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*Psicología y Derechos Humanos (PSYDEH), A.C.*  
*presents:*

# NARRATIVES

STORIES OF INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN LEADERS IN THE  
OTOMÍ-TEPEHUA REGION

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*The stories we tell ourselves and others  
determine how we live our lives: our choices,  
words, and actions.*

- Psicología y Derechos Humanos  
PSYDEH, A.C.



Comité de Mujeres Indígenas de Amecameca | Comité de Mujeres Indígenas de Puebla | Comité de Mujeres Indígenas de San Bartolomé, Tlaxcala | Comité de Mujeres Indígenas de Tehuacan | Comité de Mujeres Indígenas de la Región Oaxaqueña

*In memory of  
Nayelica Lazcano Bernardino  
and Josefina Merced Velasco Velasco*

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## COLLABORATORS

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**Jorge Echeverria, Logistics Coordinator.** For over 25 years, Jorge, a Guatemalan-Mexican psychologist, has worked at the nexus between human development and the rights of Indigenous communities. As the General Coordinator of PSYDEH, Jorge has designed and produced projects, while also coordinating the PSYDEH field team to ensure the successful implementation of activities.



**Katie Freund, Coordinator of the initiative.** Katie was a Fulbright-García Robles Scholar from the United States in Mexico (2017-2018), where she worked at the Intercultural University of the State of Hidalgo in Tenango de Doria, Hidalgo. She is currently working as a consultant on this initiative and evaluating the social impact of our multi-year program.



**Diogo Heber, Portrait photographer, story facilitator.** Diogo grew up with a camera in his hand and was constantly moving around America and Europe. He graduated from New York University with degrees in Politics and Creative Writing. As a professional photographer, Diogo has worked with NGOs and high profile magazines.



**Roisin McAuley, Designer and Editor of the initiative.** Roisin is a writer, videographer, and designer with experience in communications and documentary production. She graduated from Glasgow School of Art with a specialization in communications design. She is currently the editor of our visual and digital content.



**Eleanor Neal, Translation.** Eleanor recently completed a Fulbright García-Robles Fellowship in Mexico (2018-2020). She worked as an English Teaching Assistant at public universities in Tabasco, Chiapas, and Mexico City, centering her curriculum on writing. As a recent graduate of Pitzer College, Eleanor is passionate about storytelling for community engagement and social change.



**Diana Ramirez León, Narrative Storytelling Facilitator.** Diana is of Hñähñu origin. She is a consultant and communicator for Indigenous peoples' and women's rights through working in community radio. She holds a Master's degree in the social sciences and a Bachelor's degree in sociology from the Autonomous University of Hidalgo (UAEH). During her years with PSYDEH, Diana has advised on the design of project initiatives, such as the narrative storytelling training and workshop facilitation with Indigenous women partners.



**Damon Taylor, Executive Producer of the initiative.** Damon has 20 years of experience creating impact at the nexus of education, law, rights, technology, art, and science. Since becoming a senior advisor to PSYDEH in mid-2014, the annual in-kind and financial contributions to PSYDEH's work from 2015 to 2018 were 3.9 to 5 times greater than earnings in 2014.

## INTRODUCTION

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Anaïs Nin, the Cuban-French essayist, wrote: "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

PSYDEH agrees. Who we are, what we think about ourselves and other people, and what they think about us, shape our worldview. Telling our stories helps us to communicate our vision of the world. In so doing, we inform how others see us. Stories are the fruits of change that can lead to [so much] more.

About two years ago, PSYDEH began developing a storytelling program that focused on the demands of our Indigenous women partners in the field. We had continually heard from these women that stories and narrative traditions were once a significant part of their heritage and daily lives. However, many women felt that their stories were distorted and misinterpreted by Mexicans and foreigners alike. PSYDEH understands that powerful storytelling is perhaps the most important quality of strong leadership, vital to both personal and community growth. Towards this end, the goal of our storytelling program is to provide women with the training they need to be impactful storytellers in their communities and as community representatives to the world.

Funded by our crowdfunding campaign, "Fruits of Change," in collaboration with GlobalGiving based in the United States, our vision is already being realized. Our storytelling project began with a two-day workshop at PSYDEH's offices in Tulancingo in May 2019. Through this workshop, we highlighted the importance of storytelling and started working on narratives and individual values. We continued this fieldwork with our partners in Acaxochitlán and San Bartolo, where we focused on the organizational history of each

Council and the story they wanted to share with the world. This fieldwork continued until August 2019.

PSYDEH has witnessed the leadership development of every woman participating in this project as they progress along their path. The women have reflected on what brought them to assume leadership positions and work with PSYDEH. They have also thought deeply about the challenges they have faced throughout their journeys as well as the successes and benefits they have realized.

Now, we are excited to share the final products - the "fruits" - of our extended collaboration: a series of photographs, poems, and stories from 27 individuals who, when taken together, express the collective voice of the women leaders that form PSYDEH, in their own words.

This book is divided into chapters based on the five Women's Councils. Each chapter begins with the name and original logo (designed by women partners and professionally produced) of the Council. We have also included photos of some of the founders and their collective poems that describe the Council's mission, vision, and history, including the regional Council, Siempre Viva, which represents all of the women in the region.

After sharing the stories of each woman, the book concludes with an appendix that provides an intimate view of the creative process behind this initiative. According to the women, this process is as important as the results; the experience of telling your own story and publicly reclaiming your roots has been a process of "opening up, feeling lighter and free," and "understanding identity and the forces that drive life forward."

The work that we present here is intimate, continuous, expansive, and most of all, collective. We know that our stories are written in the contexts of other stories - that the narratives we tell about ourselves are also the stories of our neighbors, people, communities, and ultimately, our world. We hope that with this book, we open a door, perspective, or conversation, and that we inspire you to continue the work of growing narrative space for new voices.



—Katie Freund, Coordinator of the Initiative

**COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN FROM THE  
COMMUNITY OF  
ACAXOCHITLÁN:  
YOLKI INO YOLO, A.C**



**YOLKI INO YOLO A.C.**

Consejo de Mujeres Indígenas de Acaxochitlán



*Que la naturaleza humana sea educar y compartir información por la comunicación, cimentando a través de nuestro ser y alma, los valores que se retornan en nuestras raíces como un árbol.*

*Que no defraudamos el sentir de nuestro corazón, que este color intenso sea nuestra fuerza y escudo para no doblegarse ante la adversidad.*

*Que caemos en un sueño profundo donde exista la paz, la igualdad entre hombres y mujeres, con la madre naturaleza.*

*Y que al despertar de este grandioso sueño, florezca los frutos de nuestro árbol.*

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**MISSION:** Through communication, respect, and training for Indigenous leaders, our mission is to strengthen our communities. With tolerance, we will promote actions that improve our work as a team. We will use public and private resources together with honesty. Through these actions, we will generate a mutual commitment to our mission.

**VISION:** We envision ourselves as strong, recognizing and attending to the different necessities of Indigenous communities and promoting local, state, and national development. We aim to preserve pre-Hispanic culture and reflect it in ourselves as empowered women.

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## HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION

In September 2013, Maricela Romero Cruz was invited by a friend to PSYDEH's workshops in Acaxochitlán, where there was a debate about gender equality in the municipality. The communities in Acaxochitlán are Indigenous and speak primarily Náhuatl, and there is still a lot of machismo in these places.

Maricela became more interested in PSYDEH. In 2014, she began working with the organization on project design and implementation as a member of their first, field-based team of Indigenous women professionals. There were two women based in each municipality - one community organizer and one workshop facilitator. Part of their work was to identify female leaders in the different communities that make up Acaxochitlán. She then invited them to participate in the workshops and eventually to form their own organizations. The first regional forum based in Acaxochitlán was truly an unforgettable experience - we joined with other leaders to rise up as empowered women in the region.

In 2015, we continued to grow and involved more women in our work. As female leaders from the communities of Santa Ana Tzacuala and Los Reyes, we formally organized our civil society organization named Yolki Ino Yolo, which means "alive heart." From 2016-2017, women continued to work as representatives of their communities. Maricela got involved in municipal politics. We gave workshops with the government about female civic participation, and today we continue to plan activities and projects for the benefit of our communities.



## **BALBINA CRUZ VARGAS**

Founding Partner, Nahua  
Community of Santa Ana Tzacuala, Acaxochitlán  
Yolki Ino Yolo

*Soy como la orquídea porque a pesar de las dificultades de la vida  
Aún sigo teniendo aroma, a pesar de los fracasos aún sigo viva.  
Con el paso del tiempo aún sigo floreciendo.  
A pesar de la falta de agua no me he marchitado.*

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### **THE RIGHT TO HEALTH**

"Two years ago my brother became ill and was sent to Juarez Hospital in Mexico [City]. I arrived [there] with my brother, and when they gave me permission to see the doctor, he told me that I had to look for a specialist. [The hospital] transferred my brother to the emergency room. The specialist [later] told me that she could not take care of my brother because too much time had passed and she needed to see other patients who had appointments. The hospital did not have any appointments [available with a specialist] for three months - and my brother was in very poor health. In the emergency room, they told me that they did not find anything wrong with my brother and no longer wanted to see him. I began to knock on doors, check hospital regulations, and [eventually] spoke with the deputy director and the director of the emergency department. I told them that if they concluded that nothing was wrong with my brother, they needed to give me an [official] document stating that he was in good health and that nothing would happen to him. The doctor said that in order to receive this, they had to do some tests as well as an examination. I responded, 'Well, do it, and we'll see how the test results come out.' Then, they asked me if I had any money. And I said, 'I did not know that there were economic priorities [here].' I did not have the money.

So I went to the social worker to discuss my case. But she told me, 'If you do not have money, how can you [afford to] dye your

hair?' I said that this had nothing to do with it. Then she asked if I did not have money because I had three children. That was when I said to her, 'Give me whatever documentation you want, but if I do not have enough money to pay, there is no one who can make me because this is a government hospital.' And in the end, she gave me the [right] documentation.

Later, they wanted more money for [all of] the forms. I told them no, and after two days and one night, they finally came down to check on my brother. He was suffering tremendously. We did not know if he was going to make it through the night. And all of the lost time was the hospital's fault. They say it is a hospital. They say that everyone has a right [to access healthcare], but if you do not have your act together... There were patients who arrived but could not see a doctor because of the things they put people through... that is what was going to happen to my brother if I did not do everything [in my power] to get him care. And I felt helpless, enraged that the doctors did not feel the pain of the people. It filled me with so much helplessness because it is something that I lived through - but not just me. A boy arrived at the emergency room while I was waiting. He had a lot of stomach pain and a fever and everything, and they made him wait for more than three hours. He was already convulsing when they finally brought him in, in part because all of us in the waiting area became rebellious and demanded that they assist him. And you say that this cannot happen in Mexico, it cannot happen.

My brother had tuberculosis. His health was deteriorating quickly because his work would not allow him to go to the doctor. This was another violation of my brother's rights in that it was labor exploitation. He was working in a plant because he was not allowed to leave, until he practically collapsed on the job. The only person who supported him was an 11-year-old boy. By the time I arrived to

take him to the hospital, he could hardly remember his name, his age, or anything. He was more dead than alive.

And that is when I learned that if you do not put into practice everything you know, you do not get served. They push you aside because they see that you come from an Indigenous community. I arrived at the hospital with Nahuas, with sandals, and I feel that this could have played a part in why I was treated the way I was. This was an experience I lived. It opens your eyes, it makes you see reality. We were being denied a right, a right to health.

PSYDEH has supported us in learning more about our rights and about ourselves so that we can help others. You learn, you lose your fear, you raise your voice, you do not allow yourself to be left behind. You have to know your rights, and you have to enforce them - because if you do not enforce your rights, it is as if you have not learned anything."





## **MARISELA ROMERO CRUZ**

Founding Partner, Nahua  
Community of Santa Ana Tzacuala, Acaxochitlán  
Yolki Ino Yolo

*Ser parte del mismo ser  
De la madre naturaleza  
Tan grande fuera el amor y  
El respeto por la naturaleza  
No habría falta de interés  
Por los elementos naturales  
Y el corazón en el alma espiritual  
Sería como una base de espiral  
El ser humano y la madre naturaleza  
Tan feliz sería con un toque de sabiduría  
Lo sabría.*

---

### **POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL RIGHTS**

"My father is Mazahua, and my mother is Nahua. I always say that I have the strength of the Mazahua and the nobility of the Nahua.

