



**2 0 1 6**  
*annual report*



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SERES works to unleash youth leadership for a resilient future. We provide empowering opportunities for young people that engage them as the principal agents of change, connecting their skills and passions with the most pressing community needs, and helping them to develop a skill set that allows them to start creating positive social change where they are.

*“No other institution or organization is offering such holistic and safe learning spaces as SERES does. Thanks for everything.”*

SERES' youth leaders are the “unlikely” leaders, on the front lines of enormous political, social, environmental and economic changes, making a stand for justice and equality for people and the planet. They are brave, courageous, bold, passionate and committed. United under the phrase “somos seres” (we are SERES), these young people are part of a family that crosses traditional boundaries of race, class, culture, politics, wealth, education and religion. Activators, change makers, movers and shakers, empowered with their own sense of agency and desire to create change, these young people are changing the status

Over 450 new youth from 14 municipalities across Guatemala and El Salvador joined the SERES network in 2016. These are some of their stories...

**marta**  
VARGAS

SERES Ambassador



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The Global Climate Risk Index is an annual publication that analyses to what extent countries have been affected by weather-related loss events, such as storms, heat waves and droughts. The 2016 edition of the report confirmed that - unsurprisingly - it is the less developed countries and poorest regions of the world that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of global climate change. This has certainly proven true in Central America where the region's four poorest countries - Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras - rank amongst the top fifteen in the world for long-term climate risk.

For the communities where we are working, already plagued by overwhelming social, environmental and economic issues, this increased pressure can often be the breaking point. It's hard to imagine what it's like to be a young person, living here on the frontlines. Facing crime, violence, poverty, environmental degradation and social disintegration, for many young folk facing a future at home is facing a future without hope.

It was around August last year, while working on a keynote presentation for the Montana World Affairs Council, that I realized that this simple concept - hope - was what lay at the core of SERES' success. Through our trainings, mentoring, youth-led community initiatives, and support network we are building hope in the minds and hearts of a generation whose future seems bleak.

As you'll discover in this year's annual report, it is hope for a better future that guides Wilson's leadership as President of his community development council. It was hope for a safer home that stopped Marcelo from joining a street gang and instead led him to become a member of SERES. And it was hope for the difference she could make that gave Saqb'ech López the courage to stand up for women's indigenous rights in an overwhelmingly macho and patriarchal society.

At a time when it is all too easy to feel despair given the size and scope of the challenges in the world around us, these courageous, passionate and committed young leaders give me hope. Through their collective leadership and initiatives, they are creating change. Whether it's building a nursery for reforestation, running healthy school canteens or planting a new community garden, these young people - unlikely leaders in every sense of the world - are creating change. And if they can, it gives me hope that the rest of us can too.

As always, to our community of support that has helped us to plant and nurture these seeds of hope over the last eight years, I give our thanks. I am honored that you can share this journey with us.

In gratitude and community,

*Corrina*

Co-founder/Executive Director

Dear friends,

Another year has just finished, full of challenges, achievements and changes, and a new adventure of learning and growth await us in the year ahead. We stand together in the face of a sobering reality of increased effects of climate change, economic inequality, injustice, and violence. Young people around the world must be more and more prepared to face these challenges in the best possible way in order to move towards a more peaceful, just and sustainable life where everyone can live with dignity, equality and satisfaction.

I believe that each person possesses a power without limits, a power that can change the history of our society. In the moment that a person realizes how to use their own power, that person is able to realize their dreams and at the same time begins to enlighten those around them. Over the last 7 years, I have seen hundreds of young people change their way of thinking and being as they begin this stage of personal transformation: discovering their own power.

In SERES we are training Youth Ambassadors (young community leaders who can model transformative leadership in action) and working with them to build a dynamic, resilient network of change makers. Through the collective power of this network, we have helped hundreds of young people to experience their own awakening and discovery. It is an incredible privilege to be able to watch and enjoy these life-changing moments.

I have also witnessed many transformations of entire communities as young leaders, empowered by this sense of agency and self-determination and the unstoppable power of their growing network, work to create change. Together, we are building a new culture that will lead us to the wellbeing of our society. Thank you for being a part of this network.

