# Guate Groundswell

**Youth Ambassadors for Empowerment, Education and Equality**

Submitted June 4, 2021, by:
**STUDENTS OFFERING SUPPORT**

Elevating Education, Igniting Leaders

In Partnership with:

**Semillas de Innovacion para Innovacion y Desarrollo Sostenable (SIDS)**

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With Special Thanks To:

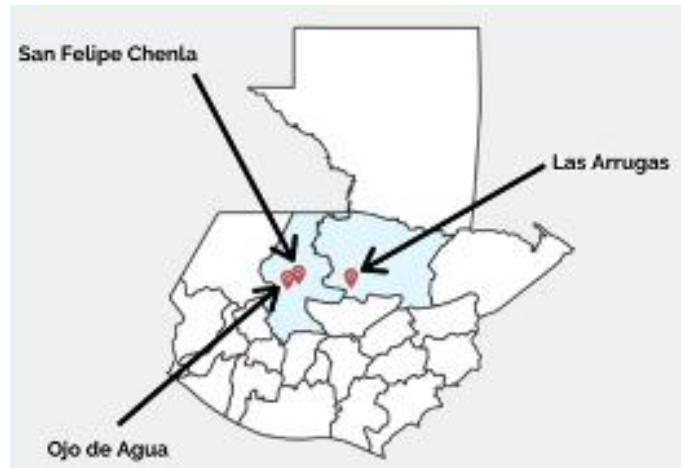WORLD POSSIBLE    rumie    DURHAM COLLEGE SUCCESS MATTERS

# 1. Executive Summary

In three rural communities of Guatemala, Mayan adolescents (ages 14-21) have been empowered as mentors supporting grade 4-6 students by leading neighbourhood-based "learning circles". These activities supported academic and personal development, both for mentees and mentors, contributing towards improved commitment to education, access to learning resources, and gender equality.

Over the course of the testing period, we engaged 77 mentors (46 F / 31 M) and 340 mentees (168 F / 172 M), 45 teachers, and representatives from 43 partner organizations. Additionally, we supported an estimated 667 parents (325 F/ 325 M), 1300 siblings (650 F/ 650 M), and 1191 schoolmates (581 F/ 610 M) as indirect beneficiaries, for a total of 3663 beneficiaries overall [1]

Beneficiary communities were located in the departments of Quiche & Alta Verapaz, two regions of Guatemala with among the highest levels of poverty, lowest levels of educational performance, and strongest presence of Mayan culture (United Nations, 2010). In the department of Quiche, the communities were: San Felipe Chenla (SFC) and Ojo de Agua (OdA). In the department of Alta Verapaz, the community was: Las Arrugas (LA). Virtually all beneficiaries, with only the exception of a nominal number of teachers and community partners, identified as being indigenous Mayan



Results, including data and observation, emphatically validated the core hypothesis of our innovation: that youth-driven learning spaces enabled by e-learning resources and inclusive community environments will lead to improved academic performance and retention among Indigenous Mayan youth, especially females.

> "We have more committed students and more empowered girls with the desire to study and excel."
>
> - Efren Rumualdo Mus Cal, Teacher (LA)

Key to the success of the initiative, especially in the context of COVID-19, was the strong emphasis on local leadership, and engagement of beneficiaries (eg. students and teachers) as agents of change.

Additionally, adaptability to respond to changes in local context was critical. Notably, in the community of OdA, a number of challenges that were identified during the mid-term evaluation were successfully resolved through pivots that led to final results that were comparable with the other two beneficiary communities.

1. Details of the method used to calculate indirect beneficiaries is included in the Testing Measurement Framework

**The overall success of the innovation is exemplified by the following results**

- 93% of mentors, 99% of mentees, and. 100% of teachers and parents indicated they would wish to participate again in the program if given the opportunity.

- 97% of both mentors and mentees rated learning circles as being helpful to their academic performance

- There were high levels of participant retention in the program: 97% of the mentors originally selected to participate continued throughout the duration of the entire project, 96% of mentees attended their learning circles "most of the time" or "all of the time"

- The rate at which students continued studies after completion of grade 6 into "Lower Secondary" school rose by 22.7%. 98.7% of mentors continued studying throughout the entirety of the program, including 96% who continued beyond graduation from lower secondary school, significantly outperforming national and regional averages

- 334 content items (11GB) were curated into customized e-learning content libraries, including original content, and gender equality curriculum materials translated into local Mayan indigenous dialects. The content supported approximately 7621 hours of student learning directly on tablets. The quality of content was rated 4.86/5 among mentees, and 4.74 among mentors considering gender, cultural and linguistic needs.

- Training was delivered to 45 teachers and school directors related to the use of technology and gender equality.

- 105 youth from 9 post-secondary institutions in Canada had the chance to connect directly with beneficiaries through virtual exchanges





In addition, there is clear evidence of shifts in attitudes towards gender equality, especially as relates to the education of girls. This impact was consistent across our school communities as **80%**+ of students, teachers and parents demonstrated improved knowledge and attitudes by project end. Parents showing the lowest baseline scores towards gender equality demonstrated significant changes, with an average increase of 39% in their KAP scores in this category.

Based on the evidence of success as well as desires expressed by community partners to continue the project's approach, SOS has already committed internal resources to support the immediate continuation of the program in existing beneficiary communities. We are also seeking additional funding support to scale the innovation to impact additional schools.

Overall, the youth-driven learning circles have proven to be an effective, scalable, and locally-driven approach that supports a range of critical development outcomes for girls and women in rural Mayan communities. Given the circumstances of COVID-19, these outcomes are more important now than ever.

## COVID-19

As was experienced in many areas of life, the pandemic produced pervasive changes in the context of the innovation. Public health measures resulted in the full and partial closures of schools, the prevention of large-scale public events, and severe restrictions on staff travel. Supply chain disruptions also led to delays with equipment procurement and deployment. These measures required significant adaptations in the ways in which testing and evaluation was conducted, and in how program communications were managed, as is explained in Section 3.3: Pivots. The pandemic also changed underlying conditions in the community influencing educational attainment, by increasing economic strain and increasing risk of domestic abuse and violence for girls, especially among those already in the most vulnerable of circumstances. The pandemic also caused changes in the organizational capacity of program contributors [2]

Despite these logistical challenges, the unexpected circumstances of COVID-19 may also have accelerated adoption of certain aspects of the innovation. For instance, there was greater public recognition of the need to provide support to students in marginalized communities – especially for those without infrastructure in place to continue learning in online formats. The pandemic also facilitated an increased focus on localization and decentralization of leadership, with youth mentors having to play active leadership roles even in the early stages of testing activities. The lack of traditional school responsibilities for students during the early stages of testing also meant youth had greater availability to commit to participation in the program.

Looking ahead, the timeline for a recovery from COVID-19 in Guatemala remains highly uncertain. The vaccine rollout remains very slow and case counts have continued to climb in and around beneficiary communities, prompting SOS and local partners to establish a temporary pause on all in-person activities until mid-June. The potential for a return to regular international travel also remains unlikely for the foreseeable future.

### Change in Testing Timeframe

Whereas the original project timeline was to have learning circles operate within one academic year (January 2020 - November 2020), delays in the project approval process resulted in those activities instead being delivered across two partial school years (eg. July-November 2020, and February-April 2021). As a result, many mentees experienced only portions of the program. This change created challenges with data collection, and significant capacity had to be allocated to coordinate intake of two separate cohorts.

### NGO Legislation in Guatemala:

Controversial new legislation[3] concerning the operations of NGOs in Guatemala was introduced in February 2020 during project kick-off, requiring substantial adjustments to Standard Operating Procedures by SOS and partners

2. Two members of the program team had to resign their roles at the onset of the pandemic, and other had to take periodic leaves for family and health reason; one key partnership (Abriendo Oportunidades) could not proceed

3 The legislation was widely seen to be a punitive measure to put excessive burden on civil society actors involved in anti-corruption investigations against the Guatemalan Government (learn more at: https://www.wola.org/analysis/qa-guatemalas-controversial-ngo-law/)

# 3. Testing Framework Implementation

## 3.1 Progress on Targets Through a Gender Lens

The project utilized a Results-Based Management (RBM) framework, implementing gender-disaggregated measures. A mix of evaluation methods were used to support performance assessment, given the complexity of capturing educational interventions' impacts. These methods included: Knowledge Attitude Practices (KAP) Surveys to assess Commitment to Education, Self-Efficacy, and Gender Role Attitudes. Analytic data from the Rumie LearnCloud software was used to measure use of content. School records to calculate changes in enrolment trends and numbers of indirect beneficiaries. Additionally, the qualitative methods of Rolling Profile Interviews, Staff observation, and Community Dialogues were also used to complement and support the interpretation of data. Evaluation was supported through engagement of a Gender Mainstreaming Specialist, with active engagement from local partners in the design of the evaluation process. The use of control groups that was originally intended to be included for validation of results was eliminated due to complications arising from the pandemic, as is explained at the end of section 3.1

### Ultimate Outcome 1100:
### What was the impact on Commitment to Education?

97% of both mentors and mentees said learning circles were helpful to their academic performance, with both groups demonstrating significant gains in self-efficacy and attitudes about their future education. This contributed towards an average of a 22.8% improvement in the rate of student transition from grade six to lower secondary, as well as impressive results of educational attainment among mentors. 25/26 (96%) of mentors who graduated from secondary school during testing successfully moved to the next stage of education, significantly outperforming regional and national averages. 98.7% of all mentors continued their studies throughout the entirety of the program. Students' mothers and fathers also showed gains of +10% in the average KAP Score related to commitment to education, and a 39% gain in scores on gender equality.



