



Catrinka Girls Project

The Catrinka Girls Project is an education and life skills mentoring program for indigenous Mayan girls aged 8-19 in Totonicapan, Guatemala. It is run by **Redmi Aq'ab'al**, an NGO formed in 2014 by young graduates of the Abriendo Oportunidades (AO) program created and run by the Population Council to reach poor and at-risk indigenous girls, aged 8-19, in rural communities in Guatemala, with basic education and life skills mentoring.

A 2004 survey documented that Guatemala's rural indigenous girls who are classified as extremely poor (1/4th of the total) had the worst education outcomes in the country: only 1/2 of the girls of primary school age had entered school; fewer than 10% of girls aged 13-24 who entered primary school completed it; and just 14% of these primary school graduates entered secondary school. The AO program was created to harness the power and potential of rural indigenous girls aged 8 to 19 by building their personal, social, health and economic assets and capabilities as a core strategy for keeping girls in school and delaying the age of marriage and pregnancy. Over the past ten years, the AO program has reached 10,000 girls in 150 communities and built a network of hundreds of young indigenous mentors. AO's program works with communities to develop safe spaces for girls, where girls gather with mentors for basic education, exchange of health and reproductive information, financial literacy training, and to build a network to support them in taking charge of their own futures.

"At its core, the program was constructed on the hypothesis that strategic investments in the poorest girls from the poorest communities are not only good for the girl, but also they directly support the achievement of local, national and international development goals, including the Millenium Development Goals. The richness of the program lies in addressing the complex and inter-related transitions that occur during puberty and adolescence across all domains of girls lives, including education, family life and sexuality." (Scale Up Strategy, Population Council, April 2014).

Catrinka was introduced to AO by Judith Bruce, a lifelong global expert in adolescent girls health. Judith taught us that early adolescence is the pivotal, and often invisible moment for girls - that is when their lives often go off track. Girls reach sexual maturity earlier than boys, and in many areas are withdrawn from society to preserve their economic and social value and for their own safety, just at the moment when they most crave a social network. One of the basic assets that the Population Council's programs for adolescent girls, such as AO, strive to achieve is that every girl has 5 friends and a place to meet them. That such a simple thing is an aspirational goal for so many girls inspires us to be part of this phenomenal program.

The AO program is evidence-based and produces results: sustained school enrollment (72% of AO girl leaders were in school at the end of the 2009-10 cycle); desire for continued education (52% of AO leaders want to complete university and 32% want to complete vocational training); delayed marriage (97% of AO leaders remained unmarried during the program cycle) and childbearing (94% of AO leaders remained unmarried during the program). These results show the power of simple investments in girls, in the context of huge challenges in Guatemala. In 2012 25% of the babies born in Guatemala were born to adolescent girls. Today 40% of those adolescent mothers are single; 60% are indigenous; 70% are living in poverty and 80% have abandoned school. These girls are denied the chance to decide for themselves what they want their future to be.

Program experience from AO over time has demonstrated that it is challenging to maintain the active participation of rural girls in the program beyond the age of 15, as the demand on them to contribute to the family economy increases, they marry and move in with their in-laws, and the lucky few must migrate from their rural communities in order to attend secondary school. All of these conditions have an economic underpinning and the bottom line is that young women in poor rural communities need to earn money. Upon "graduation" from AO, and as their reproductive, social and other risks continue to climb, the Guatemala team has been exploring livelihoods opportunities for young women, so graduates can be connected with viable income-generation strategies in order to continue pursuing their more ambitious life plans, which most often involve continued education and vocational training.

This is where Catrinka's partnership with Redmi comes in. Redmi was formed by AO graduates in their late teens and early 20s, who continue to be peer mentors to girls in their own communities. Catrinka supported Redmi to bring the AO curriculum to three communities, which included recruiting and training mentors, running mapping exercises to identify and recruit the most vulnerable girls, and building community support for the work. In addition, Catrinka supported Redmi to build a small production co-op, where older girls (aged 14-19) were engaged in making friendship bracelets that Catrinka purchased. Through this experience, the older girls had an incentive to continue to attend the program, and earned small amounts of income they were able to put towards meeting their educational and other life goals. The Redmi and AO team were able to better evaluate the impact of their financial literacy curriculum, and the Redmi team gained experience in operating a small business including quality control, meeting production deadlines, and invoicing and logistics.

As of January 2018, the Catrinka Girls Project has funding to continue through the end of 2018, and is seeking additional sources of support to continue its work beyond that time horizon. The Redmi team is replicating the mapping exercise they completed at the beginning of the 3-year cycle to identify vulnerable girls, and will work to analyze their impact in terms of the outcomes for those girls in the intervening 3 years and how the project impacted them. Those results are expected to be included in a full review and impact assessment of the project's 3 year cycle available later in 2018.

