



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

## CASE COMPETITION

Collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) have long been a part of USAID's work. USAID staff and implementing partners have always sought ways to better understand the development process and USAID's contribution to it, to collaborate in order to speed and deepen results, to share the successes and lessons of USAID's initiatives, and to institute improvements to programs and operations. Through this case competition, USAID and its LEARN mechanism seek to capture and share the stories of those efforts. To learn more about the CLA Case Competition visit USAID Learning Lab at [usaidlearninglab.org/cla-case-competition](https://www.usaidlearninglab.org/cla-case-competition).

# Rural families in Guatemala take part for quality of education

*Antonio Arreaga, Juarez & Associates Inc.*

## What is the general context in which the story takes place?

The Peace Accords in 1996, in addition of putting an end to the armed conflict of more than 30 years in Guatemala, prompted the country's education system to initiate a reform to ensure an equitable education of quality in the classroom. Through different projects, USAID contributed to this reform process in areas such as students learning assessment, with particular attention to reading and mathematics, intercultural bilingual education — in Guatemala 22 Mayan languages are spoken, in addition to Garifuna, Xinka, and Spanish— as well as the definition of learning standards and opportunities to achieve quality of education.

In 2009, data about coverage showed that 8 out of 10 children were enrolled in first grade. However, the results of the assessments carried out by the Ministry of Education showed that only 51.83% of a sample of third grade students achieved the expected reading level. Almost the other half of the national sample of third graders did not reach the expected reading level.

In this context, USAID constituted the Education Reform in the Classroom Project (2009-2014). Among other things, the project aimed to increase effectiveness of teaching practices, improve classroom learning environment, foster the effective acquisition of reading skills (Mayan language [mother tongue] and Spanish), and promote mechanisms that encourage parents, communities, and leaders to take part of quality of education, in particular in the learning to read process. The aforementioned topic was scantily explored in Guatemala.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



### **What was the main challenge/opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity?**

National research showed that parents from rural areas understood the importance of sending their children to school. Therefore, enrollment in first grade increased. It was now critical for them to become aware that it was not simply a matter of sending them to school. Results of reading and mathematics national assessments showed that half of the boys and girls were not learning, and it was important to share this fact with parents. Therefore, one of the objectives of USAID/Education Reform in the Classroom was to raise awareness among parents, as well as local authorities from the project intervention zones (12 municipalities with high poverty rates), about the conditions that need to be met in order to reach quality of education. However, the project wanted to go beyond this. Evidence showed that children who have support of their parents during their learning process perform better in comparison to those who do not. But, how to make parents take part in their children learning to read process? Specifically, when parents are illiterate and are from very poor rural areas. Moreover, many of them did not speak Spanish, only K'iche', one of the main Mayan languages in Guatemala, making the situation even more challenging. On the basis of this reality, the belief held within the national education system consisted on that it was almost impossible to involve Mayan parents from rural areas in matters related to quality of education, due to their low level of schooling. However, USAID/Education Reform in the Classroom believed that it was possible by means of using adequate strategies and methodologies in which local stakeholders had direct participation of its own change. Even though this represented a substantial challenge, it was also an opportunity to work together with parents, from municipalities with high poverty rates, in order to improve the quality of the education received by their sons and daughters.

### **Describe the CLA approach or activity employed**

The aim was to inform and raise awareness among parents from rural areas about the importance of quality of education in the classroom, in particular in the learning to read process. In addition, it was also set as an objective obtaining support from authorities (local, municipal, and education), teachers, and community leaders in favor of quality of education. However, the most challenging objective consisted in providing parents skills that enabled them to get involved in the learning to read and write process of their children. The studies carried out by the project (2010), showed that very few parents got involved in the learning process of their children and that they had limited or no material to read at home.

In order to attain these objectives, all of the strategies, tactics, and tools were based on a communication for development approach. This approach encourages stakeholders to participate in their own process of change ("bottom-up") and contributes to sustainability. In Guatemala, the communication for development approach had only been used in the health area, but not in education. The proposed communication for development mechanism was named: "Early Reading Socialization Mechanism" since it was addressed to parents of children who were in grades where the learning how to read process begins.