Both female and male mentors improved their scores for commitment to education between **Baseline** and **Endline**.

Female Mentors: 67%, 84% | Male Mentors: 66%, 83%
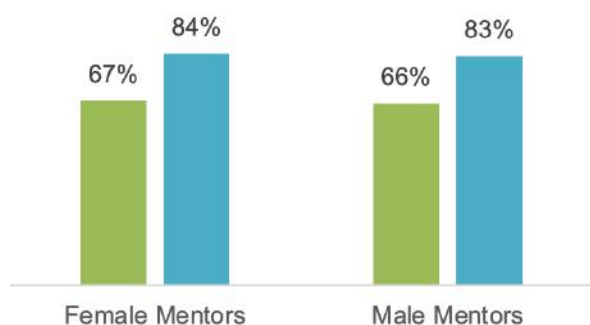


Strengthened commitment to education of children, especially girls, was also observed among parents.

Female Parents: 85%, 93% | Male Parents: 84%, 94%
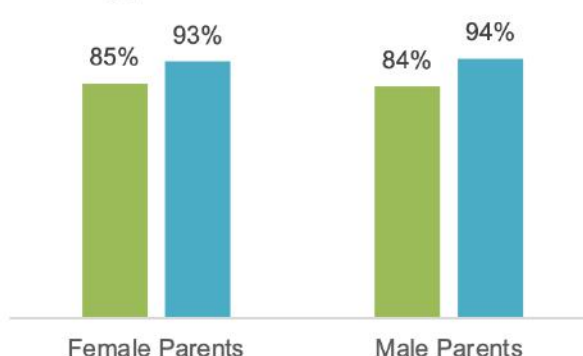
Key factors influencing commitment to education relate to the perceived economic value of education, especially for girls, due to limited presence of knowledge economy jobs especially in rural regions. Expenses associated with participating in schooling and "lost wages" was another factor. The lack of educational institutions in rural regions limits accessibility, and perceived low-quality reduces motivation

# Mentors' Improved Commitment to Education

On average in Guatemala, only 56% of those who enroll in lower secondary school (also referred to as "basico" or "telesecundaria") move to the next stage of education, with continuation rates lowest among rural, Mayan communities, and among women. (US AID, 2019). However, among the 75 students (45 F/ 30 M) participating throughout the program as mentors, 49/49 (100%) continued studying into successive grades of lower secondary school in the second academic year of testing, and 25/26 (96%) continued to study even after graduating from lower secondary school.

Feedback from beneficiaries, alongside KAP survey results, suggest the program's holistic approach (combining training, scholarships, access to e-learning content, and the opportunity to serve in leadership roles) simultaneously supported students' financial, socio-emotional, and academic needs, contributing towards the intended ultimate outcome.

> "I am proud to be part of the project and help elementary school children learn from the contents of the tablet. With the help of this project I learned more and I want to achieve my dreams, one of them is to graduate from university"
>
> Juan Salomon Us Castro, Mentor (OdA)

> "I studied here at the primary school in Ojo de Agua. Sadly not all my friends continued studying. We finished sixth grade together, then only four friends met in the first grade of Básico (lower secondary). Being in the mentoring program motivated me to enroll and continue studying this year"
>
> Manuela Gladis Chamay Gómez, Mentor (OdA)

97% of mentors self-reported that their role in learning circles was helpful to their academic performance. By leading learning circles, students increased access to educational resources through tablets, and had the chance to reinforce their own academic knowledge through a highly active and participatory form of learning. Being in the role of learning circle leaders also produced impacts in students' sense of self-efficacy.





Building youth's self-efficacy, resilience and motivation has been proven to have a significant influence on academic performance within environments with poor school quality and/or challenging socio-economic circumstances (McKinsey and Company, 2017, p. 25) (Population Council, 2019) (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012) (Orozco & Valdivia, 2017, p. 5). Therefore, building these competencies was a key focus of our logic model, especially given the generations of cultural discrimination, genocide, and intergenerational trauma experienced by youth in these Mayan communities. Mentors did have high baseline scores on self-efficacy, which was expected given that mentors had already outperformed many peers regarding educational attainment and were selected partly based on their proven academic and leadership potential. Yet, program activities enabled these emerging young leaders to continue building their sense of self confidence, with an average improvement of 12% in KAP scores in this category. This brought endline scores to an average of 94% (94% F / 94% M). Teachers and parents frequently observed changes in youth's behaviours that were reflective of these gains, such as students' increased confidence and enthusiasm to participate in school and community activities, timely completion of homework, and higher levels of organization, preparedness, and punctuality

Mentors themselves also frequently commented on their own increased sense of confidence and motivation. For instance, many mentors referred to the sense of empowerment they felt as a result of being entrusted by the committee of local leaders that selected them to serve as the youth ambassadors in their community, as well as a sense of responsibility from being entrusted by younger students and their families as learning circle leaders.

> "Now more than ever I can express myself well thanks to my apprentices because we read storybooks and when we read it is where we find learning ideas. I have learned to be creative, now I feel very confident when I participate because I have expressed myself a lot explaining to my apprentices."
> Glenda, Mentor (LA)

> I notice the ladies who were in the mentoring program are more responsible, I notice they are more self-confident when asked in class. You notice the difference between them and the other students who did not have the opportunity to be in the program
> Ana Elizabeth López Sambrano, Teacher (OdA)

Contributing to the changes in attitudes towards education were training workshops that encouraged mentors to explore new interests, set goals for themselves, and create strategies to overcome obstacles. A significant factor contributing to this increased commitment was by offering both emotional encouragement and practical guidance for mentors pursuing goals for the future. For instance, in Fall 2020, many students preparing to graduate from lower secondary school accessed assistance applying for and registering for additional studies. Another key factor was the small monthly scholarships ($45 CAD) that mentors received, which reduced financial barriers to education, and enabled future goal setting.



> "Faced with the pandemic, boys and girls were going to stop attending school. Guate Groundswell came to support the children to continue with their learning through mentoring. Not only mentees learned but also mentors were trained to become leaders of their community. I see more participation of youth and children in school and community meetings."
>
> Orlando Ostuma Cruz, Parent (SFC)

There were strong indications that the innovation may have indeed contributed towards changes in broader community norms, even beyond those students who participated directly in the program. For instance, in SFC,[4] during baseline years of 2018 and 2019, there was an average annual dropout rate of 16% among girls moving between successive levels of lower secondary studies. In 2021, the school saw 133% more girls registering to study in 2nd and 3rd year, than had graduated from 1st year of Telesecundaria in the year prior.[5] This suggests that in addition to the high level of retention of existing students, students who previously halted their studies were now returning to school, and/or students who had studied in neighbouring communities were choosing to continue studies at the Telesecundaria school in SFC.

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4  In the communities of LA and OdA, baseline data was not available for comparison. In the case of LA, school records were destroyed by flooding arising from hurricanes in Fall 2020. In the case of OdA, record-keeping of this sort was not practiced. Attempts to piece together data through conversational interviews did not yield sufficient data for a comprehensive analysis

5  Boys also saw an overall improvement in their rates of continuation, though it was less so than girls experienced with the drop out rate reducing from approximately 18% to 6%

# Mentees' Improved Commitment to Education

On average in Guatemala, only 67% of students who start primary school will make it to lower secondary school, with even lower rates of continuation among rural, poor, and Mayan communities, and among girls (USAID, 2019). This represents a key bottleneck in the overall education system of Guatemala. As such, the innovation targeted its learning circles to assist 340 students (168 F/ 172 M) in grades 4 to 6.

97% of mentees (96% F/ 98% M) self-reported that learning circles were helpful to their own academic performance. The learning circles provided increased access to educational resources, as well as tutoring, mentorship, and role modelling from mentors. Learning circles also offered a more participatory and collaborative approach to education than rote teaching.

> "I am living with my grandparents because my mother left. No one helped me at home but with the help of Anabela (mentor) now I learn more and better. I don't want her to stop helping me."
>
> Houstin Edin Javier Pop, Mentee (LA)

When it comes to the KAP scores of mentees it was difficult to comprehensively evaluate results, due to challenges with data collection at the onset of the pandemic. However, in just the five months between midline and endline evaluations (between December 2020 - April 2021), 83% of mentees (78% F/ 87% M) increased KAP scores related to self-efficacy, and 59% of mentees (50% F/ 82% M) increased KAP scores related to commitment to education. These results are atop the additional improvements that were likely made between the baseline to midline period (March 2020 - December 2020).

