



seres

ANNUAL REPORT

2021

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HOW DID YOU LEAD IN 2021?

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As a leader we constantly ask ourselves: Are we feeling stuck? What are we thinking? How can we handle the feeling of not making progress but giving our all? How are we taking care of one another? How can we manage the anxiety and stress from uncertainty, instability and sudden changes around us? And all this, while keeping our mission at the center of everything we do. These were not new thoughts and feelings, we had them in 2020, but it was more evident than ever for us. Were you feeling the same way?

This invited us to take this opportunity to share our challenges as leaders of SERES and how we decided to take action and manage these needs, hoping they could shine some reflection and questions for other local and global leaders like yourself.

The first big challenge was how we *manage* our own *emotions* and allow ourselves to manage those of others. There was anxiety of not knowing whether we could reach our fundraising goals for the year. In 2020, our fundraising declined 50%, which left us concerned about whether we would have enough funds to maintain our programs and attend to the needs of the youth and the SERES team. We were also in our second year of remote work, which brought with it a challenge to find motivation and energy. This is where we focused on *finding what brings us joy* (do we sound like Marie Kondo?). By creating and spending time in activities that cultivated our joy independently and collectively, we reconnected with the work and the purpose. This doesn't mean we stopped doing the hard work, but we intentionally found our joy together.

Our second challenge was leading without being there, to *lead from a distance*. Despite SERES having digital platforms for communication and project management, there were needs from the staff that required *connection*. While we made the decision to continue to work remotely, we activated deep listening with our team to learn about their feelings, thoughts and motivations. We worked to address the needs that arose through 1:1 calls and include other team rituals like happy hour that helped us connect as a community. We were able to carry out an in-person five-day team retreat after two years to deepen practices of self-management, creativity and idea generation; address challenges and needs as a team; and have time to cry, laugh and cook together. This helped us root our relationship as friends, colleagues and as a team.

The third challenge was *going back* to our in-person programs. Youth were hungry to re-engage in person, but we had to keep in mind how we could do this without impacting the health of the communities and our leaders. So you can imagine our joy when the facilitators were vaccinated and, with established biosafety protocols, the communities were eager to receive us. We enjoyed going back to communities to facilitate without forgetting the *learnings of adapting* to a new virtual environment, but understanding the gap rural and indigenous communities have when leaving them only with virtual interventions.

Our programs will continue to consider this gap when offering virtual and in-person programs and initiatives, in order for them to achieve the goal of transforming our communities, systems and cultures.

We are proud of the team we have sustained, always focusing on offering our strengths and leading this organization that keeps us in a zone of constant learning. We are also proud of the positive impact our team has had on the development of skills of youth in the region. Thank you for believing in and investing our work and collective journey. We are proud to work with you.

The following report is structured with inviting questions to spark a connection with you as a reader, to learn together, share and inspire you as a local and global leader.

With gratitude,

Sara y Abigail

Co-Executive Directors



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HOW DO YOU LISTEN TO YOUR PURPOSE?

4 One of the highlights of our year was creating SERES' strategic plan for 2022-2025. We decided to follow a process where
6 we could involve all the key stakeholders in SERES, which meant dedicating more time and intention to collect and really
8 hear what they had to say. We want to share our learnings throughout this process in three important good practices that
10 worked for us: a) being one hundred percent present in each session, practicing the use of strategic questions and deep
12 listening, b) being aware that the co-executive directors will weave everything that arises but are really there at the service
14 of what the ecosystem needs in this process and c) actively involving each interested stakeholder in the co-creation of
16 strategies.

Listening to the evolutionary purpose of SERES

20 During 2021, the SERES team launched into reading the book
22 Reinventing Organizations by Frederic Laloux, forming a reading
24 club in small teams that helped immerse us in deep reflections
26 as leaders and as a team. As Laloux describes it, evolutionary
purpose is “listening and understanding what the organization
wants to become, the purpose it wants to serve.” This is one of
the hardest concepts to grapple with, but it opened the team to
the changes that were needed to serve this purpose.

Like any process or program design process in SERES, we use a tool called NAOMMIE, learned from our partner organization [euforia](#), which allows us to gather the Needs of each stakeholder, establish the Aim, the Objectives, think about the Methodologies, Methods, the description of the Implementation and some indicators for the Evaluation process. This becomes the north star that allows us to guide each step of the process with a certain purpose.

Our process led us to meet on three occasions with small groups of up to 10 participants with the network of SERES ambassadors, one session with the SERES team and one session with the board of directors, each with specific objectives.

