

From: Michael Bakal michael@vocesymanos.org
Subject: Update & Pictures from Our Climate Change Resilience Work 🌍
Date: May 20, 2022 at 6:44 AM
To: psherris@mac.com

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Dear friends,

After two years away from Rabinal, I had the privilege of spending several months working with the Voces y Manos team. Our staff has now grown to seven members, five of whom are graduates of our youth program!

Since the start of the year, the Voces y Manos team has worked tirelessly to help the Maya-Achí community revive its traditional agricultural practices: they have helped farmers build contour barriers to retain topsoil, create drip irrigation systems, diversify their crops, vaccinate chickens and livestock, and much more. Not only that, the team has even started a program to help farmers share and use the many unique, heirloom varieties of local seeds that exist in Rabinal, preserving them for future generations. The team's enthusiasm, energy, humor, and humility are a light in the lives of the 250 families they serve.

The agricultural strategies that Voces y Manos promotes are increasingly recognized by the [UN and other international agencies](#) as key to confronting the climate emergency. Together with select modern technologies, such as drip irrigation, these practices help [regenerate soil](#), keeping it rich in nutrients and capable of retaining water and sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. At Voces y Manos, community outreach and training in these methods is led entirely by young adults, trained in our leadership program, who speak the Maya-Achí language and come from the communities they serve.

It was a particular joy for me to see Oscar, one of the newest members of the Voces y Manos team, in action. When I last visited Rabinal, Oscar was an intern, just beginning his community work after graduating from our scholarship program the year before.





Oscar creating contour barriers to prevent erosion

Now working as a knowledgeable and skillful agronomist, one of Oscar's most successful projects is a "model parcel" that he created with his father. They have begun using cover crops and contour barriers to reduce topsoil loss on their steeply sloped land (see pictures below). They have also planted trees, coffee plants, chard, and a range of other vegetables. Together, they have transformed their land. When neighbors visit their parcel, they see concrete examples of what agroecology looks like in practice -- a healthy synergy of agricultural productivity with environmental protection.

Your support of Voces y Manos has gone beyond simply helping Oscar transform his own plot of land: when not working with his father, Oscar is helping other farmers to implement these practices on their own lands. And he has used the income from his job at Voces y Manos to pursue a college degree in agronomy.

There were also sobering moments on my trip to Rabinal. COVID-19 has taken a devastating toll, not only in terms of sickness and loss of life but also in terms of unemployment. I was shocked by the number of young people who had left Rabinal in the last two years, mostly due to a lack of work opportunities.

Yet thanks to your support, young people like Oscar now have a job which allows them to earn a living doing what they love and which makes their community stronger. It's been an inspiration for me to see the commitment and dedication of Oscar and the entire Voces y Manos team. They are showing what is possible when we act together and in solidarity with communities locally and globally.

We're enormously grateful to each of you for helping make this all possible.

Warmly,

Michael

P.S. To follow our work, and see new pictures and videos each week, follow us on [facebook](#) and [instagram](#)

P.P.S. We want to give a special shout-out and thank you to all the individuals and Rotary Clubs who have supported this work. Through your generosity, Voces y Manos has been able to grow its team, reach greater numbers of families, and provide hope during difficult times.



Support

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