My start in politics was accidental; I did not [actually] like it. I had never been involved in politics before. When I was first invited to participate, it was because of my leadership [experience], being an Indigenous person who spoke my mother tongue, had a career, and thought deeply about my community. The leadership [abilities] that I have [include] the capacity to positively influence my peers.

PSYDEH contributed to my leadership as well as my political involvement, through the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI). I have served as a community organizer with PSYDEH and Yolki (the municipal Council), building management and agreements with other organizations. I participated in politics because I had the courage and determination to stand up to politicians. We [once] had a legal confrontation with a

senator from the Indigenous Affairs Committee. When they see that you express yourself and that you are someone who questions, they call you rebellious or unruly. These people think they are untouchable. On one occasion when he [a senator] visited us, I questioned him about how to legislate the second article of the Mexican Constitution where it establishes respect for [different] customs as internal regulations.

After that, they invited me and insisted on my candidacy for the municipal presidency. They even told me that I could run for governor. I was the first female candidate at 29 years of age. I was also an Indigenous person in Acaxochitlán. My campaign was in Nahua and I spoke Nahuatl. It was [incredibly] difficult. I would leave at 6 a.m. and return at 1 a.m. Twice, I wanted to throw in the towel. I did not win the candidacy, but I did not lose anything. On the contrary, I learned a lot - to value many things like my family and my work, because sometimes we do not value what we have [enough]. I learned many things through [my involvement in] politics. For instance, when you start to view economic resources as your main priority, you begin to play dirty.

I believe that everyone is autonomous, and that everyone has their own way of expressing themselves. An important achievement [we accomplished] in collaboration with PSYDEH is that we are constantly growing. Each woman, on the basis of her rights, has already cultivated her own identity, her own personality. Sometimes we do not agree on everything, but at the end of the day, we do agree. Each person is independent to make their decisions, and we propose that we are daughters of PSYDEH, all rebellious daughters of PSYDEH."





## **ISABEL ROMERO CRUZ**

Founding Partner, Nahua  
Community of Santa Ana Tzacuala, Acaxochitlán  
Yolki Ino Yolo

*Soy como la tierra  
Que siempre está activa  
Se sobrecalienta al trabajar tanto  
Sin embargo, contaba con un poco de hielo  
Para tranquilizarse.*

---

### **THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

"I was one of four children. We used to live at my grandparents' house. I was often left alone when my parents went out to work. My mom would go to the river to wash, leaving me at home under lock and key. Later on, when they wanted to send me to preschool, I felt terrified. I was afraid to leave home. The sound of cars even scared me. I would only go [to school] when my mom left me outside the classroom door. I had a hard time getting along with my classmates because I hadn't spent much time with other children before.

My mom would drop me off at the town center, and I only had to cross the street to arrive at my preschool. However, I always stayed behind with the girl who sold candy. I did not go to school because I felt scared and could not muster up the courage to go. I couldn't even bring myself to cross the street because of all the cars.

My parents only spoke to me in Spanish, so when I began elementary school, I felt like an outsider. All of my classmates spoke Nahuatl, while I could only understand Spanish. They excluded and made fun of me. I only had one friend throughout elementary school, and it was very difficult for me to integrate myself in society later in life. We sometimes say that we are discriminated against by people outside of our communities. It also holds true that we discriminate against each other within our communities.

My dad was very machista and sexist. He did not allow us to be out in the streets. My mom was the only one that escaped, and she escaped by going to church. Later, I started learning how to speak the Náhuatl language. My friends showed me new places in our town. Before then, I only knew my home and school. My parents told me: 'Always reflect on what you want, what you want to be in life.' They would always ask: 'What are you going to study?' Ever since elementary school, I wanted to study medicine.

I was eight years-old when my younger brother was born. It was a huge deal for me when my mom became pregnant because I used to watch my dad beat my mom - even while she was pregnant. This infuriated me. Later, when my mom was about to give birth, things got very serious. The health workers told me, 'It's either your mom or the baby.' It was at this moment that I decided I wanted to study medicine.

My mom was a paraplegic. She told me, 'Let me die.' Then my dad said to me, 'You want to be a nurse, but you're no good.' It was very difficult to hear him say that I couldn't [pursue my goal]. He implied that if I could not do anything to help my mom, I could not do anything to serve anyone else. But then I said to myself, 'Though my soul aches, I have to move forward; with or without them.' I knew that while I could not help my mother, I could help someone else. So I went on to study. I finished my degree. Things changed from this point forward; my community gained confidence and trust in me.

Before I finished my degree, I was going to get married. We were very excited because he came from the same town. He wanted to study medicine while I wanted to study nursing. We already had plans in place to get married. Though one day, I learned that he had been killed. After hearing this news, I fell into a deep depression - I

did not want to eat or do anything. I did not want to finish my degree or complete my internship. However, my sister, Mari, was there and she would not let me fall. Today I am a nurse, and my greatest achievement has been treating serious patients without the need for a doctor. I'm now up for a promotion to become a supervisor.

When others tell me I can't do something, I always say: 'Look, actually, I can.' I like to push people and help them realize that we are all equal but also special in our own way. My organization [Yolki Ino Yolo] is the essence of each and every one of us. The fact is: to be a woman is to be autonomous. Now, we are looking for more women to join us in support of the common good. Each one of our stories helps us to identify with what it means to be a woman. These stories give us courage and power. We will continue the struggle to propel ourselves forward."





**MARÍA JUANA LICONA  
MARTÍNEZ**

New Partner, Nahua  
Community of Santa Ana Tzacuala, Acaxochitlán  
Yolki Ino Yolo

*Tú que eres fuerte, grande  
Tú que pasas por aire, lluvia y calor  
Tú que nos das ese fruto  
A ti naturaleza en ti me identifico  
Como una mujer capaz de crecer  
Una mujer de frutos  
Para poder dar a las personas sabidurías  
Cada fruto que da es una enseñanza nueva  
Una esperanza viva.*

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**THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

“My core value is respect. The biggest challenge for me and women in my community is to participate in the village because there, only men participate. Women are not given a voice, we are restricted [access] to [leadership] positions - only men can have them. However, there are women who do dare to speak. I believe that it is not difficult because both men and women can hold [important] roles - I feel drawn to these roles because you support the people.

What I like most about my community are their traditions - for example, the stewardship that is celebrated for each patron saint; the celebration of All Saints Day; and the celebration of las Posadas. In my town, it is a challenge to talk and engage in dialogue with people. We have to talk to problem-solve. I like PSYDEH because they provide information for people about our values and rights such as participation and respect. As women and men, we have the same value. In my case, I communicate with my husband so he can stay with our child while I give myself some time that day. I organize myself well. What I like most are the meetings because they are

regional and I get to share life with the people [there]. I like the customs, the dances of the Councils, and above all, the experience of the Councils.

I am proud to be at PSYDEH and invite women to leave feeling happy from the discussions and workshops. The Council is there to provide information to women - I feel good because it is an impactful project that supports women to move forward and invites people to attend and participate. We have facilitated talks about rights and values. Machismo is strong in my community, but in the talks, we tell women that we do not have to give up. We encourage women to attend our trainings and workshops. I have learned so much about my rights and taught other women who are still learning. They like the workshops and even ask when the next one will be. Since first becoming involved with PSYDEH, I have participated even more because the talks make me think. I consider myself a leader because we help other people. I consider myself brave now that I know more. I am realizing several things that I did not know before like the values we have as Indigenous women; and just because we are Indigenous, we should not to be underestimated."





**INOCENCIA ATLALPA  
HERNÁNDEZ**

New Partner, Nahua  
Community of Santa Ana Tepepa, Acaxochitlán  
Yolki Ino Yolo

*Cada semilla de pensamiento sembrado  
hace crecer la mente hecha raíces  
se reproduce a sí misma floreciendo  
Yolki Ino Yolo produciendo sus frutos  
de oportunidad y esperanza*

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**THE RIGHT TO ACCESS JUSTICE**

"I can say that one thing I am proud of as a woman is getting my family through. In my community, no woman has ever been put in charge as a neighborhood leader. It was the first time when I was nominated and selected. At that moment, I thought that it was very difficult to work with people in the neighborhood, [especially] since my neighborhood is the largest in the whole community. This was the biggest challenge, but we performed well. We worked well and we established good rapport with the people. I am happy because when they wanted to re-elect me, it was not because things didn't go well, but because I did something right. They nominated and chose me again.

My value lies in my work with [other] people; it is not about saying you are a leader if you don't know how to work. I am drawn to women who fight for what they want, who do not rest - who fight and fight and don't stop until they obtain what they want. These people inspire me because I also want to excel. I have excelled through very hard circumstances and difficult responsibilities [already] - I have been able to work through that part. About ten years ago, my mother passed away. From that moment on, I had a lot of problems with my family and my brothers and sisters. No one wanted to be responsible, so I took on that commitment [myself].

I have been in PSYDEH for a short time. Here, you grow through gaining knowledge. I have also met many people - in my Council, we share different ideas of how to make crafts and do other things. I am [continually] learning how to help the people in my community, including those who are more isolated from the knowledge we don't have in the community. You go out, you see other things, and you share them; that's the reason why I go.

I loved the women's groups so much because they gave us knowledge about all rights as well as how to navigate them - this is not something that just anyone will tell you. It's nice when they take into account what you believe or think, as PSYDEH does [in their work]. It has changed my life and the way I see things. I have always been a person who likes to help, to form a team to obtain or achieve something - but here you develop even further because you obtain knowledge. I would like people to know a little bit more, because it is possible.

My accomplishment has been - more than anything else - to know and understand. By being here in the community, you learn the basics; but by meeting other people from outside, they teach you and guide you to new things."





## **ROSARIO CRUZ RAMIREZ**

Founding Partner, Nahua  
Community of Los Reyes, Acaxochitlán  
Yolki Ino Yolo

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### **THE RIGHTS TO CULTURE**

"I am a housewife. Sometimes I work in the field. I am a community organizer and I like to work with young people. I speak two languages: Spanish and Nahuatl.

Before working with PSYDEH, I was in a certificate program. The program taught me how to work with young adults, children, and the elderly. I was very interested because recently, we have not taken young people into [full] account. We have focused on other aspects - not on educating or teaching others.

I want to help young people. More than anything, [I want to help them] understand another way of life. With modernization, they gravitate towards what is most [commonly] done today, and not what others did in the past. Lately, the cultures and traditions that exist are being lost.

My goal is to teach them that we can save cultures - which are incredibly beautiful. [I also want to teach them] that it is healthier and more fun than pursuing technology, given the challenges that others place on us to be well-versed in current trends.

I invite young people to not lose these cultures that they have, to not to be ashamed of these roots, because today very few [people] speak the Nahuatl language. Very few [people] speak Otomí - it is already being lost. So I invite young people to rescue these cultures, to embrace who we are and to not be ashamed of who we are - because we are so valuable."



**COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN FROM THE  
COMMUNITY OF  
HUEHUETLA:  
NUEVO AMANECER  
RA 'DA 'YO NEKI, A.C.**



**Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

Consejo de Mujeres Indígenas de Huehuetla



*En el nuevo amanecer  
Estamos despiertos en la luz  
El sol nos dio la fuerza para ver  
Estábamos dormidas  
Ahora vivimos, amanecemos y despertamos  
con la fuerza, la vida  
Vemos la luz, el gozo y la libertad  
Vamos escribiendo páginas nuevas.*

---

**MISSION:** The majority of women do not participate in community activities or politics out of fear of their husbands. For this reason, our mission is to spread knowledge about our rights as women in our communities.

**VISION:** We envision a world in which we are proud of the efforts we have made as women; in which all of our work has been valuable and worthwhile because we have achieved what we propose in our mission through effort and participation. We ultimately seek to fulfill our promises and support fellow women.

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## HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION

We - as women from the rural communities of Huehuetla - were invited to participate in PSYDEH in 2014. The workshops we attended focused on respect, communication, health, violence, the environment, and civic participation as women. We learned that as women, we have the same rights as men as well as the same obligations to exercise those rights.

