

# AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE THE STORIES

A collection of **expressions**

FONDO SEMILLAS  
MUJERES SEMBRANDO IGUALDAD



AMBULANTE

“

A PEOPLE  
WHO IDENTIFIES  
WITH ITS  
CULTURE IS  
INVINCIBLE.

”

- MAH CUALLÍ OHTLI



The 2017 earthquakes forced us out of our routine. Individually, many of us spent a week on the streets lifting rubble, making up food packages, delivering food, or lending a hand where it was needed. But, as organizations, we had to rethink our roles. Fondo Semillas and Ambulante were not used to responding to disasters, but we could not ignore one of that magnitude. We knew that we had strengths that could aid in the recovery of the central and southern regions of the country and decided to channel them into what would later become the *Women Rebuilding their Communities* (Fondo Semillas) and *Levantemos México* (Ambulante) funds. Although the funds are independent, Fondo Semillas and Ambulante have supported each other to strengthen processes. We learned that, as a society, we must work together to stand up after such a shock and put an end to deeply rooted inequalities.

In this publication, we want to invite you to learn about some of the collectives that we support in Mexico City, Chiapas, State of Mexico, Guerrero, Morelos, Oaxaca and Puebla. **These are stories of resilience and empowerment, of women and men who decided not to stand by or wait for someone else to come and rebuild their communities. Rather, they took the lead in this process to ensure that the real needs of their communities were met and their cultures and customs respected.** Although there is still much work to do, two years after the earthquakes these organizations are showing us the importance of supporting and relying on community processes. And in a way, you made this possible. Thank you for trusting our organizations.

**Laura García Coudurier**  
Executive Director - Fondo Semillas

**Paulina Suárez**  
General Director – Ambulante



# THE STORIES

Two years after the earthquakes

# EL SUEÑO DE HUEJOTENGO




*El Sueño de Huejotengo* is a group of women who are rebuilding their community physically and psychologically after the earthquake on September 19th, 2017. They are all neighbors from a community called Huejotengo, in the municipality of Ocuituco, Morelos.

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As part of the reconstruction process, they are training in jobs that have been traditionally seen as male: construction and carpentry. That is how they participate in reconstructing their community: by repairing their own homes and practicing a trade that allows them to reactivate their economy. In the future, they aim to transfer this knowledge to other women in their community.



“We came together as women and that was when we were able to move forward. Our homes were no longer the only place for us, and we became leaders. That was how our group, *El Sueño de Huejotengo*, was born—from the earthquake and our unity.

This has especially helped us find ourselves as women. In the end, we left behind the parameter of ‘a woman’s place is behind a man’ or that ‘women should be seen and not heard’. We could’ve stayed in our homes waiting for help, but we didn’t. We decided to do something. We are learning, and we want to share our knowledge with other women in the region to help them dare to do something more.”

Yeni

# A PASO DE BUEY



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A *Paso de Buey* (which literally means, 'at an ox's pace') operates out of Tikambaj, San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca, to promote the use of waterless toilets in order to take care of the water table, also generating quality fertilizer to produce food and to plant trees for regional reforestation.



**“Thanks to the earthquake, we have learned that just when you think all is lost, there is still so much to be seen, to be felt: human warmth.**

*Apapacho and mutual care allow for the birth of strength, friendship and brotherhood to begin different jobs that allow us to imagine a possible world for the children of our children's children.”*

**José María**



# MUJERES POR LA REACTIVACIÓN ECONÓMICA DE JOJUTLA



*Mujeres por la reactivación económica de Jojutla* is an organization of neighbors from Juárez, a neighborhood in Jojutla, Morelos, who were affected by the earthquakes of September 2017. Their goal is to contribute to improving the neighborhood's economy by generating self-employment through the production of artisanal sandals, as well as to promote individual growth and strengthen women's capacities.



“I thought the workshop for *huaraches* (traditional sandals) was very interesting, precisely to keep myself busy, save money, and because everything you learn helps you. But I never thought we would organize ourselves as a group and that we would still be working together after so long. **We’re still together, even more committed than before, strengthening ourselves and learning more things.** We’re learning new artisanal trades, like how to make bags and coin purses, that we can then add to what we’re already selling. Sometimes I can’t believe I can make bags or *huaraches*.”

*Lucy*

# GRUPO COMUNITARIO TEPECOCULCO



## AMBULANTE

**Grupo Comunitario Tepecoculco** was formed around community activities to build a School House for the benefit of the community, located in Estado de México. Within this group, there is the neighborhood council composed of women responsible for ensuring community organization and resource management to support reconstruction.

