorations of the small actions carried out by the Tz'utujil people to maintain their original identity and roots in these liquid times. The mural was inspired by the wisdom and words shared by hundreds of people attending our men's and women's circles.

The mural represents the cycles of life and how each being implicitly has a responsibility to care for nature, the cosmos and life itself. The mural is read from left to right, counterclockwise.

The man depicted in the mural is a farmer who is planting maize seeds, which represent "Nauoj" (or wisdom) and in the center of the mural appears that same seed germinating and flourishing, which is fed with water, a gift of nature. In women's and men's circles, people explained that this part represents the connection to "ruk'ux caj" and "ruk'ux ruch'lief" (the connection between the essence of heaven and the essence of earth).

The three birds represent time; the bird that is nearest to the farmer represents the past and the wisdom that it has is transmitted to man so that he can sow it, the bird in the center feeding on the flowering of life represents the present and the third bird represents the future.

The birds also refer to the Tz'utujil population of Santiago Atitlán, who name their territory the House of Birds ("Casa de los Pajaros"), recognize themselves as a people that cohabits in a territory with birds. To honor this, they embroider on their clothes all the kinds of birds that inhabit their communities.

And finally, the figure of a woman appears, observing the scene that occurs in front of her and wearing clothes that identify her as Tz'utujil from Santiago Atitlán. According to the stories of the people attending our circles, women play a fundamental role in safeguarding and protecting the wisdom of their people to transmit it to children and to all those who do not know it. She keeps her people alive!

The mural was made thanks to the funds and assistance of the NGO The Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA).





## **WE ARE ONE**

**Earth is my body**

**Water is my blood**

**Air is my breath and**

**Fire is my spirit.**

**We are one with nature.**

Meeting of tz'utujil women,  
"reflections on life and nature"

