



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**GUATEMALA**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Women Weave to Save Their Families

**Weaver association helps Chortí women support their families and avert another hunger crisis**



Photo: Hugo Cabrera Paz, AGEXPRONT  
*Chortí women now produce tens of thousands of artisan products every year, helping them support their families.*

***At the start of the program, 30 women made 300 bottle sleeves a month; now 400 women make 20,000 a month.***

In 2001, drought and the fall of world coffee prices exacerbated the already extreme poverty that afflicted rural Guatemalan families. A hunger crisis struck, forcing the Chortí Mayan women in Jocotán at times to have to decide between food and medicine. Should she pay \$3 to transport their sick children to the clinic — or use that money for food? The \$5 a month women earned from the sale of palm frond mats in the local market could not even cover their basic needs, much less medicine to help their sick or starving children.

In an effort to improve incomes in the area and prevent another crisis like 2001, USAID helped 30 women weavers organize into the Asociación Ajpatnar Chortí. The association now employs 400 Chortí women, who produce up to 20,000 palm fiber sleeves for rum bottles every month. Working with local organization Kiej de los Bosques, USAID gave the women financial assistance and trained them in business administration, organization management and marketing.

Demand for artisan products increased along with production capacity. At the start of the program, 30 women made 300 bottle sleeves a month; now 400 women make 20,000. Women who made only grass mats to sell at the local market now produce a range of items for department stores and factories in Guatemala City. The world-renowned rum, Ron Zacapa Centenario, is wrapped in a palm-frond sleeve woven by Chortí women.