The network of young leaders, who are the heart of everything SERES does, had a space in which we explored and listened to the most pressing needs that youth are facing in the region. From them, we repeatedly heard that the main three needs included: a) tools to live and lead in times of crisis (e.g., pandemic) as community leaders, students and workers, b) mental health and c) economic access to sustain their lives and dreams.

Our board is SERES global sensor, and together we looked at opportunities and trends that exist, and from there envisioned from this perspective. The SERES team created a space to harvest the successes, learnings and vision to define how the SERES family can transform or change to respond to the needs of youth in the region based on its mission, vision and values.

The work of the co-executive directors was to listen and transfer this valuable information into goals and objectives, and to reflect it in concrete changes in how the organization's three strategies should be implemented. The results were presented for validation and approval at SERES Annual General Meeting which brings together all stakeholders. The SERES team then created the process of implementing these strategies during various sessions, thus creating greater openness to change.

Strategic questions:

How can we get closer to rural communities and create impact in their backyards?
How does SERES impact a few leaders in a way so deeply that we can see transformational changes for the leaders and their communities?

How can we leverage SERES' success and uniqueness to bring financial sustainability?

How can SERES promote a culture of learning, inspiration and innovation to be able to adapt as it is needed around our context?



Leading with and for others

As you may already know, we are an organization with a [teal culture](#). This has required a change in seeing and exercising the leadership that comes with the title of CEO. How has this impacted two female Guatemalan leaders?

First, it has required breaking with the traditional leadership model that exists in a region like Central America, transforming our processes into those that anchor shared decision making in response to the needs of the ecosystem, and leaving aside making changes by one's own call or desire of our egos. This has created a team that is more committed to pursuing the purpose of SERES with an openness to make changes and integrate practices like strategic questioning with those impacted by the decision. We prioritize processes of inclusion and active listening, which dignify and value the person, their ideas and their roles.



“[In] the circular leadership systems that SERES employs, we are all essential bolts that make the ecosystem move. For that reason, the power of decision is distributed.”



Second, it has required us to regularly switch our roles, responsibilities and our leadership for the service of the community. Instead of guiding and directing every strategy and initiative, we know our priority is to promote and care for the culture of the organization and be there as mentors for others. We have roles and responsibilities that we own but we reflect this service of leadership in our everyday tasks and in our team meetings by bringing powerful questions to explore ideas and opportunities, helping others resolve their needs in their roles and mentoring organically. Teal changed the role of the CEO and we are changing together as co-leaders.

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During our team retreat we asked the SERES staff members what they would say to someone who is about to start working with SERES. These answers reflect our organizational culture which has been built for over 12 years and continues to evolve with every new member that joins us, to continue to build an ecosystem of transformation for young leaders in the region.

A team with high openness to change

“It is a space for creating authentic connections.”

“Live SERES intensely.”

“You will always have some support.”

“You will own your time and decisions.”

“You have a voice and a vote to comment on the strategies.”

“ You will be heard.”

“There is no need to pretend and be someone else.”

“Don’t be surprised at the strange questions.”

“Cyclicity, we learn, implement and reflect. This cycle of constant learning.”

In conclusion, we are taking the pulse of whether our purpose as an organization is responding to its own calling and serving or attending to the needs of youth in the Central American region, leveraging the opportunities that exist around us. This can be constantly changing and we are changing the rigidity of a work team in the face of change.

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WHAT DO THE AWARDS SAY ABOUT OUR WORK?

HundrED highlights that “SERES’ mission is focused on developing 21st century skills through transformative leadership training, positive youth engagement, and eco-social enterprise. They help young people become influential and impactful leaders to address injustices in their communities and act as citizens of the world.”

When our work is recognized with awards and nominations it tells us how relevant our work is for the development of citizens with the right skills to face personal and professional challenges in the 21st Century. It affirms that our initiatives of cultivating emerging and transformative youth leadership in rural communities, with mostly indigenous youth, in Central America is being done creatively, innovatively and in line with the needs of a globalized world.

This year we want to share that we were *selected as one of 15 educational innovations in Latin America building 21st century skills*, from over 380 projects in 16 countries, by an initiative from HundrED.org and the Inter American Development Bank. SERES was rated as an initiative with high innovation and scalability by an evaluation committee of 67 bilingual experts. The *Spotlight report 21st century skills in Latin American and the Caribbean*, described that SERES programs stand out because the program costs are low, leverage community resources and is easily adaptable to a diversity of contexts, making its scalability potential high.

