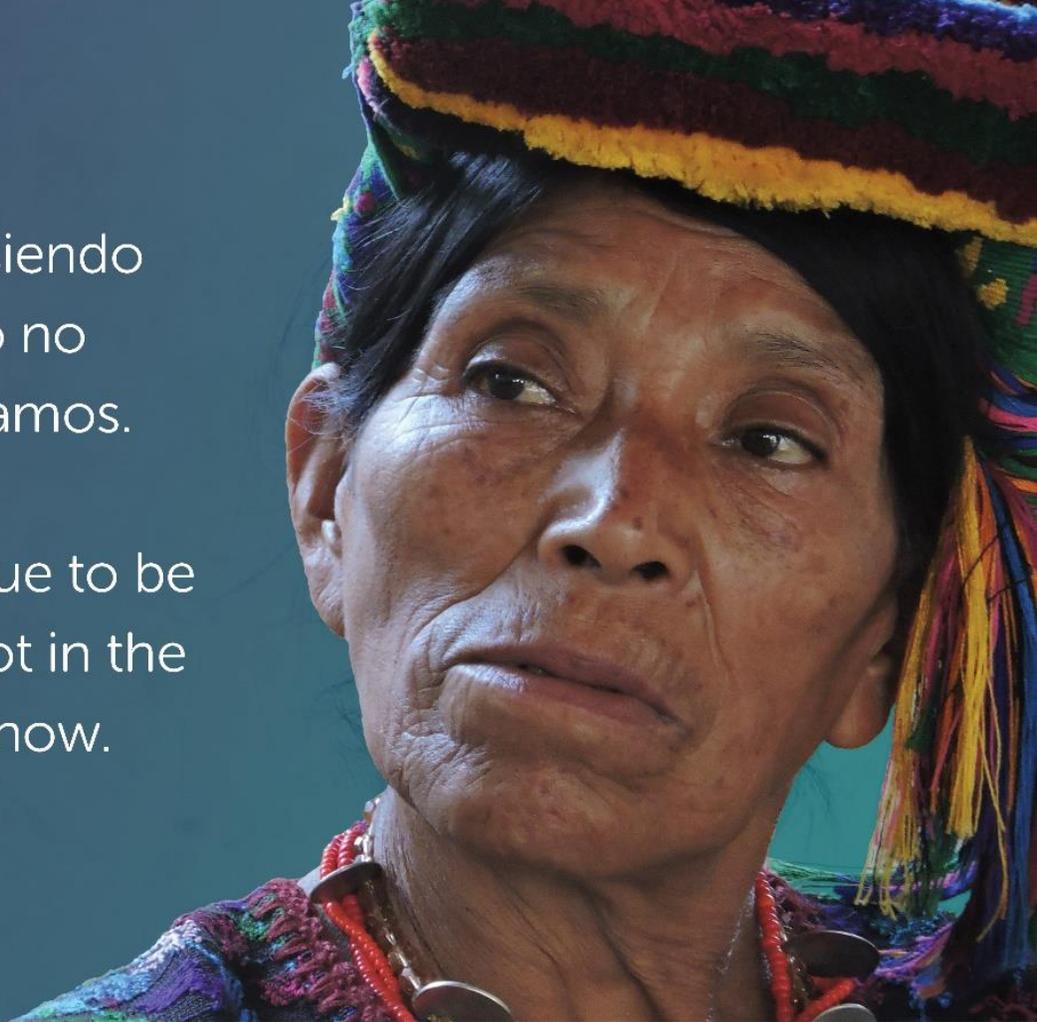


Queremos seguir siendo
como somos, pero no
estando como estamos.

We want to continue to be
who we are, but not in the
conditions we are now.



TRICKLE UP

Graduation Approach and Indigenous Populations

Jorge Coy, Florie Bielsa, Efraín Tecú & Jaya Sarkar

Adapting the Graduation Approach for indigenous populations

Trickle Up has implemented the Graduation Approach with indigenous populations in Latin America in Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay, and in India with 'Tribal' populations in Odisha and Jharkhand. In order to achieve results consistent with the research on the Graduation Approach, it is critical to adapt the Approach to the context, resources and characteristics of the participants and ensure that the implementation of the project is culturally relevant and appropriate. It is also important to implement these projects within the context of international conventions on the rights of indigenous people, national laws, and key policies.

In the last 7 years, 95% of the participants of the programs in Guatemala are indigenous, coming from the most representative ethnic groups¹ of the country where there are higher levels of inequality, exclusion and poverty. Trickle Up works in Mexico with Mayan Yucatecan populations, and is beginning a program in Oaxaca and Chiapas to provide services to 3,000 indigenous women from at least 9 different indigenous peoples. Additionally, Trickle Up is providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Planning in Paraguay to incorporate elements of the Graduation approach into their policy implementation with Guarani populations. These populations generally live in rural areas, where the indicators of poverty are higher, and are characterized by multiple vulnerabilities and high degrees of marginalization.