In order to achieve the strategic objectives of information, awareness-raising, and social support, it was designed a campaign that used traditional mass media communication (especially radio and less frequently municipal cable television) and alternative communication media (mobile publicity, puppetry, Reading fairs, and community dialogues). The target groups for the campaign were the following, in order of priority: 1) Family, 2) Community, and 3) School. The communication tools used for this campaign were: A) Protocols about the conditions that need to be met in order to reach quality of education in the classroom. These were designed, produced, and disseminated in a large format poster. B) Radio spots of 1 minute and 30 seconds were produced in Spanish, K'iche', and Mam. The spots addressed different aspects about reading and quality of education. The characters used represented community members (shopkeeper, teacher, municipal councillor), who spoke in simple and direct language about the necessary conditions to achieve quality of education.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



And finally, “schools for parents” were designed, in order to achieve the strategic objective of providing parents skills so that they get involved in the learning process of their children. From 2011 to 2012, the project designed and carried out workshops for parents, in a total of 20 schools located in the zones of intervention. In 2011, the main topic of the workshops was reading, and in 2012 it was about the expected learning outcomes in reading, mathematics, as well as social and natural science.

During 2011, the workshops (6 in each school) had an approach of rural andragogy since it would be implemented in culturally diverse regions (country’s Western and Eastern regions). Since the workshops audience (2012) belonged to the Maya ethnic group, its contents (8 per school) were adapted in order to be culturally sound or pertinent. These were carefully designed and included ludic activities, self-esteem, analogies of daily life, very little text and more images, as well as “homework”, compatible with the level of education of parents, which had to be completed by parents with their children. The workshops scheme of 2011 was carried out by a “Frank Fairchild” scholarship recipient (scholarships provided by USAID/Guatemala), who had experience in designing rural adult education programs; the workshops of 2012 were designed by “Asociación Kemow Eta’manik Bilingüe Intercultural” (AKEBI), an entity with experience in the implementation of culturally pertinent education projects in the western region of Guatemala.

**Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources or enabling factors)?**

The most critical aspects related to the implementation of the strategy referred to the “schools for parents”, particularly during their first phase (2011). The first question was who would facilitate them? Would facilitators be paid for their job? Thus, a profile of the desired facilitators was developed (many of them should: speak K’iché’, have teaching experience, and live near the communities) and it was decided that facilitators would be volunteers. The project would cover transportation expenses and would certify their work. Once all of the first phase facilitators were trained, the implementation of 8 workshops in 12 schools began, implying to carry out 96 workshops according to the schedule indicated by the parents (many of these were scheduled for weekends). Since the project did not have municipal technical staff, the head office in Guatemala City was responsible of designing, printing, and sending workshop materials, as well as the snacks for parents. After the first simultaneous workshops, the project realized that it was difficult to sustain a centralised model with respect to logistics. In addition, two facilitators drop out. Why? One of them found a paid job, whereas for the other one it was difficult to keep up with the workshop schedule; it was scheduled Sunday afternoons, since this was the most convenient time for parents. To tackle these problems, it was decided to hire a local entity of the western part of the country. It would be responsible of carrying out the “school for parents”, under the coordination and monitoring of the project. The entity hired was “Programas y Proyectos de Desarrollo Integral” (PRODI), an NGO with experience in rural education and alternative communication. PRODI completed the implementation of the first phase of the “school for parents”.

Moreover they were hired to implement the awareness-raising campaign using alternative communication media (community dialogues, forums in radio and municipal cable T.V., and puppetry). The following year (2012), the awareness-raising campaign was carried out also by this organization. The Reading fairs were included to the existing tactics. In the eastern region of the country, social context factors affected the implementation of one of the “schools for parents”. The teachers union of this municipality occupied the school where the workshop was programmed. The parents did not want to go to the school, since they were afraid. Even though local tensions eased, it was not possible to summon the parents again. Therefore, this “school for parents” was carried out during the second phase (2012), despite that the project was no longer working in the eastern part of the country. It was decided to carry out the “school for parents”, in this part of the country, given the willingness of the parents.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**What have been the outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?**

At the end of the implementation, qualitative research instruments were developed to gather information about the perceptions of participants, specifically parents and teachers. Furthermore, at the end of the project (between November 2013 and January 2014), focus groups were carried out to measure the results and perceptions from key stakeholders.