It was truly a new and beautiful experience for all of us. It was interesting to get to know the experiences of other women in our municipality and region, who could solve problems by really working at them. It was incredible to feel like we could achieve something together, for our communities, by fighting and practicing patience.

We realized that it is important to keep learning so that we can help people and preserve the customs and traditions of our communities. We realized that many women want to learn more and expand their knowledge. That motivated us. So, through the first three regional forums of women from the communities of San Antonio el Grande, Acuatla, and San Gregorio, we formed our organization, which we now call Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Neki.



## **NAYELICA LAZCANO BERNARDINO**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Antonio el Grande, Huehuetla  
Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Nek  
R.I.P 26.09.1991 - 25.09.2016

*“We are women who know that we can work, that we can move forward. With PSYDEH's support, and with the support we have [for each other] – despite discrimination and the prejudices that exist – we can all move forward to become better..”*

*- Nayelica Lazcano Bernardino*

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### **THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

Nayelica Lazcano Bernardino (25 years-old) died at the State Hospital in Pachuca, Hidalgo, on Sunday morning, September 25th, 2016. She had been in a coma for more than two months fighting the complications of advanced leukemia.

Nayelica was born in the community of San Antonio El Grande in the municipality of Huehuetla, Hidalgo. Despite her relative youth, Nayelica obtained her degree in intercultural education and quickly rose to become a leader in PSYDEH as well as in her local community and region. She joined PSYDEH in 2014 along with three other female professionals to facilitate workshops and organize women within her municipality.

In 2015 and 2016, she continued to facilitate workshops on education and sustainable development and advised on program design. Nayelica was also elected President of her new organization based in Huehuetla. She served as one of twenty, peer-elected members to be part of the regionally-focused organization.

Nayelica had a way of being that could draw and invite. Her ability to capture complicated concepts in a language that was clear to all sectors of life – Spanish and Otomí – could stop you in your tracks. Her smile, graceful presence, laughter, and sincerity always

reminded you of the good things in the world. Nayelica's powerful voice for our work, the work of her people, empowered native women to build their own strong communities. Her voice is irreplaceable.

She is survived by her father, Papa Lazcano - a recently retired educator, farmer, and fierce defender of Otomí heritage - and her mother, Doña Artemisa, who is also a strong protector of Otomí culture and leader of our Indigenous women's movement."





## GLORIA MARTÍNEZ SOTO

Founding Partner, Otomí  
San Gregorio, Huehuetla  
Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Neki

*Soy como una flor que poco a poco se está marchitando  
Yo por mi enfermedad y la flor por no tener agua.  
Para solucionar mi problema debo tener el valor  
Para salir adelante debo estar siempre firme  
Con la mirada hacia arriba y no dejarme vencer  
Para seguir floreciendo y ver hacia el sol  
Y ahora que volví a renacer me siento muy feliz.*

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### THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

"Growing up, I lived with my parents in Huehuetla. My dad was a teacher and my mom worked at home. What I liked most about my mom was that she spoke three languages: Spanish, English, and Otomí. My roots lie in the beliefs and traditions of my parents and grandparents, whose mother tongue is Otomí. I did not finish school; I only got through the sixth grade. When I went to school, I loved to recite poetry.

In San Gregorio I formed my family. I had seven children and I also raised my granddaughter, Yaquelin, who is now in high school. The little I know, I learned through teaching my children, because they completed their studies. Now, I do housework and work as an embroiderer.

I used to work at the clinic as a community agent. There, I shared what I learned at PSYDEH and through our nonprofit [Yolki Ino Yolo], such as the value of respect. As women, we have to respect ourselves. There are some women who live in situations of violence, like I did. I tell women:

*'Give yourself respect no matter who your husband is. You are not an instrument, device, or object for your husband to do what he wants to you. That's why there is a human rights organization that can protect you if your husband rapes or assaults you.'*

This is what I told women as well as adolescents who are impacted by drug addiction.

I have faced obstacles with courage. [I believe that] courage is the most important [trait we can possess] - we must strive to always look forward and be honest.

I am in the Women's Council because I have learned a lot there. I have come to understand what leadership, respect, honesty, love, and family are. [The Council] has taught us many things, including what gender equity is and how to take care of the environment. They have also instilled us with a sense of self-worth, regardless of whether we are Indigenous or speak Otomí as our first language. They emphasize to us that we are worth the same as men. We too have the right to education, the right to be a dignified person, and the right to make a name for ourselves.

It is very important for me to have the workshops that PSYDEH facilitates. Through the workshops, we gain the courage to speak out and teach other people.

My achievement has been that other women have learned from me. There are women who do not understand Spanish, and I translated for them into Otomí. Before, women were not respected and did not recognize their value. Through the workshops, I helped teach them that we all have the same value and the same rights.

I feel happy, both at home and in my community. If someone asks me a question, I now answer with the knowledge that I have gained. I also feel proud of my friends. Even though we don't always have the means to go out, we make the best of it. It gives me courage to move forward with my life, and that's something I'm so proud of."





## **LUISA ARROYO VICENTA**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of Acuatla, Huehuetla  
Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Neki

*Como el agua trabajadora  
Aprendo a transmitir y comunicar  
Abundante cosecha en valores  
Que dan felicidad a las plantas  
Y aunque a veces soy inundación  
Yo respeto y me respetan.  
Estoy contenta y orgullosa  
Cuando en mi huerta hay cosecha.*

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### **THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

"Since my childhood, I never knew my dad. I grew up with my grandparents. From them, I learned values like respect. That is what my grandfather used to tell me when I was a child. My family comes from a long line of peasants, both men and women. They have also worked as embroiderers.

When I used to sell coffee in Huehuetla, I watched the people as they spoke Spanish. I said to myself, 'I would love to speak in that way.' One day, I went with someone to work in Mexico City. That is how I learned Spanish. I have had many dreams and setbacks, but I always look forward - never lowering my gaze.

One day, my friend Nayelica invited me to Huehuetla. She asked me, 'Would you like to listen in on a workshop?' I accepted, although I did not have any idea what it was about. And I learned; before, I did not know about the workshops. In my community, I only knew how to prepare lunch, carry water, go to the field, or embroider.

I am a leader of the community, my people, and my home. I am also a leader in politics. At first, I did not know what it meant to be a

leader; but for me, it means to participate. I like to get involved and engage with people. I do not tell them, 'This is what you are going to vote for.' Instead, I take people into account and I have earned their trust. I have also earned the respect of the delegates.

In PSYDEH, I feel proud. I never imagined that I would be here talking, with my photos there [on display]. I like to participate in the customs as well as the workshops. There, I will continue participating. I am very happy because my pictures are everywhere. I like to participate, form friendships, and learn.

My husband is incredibly committed and supports me. For instance, today I left him with the food for my chickens and he helped me [complete that task]. I go to a meeting or workshop, and he asks, 'Who are you going with?' As I am, I tell him, 'I am going with my feet, my eyes, and my friend Rosy.'

Given that I organize care for the elderly, I said at the clinic, 'I must be in PSYDEH. I'm going to another workshop to train myself.' I [later] said to the doctor, 'Don't worry - I'm looking for someone who will take my place.' I left her a note with the person I entrusted to assume my role. If I ever have a pending task in the field, I say, 'I'll do it another day. I am going to learn more there [in PSYDEH]. I'll hear something new.' They used to say: 'they have no right to be there, to be involved.' Now things have changed. As the women say -

*'Doña Luisa, you are tremendous - what you learn and what you share with us. Now we defend ourselves. We do not allow our husbands to beat us. Now we are the presidents of the school. We are a committee.'*

It is a huge achievement to no longer be trapped, to be free."





**ROSALINA MENDOZA**  
**MENDOZA**

New Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Gregorio, Huehuetla  
Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Neki

*Soy como el sol paciente  
Mi trabajo es dar calor a las palabras  
Doy brillo y te enseño  
Comunico para resolver problemas en el hogar  
Poco a poco se solucionan las cosas  
Para hacer entender a las personas  
Soy como el sol que da alegría, gozo y felicidad  
Ya no sientes frío ni te esconden en el rincón  
El sol busca la manera de como entrar en un hogar  
Y si lo rechazas no lo apagues.*

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**THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

"My roots are in the coffee plantation and my grandparents are as strong as palms. I am dialogue and love; I am strong because I have the mentality of 'si se puede' - yes, we can.

In my PSYDEH school, I learned to raise awareness among young people. Nowadays, I am harvesting coffee, which is something I enjoy very much - just like embroidery. I have brought respect, love, and learning to my community.

I never thought that at this moment in my life, my youth would leave me. I was always so sheltered that I did not even realize what was happening to me. But one day, Nayelica came and invited us to the human rights workshop. I presented myself [there]. I talked to my partner and I told him: 'I'm going to a meeting, to a class.'

I went to San Antonio, Huehuetla, with a little bit of fear. As they say, there is a lot of intrigue in the community: 'She goes because someone talked to her. She goes because she earns money. She

must receive a lot of money.' But it is not like that. It is for my own good.

I do not know how to read or write, but I understand a little. What I hear, even if it is not everything, serves me well. Before, I did not go out. I was always at my husband's house. He would not allow me to leave - not to go to a meeting or a talk. That changed because of the workshops and discussion groups. I gained my partner's trust, and later, I continued to go out and talk to him about what I heard. Little by little he began to understand. With respect, he began to change how we got along - as they say in the workshops, talk and understand each other; that's how we are.

In PSYDEH and on my Council, I have learned the value of respect and patience. One learns what one does not live. It is critical to be present in the workshops and meetings, because one does not know what [they are missing] when they are locked up in their house.

I was not educated about that. I was not taught. I was not told how to live. But now I am a leader in my home and community. My pride is to serve my children and the people. I have taught my children to respect all people, their peers, brothers, sisters, parents, and grandparents. You can understand through engaging in conversation, talking, arriving at the same thought as another peer; you feel good already."





## **ANABELL ROSAS SANTIAGO**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Antonio el Grande, Huehuetla  
Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Neki

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### **THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

"I consider myself a leader because I have the ability to put forth my opinion. I consider myself an independent woman and I have the capacity to organize and offer ideas on a given subject matter. I like to relate with adults. I speak Ñahñu, an Indigenous language, and I can communicate with people from the northern region.

What I like most about PSYDEH are the workshops where we share ideas. [I especially] enjoy when we look at issues of education, health, and the economy. In the Council, we've had the opportunity to participate in meetings and gatherings where we've learned so much. This is why we are valuable - we are Indigenous women and we learn together. All of us counselors have the ability to speak the language and understand the communities. I have experience in the communities through my work with Nayelica. A significant challenge for me was that I was very shy and did not want to socialize with anyone. I learned a lot from Nayelica because she was incredibly open and liked to talk with other people. She motivated me a lot.

My challenge on the Council has been that we all have different ideas about women. Some women believe that they do not have the courage to have an opinion because they are women. At first, they contradicted us on these issues because women felt less-than and it is difficult to change their minds. The people in San Gregorio and Acuatla, for example, had a hard time - especially with families that have a different perspective about women. You arrive and you do not know much; but with the workshops, you learn and this helps us a lot.

Another challenge is education. Not all women believe in education, such as in sending their children to school. Other women

think about sending their children so that they do not lose out on Prospera's support.

It is difficult for us as women when we have the responsibilities of [our] home and children. When I entered [PSYDEH], my oldest son was in preschool. At the time, It was difficult because I was working. In order to go to the workshops, I had to move up my work. My schedule was 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., so I had more time left to attend the workshops. My mother was very supportive. She stayed with my son. I [eventually] stopped going to the workshops and meetings because of my baby. I had health problems with my high-risk pregnancy and it was hard for me.

Now, with my husband's support, I am back.

I was motivated by an experience with a family member related to drug addiction. It was a very worrisome and difficult time. But we got him through it. We encouraged him and gave him advice. Young people are particularly difficult, but everything should come from the family. We have the ability to speak the language and communicate with the parents so they [can] understand us more and [understand] the value of communication within the family."





