



Mariela works with communities to resolve conflict peacefully and advocate for access to resources.



Mariela Tax

Championing gender equality

"The pandemic has put into stark relief how gender inequalities have existed and still exist despite efforts to combat them," said Mariela Tax, a Maya woman from Salcajá, Guatemala.

As part of a virtual panel organized by USAID's Peacebuilding Project that covered women's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mariela spoke on an issue close to her heart: women's rights and the prevalence of domestic abuse in Guatemala.

Mariela, who has herself experienced the "triple discrimination" often inherent in being a rural, indigenous woman, is now a community facilitator for the Peacebuilding Project. Earlier in her career before joining Creative's team, she witnessed a brutal case of violent domestic abuse. She has since dedicated her life to working for gender equality.

"That experience really impacted me, and I had to learn to see that (patterns of violence) are not normal, not acceptable, and we can't let them continue," she says.

Mariela has also worked with the project to run campaigns aimed at helping women report violence to authorities, addressing the growing number of domestic abuse cases registered since the country went into lockdown.

The community facilitators collaborated to translate virus prevention messaging into K'iche and Mam, the primary languages of many indigenous people living in Guatemala's Western Highlands.

This information is part of the relief kits the project has created and distributed to leaders in 27 communities, many of them remote. The kits include sanitation supplies and brochures outlining protection measures against the spread of COVID-19, contact information for suspected cases, and information on preventing domestic violence and how to report it.

An amateur artist, Mariela drew the illustrations used in both the Spanish and indigenous language brochures. They depict both men and women in traditional clothing interacting in typical local contexts.

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Beyond the important work of the project, Mariela applied her creativity to writing short, fun stories that she shared with her team.

"I feel that we are carrying a lot of stress and tension from the need to get results while being remote and the uncertainty of this health crisis," she says. "So my intention was to share with my colleagues that even under these circumstances we can have humor as a tool for resiliency." ■

Photo by Vivian Jacobs