

GUATEMALA

Abriendo Oportunidades®



OVERVIEW

The Population Council's activities in Guatemala began in 1985 with a USAID-funded operations research and technical assistance project in Latin America and the Caribbean (INOPAL). The Council opened an office in Guatemala in 1992, with the aim of improving the health and well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Through the *Abriendo Oportunidades* program, the Council has developed successful and long-standing partnerships with government institutions, such as the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Education, and local municipalities. The Council is recognized in Guatemala for developing and refining nonformal educational opportunities for rural adolescent girls, bolstering the country's comprehensive sexuality education and mentoring strategies. The program has also helped raise the profile of Mayan girls and supports national actions to reduce child, early, and forced marriage. In 2011, *Abriendo Oportunidades* was awarded the UNFPA medal for its work toward the empowerment and education of Mayan girls and adolescents. Since 2015, the Council has joined the National Working Group for Comprehensive Sexual Education Steering Committee. The committee, comprised of research institutions, national universities, and NGOs, is dedicated to research, advocacy, and education projects to promote the institutionalization of Comprehensive Sexual Education in the country.

The Council has also supported and advised the Ministry of Health in producing its "Guide for Assisting in Vertical Birth." Vertical birth (giving birth in an upright position) is common among Mayan women. We have designed and coordinated internships for physicians from the Ministry of Health to train in vertical-birth assistance. The Council has also prepared culturally pertinent sexual and reproductive health advocacy materials for women's organizations, and is analyzing ways in which indigenous peoples adapt to climate change.

COUNTRY DIRECTOR	OFFICE LOCATION	STAFF SIZE	ANNUAL BUDGET
Alejandra Colom	Guatemala City	13	\$975,000

HISTORY

- 1985 USAID-funded operations research and technical assistance project in Latin America and the Caribbean (INOPAL) begins.
- 1992 Established office with USAID/Guatemala funding.
- 2003 Conducted formative research on adolescent girls to design programmatic interventions.
- 2004 The *Abriendo Oportunidades*® program was launched.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Francisco Colom; Diane & Jerry Cunningham; Global Giving (individual contributions); Inter-American Development Bank; W.K. Kellogg Foundation; John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; Nike Foundation; NoVo Foundation; Summit Foundation; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

GUATEMALA FAST FACTS

POPULATION (IN MILLIONS):	16.1
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE:	3.1 births per woman (2.1 urban, 3.7 rural)
INFANT MORTALITY RATE:	28 per 1,000 live births
MATERNAL MORTALITY RATIO*:	140 per 100,000 live births
WOMEN AGED 20–24 MARRIED BEFORE AGE 18:	30%
POPULATION AGED 15–49 WITH HIV/AIDS:	0.6%
POPULATION LIVING IN POVERTY:	59.3% (46.4% nonindigenous, 79.2% indigenous)
SEXUALLY ACTIVE WOMEN (AGED 15–49) PRACTICING CONTRACEPTION (ALL METHODS):	61% (68% urban, 55% rural)

*Modeled estimates.
SOURCES: MSPAS, INE Guatemala et al. 2011. *Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil 2008–09*; MSPAS, INE Guatemala et al. 2015. *Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil 2014–15*; INE Guatemala. 2016. *Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida 2014*; World Bank. 2015. *2015 World Development Indicators*.

For more information, contact: info.guatemala@popcouncil.org

CURRENT PROJECTS

POVERTY, GENDER, AND YOUTH

Abriendo Oportunidades® (“Opening Opportunities”)

Since it was launched in 2004, the *Abriendo Oportunidades* (AO) program has worked to improve the lives of rural indigenous girls through a safe spaces program that builds their human, social, health, economic, and leadership assets. The program was designed to respond to the needs of indigenous girls, building on the evidence produced by the Council through continuous measurement and evaluation of the program’s impact on the girls’ lives. To date, the program has trained more than 150 mentors and reached more than 9,000 girls and adolescents in Guatemala’s rural indigenous communities. Results achieved by AO have attracted the interest and support of donors and partners globally. Over the past three years, AO staff worked to improve the program’s curriculum guide, strengthening content in human rights and gender equality education approaches. The new version of the AO curriculum guide will help achieve positive outcomes in reducing girls’ experience of violence at multiple levels. Efforts are also underway to test the model in different settings, such as urban areas, and to adapt content to include boys. In 2015, the Council launched the “National and Regional Learning Circles for Adolescent Girls Programming,” implementing a coaching strategy with partners to expand the safe spaces model in communities across Benin, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

Currently, the Council is developing a comprehensive scale-up strategy to sustain, expand, and institutionalize the AO model in the national agenda. In the scale-up phase, AO will reach 6,000 girls in 150 rural communities, while actively engaging and mobilizing key stakeholders from public-, private-, and civil-society sectors to sustain and institutionalize the program. As the AO program reaches scale, an experiment is underway to demonstrate the impact of the model through a randomized controlled trial with 1,200 girls aged 12–16. A lot of expectations have been raised from partners and donors on the evidence that this study will produce, given that it is one of the few randomized trials targeting indigenous girls in the region. Evidence will examine the program’s impact across the domains of school enrollment; reduction of child marriage and unintended pregnancies; and transformation of negative cultural norms that harm girls.

Important results achieved by the *Abriendo Oportunidades* program include:

- A 2007 program evaluation showed that 100 percent of *Abriendo* girl leaders had completed the sixth grade, compared with 82 percent nationally; 97 percent of *Abriendo* girl leaders remained childless and unmarried during the program cycle.
- A 2010 quantitative household-level evaluation documented that over half of *Abriendo* girl leaders wanted to complete university and over 90 wished to delay childbearing until after the age of 20.

- In 2011, the AO program was awarded the UNFPA medal for its work toward the empowerment and education of Mayan girls and adolescents.
- Elizabeth Vásquez, an AO mentor, participated in a regional forum in Panama to address violence against women. She was one of three delegates invited by UN Women. She traveled with the president of the 48 counties of Totonicapán (the highest traditional authority of the K’iche people) and the director of the government’s Youth Organization (CONJUVE).

(JAN. 2004–NOV. 2016)

Toledo Adolescent Girl Program, Phase II: Sustaining and Adapting Targeted, Evidence-Based Girl-Centered Programming in Belize

In 2014, the Council launched a girl-centered pilot program in Belize called “Girls Creating Opportunities for a Brighter Tomorrow,” implemented by local partner Toledo Maya Women’s Council (TMWC) in ten Q’eqchi’/Ketchi communities in the Toledo District. In 2016, the program will be sustained, building on the lessons learned over the ten years of implementation of *Abriendo Oportunidades* in Guatemala. Strategies to be introduced and tested in Belize include: (1) strengthening mentoring and training modules for young women interested in working with girls; (2) building and strengthening capacities of local partners as they expand coverage of the girl-centered program to reach an estimated 300 girls; and (3) establishing alliances with governmental and nongovernmental entities at the local (district) and central (government) levels to improve the current program or project designs by incorporating a girl-centered approach. (OCT. 2013–OCT. 2016)