

CHI^ÍELTIK

1. Project Title

Lekil Kuxlejal: Pathways to Peace for 350 Young People in Chiapas

2. Project Leads

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3. Thematic Area

Mental Health Promotion and Well-being

4. Secondary Themes

- Inner peace and self-care
- Emotional regulation
- Peaceful conflict resolution
- Violence prevention
- Youth participation
- Recognition of Indigenous knowledge and practices

5. Geographic Location

The project will be implemented in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, across three Indigenous territories with distinct cultural identities: the Tsotsil municipality of Chenalhó, the Tzeltal municipality of San Juan Cancuc, and the Tojolabal municipality of Las Margaritas.

6. Target Population

CHI^íELTIK

The project will benefit Indigenous children and young people aged 10 to 24 who are speakers of the Tsotsil, Tseltal, and Tojolabal languages. This age group experiences profound physical, emotional, and social transitions that shape their well-being and future opportunities. Through mindfulness-based practices and mental health self-care, the project will create safe spaces where participants can recognize and manage their emotions while developing the foundations for lifelong well-being.

7. Background

For generations, the Tsotsil, Tseltal, and Tojolabal peoples have preserved Indigenous knowledge systems that serve as ethical frameworks for health, human relationships, community life, and harmony with nature. These traditions are reflected in concepts such as “Lekil Kuxlejal” among the Tsotsil and Tseltal peoples, commonly understood as “Good Living”, and “Lekilaltik” in the Tojolabal worldview, meaning “Our Well-being”. In both concepts, the suffix “-tik” means “we” or “us,” emphasizing that well-being is achieved collectively rather than individually and through a deep relationship with the community and the natural world.

From this perspective, well-being is not defined by material wealth but by the ability to act with awareness of the consequences of one's actions, cultivate relationships based on respect and trust, care for one's words, body, and mind, make decisions that promote the common good, and sustain reciprocal relationships with people, communities, and nature. Well-being is therefore understood as a daily practice grounded in empathy, shared responsibility, mutual respect, and a commitment to peaceful and non-violent coexistence.

In recent years, profound social, economic, and cultural changes have created new challenges for Indigenous children and young people in Chiapas. Migration, forced displacement, violence, organized crime, discrimination, educational inequalities, substance use, and limited access to culturally relevant mental health services have

significantly affected their emotional well-being and future opportunities. As a result, many experience stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and social isolation, weakening their support networks and limiting their ability to build meaningful life plans.

Addressing these challenges requires mental health promotion strategies that build upon Indigenous knowledge and community values. Mindfulness offers practical tools to strengthen present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, compassion, and self-care. When integrated with the principles of “Lekil Kuxlejal”, these practices can strengthen both personal and collective capacities, enabling Indigenous children and young people to cope with adversity, improve their well-being, and cultivate healthier relationships with themselves, others, and their communities.

8. Overall Objective

To strengthen protective factors for the mental health of Indigenous children and young people in Chiapas by developing social-emotional skills, self-care practices, and community support networks inspired by the principles of “Lekil Kuxlejal” and mindfulness, thereby contributing to the prevention of violence, substance use, and other associated risk factors.

9. Problem Statement

The emotional well-being and development of Indigenous children and young people in Chenalhó, San Juan Cancuc, and Las Margaritas are increasingly threatened by persistent poverty, inequality, violence, and social exclusion. Although Chiapas has one of the youngest populations in Mexico, it continues to face significant disparities in access to education, healthcare, and social protection. In recent years, anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional distress have become increasingly prevalent among adolescents and young people, while culturally appropriate mental health services remain scarce. The shortage of specialized professionals, combined with

the lack of safe spaces for emotional expression and psychosocial support, limits timely access to care.

Risk behaviors further undermine young people's well-being and life opportunities. According to Mexico's 2022 National Health and Nutrition Survey (ENSANUT), one in five adolescents aged 10–19 reports current alcohol use, while alcohol consumption among young people continues to rise in Chiapas. Early alcohol and substance use often begins around age 13 and is associated with increased risks of violence, school dropout, accidents, and poor mental health outcomes. At the same time, Chiapas continues to report some of the country's highest rates of child, early, and forced unions, with 27.6% of women entering a union before the age of 18—well above the national average. These practices restrict girls' access to education, increase the risk of early pregnancy, and limit their ability to pursue independent and meaningful futures.

The security situation in the Highlands of Chiapas and the Comitán Plateau–Tojolabal region has further intensified these vulnerabilities. Growing territorial conflicts, the presence of organized crime, and forced displacement have created environments of fear and uncertainty that directly affect the mental health of Indigenous children and young people. Continuous exposure to violence and the risk of recruitment by criminal groups weakens community protective factors and undermines young people's ability to imagine and build hopeful futures.

In response, there is an urgent need to strengthen social-emotional skills, self-care practices, and community support networks that enable Indigenous children and young people to face adversity while drawing on the principles of “Lekil Kuxlejal” and other culturally grounded approaches to mental health promotion.

10. How will this project solve the problem?

To address these challenges, Ch'ieltik will implement a culturally grounded mental health promotion strategy for Indigenous girls, adolescents, and young people in the

CH'IELTIK

municipalities of Chenalhó, San Juan Cancuc, and Las Margaritas. The initiative integrates the principles of *Lekil Kuxlejal* and *Lekilaltik*—understood as Indigenous concepts of well-being rooted in personal, community, and environmental balance—with mindfulness and social-emotional learning. This intercultural approach will strengthen protective factors for mental health by fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, informed decision-making, and self-care.

Through participatory workshops, dialogue circles, artistic activities, and safe spaces for reflection, participants will gain practical tools to cope with stress, anxiety, violence, and other risks affecting their communities. The project will also address priority issues for Indigenous adolescents and young people, including the prevention of alcohol and substance use, gender equality, the prevention of child, early, and forced unions, the promotion of healthy relationships, and the development of meaningful life plans. All activities will be delivered through participatory and intercultural methodologies that recognize, value, and build upon Indigenous knowledge, languages, and community practices.

In addition, the project will strengthen community care networks by actively engaging families, community leaders, and educators to create more protective environments for young people. Indigenous youth leaders will be trained to promote emotional well-being practices within their communities and among their peers, helping to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health. By strengthening both individual capacities and collective systems of care, the initiative aims to foster resilience, hope, and the ability of Indigenous adolescents and young people to build lives free from violence and filled with greater opportunities for their future.