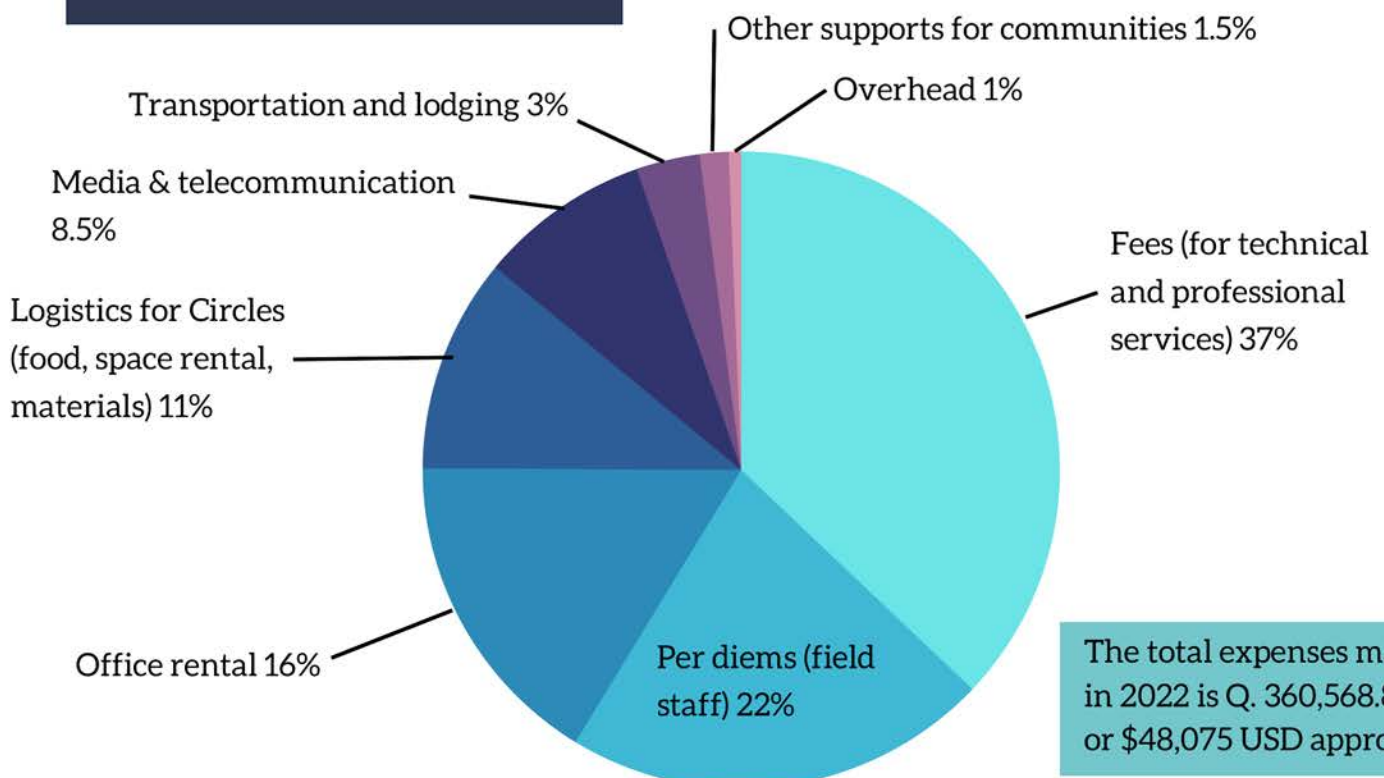


# FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

One of our principles is transparency and proper administration of the funds we receive, through generous donations from the organizations and individuals who place their trust in us.

INCOME 2022	
Grant from Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (Central American Women's Fund), or FCAM (for execution over 16 months between July 2022 and October 2023)	45.2 %
Donations (169 individual donors)	36.5 %
Grant from Grassroots International Grant / Martin Baró Institute	15 %
Balances 2021	3.1 %
Bank interest	0.2 %
<p><b>Total income in 2022 was Q 509,871.43, or \$67,982 USD approx.</b>  <b>Of the funds received in 2022, 63% were received directly by CIET Internacional, Inc (Guatemala); 15% by CIET NY (USA); 17% by HIPGive (USA); and 5% by Faraway Projects (USA)</b></p>	

## EXPENSES 2022



The total expenses made in 2022 is Q. 360,568.89, or \$48,075 USD approx.

# DREAMS FOR 2023

Our heart thanks the universe for each person who has joined us in the realization of this collective dream and has placed their trust in the work of Buena Semilla, and for the opportunity to be part of much needed change in favor of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala.

Today we are filled with hope, trusting that, as has been the case for the last 13 years, paths will continue to open for future projects and dreams, allowing us to continue contributing to this collective movement for wellbeing, equilibrium, and love.

With your generosity, this year we hope to achieve the following results together:

- **10 new young women leaders, and 4 new men leaders to guide new Circles and accompany participants in their transformation and collective healing.**
- **10 new Women's Circles for adolescents and young women, and 4 new Men's Circles**
- **2 new guides for Circles, rooted in ancestral knowledge and informed by our 10 years of experience implementing collective spaces of healing and transformation**
- **Contributing to the recovery of Mayan ancestral knowledge:**
  - The guide for the Women's Circles will be inspired by ancestral Maya wisdom and the 20 energies, or nahuales, that make up the sacred Mayan calendar, or Cholq'ij, to guide women in healing in their different dimensions (physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual)
  - The guide for the Men's Circles will be oriented in the knowledge and ancestral practices for collective healing, and involve exchanges with elders who will share of their knowledge, wisdom, and craftsmanship
  - Collective actions to reconnect with regenerative and reciprocal models of economy, exchange, and reconnection with nature.
- **Strengthening of community spaces (Casa Alegria)**
  - Improvement of physical spaces used Women's and Men's Circles, including equipping them with the necessary tools, a community library, murals for social expression, family and medicinal gardens.
- **Co-creation and experimentation with new spaces of exchange and growth between Circles located in the "global North" and Circles located in the "global South"**
- **Exploration of sustainability processes and financial autonomy for Buena Semilla**







We envision a world where everyone's voice counts. Where today's oppressed peoples are liberated and able to live full lives free of violence. Where we move beyond polarities of North & South, resource-rich & resource-poor, above & below, and allow ourselves to stand side-by-side in a reciprocal flow of knowledge & wisdom, of giving & receiving, for the better of all of life.

**MELTIOX  
CHJONTE  
MERCİ  
THANKS  
GRACIAS**

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