We can reasonably infer significant improvements were made among mentees during this time, given that the scores of mentees taken in December 2020 were already higher than were the baseline scores of Mentors taken in May 2020, even though mentors were selected based on factors that would have suggested they would be likely to have higher scores in these categories. Additionally, this assumption is reinforced by the self-reported impacts by mentees and observations from parents and teachers, who broadly commented on the improvements to mentees' commitment to education, self-efficacy, and academic performance.
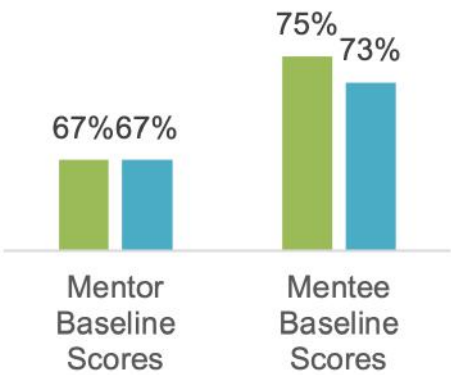


Attendance records of schools located within beneficiary communities also suggest that the project contributed towards significant progress regarding students' school continuation beyond grade six. When comparing the percentage of students studying in grade 6 to those studying in the first year of lower secondary, we witnessed an overall increase in the rate of transition to lower secondary of 22.7% (10.2% F / 25.9% M)[6]

In San Felipe Chenla and Las Arrugas, the number of students enrolled in 1st year of telesecundaria was higher than the number of students who graduated from grade 6. This again suggests that students who may have previously stopped or paused their school participation in prior years returned in 2021 to continue their studies, and/or students who studied in elementary schools from other communities elected to study at the telesecundaria schools within beneficiary communities.

6 This was calculated by comparing enrolment data at the start of the new school year in February 2021 (after eight months of program activities) to the average enrolments over the two years prior to program activities (2018 & 2019).

However, in Ojo de Agua, there was a concerning decrease in the number of girls and women enrolling in the first year of Lower Secondary in 2021. This could be as a result of students electing to study in locations outside of their own community, and/or due to the impact of the pandemic, with disproportionate effects experienced by girls and women in the most vulnerable circumstances. Further monitoring and analysis is required to understand if and how the pandemic contributed to this anomaly in results, and whether the drop out from school among girls in OdA is a temporary fluctuation due to the pandemic or a trend likely to continue. This reinforces the need to focus on the needs of women in the most vulnerable of circumstances.

## Parents Increasing Commitment to Education

While students' increased skills and motivation are significant, supportive community attitudes are critical to enabling continued educational participation. Parents are at the forefront of this, given the important role parents' play in setting expectations and guiding their children's future. Over the course of the project, 69% of parents (67% F/ 75% M) increased KAP scores between baseline and midline regarding commitment to education, bringing the end line average score to 93.5% (93% F / 94% M). In the community of Ojo de Agua, where parents' began with noticeably lower baseline scores, the average scores improved from an average of 70% to 89%

Whereas the logic model of the innovation originally called for large-scale 'Community Dialogue' events to engage a broad base of participants' parents, this was not feasible due to the pandemic's restrictions on large group gatherings. However, three dialogue events were hosted at the launch of the program, prior to the restrictions taking effect. Additional dialogues were hosted with a small subset of parents, each representing different stakeholder groups within each beneficiary community. Program staff also engaged in small groups with parents on an ongoing basis through informal interactions as part of learning circle coordination.

Feedback from parents suggested the increased support to their children's studies through learning circles played an important role in encouraging a greater commitment to education. Given low rates of adult literacy and levels of education among older Mayan populations in rural areas, parents' themselves may lack the skill and experience to directly engage with their children's studies. Especially without in-class activities during the pandemic, children without educational support in their own home would surely suffer disproportionate impacts.

Many parents also commented that seeing their children's increasing levels of motivation to learn, and hearing their children advocate for their own futures, contributed to their own increasing commitment to education. Additionally, many participants commented that the provision of school supplies, and nutrition programs, delivered as part of learning circles were essential to gaining their parents support to continue studies. Reducing the financial burdens on parents in a context where extreme poverty is high, especially given increased economic, was an essential first-step to enabling the commitment to education.

"Since last year we have been struggling with how to teach our classes because due to the current situation in the world we have had to change everything. Now we only leave work guides for primary school students. For many parents this has been a very big challenge, but thanks to the learning circles our children continued to learn."

Alfredo Israel Pop, Teacher (LA)

## Outcome 1110:
## How has access to educational resources changed?:

**334** pieces of custom e-learning content were created or curated, supporting **7621 hours** of technology-enabled learning, with mentees' giving an average rating of **4.86 / 5** on the relevance and quality of content. **45** teachers also received training and technology equipment to support ongoing access to educational resources within their classrooms.

## Availability of Content

At the beginning of the project there were no tablets provided through schools to students in any of the communities. There are now 98 tablet devices available, which all include the Rumie software hosting our e-content libraries to enable offline access.

Through collaboration with local teachers we collected and deployed an 11 GB content library, customized to each community's learning circle activities. This included the curation of over 334+ educational videos from YouTube and other sources, as well as creation of original content. Analytic reports from Rumie indicate tablets have been used for a total of +1725 hours, though the estimated figure is estimated to be even more than that due to technology challenges. Knowing that learning circles engage an average of 4.4 students at a time (3.4 mentees, as well as 1 mentor), we can therefore extrapolate that there has been a total of approximately 7621 learning hours supported through Rumie

Additionally, we procured and installed four units of the RACHEL Local Access Network (LAN) Systems across the three communities. Two-day training sessions supporting 12 teachers in LA and 33 teachers in Cotzal (OdA and SfC) were provided to enable them to make continued use of a +1 Terabyte library of Spanish-language content as part of core classroom activities.

> "I had never used a tablet or computer, this was a new experience for me. I learned about the Rumie app and we always had new content. I had not seen a teacher give classes with a Tablet. The students (mentees) also got very excited when they saw the videos on the tablet, for them it was new and they told me so"
>
> Maria Sulamita Us Chití, Mentor (OdA)

## Quality and Relevance of Content

One key area for improvement identified during midterm reporting was regarding the relevance and quality of learning materials deployed through Rumie. As a result of course corrections made to support teacher training and engagement in the selection of e-learning content, outcomes in this area improved significantly at the endline.

Rating of learning materials on responsiveness to gender and culture (out of 5) by mentors, mentees and teachers were consistently high across communities.
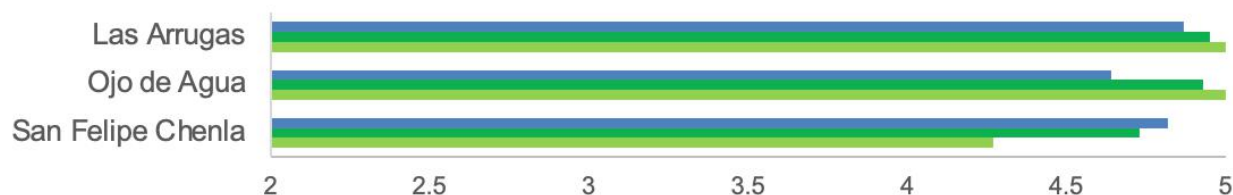
The need for course correction had been most evident in the community of Ojo de Agua where levels of teacher engagement had been lower,[8] and due to lower baseline levels of academic proficiency, especially with regards to Spanish comprehension and literacy. However, thanks to the new efforts undertaken between December 2020- May 2021, the average rating of e-learning content in OdA improved to 4.93/5 among mentees and 4.64/5 among mentors.

Overall, across all 3 communities, 97% of mentees (97% F/ 96% M) were satisfied with the relevance of content with consideration of linguistic, gender, and cultural identities. The average rating of content across all three communities improved from 3.89/5 at midline (3.8 F/ 3.98 M) to 4.86/5 (4.87 F / 4.85 M) among mentees, and from 4.23 (4.42 F/ 3.92 M) to 4.74 (4.79 F / 4.65 M) among mentors.

## Outcome 1120: What has been the improvement to opportunities for self-directed and peer-supported learning?

**417 students (77 mentors and 340 mentees)** had the opportunity to engage in the unique, student-driven format of learning circles, facilitating **+9400 hours** of self-directed and peer- supported learning. **97%** of both mentors and mentees rated learning circles as being helpful to their academic performance.

The student-driven, participatory model of peer-to-peer learning that informed the learning circles was at the core of driving all outcomes of the project. With each mentor contributing an average of 40 hours per month to facilitate learning circles, we an estimated 3020+ learning circle sessions[9] Mentees almost unanimously (97%) self-reported learning circles to be helpful to their academics, matching the same results of mentors. 96% of the mentees were classified as having participated in learning "most of the time" or "all of the time".

