Program: Mercado Global
Website: www.mercadoglobal.org

Mission: Mercado Global is a cutting-edge, nonprofit fair trade organization with an innovative approach to fighting poverty and empowering indigenous women in Guatemala's highlands by connecting their artisan cooperatives to sales opportunities in the U.S. on an unprecedented scale.

History of the Organization: Founded by young women entrepreneurs, Mercado Global is dedicated to promoting women as leaders in their work, communities, and family structures. Two Yale University graduates started the nonprofit organization in 2004 after witnessing the difficulties Guatemalan villagers had in finding customers and getting fair prices for handmade goods. Benita Singh and Ruth DeGolia’s studies led them to the lush western highlands of Guatemala. They visited tiny villages of families driven to the isolated region after the country’s devastating civil war, and they were struck by beautiful pottery, jewelry and rugs the women had crafted. They discovered the artisans had a limited customer base, and decided to help. They created Mercado Global, an organization of village cooperatives whose goods are sold online and in catalogs. By 2006, Mercado Global co-founder and Executive Director Ruth DeGolia was on the cover of Newsweek with Brad Pitt, both of them Giving Back award winners.

Mercado Global currently works with 31 indigenous women’s cooperatives throughout Guatemala’s western highlands. Many of their partner artisans are widows or returned refugees from Guatemala’s civil war, and approximately 72% of partner artisans are illiterate. By providing training and support to indigenous artisan cooperatives, Mercado Global ensures that the women who need help the most are connected to the income and empowerment brought by United States market access.

Where They Work: Guatemala
- The Mayan civilization flourished in Guatemala and surrounding regions during the first millennium A.D.¹
- After almost three centuries as a Spanish colony, Guatemala won its independence in 1821.
- During the second half of the 20th century, it experienced “a variety of military and civilian governments, as well as a 36-year guerrilla war.”²
- In 1996, the government signed a peace agreement formally ending the conflict, which had left “more than 100,000 people dead and had created, by some estimates, 1 million refugees.”³
• Today, the distribution of income remains highly unequal “with the richest 10% of the population accounting for more than 40% of Guatemala’s overall consumption.”

• More than half of the population is below the national poverty line and 15% lives in extreme poverty. . .43% of children under five are chronically malnourished, one of the highest malnutrition rates in the world.

• Guatemala is the most populous country in Central America, and more than half of Guatemalans “are descendants of indigenous Mayan peoples.”

• Westernized Mayans and mestizos (mixed European and indigenous ancestry) are known as Ladinos.

• The predominant religion is Roman Catholicism, “into which many indigenous Guatemalans have incorporated traditional forms of worship.”

• Though the official language is Spanish, it is not universally understood among the indigenous population.

• Guatemala’s abundance of “biologically significant and unique ecosystems contributes to Mesoamerica’s designation as a biodiversity hotspot.”

Rigoberta Menchú was born on January 9, 1959 to a poor Indian peasant family and raised in the Quiche branch of the Mayan culture.

Rigoberta became involved in social reform activities through the Catholic Church, and became prominent in the women’s rights movement when still only a teenager.

In 1979, Rigoberta joined the Committee of the Peasant Union (CUC). That year her brother was arrested, tortured and killed by the army. The following year, her father was killed when security forces in the capital stormed the Spanish Embassy where he and some other peasants were staying. Shortly afterwards, her mother also died after having been arrested, tortured and raped.

In 1980, she figured prominently in a strike the CUC organized for better conditions for farm workers on the Pacific coast, and on May 1, 1981, she was active in large demonstrations in the capital.

In 1981, Rigoberta Menchú had to go into hiding in Guatemala, and then flee to Mexico. That marked the beginning of a new phase in her life: as the organizer abroad of resistance to oppression in Guatemala and the struggle for Indian peasant peoples’ rights.

Over the years, Rigoberta Menchú has become widely known as a leading advocate of Indian rights and ethno-cultural reconciliation, not only in Guatemala but in the Western Hemisphere generally, and her work has earned her several international awards.

Mercado Global is dedicated to promoting women as leaders in their work, communities, and family structures. Mercado Global has made great strides in developing an innovative, market-based model for fighting poverty in rural Latin America. Some recent accomplishments include:

- **Decreased Local Poverty**: Sales, on average, triple the daily income of their partner artisans. Mercado Global sales provide fair-wage income to over 360 artisans in 31 cooperatives and 2,100 dependents.

- **Increased School Enrollment**: This year, all elementary school-aged children of Mercado Global’s original partner artisans are enrolled in school for the second consecutive year. This is the exception in a country where indigenous children receive on average just 1.8 years of education over the course of their lifetimes.

- **Improved Health & Well-Being**: Mercado Global partner artisans and their children are experiencing unprecedented food security and nutritional rates. These artisans have also reported a 25% increase in access to potable water and a 34% increase in electricity in their homes since partnering with Mercado Global.

- **Expanding Socially Responsible Purchasing**: Mercado Global has established partnerships with major retail chains and catalogs, including Levi Strauss, Hallmark and Whole Foods. These partnerships are expanding the market for fair trade products.

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**The Project: Market Access and Market Readiness Program**

Dining for Women’s donations will help support Mercado Global’s Market Access and Market Readiness Program, ensuring that rural women artisans in Guatemala receive the comprehensive training that empowers them to become business and community leaders.

Mercado Global built a model that is increasing the financial sustainability of hundreds of women by connecting them to the U.S. market, and has the potential to impact thousands more women. DFW’s donations will be used to provide extensive training in business administration, financial literacy, technical skills to improve artisans’ craftsmanship abilities, as well as training focused on building their self-esteem, confidence, and leadership abilities.

**Why We Love This Program**: Having access to markets for Fair Trade goods is important. Mercado Global offers this access to the indigenous women with whom they work. Mercado Global has a holistic approach to women’s empowerment, including business and financial training, in addition to leadership and self-esteem building.
**Project Budget: $35,000**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Staff Salaries</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
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<td>Contracted trainers (technical experts)</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Program Budget</strong></td>
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An additional $5,000 from DFW would support expanding the model to empower more women artisans in rural Guatemala. Specifically, over the next year, Mercado Global plans to expand their model to incorporate **four additional artisan cooperatives**. This would help approximately 40 more women form into organized cooperatives in their rural villages, receive training in basic business administration and financial literacy, and participate in orders with our U.S. market clients to significantly increase their income levels.

**How They Measure Success:**
Mercado Global tracks results, including:

- The number of partner artisans who earn a fair and sustainable income.
- The number of partner artisans more actively participating in leadership roles in their communities, an increase of 22% from 2008 to 2009.
- The percentage of artisans reporting that they participate in financial decision making and money management in their households, which increased nearly 40% from before they partnered with Mercado Global.
- Health and nutritional rates: Nearly 100% of artisans who partner with Mercado Global report having access to electricity and potable water, and a vast majority have been able to install paved floors in their homes (as opposed to dirt floors), which decreases their susceptibility to disease.
- Children’s Education: Due to increased income for local mothers and direct Mercado Global scholarships, 100% of elementary school-aged children of original partner artisans are enrolled in school for the third consecutive year.
Financial Profile

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Program Expenses</td>
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<td>Administrative Expenses</td>
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Sources:

Photos provided by Mercado Global.


2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 U.S. Department of State [http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2045.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2045.htm)

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

9 "Biodiversity Hotspots-Mesoamerica-Overview". Conservation International.