**ROSALBA BERNARDINO  
VENTURA**

New Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Antonio el Grande, Huehuetla  
Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Neki

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**THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM**

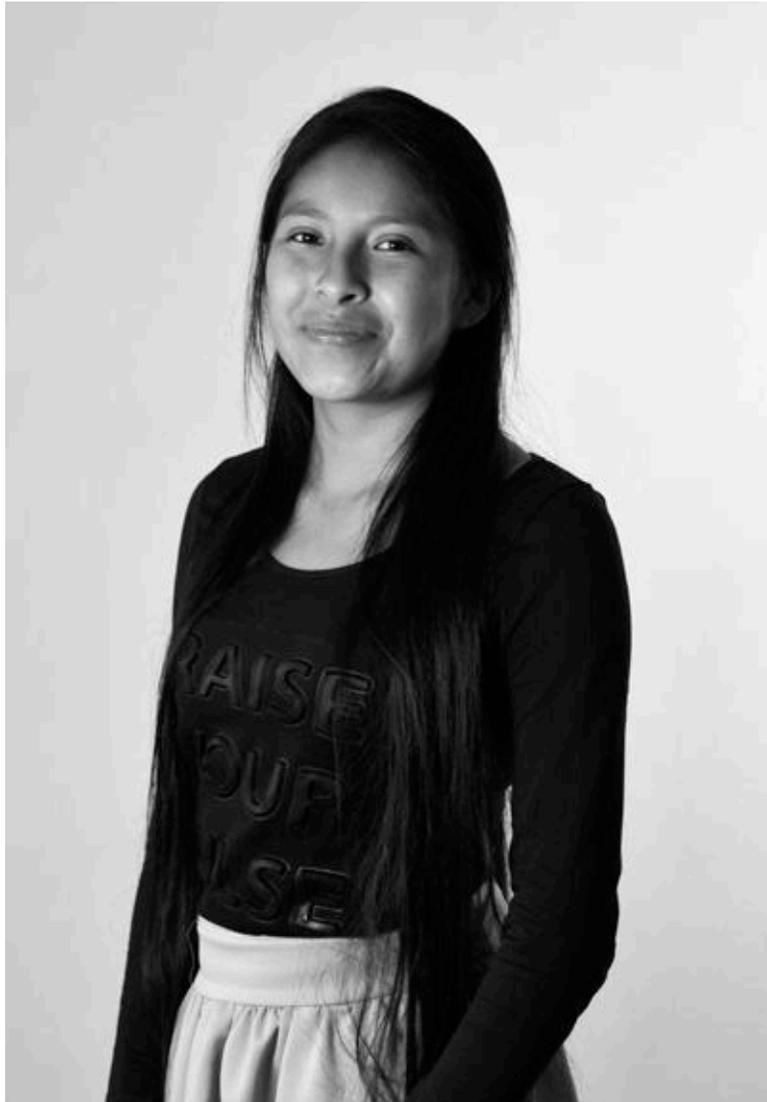
"My mom's close friend invited me to go listen to a talk. Curiously, I went to see what it was about. When I arrived, there were people from the communities of San Gregorio, Acuatla, and San Antonio. For me, it was important to bring the information to other communities. So I invited other women.

I was very interested in PSYDEH because of the information [they shared] and the changes [it brought] to my life and the lives of the other women who participated. That's why I felt so motivated to participate. There was a history of abuse in my family, but through the workshops, my family ultimately came to terms with the information they were sharing.

I had the opportunity to be at meetings for Indigenous women in other places. It was such a beautiful and new experience for me, hearing and learning from the experiences of the women who participated.

As Indigenous women, we have to raise our voices. To not allow violence, we have to know our rights and obligations. More than anything, we have to promote the knowledge of women's social, economic, and political rights. We must always keep in mind our values: honesty, respect, communication, equality, coexistence, trust and love."





**YAQUELIN MENDOZA  
MARTÍNEZ**

Potential New Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Antonio el Grande, Huehuetla  
Nuevo Amanecer Ra 'Da 'Yo Neki

*Soy humilde de aire joven  
Soy del Nuevo Amanecer que da vida  
Hay obstáculos que impiden mi paso libre  
Pero ayudo a respirar a la humanidad  
Formo nubes para traer agua para la vida.*

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**THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM**

"I am a young leader because I am a woman who will one day start a family. I will be a leader in my home and community. My roots come from my mother, who is engaged, loving, and honest. They also come from my grandmother, Gloria, who is collaborative and taught me humility and respect.

I won a poetry contest in elementary school, competed in reading in middle school, and won first place in soccer in high school. In addition, I learned to embroider and sell my art. In my community, I have led workshops at the health center focused on caring for the environment. I am careful, patient, and collaborative in everything I do. I also like to discover new places.

It motivates me that I can deepen my knowledge and invite more people to learn what this [work] is all about. There are many people who do not understand their rights. In some cases, their rights are violated unbeknownst to them. But if we invite them, they will learn more. I am inspired to let them know that we are all worth the same. The men here are very machista and they say that women are worthless. That's what motivates me. I want to help others recognize their worth.

In my community, the older folks say that we do not have the right to participate in community meetings because we are not of age. Oftentimes, they criticize us and assume we don't know anything. They say that we cannot achieve anything given our age.

I know that if I set my mind to something, I will achieve it. I know that the women on the Council are older than me, but I also know that I can learn and invite other women who are around my age. In this way, I can learn and teach more people.

The times that I have attended the meetings, I learn new things. Perhaps I had a basic knowledge about the subject but gained a deeper understanding. We are taught extensively about our rights. We are also taught that no one is less valuable and that we are all equal.

I admire my grandmother, Gloria. Despite facing a number of challenges, she managed to get ahead. She has learned more through her participation in these meetings. Ultimately, she is the one who motivates me.”



**COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN FROM  
THE COMMUNITY OF  
SAN BARTOLO TUTOTEPEC:  
MUJERES CON FUTURO, A.C.**



**Mujeres con Futuro A.C.**

Consejo de Mujeres Indígenas de San Bartolo Tutotepec



*Mujeres con futuro  
Para seguir trabajando  
Con una vida mejor  
Y para seguir triunfando.*

*Mujer emprendedora  
Sabia, inteligente y voraz  
Eres capaz de elevar  
La autoestima de los demás.*

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**MISSION:** Our organization aims to strengthen our municipality and help families overcome challenges, with the goal of achieving a better quality of life and decreasing discrimination in our communities.

**VISION:** We envision ourselves as an organization that is coordinated, strong, acknowledged, and respected; that works to achieve our goals with solidarity among our members and a collective commitment towards better living conditions for all.

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## HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION

In late 2015, we - along with other women from different communities within the municipality of San Bartolo Tutotepec - attended PSYDEH's workshops on women's rights and participation. We began inviting other women from our communities. We shared our experiences and motivated them to participate as well. From this moment on, we - the future founders of Mujeres con Futuro from the communities of El Lindero Chico, La Flor de Santiago, Piedra Blanca, and El Nandho - started to understand and develop a plan for how to form our municipal Council. We learned that together, with our fellow women partners, we could use the organization to represent the interests of the communities of San Bartolo at the regional and state levels.

In 2016, we became increasingly engaged as an organization - there was hard work to be done and not everyone could find the time to contribute. However, we supported each other through these challenges and worked together with INE (The Federal Election Institute in Mexico) to address the issue of women's political participation. Later in 2017, at the third regional forum in Tenango de Doria and fourth regional forum in Huehuetla, there was more female participation and involvement. Since then, our group has only continued to grow.



## **JOSEFINA MERCED VELASCO VELASCO**

Founding Member, Otomí, Community of El Nandho  
Community of San Bartolo, Mujeres Con Futuro



R.I.P 24.09.1962 - 27.01.2019

*"I like to learn and that is why I am here. I always invite the women of my community, El Nandho, but over there, women like me cannot write or read. For this reason, I like to share with young women that I can learn and teach too."*

*"Josefina was neither old nor young," as Jorge Echeverria, General Coordinator of PSYDEH, says, "She was a strong, reliable, and hopeful adult presence, committed to working with other women to solve local problems."*

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### THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Josefina Merced Velasco Velasco (Doña José) died unexpectedly of liver complications in late January 2019.

Doña José was powerful in her community. As one of her colleagues said on the day of her funeral, and as you can see in the video tributes, "She was a great source of joy for all those she worked with."

Josephine lived with her devoted husband in the community of El Nandho, San Bartolo Tutotepec. They raised and sold pigs, coffee and peanuts. Their community is located deep in a mountainous valley above the main town.





**ALBERTA SAN AGUSTÍN  
VELASCO**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of Lindero Chico, San Bartolo  
Mujeres con Futuro

*Como la naturaleza viva  
Soy trabajadora con fuerza, justicia y voluntad  
Para lograr lo que quiero para mí y los demás  
Tanto como las plantas, la tierra y las personas  
Para poder salir adelante con grandes logros.*

THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

“When I turned 31 years-old, I became a single mother, widowed with six children. Things have been difficult for me, but I know how to work hard and carry myself forward. All of my children are hard workers.

My family roots are in farming and bricklaying. At school, I learned to read and write. I also participated in many dance classes. Now, I have several roles. I work as a business woman, a delegate for my community, and an assistant at the local health center. My work is centered in commerce, and one of my greatest achievements is that I have a son studying at the university in the [state capital] of Pachuca.

The program, ‘Initial Education from CONAFE’ (National Council of Educational Promotion), came to my house and invited me to work with my community. I did not have a strong educational background, but I did it anyway. I worked [with CONAFE] for three years. We organized workshops for children. They also invited me to serve as a health assistant. Then, I began working as a delegate for my community. I helped start our health center. Together, with my colleagues, we built the building.

I am a leader because I like to participate. I think that I promote the common good for the people in my community. To be a delegate, you need to have knowledge. You have to serve as a representative [of

everyone]. In the community, leadership looks different in that there are meetings and people elect you.

[Civic leadership] has multiple dimensions. You have to work one behalf of all people and attend to everyone's needs. Given that we think differently, everyone works in their own way. Still, you must have knowledge and understanding [to represent everyone]. If you don't do anything, nothing will happen. At the same time, you will not earn your community's respect.

I lead by asking other people for their perspectives. If I can't convince others to understand my view, I must listen and [base my decisions] on the most commonly-held opinions. I really enjoyed working as a delegate. My first term lasted four years, and my second lasted three years. What I loved about this job was working in the community to build a chapel and a health center. I am happy that I am able to help people, and I thank them for electing me to carry out this work. You never expect others to thank you, but you still feel proud of yourself. I am proud that my community now sees me in a different light. Since working as a delegate, people recognize that I have knowledge. I don't ask others for permission to do something. I am motivated to continue working with my organization [Mujeres con Futuro] because I want to deepen my knowledge and the knowledge of my peers. We come to PSYDEH for knowledge; then, we return to our communities and gather in groups to share what we have learned. With respect for others, we will inspire people towards change.

In my community, the women are the primary breadwinners because they are involved in everything. There are also few men because they travel long distances to find work. The women are the ones who participate. If there is a meeting, all of the women in our community attend. If the meeting is about work, the women will dictate what needs

to be done. It is as if we are operating alone; we have the power to decide. I think this is better - if we decide that we want to promote cooperation and work, then we will make it happen.

To achieve something, you have to suffer a bit. It requires leaving your home. It requires money and sometimes the permission of others. Work is work: the key is to be able to do it."





## REMIGIA RIVERA ISLAS

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of Lindero Chico, San Bartolo  
Mujeres Con Futuro

*Reflejo de la naturaleza  
Emoción hacia los animales  
Mirar hacia Mujeres con Futuro  
Imaginar jóvenes con la salud  
Grandiosos en la vida  
Intercambiando ideas para  
Amar a la madre con alegría.*

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### THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

"My father was a peasant, my mother an embroiderer, and my grandparents farmworkers. My roots are respect, honesty, understanding, equality, participation, ideas, and tolerance.

I am the representative of the Council. I was a teacher for CONAFE at the preschool and primary school in my own community. There, I had the opportunity to express myself and get to know different communities. I have served as the Vice President of Parents, and currently, [I am] the Assistant of the Health Center. I work as an artisan and I embroider different garments.

What motivates me is having more knowledge to share with other people and carry out into the communities. My time with this organization has helped me significantly in terms of accomplishing more goals and supporting the female partners.

The work that's been done with PSYDEH is very beautiful because it has supported us to thrive. Within the Council, PSYDEH has enabled us to guide and continue supporting women in need. We have achieved this together - supporting each other in order to move forward.

