



ANNUAL REPORT

2024

Rooted in *Community,* Rooted in *Land.*



Environmental conservation & women's
leadership in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala



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Executive Summary

In 2024, Tui'k Ruch' Lew (TRL) had a year of challenges, cooperation, and milestones. Our team collaborated closely with families in Santiago Atitlán, delivering cleaner air to their homes and hope to their everyday lives.

Together, we installed 80 new Q'aaq' stoves, reinstalled 8 for families who needed replacements, and repaired eight more to ensure they continued to work safely. In total, we made 877 visits to homes—checking on stoves, offering maintenance, and sharing information. Each visit reminded us why this work matters: every stove represents a healthier family and a forest that can continue to grow.

This year also brought exciting milestones. We celebrated our first carbon credit sale, an important step toward making TRL more self-sustaining. We were honored to receive the GEMAS Environmental Citizen Award, a recognition of the trust and hard work shared by our team and the families we serve.

We launched our new program: Forest Walks for Women. We visited a school to inspire younger generations to care for the environment and joined efforts with local organizations to expand our impact. While our Biogas Digester Project is currently on pause, the groundwork laid this year will guide us when the time is right to continue.

2024 reminded us that progress is built one step at a time, and not always in a linear manner. Every stove installed, every conversation held, and every tree saved moves us closer to the future we believe in: a cleaner, healthier Santiago Atitlán for everyone.

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Who We Are and What We Do

Tui'k Ruch' Lew (TRL) is a grassroots, award-winning Guatemalan non-profit dedicated to creating sustainable solutions to the environmental, health, and economic challenges faced by the Tz'utujil Maya community in Santiago Atitlán. For over a decade, TRL has worked to protect the forests surrounding Lake Atitlán, improve family health, and uplift women through clean energy solutions that respect Mayan culture and community values.

Our vision is a thriving Lake Atitlán basin—one where families breathe clean air, forests remain alive and green, and communities have the tools to live in balance with nature.



Our Programs

At TRL, we believe in being the change we want to see in our community. Our programs are born from this belief — practical actions that turn hope into daily progress. Each initiative reflects our shared responsibility to care for the Earth, protect our health, and support one another. Through clean cooking, women's empowerment, and environmental education, we work hand in hand with families to build a future rooted in respect and sustainability.

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The Q'aaq' Stove Project: Fire for Life



In Santiago Atitlán, most families still cook over open fires. Behind every meal, there's a woman surrounded by smoke, bending for hours over the flames, often with little ventilation and no protection. This daily reality harms her lungs and her eyes, and takes away time that could be spent earning money or with her family.

According to Guatemala's National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2022), over 80% of households in Santiago Atitlán still depend on firewood for cooking. Electricity and gas remain out of reach for most, making firewood the only option for thousands of families.

The Q'aaq' Stove Project is changing that story. Each stove — named after the Tz'utujil word and glyph for *fire* — replaces open fires with a raised, smoke-free design that brings health, dignity, and comfort into the home. Families use up to 70% less firewood, saving money and helping protect the forests that surround the lake.

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The stove cast-cement modules are produced in Santiago Atitlán. They are a product of local craftsmanship. TRL continues to purchase the stoves' metal parts (stove tops, chimneys, and combustion chambers) from independent, local producers, supporting community livelihoods and reinforcing our commitment to sustainable, locally driven development.

In 2024, TRL installed 80 new stoves and made 877 household visits to ensure every stove was being used safely and effectively. These included 62 visits to improve stove performance, 481 visits for general outreach and



monitoring, 106 site visits to assess potential installations, and 290 maintenance visits to guarantee long-term efficiency. Our team also held public demonstrations in the local market and partnered with other organizations to reach more families interested in clean cooking.

Every stove represents more than just a tool — it's a step toward cleaner air, stronger families, and a more sustainable Santiago Atitlán.

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Meet One of Our Amazing Beneficiaries

Micaela Bixcul Vicente, 72 years old

"I used to cook on an open fire, and it was difficult. When it was windy, I suffered from the smoke. My daughter-in-law started using the Q'aaq' stove and soon convinced me to use it; she told me it was very good. Despite my age, I adapted to the stove and enjoy cooking here. I believe and feel that it's helpful for women. Cooking on the floor is tough. In contrast, cooking on a Q'aaq' stove makes a huge difference. When necessary, I request repairs to ensure it continues to function correctly. Most importantly, it takes care of my health and does not need much firewood."