## A collection of expressions



“I have enjoyed the learning gained in this School House. When they ask me why it is called that, I tell them that it is because it has taught us to make a wall, make a stone, make a ring, it is a beautiful traineeship.

**In your head you think that you will not be able to do it, but now that we are doing it, almost all of us women, we are very proud of ourselves.”**

**Sandy**




# MONAPAKÜY



**Monapaküy** is a group of women and men that work towards community development in San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca. They accompany women and families in different ways: they give talks on soil improvement with water filters, offer sewing classes and human rights awareness workshops, support the reconstruction of special Oaxacan ovens used to make *totopos* (traditional toasted corn tortillas), among other activities that aim to restore the social fabric of their community.





“This project has meant a lot to me because I’m contributing to a better future for us.

We’re going to have a training and education center for everyone, and this gives me great hope that we can change things.”

*Bety*

# REMOVIENDO



## AMBULANTE

**Removiendo** aims to preserve and rescue the *chinampera* area of San Gregorio Atlapulco. The group is made up of local inhabitants, *chinamperos* and volunteers who share an interest in preserving the ancient culture of the *chinampa* (traditional sowing method), so that it remains alive and current.



“We also dream that our *chinampas* will be a meeting place for collaborative work, a sanctuary of good practices, a shelter for native seeds and a group that helps to keep the chinampera culture alive, that reinvents itself, and where the community spirit persists.”



# SOAME - CASA X CASA X MORELOS



**Casa x Casa x Morelos** is an organization that was created after the earthquake and supports different community processes. In Hueyapan, Morelos, together with *Reconstruyéndonos* and *Decupaz*, they supported a group of artisanal weavers (*SOAME – Mujeres de Tradición*) in their process towards becoming a women's work collective and improving the commercialization of their products made with backstrap loom weaving.





“We want to build a community center so we can have a meeting place to teach the next generation of girls backstrap loom weaving and how to speak nahuatl.

We don’t want to lose our culture and we think it’s important to share it with the whole community.”

*Mireya*

# COOPERATIVA AUTÓNOMA CIMARRONEZ ANTICAPITALISMO ORGANIZADO



## AMBULANTE

**Cimarronez** is an autonomous cooperative, a work and training space, and a left-wing organization that seeks to revalue cooperative work and the possibility of autonomously building new social relations of production.

“We have learned that we are not alone, that there are many communities and people who think collectively, that it is possible to agree and have connections with similar and different processes at the same time, that solidarity between people is still very strong, that there are people in many parts that are committed to improving living conditions without waiting for applause or recognition, and that it is important to recognize mistakes and propose realistic goals.”

**Carlos**

# UNA MANO PARA OAXACA



*Una Mano para Oaxaca* was born on September 8th, 2017 with the desire to support the Istmo region affected by the earthquakes. Its members know that community development is a way to generate solutions to common issues.

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**This is why their work focuses on three lines of action: a community center for both workshops on wellbeing and to build skills in small enterprise; a series of murals with imagery inspired by traditional trades; and the recovery of community and family spaces,** like the river and ovens for making bread and *totopos*. Further, they aim to revitalize Zapotec culture as a living entity, thus strengthening the social fabric of their community.



“Our dream is to see Ixtaltepec as a regional example of cultural sovereignty and social justice through personal and community development. We want our town to be capable of using its culture, as well as its ancestral and traditional knowledge, to generate a solid platform that will allow it to restore the community’s health.

Economic reactivation through the revitalization of knowledge is key for rebuilding communities and making them resilient while reinforcing cultural belonging. We plan to continue creating and sharing so we can repair the cracks in our community.”

*Alejandra*

# COLECTIVA BIORECONSTRUYE



## AMBULANTE

The **Colectiva BioReconstruye** is a team of women who work construction with natural materials, appropriate technologies and agro-ecology through horizontal practices. Their approach is to strengthen community resilience as a central axis for risk management. With an approach that integrates gender and grassroots perspectives, their vision is to strengthen the community ties that sustain life.



“In my opinion, one of the most positive things about the earthquake is the link between the communities and the collective generated from this disaster. This link makes us think about the need to ‘bio-rebuild’ ourselves collectively, and about the opportunity to understand from a community perspective that solutions to the problems in our society can be found in people's collective knowledge. Our experience in Chiapas has shown us that knowledge is built between everyone involved.”