In the beginning, PSYDEH was in charge of searching for the communities. Then, they left us with that responsibility as leaders. If we have to face something difficult, there are some people who will say I can and others I can't. At the end of the day, we managed to recruit women and leaders for the workshops. Yes, at times, it was difficult holding the workshops, walking back and forth. Still, people ask when there would be another workshop because they enjoyed it so much.

I not only like to learn and understand new things, but to carry them out. There are values that one adopts through [involvement] with the Council or PSYDEH. These are respect, punctuality, knowledge, honesty, and participation. It is like a chain - to understand the different ideas of a group and from there, carry these ideas and disperse them throughout the communities.

To leave the family and, at the same time, set aside some of our time to come to PSYDEH is an achievement. You can share this achievement with your family and invite and motivate other people, including your family members. For me, it is difficult because I have to bring my child with me. It is not the same leaving him with his grandmother because she must take care of her husband.

I have managed to get people to see how I relate to them. Whether I am elected to a community position depends on my knowledge and work. Looking for projects and getting together is difficult. However, women are more engaged than men.

With PSYDEH, we work on [issues related to] rights such as education and health. We want to cultivate these rights in young people through our workshops. We currently have a project in place working with youth in secondary school. With the support of nurses,

the project focuses on how to prevent pregnancy. Since young people do not have the same trust with their family members, we want to achieve this ourselves. There are many teenage pregnancies under the age of eighteen, and we hope to avoid that.

With this project, we want to promote awareness among young people. Before having a family, we encourage young people to integrate, value, and study what is most important. Our challenge as counselors is to move forward and make this project happen, as according to teachers, there are the most cases of early pregnancy in this municipality.

I am an Assistant at the Health Center. I have gained more knowledge through this position. I have managed to learn what they teach me and up until now, I served as the chairperson of Prospera. I feel different; it is difficult for me to be there, but I still go.

As a child, I never imagined myself becoming an assistant or chairperson. I wanted to be a teacher and I became a CONAFE teacher. I got in because I needed a scholarship for a baccalaureate program, which I received. I did not have the support of my parents to study. That is why I entered CONAFE. I worked and studied. It was difficult for me to motivate myself.

It was a teacher who used to work as a cleaner who motivated me. I am proud of myself even though I did not finish my degree. I felt bad that I could not do it on my own, but my mission was to continue on. Nevertheless, now that I am an assistant, I understand many things. When I began working as an assistant, it was not to gain [anything] but to support people and learn the basics. I succeeded in this. Because to begin somewhere with what motivates you is to learn - not like others who either seek personal gains or become stagnant.

I've been challenged tremendously by my son and his illnesses. Each time he faints, I have to find a way to bring him back. I had the challenge of making my son walk on his own without me carrying him. He - and I - overcame this challenge, and I am very proud of him. I feel happy and grateful. He has already received his certificate [of completion] for the therapies. I want him to be able to have a job and recognize his self-worth. Now he can write.

When I was a teacher at CONAFE, it was difficult to work with children in the preschool and primary school at the same time. Also, I came to understand the people in the communities as well as how to integrate myself so that they would receive me well.

In all of these moments, I was afraid. However, I faced my fears and people accepted me. A leader is the head of the others. You must be the engine that drives your Council or family. There has to be support and consideration for other people's opinions. If I am a leader and want to do what I want - and not what others believe - it does not work."





## **NAYELI HERNÁNDEZ ROLDAN**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of La Flor de Santiago, San Bartolo  
Mujeres Con Futuro

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### **THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM**

"I consider myself an understanding person. I like to help people when they are in need. I am a housewife and I dedicate myself to my daughters and our home. I am understanding, but I do not accept injustices against other people. It makes me angry that people do not treat each other well. I like to be caring and supportive.

I believe that women can make a difference, [and I believe that] to open doors is to do something. Just because we are women from a small community does not mean that we cannot have the opportunity to do something for ourselves or other women.

One of my main goals was to finish my studies. I finished high school and faced significant economic hardship. As a young girl in primary and secondary school, I was part of the honor roll because I had the best grades. I invested myself in my studies because no one in my family had completed that grade level. So I said, if they are giving me the opportunity, I will do my absolute best. I received a scholarship and took care of a girl from San Bartolo in exchange for food and lodging. I had to travel daily. We suffered from hunger, and because of the rain, we didn't have [adequate] transportation facilities. Nonetheless, I still finished.

When I grew up, I was chosen by the community to be a health assistant. We had to do everything to support the people. They chose me because they had confidence in me. Now, I am part of the Parent & Families Committee. I have served as a secretary there for two years.

As a mother, my challenge has been to take care of my sick, two-month-old daughter. She needed an operation and I went [with her] to a place I did not know. I suffered many changes that made me stronger. To this day, I have to take my daughter to routine medical appointments. She had a tumor in her gum. Once it stops growing, it will become permanent.

Many men go out to work in other places while we women stay at home. There are many responsibilities, including those we didn't even think of doing because we were alone. I do not think that women should just be in the home. We have to look for [more] opportunities to support our families or learn other things - other customs or ways of life.

We are each capable of doing certain things. It is difficult to find the time needed to attend the Council. We have to leave home for a day, [which involves] leaving food, clean clothes, and a clean house [for our families]. If we have children, we have to find someone to leave them with or pick them up from school. Sometimes the Council lasts a whole day - I do not always want to go because of these logistical constraints. But belonging to the Council is important because not everyone has the opportunity to be there. What we need to do is work to become more visible."





## RUFINA GUZMÁN GUZMÁN

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of Piedra Blanca, San Bartolo  
Mujeres Con Futuro

*La lluvia que me da vida y me alegra  
Como un atardecer  
cada que la miro yo quisiera florecer.*

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### THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM

"I am a worker. I like to work in the field and I love to embroider. I have brought up my children. I believe in the customs of our grandparents, in worshipping the hills and nourishing Mother Earth so she can give us corn, beans, and coffee.

Through my PSYDEH school, I learned how to manage resources, respect others, participate in workshops, and organize my time effectively. I currently work in the field. I also make embroidery and take care of my children. In my community, I served as a delegate for six years. In this capacity, I sought support for housing, seeds, and livestock as well as in [preparing] for the patron saint festivals.

My motivation is to learn new things and share them with my peers in [different] communities so that women do not remain trapped or isolated. As both a delegate and participant in PSYDEH, I have learned how to complete an application, including how to fill out all of the [required] documents. I have also learned how to reach agreements within our group of advisors as well as with other people.

One challenge is the distance. Leaving my children alone is difficult [for me]. Still, I feel proud that people give me a chance. I come and talk to them, and they do not reject me. They support me.

When I first started going to the workshops, my partner would not let me [attend]. He would not allow me to leave home. He scolded me. He even hit me. So we separated. It was my daughter who said to me, 'Let's go. Why are we here? You are the one who has raised us.' My partner worked only enough to sustain his alcoholism. From there, we parted and each went our own way. I stayed with my daughter who is now studying.

Now I am in charge of my daughter's expenses. I had the courage to become a delegate.<sup>1</sup> As women, we agreed to take on that position. We built a foundation and arranged benches. This compelled some people to reconsider us and recognize all the time we invested in our work. A few nurses came and I asked them to facilitate some workshops to help men and women learn something. There were several cases of sexual violence [in the community]; little by little, that changed. Men are jealous, but we engaged with them and some began to understand.

I am a leader because I have completed several projects and I have supported people in need. I feel fully capable to continue working in my community. On the Council, we have already been able to develop a sustainability project focused on seeds. We have also been working on several training sessions. For example, I would like to offer training on violence prevention and raise awareness among young people to reduce the number that become parents by age thirteen.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, some Indigenous municipalities have become more flexible in allowing women to participate in community leadership. This is mainly due to the migration of men. Some studies, such as "The Negotiation of Gender Relations in the Valley of Mezquital: An Approach to the Case of the Community Participation of Hñähñu Women" by Rivera, Guadalupe (2006), explain that Indigenous women have been assuming community posts. This is the case of San Bartolo Tutotepec, which is the first municipality in the Otomí-Tepehua region where - in the face of men's migration - Indigenous women are elected to community assemblies as delegates of their communities.

I encourage my daughter to study, work, and own her own home. Before, I did not go out; I was trapped. But now that I started attending the workshops, I feel independent. I have work at home with my farmland, animals, and embroidery. Some people think you are just there doing nothing, but I always have work to do.

To be a leader is to work in a group and make progress. I am proud because in my community, people elected me as a delegate for six years. More than anything, [being a leader] meant extending help and support to the people who needed it most - I applied for their homes and building foundations. For me, leadership was to support those most in need. My dream was always to become a delegate or an assistant. Step by step, I arrived; with work, but I arrived."





## **REGINA FLORES MARCOS**

Prospective Partner, Otomí  
Community of El Mavodo, San Bartolo  
Mujeres Con Futuro

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### **POLITICAL-ELECTORAL RIGHTS**

"I consider myself an Indigenous, Otomí woman. I believe in Todos Santos, in El Carnival. Day in and day out, I am a leader because I actively participate. One challenge has been to help people understand the purpose of the Council; I tell them to participate and come see [the impact] for themselves. A personal challenge [that I have faced] is resolving my son's health.

To go to PSYDEH's workshops, I would wake up at four in the morning to prepare lunch and leave [home] by six - some days there was transportation and other days not. From then on, I would change and be ready [for the workshops] to start at eight o'clock. At eleven o'clock, we had an hour lunch break. Around five, I returned home. I arrived home at seven and washed my uniform. [All the while,] my mother took care of my son.

PSYDEH's events motivate me because people from different communities join together. I am surprised by the progress - more people are invited, and men are [even] attending now. I organize myself a day in advance and get up early to attend PSYDEH. What has caught my attention most is the privacy and protection of personal information, something few people or organizations can do. Women can also serve as delegates and take on other leadership roles. For instance, I never thought about being a traffic officer. I like that other people listen to you and take your directions. It was difficult and exhausting work - you get tired and your feet hurt from standing so much. A lot of people say it's a lazy job, but I found out [from working] there that it's not.

I worked with several people in different places and jobs as a public roads officer. In Mexico City, I also sold tacos de canasta. For two years, I got up at three in the morning to prepare everything to start by six. In school, even though I did not attend kindergarten, I was still able to learn. In sixth grade, I led my class as the flag bearer."



**COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN FROM  
THE COMMUNITY OF  
TENANGO DE DORIA:  
FLOR DEL BOSQUE, A.C.**



**Flor del Bosque A.C.**

Consejo de Mujeres Indígenas de Tenango



*The Council of Indigenous Women of Tenango de Doria – named Flor del Bosque – was originally formed by women who wanted to create opportunities for other women in their communities to understand and exercise their rights as citizens.*

*Over the course of five years, the women involved in Flor del Bosque have experienced significant challenges, including economic hardship, health problems, and instances of interpersonal violence, among others.*

*These challenges have contributed to a reduction in participation in Flor del Bosque. In some cases, women resigned from their positions in the Council because it was difficult for them to leave their families and communities. PSYDEH, in alliance with the council members, is working to motivate women in the municipality who have been participating in the training process to become council members. The goal of this effort is to strengthen the organizational structure of Flor del Bosque. .*

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**MISSION:** As female leaders, we aim to strengthen and promote workshops within and beyond our municipality. These workshops are held by and for Indigenous communities and are strengthened by the power and pride of our community members.

**VISION:** We see ourselves as strong and talented leaders who use our understanding of psychology and human rights to communicate knowledge as well as continue learning, together.

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## HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION

Legally constituted in 2015 and named in March 2017, we, the founding members of Flor de Bosque, first met at a series of activities led by PSYDEH in September of 2015. Women from the communities of Cerro Chiquito, San José del Valle, El Barrio de San José, El Nanthe, and Tenango de Doria attended workshops focused on gender equity, civic participation, health, economics, violence, and the environment. This work culminated in PSYDEH's second regional forum in Acaxochitlán. We, in collaboration with PSYDEH and fellow Otomí women from Tenango de Doria and the surrounding region, took a powerful stand as leaders and entrepreneurs in our communities. We formalized the regionally-focused, civil society organization (CSO) known as Siempre Viva as well as Tenango's own CSO.

