



Final Progress Reporting Guidelines

Grantee Name: Mercado Global

Report Due: January 31, 2017

Prompt detailed final reports are required for all Dining for Women funded programs. We will share your report and success stories to educate our members. This information will be included in our newsletters, on our website and in other DFW social media. Please be candid. Dealing with obstacles, or less than ideal outcomes, educates our members about the successes and challenges NGOs face with program implementation in the developing world.

Please submit the progress report, photos, and other supporting documentation by loading them to the Dropbox folder assigned to you. We request that reports be attached as MS Word files. Please send an email to grants@diningforwomen.org to confirm these files have been uploaded.

Grant completion requirements include the following to be submitted:

- The final budget with detailed financial accounting of all grant funds.
- Five to six page narrative addressing the questions listed below.
- Several high-resolution JPG photographs of the program depicting the women/girls who have benefited from the grant funds should be posted to your assigned Dropbox. Photos should be submitted with the right to use in all forms and media in DFW documents and website. Include confirmation of grantee's right and consent to use photos/videos as per local law.
- Include several stories, experiences and quotes from women/girls, preferably in their own words, whose lives were altered by the funded program.
- Any message you would like us to convey to our membership and donors about the impact our grant is having on those being served and/or your organization and its mission.

Please Note:

- Answers need not be lengthy; five to six pages for the report is often adequate.

Final Report Content

I. Please provide the following information:

- a. Organization Name: Mercado Global
- b. Program Title: Power to Change Program
- c. Grant Amount: \$28,061.99
- d. Contact Person: Sara Pressman, Institutional Partnerships Coordinator
- e. Address: 254 36th Street, Suite C-308, Unit 41, Brooklyn, NY | 11232

2. Recap briefly what outcomes the program was designed to achieve.

The "Power to Change" Program equipped indigenous women artisans with the tools and knowledge needed to run their community businesses, invest in self-identified needs, and build healthier lives for their families and communities.

The program outcomes included:

- Developed and strengthened community-based training curriculum in partnership with leading global health experts to make topics relevant and impactful for rural indigenous women who fall outside of other health education efforts.
- Empowered women to adopt healthy practices in their families and communities, leading to less illness, decreased mortality rates, and increased well-being for their families.
- Increased the number of partner artisans taking leadership roles in their co-ops and communities.

- Onboarded new additional trainer that led the expansion of the “Power to Change” Program, reaching new and current groups with updated content and stronger curriculum that addressed the evolving needs of women artisans in taking on more challenging work.

3. What was accomplished in connection with this project? Please address each stated objective. If any project objectives were changed, please also explain the circumstances leading to the modification of the objective(s).

Below are the original objectives with minor changes, explained below. Each objective includes the progress and achieved outcome:

I. Double the number of community-based training sessions that artisans take part in during the month from one to two monthly classes.

- Over the course of this grant, trainers Olga Morales and Aurora Matzar Lopez visited each partner community twice per month to lead all technical and education trainings from the convenience of artisans’ homes. Each partner community now receives one education training and one technical training per month. Education trainings are comprised of five key areas of core curriculum including health, leadership, business development and entrepreneurship, and financial management.
- Dining For Women’s investment proved to have a clear impact through trainings delivered in partner communities. Over 200 trainings were delivered during this grant period. Trainers covered all activities and topics within the Self-Esteem track including *Be the Change*, *Community Cowers*, *Get Started*, *Breaking Down Barriers*, *Putting It Together*, and *Support Sessions for Stress*. Trainers also covered all planned activities within the Health Track including *Pain Away and Physical Exercises*, *Nutrition*, and *Sanitation and Hygiene*. When combined, these trainings provide holistic empowerment tools for women to bring into their homes and communities. Impact can be seen in all areas of programming:
 - 99% of artisans’ children are enrolled in school, compared to only 35% of children in Guatemala’s rural areas.
 - 64% of artisans have a personal bank account in a country where only 27% of the indigenous population has one.
 - 73% of artisans have access to the food and nutrition they need while 69% of Guatemala’s indigenous population and 55% of its rural population face chronic undernutrition.
 - 72% of artisans have reported saving or saving more since starting with Mercado Global, compared to 60% in 2013.

