



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

GUATEMALA

CASE STUDY

Leadership Training Targets Youth

Young men and women learn life and job skills to help them excel



Photo: Luis Córdova, Partners of Americas

Young Mayan and Ladino women and men gather in Sololá, Guatemala, for youth leadership training sessions.

One program participant said, “Now I’m motivated to study beyond sixth grade — no matter how impossible it seems to do it.”

Challenge

More than a third of Guatemalans are between 15 and 29 years old. Only two of every five children finish sixth grade and just 19 percent of all high school–aged kids are in school.

Guatemala’s population growth rate is the second highest in the hemisphere and doubles the population every 19 years. More than 70 percent of Guatemalans live rural poverty, driving the country’s youth to seek work in unskilled labor or organized crime. Youth are disenfranchised and marginalized, deprived of the tools and the opportunity to become productive, healthy, responsible citizens.

Initiative

USAID supports a program that gives a boost to young, disadvantaged Guatemalans. At 10- to 15-day camps, young men and women are taken out of their familiar social contexts and put together for the first time with youth of other social, cultural and linguistic groups so they can “learn together by doing.” The camps teach the youth a range of leadership and life skills, including how to cook, clean, exchange ideas, resolve conflicts, work as a team and use resources efficiently. In training sessions they dance, act, paint and write poetry as they learn about self-esteem, nutrition, health, job search skills, budgeting and decision-making.

Results

USAID’s skills program has trained more than 700 young people. Half of the graduates now work with local organizations to replicate the experience in their own communities and impart their knowledge to other students and their parents. Many participants have gone back to school; others have assumed local political leadership roles. The program’s mix of cultures, genders and urban and rural residents generated newfound tolerance, respect and commitment among participants. “In camp we learn to express ourselves,” said one. Others said:

“We get the tools to open ourselves up.”

“We are each responsible for our own life.”

“Now we know how to differentiate positive from negative.”

“I can go back home and help others like me now.”