



## **ANNUAL REPORT 2023 LIGHT OF ESPERANZA**

### **SUMMARY OF 2023 HIGHLIGHTS:**

Throughout the 2023 year, Light of Esperanza worked dilligently to expand and define the scope of our vision for the programming we are realizing in Honduras. In addition to maintaining our current projects, we were able to connect with a number of professional allies that have joined our efforts in ensuring that our programs will maximize their potential to benefit the women and youth of rural Honduras

Light of Esperanza's educational programming included the graduation of two of our Leaders from high school this year. The other three Leaders continue into their final year of high school in 2024, working diligently with us on developing their cooperative business of Bamboo Artisanry, advancing in their learning of English through our online tutoring program, and preparing to transition into the professional workforce through our leadership training activities.

Now in its second year of life, our bamboo continues to grow strong on our land. We are busy connecting with educational and professional institutions throughout Honduras, Central America, and the United States to grow in our knowledge and application of working with bamboo. Our bamboo should reach a construction-grade level of quality in three years, in which we plan on implementing a series of business endeavors designed to benefit the women from the villages we work with.

Our new collaboration with Dr. Gerardo Aldana, of the University of California at Santa Barbara, on a special initiative to transform our land into a space to study indigenous Mesoamerican agricultural techniques is another exciting development that occurred in 2023. In addition to a unique STEM mentorship program connecting students from Honduras and the United States with university students from the University of California, we also plan to plant the crop of Amaranth to support a new food program for school children in the rural communities.

## **“LEADERS OF TOMORROW” PROGRAM**

In 2023 our Leaders flourished in their progress as future leaders. Two of our members, Diana and Gloria, graduated from high school. Valeria, Britany and Karol continue to rank amongst the top performing students in school and will enter into their final year of high school in 2024. Due to the vacancy made available with the graduation of Diana and Gloria, the Board of Light of Esperanza decided to offer the opportunity for a new youth, Naomi, to join this first cohort of Leaders in their final year of school. Over the past two years, Naomi has demonstrated her excellence and desire to develop her leadership skills by volunteering with Light of Esperanza’s activities. Her initiative, as well as her financial need, made her a logical candidate to join this first cohort of Leaders.

All youth participated in a number of leadership development activities over the past year. These activities included a special training with the international expert on Mesoamerican history and culture, Dr. Gerardo Aldana. These trainings offered our Leaders the opportunity to assist in presentations at their high school focusing on the teaching of Mesoamerican culture. Our Leaders also had the opportunity to attend a private tour of the Mayan ruins at Copan Ruinas with Dr. Aldana, giving them a special insight into this unique history.

The Bamboo Artisan cooperative that is being run by our Leaders continues to develop well. Our Leaders participated in special artisan workshops over the past year, as well as trainings on cooperative business operations. After a year of trial with different prototypes, our Team has settled on a number of designs that we believe will be successful in both domestic and international sale. Light of Esperanza helped to purchase new tools that will facilitate the production process, and is excited to see the potential that this initiative will have.

Our Leaders also continued to develop their English language skills through our weekly online tutoring program. The curriculum that our Team has developed continues to grow and has a demonstrated success in providing the experiences so that our Leaders have a heightened level of confidence in engaging the English language. We have been able to reach out to a new group of volunteer tutors, many of whom are excited with the opportunity to practice their teaching skills as well as develop their knowledge of the Honduran culture through this weekly exchange.

## **“PROYECTO BAMBURAS”**

Light of Esperanza was impressed with the growth of our bamboo plants in 2023. We are expecting large amounts of growth with this crop of bamboo now that it has completed the second major rainy season.

Light of Esperanza is exploring the possibilities of beginning a bamboo nursery in Honduras in the coming year. The objective will be to cultivate a greater variety of bamboo species, as well as to be able to distribute bamboo plants to members of the community. The first bamboo harvest should be ready in between 2027 and 2028, in which the possibilities of programming that will benefit the women from the villages we work with will increase substantially.