Due to the project extending across two academic years, there were multiple cohorts of mentees. 82 mentees participated only in the first five months of testing (July to December 2020) and then 'aged out' of the program upon graduating from grade six. They were replaced by 103 new mentees, freshly entering grades 4 or 5, who participated for just three months (February 2021 - April 2021) during the 2nd cohort.

155 mentees participated throughout the entirety of testing activities (July 2020 - April 2021). These were students who began in grades 4 or 5 during the first academic year of testing, and then moved into grade 5 or 6 during the second academic cycle during testing. Data regarding mentees is reported based on those mentees who participated throughout the entirety of the program.

Another strong indication of success was that 149 of the 155 (96%) mentees were classified as participating in learning circles "all of the time" or "most of the time". 92% of mentees said their mentors were "always" well-prepared and 86% said mentors "always" made learning circles fun and engaging.

"I have noticed that most mentors have shown more initiative when leading activities, and this was not very common in the community before. Elders were supposed to tell the youth how things were done."

Salvador Escobar, teacher (OdA)

8   In Ojo de Agua, the majority of teachers do not live within or near the community, but rather travel from the nearest city center. Due to travel restrictions arising from the pandemic, it was more challenging to coordinate and directly engage teachers from this community compared to LA and SFC.

9.  Detailed attendance records of the number of hours spent in learning circle activities were kept only for the period of January to April 2021. Capturing data in this level of detail was not feasible in the period of July 2020-December 2020. However, data has been extrapolated and estimated according to overall program timelines and trends.

# Outcome 1130:
# What has been the impact on gender equality?

Parents showed a 39% improvement in the average KAP score on gender equality, while teachers, mentors, and mentees all demonstrated significant improvements as well. There is increasing comfort with discussing gender-based disparities in education, and young women feel more knowledgeable about their rights and empowered to express their views



Improved knowledge and attitudes towards gender equality were observed across all beneficiaries.
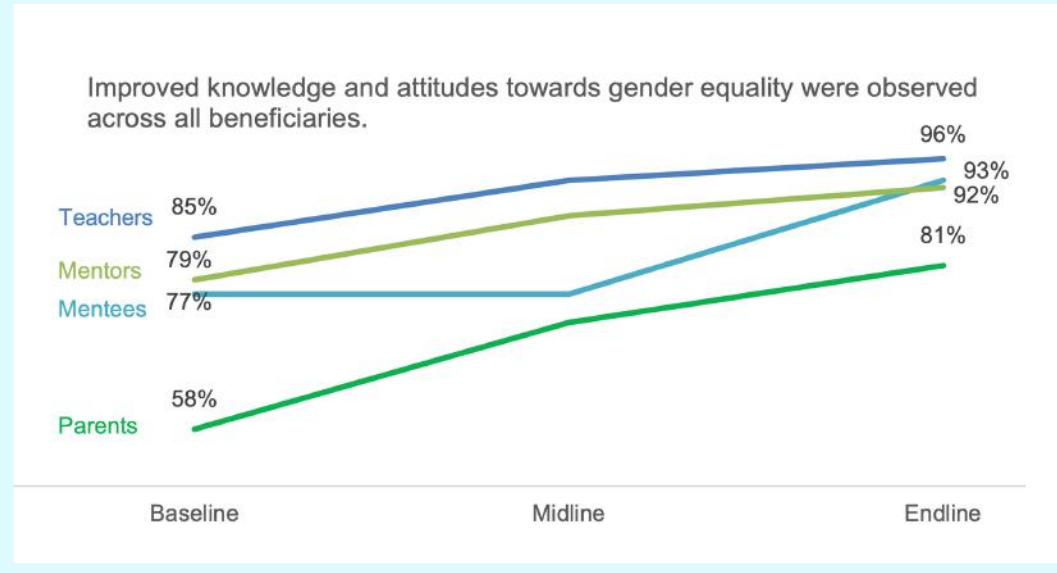
As identified in the original Gender Analysis of the program, there are acute disparities experienced by Mayan girls in rural communities of Guatemala, in the context of education and in many areas of life. A multi-faceted approach was implemented to engage all segments of the school community in shifting norms around women's rights, especially as relates to education.

First, a multi-day training and consultation was facilitated with support from Girl Rising Guatemala, engaging a total of 19 parents and teachers (12 F/ 7 M), with the intent to strengthen community-wide support and leadership for gender equality, and identify key themes for broader community engagement. Key themes chosen by local community members were regarding early marriage and teenage pregnancy.
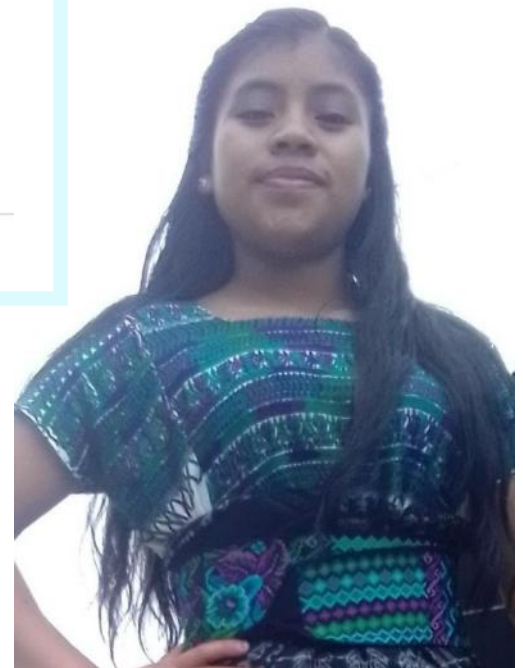
"My Dad used to think that men should be served food first and he also said that men take advantage of their studies but women not so much, he thought females just wanted to get married and drop out of school. After he saw my commitment to the program, he has been encouraging me to continue fighting for my dreams and studies. Today, I am confident that I can get ahead and become a great professional. I have spoken with my brothers and parents about what I have learned in the gender equality workshop that both men and women have the same rights"

Juana Lidia, Mentor (SFC)

Based on this process we engaged a local representative in each community, selected from among the initial trainees, to participate in additional training activities and then deliver workshops to the 75 mentors (45 F / 30 M). The mentors in turn applied what they learned in the workshops to facilitate activities among their mentees between February to April 2021. Every stage of this process was built around curriculum materials produced by Girl Rising Guatemala. SOS also arranged for the translation of selected GR materials into local Mayan dialects in partnership with the Mayan Languages Academy. Students were also encouraged to discuss the topics they learned about with their families at home.

This community-driven, train-the-trainer approach proved successful, built upon other tactics utilized during earlier stages of the program, including direct communication with parents by Program Officers and School Officials, and engaging students themselves to encourage girls participation in education. Additional, female participants have had the opportunity to participate in training opportunities that they might

Overall, there was a notable and obvious change in attitudes among all stakeholders, with a greater willingness and comfort to discuss gender-specific challenges for students, less resistance being faced by girls wishing to continue studying, and greater advocacy being exhibited to support the rights of girls and women in beneficiary communities.

While many significant improvements have been made, a comparison of Fathers' average endline score (75%) to Mothers' average (83%), indicates more work continues to be needed to engage male leaders in the community surrounding the value of education for women in the community, especially in the community of Ojo de Agua where fathers endline score of 67% was significantly less than SFC (84%) or LA (88%).

"The combined impact of these efforts is made evident by the following outcomes:

- 73% of mentors (75% F / 85% M) demonstrated improvements in KAP scores between baseline and midline related to gender equality, bringing the average score for female mentors to 92%, and 91% for males.

- 83% of mentees (78% F/ 87% M) also demonstrated improved KAP scores, bringing the average score to 93% at the endline.

- At the endline 91% (11/12) of teachers surveyed were able to identify specific actions they were taking to support gender equality for female students, compared with only 67% of teachers (8/12) who were able to do so at baseline.

- At baseline, parents had significantly lower KAP scores related to gender equality than students or teachers. Parents' average KAP scores on gender equality increased between baseline to midline from 58% to 81%, with significant gains for both mothers and fathers.

# Validation of Results

Our evaluation strategy originally included the use of control sites to be able to compare results across indicators for the sake of validation. However, this strategy was not feasible given the onset of the pandemic at the same time as baseline evaluation. After consultation with FIT, we adapted our validation strategy as best as possible within the circumstances, to compare results among those who participated most actively in the project with those who participated least.

However, given the overall high levels of participation in the program we did not end with significant enough sample sizes among "lesser active participants" for appropriate comparison – i.e. only 1 mentor, and 6 mentees fell into this category. Additionally, there are other variables that may impact the validation of results among these small sample sizes. For instance, the mentees that chose not to participate as actively may have done so because they already had sufficient support for their studies at home and did not require extra support.