In Solidarity

*Antonio*

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# a LEADERFUL GENERATION

Our training programs help emerging young leaders build core competencies for effective sustainability leadership, providing the tools for both personal and societal transformation. We believe that given encouragement and the right kind of learning, any young person can become a highly influential and impactful leader, deeply committed to addressing the root causes of injustice and inequality in their community.

*“SERES means a lot in my life. It’s like a rediscovery of myself and those around me. It’s a circle of friendship for learning, transformation and personal growth. It’s a place of trust and confidence - that’s the most fundamental. As a SERES facilitator, I get to transmit all of this to other people.”*

wilson  
SÁNCHEZ

SERES Facilitator  
and Youth Board Member

The work of transformation is more than the work of a handful of leaders and conscientious citizens, it requires a movement of leaders...  
**a leaderful generation.**

wilson  
sánchez

Wilson began participating in SERES programs in 2010. A quiet teenager at the time, Wilson did not have a strong leadership presence in his community. What he did have was an unwavering commitment to the processes in which he was involved. Bit by bit, as he continued to develop his skills as an active and dynamic leader, he began taking on more responsibilities.

Today, at 22 years of age, Wilson is the president of his local Association for Community Development (ADESCO), a platform from which he is able to share his vision and lead the way forward towards a community with shared values for a sustainable future. It’s no easy task, with increasing threats from gang violence and a lack of educational and economic opportunities causing more and more youth to give up hope and head north to the United States in search of a better future. Last year alone, over 6% of the community’s population - all youth - made the difficult decision to leave their homes and undertake the dangerous journey towards the U.S. border. As a community leader, Wilson’s goal is to address the underlying issues that are causing youth to migrate. One of the ways that he does this is by working with SERES to run more youth leadership programs in his municipality. “SERES programs are important (for youth) because they are empowering, more than anything in the way they are facilitated and the people who facilitate them. These programs help to transform the perspective of young people, motivating and inspiring them to work together for the good of their community.”

Wilson’s role as a youth facilitator is helping to create a new generation ready to take on leadership roles and work together to solve the situations and challenges that present themselves daily.

*In addition to being president of the ADESCO, Wilson is one of two youth-elected board members for Asociación SERES, one of the founders of the ecological group “Jóvenes en Lucha”, and a member of a youth network that supports youth-led entrepreneurship.*

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# GIRLS

*“Equality is still utopic in most cases for young Mayan women. This is clear in Guatemalan society where prejudices and stereotypes surround any woman walking down the streets in her traditional indigenous dress. Especially in the most important neighborhoods, in the most important Guatemalan cities.”*

**abigail**  
QUIC  
Guatemala  
program director

In Guatemala’s macho and patriarchal society, Guatemalan women - particularly indigenous women - face more than their fair share of gender-based discrimination and violence. We see this every day in our work and the world around us. Our facilitators must spend much more time working to help young women attend our programs. It is not unusual to hear stories of young women that would like to attend a program, but whose fathers won’t let them as they have duties and responsibilities in the house. The sad truth is that for many Guatemalan girls and women, especially in the rural areas, both cultural values and practical obligations are tying them down to a life at home. Even among those young women who are able to make it to our programs, stories of violence and sexual assault are all too common, and make clear just how pervasive and deeply entrenched are the challenges and discrimination girls must face from a young age as they strive to pursue their goals.

Given this context, many people have asked us why we don’t just focus on young women and girls. What we have found is that running co-ed programs that allow young people to explore issues such as gender equality, power dynamics and identity together builds a more solid foundation for being able to face these challenges out in society. Through these experiences, SERES’ youth leaders are able to gradually start closing the gender equality gap, starting with their own attitudes and actions. As a result, many young women like Saqbèch López or Micaela Salanic find the courage and inspiration to step into spaces of leadership and influence that have traditionally been male dominated.