**Parents perceptions:**

1. *"It was to wake up the mind. It is no longer as before when nobody supported us".*
2. *"I have changed my way of thinking about the responsibilities of having a child in school and that he learns well".*
3. *"My son has improved his grades this bimester".*
4. *"It helped us a lot in letting us know what we as parents have to do to help our children learn".*



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



5. *"I didn't know the library of Joyabaj; Now, I take my daughter [there], who likes to go".*
6. *"In addition of reading more, I got closer to my daughter".*
7. *"We have to help our children, even if we don't know how to read and write".*
8. *"We learned how to spend time with our children reading stories".*
9. *"We read signs of shops and stores with our children".*
10. *"Now he does his homework and he doesn't bring any reds [to fail an exam or class]".*
11. *"Even though we don't know how to read and write, the program gives us great ideas to accompany our children".*
12. *"My son used to fail classes, but this year he passed them all. The teacher says he is improving".*
13. *"We dare to help the children, mainly in reading".*

**Teacher perceptions:**

1. *"Students are more interested in attending school".*
2. *"[A] significant change in the relationship between teachers and parents".*
3. *"I had a student who had problems to read and write. I believe the school for parents has helped him to read more".*
4. *"75% of the children have improved their school performance".*
5. *"Boys and girls are now less shy".*

**What were the most important lessons learned?**

- It is important to give an economic stipend to local facilitators who carry out empowerment tasks. Otherwise, there is a risk that they might abandon the project once they find a paid job.
- In order to achieve social support and empowerment strategies at the municipal level, it is important to have regional/local teams -full time or per intervention-, to constantly measure the advances and/or setbacks.
- If there isn't sufficient budget to ensure constant repetition of messages during long periods of time, in mass media, including radio, there is a risk that awareness-raising messages vanish in the face of other commercial publicity or political propaganda.
- The results of the focus groups and surveys carried out by USAID/Education Reform in the Classroom showed that although the radio campaign had a certain level of penetration, particularly in the eastern part of the country, alternative communication media had greater impact on the target audiences, such as: Reading fairs, community dialogues, and puppetry.
- Given that the most convenient time for parents to participate is during weekends or outside school hours, there is a risk that teachers do not get involved in the process. Therefore, it is essential to devise ways to integrate and inform teachers periodically about implementation advances and/or problems.

**Any other critical information you'd like to share?**

The project included the communication staff of the Ministry of Education from the beginning of the diagnostic and design of the development communication strategy. Therefore, the communicators of the Ministry of Education were part of the team that gathered information during the diagnostic study, and then participated in the design of the communication strategy. The communicators were from the zones of intervention and the Directorate of Social Communication of the Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, in 2011 and 2012, all of the communicators of the Departmental Directorates of the Ministry of Education, participated in development communication workshops. These were designed and facilitated by Jan Servaes, an international specialist in this communication approach. The purpose of these efforts consisted in

57 Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) mechanism implemented by Dexis Consulting Group and its partner, Engility Corporation.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



training communicators of the Ministry of Education in order for them to develop communication strategies and actions to involve local education community in favor of quality of education.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



The USAID/Education Reform in the Classroom project implemented the “Early Reading Socialization Mechanism” from 2009 to 2011 in 4 municipalities of two departments of the eastern part of Guatemala (Jalapa and Chiquimula) and in 2 municipalities of the department of Quiché. In 2012 and 2014, it was implemented in 5 municipalities of Totonicapán, 1 municipality of San Marcos, and 2 municipalities of Quiché.

Currently, USAID/Lifelong Learning Project (2014-2019) continues implementing “schools for parents” in order to motivate parents to take part in the learning to read process of their children, both in Mayan language [mother tongue] and Spanish.