While it is difficult to assess exact levels of causation or correlation of the project with outcomes, the strong measures of success across all indicators, combined with qualitative data from Rolling Profile Interviews and staff observation provide an overall clear picture of success.

"He was more dedicated when it came to doing his homework, he had more support and that made him learn more."

Maria Susan Ju, Parent of Mentee

## 3.2 Risk and Mitigation Measures

The table provided in Annex 7.3.1 provides a detailed summary of the risk mitigation measures implemented throughout testing. In particular, the implementation of safety measures related to COVID-19 (especially related to postponement of large events) led to significant changes in budget, scope, timeline, and evaluation approaches, adapted in consultation with FIT. Below we've provided updates to two key risks that were identified as part of the mid-term evaluation.

The first risk was regarding participant retention from the community of OdA, and overall program effectiveness, originating from challenges selecting relevant content fit to the lower baseline state of academic proficiency, lower levels of Spanish-language comprehension, and lower levels of teacher engagement. As described in our mid-term report, multiple corrective actions were implemented to improve the relevance and quality of content, and increase teachers' engagement. These strategies proved successful with end line ratings on the content improving to 4.64 / 5 among mentors, and 4.93 / 5 among mentees, and youth showing increased levels of engagement in the program.



""It motivates me that people in my community see me as an example student for others."
Alejandro Fernando Xuc Toc (Mentor, LA)s)

Another key risk identified at midline was regarding the uncertain state of school reopenings in 2021. In February 2021, schools indeed began to reopen with staggered schedules and partial capacity. Mentors' therefore had reduced availability to participate in the scale of program activities that had been implemented during earlier stages of testing. To ensure students were able to continue to participate in program activities, activities were scheduled through close coordination among students, teachers, and school allies to accommodate students' staggered schedules and to re-align expectations of mentors based on increased school commitments



10  Strategies focused on more direct engagement of SOS HQ staff in coordinating communication between with school directors and local teachers. Through this process we increased training, support, and oversight and accountability mechanisms related to content selection.

# 3.3 Pivots and Iterations

As a result of COVID-19, virtually all outputs of the workplan had pivots. Those changes have been previously coordinated with FIT, and are summarized in Annex 7.3.2 for reference. A few of the most significant pivots are explained in greater detail below.

## PIVOTS RELATED TO COVID-19

● **Learning Circle Structure and Location:** Whereas originally learning circles had been intended to be delivered in large group settings (eg. 30+ student participants) with Program Officers and Teachers playing the lead role in facilitation, and youth mentors supporting smaller breakout sessions, this was not feasible due to restrictions on large group gatherings arising from COVID-19. Instead, youth mentors met directly with their mentees in local neighbourhood clusters and had a more active leadership role in designing and facilitating sessions. This decentralized structure also involved a greater focus on the use of the Rumie system, with limited opportunities to make use of the RACHEL system which has a limited 'range'.

●**Virtual Exchange Workshops:** Whereas originally we had arranged a partnership to have journalism and videography professors and students to travel to Guatemala to help facilitate storytelling and public communications related to the project, these activities were instead implemented through virtual workshops where youth mentors were trained to share stories of their own community through video, podcast, and photo essays. These virtual workshops ended up being among the most frequently cited highlights of the entire program experience among mentors and are likely to be an ongoing pillar of SOS' ongoing programming.

●**Validation Strategy:** As noted in Section 3.3 regarding validation, our evaluation strategy originally included use of control sites to be compare results across indicators for the sake of validation, but this was not feasible due to the circumstances of the pandemic. In consultation with FIT, we adapted our validation strategy to instead compare results among those who participated most actively in the project with those who participated least.

● **Community Dialogues:** Due to the restrictions on large group gatherings, our end-of-program Knowledge Sharing Summit was adapted to facilitate various small group, virtually-based sessions based on specific areas of interest and engagement within the program. Overall, 65 individuals engaged in small group knowledge sharing sessions. Additionally, other activities to be delivered through large scale community events were adapted into small group and 1 on 1 discussions.

## ADDITIONAL PIVOTS

One insight gleaned early in the testing period was the significant variation in students' ages, due to delays in childhood with starting studies, or the need for students to take periodic hiatuses throughout their education (eg. due to economic challenges). As such, we expanded age eligibility criteria for mentor applications. In the community of Ojo de Agua, we also expanded eligibility for mentees to grade four, due to the lower enrolment rates observed for younger students in this community in particular. These iterations to our original project proposal were likely to have been needed regardless of the circumstances presented by COVID-19.

# 3.4 Lessons Learned

We collected beneficiary feedback through a variety of methods, including: Creation of local Community Steering Committees and Youth Committees; Participant satisfaction survey from Mentors and Mentees; KAP Surveys & Rolling participant interviews; Ongoing PO interactions with students, parents, and teachers; Weekly meetings of SOS staff with local Program Officers; and hosting end-of-program debrief sessions with key program partners. Below we've summarized key insights gathered based on the three key questions we had identified at the outset of testing as being critical for future program scalability and sustainability.

**Q1: How can we best support the training and coordination of youth mentors?**

One of the most significant questions associated with the program was regarding students' (ages 14-21) willingness and ability to be entrusted with leadership responsibilities of youth mentors. The level of responsibility entrusted to youth was put to the test even more given the adapted program structure arising from the pandemic, which required youth to act as the facilitators of learning circle activities with minimal supervision. The results emphatically validated the overall efficacy of the program approach while offering a number of important insights about the supports and structures required to enable the leadership of youth:

"Many parents gave me good feedback from the mentors and it is very impressive to know that young people at their young age took up the challenge of supporting fifth and sixth grade students. The only observation could be is that it could (also)help third and fourth grade children".

- Alfredo Israel Pop, Teacher (LA)

- Engaging local committees to select mentors helps youth feel entrusted by their community, and enhances their accountability as well as the perceived fairness of the process
- Youth are likely to feel intimidated by their roles at first. Initial training activities should especially focus on helping youth feel confident speaking in a group settings, which may be unfamiliar due to cultural norms. Additionally, training should introduce mentors to sample icebreaker / energizer activities, and offer various learning strategies to facilitate interactive discussion
- Mentors must be provided with high quality and appropriate content to support learning circles. There can be significant variation in youth's levels of baseline knowledge. Regular meetings with mentors to review questions about content is essential to ensure mentors have a strong understanding of topics before they engage with mentees.
- Engagement of mentors of different ages and grade levels helps to support learning among mentors through a cascading leadership model
- Mentors should not be asked to act in a disciplinary role. Situations of misbehaviour or absenteeism from mentees or are best dealt with by Program Staff or assigned partners.
- Building a sense of community among mentors and providing fun incentives for participation will increase their sense of ownership of the program. This includes use of simple incentives such as providing buttons/badges, achievement certificates, t-shirts, and celebratory events
- Virtual exchanges with youth from other countries were a significant source of motivation for mentors
- The provision of modest scholarships for mentors is a highly important component to reduce financial barriers to immediate program participation and enable future educational planning. Even with scholarships provided there must be attentiveness paid to the level of time commitment expected of youth.

## Q2: How to select and deploy e-learning content?

While it was clear to all program stakeholders upfront that technology could play an important role in increasing access to educational resources, the school communities had limited existing technology infrastructure and limited experience working with technology. As such there were a number of significant questions regarding the best methods for deployment. The rollout strategy had to be developed to facilitate a sustainable, locally-owned approach. The exact nature of content required extensive research, consultation, and coordination to ensure local relevance; and ongoing testing, troubleshooting, and retraining was required to find the most efficient means of deploying technology, while working within regions without steady internet access.

> "When I started I was afraid to use the Tablet, I did not know how to use (it), but the teacher Antonio taught us videos on how to use the Tablet, we also did exercises and activities with which little by little I lost my fear."
>
> Maria Sulamita Us Chití,
> Mentor i(OdA)

- Due to significant local variation regarding core learning objectives and students' levels of proficiency, national curriculum standards cannot be used as a reference point for content selection. Teachers from within the community who are intimately familiar with students' specific proficiency levels should be actively engaged at all stages on an ongoing basis.
- Teachers are likely to require support with learning how to search for content and make use of it. Clear roles and responsibilities need to be established among stakeholders involved in content selection and curation to ensure alignment with students' needs. Teachers also need to be provided with necessary equipment (tablets and internet credits)
- Incentives and recognition for teachers may encourage other teachers to adopt similar approaches
- When selecting content, the visual aesthetics of the content must be considered (eg. colourful materials) to support effective student engagement in learning, and the length of videos should be kept to 5-10 minutes
- A diversity of content types should be utilized, rather than just relying on videos. E-learning activities can be effectively complemented by individual or group activities such as art projects.
- For many topics, a significant body of free, Spanish-language content is already available. The challenge lies in curating this content effectively.
- While Mayan language resources are preferred by local stakeholders for only selected topics, there are very few resources available in Ixil and Poqomchi. Mayan-language translation is further complicated because variations of a single dialect can differ even between neighbouring communities.
- The creation of high-quality new content is resource-intensive and challenging. There is also limited existing capacity available locally to lead production of high quality e-learning content.
- Use of Rumie is intuitive for end-users, even among students with limited technological savviness. However, the administrative, analytic, and reporting functions of Rumie are prone to various technical and user errors. Sufficient time and resources need to be allocated for technical training and troubleshooting. Without strong internet connections, syncing content to tablets using SD cards is most efficient.
- Even in regions without widespread internet access there may be creative means of enabling youth to access the internet to expand online learning capabilities (eg. providing internet credits by phone, providing transportation to neighbouring regions with internet, arranging installation of internet services locally)
- The use of virtual workshops was a compelling way to promote engagement with educational content and build technology-based skills
- Procurement of digital devices within Guatemala can be challenging due to import regulations and limited options among vendors

**Q3: How to encourage gender equality within communities?**
While direct program partners were deeply committed to encouraging women's empowerment, the culturally sensitive and potentially divisive nature of topics required steady care and intention to build widespread community buy-in for promoting sustainable, locally owned outcomes. The pace and approach of the Gender Equality Strategy's rollout required significant consultation and then had to be closely monitored and adapted. This included accounting for the prevailing beliefs and attitudes among men as well as women, across all stakeholders groups, including students, their parents, teachers, and community leaders.

