

A photograph showing several young women in a rural setting in Guatemala. They are engaged in a traditional activity, possibly preparing tamales, using large green banana leaves. One woman in the foreground is focused on her work, while others in the background are smiling and talking. The scene is outdoors with trees and a simple wooden structure visible.

# Promoting Opportunities for Young Women & Girls

Project Brief | February 2017

A white outline map of Guatemala is positioned to the left of the text.

Lachua,  
Guatemala

The Promoting Economic Opportunity for Young Women and Girls project launched in December 2014 to transform the lives of 150 indigenous young women and girls between the ages of 10 and 23 in six rural communities of Lachúa, Guatemala.

This project was the first to integrate Trickle Up's traditional Graduation Approach with trainings on sexual and reproductive health to provide young women with critical information and reduce the rate of early pregnancy. With the objective of empowering young women and girls in the region to develop successful livelihood activities and become empowered, effective self-advocates and leaders in their communities, Promote Economic Opportunity for Young Women and Girls presented a new opportunity for Trickle Up. Using this project as a testing ground for the integration of health and rights training into the Graduation Approach, Trickle Up explored whether or not this integration would generate better outcomes for young women and girls.

*Trickle Up combats extreme poverty by tapping into the power of the poorest and most vulnerable people to improve their lives. We invest in people and bolster communities.*

*We champion power over poverty.*

**“At home it is difficult to save because we end up spending the money, whereas we can't spend it if it's in the group. Our savings generate profits and we can receive loans. We want to save more and achieve more profits.”**

Hilda Elizabeth Cac Mez

## About Our Participants

**7+** average size of participants' households.

**6%** of participant households affected by a disability.

**98%** of participants can read and write.

**66%** of participants currently enrolled in school.

## Context

Guatemala has experienced a succession of political crises related to long histories of poverty, conflict, and structural exclusion. A 36-year civil war left the country devastated and incurred a legacy of human rights violations, including gender-based violence targeting women of indigenous backgrounds. Even though peace was established in 1996, effective initiatives to bring economic and social justice to Guatemalans never materialized. Today, 59.3% of people live below the national poverty line in Guatemala and approximately 23.4% live in extreme poverty. Women, people with disabilities, and indigenous people are overrepresented among the extreme poor.



# Our Impact on Young Women and Girls in Lachuá

Before the project, participants who left school for economic reasons reported not knowing how to spend their free time, which led to destructive habits and even early pregnancy. However, once they began their new businesses, many noticed a change in their lives. Now, they not only had a way to occupy their time after household chores, but also to build solidarity and supportive friendships with other young women and girls in the community.

The young women and girls also felt empowered to make goals and plans for the future as a result of the project, since now they have a way of earning their own incomes. At the start, many participants would not voice their opinion in group settings, but by the end they had become outspoken leaders. They report feeling more confident in themselves and believe that their savings groups can help them accomplish their dreams.

## Livelihoods

**\$287** average profits earned by participants after one year in the program.

**87%** of participants felt satisfied in their businesses.

**58%** of participants took loans from the savings group to invest in their productive activities.

## Food Security

**95%** of households never or rarely experience hunger at the end of the project.

**73%** of households have adopted healthier eating practices after the project.


**23** different species of crops grown by participants, compared to 9 at the start of the project.

## Empowerment

**97%** of young women & girls take an active role in household decisions, compared to only 14% at the start.

**94%** of participants avoided early pregnancy during the project period.

**69%** of participants increased their knowledge about sexual and reproductive health through the project.



*Elvira's business has been extremely successful – she significantly increased her working capital in one year. From the \$75 starting seed capital from Trickle Up, she now has \$450. She tells us she intends to continue working and diversify her income.*



# Project Adaptations

## 1 Considered the cultural, religious, and political context when designing trainings for young women and girls.

*“[We learned that] we have the same rights as men.”*

**Rutilia Xol Chub**

Trickle Up respected cultural sensitivities by presenting information, particularly sexual & reproductive rights trainings, in a way that encouraged participants to make their own decisions relative to other information they receive from external sources. Providing information without recommending a certain course of action facilitated the acceptance of this pioneering aspect of the project.

## 2 Conducted project activities in both Spanish and Q’eqchi’ to address linguistic barriers to inclusion.

Trickle Up transcended linguistic barriers that often correlate with extreme poverty in indigenous communities. In Lachuá, many families speak Q’eqchi’, one of the 21 indigenous languages spoken in Guatemala. Trickle Up trained staff in Q’eqchi’ and developed appropriate technical vocabulary both in Spanish and Q’eqchi’ to meet the needs of these indigenous communities.

## 3 Encourage flexible training and meeting times to fit into busy schedules.

Youth have to balance school, work, and other household chores with project activities like savings group meetings or trainings. Scheduling meetings on weekends or offering repeat trainings throughout the day ensured everyone was able to attend and participate fully.

*“Business is great. In times of scarcity, my business helps out with household costs.”*

**Flora Adelaida Cac Mez**



**“I see that one day my parents won’t be able to support me, but I already know how to depend on myself.”**

**Mirna Xo Ical**



**“[Before, we] could not get money, because we only had my dad’s income. Now we have more income and it’s sufficient for us: we’ve been able to buy turkeys, chains, earrings, food. There is always food and we could always eat some of the chickens we raise.”**

**Zoila Xol Chub**

## Lessons Learned

### 1 Develop baseline and endline indicators specific to participants’ age.

We found that young participants often relied more on technical staff and coaches than our participants from other projects. Similarly, parents were highly involved in the girls’ activities, whereas previous projects focused on mothers and adults themselves. As a result, indicators need to be developed to measure when younger participants have achieved independence from the assistance of parents and coaches in their savings group and business activities.

### 2 Include trainings on interpersonal relations and conflict mediation.

Project staff noticed that youth tend to be more “sensitive and impulsive” than older participant groups. Girls who felt excluded or pestered by their savings group tended to drop out of the project. Trainings on conflict mediation for adolescents early in the project timeline would help mitigate these factors and encourage participants to remain in the program.

### 3 Assess the suitable age to begin teaching sexual and reproductive health to young women and girls.

Age is an important factor in determining whether a participant is ready to learn about sexual and reproductive health and rights. Trickle Up found that young women age 15 or older tended to benefit more from these trainings than younger girls. Trickle Up has applied this learning in the design of a subsequent project targeting similar age groups.