This paper shares results from Trickle Up's work in adapting the Graduation Approach to indigenous populations in Latin America, a description of the adaptations to the approach required, and key learnings.

Results

The following data is based on the experience of the past 5 years in Guatemala with Graduation projects, with over 1000 indigenous people, 96% of whom are women.

Food Security and Sovereignty

One of the most visible effects of the Graduation Approach is the improvement of household food security. Between baseline and endline, households that experience a moderate incidence of hunger reduced from 60% to 8% and households with a severe incidence of hunger reduced from 15% to 0%. In addition, gains were made in food sovereignty through the increase of patio crops from 75% at the start of the project to 92% at the end, 89% increased the amount of nutritious species grown, and weekly consumption of these increased 36 % to 72%. The extension of milpa grew by 61% and there

¹ Trickle Up works with indigenous Mayan groups including Q'echi', Poqomchi, Kaqchikel, Mam, K'iche' y Tz'utujil in Guatemala, and Yucatecos in

Mexico, as well as 9 other indigenous groups in Mexico: Zoque, Tzotzil, Mixe, Nahuas, Mixteco, Nuu' Savi, Tseltal, Chuj y Tojolabal. In Paraguay, we work with the Guarani.,

was a 66% increase the number of birds in their home, serving as another livelihood strategy.

Savings groups for sustainability and solidarity

Participants, who initially lived in extreme poverty, have been able to save an average of \$77 per year. Participants typically use the distributions after the first year's cycle to invest in their business, food, school or health expenses, and for the purchase of assets.

The savings groups are the pillars of sustainability for Graduation. At the end of the first cycle, 84% of the participants made the decision to continue their savings groups, recognizing its added benefits that improve their capacities, strengthens their vision of their medium and long-term plans.

Many participants also comment on how being part of a group of savings has allowed them to improve their self-esteem, learn to speak in public, and participate in the decision making of the group and their families.

Livelihoods and resilience

With the training and personalized coaching, the participants implement productive commercial (including buying and selling of grains, vegetables, fruit or clothing) or service activities (repair of electronic gadgets or bicycles), additionally many participants sell part of what they produce including food and weaving, generating income to cover household expenses. From a seed capital of US \$ 150, participants managed to increase their working capital to US \$ 218 in 12 months; 38% managed to diversify their activities from the

initial grant and the generated profits, and 80% felt satisfied with their productive activities.

At the end of the project, participants were more resilient and independent, less dependent on wages (which are an irregular and very low source of income), had greater autonomy in the generation of resources, and decreased migration, keeping families united.

Empowerment

As a result of the project, women increased their productive and decision-making roles in their households; 75% of the participants increased their economic contribution to the household; and women who actively participate in household decision making increased from 38% to 74%.

Adaptations for *buen vivir*,² or living well

Graduation is a flexible approach that has great potential to be adapted to different contexts and target populations. In the case of work with indigenous peoples, several adjustments were made to align with the concept of *buen vivir* and to align with important cultural values and concepts. The premise of Buen Vivir is achieving harmony through community-centered, ecologically balanced and culturally sensitive relationships that represent an alternative social and economic model of life that does not always align with the model of capitalism.

In implementing the Graduation Approach with indigenous populations, this concept was taken into consideration in the different phases

² Here is a reference to buen vivir:
<http://www.siemempuu.org/es/theme/buen-vivir-0>
An article in the Guardian describes the collective vision and harmonious vision of the concept of

Buen Vivir:
<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/buen-vivir-philosophy-south-america-eduardo-gudynas>

of the program. In livelihood planning, for example, rights to land and the production of nutritional crops for household consumption were highly important as the forested lands in their territories provide food and housing materials. At the beginning of the program, processes of Free, Prior and Informed Consent³ consultations were held so that populations could initially decide whether or not they wanted to participate in the program. Incorporating this rights framework is particularly important in cases of integration within social protection and other government policies. It is important to emphasize that participatory processes are critical in all project phases including processes of evaluation. Health and education are critical vulnerabilities that people living in extreme poverty face, impede their economic progress and often reflect violations of rights, particularly for women, youth and people with disabilities.

Promoting Solidarity

Savings groups promote solidarity among members. "The social fund" is used as a mini-insurance fund they can grant immediately to participants who are in a crisis (illnesses, death of a family member, etc.). Participants say that being a part of a group allows them to express their difficulties and request support from some or the whole group if necessary.

This methodology also strengthens the responsibility of and trust in each member, based on values of respect, honesty and transparency, in stark contrast to treatment indigenous people often face when they approach more formal institutions for loans.

³ FPIC is a principle protected by international human rights standards that state, 'all peoples have the right to self-determination' and – linked to the right to self-determination – 'all peoples have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'.

Additionally, the project promotes a household-based approach, where several people support the participant with productive activities, and the benefits obtained are for the whole family (collectivity).