"My uncle has 3 daughters and 3 sons, he only gave school to his son, but not to his daughter, and when I asked him why he replied that spending money on women in education was a waste of it as they will end up changing diapers. I felt angry and I didn't think it was true. I am helping him by sharing what I learned at the Guate Groundwell Program"
                    Deisy Moran, Mentor (LA)

- Cultural norms about gender equality show signs of changing across generations, demonstrated by the significant changes in baseline scores between parents and youth participants. Among parents there is a strong interest in supporting womens' participation in education, but programming must especially work to help identify and remove the practical barriers that continue to cause inequities (eg. scheduling activities to accommodate youth's other responsibilities, providing scholarships to reduce financial barriers).
- Training on gender equality is best delivered by individuals with lived experience of local conditions. However, there may be limited existing capacity within communities to deliver such trainings. Collaboration of additional organizations offers a promising approach to offer resources and best practices and adapt them to suit local contexts.
- For gender equality trainings to be effective they should account for, accommodate, and relate themselves to the religious beliefs of the community that in some cases may influence attitudes towards gender
- Significant cultural sensitivities remain around topics of gender equality related to sexual orientation and non-binary gender identities.
- During the first period of test (March - December 2020), the program demonstrated improvements among parents related to Gender Equality even without offering formal gender equality trainings. This suggests it is possible to produce attitudinal changes by focusing on changing behaviours (ie. rather than assuming attitudes need to change first in order to lead to behaviour change).
- Recognizing the low levels of Spanish fluency and literacy among elder populations, parent-targeted training materials associated with gender equality should be provided in oral form in Indigenous languages
- Partnerships should be established up front to provide counselling and legal support in the likely event that prior incidents of abuse (eg. within students home) are disclosed during gender equality workshops
- During early stages of planning, concerns were expressed about parents' potential reactions to mixed gender groupings among adolescents. However, communities were broadly supportive of this approach. In fact, there were positive reactions to engaging males to engage with roles and responsibilities traditionally associated with females (eg. sweeping and cleaning after a workshop session), and vice versa for males

**Q4: How to administer and supervise program activities?**

The program entailed multiple components, involving a diversity of stakeholders and oftentimes logistical complexities. Strategies of program coordination and communication had to be developed and adopted that would be fit with local circumstances, to support sustainability of outcomes and scalability of the approach.



*Shown above are the Project Officers originally selected to lead the innovation in their communities. Below is the entire project team, including SOS & SIDS staff*



- Having Program Officers who are deeply familiar with local contexts is critical to the success of the program. Program Officers do not necessarily require formal experience as educators, nor working with technology to be successful, but familiarity with local contexts and presence of relationships with key stakeholders is critical. Program Officers must also be empowered to make decisions locally while remaining within a guiding framework.
- Sufficient time should be allocated to provide staff with training related to technology, teaching & learning methodologies
- Data collection related to monitoring and evaluation practices is resource intensive, especially considering challenges of internet connectivity, literacy levels, and translation requirements
- There is significant variation in the level of detail available in school enrolment and attendance records among communities, and significant challenges with accessing and interpreting data at a regional level.
- All components of the program are interconnected. The impacts of the program to date cannot be attributed to any one factor (ie. only due to mentorship, or only due to access to e-learning resources), but rather is due to all the components of the program working together in tandem.
- If possible, additional budget allocations should be established as an Emergency Fund that can provide a fair and transparent process to support youth participants who may be faced with extenuating circumstances (eg. family health challenges, etc).
- Especially as a result of the new NGO laws brought forward in February 2020, the financial management requirements are highly burdensome. Many practices required by the legislation don't fit with norms within the local communities. All parties require further training to understand nuances of the legislation.
- In the context of developing a new, iterative innovation, it is critical to build and maintain strong and trusting relationships among all team members and facilitate open communications. Given inherent power dynamics associated with international cooperation efforts as well as traditional cultural norms of hierarchy within beneficiary communities, extra efforts must be made to empower local staff
- The frequency and scope of adaptation in an testing-focused environment may also be less familiar from a cultural standpoint. Culturally-relevant training specific to the concept of "innovation" should be provided to all team members
- Having at least 1 member of the staff team with advanced proficiency in both English and Spanish is helpful to enabling team collaboration and direct communications with beneficiaries
- Scheduling of team calls must account for timezone differences (including daylight savings time), and also the weather patterns that impact internal reliability based on time of day

# 3.5 Gender Equality Strategy Implementation

The project applied a Gender transformative (GEM 3) approach, with a Gender Equality Strategy (GES) developed through both external literature reviews and local stakeholder consultations engaging a total of 176 parents, teachers, and students.

As of 2015, the Gender Inequality Index positioned Guatemala at 113 of 159 countries studied, demonstrating the strong presence of discriminatory social norms infringing on womens' human rights, political representation, participation in schooling and the labour market, social independence, health, and safety from gender-based violence (USAID, 2018). USAID found that gender disparities were especially prevalent in indigenous communities, with lower school participation, literacy levels and negative biases from teachers (USAID, 2018).

Gender-inclusive programming and implementation strategies were incorporated at all stages of the project lifecycle, and gender-disaggregated indicators were utilized in monitoring and evaluation. The three immediate outcomes within our Logic Model mutually reinforced one another in support of gender equality and empowerment of female Indigenous youth within the school environment. Below we've provided updates about the implementation of each core component of the GES

**PROGRAM LEADERSHIP:**
Women continued to successfully serve in senior decision-making roles at all levels to ensure the diverse needs of female participants are considered throughout testing activities. The field team was led by Sheily Carrillo. Isabel Zacarias was the lead Program Officer. The local Community Steering Committees were made up of representatives of different local community organizations. Originally, the committees were primarily made up of men, as a result of the decision-making roles men typically hold within the community due to prevailing cultural norms. However, we worked with the committees to arrange additional positions specifically to ensure adequate representation of women on the selection committee. Additionally, 11/17 leaders of the youth steering committees established were also young women.



**YOUTH MENTOR RECRUITMENT & SELECTION:**
Through targeted recruitment, we were able to have females account for 60% of all mentors. This was achieved through hosting in-person information sessions for parents that emphasized the focus of girls' participation. Promotional materials also specifically encouraged applications from girls. Additionally, the provision of scholarships for mentors helped reduce barriers to girls' participation in the program, and strengthen parental support.

In the community of Las Arrugas, in which local schools serve a number of surrounding villages, there was also a strong focus paid to ensuring representation of different villages, recognizing that girls from more remote communities often face the greatest barriers to education. In OdA, a challenge was faced regarding mentor recruitment given that there are very few people (and especially fewer women) from the community who had moved into higher levels of education. Therefore due to the reduced pool of candidates, there is a lower percentage of female mentors in OdA compared to the other two test sites.

*Shown to the left are members of the Youth Committee supporting program design in Las Arrugas*

**COMMUNITY TRAINING:**

Originally we had established a partnership with the Abriendo Oportunidades program to offer gender equality trainings within each community, given their specific expertise in supporting women's empowerment in Mayan communities. However, due to the impacts of COVID-19 it became unfeasible for the organization to be involved. We sought to identify individuals or organizations within the communities with the required expertise to lead the trainings, however were not able to identify any such individuals. We instead worked with the Country Director of Girls Rising Guatemala (based in Guatemala City) to deliver hybrid virtual/in-person sessions for teachers and community leaders to initiate a 'train-the-trainer' approach, as described further in Section 3.1 regarding outcome 1130

**LEARNING CIRCLE PROGRAMMING:**

During learning circles, Program Officers established strong lines of communication with parents, to encourage continued participation of girls in learning circle activities and arrange accommodations where required (eg. timing of learning circle activities with reference to other familial obligations students may have). In the event of a mentees' repeated non-attendance at a learning circle session, Program Officers work alongside teachers and parents to identify barriers to participation and discuss any necessary accommodations required and coordinate workaround strategies for encouraging their continued participation. One adaptation made was with regards to the mentees participating in learning circles. Originally, it had been intended that 2/3rds of all mentees would be female. However, based on further discussion with local stakeholders it was determined to make the learning circles available to all grade 5 and 6 students within the communities. Participants in learning circles therefore reflect the existing trends in enrolment. In OdA, the program also supports grade 4 students due to low enrolment numbers in grades 5 and 6.