2. Incorporate the position of Community Training Program Manager, who can lead and support the implementation of new training sessions and grow the program.

- This position was originally intended to be a manager position, but the organization had a greater need for an additional and more advanced trainer to increase our ability to implement more trainings. The newly hired trainer, Olga Morales, serves as the lead trainer for the Community-Based Education program. Her fluency in English, Spanish and three Mayan languages, along with her experience in implementing agricultural workshops in the rural highlands, makes her invaluable. Now that this position is in place, we are actively seeking a Community Training Program Manager and currently have applicants in the interview phase. Ideally, we are seeking a candidate from the Highlands of Guatemala with a Bachelors or Masters degree who is fluent in at least one indigenous language. As previously stated, the individual in this position will be in charge of monthly reporting to the Programs Director, Executive Director, and Development team. They will create new curriculum, maintain monitoring and evaluation systems, and be in charge of annual planning. The Program Manager will absorb these responsibilities from the Trainers, allowing them to conduct more in-community training and better support current and new artisan groups.

3. Reach 40 new indigenous women artisans with these trainings, and continue to deliver and reinforce content to 370 current artisans.

- As mentioned in the mid-year report, we had to adjust our target beneficiary number due to major changes in the retail market and sales orders. We are proud to share that over the course of this grant period, we reached 198 women with this training program, 87 of whom were new Mercado Global participants. This number made 47 more new artisans than our original new artisan goal. As part of our restructuring, we will continue to bring our model to more women over the coming year, offering them the tools and skills to help them lift themselves out of poverty through education and market access.
- This fiscal year has been focused on expanding and growing sales. As of now we expect to increase sales over the last fiscal year by as much as 71%. We have already closed on 82% of budgeted sales for the year with new retail partners including

Target, Anthropologie, Zimmerman of Australia, Everything But Water, Garnet Hill, Peruvian Connection, Yoox of Europe, and Nordstrom. At this rate of success, we expect to reach our original plan of partnering with 370 artisans in 2017 and will most likely exceed it.

4. Maintain or increase the 44% rate of partner artisans holding leadership positions in their communities within a period of three years.

- Due to the bi-monthly trainings, Mercado Global is proud to see that 84% of MG artisans are currently in a leadership position, in comparison with 44% of artisans in 2013. We have seen this number almost double as a result of women's leadership and Power to Change trainings that encourage women to be more confident and strive for equality in their communities and homes.

Power to Change trainings ultimately help women understand the root of stressful issues and help them to find viable solutions to manage stress. These classes emphasize the supportive role of the group and guide women towards making informed decisions about the immediate and long-term prosperity of their communities. This guidance and empowerment helps women to realize their potential as respected community members and leaders through decision-making, conflict resolution, and navigating gender dynamics modules.

5. Decrease preventable diseases through adoption of healthy behaviors for women and families, and increase support available for mental health issues.

- In February and April of 2016, over the course of the four-day visits to partner communities, doctors from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and University Hospitals Case Western Medical Center led discussions, skit reenactments of conversations between doctors and 'patients,' group exercises, and performed individual health assessments. The findings from the recent April 2016 trip have informed new initiatives for the organization on WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) and eye care and eyeglasses access, as previously mentioned.

Our most recent Social Impact Assessment indicated that artisans are experiencing much higher levels of food security, with 73% of artisans saying they always have enough to eat, as compared to only 59% in 2013. General health has increased as well, with 95% of MG artisans having vaccinated their children and 67% of MG artisans seeking medical treatment from professionals (hospital/clinic), which increased from 62% in 2013.

Through the *Nutritious Cooking* and *Healthy Recipe Sharing* modules, women learned the importance of nutritious food choices and preparation. Hands-on cooking classes made learning fun and relevant to everyday life. Recipes for this module included carrot cake, broiled chicken, varied salads, and foods low in sodium and sugar. This year we also started a gardening program, and women created sustainable and affordable sources for more balanced diets. Five cooperatives created community gardens this year, with a total of 47 women participating.

