A Cascading Leadership Program for Mayan Adolescent Girls in Guatemala: The *Abriendo Oportunidades* Program

Adolescent Girls Capacity Building Workshop
July 14, 2009
Ministry of Gender & Development
Monrovia, Liberia

*Opening Opportunities*
• Indigenous peoples make up a reported 38% of Guatemala’s 13.3m population
• Guatemala’s population is 52% rural and very young
  – 69% of the population is under 30 years of age
• There are an estimated 1.6 million females between the ages of 10-19
  – Of these, 39% are indigenous girls
• Our program specifically targets one of Guatemala’s largest, most vulnerable, and least supported sub-populations
The lives of rural, indigenous girls

- Early school dropout
  - Limited opportunities to build vocational and productive skills
  - Lack of social and recreational activities
- Heavy domestic and productive work burden
- Limited mobility and autonomy
  - Reduced access to information and social services
  - Decreased peer and social networks
- Increased risk of gender violence and insecurity
- Early marriage
  - Poor reproductive health outcomes
- Chronic poverty
Who are we targeting?

- **Participants:** rural, indigenous girls ages 8-18 from Guatemala’s poorest communities
- **Two age cohorts:** 8-12; 13-18
- **Community-based girl leadership:**
  - Two young women ages 15-18 from each community lead each annual cycle of girls’ club participants
  - Some communities also have leadership involvement from young, indigenous female interns from local NGOs
- Girl leaders receive a stipend to guide club activities and serve as positive alternative role models at the community level
When are we reaching them?

- Begin early – prevention focus
  - Most youth-serving programs start too late!
- Provide continuous support during transition to adulthood
- Target and provide support through key life-cycle events
  - Puberty
  - School dropout
  - Age at marriage
  - Age at first pregnancy
  - Birth intervals
  - Safe, productive livelihoods
What are we doing?

• Build community-based social infrastructure to identify and reach most vulnerable girls
  – Rural community girls’ clubs = safe local space where girls can meet, learn, exchange, build skills and recreate
  – Develop and protect the social assets and capabilities of vulnerable girls ages 8-18
• Identify, train and support young female leaders from communities to guide club activities
  – Cascading leadership approach: Develop and harvest leadership from within communities
• Link clubs through national rural girls’ network
• Document and evaluate results
Participation in program

- Professional girl interns
  - To date: 55
  - Active: 19
- Community girls’ club leaders
  - Active: 28
- Participants ages 8–18
  - Active: 2,161
Cascading Leadership Model

**National/Regional Support**

**Mentors**
(Program Graduates)

**Community-level Intervention**

**Girl Leaders & Interns**

**Girls Age 13-17**

**Girls Age 8-12**
Expected changes among girls

**Assets provided through program**
- Safe public space for girls in community
- Larger and stronger peer network
- Positive role models and mentors
- Opportunity to learn new knowledge and skills
- Life plan (goals for the future)
- Identity card
- Stipend and bank account (girl leaders)

**Indicators of impact**
- Increased self-esteem
- More ambitious educational, employment, and citizenship goals
- Desire for later marriage and smaller family
- Greater autonomy and mobility
- Increased knowledge and skills
Thank you!