### **“PROJECT ROSA”**

Light of Esperanza continues to be busy planning workshops and economic development opportunities for the women we work with from the rural villages of the State of Copan in Honduras. Our goal is to have between ten to twenty women trained in carpentry skills so that they will be able to form cohorts dedicated to building homes and other items out of bamboo when our first bamboo harvest is ready to process in 2027-2028.

Additionally, our Team has acquired Amaranth seeds that will be planted on our organization’s land in Honduras in the coming year. This project will be designed to reintroduce this highly beneficial crop into the Honduran diet. We envision that we will have a cooperative that is dedicated the production of Amaranth related food products in the coming years.

### **“BAMBOO CENTER FOR CULTURE AND EDUCATION”**

Light of Esperanza is planning to open a Bamboo Center for Culture and Education on our organization’s land in Honduras in the coming years. This Center will provide members of the Honduran community, as well as international students and guests to engage in a number of hands-on educational opportunities. Visitors will learn about the environmental and productional capabilities related to bamboo, of the benefits of traditional Mesoamerican agricultural techniques, and delve into a celebration of Honduran cultural traditions.

Light of Esperanza has already produced the first video in a series related to the history of the Mayan ruins at Copan Ruinas. These videos will be available at our Center for Culture and Education, as well as online for educators to access in Spanish and in English. Additional projects, such as a series of interviews with community elders, is currently being developed to enhance the incredible opportunity to learn about and share the wealth of knowledge of the Honduran culture and history.

Light of Esperanza is also coordinating an initiative with the University of California, California State University, and the National University of Honduras (UNAH) to utilize our organization’s land as a space for scientific and cultural research. There are currently a variety of proposals that we are working on developing that seek to establish a space for investigation and the opportunity to connect students from Honduras with students from the United States and elsewhere.

### **COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS**

Light of Esperanza connected with a number of incredible community partners in 2023.

Our Board had an opportunity to travel to Guatemala to engage in a special training with the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institution (IMAP) in Lake Atitlan. This training provided our Team with the knowledge and approach to working with the Amaranth crop.

Light of Esperanza's continued collaboration with the Guatemalan-based sustainable construction company, CASSA, provided our Team with further information about working with bamboo. CASSA continues to provide our organization with access to their processed bamboo so that we can engage in artisan projects while our bamboo crop is maturing.

Another exciting community partner collaboration for Light of Esperanza revolves around a proposal to investigate and celebrate traditional Mesoamerican agricultural techniques with the University of California at Santa Barbara and the California State University. The proposal, "Hunbakte' Olala," seeks to engage students in Honduras and in the United States through a curriculum that focuses on cultivating STEM identities within marginalized communities through a focus on traditional Mesoamerican culture and history.

Finally, Light of Esperanza was very excited to begin a new partnership with the Architectural Department at the National University of Honduras, UNAH. This proposed collaboration will offer students in UNAH's sustainable construction branch to practice with bamboo-based building techniques on our organization's land. Additionally, this initiative will enhance the educational opportunities for youth from the rural sectors of Honduras, connecting with students and professors from UNAH.

### **ANNUAL VOLUNTEER TRIP TO HONDURAS**

In 2023, Light of Esperanza focused on preparing for annual volunteer trips to Honduras by connecting and planning with local businesses and institutions. In July of 2024, Light of Esperanza will host our first Volunteer Brigade to travel to engage in a number of exciting volunteer activities with the women and youth we work with. In addition to volunteering on Light of Esperanza's land and in the local schools, an exciting focus on the celebration of Honduran cultural traditions will add to this unique annual experience.

### **ADMINISTRATION**

Light of Esperanza sent a number of boxes of donations to Honduras in 2023. Included were educational supplies, bilingual art therapy workbooks for children, soccer supplies to amplify our Girl's Soccer League, and dental supplies.

### **FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY**

The total amount of donations received by Light of Esperanza was \$6,132. The total amount of expenses in 2023 was \$5,854. 76% of the expenses were Programming, 9% of the expenses were Fundraising, and 15% of the expenses were Administrative in 2023. Additionally, Light of Esperanza received an inkind donation of operational expenses by Angela Madrid Lara and Shmuel Rubinstein in 2023.