“By harnessing their positive energy, developing a deep trust relationship, and teaching leadership, communication, finance and agriculture skills, SERES is giving youth the tools to make profound changes in their communities. Tremendous program”

HUNDRED
ACADEMY MEM-
BER

SENIOR
FACILITATOR
SERES

Abigail
Quic

“As the facilitator of the series of LTS programs in SERES, the HundrED award inspires me to continue giving one hundred percent of myself by educating youth with passion, joy and confidence. That the curriculum brings value to the lives of youth which also makes me feel that I am contributing to providing quality education to young people from underprivileged areas. Likewise, I celebrate when I see young leaders taking our model to public schools in their profession as primary and secondary school teachers like Johana K’eshel López in San Miguel Uspantán and Heidy Santamarina in San Andrés Osuna, Escuintla.”

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN EXPERIMENTAL RESILIENCE SPACE ?

Guatemala is a country rich in diverse cultural and natural resources, ranked as one of the world's top 19 hot spots for biodiversity, with a total of 10 physiographic regions, seven biomes, 14 ecoregions, 66 ecosystems and 14 life zones identified within the country's borders.

However, Guatemala's position as one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change, coupled with a weak democracy, rampant government corruption, and lack of a proper education on environmental and social issues, means that these once-abundant resources are now under threat.

Biodiversity is being rapidly degraded through land occupation and unsustainable land uses. Agriculture provides the backbone of Guatemala's economy; however, techniques such as slash-and-burn, monoculture and the use of industrial pesticides and fertilizers are not only unsustainable but contribute towards the rapid destruction of Guatemala's land and water-based ecosystems.

The Boca Costa region in Guatemala is a semi-warm subtropical region with a humid climate. The characteristic vegetation is subtropical broadleaf forest. The coastal area of Guatemala is characterized by having one of the most fertile areas due to its type and quality of soil. Unfortunately, most of the southern coast of Guatemala is dominated by extensive monocultures of sugar cane, African palm, banana and rubber. The forested territory and the water bodies have been deforested and contaminated by human activities.

This area is where Ulew Fuego is located. Ulew Fuego is an experimental center by SERES for leadership and ecosystem regeneration located in El Rodeo Escuintla in the Boca Costa region of Guatemala.

Ulew Fuego is our response to the threats humans and traditional agriculture are generating to our ecosystems. It includes practices of mitigation and adaptation of climate change that are relevant to our social context, so that they can be adopted, replicated and respected by farmers and communities. Few spaces like this exist that are completely open to community leaders. We drew inspiration from this concept and the land in naming the center "Ulew Fuego" In Mayan language this refers to land of fire, the connection with the nearby Fuego Volcano as part of our history. We've shifted away from the traditional meaning of farm/finca that refers to landowner, and moving towards a shared land where resources, ideas and people are equal.

Ulew Fuego includes four main areas: a) 40% of the land is devoted to the *conservation*, identification, protection and recovery of forests, b) 15% is dedicated to productive and commercial purposes, demonstrating positive role models of successful social enterprises and strengthening our role in *connecting small-scale producers and farmers with larger markets*, c) 28% is destined to provide spaces and opportunities for farmers to cultivate the land and food with sustainable agricultural practices; and d) 20% is committed to *experiential learning*, which includes demonstration plots, a leadership training center for youth and community members, and a wilderness camp with a capacity of up to 70 people.



Imagine a place where community-led solutions to problems they identify are integrated, a place where regenerative solutions are created, a space that inspires others to contribute meaningfully to transformation. This is Ulew Fuego.

ULEWFUEGO

In 2021, we were able to finalize the leadership training center, integrating sustainability building practices by using bamboo as the construction material. The development of the center integrated training for youth and community leaders to learn the different building techniques, involving them in each step of the construction process, which meant that the leaders took ownership of the process and were a core part of its development. Each phase of Ulew Fuego includes experiential learning and spaces for leaders where they don't just receive information but are able to practice over and over again, implement pilot projects and see the benefits before implementing in their own land or crops.

Spaces like Ulew Fuego, where young leaders can come to spend some time, learn, connect with nature, discover and create things that really make them feel like home are not common. *Our goal is that this is not SERES land anymore, but a safe space where various cultures converge, where alliances, friendships and collaborations are created, where new ideas are born.*



WHAT IS SERES'S IMPACT?



“The youth of SERES, without a doubt, is vibrant and bright. Curious and intriguing beings, with critical thinking and acting decisively towards change. Always ready to expand, to transform and learn something new about themselves and their peers. They dare to bet on being different and having a series of essential values for the development of their leadership skills within their communities. They are dreamers-doers. Our youth are as diverse as the communities we serve. From geographical locations with landscapes to diversities in socio-cultural and environmental contexts, they invite us to recognize that good living (buen vivir) is such an abstract and subjective concept when we see it in practice within the communities we serve.”