Focus on Livelihoods

TRADITIONAL PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

Food available for family consumption is critical for families living in ultra poverty as this provides security, decreases additional expenditures, and allows the freedom to produce and consume preferred and customary foods.

The typical diet of the Mayan populations includes corn, beans and squash and value is placed in producing them according to ancestral practices, such as respecting the sowing, clearing, and harvest cycles of these crops. The adaptability of the Graduation Approach enables production to be synchronized with the local agricultural calendar, respecting these cycles. Patio crops, or kitchen gardens, promote the return to traditional production systems

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/2016/10/free-prior-and-informed-consent-an-indigenous-peoples-right-and-a-good-practice-for-local-communities-fao/>

(*milpa*⁴) and encourage the cultivation and consumption of native nutritious species, as well as promoting children's knowledge and consumption of these foods.

CULTURAL SYMBOLS

Key aspects of the Graduation Approach are often related to cultural concepts to ensure their pertinence and support adaptations. For instance, the metaphor of the seed of corn is used to convey the concept of seed capital. Important parallels are drawn between the use of seed capital and caring for and sowing seeds, and eventual use of the harvest for consumption, replanting, and selling.

Culturally pertinent training materials TRAINING

The trainings take systems and concepts understandable to the groups and use local languages. Guides or manuals are used to address issues of (a) methodology of savings and credit and (b) planning of sustainable livelihoods. Additional materials, such Sexual and Reproductive Health with young people, are developed to address critical barriers to specific groups. These materials have been designed to work in two Mayan languages; some have been translated into Guarani.

Most of the training materials used for the Graduation program use images, graphics and key messages to coincide with the oral culture of indigenous peoples.

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP COACHING

The individual and group coaching is carried out in homes and communities with trained coaches who know the dynamics of the territory and communicates in the local language. Many of these coaches are women.

⁴ More on milpa: <http://www.marc.ucsb.edu/research/maya-forest-is-a-garden/maya-forest-gardens/milpa-cycle>

Respecting Self-Determination

Through participatory methods, participants and community leaders are involved in the targeting, monitoring and evaluation, and the processes of accountability. Participants themselves define rules for their Savings Groups. Participatory processes are essential to ensure ownership and cultural pertinence. Highlights include:

- ✓ The definition of poverty is made at community level with community leaders, based on local indicators and definitions.
- ✓ Participants define their own graduation criteria to define the success of the project and their exit from extreme poverty.
- ✓ Savings groups define their by-laws and manage compliance within the group.
- ✓ At the end of the project, results are shared with participants. Likewise, they are invited to give their testimonies (to municipal and / or national audience) regarding the changes they have experienced in their life.

Adaptations for Technical Assistance

Incorporating the Graduation Approach into government policy outreach to increase the inclusion of and impact for indigenous populations requires additional adaptation. Not only is it important to incorporate the process of Free Prior and Informed Consent⁵ (FPIC), but the components of the Graduation Approach must be integrated into, or inform existing interventions of existing policies, and how they are implemented through government, including indigenous, structures. Analysis and testing of different resource allocations can also be incorporated into demonstration and early design to build evidence for scale.

⁵ More on FPIC: <https://trickleup.org/how-does-trickle-up-work-with-indigenous-communities-in-latin-america/>

The approach often requires training of indigenous leaders in financial literacy so that they have the knowledge to replicate this training and build local capacity. Additionally, cultural sensitivity and pertinence must be reflected in hiring of staff, managing terms and key messages, understanding their significance in each culture. For example, the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) model employs the use of fines for late attendance, however in the Guarani culture this was not acceptable. Implementation of the Graduation Approach with indigenous populations often involves a process of building consensus among the entire community before they accept a new project which requires information to build understanding of the project and responds to questions, as well as incorporating additional time in the planning phase to accommodate these processes.



Lessons

- Applying the Graduation Approach to indigenous populations underscores its flexibility, adaptability and ability to achieve significant impact with various populations.
- The design phase of the Graduation intervention must take into account the complex community dynamics such as land tenureship even this is not the central theme of the project. A rights-based approach is critical to working with

extremely vulnerable and historically marginalized populations.

- The history and experience of many indigenous populations is filled with egregious rights violations, dispossession of their lands, and violence. This has often generated distrust for policies and organizations. The process of consultation and adaptation is critical to establishing the agency of the participants.
- As a result of globalization, ancestral knowledge and values are often lost with the younger generations. This contributes to their struggle for identity affecting self-esteem and future plans of young women.
- Work with indigenous people is not uniform: there is tremendous diversity between groups and even between generations. It is not possible to generalize and stigmatize. The design of each project has to take into account the local reality and reflect on the characteristics and conditions of each group.
- The importance of involving indigenous representatives at all times to validate the different processes and ensure cultural relevance is key. In our experience, far from being a rigid process, we have found much openness towards change on the part of indigenous peoples. This is captured in the following quote: "We want to remain who we are, but not in the conditions in which we find ourselves."

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