“All my life,” says Saqbèch, speaking at an International Youth Day event in her hometown of Cantel, Quetzaltenango “I was told things like *you can’t because you’re a woman, you can’t because you’re indigenous, you can’t because you weren’t born for that.* But know I now I must work to change that. Our participation as women and as indigenous Maya is very important to show that we also have the ability to develop ourselves in society as leaders, without having to lose our identity. This is why I have stepped forward to be a leader in my community.”

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Micaela, Guatemala Youth Representative to SERES Board of Directors, says that after participating in SERES programs, her involvement with her local community grew, leading to her current role in representing youth at the municipal level in Cantel, while also continuing to act as a youth ambassador for SERES. “[SERES] is important because there are so many young people that ignore what is happening around them, but this is because of a lack of integrity and equality in our communities: they’ve never had the opportunity to discover what they are capable of. Through SERES, those seeds buried in our communities have awoken.”

*“Before I knew about SERES, I was ignorant about my own reality and that of where I live. Today it is reflected regularly in the level of leadership that I have.”*

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over **50%** of our participants are female  
& **42%** identify as indigenous



# CITIZEN **weightlifting**

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*“Building the citizen muscle”* is a phrase we use at SERES to describe the work of **community action plans** or community initiatives that all youth in our network get involved in. These initiatives are designed, developed and implemented by the youth themselves to address the most pressing concerns that they identify in their community. Building up the citizen muscle is an important part of our strategy for creating change: helping young people discover their capacity to positively influence the world around them, creating opportunities for to practice their skills and develop experience leading a project, and positively contributing towards actions and strategies that are building more resilient and equitable communities.

Each year, SERES awards cash prizes from our carbon-onsetting green fund to the best community action plans. In 2016, we received 22 submissions and awarded three prizes in the categories of *Most Inspirational*, *Best Impact* and *Outstanding Project Management*.



# most inspirational

Also known as “the people’s choice award”, this prize is awarded to the project that receives the most number of “likes” through social media. The Most Inspirational category encourages youth to get public and share their work amongst their networks, helping to raise awareness about their projects and build skills in digital media and marketing. Youth in Guaymango, El Salvador, won this category for their action plan that focuses on reforestation and raising environmental awareness in their local community.

*“As Association 4.0.1, we feel very fortunate to have participated, and moreover to have won a prize. This means a lot. With the prize money we will implement four projects this year. This will help with the self-sufficiency of the group and the enthusiasm of the group’s members to continue working together for youth and the environment.”*



## best IMPACT

The Best Impact award looks at what the overall direct and indirect impact of the project is on people and the planet. It takes into consideration not just numbers, but also the quality and long-term benefits. Youth in El Papaturo are promoting a culture of environmental stewardship and sustainability by providing comprehensive environmental education programs to over 350 children, youth and adults in their community. The judges awarded this prize to Jóvenes en Lucha for their holistic and inclusive approach, which is promoting not just environmental stewardship but also helping to protect natural resources and revitalize local wealth and economy.

## OUTSTANDING project management

This award was created to encourage project management skills such as alliance building, creating partnerships, fundraising, resource management and project planning. The Outstanding Project Management award was given to the “SERES Uspantan” youth group for the skill they showed in planning, implementation and creating partnerships which allowed them to run 6 different initiatives including a healthy canteen pilot project, reforestation in three different villages and environmental education classes in the local school.

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# NETWORK

Through our work we actively strive to build a dynamic, highly connected and diverse network of transformative young leaders. Working together and supporting each other, these young leaders are helping to mobilize and empower youth around a sustainable development agenda at the local, national and international levels.