**Martina**

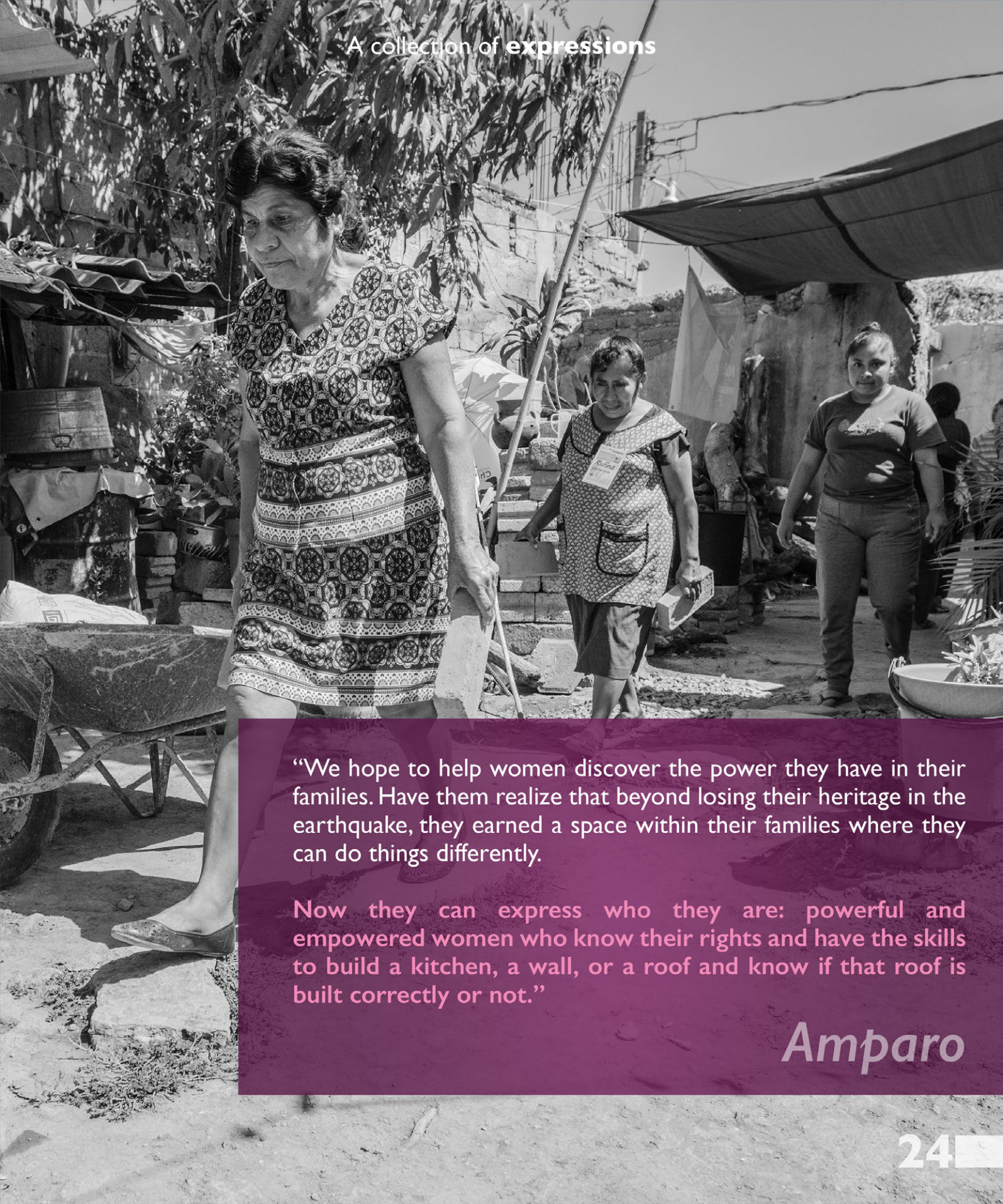
# ASOCIACIÓN ESTATAL DE MUJERES INDÍGENAS Y CAMPESINAS XASASTI YOLISTLI, A.C.



The *Asociación Estatal de Mujeres Indígenas y Campesinas Xasasti Yolistli A.C.* trains women in how to build firewood saving stoves and ferrocement kitchens. They complement their bio-construction workshops with gender and human rights workshops, and training in how to care for their ovens and kitchens.







“We hope to help women discover the power they have in their families. Have them realize that beyond losing their heritage in the earthquake, they earned a space within their families where they can do things differently.

Now they can express who they are: powerful and empowered women who know their rights and have the skills to build a kitchen, a wall, or a roof and know if that roof is built correctly or not.”

*Amparo*

# UNIÓN DE COOPERATIVAS TOSEPAN



## AMBULANTE

*Unión de Cooperativas Tosepan* is an organization made up of indigenous peasants from the Northeast Sierra of Puebla. After the earthquake in September, they channeled their support in an organized way towards the comprehensive reconstruction of the community of Santa Cruz Cuautomatitla, in Puebla.