Finally, women gained access to healthcare with mobile Pap screenings, and learned new skills through the Power to Change Program, which helps women manage stress and PTSD and create plans to implement positive life changes. These screenings and trainings cemented a trust between the cooperative and Mercado Global, while creating a support system for women to rely on each other.

4. What challenges did you face in connection with this project? How did you address these challenges?

Mercado Global faced two major challenges during this grant period: successful adoption of new sanitation practices and managing the constant flux in the number of beneficiaries working with the organization.

While we have seen many improvements for artisans and their families' health across the board, there is more that can be done to achieve the second project outcome to, "Empower women to adopt healthy practices in their families and communities, leading to less illness, decreased mortality rates, and increased well-being for their families." Thanks to the partnership with Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and University Hospitals Case Western Medical Center, new areas of improvement were identified during their February 2016 and April 2016 trips to Guatemala to work with our partner artisans. These improvements include implementing mother and child health notebooks, connecting artisans to eye care, and creating a partnership to ensure access to clean water.

First, the doctors would like to help artisans create mother and child health notebooks to help artisans track their children's health and development progress and receive feedback from the doctors during their visits. The team also identified that the "Pain Away" curriculum of the "Power to Change" program could have greater impact through individual assessments to create tailor-made self-care plans. The "Pain Away" curriculum was designed to support musculoskeletal health while alleviating lifestyle and work-related pain among the artisans of Mercado Global. The initial program included four exercises to address cervical and thoracic spine complaints.

A second improvement is helping Mercado Global cooperatives and communities gain better access to potable water. In a recent assessment, artisans confirmed that they must buy or treat their own water in order to consume it safely. Eighty percent of artisans interviewed drink chlorinated water (purchased bottled water) and the other 20 percent boil water that arrives through a simple piped system or to a community well or similar source. There continues to be a lack of understanding of the time that water needs to be boiled in order to be potable and safely consumed. The impact of the lack of access to water and understanding is clear, 80 percent of artisans and their families are still suffering from stomach issues like diarrhea on a regular basis. This indicates that lessons from the Five F's curriculum are not being fully understood or implemented by artisans.

To address this need, Mercado Global has started talks to create a partnership with a local NGO, EcoFILTRO, to provide access to water filters and has developed a new curriculum to better teach artisans about WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) and safe water consumption practices. The module is called, "Importance of Potable Water" and it is ready to implement in partner communities. However, to make this module most effective, water filters also need to be made available to artisans for use in their homes.

The second major challenge the organization faced in implementing the project during this reporting period was a drop and then an increase in artisan participation. Over the past two years, changes in the market have caused Mercado Global to experience a drop in international sales. As our previous program structure heavily focused on providing training to support international market access, we experienced a decrease in program participation with reduced sales. In order to address this, Mercado Global began a restructuring program starting almost one year ago with the following components:

- 1) *Expanding international market access:* We brought in the former head of accessories at Eileen Fisher to serve as our Creative Director and help us rebrand and redesign our artisans' collections so that they can better compete internationally. We also built a Fashion Advisory Board with C-level executives and seasoned industry veterans to expand our connections in the industry and provide access to market pulse information in real time. Additionally, we began building more direct-to-consumer sales partnerships, such as the new sales partnership we have begun with Dining for Women. Early signs reflect that this restructuring will help us grow sales going forward. Since this initiative began, we have nearly doubled direct-to-consumer sales and established major sales partnerships with companies such as Garnet Hill, Restoration Hardware, and Nordstrom.
- 2) *Restructuring our community based education program to provide training for accessing both the international and the domestic market:* This shift towards providing both domestic and international market training has allowed us to expand our impact and programming to more communities, even when sales are not as robust as we would like. Over the past year we piloted providing our community based education programming with a focus just on domestic market access to 100 new artisans. This shifted focus is ensuring that artisans have a more diversified income stream and is allowing us to help more women at all levels of international sales. However, within this fiscal year we have focused on increasing our sales, and as a result, we are on track to increase sales over last fiscal year by as much as 71%.

5. Is your organization or program situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant program staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?

No, Mercado Global as an organization and its programming have remained essentially the same as presented in the original grant proposal. Our mission to empower indigenous women through market access, education, and asset development continues to drive our work and inform our programming.