## SHAPING POLICY & BUILDING REGIONAL RESILIENCE

SERES-trained youth leaders are increasingly being called upon as representatives of the youth voice on issues such as water, climate, education, regional resilience and youth violence. In turn these platforms provide these young leaders with a space from which they can advocate for a socially-just climate resilience agenda and work to influence policy, practice, regulations and public opinion. The following are some of the events where SERES' youth network were represented:

- Central American Water Conference, Global Water Partnership (March 2016)
- UNESCO Key Partner's Meeting, Global Action Program for Education for Sustainable Development (July, 2016)
- Central American Vulnerability Summit for civil society actors (July, 2016)
- Violence Impacting Youth in Latin America (October, 2016)
- Annual conference for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) (October 2016)

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## HOW AN AMBASSADOR CHANGED MY LIFE

*“The tools that SERES teaches us help us to replicate work in our communities... we can reach more people, empower more youth, and make our actions plans at the local level known at the regional level.”*



SERES ambassador

In SERES, you will often hear us talk about our SERES Ambassadors. These Ambassadors are young leaders who have demonstrated a high level of commitment and strong leadership skills, and who are then trained by SERES to become community youth organizers and program facilitators. These Ambassadors, unlikely leaders from marginalized and frontline communities, are an important part of our network-building strategy. Their success and impact, as well as the relationships that they build within the community, has a catalyzing effect on other young people from similar backgrounds, for whom role models are few and far between. Marcelo Acosta's story of how he came to SERES demonstrates the important role that Ambassadors have at a community level.

Marcelo lost his father in 2015 at the age of 17, leaving a chronically ill mother and two siblings less than 6 years old under Marcelo's care. Feeling frustrated and lost, unable to work or study, Marcelo felt that the only option available - since he couldn't leave his sisters - was to join a street gang. It was at this point in time, in May 2016, that a SERES Ambassador invited Marcelo to participate in one of our youth leader's community congresses. That experience, says Marcelo, changed his perspective about himself and the world around him. With a newfound sense of agency and self-determination, Marcelo was able to identify more options than migration or gang membership. He also realized that these choices were important, because he has a responsibility to be a role model for other youth, particularly his sisters.

Four months later, Marcelo applied for a scholarship for one of SERES' Sustainable Livelihood programs to learn about sustainable agriculture. "The program changed my life" said Marcelo. It allowed me to see a different possibility for my community, and for me."

Marcelo attended the annual youth summit in December, and on the last night of the program there, he expressed his happiness at having participated in the gathering of over 50 youth leaders from Guatemala and El Salvador. His action plan hadn't won any of the prizes just announced, but, Marcelo said, that didn't matter.

"We're all winners here," he said with assurance, looking out at all of the youth leaders gathered before him. "We're winners because we're here."

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*“I alternate between tears and goosebumps everytime I hear this song. Helping young people find their voice is an integral part of the work we do and here is Myka, a young Guatemalan indigenous woman, putting her voice to music as all these young men (literally) back her up.”*

SERES creates collaborative partnerships to provide further training and development opportunities for youth in our network. As a SERES Ambassador, Micaela Salanic was awarded a scholarship to attend a musical activism program run by Global Platform and Action Aid. Approximately 10 scholarships are provided each year for these types of programs.



*“My highlight of 2016 was during the Sustainable Livelihoods - Agroecology program. Participants were inspired by the vision of ethical and sustainable food production and excited to learn how they could apply design principles to have healthier and more ecologically-friendly crops. Everyone was motivated to go back to their communities and replicate the training with other farming families. One participant, Alejandro Lorenzana, even went on to replicate the training program with one of SERES programmatic partners.”*

A large percentage of SERES’ participants come from a subsistence farming background. The agroecology program helps them to see that farming and working the land does not necessarily equate to poverty. It also helps to introduce ecologically-sound farming practices into the region, and to decrease the reliance on harmful and expensive pesticides, fertilizers and herbicides.

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*“One of my favorite moments this year was during the Sustainable Entrepreneurship program. It was a challenging program, as many of us - staff and participants - come from a reality where making money is often done without concern for the environmental or social impact. So for us, the concept of building businesses for profit has a negative connotation. But the facilitators challenged us to try and think about a world where you could make money and still do good. It wasn’t easy, but I think we all got there in the end and what I was most proud of was that all of the business proposals from our participants were based on sustainability, social equity and respect for natural resources, which showed me that SERES’ programs are working to instill a fundamental understanding of how we achieve sustainable development.”*

In 2016, we introduced a new entrepreneurship program to our Sustainable Livelihoods series. This program seeks to promote youth-led sustainable community economic development by supporting trainees to turn their action plans into community-focused business enterprises.



