



ATITLÁN RECICLA:

**Driving Collective Impact
for Women's Economic
Empowerment and
Environmental Sustainability**

Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program that is jointly operated by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation). The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Uniterra works with key private, public, and civil society partners to facilitate growth and change in markets that have the greatest impact on the marginalized.

A contaminated lake

Lake Atitlán, one of Guatemala's main water bodies, is both an important tourist attraction and a source of income for populations living on its shores. However, its progressive deterioration, due to poor solid waste and sewage management, is a serious threat to the Sololá Department who depends on this natural resource for subsistence and development.

The inefficiency of collection services of solid waste – such as plastic and paper – as recyclable material, as well as their marketing, constitute barriers to the creation of a robust market for recycled materials and goods. In fact, the root cause of this situation is a lack of awareness of the harmful environmental effects of solid waste contamination and ignorance of the commercial value of recyclable materials. Moreover, persistent gender stereotypes hinder women from obtaining potentially lucrative jobs in this sector.

The *Atitlán Recicla* project took up the challenge of connecting the different actors of the recyclable materials sector to strengthen the management of solid waste and to create jobs and income-generating activities for women. **Today, *Atitlán Recicla* is a model of sustainable work, as well as of community collaboration and collective impact, that provides income to groups of women and communities along Lake Atitlán.**

Intervention

Atitlán Recicla sought to strengthen management processes for recyclable solid waste in nine communities of Sololá. Financed by the Central America Bottling Corporation (CBC), a private bottling enterprise, and the Uniterra Program, and implemented by the *Asociación de Amigos del Lago de Atitlán – AALA*, a non for profit organisation working to protect and preserve Lake Atitlán's natural resources, the project enabled the participating communities to create business linkages and collaboration to strengthen solid waste management models, minimize contamination of the lake and improve the conditions of local residents.

Program

Uniterra Volunteer Cooperation Program
2015-2020

Date

2017-2018

Implementing partner

Asociación de Amigos del Lago de Atitlán (AALA)

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Key themes of the story

Recycling, solid waste management, environment protection, job creation for women, private sector, interinstitutional and community collaboration



The project included three main components:

- The creation of solid waste collection centres for groups of women, who were trained to manage the collection centres and market the recyclable materials.
- A participatory awareness program that reached 560 households, 35 stores and 19 enterprises. The population was invited to participate in waste management activities, from the sorting, to technical training, to treatment and final disposal.
- The marketing of recyclable materials: the Unitererra Program facilitated contacts and agreements with several recycling enterprises that offered better prices than informal buyers. These enterprises are very important, as they are few who come to buy material in these communities.



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Atitlán Recicla's objective is to strengthen the culture of recycling within the population, by facilitating the necessary infrastructure and logistics for an adequate recycling of solid waste management. Through the sale of collected materials, recycling has the potential of converting itself into an alternative source of economic income for the communities.

Anna D'Apolito

Executive Director, *Asociación Amigos del Lago de Atitlán*

Results

- 640 direct beneficiaries (128 women and their families)
- + 130,000 indirect beneficiaries (populations of the communities involved)
- 4 volunteers involved

Emerging results

- 6 organic, non-organic and recyclable solid waste collection centres were created.
- Project *Atitlán Recicla* realised in March 2018 its first sale of recyclable waste collected in the participating communities, i.e. over 40,000 kg of recyclable waste recuperated around Lake Atitlán's basin and treated for their reuse and sale.
- 23 groups of women were created and trained as leaders and persons in charge of the collection centres' operations; they are responsible for the management, sorting and stocking of recyclable materials. Today, 128 women work in the sorting of solid waste, a job until then reserved to men.
- The project contributed to changing the mentality of the different recycling actors, by making visible and valuing the work of women, in order to break gender stereotypes within the sub-sector, therefore enabling a wide recruitment of women.

The results of this project contributed to Sustainable Development Goals: 1 - No poverty, 5 - Gender equality, 6 - Clean water and sanitation, 10 - Reduced inequalities, 14 - Life below water

Scaling up, reproduction, sustainability and innovation

AALA is currently replicating the successful experience of *Atitlán Recicla* in a pilot project for the victims of Volcano de Fuego's eruption who were relocated in transitional household shelters in Alotenango. The project promotes good practices of sorting and managing solid waste and set up a collection micro centre of recyclable materials to commercialise value-added waste and improve the quality of life of vulnerable people who were impacted by the eruption.



Émilie Fontaine, a Unitererra volunteer acting as Communication advisor for AALA, has strengthened the Association in terms of communications for development and health. *Atitlán Recicla* focuses on women thanks to the volunteers' work in targeting this population within their projects. Émilie supported AALA in efficiently communicating project results to the public as well as to donors and key stakeholders.