An example of what Lucía expresses are the communities in Escuintla such as La Dignidad, Osuna and Ceylan. These communities are recognized as a convergence of culture, resilience and social construction towards a new reality that began in June 2018, when more than 10 communities were displaced from the eruption of the Volcán de Fuego, the nearby volcano. Among their knowledge is the development of the land, as a rooted source of income and living stories. Many times, due to their somewhat remote rural locations, they do not have access to resources to cover basic needs such as electricity or drinking water. However, it is their livelihoods, such as the forest and rivers, and human beings like the women's groups, youth and local leaders, who create that sense of wealth and abundance within them.

During the year, we partnered with *367 young people who began their leadership journey, from this context in Guatemala and El Salvador.*

Through four SERES Community Centers, *more than 1,680 young people participated in activities led by 5 fellows.*

We were able to strengthen our network of ambassadors with *28 new graduates of the series of Leadership for Transformation programs in SERES.*

In our experience we know that leadership cannot occur without a vision that guides and actions that support it.

During the sessions of our programs and follow-ups, youth have a colorful painting of the preferable future that allows them to have hope in the midst of an environment full of challenges, including the pandemic and its community effects (lack of opportunities for youth, access to resources/services, insecurity, violence, corruption, migration, among others).

Our commitment is to be connected with other youth in their leadership through a visit to their communities. Throughout the year the team of facilitators and the fellows carried out *103 mentoring sessions with leaders of 12 youth groups, and 23 ambassadors who had active leadership in their community, municipal and national levels.*

In these mentoring sessions we are happy when youth identify opportunities for growth and development as leaders and citizens; and we witness when they become influential people in decision-making in their community, municipality and in networks at the national level, by taking actions under their own efforts, leading the transformation of their communities to make them more just, sustainable, and resilient.

181 young people led 102 actions that mobilized and involved 32,736 people from their communities.

These actions fit into the following objectives of sustainable development.



Stories are one of the best tools to exemplify the impact of our programs in cultivating youth leadership. For us this is just one example of this new generation, who are creating hope for a future that we all prefer.

Director
OF PROGRAMS
AND OPERATION

Lucía
Solórzano

Creating a municipal youth policy

The SERES Transformative Sustainability Leadership curriculum strengthens the qualities of critical thinking in youth that allows them to see, create, express their ideas, in the same way, weave strategic relationships in search of promoting an ecosystem of support, which allows them to identify opportunities that exists in their environment and transform and influence spaces where systemic changes can happen.

Youth in unfavorable contexts have zero to very little trust in government institutions and governance systems because they are rarely included and interested in participating in processes of public policy. The concept in itself is often misunderstood, their benefits and purposes lack clarity and they question what difference can a public policy really make?

The SERES youth group in La Dignidad, Escuintla, led by Steven Mijangos, dedicated and prioritized time to get involved in the development of the first Youth Municipal Public Policy in Escuintla promoted by USAID and other civil society organizations. Steven tells the story this way:

“In December 2020 I applied to participate in a Rural Youth Network camp in Alta Verapaz, and I was surprised to find other civil society leaders who were creating a movement in Escuintla.

At the beginning of 2021, they contacted me to invite me to a meeting promoted by USAID. I knew of them based on the humanitarian aid or infrastructure work they carry out in the country, however my main reason for saying yes was networking opportunities. I was interested in starting to knock on doors of the municipality. When I found out that the purpose was to create a public youth policy, I said why not? That’s how I started to get involved in the process representing SERES together with 12 other organizations.

My greatest learning was knowing the process of creating a public policy, from community consultations with youth from the region about the biggest problems and hopes, and working groups to prioritize the 8 issues that make up the policy. In March I noticed that there were no voices from rural youth and I realized that this is the added value that SERES could offer. I invited the youth of La Dignidad and in this way we were able to form a work team from this community to become fully involved in the entire process. I also involved the youth group of San Andrés Ozuna in one of the community consultation processes.

The process was very dynamic to include the following strategic axes: violence prevention, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, education, citizen participation, health, science, and technology, prevention of alcohol and drug use, art, culture, sports, and recreation. I was also struck by the openness of the municipality to support this initiative, they were involved in conducting surveys and providing a space to meet.

This policy provides a line of action for each institution and organization that wishes to work with youth in the municipality of Escuintla, but also a framework and support for us, the community leaders. The beneficiaries are the youth of the urban area and we must reach rural youth.

