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## Woman Launches Sewing Association

**Miriam Sánchez and 76 other women are sewing their way to a better life**



Photo: USAID/David Hatch

Miriam Sanchez, a founding member of the Comuna Cubinche Women's Sewing Association.

***"It took me two weeks to sew a dress by hand, now I can finish six in the same time," said Mariam Sánchez, a woman who helped establish a sewing workshop.***

What can 77 women do with \$5,000? Just ask Miriam Sanchez. This rural mom in Cubinche had few employment opportunities and, as a result, no reliable source of income. As she looked around her community, she noticed that the ability to sew was a common thread among many women. She also noticed that many other women lived under similar conditions, with no reliable income. Determined to act, Miriam decided it was time for a change. As a first step, she led a group of women in forming a small association that would use their sewing skills to produce and sell clothing. In a one-room building beside the town church, the women armed themselves with needles, cloth, and thread. This was the beginning of a group that became known as the Comuna Cubinche Women's Sewing Association.

Upon hearing about Miriam and the association, USAID provided financial support to help the group expand its operations. With a \$5,000 grant, the group purchased two industrial sewing machines, one over-lock machine, an embroidery machine, and a cloth cutting machine. The group was now equipped with a full sewing workshop and the women could start manufacturing quality and low-priced clothes on a larger scale.

As the business grew, the association tapped into local resources to expand its operations. They used local builders to customize the space where the workshop was set up and build furniture to make the machines more easily accessible. They also found experts who taught them how to use their new machines. Finally, the local government sponsored training in sewing techniques and new styles and patterns, enabling the the association to manufacture more sophisticated products and refine its clothing line.

The group has grown to 77 women and is earning enough to provide members with a more steady source of income. With new equipment and professional training, Miriam says the group's operations have become much more streamlined. "It took me two weeks to sew a dress by hand, now I can finish six in the same time," said Mariam Sánchez.

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