



Fit for school entry: Bilingual, intercultural and holistic education for Maya children

Project Background

A large gap between rich and poor prevails in Guatemala. Particularly the indigenous Maya population are affected by poverty and experience discrimination on different levels. In our project region, over 90% of the population are indigenous. 85% of the inhabitants live in poverty and 20% live in extreme poverty. Less than half of the children of pre-school age attend a kindergarten. The transition to primary school, however, is very difficult without early support. Their mother tongues are Mayan dialects Quiché, Kaqchikel and Tzutujil and at school they are suddenly supposed to speak Spanish, but have never learned it.

Project Goals

The project improves the educational opportunities of indigenous children in 20 kindergartens in three school districts in Sololá Department through bilingual, play-based preschool promotion.

- Our bilingual, culturally adapted pre-school model is firmly anchored in 20 schools and the children reach an age-appropriate level of development.
- Together with the Ministry of Education and the municipalities, sustainable strategies have been developed to further develop the model with a strong local and culturally adapted focus.

Project Activities

Pre-school support in kindergarten

We support the school authorities in converting 23 existing kindergartens with 58 kindergarten classes. We thus improve the quality of existing kindergartens that up to now have been run inadequately and make them accessible to children from the age of 4.

We will systematically process the experience gained so far. In this way, we will create tools and working instruments that the teachers and school coaches of the state school authorities can use independently.

Training of teachers

The quality of every lesson depends strongly on the teacher. Teachers are usually educated in primary schooling, are locally rooted and thus familiar with the reality of the children's lives and the cultural and linguistic context. However, they have no methodological training for pre-school level and have so far worked with authoritarian disciplinary methods and frontal teaching. In the course, our pedagogues introduce the topics of creativity, health and nutrition to the school teachers. Although the training and further education modules are designed in a simple way and are implemented using practical examples, teachers often find it difficult to apply what they have learned in their daily work. Until now, we have therefore accompanied and coached the teachers on-the-job.

Country and Project location

5 indigenous communities (San Pablo la Laguna, San Marcos la Laguna, Santa Cruz la Laguna, San Juan la Laguna, San Pedro la Laguna) in three educational districts of the department of Sololá, Atitlán highlands, Guatemala.

Topics

Bilingual pre-school education, Community development.

Vivamos Mejor Programme

«Bridges to school»

Duration

2021-2024

Project costs

CHF 1,037,401

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Impact

Strengthened age-appropriate development increases the chances of indigenous children for a successful school career, enables them to reach their full potential and thus increases dignified income opportunities later in life. According to studies by the World Bank*, every dollar invested in preschool education has a return of investment of 6 to 17 dollars, which feeds back into society. The present project increases equal opportunities and societal integration of indigenous communities in Sololá, Guatemala. Furthermore, the general educational level will thus rise in the region, enabling the future generation of adults to actively exercise their civic participation rights as informed and strengthened citizens.

Further information on the impact of our project work can be found at www.vivamosmejor.ch/en/impact

*www.worldbank.org/en/topic/earlychildhooddevelopment

Our mission

With our "Bridges to School" programme, we aim at reducing the development gaps marginalised children have compared to privileged children and preparing their successful entry into school. A balanced diet is a basic prerequisite for learning.

Our vision

Our vision is that children, regardless of their social background, have equal opportunities to successful graduation as well as a dignified professional future.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION
Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
To reduce inequalities between and among countries.

Improving infrastructure and equipment

Many places lack age-appropriate furniture, stimulating toys, teaching materials and latrines. Together with the parents and teachers, the project team discusses with the authorities and the village population who will carry out and finance which adaptation work. The Mayan culture will be taken into account for the design concept.

Training of parents

Education is not regarded as important in many Mayan families and thus the parents do not support their children's learning capacities. With targeted parental work we want to achieve that parents recognise the value of school education, support their children in their school career and are able to stand up for their children's right to education when dealing with the authorities.

Healthy diet and vegetable gardens

Children are provided with a snack at school and in Kindergarten - this is what is foreseen in Guatemalan school regulations. However, the school food is not of sufficient quality to prevent malnourishment. Therefore, our nutritionist advises the parents and school officials on the importance of a balanced diet. Additionally, our partner organisation works alongside six parent groups in establishing and managing of some model gardens, which other parent groups can use as a model and thus enrich the snacks with fresh vegetables.

Target group

Direct: 2,450 children, 2,250 parents,
80 Teachers, 9 school coaches
Indirect: 4'350 additional families

Costs

The planned project costs to be borne by Vivamos Mejor amount to CHF 1,037,401. To cover the costs, we are applying for support from cantons, municipalities, companies, foundations and parishes. The project is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, as part of the international programme contribution.

Personal and local contributions

Local contributions totalling CHF 1,027,200 are not included in the total costs. The Ministry of Education finances teachers' salaries totalling CHF 731,900 as well as food and learning and teaching materials amounting to CHF 295,300. In addition, the beneficiaries perform voluntary work.

Local project partner

The local partner of Vivamos Mejor in Guatemala is the Asociación Vivamos Mejor Guatemala (AVMG) with its headquarters in Panajachel. The organization has been working with indigenous communities in the Guatemalan highlands since 1989. AVMG and Vivamos Mejor are legally and organizationally independent organizations. The mutual rights and obligations of the partnership are formalized in a cooperation agreement and their fulfilment is monitored regularly. The NGO has an excellent network in the department of Sololá and participates in thematic expert groups at the departmental level, works constructively with various government agencies and is involved in local and departmental development councils.

Impressions



In the kindergartens, we stimulate children in their motor, cognitive and social skills.



The careful training of teachers and the integration of parents are central to the project.

