

Voices OF HOPE

Guatemala

When Mirsa Araceli Chinchilla Godoy was just three months old, civil war in Guatemala forced her family to flee to Mexico. They were granted refugee status and given food assistance, land for a house and work permits. In 1994, at 13, Mirsa married and had three children, though the marriage would only last four years. She also joined Ixmucane, a group of Guatemalan women who reunited to defend their rights while in exile and women's rights during the return process. Upon return to Guatemala, Ixmucane received support from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, PWRDF and other groups.

Conditions improved through education, agricultural and leadership training. Ixmucane was able to fight for and obtain co-ownership of the land when titles were given to families; it preserved the right of women to own land. Mirsa has served as Ixmucane treasurer and is now the vice-president of the co-op where she lives. Not only is she a decision maker in the community, but she owns land and a business. "Perhaps Ixmucane never gave me huge financial resources but it gave me knowledge," says Mirsa. "Without it, I would be another person. ... What I achieved was thanks to the strength the organization gave me, to know that I have rights and that I was capable of doing things."



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