

# Annual Report 2023







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# Letter from Co-Executive Directors

Dear friends,

Summarizing 2023 in a strategic and inspiring document is challenging, but we embark on this task with gratitude towards our allies, partners, and champions. We will highlight achievements, reflections, and cherish special moments within SERES, among the youth, and the communities we serve.

In Guatemala, young people from various regions of the country turned out to vote and exercise their rights as citizens to choose the government authorities. From SERES, we acknowledge the efforts of numerous organizations, leaders, activists, and youth movements that have laid the foundation for this generation to make such a crucial decision that could alter the course of the country.

For several years, we have advocated for generational transformation to address the necessary systemic changes. Social changes cannot be the reflection of a single organization but rather the result of collective efforts, including programs, initiatives, technological advancements, and generational shifts.

Having accompanied multiple generations of youth for 15 years, we have witnessed the development and benefits of being part of the SERES network. We highlight personal, community, and generational transformations. Informed and committed young individuals are addressing issues impacting their communities, utilizing newly acquired skills for community service and entrepreneurship.

In this report, we will share these transformations, focusing on the stories of Central American leaders, the true protagonists. SERES will continue leading processes recognized for their generational impact, and without the support of individuals and institutions that believe in long-term work, this wouldn't be possible. The region requires local leaders to take the reins, change the course, and create an impact, and SERES remains committed to this mission.

We appreciate your time in exploring more about SERES, being curious, contributing, and joining our cause.

With gratitude,

*Sara Hurtarte & Abigail Quic*  
**Co-Executive Directors**



# Highlights of 2023

## Ulew Fuego as a Hub for Sustainable Transformation

Ulew Fuego opened its doors to accommodate more programs, activities, and events that contribute to the sustainable development of the region.

Since the inception of the dream of having a dedicated space for SERES activities, in 2023, we were able to turn this dream into a tangible reality. SERES leadership programs such as Activate, Catalizadores, the Youth Council Meeting, Ambassador Meeting, and collaborative programs with Global Platform took place at Ulew Fuego, marking the beginning of tangible benefits for both local communities and Ulew Fuego as an economic initiative. Additionally, we hosted activities by our allies such as Rotary Club Escuintla, Ulew Sport with its first Trail Running race, USAID Escuintla, UReport, among others.







## Certification of the Activate Community Congress by the Ministry of Education of Guatemala

The Ministry of Education has certified 33 programs, including the SERES Activate Community Congress, through the General Directorate of Accreditation and Certification (Digeace). Obtaining these certifications signifies a quality process, with implemented initiatives that align with the Institutional Strategic Plan of the Educational Management Strategic Lines portfolio, focused on delivering quality educational services.

For SERES, this certification validates our program's curriculum, ensuring it meets the necessary requirements and quality standards for bringing about educational changes in young people. Additionally, it allows us to collaborate more effectively with schools and educational centers, supported by this official recognition.

The Activate Community Congress is a 3-day event led by the participants themselves. The purpose of Activate is to foster a culture of environmental awareness and sustainability through collaboration and shared leadership, aiming to help young people develop a vision of community and critical thinking about urgent socio-environmental issues.

At this initial level, all participants come from the same community or neighboring villages, and participation is open to any young person aged between 15-30. Each program typically involves an average of 25-30 participants. The congress process is built around the strategic questioning technique of community activist Fran Peavey, within an appreciative leadership framework.



# Recognition Towards Youth Leadership

Steven Mijangos is a young individual who stands out for his proactivity, passion for change, entrepreneurial spirit, and leadership at heart. His story is one of resilience, perseverance, and determination. A survivor of the eruption of the Fuego Volcano, a student of Industrial Psychology, and an activist for the environment, water, and youth – these are some of the characteristics that Jaxjs (Young Artists for Social Justice) acknowledged when honoring him alongside 50 other young individuals from Guatemala as a Young Leader in the inaugural edition of their awards.

Steven received this recognition from the organization and representatives of the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala. This marks the second occasion when Jaxjs, in collaboration with the Presidential Youth Commission, acknowledges the work, trajectory, and impact of young leaders in their local spaces.



## #ShiftthePower A Guide for Philanthropy Practices

In collaboration with [El Directorio Guatemala](#), we are continuing our efforts to engage in conversations with foundations and NGOs investing in Guatemala. By listening to the practices already implemented by some founders and the feedback from organizations, we have launched [a guide on practices](#) to change the power dynamics in philanthropy. This guide has garnered support from 18 organizations and foundations and was presented at

the #ShiftThePower Summit in Bogotá, Colombia, where global actors are addressing these practices in innovative and inspiring ways.