As trained facilitators, we led additional workshops in 2016 to involve more women and help spread information about themes related to citizenship, justice, and education. These workshops sought to educate women in the municipality about their rights as well as how to exercise them. At the end of the workshop series, we helped PSYDEH produce the third regional forum in Tenango de Doria in November 2017, linking us with local governments and Indigenous women leaders across the region. We also formally named our four local CSOs, including Flor de Bosque, our own locally-focused CSO.



## MARCELA MONROY MENDOZA

New Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Jose, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

*Soy una nube que vino a PSYDEH  
Y regreso a mi comunidad  
A decirle a las personas:  
Les comunico a los ríos de San José  
Lo que me dicen en las reuniones  
A transmitir lo poco o mucho que sé  
Los ríos me preguntan qué podemos hacer  
Para lograr algo en la comunidad  
Y les digo que es bonito porque aprendemos  
Que valores tenemos y cuanto valemos  
Y luego me preguntan que valores son  
Intentar cambiar ideas con nuestras compañeras  
Pero ser como las nubes que respeta los lugares.*

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### THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

“Through Flor de Bosque A.C., I have learned many things. The meetings teach us how to build relationships and talk in front of other people. Sometimes, public speaking is difficult for us – perhaps due to the pain or fear we experience or because we lack the confidence to use our voices. Just as we have learned to respect others, we have also learned to exercise respect for ourselves. The Council has instilled us with a value for fairness, love, trust, responsibility, and honesty. In school, I enjoyed math. I have served as a healthcare worker in my community’s clinic. Now, I work at home, doing embroidery and tending to coffee plants.

When I started coming to PSYDEH, they said, ‘Come join us. There’s going to be a workshop and they will fund your participation.’ I thought to myself, ‘Well, even though I have some work to complete at home, I know that I will learn something new.’ I feel motivated by my responsibility and commitment to PSYDEH. I also feel motivated by our

seed project, the goal of which is to promote health [in the community]. If we achieve the goals of this project, I will feel even more empowered. I will also feel tremendous pride for the fact that we accomplished for our region. People will [hopefully] feel inspired and say: 'Women like that are so motivated.'

The health project excites me because there is a lack of resources in the community. Through this project, I want to make a positive impact and feel that I contributed meaningfully [to the common good]. I feel proud of the Flor de Bosque Council. I feel that this work is going to continue and that we are going to succeed with our projects. I enjoy our meetings, talks, and activities, like sharing my own experiences and listening to the experiences of others.

I believe that I am a leader through public speaking and motivating women towards community engagement. I let women know about projects and opportunities so they can say, 'We made it because we are united. Together, we can achieve great things.' For me - even if my peers do not attend - I have made the commitment to participate in the Council, regardless of whether I fulfill my responsibilities at home. I value participating in the workshops and doing my part. If I don't do my part, I am not bettering myself as a leader. I cannot leave my mother at home because I help her manage her medications. Instead, I bring her along so I can continue caring for her. For me, it's so important to be here.

Many people used to say that because we were women, we could not attend school. At that time, there was no school apart from elementary education. This was an obstacle for us. My parents also questioned whether I should study given that I'm a woman. Later on, I went to work outside of my community for two years. Then I got married and couldn't go out anymore. I felt isolated and trapped until I discovered PSYDEH. If I'm being honest, my husband told me what I had to do. He said that if I have children, I have to take care of them. There were embroidery workshops in my community, but I didn't go. When I came to PSYDEH, I finally said, 'Enough.' Here they are telling me that I

can participate and be active in my community. If not now, I will never leave my home. I like it here and my children have to understand that.

In the community, people say things like: 'Women go because they have nothing to do; they go because they want to be out running around; or they go because they have children.' I think there's time for everything. I have devoted a lot of time to my children and husband, but they don't always value it. Still, my achievement is supporting my family - my children and grandchildren, who may not be educated but are all hard workers. I know that they will always love me, and I will always be there for them. Another achievement is that my family is healthy and stable. Before, we didn't have anything. Sometimes, when my children were little, I would embroider tablecloths to support my family's income. Now, we have the things we need.

I have done my best for my children. In this way, I feel that I am worth a lot. In the clinic, we helped organize workshops in different communities. We explained and presented evidence and completed evaluations. The workshops focused on themes of respect and equity. Many women said they liked the way we facilitated the workshops and wanted to participate again. I continued leading other workshops for my own pleasure, without being asked by the clinic. For me, it is a source of pride because women say to me, 'Maybe you can go and lead workshops for the President. Even though you don't earn much, you do great work.' While I don't have the formal education to lead these workshops, I learned to facilitate them effectively. I know how to explain things well and I take joy in this work. As a mother, I finished high school through a continuing education program in 2005.

Sometimes, [other people] lower your self-esteem. They say that you're not worth anything; but if you truly think about it, you're worth so much."





## **GONZALA CLEMENTE GÓMEZ**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of Emiliano Zapata, Santa Monica, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

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### **POLITICAL-ELECTORAL RIGHTS**

"My value has been my work and embroidery. Before, we used to scavenge [for resources]. Now, I serve as a health volunteer. This provides me with compensation and [the opportunity to] help my community in the case that someone gets sick or if a young woman becomes pregnant. I offer [support around] family planning for young people. I started working in 1994, and I have been re-elected [to my position].

I was elected because of my abilities. There are other women who are not motivated, who do not want to go out. They chose me again and again because of my experience. It is a challenge at times because I also have to work at home; but I get up early to accomplish various things.

What I like most are my people and the forest. I love the customs, such as cultivating seeds, creating dolls from the seeds and making their parties, like the rain festival.

My childhood was very difficult. I could not play and my mother was very strict. As a young woman, I went to work in Mexico City from the age of ten years-old on. I did not know how to speak Spanish, but with time I learned. I listened to my employers. They taught me words. My employer taught me the alphabet and I learned to write and read [from them] because I did not go to school.

I was a single mother for a while until I got married. When my husband went to the United States for ten years, I had to work because my husband did not find a job for a year. I was washing and

ironing to support my children. Even though I did not have any money and there were no scholarships back then, I got my kids through high school. I am proud because we persevered.

At PSYDEH, we were invited to the meetings in San Nicolás and then to Tenango, where we formed the Flor del Bosque Council. What I enjoyed most was that we learned several things; for example, the early history of people and their methods for exchanging things when there was no money. [I learned that] they exchanged corn for a small bowl of nixtamal (tortilla dough). Another topic I liked was about rights. I would set my day aside to attend the meetings. My husband would take me with the other advisors in our van."





## **YESIKA FELIPE JOSÉ**

Prospective Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Nicolás, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

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### **THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

"I am independent and sociable, and in this way, I support people. I have the ability to get along with and support others to have confidence in me. I am a leader in my own life. I want people to know that we Otomí people are important - that we are part of something important, that we give value to the mother tongue, [a language] they know and understand. I want young people to feel proud - it is so important for us to value ourselves. As an individual, I feel that I have passed this on and encouraged others to realize our value. In my community, we govern with our own rules. We have a delegate who does not allow the president to impose himself on the community. We celebrate the patron feast, Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead).

Since I was a child, my challenge has been to make young people aware of our incredible worth. It was hard [work]. There was a lot of discrimination for being Indigenous, but I was able to prove myself. Now, I am a certified interpreter. Based on those bad experiences, I have been able to certify myself and make many people aware that we are all equal.

Currently, I am studying to earn my degree in education. Now that I am a single mother, I have to look after my son, my work, and my studies in addition to myself. Thanks to PSYDEH, the certification has helped me a lot.

In the family sphere, I had no difficulties because my parents always reminded me: 'You have to get ahead. You have to find a way to develop your skills.' They realized that I like to involve myself in

everything and that I like to support everyone. The only thing they told me was: 'Take care of yourself and behave yourself.' I got into politics because many people were too ashamed or embarrassed to get involved. Now, women come and say, 'How is it that Yesika could enter politics? If she can, anyone can.' It has not been easy because society criticizes you and you have to be strong. Now, everything is changing; as a woman, I can [do anything].

I am a single mother and I say this with pride. You can get by without having a man at your side. It has been very complicated because of the comments; oftentimes, it affects me. Nonetheless, it is an achievement as a woman given that women often do not manage to take that step. For me it was a very strong step. After eleven years as an independent person, I'm still standing here.

My achievement is getting certified. Now it is a true achievement because of all the opportunities I've had. I have been working for two years on my studies. Everyone told me that I couldn't. They said: 'You're already grown up. You have a child. You're going to fail. It's better to not invest your money.' I am going to finish and it will be a very important achievement [for me]. Through my leadership, I have supported many people. As an interpreter, I have been able to help other people who do not understand Spanish well.

I like PSYDEH. As an organization, they have empowered women to feel free. PSYDEH helped me to see this important aspect of society. It has always been emphasized through the workshops and within me. In this way, [PSYDEH] has succeeded."





**ZENAIDA TRANQUILINO  
LUCAS**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of El Nanthe, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

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**THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM**

"I am very happy that I have been participating in PSYDEH. PSYDEH is an organization that has motivated me a lot, and I have enjoyed the opportunity to grow and develop. I love to embroider in the typical, Tenangos style of embroidery.

Last year, some of my friends who were involved with PSYDEH invited me [to attend]. Unfortunately, these friends are now less motivated to participate because of a misunderstanding. However, this has not influenced my path, as I will continue going. I will continue motivating myself and I will invite other women advisors to come with me. For me, it is a great training for us to learn, carry out projects, or bring our products to sell here in Tenango or elsewhere in our country. We can even take [our projects and products] to another country. Being able to continually learn more is my core objective, my plan, and my dream. Since I have come to PSYDEH, I have had the pleasure of knowing and learning.

What I would like to do is facilitate progress within my community. The five women that I invited will support me [in this endeavor]. They not only came to listen but to learn. I hope that they will support me and help me motivate other people in my community. That is what I propose in my community - that we move forward with purpose and the confidence in our capacity to manage what our community needs, especially because our community is very low-income. We do not receive any support from the government. Supposedly, my community already has a paved road, but this is not the case. I am training and actively involved in PSYDEH's group because I want to feel valued and empowered to carry out projects and promote forward momentum in my community. Equally, I would like people in my community to stop saying that I am going out for nothing, without a purpose."





## **AGUSTINA ACOSTA FLORES**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Jose del Valle, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

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### **POLITICAL-ELECTORAL RIGHTS**

"I am a cheerful woman who likes to share and serve the people in my community. I live in the valley - that is why my community is called San José del Valle, in the municipality of Tenango de Doria. In my community, they plant coffee, avocados, oranges, bananas, and lemons. I like to embroider in the traditional Tenangos style of embroidery. My mother taught me how to embroider when I was a child. Since then, I have embroidered many Tenangos. I sell them in the municipal capital as well as in Mexico City.

At a very young age, I became responsible for my parents since my brothers left my community to work and support my parents financially. This prevented me from continuing my education. In my community, we only had an elementary school. Now we have a secondary school. Still, I only completed elementary school.

I have always been a person who likes to learn new things. When I was invited to participate in PSYDEH's workshops, it was as if another door opened in my life. This motivated me a lot. I invited more women from my community to attend PSYDEH's workshops. I managed to form a group of 10-15 women from my community and other nearby communities. After a year of participating in different workshops focused on our rights as women and Indigenous peoples, we formed our own Council among the women who participated. At the end of 2014, we held an election in which my peers elected me as their counselor. We also elected three women from different communities. This is how we formed the Council of Indigenous Women of Tenango de Doria, Flor del Bosque.

I am very happy that I became involved with PSYDEH. I am grateful for the opportunities I've had to participate in activities and events within the Otomí-Tepehua region, such as the regional meetings where we gather more than 200 women from the four municipalities. Men have also participated in these meetings, and municipal and state authorities have listened to our demands. Through PSYDEH, I have enjoyed meeting people from other countries who visit our communities and collaborate with us [on projects].

Since 2018, I unfortunately had to leave my community to attend to my mother's health. In my community, there are no medical services that meet her needs. I now live in Pachuca and with my partner. I continue to embroider Tenangos, but I miss participating in the workshops, meetings, and gatherings that PSYDEH organizes with my peers. I feel proud to be a counselor. Someday, I will be able to work for my community again, training and learning how to be a woman leader.