The challenge for me to lead the rural youth group is to clarify their doubts, because this is an unknown subject and it led me to inform myself in advance of the processes with the leaders of the other organizations, to understand why, for what, functionality of each stage, to have the context and thus be prepared for the young people’s questions, also helped to encourage their active participation during the working tables where they were participating individually.

I felt very happy and emotional when we presented this policy to the municipality, because it was worth investing time and we prioritized that time to work on this public policy.

Our hope is that this policy is an instrument that offers greater legitimacy for youth, becoming a source of formal power for emerging young leaders, allowing them to frame the impact of their leadership under the prioritized axes of the youth policy that the municipality of the municipality is executing, allowing them to access greater support from other stakeholders.”





WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST LEARNINGS?

We don't often get to include a space to say ouch, that wasn't really what we thought would happen. This is where we want to share with you what were some of our biggest learnings in the past year.

a) Fellowships Reimagined

As we evaluated our three year fellowship program and community centers, we noticed how youth that were part of our fellowship mistaken their program as being part of SERES staff. We wanted to give and provide all the tools, the culture, our systems and process as a development experience and we ended up making them feel overwhelmed. This taught us to be very clear around the expectations from the fellows and what they expected from SERES. We took this with humility and redesigned our fellowship program, because it was where they expressed learning and growing the most, opening doors for other opportunities and changing their life plan.

b) Community Centers Model

The pandemic was not easy on our community centers model, we tried to push for youth to come to the spaces, however mobility restrictions from their communities to the center of town where the centers where located made it difficult for them to visit and use the services and resources. We felt at some point that there were underused resources, free internet/wifi for them to do their schoolwork and realize that the closer we are to their community, where this access is more limited, the greater the impact. Of course the pandemic did challenge us and we felt we didn't react sooner. We finally decided to change this model and instead of opening the centers in the center of town (where you can find the space to rent, accommodate, etc), we will provide ConeXpacios Kits that could be use in the community, supplies, data for smartphones, where a SERES fellow could accommodate a space that already exist in the community providing them with the resources and support around the corner.

c) Community Economic Initiatives

One of the main components of the community centers was to generate a business plan for the sustainability of the space. We realized this process should begin once community collaboration relationships are established, the fellows have gained trust in themselves, with their community and an active youth group, which usually happens at the end of the first year, so this should be the right time to start the business ideation process, allowing enough time to fundraise and manage seed capital.

From now on we will focus on helping small businesses already established where we can add value and therefore create models to follow. We learned that for young people from vulnerable areas the path to entrepreneurship is so varied depending on the strong needs and context of the youth, and now SERES will follow their rhythm and style.

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FINANCIALS

*For Guatemalan-based operations for fiscal year ending December 31, 2021.

REVENUE AND OTHER SUPPORT

	FY 2020	FY 2021
Foundation Grants	\$48,807	\$1100,312
SERES Global Grants	\$112,799	\$142,660
Individual Contributions	\$294	\$2,095
Fee-for-Service	\$1,626	\$3,700
Other Income (interests)	\$179	\$24,504
Total	\$163,705	\$ 248,922

EXPENSES

	FY 2020	FY 2021
Direct Program Expenses		
Training Programs (Central America)	\$94,033	\$121,235
Training Programs (International)	\$-	\$-
Leadership Center Grants	\$45,926	\$53,381
Operating Costs	\$2,202	\$23,078
Development	\$5,318	\$3,062
Management and General	\$8,360	\$8,998
	\$24,235	\$20,131
Total	\$187,947	\$229,885
Net assets at beginning of year		\$52,337
Net assets at end of year		\$70,686

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HOW CAN YOU GET ONBOARD?

In the next few years we are really looking forward to connecting local leaders with global leaders, but what does this mean? Closing the gap of access between leaders of color, indigenous and rural with our larger global networks and beyond.

We will be hosting community calls for our network of support to create a community among yourselves and be connected to what is going on the ground. Every three months there will be an opportunity to get to know other supporters and discover more about SERES.

We will be hosting ambassador calls, we want young leaders that are amazing advocates, activists, entrepreneurs, to be able to have a closer connection with the global community. They will be open for anyone that wants to join in, so inviting friends, family, colleagues is encouraged.

Finally, you will be seeing us more on facebook and instagram doing lives to connect and give you real time updates of what is happening.

We invite you to follow us on social media and subscribe to our [newsletter](#). Our goal is to grow our network of friends so we can become a movement of local and global leaders working to transform our cultures, societies and systems and inspire millions while doing it.

LEADERSHIP & STAFF

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Co-executive Director

Abigail Quic
Co-executive Director

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Program Coordinator, El Salvador

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Gary Tale (Treasurer)
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