6. What were the most important lessons learned?

Upon completion of this grant period, we were able to define three key lessons that we have learned. The first was the realization that we need to restructure our reporting on all programs within the Community-Based Education Program. At the moment, we

capture very basic information including attendance, participation, and the tangible results of bank accounts opened, personal savings trends, and gardens implemented. We are currently onboarding a new role in the Community-Based Education team that would be responsible for setting detailed metrics and tracking all results for more specific reporting. Trainers would be reporting to this Manager role, increasing our efficiency as an organization as well as the ability to provide more detailed reports. The Manager will oversee the 2017 Social Impact Assessment, and creating the outline for information to track, survey, and compare to past years.

The second main lesson learned pertains to the need for improvement to the reproductive health trainings in the Community-Based Education Program. We realized we could implement these trainings with higher-impact through a local NGO partnership to deliver Pap smears and cervical cancer screenings and resources for follow-up appointments or irregular results. In 2017, we plan to formalize a partnership with a local organization, Waku Kawoq, to bring mobile medical clinics to partner communities to conduct Pap smears and cervical cancer screenings for all women that are interested. During this grant period, women that attended reproductive health trainings disclosed they were too afraid to go to the doctor, lacked funds, or didn't know the importance of Pap smears and screenings. With this in mind, we plan to continue education on cervical cancer and various facets of women's health.

The third main lesson learned was in the area of community health. After the Case Western doctors visited in April 2016 to do screenings and general health check-ups, they completed an assessment of partner artisans, which they shared with the MG staff for long-term implementation. Doctors reported the below learnings and recommendations to improve conditions for partner artisans.

Learnings:

- A significant number of musculoskeletal problems were identified in each community.
 - Low back pain, shoulder pain, neck pain, foot/ leg pain, and elbow pain were the most common, and most likely resulted from posturing during work.
- Significant visual impairments were common in all communities.
 - Poor lighting in workspaces as well as environmental exposures likely contribute to the number of visual problems seen in the communities.
- Somatic pain syndrome seemed to be associated with multiple life stressors.
 - Many of the ill-defined musculoskeletal pain syndromes may be secondary to underlying stress, mental health challenges, or low self-esteem.
- Illnesses due to unsafe water consumption.
 - Many artisans do not have water filters and fail to understand the importance of potable water and its effects on health.

Recommendations:

- Implement revised exercise regimen.
- Improve lighting and working environments for all artisans.
- Include education on good working environments and the Pain Away program.
- Implement coping mechanisms to reduce stress among the artisans.
 - Underlying self-esteem issues often manifest as anxiety, fatigue, and generalized pain.
- Implement Clean Water Initiative to educate women on water safety and consumption.
 - Identified potential local NGO partner EcoFILTRO.

All findings and evaluations of this project were presented to the organization's leadership in verbal and written format by the Community-Based Education Coordinators Olga Morales and Aurora Matzar Lopez. Thereafter, the Coordinators verbally communicated the results to all partner artisans to implement proposed changes and preventative health exercises.

7. What has changed within your organization as a result of this project?

As stated above, Community-Based Education Coordinators are focused on providing engaging, informative, and educational trainings. In order to continue to teach artisans new trainings and reinforce previously taught trainings, Coordinators have adopted new methodologies for delivering content. Instead of discussing trainings in theory, Coordinators are creating more dynamic trainings that culminate to an overarching message delivered at the end of the training. Activities are more interactive and hands-on. One activity within the program is designed to build trust. It entails no verbal communication; women can only use hand signals and teamwork in order to solve a puzzle.

Additionally, the organization has created a new strategic focus for 2017 in which we are looking to partner with a variety of local NGOs to expand the Community-Based Education Program and create more robust curriculum and programs. Potential partnerships in 2017 include EcoFILTRO for WASH trainings, ALAS for women's rights trainings, Wuqu Kawoq for Pap smears and mobile medical screenings, and Tigo Foundation for cell phone literacy and mobile banking.