Micaela's story reflects the everyday transformation that TRL's Eco-Stove Program brings to families in Santiago Atitlán. Her words remind us that clean cooking is not just about technology—it's about dignity, health, and the empowerment of women who can now cook safely, comfortably, and sustainably in their own homes.

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Biogas Digester Program

Tui'k Ruch' Lew (TRL) continues to explore innovative ways to transform organic waste into sustainable energy through the Biogas Digester Program. The initiative aims to reduce dependence on firewood, improve sanitation, and generate natural fertilizer by capturing methane from household waste and converting it into clean-burning gas for cooking.



In 2024, French environmental engineering student and intern Estelle Olivier joined TRL to support the project's technical development. Her work helped refine the digester design and evaluate its feasibility for local use. The first pilot unit was installed at the home of Candis Krummel, TRL's Co-founder and President of the Board of Directors, who personally funded the project. Affectionately named "Daisy," the pilot served as a valuable demonstration model, allowing TRL to test gas production, maintenance routines, and community suitability.



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Although the results were modest and the system faced several technical and logistical challenges, the experience provided important learning opportunities for TRL. The project highlighted the need for more training, reliable materials, and cost-effective designs before scaling up. While the pilot did not yet achieve the expected performance, it offered valuable insights. TRL remains committed to learning from these experiences and will continue to explore sustainable energy alternatives that can genuinely benefit the Tz'utujil Maya community in the future.



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Forest Walks for Women

In 2024, Tui'k Ruch' Lew (TRL) introduced a new initiative called Forest Walks for Women, designed as a cultural and educational extension of our successful eco-stove program. The project's goal is simple yet profound: *what you love, you protect*. Through these guided walks, women reconnect with the forests that have long sustained their families—learning where the firewood they use comes from and rediscovering the deep cultural roots that link them to nature.

The first “test” Forest Walk was in **November 2024** at the **Rey Tepepul Nature Reserve**, a sacred place that bears the name of the last Tz'utujil leader who resisted the Spanish conquest. Led by a local, Maya eco-tourism guide who speaks Tz'utujil, the women experienced the forest's biodiversity. Many of them saw a quetzal for the first time—the national bird of Guatemala and a symbol of freedom and identity in Maya culture.



This program was born from a desire to heal historical wounds. During Guatemala's civil war, the forest, once a place of life and belonging, became associated with fear and violence, particularly for women. Even decades after the Peace Accords, many still felt disconnected from this vital space. The

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Forest Walks seek to restore that relationship, offering a path of cultural recovery and emotional healing.

Each participant received a reusable stainless steel bottle as a symbol of continuity—caring for themselves and the planet. Beyond a simple excursion, these walks are a journey of memory, identity, and renewal. They remind us that protecting the environment begins with understanding and appreciation. By bringing women back to the forest, TRL helps foster a deeper sense of environmental responsibility and collective commitment to preserving the ecosystems that sustain life in Santiago Atitlán.



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Utz Ja' (Good Water) Program

In 2024, Tui'k Ruch' Lew (TRL) continued expanding the Utz Ja' (Good Water) Program, which complements our eco-stove initiative by promoting clean water and healthier living conditions for families in Santiago Atitlán. Through this program, TRL distributed and maintained ceramic water filters that provide safe, affordable, and long-lasting access to drinking water.

Over the course of the year, our team carried out six candle distribution visits to replace worn filter candles and four household visits to provide follow-up support and education on filter

maintenance. These visits ensure that the filters continue to function effectively, protecting families from waterborne illnesses and reducing reliance on bottled or boiled water—saving firewood and further reducing carbon emissions.

The Utz Ja' Program reflects TRL's holistic vision of well-being, where environmental conservation and community health go hand in hand. By ensuring access to both clean air and clean water, we move closer to our goal of building sustainable, resilient homes for the Tz'utujil Maya community.



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2024 Highlights

Winning the Gemas Award

In November 2024, Tui'k Ruch' Lew (TRL) received the **Gemas Award**, a recognition that celebrates organizations making a meaningful difference in environmental protection and sustainability across Guatemala. This award



acknowledged TRL's commitment to promoting clean energy, community empowerment, and cultural preservation through the Eco-Stove Program. The recognition reflects the collective effort of our team and the trust of the families we serve, reinforcing our belief that local action can drive lasting environmental change.

First Carbon Credit Sale

This year marked a significant milestone for TRL with the **first sale of carbon credits** generated through our Eco-Stove Program. The transaction represented the culmination of years of work in monitoring, verification, and certification



under Verra standards. Beyond a financial achievement, it confirmed the measurable environmental impact of our project and our ongoing commitment to transparency, integrity, and climate action.

