



**ADOLESCENT
GIRLS** COMMUNITY
OF PRACTICE



Intentional Design Practitioner Report

Intentional Design as a Catalyst for Change in Belize Migration Zones and Later Yucatán, Mexico

By Angel del Valle

Contributions from María José Aldana, Ludivine Cicoella, Ale Colom, Fabiola Romero, Amira Teul, Pulcheria Teul, Claudia Tut, and Isabel Vieitez

Excerpted from: Bruce, Judith and Sophie Soares. 2021. *Intentional Design: Reaching the Most Excluded Girls in the Poorest Communities—A Guide for Practitioners and Advocates*. New York: Population Council.

The Adolescent Girls Community of Practice is a project of the Population Council.

<https://buildcommunity4girls.org/>

About

The Intentional Design approach has been foundational to the Population Council’s work since 2000, when on-the-ground programs to reach the most excluded girls in the poorest communities greatly expanded. This practitioner report is part of a series of 20 reports reflecting work in sites around the world from 2000 to 2020. The Intentional Design approach was implemented in these sites with nongovernmental and governmental partners who explored the question: Why invest in girls? Once that was understood, the Council offered learning tools to navigate the questions: Where do we work? With whom do we work? When, chronologically, in the girls’ life cycles are the most crucial moments? Which content is meaningful and realistic and builds girls’ protective assets? What does success look like for different segments of girls?

In 2013, the Girl Roster tool was added when it was clear that many partners lacked the technical and scientific resources to establish the “universe” of girls in the places they had selected to work. Intentional Design tools—with the Roster being the most known and catalytic learning aid—have been utilized in South and East Asia; the Middle East; Central, East, and West Africa; North America; Latin America; and the Caribbean.

The Roster has been adapted for use in an array of sociodemographic contexts including dispersed rural villages, poor urban neighborhoods, conflict zones, refugee camps, densely packed informal/migrant-receiving settlements, high-risk HIV zones, before and after epidemics, as a rebuilding tool, and in Native American reservation communities. In every context, the Roster provided a transformative opportunity to see girls’ lives more systematically, drawing both quantitative and qualitative information. The efforts to estimate and segment the universe of girls has challenged initial assumptions about girls, families, safe and unsafe zones in communities, and the accessibility and relevance of services, even among those who felt they knew their community, including longstanding program staff. Across the board, practitioners report that on-the-ground application of the learning tools generates surprising and useful knowledge vital to shaping their work, assessing its reach, and articulating plans for expansion.

In the 20 reports that comprise this series, our partners share their experiences applying Intentional Design tools and principles. The reports represent just a few on-the-ground projects, but most of our partners report that the Intentional Design approach has taken root. We honor our partners for their honesty and dedication. They inspire us.

Judith Bruce and Sophie Soares

Authors, *Intentional Design: Reaching the Most Excluded Girls in the Poorest Communities—A Guide for Practitioners and Advocates*, from which these reports were excerpted.

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Findings and Decisions	Implementation Observations and Adaptations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though there is some variation across communities in percentage of girls out of school up to age 14, across all communities it was found that girls from 15 on are highly likely to be out of school. • Even—and perhaps especially—those girls who have completed all the available schooling in home communities are likely to leave unless they can find acceptable livelihoods and social life at home; both girls and mothers confirmed this. • Financial literacy, vocational training, and entrepreneurial skills are vital to engage and sustain the participation of girls over age 15 and generate community support. It is not sufficient to tailor vocational training to the safety and skills of girls; must also assure they have female instructors and mentors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was essential that the team, once formed, remained constant and, in the context of relatively continual support, that locally recruited mentors learned the technology to administer the Roster and collect information at the household level. • Roster and community mapping results could not be interpreted locally because of intermittent Wi-Fi and also because the skills required to interpret the results of the Output Tables had not yet been built; the technology has since improved, which should allow for local generation and greater readability of Output Tables. • We stress that though it would have been ideal to have had immediate turnaround from rostering to results, the delay of two weeks in getting results back to the communities did not disrupt the momentum of the program. • Local female mentors (aged 18–30) were the principal collectors of information and designers of programs with girls in Mexico, and the same principles that applied in Belize were adopted here—that is, taking a team and giving them consistent support to generate intergenerational capacity. It is suggested that it takes about two years of support for mentors to have roles that go beyond managing safe spaces and offering insights to becoming program leaders and designers.

The Toledo (Belize) Context

In 2015, the Population Council began collaborating with the Toledo Maya Women’s Council (TMWC) in the district of Toledo in Belize, a migration zone adjacent to Guatemala, to implement a pilot of the first girl-centered program in the region.

