



Starfish One By One, Guatemala Food for Thought - February 2012

Theme for February: Empowering Young Women to Become Leaders in their Community

In this issue of Food for Thought:

- ♀ Monthly Theme
- ♀ Millennium Development Goals
- ♀ Discussion Questions



Quotes:

"If you want to end poverty and help the developing world, the best thing you can do is invest time, energy, and funding into adolescent girls." - Girl Effect

Empowering Young Women to Become Leaders in their Community

"Adolescent girls are at a crossroads," asserts the Girl Effect campaign.¹ One path leads to illiteracy, early marriage, high fertility, a high risk of HIV, social isolation, and political disenfranchisement. The other path leads to economic independence, ownership of life choices, a smaller and healthier family, and a voice in society. Which path a girl goes down depends on her access to education and whether there are adults in her life helping her to think about and plan for her future. Adolescence is a time of transitions, but being in school and having positive role models works to protect and guide girls as they grow into adulthood. "During this phase of life, an education that heightens a girl's social status, minimizes her social risks, delays her assumption of adult roles, and cultivates a capacity for critical thinking and independent decision-making can reshape her future pathways radically and profoundly—with cascading benefits over her lifetime."²

It is this defining stage of life that is the focus of the Girl Effect campaign--a movement whose aim is to bring girls, and their needs and challenges, to the center of the conversation on international development. "It's about the unique and indisputable potential of adolescent girls to end poverty for themselves and the world."³ But along with the

¹ <http://thegirleffect.org/learn/the-big-picture>

² Lloyd, C. B., 2009. p 36.

³ <http://thegirleffect.org/learn/faq>

potential to chart a new course for themselves, their families, and their communities, there are indisputable challenges and risks for adolescent girls. For a girl born into poverty, whether she is able to break the cycle, create opportunities, and make unprecedented choices does not depend on her alone--in fact, it would be unfairly demanding of us to expect that from her. She needs help to break the mold.

In Guatemala, while 94% of primary school-aged girls are enrolled in primary school, only 39% are enrolled in secondary school.⁴ Further, "while indigenous peoples generally have less schooling than nonindigenous peoples throughout Latin America, ethnic differences are greatest in Guatemala, where indigenous adults have less than half the schooling of nonindigenous adults (2.5 years of education compared with 5.7 years)."⁵ These discrepancies carry over into all other human development indicators: indigenous Guatemalan women are underrepresented in the formal economy, experience poverty at a higher rate, and have more children, more of whom are malnourished.

Starfish One by One is championing the cause of Girl Effect and working with the high-risk, yet high-potential population of rural, indigenous, Guatemalan adolescent girls. By taking an active role in ensuring that the girls complete and exceed their primary education and providing mentors for program participants, this program offers the protection and guidance that teenagers need to become capable, independent adults. Beyond the assurance that the girls will be able to take care of themselves and their families, Starfish is cultivating crucial leadership skills--providing the confidence and communication skills necessary for the girls to become advocates for their community; looking beyond the immediate benefits to the girls toward the future of Guatemalan society. Change has to come from within, and Starfish is putting the tools in the hands of this powerful group to make that change happen.

Taking action for adolescent girls' education: 10 recommended steps

1. Collect and compile data on non-formal education
2. Build and maintain a global database for education programs for adolescent girls
3. Expand opportunities for girls to attend secondary school
4. Support the non-formal education system
5. Develop after-school tutoring and mentoring programs in both primary and secondary schools
6. Produce curricula relevant to adolescent girls
7. Offer post-secondary vocational programs
8. Provide training and ongoing incentives for women to enter and remain in teaching
9. Promote easy transitions between non-formal and formal schools
10. Encourage and evaluate innovation

-Lloyde, 2009.

Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight objectives designed by the UN to improve social and economic conditions in developing countries by the end of 2015. Each month we focus on the MDGs

⁴ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab4b.htm>;
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab4c.htm>

⁵ Lews, M. A. & Lockheed, M. E., 2007. p145.





impacted by our theme and our monthly featured project. This month we highlight:

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

→ Currently only 5% of indigenous girls in Guatemala complete a primary education.

"Getting children into school is a vital first step. But to receive the full benefits of education, they must continue to attend classes." - United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report, 2010.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015; increase the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; increase the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

→ Currently, only about 12% of seats in the Guatemalan parliament are held by women.

Discussion Questions

1. Think back to when you were a teenager. What influences did you have in your life, positive and negative, that shaped who you are today? What opportunities and/or role models made the biggest difference in your life?
2. Why, do you think, do Girl Effect and Starfish One by One place so much emphasis on adolescent girls? Aren't younger children living in poverty at more risk than teenagers?

Sources

"The Big Picture - Girl Effect." *Girl Effect*. Web. <<http://thegirleffect.org/learn/the-big-picture>>.

"FAQS - Girl Effect." *Girl Effect*. Web. 29 Jan. 2012. <<http://thegirleffect.org/learn/faq>>.

Lewis, Maureen A., and Marlaine E. Lockheed, eds. "Chapter 6: Indigenous Girls in Guatemala: Poverty and Location." *Exclusion, Gender and Education: Case Studies from the Developing World*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2007. Print.

Lloyde, Cynthia B. *NEW LESSONS: THE POWER OF EDUCATING ADOLESCENT GIRLS*. Rep. Population Council, 2009. Web.

"Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments Gender Statistics, Country Comparison." *Encyclopedia of the Nations United Nations, and World Leaders*. Web. <<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/WorldStats/Gender-proportion-seats-held-parliaments.html>>.

"Statistics and Indicators on Women and Men." *United Nations Statistics Division*. Web. 29 Jan. 2012. <<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab4b.htm>>.

United Nations. "The Millennium Development Goals Report." 2010. Web.