These efforts stem from the belief in amplifying local voices in spaces where they are lesser known, where local wisdom is acknowledged for its inherent value. We aim to promote more and more balanced and trusting collaborations from the spaces where SERES operates.





# Measuring what matters

# SERES

# Impact

For years, we have established our monitoring and evaluation model, which has evolved to incorporate more practices and indicators. However, at times, it may become overwhelming for a limited team to use and eventually communicate these metrics effectively.

Each year, this space aims to capture the scope and results achieved through our efforts, showcasing how we address our theory of change. In 2023, we conducted various exercises that we wish to share, including surveys at every touchpoint in the youth journey with SERES, one-on-one interviews, and focus group sessions with groups of young individuals and in communities where SERES has been actively working for over 5 years. What we obtained leaves us proud and amazed by the generational changes accomplished.

## **Participant Profile at SERES**

A snapshot of the diverse cohort engaged in SERES programs reveals a dynamic journey of leadership development. While 61% commence their leadership journey between the ages of 15-17, the age dynamics shift as the programs progress, requiring permissions for travel beyond their communities, making those over 18 eligible. A significant 66% of program graduates are aged 21 and above.

## ***Gender Representation:***

Ensuring inclusivity, an average of 59% of participants across our leadership programs are women, highlighting our commitment to fostering gender balance in leadership.

## ***Educational Progress:***

Initiating their engagement with 50% having incomplete secondary education or lower, participants exhibit remarkable educational progress. During the Catalyzers program, 50% of youth have embarked on technical or university degrees, reflecting the transformative impact of our initiatives on educational pursuits.

## ***Employability:***

The trajectory of employment is striking. Starting with an initial employment rate of 3%, participants, especially those graduating as ambassadors, witness a significant upswing, reaching a final employment rate of 36%. Equally notable is the surge in self-employment, soaring from 21% to an impressive 45% post-program graduation. This underlines the capacity of SERES programs to not only enhance employability but also to foster entrepreneurial spirit among its participants.





**24 Sustainable Leadership Programs**



**1,108 Cultivated Youth**

62% Women y 38% Men

**32 Communities Impacted**

by youth-led activities and events.



**18 Fellows**

have implemented 69 quarterly community projects.

**3707 community members**

children, youth and women.



**166 activities**



# Women's Leadership Scholarship Stories



**Johana Lares**

**Culinary Course** "Through three culinary modules, I explored Guatemala's regional and international cuisines, especially enjoying pastry in the last module. With 160 hours of practical experience, I've delved into baking, receiving orders. My dreams include establishing a culinary space, exporting local dishes, and teaching authentic preparation methods."



**Alicia Nolasco**

## **A diploma in professional acrylics**

"What I enjoyed the most was discovering that acrylics, and the entire field of nails, go beyond aesthetics: it is an expression of confidence and care. Additionally, I enjoyed challenging myself to experiment with new techniques every day, witnessing with satisfaction my constant progress."

Thanks to this scholarship, I currently have a part-time job in the sector, allowing me to start my own home services. My aspirations is to specialize in various areas of the beauty industry and, in the future, fulfill my dream of having my own salon, specializing in acrylic nails."



**Beatriz Sic**

**English course** "The part of the program that I enjoyed the most and left a lasting impression was access to reinforcement classes. The biggest challenges were pronunciation and getting used to speaking a new language; however, little by little, I have learned to feel more confident. Throughout this course, I have mastered the fear of expressing myself in another language."

Mastering the English language is crucial as it allows me to access other opportunities, given that it is a universal language important for both everyday and professional aspects."



**Esmeralda Aguiar**

**Feminist Course** "One of the topics I enjoyed the most was Feminist Anthropology. Through the questioning of the nature-culture binary, being a feminist is understood as an interest in general cultural culture. The yoga exercises were also a highlight."



# SERES Theory of Change in Numbers

## Community Awareness

- » Before our programs - **25%** of non-participating youth have limited knowledge on community topics. After participating - 56% show interest. 24% claim to have acquired sociopolitical knowledge.
- » Environmental awareness - 36% are now familiarized with the issue through news and **36% of program graduates can now investigate, understand, and explain environmental issues.**



## Youth Perceived Leadership

- » Initially, only 24% believe others see them as leaders. **After the program: 77% feel recognized as leaders** in the SERES network.
- » Before joining, 23% think they lead effectively. Upon completion, **69% believe they lead effectively.**
- » **72% feel they possess necessary knowledge and skills for leadership** in the SERES network. Initially, only 40% held this belief at the start of their training.