8. Describe the unexpected events and outcomes, including unexpected benefits.

One unexpected outcome appeared through the Pap smears and cervical cancer screenings. When we introduced the reproductive health trainings, many women did not know what a Pap smear was or why it would be important for preventative measures. After months of education around women's health, partner artisans became more interested in the idea of screenings and check-ups as they relate to cervical cancer, a common medical issue among this population that many at-risk women are unaware of. Looking to 2017, we will be partnering with local NGO, Waku Kawoq, to deliver Pap smears to partner artisans and to provide education and assistance for any women in need of further care.

At the heart of our work are the women who partner with us and the impact these trainings have on their lives. Each woman is fighting for her family, for a future, and every story is inspirational. One particular partner artisan, Rosario Chopen Coc, has a very interesting story that started with a very difficult childhood. As a young girl, she began working at a very early age and witnessed first-hand her parents' toxic relationship and the violence that took place in her household. Then, at age twenty-two, she was left pregnant and abandoned. "That was very hard for me," says Rosario. "At twenty-two, who can have a child by themselves? But I fought for my son. I fought, I worked, and I didn't allow myself to be used."

After remarrying and joining Mercado Global as part of the *Analizadoras* weaving cooperative in Sololá, Rosario decided that she didn't want the kind of life her mother had. Today, she credits the Power to Change program with encouraging her growth and teaching her ways to stand up for herself in the way she had always wanted. The trainings allowed Rosario to feel empowered and dictate the kind of life she wants for herself and for her children. At home, she made it clear to her husband that they would share household responsibilities and that they would be partners. "We help each other now," Rosario says. "When I'm not home, he takes care of the kids. He makes lunch and cleans the house. He says, 'go do what you have to do.' We understand each other. It is a completely different situation from my parents'."

Not a day goes by where Rosario doesn't think about how much her life has changed. She oftentimes thinks back to her childhood and remembers how much she suffered. But she quickly reminds herself to not think of those things. Instead, she reminds herself to keep fighting. "That's the lesson," she says. "We have to fight. We, as women, are capable. We don't have to depend on men to move forward. I want my kids to have opportunity, to not suffer like I did. That's what I want. I have to fight."

9. Did you change your strategy as a result of obstacles you encountered? How will you address these challenges in the future?

The overall strategy for the Power to Change Program within this grant remained the same. However, some adjustments were made within the trainings and their delivery over the course of the year. Trainers altered some trainings to make them more dynamic and involved, ensuring artisans attention, interest, and participation. With this change, all trainings in this program were interactive and hands-on. In the self-esteem trainings, one activity was designed to build trust and no speaking was allowed. Women were allowed to only use hand signals and teamwork in order to solve a puzzle together. Light-hearted trainings like this paved the way for more serious topics on self-esteem. Through Power to Change, women grow closer as a cooperative and improve their communication and support systems.

The women's rights trainings in the self-esteem track included decision-making, conflict resolution, and navigating gender dynamics modules that educated women on gender equality and their rights as productive and integral community members. These trainings gave real life examples of in-home disputes and sometimes touched on taboo subjects, helping women to feel comfortable openly discussing them and addressing them through role-playing. Originally, we planned to partner with local NGO Redmusovi to deliver women's rights trainings. However, due to budget and scheduling conflicts, this partnership was postponed to early 2017. Instead, Community-Based Education Trainers delivered the training with in-house created curriculum.

Finally, in the health track of the Power to Change Program the nutrition programs were elevated to a new level as trainers changed the trainings from theoretical classes to visual and interactive workshops. Nutrition trainings featured food pyramid posters with removable food items for the women to categorize and understand daily and weekly intake of certain foods. Childhood malnourishment trainings utilized photos of various children in different states of malnourishment so women can identify the

importance of proper nutrition as opposed to merely adequate quantities of food to ensure their children are well-nourished. All the changes implemented during this grant period were very well-received and will be continued in trainings in 2017.

10. Approximately how many lives have been touched, both directly and indirectly, by the program?

Through this project, Mercado Global directly reached 198 indigenous women in 19 cooperatives and indirectly impacted approximately 1,100 beneficiaries from isolated communities in Guatemala.