**MENTOR TRAINING & PROGRAMMING:**

A variety of tactics were used by Program Officers to support participation and empowerment of female mentors and mentees during Training Sessions and learning circle activities. Icebreaker activities and group facilitation and teaching techniques were used to help encourage the equal participation of all mentors during group activities and help all mentors feel their voices are valued. Teachers were engaged to help deliver sessions on teaching skills and strategies. Mentor training sessions have included learning opportunities for women on topics that generally they may not otherwise have exposure to (eg. entrepreneurship, financial literacy, digital storytelling). In particular, youth mentors commented on the empowerment they felt as a result of the digital storytelling workshops which allowed them to engage in self-expression activities. In fact, many of the youth mentors chose to focus on the theme of gender equality when given the chance to create a podcast, video, or photo essay about a community issue

**MONITORING & EVALUATION**

Surveys and rolling profile interview participants were selected to include representation of both women and men, as well as other demographic considerations. KAP Surveys were designed in collaboration with local field team to be responsive to local contexts, focusing on the most relevant topics to the gendered experience of girls and women. Rolling profile interviews were arranged so that interviewees could speak in private, without other members of their household present. Interviews were also conducted in pairings, which always included at least one female. Given low levels of adult literacy and Spanish comprehension among segments of the population, Program Officers provided assistance with translating surveys into local Mayan dialects and collecting answers verbally when requested. Data has been collected and reported on a gender-disaggregated basis in all aspects of program monitoring and evaluation to remain mindful of potential differential impacts on males and females throughout program activities.

**Emerging Gender Equality Strategy Opportunities**

Given that we were unable to identify individuals locally who had the pre-existing expertise to support gender equality training, we worked with national organizations' like Girls Rising Guatemala and Abriendo Oportunidades to leverage existing expertise in order to build greater local capacity within each community. This approach established a strong foundation for ongoing collaboration connecting efforts at local, regional, and national levels to support gender equality, and offers a promising practice to consider for future.

During delivery of Girls Rising curriculum activities, some students began to disclose situations of observing domestic abuse within their own homes and families, unrelated to program activities. We have been working to identify individuals with the sufficient training and expertise to provide culturally appropriate counselling and legal support if/when such situations are disclosed or suspected. There is limited local infrastructure to provide such assistance currently and there also remains significant social stigmas about accessing such supports. This represents an area for continued research, consultation, and capacity building.

## 3.6 Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

We have been working with national organizations and local representatives to provide training to Program Staff, Teachers, Community Leaders, and Youth Mentors related to gender equality, including the prevention of sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation. This included Spanish-language translation and dissemination of SOS' PSEA policy, and providing contacts for individuals and organizations to contact regarding any abuses of the policy.

One challenge faced with the local implementation of PSEA frameworks is with regards to identifying the authorities with legal responsibility for prosecuting sexual harassment or abuse allegations. Significant distrust exists locally of the formal criminal justice system. Local partners have instead advised that any claims be brought forward to Indigenous Women's Defense Committees rather than the police. To date, our approach has been to provide participants with information about all potential avenues to take in the event of a harassment case. However, no incidents of exploitation, harassment or abuse were reported in relation to the program.

# 4. Capacity Building with FIT

The opportunity to participate in a community of practice was one that was of significant interest to SOS. We were grateful to have the opportunity to begin initiating relationships and strengthen capacity with other grantees through the virtual training events, online forum, and small group knowledge-sharing sessions arising from this community of practice. For instance, in Summer 20201, in response to a question posed by another FIT grantee regarding MEL practices, SOS arranged for an informal discussion among various grantee organizations along with our Project's Evaluation and Gender Mainstreaming specialist to share specific practices and approaches related to our projects.

However, factors related to timing seemed to limit the scope of knowledge-sharing. SOS' project was among the first to launch as part of the FIT program, with even most grantees' projects within our own cohort having later start dates. By the point at which capacity building and knowledge- sharing opportunities began to be formally offered by FIT, SOS' project was already far into the process of implementation, offering fewer opportunities for program adaptation or development of significant new partnerships. Additionally, the onset of the pandemic during the start of our Cohort's projects meant many grantees were in the process of adapting to COVID 19, presenting challenges with organizational capacity. Such an uncertain context made it challenging to initiate significant new knowledge-sharing collaborations. Ideally, knowledge-sharing and community building opportunities could be facilitated in advance of project start dates to allow for the incorporation of new knowledge into the project design prior to implementation.

**Increase opportunities for small group exchanges based on shared themes of interest among grantees.**
Breakout rooms during virtual trainings were highly valuable but generally felt too short in timeframe to enable the depth of discussion required by the complexity of topics being covered. Methodologies such as "Open Space" meetings could be used to help facilitate small group discussion around shared themes of greatest interest to participants. Additionally, if capacity allows, more direct engagement from FIT to convene and facilitate conversations among grantees' pursuing similar goals and/or facing similar challenges would be helpful, given FIT's unique vantage point to understand grantees' common project goals, activities, and challenges. Enabling in-depth relationship-building and trust-building among sub-groups of grantees would likely also encourage greater motivation to participation in large group activities and online community discussions

**Clarify knowledge-sharing expectations of grantees in advance of project initiation.**
Additional clarification would be helpful on the following topics: designating which knowledge-sharing activities were optional or required, and expected levels of participation in the community of practice; establishing standards related to the privacy and confidentiality of information shared through knowledge sharing; clarifying roles of how FIT staff would be involved with knowledge-sharing opportunities self-organized among grantees; clarifying role of collaborating partners within the community of practice

**Use Slack apps to help animate the online community.** For instance, the "Translate for Channels" app could be used to facilitate bilingual communications among Francophone and Anglophone participants; additional channels could be established for "requests" or "wishlists"

SOS is excited to continue being part of FIT's Community of Practice and looks forward to contributing in whatever ways we can even following our project's end date. For instance, we have been invited to share our project experience during a virtual event in September organized by FIT, themed around innovation in education. We welcome any opportunities to connect with other grantees working towards common goals or facing similar challenges, as well as to share lessons learned from our work.

**Build funder-grantee trust and understanding.**

Recognizing that many SMOs funded through FIT may be new to working with institutional funders such as FIT, and also that the funder-grantee relationship is one that comes with inherent power dynamics, strong efforts are needed to establish open communication between funder and grantee. This could encourage grantees' participation in the broader community of practice. Some means of strengthening trust would be:

1) Use of video calls rather than audio calls during initial orientation and welcome meetings,

2) Clarifying roles of the various staff within the FIT team and when/how grantees should communicate with staff

3) Providing clear meetings agendas

4) Clarifying expected timelines for responses to questions

5) Providing specific, actionable, timely feedback on grantee reports, and clarifying whether suggested changes are required or optional

6) Provide transparency in the process of selecting SMOs that are featured through Community of Practice calls

7) Establishing clear guidelines, processes, and timelines for submitting and approving 'change requests', and being mindful of the impact of delays on overall implementation of innovations

8) Providing clear guidance on reporting standards in advance of project initation

# 5. Sustainability / Exit Strategy

As per SOS original program proposal, internal resources valued at over $25,000 CAD per year have been allocated to support the sustainability and scalability of the innovation, following the initial period of testing that was supported by FIT. This strategy includes both short term and longer term components:

## Immediate Program Continuation

The short term strategy is focused on continuing existing program activities until the end of the current school year (November 2021). Our original community of mentors have been invited to reapply for continuation in the program. A reduced number of spaces were available due to budget constraints, so a competitive selection process was led by local partners. The number of mentees supported by each mentor will be increased. While the need to temporarily reduce the number of mentors and the level of staff capacity we are able to support is disappointing to all parties involved, the rationale is widely understood and accepted from local stakeholders due to budget constraints, and the efforts made to sustain programming are widely appreciated.

## Long Term Sustainability

We are seeking additional program funding partners to assist with the expansion of the youth led learning circle approach to additional communities throughout Latin America with similar profiles as those engaged during the initial testing, while incorporating lessons learned. This will be complemented by further formalizing the program's procedures to support increased scalability. SOS is also expanding fundraising initiatives, especially monthly donor appeals, to establish a continuing basis for financial support to support mentors' monthly scholarship stipends.

The future program strategy is being developed in consultation with program officers and local partners, including the facilitation of debrief sessions with all key partners.