## Network of support

- » 50% had no mentors before starting. At the end, **33% have 1-2 mentors, and 36% have 3+ mentors.** Signifies the development of personal support networks during the program.
- » Initially, 68% were not part of any youth group. After completion, **72% have joined a group.**

## Ambassador's Impact

- » **61% held elected positions in their community.**
- » **72% assumed leadership roles** in their community within the last six months.
- » **91% applied** newly acquired **leadership skills** since their last SERES training.
- » **66% conducted multiple activities** (e.g., talks, workshops, forums) in the last six months.
- » 61% implemented one or more community action plans in the same period.





# Spotlight Stories

**Maritza Ayala: Creating a Bright  
Future in Rural Communities of El  
Salvador**

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In the heart of El Salvador's rural communities, Maritza Ayala emerges as an inspiring frontline leader, challenging expectations, and transforming lives through her dedication and leadership at SERES. Maritza has been an intern since the third quarter of 2023 and has led five projects, directly benefiting 118 people to date.

With over 26 years in Cenícero, Maritza, despite her introverted nature, radiates confidence when engaging in conversation, revealing a genuine commitment to her community. Her love for collaboration and ability to lead groups of people, both young and old, position her as a positive force in the local social fabric.

In 2021, Maritza joined SERES participating in an Activate program. Studying Business Administration during the pandemic, she graduated in November 2023 while performing social service. Her participation in Activate was driven by the desire to strengthen bonds in her community and activate a neglected common space, leveraging her scholarship with a social service component.

Her major leadership challenge was learning to manage emotions, an obstacle she courageously overcame with support from mentors and SERES programs that provided tools for leadership and emotional

management. Proudly leading an empowered youth group, she highlights the shift in dynamics: members actively participate in decisions and projects, demonstrating shared leadership. Her ability to delegate responsibilities, practice patience, and maintain clear communication has been key to the team's success.

Maritza not only leads community projects but has also played a crucial role in helping people adapt to technology, especially during the government distribution of computers to students.

Looking ahead, Maritza envisions working in a non-profit organization that supports social groups, fulfilling her life's purpose of working and supporting people in communities.

Her greatest aspiration is to hear her community say that they contributed to activating a youth movement that preserves livelihoods and strengthens local identity, promoting a connection with their lands.

Maritza seeks to motivate youth to seize training opportunities, especially when they arise for the benefit of their communities. Her story is a living testament to how frontline leadership can trigger positive change, empowering rural communities to preserve their roots and build a sustainable future.



A photograph of a woman, Karen Acajabon, leaning on a green metal railing of a boat. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. She has dark hair and is wearing a light-colored, ribbed, short-sleeved shirt. Her hands are clasped together on the railing. She is wearing several bracelets on her left wrist, including a white beaded one and a blue one. The background shows a body of water with a white wake, and distant hills under a clear blue sky.

## Karen Acajabon: From Adversity to Inspiration, a Transformative Journey with SERES



Karen, a courageous survivor of the 2018 volcanic eruption, has turned challenges into a journey of self-discovery and community leadership in La Dignidad, Escuintla, Guatemala, with SERES as her guiding light for support and transformation.

Her connection with SERES began in 2019 during restorative circles for eruption survivors. Since her first participation in Activate, Karen has stood out as a resilient woman who refuses to give up, fighting for her childhood dream. Before SERES, she lived in the ATUS (**single-family transition shelters**), dedicated to fruit vending and limited in her aspirations. Now, her definition of freedom intertwines with expressing herself and doing what she wants, supporting others to find their life purpose.

Her greatest leadership challenge arose during the internship when she doubted her ability and faced initial lack of support in her community. However, Karen overcame these obstacles, rallying a significant group and leading 32 activities involving 603 participants in 15 months.

The tangible impact of her leadership is evident in projects such as river clean-ups, reducing garbage hotspots, and the “No Bags Please” initiative. These projects not only transformed the physical environment but also planted a cultural shift in her community.

Karen describes leadership as a continuous learning process, emphasizing the importance of initiative, confidence in action, and a positive mindset. Her leadership translates into the freedom to be herself and instill confidence.