Following the Abriendo Oportunidades (AO) evidence-based approach in Guatemala, a secondary analysis was conducted (using the 2011 MICS Survey) and the key findings were (Population Council and UNICEF Belize 2015):

- Rural girls’ school attendance drops steadily starting at age 12, while urban girls tend to stay in school until at least 16; Mayan and Mestizo girls have the fewest educational opportunities, with only 55% of Mayan and 65% of Mestizo girls aged 10–17 enrolled in school;
- 17.3% of Mayan and 9.7% of Mestizo girls 15–17 years old reported being ever married, and one in five had given birth to a child before age 18.

Toledo was a hotspot of these poor indicators. Half of the population is Mayan, only 38% of girls aged 15–17 had completed any level of primary education, and 11% of girls became mothers during their adolescence. Based on these findings, the Council and TMWC sought to initiate a safe spaces program for rural indigenous girls in four communities located near the Guatemala–Belize border and migration zone (Figures 1 and 2).

Action Steps

As a first step to root the program at the community level, the Council and TMWC collected information on the profile of girls in the community using the Roster. The process and description of outputs are shown in Box 1.

FIGURE 1. OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COUNCIL AND TOLEDO MAYA WOMEN'S COUNCIL (TMWC) SAFE SPACES

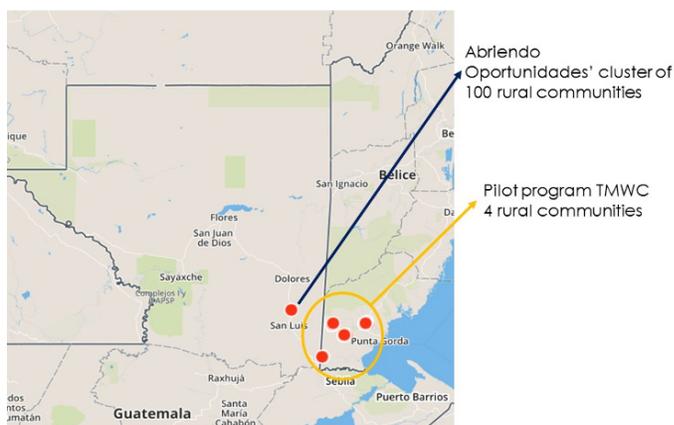


FIGURE 2. LOCATION OF THE FOUR COMMUNITIES WHERE TOLEDO MAYA WOMEN'S COUNCIL (TMWC) WILL IMPLEMENT THE SAFE SPACES PROGRAM



BOX 1. DESCRIPTION OF ROSTER OUTPUTS FROM ROSTER IMPLEMENTATION WITH TOLEDO MAYA WOMEN'S COUNCIL

Where	4 rural communities in the District of Toledo, Belize (border with Guatemala)
When	January 10-15, 2015
Process	<p>The AO/Council staff trained a team of one supervisor and two mentors (all local, female mentors who spoke the local language—English in Belize) of TMWC in the use of the Roster. The AO/Council team stayed connected to the field team during this time. The technical training was fairly simple. Five mobile phones were provided to the organization for information collection, and the technical training in the Girl Roster app in the field was accomplished in two days.</p> <p>1) Training</p> <p>2) Engagement with community leaders</p> <p>3) Information collection</p> <p>Before the Roster was conducted, TMWC had already presented the idea of a safe spaces program to community leaders.</p> <p>TMWC's supervisor organized the team to map all households in the community. The Council supervised and accompanied information collection in all communities. Community leaders led the AO/Council and TMWC teams to show them the boundaries of their walkable community. Given the density of local languages, their participation helped greatly with translation and further engaged them; support from these leaders and school principal was crucial in all communities.</p> <p>During the rostering, although weather conditions were not ideal because of the mud and rain, the team made the effort to include all households in the community.</p> <p>Each young female mentor, in teams of two, simultaneously identified public spaces, facilities, and features—a resource mapping exercise—while the Roster was being conducted. Photos of resources were collected in the course of this dual rostering and resource mapping exercise.</p> <p>Once completed, phones were sent to the Council's office in Guatemala, as there had been intermittent Wi-Fi in the Belize area and the staff still did not feel they had the skills to interpret the Output Tables. (This was a more onerous process than it would be today, where the generation of Output Tables is near-automatic; two weeks later, the outputs were transmitted back to the Belizean partner.)</p>

Findings and Implementation in Toledo

Roster results revealed information about girls' numbers and schooling status. Mapping analysis shows the following information (see Table 1) about girls' schooling:

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF ROSTERING

Community	Number of households (HH) and population	Number of girls aged 6-17	Number of girls aged 12-17 out of school as a proportion of total girls in the age range	
			12-14	15-17
Community A	75 HH 429 inhabitants	77 (18% of total population)	12-14	2/20
			15-17	13/16
Community B	79 HH 450 inhabitants	81 (18%)	12-14	3/13
			15-17	12/14
Community C	52 HH 299 inhabitants	46 (15%)	12-14	4/14
			15-17	4/10
Community D	99 HH 599 inhabitants	103 (17%)	12-14	1/20
			15-17	13/28

Strikingly, across four communities, at minimum 40% and more typically closer to 85% of girls 15–17 were out of school. Given the important shift that takes place at 15 to an increasing proportion of out-of-school girls, girl-only groups were organized by age: one group for girls 8–13 years and one for girls 14–17 years.

