



Understanding the Youth Perspective in the Western Highlands: The Participatory Youth Assessment (PYA) 2015

Introduction

Guatemala is considered a ‘youth bulge’ nation, with almost 70 percent of the population under age 30.¹ Since 2011, approximately 8,000-10,000 youth have engaged in gangs, drug trafficking, and illicit narcotics² and increasing numbers of youth are emigrating, with over 14,000 unaccompanied minors at the US border in recent years.³ Yet crime and violence is not the whole story. In order to build a baseline for the five-year, USAID-funded Guatemala Lifelong Learning Project (2014-2019), led by Juarez and Associates, Inc., Plan International administered the Participatory Youth Assessment (PYA) 2015 to understand the motivations and real circumstances of youth in the Western Highlands.

The Lifelong Learning Project aims to combat negative perspectives of youth in order to provide them with more education and economic opportunities in the Western Highlands. The project aims to increase economic growth and stability through alternative education models and education for employment, while promoting sustainability through inclusion of local and national actors. The PYA provides interesting insight into the factors that influence youth decision-making in the Western Highlands, which can also be applied to other youth projects in the area.

Research Methods

The PYA assessed 12 core dimensions: youth characteristics; household characteristics; employment prospects and migration; educational offerings; social risk; access to education; entrepreneurship; discrimination and violence due to gender; ethnicity and disability; social capital; civic engagement; and communication/ICTs using a survey of 600 questions. The research team conducted 200 quantitative interviews, 24 focus groups, and 97 open-ended and/or semi-structured interviews over a two-week period in late 2014.

Key Findings

- 5 out of 10 youth did not complete basic education
- 6 out of 10 youth left school due to lack of finances
- 7 out of 10 youth wanted to start a business but lacked financing and knowledge of how to do so
- Youth participation in the community is very low, especially in leadership positions, and young women participate in lower rates
- 38 percent of youth had considered migrating to the United States

Results of the Assessment

The PYA produced a database of approximately 1,300 variables, indicating a high level of apathy among youth, high levels of unemployment, and extensive gender discrimination towards women. Of the 640 participants, 49 percent were young women and 51 percent were young men, between the ages of 15-24. A large percentage identified as indigenous (84.2 percent).

¹ National Institute of Statistics (INE, Spanish acronym), 2012.

² Policía Nacional Civil, Julio 2015.

³ Orozco, Manuel & Julia Yansura. *Confronting the Challenges of Migration and Development in Central America*. Inter-American Dialogue. November 2015.



Education & Training

A high percentage of youth were unable to continue studying during the year (36.2 percent male; 57.1 percent female), mainly due to lack of funds (62.7 percent male; 41.2 percent female). Of the respondents, 28.6 percent of males and 16.5 percent of females claimed to have left school to work. A high level of youth is looking for a job, potentially disrupting their studies.

Many youth lack technical skills, with 64.7 percent without the knowledge of a trade, and over the majority of females (59.5 percent) and almost half of the males (44.9 percent) unable to operate a computer. Of those with technical skills, the most common trades for young women include fabric handicrafts (41.6 percent) and tailoring (23.9 percent), while masonry (33.6 percent) and carpentry (31 percent) are common for young men. The traditional occupations tend to be over-subscribed. The majority of youth are not learning these skills in formal institutions (35.4 percent), but instead through family (83.1 percent) and friends. Only 6.3 percent of youth had received training at a non-formal or technical training center, preparing a very low percentage to enter the marketplace with credentials. The overwhelming majority of youth want more training, with 82.8 percent indicating they would accept training, if offered, to qualify for a job. Yet only 16 percent (3 percent female) were working at the time of the interview and only about half indicated their intention to continue studying that year.

Economic Opportunities

On average, men began working at 15 years old and women at 16, and by the time of the interview they had already averaged 2.3 or 1.8 different jobs, respectively. Of youth that have worked, 37.2 percent of young men have received a salary, as compared to 25.6 percent of young women. Most young men sought jobs in business (30.2 percent) or in a workshop (20.1 percent) and young women looked for positions in housework or informal business at equal rates (24.8 percent each). Only 11.3 percent of households reported some non-agricultural business. Youth do not have much confidence or hope to find a job, with 71.9 percent indicating they would be unlikely to find one. This perception of meager economic opportunities leaves youth feeling pessimistic and frustrated.

Youth Participation & Community Engagement

The PYA also demonstrated the low levels of participation of youth in community development councils (COCODEs) and their low interest (57.7 percent) in politics. The vast majority of youth do not have communication with local authorities (79.4 percent). Surprisingly, the level of migration reported among young people in the sample was not as high as expected, with 11.5 percent of men and 10.4 percent of women reporting that they had migrated at least once in the past three years within the country, motivated mostly by work for men (47.2 percent) and school for women (35.3 percent). Almost 70 percent of respondents, though, said they would move to the Guatemala City to study or work if they could. When asked about their five-year outlook, the majority said that they would be studying (22.2 percent), working (16.7 percent), or self-employed (16.1 percent), while 22.2 percent remained unsure (22.8 percent provided other responses). The research team confronted great apathy among the youth, as only 18 percent of approached youth participated in the research.



Gender & Sexual/Reproductive Health

The PYA found that youth are marrying and giving birth at an early age, and that many youth said they had little or no information on sex education and family planning. More than one out of five youth reported being married or living in common law (22.5 percent) and over one in four young women reported having at least one child (28.7 percent). Gender discrimination and discrimination about other sexual preferences was perceived in young men and women. About a quarter of youth believed to some extent that a woman and/or man should tolerate their partner's violence to keep their family together. Roughly three out of four youth agreed with traditional gender roles.

Key Conclusions

- A high level of youth indicated that they are looking for a job; this could be disrupting their studies. Yet when asked about their five-year outlook, the majority stated that they hope to be studying. These findings align with the project's current work on overcoming the predominant barriers keeping youth from accessing education and workforce readiness.
- Many youth lack technical skills. Of those with technical skills, the majority does not learn them in formal institutions, but instead through family and friends. Development of youth capacity and access to training institutions should be further addressed.
- Apathy was demonstrated in the low overall response rates of targeted youth during data collection. The project must continue to identify new motivation mechanisms for youth engagement, including initiatives to address low levels of confidence for finding a job and their lack of interest in politics.
- Gender discrimination toward young women was identified, especially in regard to opportunities to continue studying and working. Gender discrimination and inequality must be addressed to increase the opportunities for both young men and young women.