“We have learned that there are no natural disasters; nature has its own path. The disastrous thing is when in situations of difficulty we do not know how to organize and act collectively.


Our experience doing community work has taught us the importance of the values of cooperation and solidarity, and the strengthening of community roots. **We've learned that there are other ways of organizing ourselves, of developing relations with the land and territory, and that the inner strength that makes us a community is what builds livelihoods for the common good.**”

# XOCHIMILCAS DISIDENTES



**Xochimilcas Disidentes** works on generating creative spaces to reflect on women's role within their communities and collectives; this helps strengthen their work for the benefit of Xochimilcan territories.





“Our dream for Xochimilco is to give it back its dignity; make it a dignified place to live in again. The earthquake exacerbated precarity not just materially, but also a disregard for Xochimilcan culture, identity, and environment. We want to reclaim Xochimilco’s traditions and the cultures of its people by strengthening women and the collectives they form to generate a network of women who work for their community.”

*Valeria*

# TECALZINTLI



## AMBULANTE

**Tecalzintli** is a group of people with knowledge in sustainable architecture and anthropology. The project's objective is social development led by and for the community, attending to specific needs through a constant, participative and collective collaboration in Chinameca and Zacatepec, Morelos.

A collection of **expressions**



**“We decided to join efforts and put them at the service of the community under the following guidelines:** acting in a responsible, ethical and moral way in order to help the affected sectors; proposing appropriate solutions for each person, family or place; preserving their own cultural roots related to habits, customs and particular characteristics; providing comprehensive, architectural, bioclimatic, sustainable and progressive responses.”

# COMITÉ DE MUJERES DE LA ASAMBLEA DEL PUEBLO DE SAN DIONISIO DEL MAR



*Comité de Mujeres de la Asamblea del Pueblo de San Dionisio del Mar* is a group of women that came together to fight against extractive development and became stronger after the earthquakes of 2017.

Since then, they have worked to rebuild their kitchens and their lives based on a mutual support model by and for women. They have also pushed for innovative eco-friendly technologies for the region, such as the use of solar ovens.

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“We’re a group of strong women who, despite losing our homes, are moving forward little by little, and we’ll continue fighting to provide for our families.”

**Lorena**

# FUNDACIÓN COMUNIDAD, A.C.



## AMBULANTE

**Fundación Comunidad, A.C.** is a non-profit community organization, established in 1996 to support vulnerable groups in Morelos. It arises out of the need to promote the initiatives of groups and grassroots organizations that work with and from the community. The intention is to bring together different social actors to strengthen the social fabric based on the needs expressed by those who inhabit it.





**“The earthquake moved community spaces. We see that we have the opportunity to rebuild them from other perspectives.**

The groups, grassroots organizations and NGOs are working to build from a place of possibility and hope and, as one of the beneficiaries of the project in the Xoxocotla community mentions:

'I learned and I continue to learn from each of the members of this group to support each other, that we need everyone, that we are all different, but more than the need for a house and help to build the house, maybe you need a hand, friendship!'



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**Fondo Semillas** is a feminist organization that improves the lives of women in Mexico. We dream of a country where all women, whether they are indigenous, mestiza, black, young, migrant, heterosexual, lesbian, mothers or students, have access to health, decent work, justice, happiness, and the power to make their own decisions.

After the 2017 earthquakes, Fondo Semillas wanted to direct all the positive efforts by civil society organizations and donors towards strengthening groups of women who came together in leadership to support the most affected communities. After a thorough selection process, we chose 24 women-led grassroots organizations and provided them with financial and technical support. This is how the *Women Rebuilding their Communities fund* was created.

Fondo Semillas believes that the inclusion of women in post-disaster recovery processes is critical to ensure the sustainability and success of community actions as a whole, because natural disasters affect women in different and particular ways.

## AMBULANTE

**Ambulante** is a non-profit organization, founded in 2005 by Gael García Bernal, Diego Luna and Elena Fortes, dedicated to supporting and broadcasting documentary film as a tool for cultural and social transformation.

In September 2017, Ambulante launched the *Levantemos México* fundraising campaign, which sought to provide immediate response to the earthquakes that hit the central and southeastern regions of Mexico. With the resources obtained, we decided to support the reconstruction of 44 of the most affected communities.

The *Levantemos México* fund seeks to strengthen the communities affected by the September 2017 earthquakes from a human rights perspective, enhancing their own capacities to define and implement actions that allow them to regain their ways of life and rethink their future through experience.

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**Images:**

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