Key considerations being considered for future programming include:

- Continuing to seek new ways to best engage youth, especially girls, most at-risk of dropping out of school, or those who already have stopped participation. For instance, while all students came from "rural regions", there were further inequities observed between students depending upon their relative proximity to schools (in connection with other factors such as parental levels of literacy, rates of poverty, etc). The use of radio and WhatsApp-based communications may offer possibilities for engagement of additional youth audiences
- Increasing the scope of teacher engagement and training to support integration of student-driven pedagogical practices into classrooms
- Aligning of KAP surveys to externally validated indicators regarding self-efficacy, commitment to education, attitudes towards gender equality
- Increasing scope of virtual exchange programs to connect youth from different cultures, which were exceptionally well received by all parties and often cited by Guatemalan youth as among their favourite memories overall
- Increasing the scope of parent engagement in the program
- Increasing the scope of content provided related to entrepreneurship and also agricultural topics to increase the perceived economic value of education, and its fit with local economic needs and opportunities
- Exploring how similar approach of peer mentorship could be adapted to serve additional community needs during transitions from lower to upper secondary school, and from upper secondary to post-secondary

# 6. Financial Narrative

Please refer to Appendix 7.2 for the detailed budget with forecasted vs. actual expenditures. The only variances from the revised budget officially approved by FIT in January were related to the following factors, and were approved by FIT in early May 2021:

- Cancellation of the Control Site within our evaluation framework (due to the complications arising from COVID-19). This change in this approach was previously approved by FIT in October/November 2020.

- Reduction in the 'Learning Circles' food budget. Due to the delayed start of the school year in Guatemala in 2021 (as a result of COVID-19), food expenses for our Learning Circle sessions were lower than originally projected.

# 7. Appendices

- **7.1 – Testing Measurement Framework**
  Refer to Worksheet #1 of the accompanying Excel file

- **7.2 – Budget with Forecasted vs Actuals Expenditures**
  Refer to Worksheet #2 of the accompanying Excel file

- **7.3 - Communications**
  Refer to Worksheet #3 of the accompanying Excel File

- **7.4 – Other relevant information**
  - 7.4a - Risk Mitigation Measures
  - 7.4b - Workplan Adaptations
  - 7.4c - Works Cited



"I see greater security in them, especially in my daughter, they learn more with technology and practice being teachers at this age, that's very good"

Andres Hermoguenez Sajic Pacheco, Parent (SFC)

"In the program I learned about all the contents that were uploaded in Rumie, thanks to that I am committed to continue studying at the university, (in the field of) Pedagogy. After I graduate, I want to share my experience and knowledge with the children in my community and to continue improving education"

Maria Vilma Toma Toma, Mentor (OdA)

"Participating in the learning circles has been helpful because I learned by watching videos while having a lot of fun. Things that I didn't understand before now I understand better""

Dulce Maria Mo Cul, Mentee (LA)s

# 7.4a Risk Mitigation Measures

| Risk | Risk Mitigation Strategies Implemented |
|---|---|
| **Inability to sustain sufficient youth and community participation** | • Selecting test site locations wherein SOS & local partners have string pre-existing community relationships<br>• Consulting with relevant stakeholders throughout program development<br>• Incentivizing peer coach and mentee participation and reducing barriers through scholarships and food<br>• Communicating a fair & transparent participant selection process<br>• Engaging more participants than minimum thresholds<br>• Hiring tri-lingual program officers to deliver culturally relevant programming<br>• Increasing communication with teachers and community stakeholders in Ojo de Agua to improve relevance of selected content<br>• Strengthening attendance collection record and reporting systems to monitor future changes in engagement levels |
| **Security of Technology** | • Using high security storage vaults and protective tablet cases<br>• Signing Participant Responsibility contracts<br>• Installing Android Device Manager app for remote locking<br>• Educating communities and users on technical security features<br>• Using post-incident reports in the event of a damaged or lost tablet, and coordinating replacement or repair costs if needed |
| **Deployment, Maintenance and Adoption of Technology** | • Delivering tech training on use and management features among all relevant stakeholders<br>• Scheduling regular online syncing for software/content updates<br>• Budgeting for technology ancillary costs (ie. electricity, storage, etc)<br>• Monitoring device usage and performance through RMC<br>• Delivering additional training to participants to address gaps |
| **Prevailing cultural gender norms and male dissent in communities** | • Engaging men and boys to be engaged throughout the program<br>• Communicating benefits to entire community of gender equality<br>• Inclusion of scholarships and incentives for girls' participation<br>• Mainstreaming women in leadership roles and program design<br>• Translating resources about gender equality into Mayan-languages to facilitate greater participation of parents |
| **Participant Safety** | • Enforcing Anti-Harassment & Safety policies<br>• Implementing privacy policies to protect sensitive participant information<br>• Scheduling program activities during daylight hours in groups of 3+<br>• Implementation of COVID-19 Safety Precautions, including additional measures related to reopening of schools in February 2021 |
| **Efficacy of Youth Mentorship** | • Including recent graduates (eg. up to age 21) alongside current "lower secondary" students<br>• Utilizing existing resources and best practices learned through other youth mentor programs and utilizing resources from another proven programs (Abriendo Oportunidades, INTECAP) to support mentors' training<br>• Delivering upfront and ongoing training for mentors<br>• Providing scholarships for peer mentors, and utilizing Participant Learning Contracts<br>• Strengthening feedback collection and review processes to closely monitor changes in effectiveness<br>• Providing additional training to mentors in Ojo de Agua |

"Youth are more active now and above all more responsible, mentors are a great example to follow"
Ines Ostuma Toma, parent (SFC)

"The children have immersed themselves in the learning circles coordinated by youth mentors. They are learning more and are on the right path to being more committed to their studies"
Abnego de la Cruz, Teacher (SFC)

"I liked the gender equality workshops because sometimes girls don't have the opportunity to study. These sessions taught me that boys and girls have the same rights,"
Belinda Castro, Mentor (OdA)

# 7.4b Workplan Adaptations

| OUTPUT | ADAPTATION(S) | CAUSE OF ADAPTATION |
|---|---|---|
| 1111 E-learning resources compiled, created, and distributed | 1) Use of "SD Cards" to sync Rumie content in OdA and SfC instead of syncing through | Improved efficiency of process |
| | 2) Selection of e-learning content initially focused on supporting students' core academic needs (rather than other 'life skills') | Increased need for core academic support for students in response to school closures |
| 1112 E-learning technologies deployed | Installation of RACHEL LAN systems delayed (installed in November 2020 in OdA and SfC, and planned for January 2021 in LA) | - Lack of relevance of RACHEL system in the context of school closures<br>- Challenges to deliver training and installation due to restrictions on interregional travel and group gatherings |
| 1121: Initial Youth Mentor training delivered (Includes gender equality training) | Mentor training process adapted into a multi-phased process, beginning with instructional videos | COVID-19 related restrictions on in-person gatherings |
| 1121: Weekly Youth Mentor trainings & program planning sessions hosted | Scheduling, location, and format of mentor trainings adapted to incorporate physical distancing requirements | COVID-19 related restrictions on in-person gatherings |
| 1122: Weekly Learning Circles Hosted & Evaluated | 1) Scheduling, location, and format of learning circles adapted to incorporate physical distancing requirements<br>2) Increased focus on academic reinforcement through early stages of the innovation | COVID-19 related restrictions on in-person gatherings |
| 1122: Set-up of Youth Led Steering Committees | Delayed set-up of youth-led steering committees (established in Month 9 in SFC and OdA; and in month 11 in LA) | Delayed start of learning circle activities due to COVID-19 restrictions |
| 1131: Community Dialogue Events Hosted | Reduced scope of community events/ dialogues | COVID-19 related restrictions on in-person gatherings |
| 1131: Promotion & Coordination of Knowledge Sharing Summit | Shift of Knowledge Sharing Summit to small virtual debrief sessions | COVID-19 related restrictions on in-person gatherings and intraregional travel |
| 1133: Indigenous girls present at community dialogues, Knowledge Sharing Summit & Webinar | Reduced scope of community events/ dialogues | COVID-19 related restrictions on in-person gatherings |
| 1133: Durham College (DC) team delivers digital storytelling workshops | Digital storytelling workshops facilitated virtually | COVID-19 related restrictions on international gatherings |
| MONITORING & EVALUATION ACTIVITIES<br>Control Group design identified and set- | Control site cancelled | Inability for teachers to support control site as a result of school closures |
| KAP Surveys | Baseline KAP Surveys not captured from Mentees | Challenges with mass data collection during COVID-19 (eg. inability to host large community events) |
| Collection of attendance records | Attendance records not collected on a per session basis | Scope of data collection not feasible given the adapted, decentralized structure of learning circles |
| Communication Content Shared to Canadian audiences | Timeframes for implementation of communications strategy delayed at start of project | Unpredictability of program activities due to COVID-19, and challenges with capacity due to the responses to COVID-19 |

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