Currently, Karen studies Pastry at INTECAP and envisions opening her own bakery in five years, creating employment and pursuing her dreams. Her community recognizes her as someone who doesn’t give up and, in addition to pursuing her own dreams, now helps others.

Karen deeply values SERES’ support, considering them her second family. She currently benefits from a training scholarship allowing her to study pastry and pursue her jewelry business. Her determination and positivity are evidence that, even in the midst of adversity, leadership and self-discovery can pave the way for a bright future.





## Uspantán Youth: Driving Change through Municipal Youth Committee

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SERES initiated work in 2015 in San Miguel Uspantán, Guatemala, driven by a determined young individual. Over the years, the SERES Uspantán youth actively pursued influential roles, fostering connections with the municipality since 2016. The establishment of ConeXpacio in 2018 further propelled their engagement in municipal youth activities.

In 2022, supported by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), new ambassadors underwent training on childhood and adolescence, leading to significant proposals like the Municipal Youth Policy and the formation of a Municipal Youth Committee. Four SERES youth—Rafael Sic, Juan Fernando Aguaré, Nikté, and Kevin Us—played key roles.

By 2023, the committee, now including additional ambassadors like Jairo Soto, successfully devised an annual plan to promote activities in Uspantán. **They formed an alliance as SERES Uspantán youth, integrating three SERES programs into the Municipal Youth Committee's Operational Plan. This committee focuses on enhancing the active participation of young individuals in Uspantán, ensuring their voices are heard in collaboration with community leaders, COCODES, assistant mayors, and the municipal council. Their efforts aim to promote youth activities, projects, and create opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.**

*"This committee primarily benefits the audit aspect to assess how effective and positive the work of the municipal youth office in Uspantán has been. Therefore, we have the role of verifying the proper execution of resources,"* says **Rafael Six Menchú, SERES Ambassador.**

They achieved official accreditation in the Municipal Development Council (COMUDE), gaining voting rights on decisions crucial to youth. This recognition underscores their influential role in community decision-making. The committee also holds the authority to propose projects, actively contributing to the municipality's comprehensive and sustainable development.

*"We believe that this committee reinforces the work done by other organizations such as SERES and NIMD. These are institutions that empower young people in terms of civic participation and youth empowerment,"* emphasizes **Rafael Six Menchú, SERES Ambassador.**

*"Currently, we are seeing the participation of more organizations and youth in the municipality. I am completing my professional community practice at a community that is 4 hours away from the urban center. There are very active youth in these remote areas, but the involvement of the committee is needed to promote more activities for the youth,"* adds **Juan Fernando Aguaré, Vocal I of the Municipal Youth Committee and SERES Ambassador.**



# Our ecosystem of partners

We want to express our gratitude to our allies, institutions, networks, and individuals who support and believe in the work of SERES to create a positive impact in communities through youth and sustainable development.

## **We participated in the following fellowships:**

- » Gratitude Fellowship
- » Conservation and Communities Fellowship 2023

## **We were actively engaged in these networks:**

- » Red Impacto LATAM
- » UNESCO ESD-NET 2030
- » El Directorio Guatemala
- » UReport

## **Our efforts were supported by:**

- » Leopold Bachmann Stiftung
- » atDta
- » The International Foundation
- » Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres
- » Embajada de Australia en México y Centroamérica
- » Embajada de Francia
- » Target Foundation
- » euforia

**A special thank you to our monthly donors and friends who continue to believe in and trust our work. Your support is invaluable.**

# Financials

Revenue and Other Support (USD)	FY2022	FY2023
Foundation Grants	\$ 200,580	\$ 204,062
SERES Global Grants	\$ 68,000	\$ 157,901
Individual Contributions	\$ 1,735	\$ 2,124
Fee-for-Service	\$ 10,494	\$ 7,772
Other Income (interests)	\$ 157	\$ 169
TOTAL	\$ 280,966	\$ 372,028
EXPENSES		
Training Programs (Central America)	\$ 141,681	\$ 177,488
Ulew Fuego	\$ 64,484	\$ 74,736
Grants	\$ 27,949	\$ 71,218
Operating Costs	\$ 2,998	\$ 3,224
Development	\$ 14,839	\$ 9,638
Management and General	\$ 19,686	\$ 21,178
TOTAL	\$ 271,637	\$ 357,482
Net assets at beginning of year	\$70,686	\$53,229
Net assets at end of year	\$53,229	\$65,027



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