Meet the girls and young women of **Redmi Aq'ab'al** in these short videos:

Younger girls

[Magdalena](#), 10, is the oldest of three children, and her parents work in the fields. When her mother is working, she looks after her 1 year old sister. Before joining, she was very shy and didn't like expressing her opinions. Through the program, she has been learning about her strengths and discovering her skills, and says her attitude and thoughts have changed. She loves sharing the experience with other girls, and building a network of girlfriends. Magdalena wants to become a teacher so she can help the girls in her community.

[Ericka](#), 12, lives with her aunt and two little brothers. Her parents had to move away to be able to earn enough to support their children's education. Before joining the Catrinka Girls Project, her classmates made fun of her for being too scared to answer a question in class. Now she is discovering her voice and isn't afraid to express her opinions. Her dream is to get an advanced degree and become a teacher to help her community.

Older girl:

[Benita](#), 15, would like to continue formal education but doesn't have the financial resources to do it. Once a year she works 2-3 months over the holidays in a restaurant kitchen or taking care of children for a wealthy family to contribute economically to her family. She would like to build her own business and sees the program as a way to build the skills to do that.

Mentors:

[Elizabeth](#) is the coordinator of Redmi, the NGO formed by indigenous women to provide education and life skills mentoring to adolescent girls in the most vulnerable and poor rural areas of Guatemala. "We see what the girls' lives are like. It is very difficult. They have very few opportunities to be able to succeed in life.." The program's goal is to strengthen girls "so they can make their own decisions about their own lives."

[Hermelinda](#) is the leader of the productive skills component of the Catrinka Girls Project. "I feel very good to be passing my skills to other adolescent girls who need them." I invite every adolescent girl to be a fighter, to be an entrepreneur, that each of us be an example for every girl who comes behind us."

CATRINKA'S IMPACT IN NUMBERS

- 4** Rural communities in the indigenous highlands of Totonicapán reached by REDMI during between April and November 2015
- 2** Senior mentors supported by a monthly stipend to recruit, teach and work with adolescent girls and young women ages 14 to 25 on the production of bracelets for Catrinka
- 3** Young mentors ages 15 to 19 recruited and trained by REDMI to work with girls in three of the four communities reached between April and November 2015
- 20** Adolescent girls and young women between the ages 14 to 25 who earned money by elaborating bracelets for Catrinka, organized by REDMI mentors
- 71** Young girls ages 8 to 13 participated in 18 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each in safe spaced located in the communities to learn lessons from the *Abriendo Oportunidades* curriculum guide
- 56** Adolescent girls ages 14 to 18 participated in 18 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each in safe spaced located in the communities to learn lessons from the *Abriendo Oportunidades* curriculum guide

CATRINKAS' IMPACT IN NUMBERS 2016

- 4** Rural communities in the indigenous highlands of Tonicapán reached by REDMI during 2016
- 2** Senior mentors supported by a monthly stipend to recruit, teach, and guide community mentors
- 8** Young community mentors ages 15 to 25 recruited and trained by REDMI to work with girls and adolescents in four rural indigenous communities
- 12** Adolescent girls and young women ages 15 to 30 who earned money by participating in the process of bracelet-elaboration for Catrinka
- 107** Young girls ages 8 to 12 participated in 24 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each in safe spaced located in their communities to learn lessons from the Abriendo Oportunidades curriculum guide
- 52** Adolescent girls ages 13 to 18 participated in 24 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each in safe spaced located in their communities to learn lessons from the Abriendo Oportunidades curriculum guide
- ALL** REDMI members continued their university studies in the fields of pedagogy, social work, auditing and administration
- Community mentors were enrolled in school for the 2016 cycle

CATRINKAS' IMPACT IN NUMBERS 2017

- 2** Rural communities in the indigenous highlands of Totonacapan reached by REDMI during 2017
- 2** Senior mentors (ages 21 and 25) received a stipend to work with girls, provided support to community mentors and organized the elaboration of bracelets
- 3** Young community mentors ages 21 to 25 recruited and trained by REDMI to work with girls and adolescents in 2 rural communities
- 12** Adolescent girls and young women ages 15 to 30 who earned money by participating in the process of bracelet-elaboration for Catrinca
- 110** Young girls ages 8 to 12 participated in 48 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each in safe spaced located in their communities to learn the Abriendo Oportunidades curriculum guide
- 45** Adolescent girls ages 13 to 17 participated in 48 weekly sessions of 2.5 hours each in safe spaced located in their communities to learn the Abriendo Oportunidades curriculum guide
- ALL** REDMI members continued their university studies in the fields of pedagogy, social work, auditing and administration
- Community mentors were enrolled in school for the 2017 cycle