The emphasis for girls 8–13 years was to build girls' schools and to increase commitment to future schooling and families' willingness to invest in their schooling past age 13. For girls 14–17 years, in-school girls were supported to stay in school while for those out of school a high priority was accorded to program content, which assisted them in navigating sexual and violence risks and preparing for decent livelihoods.

Fact sheets were prepared for community leaders to sensitize them to the severe situation of girls; community contracts specified the promise of space for at least two groups, the support and protection of the mentors, and affirmations of support of girls' rights and skill-building. The contracts were signed with each community the day the program was launched.

The pilot program was to run 12 months initially (it is, as of 2020, 24 months) across all seasons of risk, including the heavy rains and the school break in June and July; the content emphasized financial literacy, sexual and reproductive health, and prevention of violence. After the pilot, the safe spaces and girl-only groups expanded to reach new communities. There were not sufficient resources for a full-on assessment, but the Roster was completed after 12 months and it was seen that a longer dose of the program and higher saturation was needed. The teams aimed for 80% of girls 10–17 to participate.

An assessment in 2019 on the status of girls who participated in the program shows that at least 30 girls migrated from their communities before age 18. Heads of household cite work and marriage as the main reasons for girls' migration. These girls had 9 years of education on average by the time they migrated, which coincides with the level of schooling girls were able to complete in home communities by age 16 before going to vocational training.

A study of the content and assumptions of vocational training led the team to make some changes. Aware of the power hierarchies in the communities and their desire to create a richer, safer environment for girls in home communities and prepare them better should they migrate, TMWC enhanced the curriculum to include content on financial literacy and combined learning sessions with entrepreneurial activities led by local females as tutors. Given the high levels of migration in the community, and rising levels of migration across central America, it is disheartening to see that girls who were fully educated, to the extent they could be in the community, still had to leave to find meaningful work and perhaps an enriched social life. Thus, one of the goals of the girls' groups was to create a stronger basis for social participation, civil society, and economic inclusion.

Implementation ended in October 2019 and reached close to 800 girls aged 10–18 in ten communities. As of 2019, TMWC continues to work with girls in four communities with support from the CAMY Fund. It is the lack of resources that can constrain a program's expansion; the value of the program to the girls in these communities is clear, and as migration continues to rise, the local community organizations and the governments must understand the value of expansion subject to resources.

Lessons from the Toledo Impact Program in Mexico

Lessons from Belize also informed the Council's approach in Mexico, where a program for the rural and indigenous setting in Yucatán, Mexico, was set to expand; there, 40% of the population is indigenous and 60% live under the poverty line. In Yucatán, the team followed a similar approach to set up the program as in Belize:

- Local female mentors (aged 18–30) were the primary collectors of information and designers of programs with girls, and the same principles that applied in Belize were adopted here—that is, taking a team and giving them consistent support to generate

intergenerational capacity. It is suggested that it takes about two years of support for the mentors to have roles beyond managing safe spaces and offering insights to becoming program leaders and designers;

- Roster information collectively analyzed by the Roster team and the local community leaders helped identify the priority segments of girls and the development of an intentional recruitment plan per segment;
- Among the priority content—given the economic pressures that create scarcity and drive migration—basic financial skills in preparation for entrepreneurial activities were core;
- Age-graded, girl-only groups were established;
- Mentors led weekly meetings for younger and older girls for a period of 24 months.

Throughout the process, as in Belize, community leaders of Yucatán were engaged in initial discussions, in defining the walkable community, in interpreting Roster and resource mapping results, and providing both contractual and more informal support to the program.

An assessment conducted at the end of the implementation showed that about 30% of girls aged 12-17 were very regular participants (attending at least half the sessions); those who participated were more likely to have savings and have better knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, and reported having a stronger network of female friends compared to girls with a similar profile who had not accessed the program at all.

As of 2019, *Abriendo Futuros* was reaching close to 300 girls aged 10-19 in indigenous communities in Yucatán (supported by the Kellogg Foundation). As with the Belize program, the limitation on the Mexico program was simply financial. This program was ready to scale at the time.

References

Population Council and UNICEF Belize. 2015. *The Adolescent Experience In-Depth: Using Data to Identify and Reach the Most Vulnerable Young People, Belize 2011*. New York: Population Council.

For more information on *Abriendo Oportunidades* in Belize or *Abriendo Futuros* in Mexico, please visit: <https://www.popcouncil.org/research/abriendo-oportunidades-opening-opportunities>

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