11. What are the measurements used to monitor success and how was this information measured (e.g., surveys, observation)? Be specific and include measurable results.

Over the course of 12 years, Mercado Global has proven the impact and the positive effects of its model. MG started with a network of a few dozen artisans, and as of today, has impacted over 450 women and more than 2,700 dependents from over 40 Mayan communities. The organization has continued to grow and consistently proves its model's efficiency. Across the board, our hybrid model and the Power to Change Program and its two tracks have allowed our partner artisans to thrive in comparison to national averages.

- Health Track included *Pain Away and Physical Exercises, Nutrition, Childhood Malnutrition, Potable Water, and Sanitation and Hygiene*. From these trainings we have seen improvements including:
 - 73% of artisans have access to the food and nutrition they need while 69% of Guatemala's indigenous population and 55% of its rural population faces chronic undernutrition.
 - 92% of artisans reported having running water in their homes, compared to only 23% in 2013.
 - 95% of MG artisans have vaccinated their children.

- Self-Esteem track including *Be the Change, Community Cowers, Get Started, Breaking Down Barriers, Putting It Together, and Support Sessions for Stress*. With these trainings women are taking more initiative for themselves and their families, ensuring education and personal savings for the stability of their livelihoods and futures. From these trainings we have seen improvements including:
 - 84% of MG artisans are currently in a leadership position, in comparison with 32% of artisans in 2013.
 - 93% of MG artisans responded that they have become more involved in decision-making since working with MG, compared to only 70% in 2013.
 - 72% of MG artisans are confident in their ability to handle problems and stress, in comparison with 62% in 2013.
 - 99% of artisans' children are enrolled in school, compared to only 35% of children in Guatemala's rural areas.
 - 64% of artisans have a personal bank account in a country where only 27% of the indigenous population has one.
 - 72% of artisans have reported saving or saving more since starting with Mercado Global, compared to 60% in 2013.

Mercado Global tracks metrics of all organizational activities. We track artisan skills and capacity, effectiveness of community-based education trainings, and important social metrics of artisans and their families such as income and savings, decision-making in the household, education, health, and self-esteem. Additionally, the organization conducts a bi-annual Social Impact Assessment led by outside experts. The last assessment was completed in 2015, concluding that the Community-Based Education Program was far-reaching with significant positive impact in strengthening communities in the areas of personal savings, financial literacy, women's health, and market understanding. With increased income and knowledge, women are creating a new cycle of empowerment for themselves and are building up their communities.

12. If the program is ongoing, provide plans and expected results, including projected timeframe.

The Power to Change Program is a cornerstone of the Community-Based Education Program, one that arms partner artisans with a set of full circle empowerment tools to fight poverty. The organization sees a future in which partner artisans utilize this knowledge to become trainers themselves and replace the cycle of poverty with a cycle of empowerment. We plan to continue implementing this program with current and new cooperatives and remain focused on improving artisans' livelihoods.

In the next year, we look forward to expanding this program to new communities and deepening its impact in existing communities. We plan to onboard ten new cooperatives in the coming year to take part in this program, impacting additional dependents and communities. We also plan to increase focus on our Clean Water Initiative and implement a Domestic Violence workshop. In a region with the fourth highest rate of gender motivated killings in the world, this model has the potential to lift thousands out of

poverty and bolster women's self-confidence to new heights. We hope to continue our partnership with DFW in some capacity, and empower this generation of rural entrepreneurs and pave a path for the next generation.

13. Provide a detailed list of all expenses incurred during the grant cycle which have been paid for with the Dining for Women grant.

Project leadership and oversight by Guatemala Programs Director - \$2,500

Twelve months of 25% portion of the Programs Director's salary/time dedicated

Project execution by Lead Trainer - \$13,020

Full cost of program manager dedicated to implementing and overseeing this project. \$1085/month for 12 months.

Travel for Community-Based Lead Trainer - \$480

Includes lowest-cost travel options in-country (local busses and tuk-tuks) at \$40/month for 12 months.

Project Execution by Program Trainer - \$8,760

Portion of Program trainer dedicated to this project at \$730/month for 12 months.