Meanwhile, I will continue to smile and be happy with what I do. I will continue supporting the women and men who want to lead."





**GUILLERMINA GÓMEZ**  
**MENDOZA**

Prospective Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Francisco la Laguna, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

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**THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM**

"I left school and started doing domestic labor at the age of eight. As one of sixteen siblings, there was not enough food to eat or money for education. Some of my siblings completed their studies through high school, but not me. My parents said that school was too dangerous for me.

At age twenty, I married a humble man dedicated to agriculture. He studied through the third grade in primary school. I had four children, and I dedicated my life to help them get by. My eldest daughter studied up to her first semester in college, but then she quit. I could not support her anymore and my husband did not want to support her. My other three sons completed high school, but did not continue their education further. They saw that they did not have a chance to practice a profession and decided to cross over to the north, where they now have become parents and lead their lives.

With my children leading their independent lives, I used my free time to study for primary and secondary school. I have earned my certificate. Now, I enjoy teaching others what I learn with PSYDEH - to support those who need me."





## **YOLANDA SAN JUAN GÓMEZ**

Founding Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Jose, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

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### **THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

"My name is Yolanda San Juan Gómez. I am from the community of San Jose, Tenango. I work in the field and I have a greenhouse. I was invited to a training [with PSYDEH]. I am both an artisan and farmer. I am in a greenhouse group. Last year, they offered us a course, but we were only listening and eventually we forgot [the information]. I would love for them to come give another course so we can practice what we saw.

Now, my plants are full of pests and I do not remember what treatments I should give them. At the same time, I am a craftswoman. Here, people pay a very low price for embroidery. In other countries, embroidered textiles have another value; I want them to be valued in the same way here. I speak ñahñu and Spanish. My primary motivation is to thank the people who came to give the course as well as the people who invited me.

As a fellow artisan, my motivation with PSYDEH is this: through the workshops, you learn about rights. I tell people to come and meet other people, because I think they have heard about embroidery.

It was Marisela who started inviting me to learn and help fellow artisans in my community. Serving as an advisor [with PSYDEH] benefits my community and helps other women learn about their rights. I encourage people to support us. I also tell them to value us as artisans."





## ISABEL GÓMEZ FLORES

Prospective Partner, Otomí  
Community of San Isidro la Laguna, Tenango de Doria  
Flor del Bosque

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### THE RIGHT TO WORK

"I am Isabel Gomez Flores. I come from the community of San Isidro del Valle. My parents are Honorato Gomez and Trinidad Flores. I remember going to school when I was six years-old, but I attended infrequently because my parents took me with them to harvest coffee and beans. When I was ten years-old, my mom stopped taking me to the fields. She left me at home to prepare food and tortillas so it would be ready when they arrived.

The biggest challenge of my childhood was going to a well for water that was twenty minutes away from my house. The road was very slippery and sometimes I fell. I had to go back for more water so that when my parents returned, everything would be ready for them. While I hardly attended school and had low grades, I managed to finish my primary education.

One day, my father bought me a piglet. I took care of it every day, feeding it and giving it water so it would grow. When I was older, my father told me that I had to kill it. I began to cry, and my father became very angry. He scolded me, and as a punishment, he gave me a knife to kill it myself. He took me by the hand, and even though I cried, I had to kill him. I could not bring myself to taste it once cooked.

At age fifteen, I met my husband and we were engaged for two years. My parents did not agree when I got married. They thought that I was too young, but they still respected my decision. I got married and came to live in San Isidro la Laguna with my in-laws. Here, I formed my family. I had seven children, but two died due to the lack of [adequate] medical attention; there are no hospitals here. I have three daughters and two sons. My youngest daughter lives with me due to lack of work or job opportunities. My other children live far away because of their work. This is [all] part of my story."



**COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN FROM  
THE COMMUNITY OF:  
SIEMPRE VIVA, A.C.**



**LOGO:**

The flower Siempre Viva symbolizes mother nature and is found throughout the region. This plant is very important because it is a curative plant used in the treatment of bruises and infections. We chose this plant because like the Siempre Viva flower, we are “always alive.” We are continually working to move forward for our families and for ourselves as women. In addition, the name helps us remember that those women who are no longer with us remain alive in our memories and in the work we do.

Forget-me-not, a second flower found across the region, represents the work that we do - demanding that we do not forget one another and that we are not forgotten by local or federal governments. We will not be forgotten because we are proud Indigenous women. Our work with PSYDEH is based on our rights. We do not demand recognition because we are poor or because we are women suffering from discrimination and violence; rather, we demand recognition because we, like all human beings, are people with rights who deserve to be protected under the law.



**MISSION:** Our mission is to generate self-love and to achieve cultural diversity by promoting peace, equality, and inclusion in the construction of a more just world.

**VISION:** We envision ourselves as an organization of women that, with wisdom, spreads the values we generate as women leaders to new generations in the Otomí-Tepehua-Nahua region.

**VALUES:** Trust, respect, responsibility, honesty, and collaboration.

APPENDIX

# THE INITIATIVE IN ACTION





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PSYDEH uses the camera and their writing to respectfully promote modern, rural Mexico and their local partners in collaboration with PSYDEH. We help local women and their organizations create and share their stories, and we use high quality animation, photography, video, and film to help promote and educate our audience. Our photos help grow self- and community awareness; our videos convey information; our films inspire emotion and thought; and our exhibitions bring people together across cultural and class barriers. All of our media promote the power of citizens to organize themselves for the better.

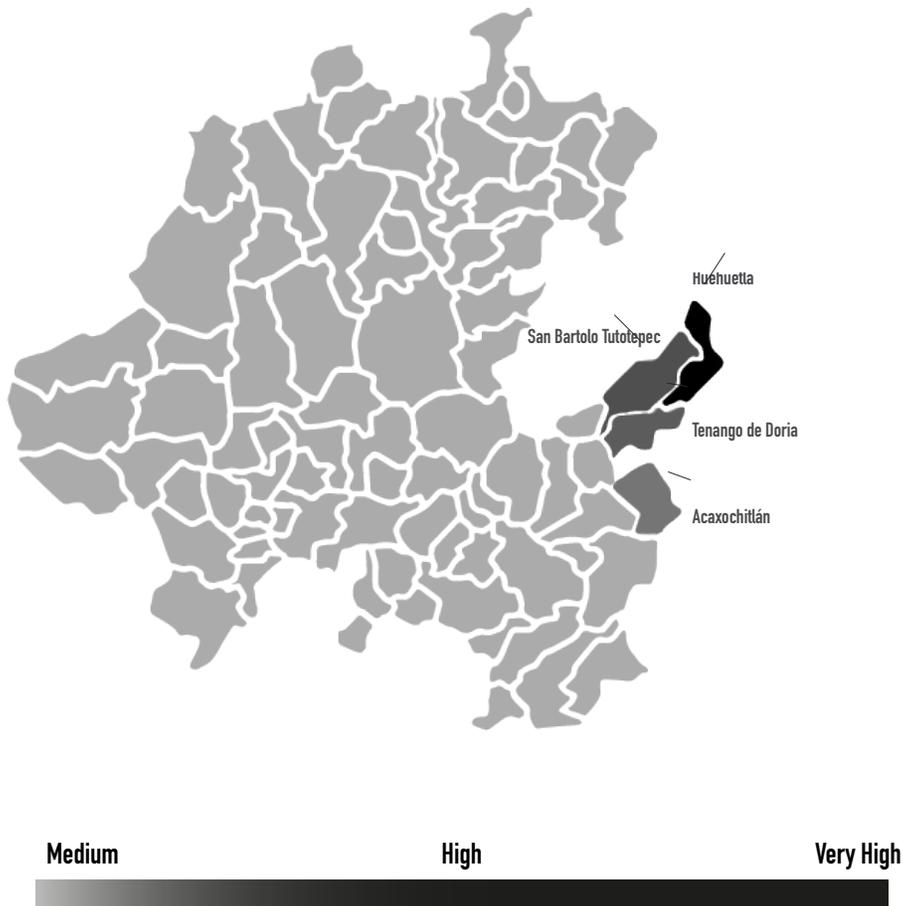




APPENDIX

**THE OTOMÍ-TEMPEHUA  
HIDALGO REGION AND ITS  
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

## DEGREE OF MARGINALIZATION



East of Hidalgo, the Sierra Otomí-Tepehua region is located in the southern mountain range of the Sierra Madre and to the north of the Tulancingo Valley, within easy reach of the states of Veracruz and Puebla.

Here, approximately 120,000 citizens (51% women, 49% men) live in 473 communities divided into six municipalities. Four [of the municipalities] are predominantly Indigenous with a total population of 99,489 inhabitants, of which 60,000 speak [the Indigenous languages of] Nahuatl, Otomí, or Tepehua.

In [the municipalities of] Tenango de Doria, Huehuetla, and San Bartolo Tutotepec, the production of internationally renowned embroidery, coffee, and wood crafts drives the existing trade. [The municipality of] Acaxochitlán is a regional distribution center for flowers and produces ornamental plants, apples, wood, wool, and handcrafted embroidery.

Ineffective government, coupled with the isolation of this region, pose challenges to modern communication and the exchange of information and ideas. Towards this end, women struggle with the deprivation of knowledge, nutrition and health, property (especially land and housing), and of their free time. The birth rate is 3.3 children per woman. As in Chiapas and other rural regions of Mexico, pregnant women face excessive health risks when giving birth.



APPENDIX

**THE DYNAMIC:  
ADVANCES IN THE  
LEGAL ORGANIZATION OF  
INDIGENOUS WOMEN**

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Currently, almost five years after the legal constitution of four municipal Councils of Indigenous women (who are grouped into a regional network through the Regional Council of Indigenous Women of the Otomí-Tepohua Region), PSYDEH is conducting an assessment on the progress and future challenges of this model.

Among its advances, PSYDEH has managed to develop broad training and awareness processes. [These processes have placed] a strong emphasis on the rights of women and Indigenous peoples, including the right to political participation for women, the right to access public information, and the right to personal data protection. However, it is concerning to PSYDEH as we look at the difficulty of continuing to work as advisors and partners within each of these organizations. This work requires, and deserves, a lot of personal support from PSYDEH - field-based support in the form of financial and human resources, which we have not yet earned, and great personal and family efforts within the daily lives of Indigenous women.

Throughout these five years, there has been notable progress in various domains where Indigenous women organized in these Councils have been involved. [This progress can be seen] within training processes, public actions such as the regional meetings, and on-going projects (up to 23 projects financed by government institutions), among many other areas. It must also be recognized, however, that the conditions of marginalization and poverty within the communities and municipalities from which [the Indigenous women] originate have greatly affected these women. To be part of an Indigenous family and, on many occasions, to be the heads of these families, has led some of the Indigenous women to step down from their positions as advisors in each of the municipal Councils.

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We (PSYDEH) can confirm that women have been gaining citizen rights. Although these rights have been constitutionally recognized, they have not yet been exercised. These rights include the right to free movement, the right to vote, and the right to be voted for. [The women] have also conquered the right to free expression, which has been highlighted both by their Declaration of Huehuetla in 2017, and especially by their unprecedented regional development agenda which includes seven distinct local challenges. As the Indigenous women offered their perspective on how to solve these challenges, their agenda was at the heart of a talk in January 2020 between leaders of their region and Mexico's President, André Manuel Lopez Obrador.

One of PSYDEH's projects included the initiative "Fruits of Change." The result of this initiative can be seen here through the production of this book. Alongside other PSYDEH collaboration projects, the establishment of processes and methods focused on communicating cultural and gendered differences has helped to build a strong platform [for Indigenous women]. With this leadership and marketing training, and with the support of their partners and communities, we have seen that PSYDEH's Indigenous women partners have gained access to positions of leadership and political representation. Additionally, they have also gained access to financial resources and what they need for project management in the short, medium, and long terms.

It is also important to highlight the legacy of the women whose paths have been woven together with PSYDEH and then, for various reasons, left the partnership. The methodology of narrative storytelling training shared in this experience has been really

impactful - mostly because of the tools that the group of advisors participating in the initiative learned to use. [As a result], the women advisors were able to build - together with the PSYDEH team - the stories of two of their colleagues who unfortunately passed away at this stage of their Councils. In a very personal way, we would like to recognize the work of all the Indigenous women who have both directly and indirectly formed part of the PSYDEH community. They are true leaders who have left a tremendous legacy for all the partners and advisors to follow. They have also left PSYDEH a great responsibility to continue our work.