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School Outreach at Padre Apla's Catholic School

Our team had the incredible opportunity to engage with 75 first-year high school students at Padre Apla's Catholic School, named in honor of Father Stanley Francis Rother¹ —known affectionately as *Aplas* ("Francis" in Tz'utujil). Through interactive demonstrations, we introduced the students to TRL's Q'aaq' Stoves and their life-changing impact: reducing firewood use, lowering indoor air pollution, and protecting our shared environment. The students' enthusiasm and thoughtful questions reflected their growing sense of responsibility toward caring for the planet.



Demonstration at the Santiago Atitlán Market

We brought the Q'aaq' stove to the heart of the community during a demonstration at the Santiago Atitlán market. By cooking local dishes and sharing conversations with residents, our team showed how accessible and efficient clean cooking can be. These events encouraged more families to adopt stoves that improve health and reduce pressure on the surrounding forests.



¹ Father Stanley Rother was an American priest who served the Tz'utujil Maya community in Santiago Atitlán. Renowned for his compassion, he learned their language, supported education and health, and stood by them during Guatemala's civil war. Martyred in 1981, he was beatified in 2017.

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Collaboration with Mayanza

In partnership with **Mayanza**, a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to improving community health in Guatemala, TRL organized an activity focused on environmental education and women's health. Together, we strengthened local knowledge on conservation practices and highlighted how clean cooking empowers women to become active stewards of their environment.



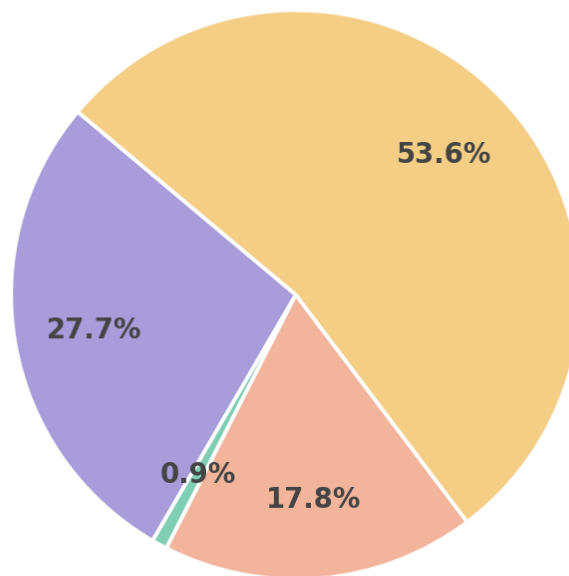
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Financial Report

Revenue	
Community Stove Owner Donations	\$3,338.67
Individual Donations	\$6,210.23
Grants	\$70,792.80
Total Revenue	\$80,341.70

Expenses	
Salaries	\$18,133.33
Mobilization Costs	\$573.02
Administrative Costs	\$11,641.92
Direct Costs	\$35,063.04
Total Expenses	\$65,411.31

Expenses FY 2023 Improved Cookstove Project



- Salaries \$18,133.33
- Mobilization Costs \$573.02
- Administrative Costs \$11,641.92
- Direct Costs \$35,063.04

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Goals for 2025

1. Install 120 New Q'aaq' Eco-Stoves
Continue promoting clean cooking and forest conservation by installing 120 new stoves in households across Santiago Atitlán, while ensuring proper training and follow-up visits for maintenance and user support.
2. Continue the Forest Walks for Women Program
Strengthen the Forest Walks initiative by conducting nine, small group (6 women) visits to the Rey Tepepul Reserve, reaching TRL's goal of connecting 54 women to their forests -- deepening women's connection with nature and reinforcing the message that protecting the forest begins with understanding and love.
3. Collaborate with More Local Organizations
Strengthen partnerships with community groups, schools, and local NGOs to expand environmental education, cultural recovery, and sustainable development initiatives in Santiago Atitlán.
4. Secure More Funding for Program Sustainability
Pursue new grants, partnerships, and carbon credit opportunities to ensure the long-term sustainability of TRL's programs and expand their impact within the Tz'utujil Maya community.

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Thank you

None of this would be possible without our incredible team, our dedicated partners, and every donor who believes in TRL's mission. This year, we were fortunate to welcome new volunteers who have brought fresh energy and ideas into our work. Your support is the foundation of everything we do. Thank you for standing with us, for sharing our vision, and for being part of this journey toward a healthier, more sustainable future for Santiago Atitlán.