*“My highlight of the year in SERES was being able to participate in and witness the incredible community of youth leaders at the Annual Youth Sustainability Summit in December. The ways in which they supported one another throughout the week, exchanging ideas, helped me to see how resilient and dynamic the network of SERES leaders is.”*

Each year, SERES hosts a Youth Sustainability Summit that brings together 60+ youth leaders, mentors, ambassadors, facilitators and trainers for a 5-day camp designed to strengthen the network, build skills and deepen leadership.

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*“Simple: energy,  
enthusiasm, equality,  
collaboration and a  
single vision.”*



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# SERES in numbers

**18**  
ACTIVATE  
community congresses  
450 participants



**2**  
YOUTH  
summits  
93 participants

**2**  
SUSTAINABLE  
LIVELIHOOD  
programs  
43 participants



**2**  
CATALYZERS  
trainings  
26 participants



**2**  
NATIONAL  
AMBASSADOR  
meetings  
26 participants

**2**  
INTERNATIONAL  
programs  
26 participants



## FINANCIALS

For Guatemalan-based operations for fiscal year ending December 31, 2016.  
\*Asociación SERES finances were audited by an independent auditor for the period July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.

### REVENUE AND OTHER SUPPORT

	FY 2015 (Guatemala only)	FY 2016 (Guatemala only)
Foundation Grants	\$148,625	\$106,498
Prizes and Awards	\$25,000	-
SERES Global Grants	\$70,300	\$25,000
Individual Contributions	\$17,420	\$9,508
Fee-for-Service	\$75,160	\$24,504
Other Income (interests)	\$130	\$330
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$336,635</b>	<b>\$165,839</b>

### EXPENSES

	FY 2015 (Guatemala only)	FY 2016 (Guatemala only)
Direct Program Expenses		
Training Programs (Central America)	\$86,893	\$84,390
Training Programs (International)	\$58,000	\$4,591
Leadership Center	\$39,158	\$31,978
Grants	\$4,615	\$400
Operating Costs	\$27,970	\$39,194
Development	\$1,358	\$6,792
Management and General	\$14,935	\$25,076
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$232,928</b>	<b>\$192,422</b>

**Net assets at beginning of year** \$129,324

**Net assets at end of year** \$102,740

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## LEADERSHIP & STAFF

**Corrina Grace**

*Executive Director*

**Sara Hurtarte**

*Director of Operations and Programs*

**Antonio Sánchez**

*Program Coordinator, El Salvador*

**Abigail Quic**

*Program Coordinator, Guatemala*

**Dora Perez**

*Finance Officer*

**Luisa Paz**

*Administrative Associate*

**Emily Neil**

*Communications Officer*

**Glenda Xulu**

*Guatemala Program Associate*

**Susana Ruiz**

*El Salvador Program Associate*

**César Recinos**

*El Salvador Program Associate*

**Juan Pablo Sic**

*Community Manager*

**Marco Antonio Mendez**

*Land Manager*

### **Central American Board of Directors**

**José Toriello**

*President*

**Sherry Miller**

*Vice-President*

**Wilfredo Fuentes**

*Board Member*

**Corrina Grace**

*Board Member*

**Mikaela Salanic**

*Guatemalan Youth-Elect Representative*

**Wilson Sánchez**

*El Salvador Youth-Elect Representative*

### **SERES**

#### **Global Board of Directors**

**Sherry Miller (President)**

*Adjunct Professor, Framingham University*

**Kathy Ruhf (Secretary)**

*Executive Director, Land for Good*

**Alissa Harrington (Treasurer)**

*Project Manager, BMW Connected eMobility*

**Alia Whitney (Officer)**

*Executive Director, Freedom FWD*

**Jacob Carter (Officer)**

*Doctoral Student, Center for International  
Education, University of Massachusetts*

**Fernando Maldonado (Officer)**

*Masters Student, Integrative Ecosocial Design,  
Gaia University*

“Energy  
& transformation”



finance office



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