In conclusion, we must remember that while the successes achieved are important, the remaining tasks at hand are even more important. Without a doubt, there is a greater awareness and recognition of the role of Indigenous women in their communities. It has become even more clear that these women are political actors whose resistance and struggle begin at home and extend to the community, municipality, state, and world.



APPENDIX

# WHO IS PSYDEH?



*We are a Mexican grassroots NGO working towards a paradigm shift with a community of local, Indigenous women partners and global friends. We offer a new path for similar organizations in Mexico and around the world to have a sustained impact within vulnerable and marginalized communities. We encourage community-led development as an antidote to social and economic inequality and, as an organization, we work to obtain the resources needed to sustain the impact of this work. We believe that with a commitment to obtaining an impact through learning and improvement, we will help strengthen Indigenous, rural, and migrant communities in the convergence of human rights, community rights, and development.*

**MISSION:** To empower rural and Indigenous people with both training in human and citizen rights and development as well as the production of micro-projects. At the same time, to help rural and Indigenous people to lead sustainable development initiatives, starting from the bottom to the top within their own marginalized communities.

**VISION:** PSYDEH is the leading grassroots civil society organization in Mexico that empowers Indigenous, rural, and migrant communities in the convergence of human rights, community rights, and development.

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## HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION

PSYDEH was established by four professional Mexican women in 2007 to serve women and girls while promoting local, sustainable, human development. In 2014-2015, we completely reorganized the field and organizational work in response to two core questions:

How do we combat social and economic inequality in Mexico?

How do we secure and sustain the resources we need to achieve this impact?

Our hypothesis, which we actively tested to answer these questions, is this:

Equitable and sustained community development is most easily achieved when we educate and organize marginalized citizens around values of leadership based on love. [In this way], they can freely exercise their economic and political rights in order to increase democratic accountability and innovate appropriate collective action to promote their own development from the bottom up.

The result is what PSYDEH looks like today: An intercultural team made up of Mexicans as well as foreigners from different countries. [The team is] mostly full-time and part-time staff and volunteers [who] produce interrelated projects according to information received from partners and local stakeholders.

PSYDEH staff evolves as the success of the program and funding allows. The majority of our multinational team are women, including many locally-based Indigenous women. They all work as full-time

and part-time professional staff - as a team with positions as project coordinators, community organizers, workshop facilitators, photographers, and event organizers. [Additionally], a very important role has been our large group of volunteers.



APPENDIX  
**NOTES ON PHOTOGRAPHY**

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**Pg. 13, Female Advisors from Yolki Ino Yolo A.C., Council of Indigenous Women from the Community of Acaxochitlán**

The photo was taken at a storytelling workshop at the PSYDEH office. Brazilian photographer, Diogo Heber (D. Heber; @diogo.heber), Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 16, 19. Balbina Cruz Vergas, Yolki Ino Yolo A.C.**

These portraits are a reflection of a dialogue between Diogo and Balbina. Diogo and Balbina use photography to share Balbina's story as a woman, mother, and businesswoman. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 20, 23, Marisela Romero Cruz, Yolki Ino Yolo A.C.**

With this pair of portraits, Marisela decided to communicate the force of her spirit and her passions for learning and being the owner of her own power. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 24, 27, Isabel Romero Cruz, Yolki Ino Yolo A.C.**

Here, Isabel communicates her sincerity as a human and a nurse; for these reasons, she chose to pose with an oil lamp made famous by Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern, professional nursing. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 28, 31, María Juana Licona Martínez, Yolki Ino Yolo A.C.**

María Juana decided to show her strength and happiness through her portraits. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 32, 35, Inocencia Atlalpa Hernández, Yolki Ino Yolo A.C.**

The portraits of Inocencia show how education and learning inspire us to be known instead of invisible. These photographs are also an important part in the short film, "Mujer Ciudadana" [Woman Citizen], an original short film from PSYDEH produced by Creativos Obscura, the production company of D. Heber y Kevin Fitzpatrick. Tenango de Doria, Hgo.

**Pgs. 38/9, 36, 38-39. Rosario Cruz Ramírez, Yolki Ino Yolo A.C.**

These portraits were taken by Damon Taylor (D. Taylor), principal consultant of PSYDEH. The portraits of Rosario were taken of her actively participating in various fieldwork activities in the region of Otomí-Tepehua, Hgo.

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**Pg. 43. Otomí Advisors from Nuevo Amanecer A.C., Council of Indigenous Women from Huehuetla**

The photo was taken at the storytelling workshop in the PSYDEH office. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 47, 49, Nayelica Lazcano Bernadino, Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

The portrait of Nayelica (pg. 46) was taken by Abraham Carrasco and captures the essence of Nayelica's spirit. The portrait on pg. 49, taken by D. Taylor, shows Nayelica's great sense of humor and how she found enjoyment in the little things in life. We miss her dearly.

**Pgs. 50, 53. Gloria Martínez Soto, Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

Here, Doña Gloria has decided to present herself as an adult woman with strong inner power and a willingness to always be ready for new life journeys, just like a "nuevo amanecer" (new sunrise). D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 54,57. Luisa Arroyo Vicenta, Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

The portraits of Doña Luisa, according to her, demonstrate that she is a woman who believes in Mother Earth and that we are only a small part of this world - and that things are bigger than ourselves. She works closely with Mother Earth, as both a local farmer and spiritual leader for her community. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 58, 61. Rosalina Mendoza Mendoza, Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

These portraits are a reflection of the dialogue between Diogo and Rosalina, where Rosalina decided to recount her truth - that she is "dialogue and love." D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 62, 65. Anabell Rosas Santiago, Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

The portraits of Anabell were taken during her fieldwork, where she participates with great enthusiasm. D. Taylor, Tenango de Doria, Hgo.

**Pgs. 66, 68-69. Rosalba Bernardino Ventura, Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

Rosalba's portraits show her intelligence, resilience, and power in spite of her fight against a severe illness. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 70, 73. Yaquelin Mendoza Martínez, Nuevo Amanecer A.C.**

Upon seeing the portraits of Yaquelin, we see a creative, optimistic, and unique woman who is the granddaughter of Gloria (pages 70-73). You would never know that Yaquelin is originally from a rural, isolated community that faces enormous challenges. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

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**Pg. 77. Consejeras Otomí de Mujeres con Futuro A.C., Consejo de Mujeres Indígenas de San Bartolo Tutotepec.**

The photo was taken at a storytelling workshop in the PSYDEH office. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 80, 82-83. Josefina Merced Velasco Velasco, Mujeres con Futuro A.C.**

Captured by D. Taylor, the portraits of Doña Jose, illuminate her facial profile and reflect her strength as a woman and farmer. The photo in her kitchen with PSYDEH friends, taken by D. Heber, shows both her commitment to her work and generosity in always sharing homemade food - including her famous peanut tamales. We miss her dearly!

**Pgs. 84, 87. Alberta San Agustín Velasco, Mujeres con Futuro A.C.**

As you can see, Alberta has decided to use her portraits to show the essence of what she is saying in her story: "To achieve things you have to suffer a bit. It requires leaving your home, it requires money, it even requires, at times, permission from others. Work is work: the key is to be able to do it." D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 88, 93. Remigia Rivera Islas, Mujeres con Futuro A.C.**

These portraits reflect the dialogue between Diogo and Remigia. Within this dialogue, she expressed her inner truth - that she is a compassionate leader and critical thinker. She is someone who walks, step by step, with internal love and with her son, who will someday work and value himself for who he is regardless of his sicknesses. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 94, 97. Nayeli Hernández Roldan, Mujeres con Futuro A.C.**

The portraits of Nayeli, taken by D. Taylor, show how Nayeli views herself as a whole person. She believes that each of us are capable of doing certain things. She sees herself as a homemaker dedicated to her daughters as well as a strong fighter against injustices. San Bartolo Tutotepec, Hgo.

**Pgs. 98, 101. Rufina Guzmán Guzmán, Mujeres con Futuro A.C.**

Here, Rufina has decided to use her portraits as a mirror to understand the depth of her womanhood. She is a farmer of her own farm, an embroidery artist, and a mother of her children. She is also the owner of her own story as a survivor of gender-based violence. D. Heber, Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 102, 104-105. Regina Flores Marcos, Mujeres con Futuro A.C.**

The portraits of Regina show how she is a force of nature. The first photograph is from the short film "Mujer Ciudadana" (Woman Citizen), a PSYDEH original film produced by Creativos Obscura. The second photograph was taken outside of her house with her spectacular artwork. D. Heber. San Bartolo Tutotepec, Hgo.

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**Pg. 109. Otomí Advisors from Flor del Bosque A.C., Council of Indigenous Women from Tenango de Doria**

This photo was taken by D. Taylor during a civic leadership training. Tenango de Doria, Hgo.

**Pgs. 112, 116-7, Marcela Monroy Mendoza, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

The portraits of Maricel show the essence of her worldview that is captured in her story. The first photograph was taken in collaboration with D. Heber. The second photograph was taken in collaboration with D. Taylor and shows Marcela actively participating in a civic leadership training.

**Pgs. 118, 121. Gonzala Clemente Gómez, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

The portraits of Gonzala capture her attitude toward life: she takes life one step at a time, doing all that she must do so that her children can succeed regardless of her personal challenges. The photographs were taken in the field by D. Taylor.

**Pgs. 122, 125, Yesika Felipe José, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

In these spontaneous portraits of Yesika, taken by D. Heber while she is acting as a workshop facilitator, we see her capacity to live alongside others and offer support to other people as she gains their trust. We celebrate her as the leader of her own life and as a person who never wavers in saying, "I am a single mother and I say that with pride."

**Pgs. 126, 129. Zenaida Tranquilino Lucas, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

Captured by D. Taylor, these portraits of Zenaida show her strength as a leader with a goal of helping her community succeed. The photo of Zenaida laughing was taken by D. Heber and reveals her capacity to take all of life in the best possible way.

**Pgs. 130, 133. Agustina Acosta Flores, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

"I am a happy woman who loves to share experiences with and serve the people in my community." Agustina began her story with these words. Her truth is evident in the spontaneous portraits of her taken at a regional gathering for Indigenous women. The portraits also capture her sincerity, hunger for learning, and ability to sacrifice for her family. D. Taylor, Tenango de Doria, Hgo.

**Pgs. 134, 136-7, Guillermina Gómez Mendoza, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

The portraits of Guillermina show where she lives, what she does, and how she grew up as a girl with 16 brothers and sisters. The first photograph was captured by Jorge Echeverría (J. Echeverría) in the mountains of her home. The second photograph of Guillermina, taken in action by D. Heber, shows how she is a mother, embroiderer, leader, and woman who received her high school diploma after she raised her own children.

**Pgs. 138, 140-141. Yolanda San Juan Gómez, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

Here, the portraits of Yolanda show us a woman who has the capacity to listen and act as a fighter for fair business practices for all artisans. D. Taylor, Tenango de Doria, Hgo.

**Pgs. 142, 144-145. Isabel Gómez Flores, Flor del Bosque A.C.**

In her story, Isabel tells us, "The biggest challenge of my childhood was going to a water well located about twenty minutes from my house. Sometimes the walking path was very slippery and if I fell, I would have to return for more water so that when my parents returned, everything would be ready for them." As we can clearly see in the second portrait taken by D. Heber, these challenges never stopped Isabel from continuing forward in her life. The first photograph was captured by J. Echeverría.

**Pgs. 152-153, 154, 156-157. Appendix: The Initiative in Action**

Photographs by D. Heber. Tulancingo, Hgo.

**Pgs. 162-163. Appendix: The Otomí-Tepehua, Hidalgo Region and its Indigenous Towns**

Photograph by D. Heber. Huehuetla, Hgo.

**Pgs. 168, 169. Appendix: The Dynamic of the Narrative Initiative**

Photograph by D. Heber. San Bartolo Tutotepec, Hgo.

**Pgs. 173, 177. Appendix: Who is PSYDEH?** Photographs by D. Heber.

**Pgs. 184-185**

Photograph by D. Taylor. Tulancingo, Hgo.



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