Community-based travel for Program trainer -\$732

Includes lowest-cost travel options in-country (local busses and tuk-tuks) at \$61/month for 12 months.

Design and development of visual manual - \$1,749.99

Labor involved with developing visual leave-behind manual for artisans with limited literacy, includes partnering with Case Western Reserve Global Health Track doctors for activity build-out.

Printing of training materials - \$820

Local printing of 410 manuals at \$2 each.

14. Did this grant and relationship with DFW assist your organization in obtaining other funding, partnerships with other organizations, or public recognition in some capacity?

Over the course of this grant, we obtained new institutional partners including the Belizean Grove, Clif Bar Family Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, PIMCO Foundation as well as support from Padma Lakshmi for our women's health programming. Additionally, we received the Leadership Circle Award from the PIMCO Foundation in November 2016 for our innovative model, program, and impact.

Artisan Story

Nothing brings a smile to Felipa de Jesus Lopez Estrada's face quite like the topic of her daughters, Gabriela and Victoria. Though she may have just finished discussing her family's difficult economic situation and the challenges she and her husband have endured, the moment her daughters are mentioned, the worries disappear. A concerned and tired woman is instantly replaced by a beaming mother who can't contain her pride.

"The oldest really wants to be an astronomer," Felipa says through laughs, unable to say where the girl got that idea. "She just loves to study everything that has to do with space and stars. She spends all her time looking up at the sky!" Her youngest, she explains, wants to be a lawyer. Despite the pride she feels, Felipa does admit that her daughters' boundless ambition has created some unease for her and her husband. In order for them to reach their goals, she acknowledges, they will need to keep studying, something that won't come without heavy costs. And, until a little over a year ago, Felipa did not think it would be possible to provide them with that opportunity.

Felipa's journey with Mercado Global began last year, when she joined the Ajkem cooperative in her community of San Andrés Semetabaj. She had been with the group years ago, before they had heard of Mercado Global, when they had come together to learn how to use sewing machines. Eventually, Felipa decided she could not keep up with the time commitment and had to leave. She returned when the group was invited to join Mercado Global, and has been an enthusiastic member ever since.

"It has been such a wonderful experience because I have learned so much," Felipa says. "We've made traditional bags, and now we're learning to use a loom. Little by little, we're learning new techniques that will be so beneficial to me and my family."



One program that has been especially valuable to Felipa has been Mercado Global's Domestic Market Access Program, which has recently been implemented in partner communities. The program teaches partner artisans the skills necessary for success in Guatemala's local markets. With trainings that teach sewing and weaving techniques, coupled with an education in business management, artisans are able to be more independent and generate additional income through their own local businesses.

Through the program, Felipa has learned embroidery and other useful techniques that she can use for products to sell in her community. Not only does she hope to use this additional income to contribute to her daughters' education, but she also hopes the new knowledge will benefit them in other ways. "The things I'm learning are great because now I can make things for my daughters and invest less money in

clothes for them," says Felipa. "I am also able to teach them the techniques I am learning so that they can do it for themselves. It has been so helpful for us."

Mercado Global's impact within Felipa's home also goes well beyond the added income generated through new techniques. She also receives educational trainings on nutrition and personal savings as part of the Community-Based Education Program, which is improving her family's quality of life. "We've been taught how to manage our money better, and take note of how much we're spending on a daily basis," notes Felipa. "That all helps, because you're not always aware of where our money goes. You just buy what you think is necessary at the time and don't put much thought to it."

The group, Felipa says, has learned how to properly budget as a result of the trainings. That, paired with lessons on health and nutrition, have completely changed how she shops for food. "Sometimes we have the bad habit of buying a soda, for instance, without thinking twice about it. Now I realize how much money goes into that. On the other hand, buying a juice is a lot more cost effective and nutritional as well," says Felipa.

Going forward, Felipa sees a door of opportunity that she did not see a little over a year ago. Though she and her family still face hardships and the future is anything but clear, her involvement with Mercado Global has provided a path for her to contribute to her daughters' education.

"More than anything, we want them to study so that in the future, they have a way to defend and provide for themselves," says Felipa. "Because without an education, life can be very, very difficult."