



Local Governance Project (LGP) / NEXOS LOCALES

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Implemented by Development Alternatives, Inc.

Gender and Youth Integration Plan

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I. Background on the Situation of Gender and Youth in the Western Highlands

Women and youth are fundamental to success of Nexos Locales' objectives, but due to longstanding and ingrained social, political, and economic patterns of discrimination and exclusion, their participation in the project cannot be assured without specific attention. Used to shape the interview guide and analyze the findings, background documents from Nexos Locales, USAID, and others provide important evidence about gender and social inclusion that validates and contextualizes the interview results.

Gender

As defined in USAID ADS 205, "promoting gender equality and advancing the status of all women and girls around the world is vital to achieving U.S. foreign policy and development objectives" (ADS 205 2013). The Guatemala CDCS notes, "Barriers to participation in decision-making in the household and in the community are a fundamental aspect of gender inequality for women. Political and economic empowerment is an important path to more equitable gender relationships. In Guatemala, the gender analysis and activities that emanate from it must necessarily deal with the intersection between gender and ethno-cultural identity, and the commonality and differences among women and their relationships with men in a multi-cultural society" (CDCS).

Gender discrimination and violence have critically undermined full democratic and economic participation in the Western Highlands. Girls often experience both discrimination and violence at a very young age. In 2012, Guatemala registered over 4,200 births by girls ages 10 to 14, providing evidence of widespread sexual abuse of minors that threatens their psychological and physical health and impedes achievement of their lives' potential (United Nations 2014). Gender-based violence has been called an epidemic in Guatemala, as the country is third globally in killings of women per capita. In 2014, two women were killed by gender-based violence per day, and this number has been rising (OACNUDH 2015). While murders in the country overall have decreased since 2010, violent deaths of women have increased (United Nations 2014). The CDCS notes that, "young women are most affected by rising femicide" in Guatemala (CDCS). The judicial response has been poor, particularly in areas where there is no access to special courts to address gender-based violence.

While there have been significant advances in the last 20 years to achieve parity overall in primary education between girls and boys, there are still significant economic, ethnic, and regional disparities that affect gender parity. In Concepción Chiquirichapa, for example, only 14 percent of rural indigenous girls finish primary school, compared to 68 percent among Guatemala's general population (Hallman 2007). Overall, at age 16-18, a boy has a 9.8% greater possibility of being in school than his female counterparts with the same demographic characteristics (United Nations 2014). Education in Guatemala is a strong predictor of many things, including political engagement. A 2013 study found that women with higher levels of education, even in rural areas, are much more likely to feel free to exercise political rights (Azpuru 2013).

Women's participation in income-generating activities in Guatemala has increased, but is still relatively low at 45.7 percent (compared to 87.6 percent for men). Largely concentrated in the informal sector, women frequently lack job security and benefits. Unpaid tasks in the home take up on average a quarter of women's daily life. While women are increasingly working in agriculture, gender and ethnicity pose a barrier to agricultural income. Indigenous women farmers earn 27% less than indigenous men, 37% less than non-indigenous women and 50% less than non-indigenous men (United Nations 2014). These disparities reflect women's barriers to property ownership and credit. As the USAID CDCS notes:

Biases against women's participation as members in farmers' groups or cooperatives, and particularly against their presence in decision-making positions within the groups, also restrict their access to inputs, information, and markets....The barriers to participation for rural women, both politically and economically, cannot be countered merely through equalizing opportunities. The history of exclusion and isolation and lack of experience in dealing with national institutions and markets means that particular measures must be taken to provide women with the tools to take advantage of these opportunities. (USAID CDCS)

In the political environment, while women increasingly have become leaders of nongovernmental organizations and other civil society groups, they still have not achieved parity with men, and their barriers to participation in electoral politics remain high. Only seven mayors' offices nationwide are occupied by women as a result of the 2011 elections, only one more than resulted from the 2007 election, and no indigenous woman serves as mayor (United Nations 2014). This is due in part because campaigns are getting longer, requiring more resources. Compared to men, women have relatively low access to resources (Vásquez 2012). Also, governmental corruption falls particularly heavily on women and others who are socially excluded because benefits, services, and information flow to those who are well connected (CDCS). Gender-based violence and discrimination affects all types of participation outside the home. According to María Machicado, UN Women's representative in Guatemala, "80% of men believe that women need permission to leave the house, and 70% of women surveyed agreed" (CNN.com 2015).

In recent years, the U.S. government has developed several relevant policies that guide attention to gender in the Nexos Locales project, including **The Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy**; **The U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security**; **The U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally**; **The USAID Vision for Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children**; and **The USAID Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy** (web pages linked in bibliography).

Youth

The USAID Youth in Development Policy notes that, "Youth is a life stage, one that is not finite or linear" (USAID 2012). Young people in Guatemala, like elsewhere, are not a monolithic group. Their characteristics vary greatly by class, ethnicity, gender, and residence. Even the duration of adolescence varies, with expectations of adulthood pressing in at younger ages for poor, rural residents, particularly

indigenous girls. For this reason, programming targeting young people must take into account the different political and economic spaces they occupy (UNDP 2012).

Young people in Guatemala's Western Highlands face an extremely challenging path to adulthood. Poor possibilities for vocational and higher education and a lack of entry-level employment contribute to crime, early childbearing, and migration, exacerbating cycles of poverty and family disintegration. Local political systems are largely closed to their inputs, excluding youth from decision-making roles in their communities. With half of Guatemala's population under 19, such systematic barriers to the successful transition to adulthood pose a formidable challenge to the country's economic and political development.

Research indicates that most young people who migrate from Guatemala are 14-17 year olds from the western part of the country, and 80 percent of them work for their family (United Nations 2014). Common drivers for youth migration are poverty, violence, and reuniting with family members who have already migrated. In a meeting on the issue with Ambassador Shannon, USAID partners indicated that local municipal officials see migration as an opportunity instead of a problem, as it leads to inflows of remittances into the community (Meeting Notes).

One of the primary reasons young people do not see a future other than migration is the lack of economic opportunity they face. In its very comprehensive report on youth, "Guatemala: Un País de Oportunidades para la Juventud?" the UNDP reports that 52% of Guatemalan youth live in poverty. In spite of the fact that they make up half the population, they also estimate that only 6 percent of Guatemala's budget is focused on benefiting youth, largely through the formal education system.

Limits on education play a large role in diminishing economic opportunity, with students reaching six years of schooling on average nationwide, and rural students receiving fewer than four years of school on average. Beyond primary level, rural residents have very low access to schools because of infrastructure and staffing shortages. Indigenous children have a lower probability of attending school, and only half of those attending primary school are taught in bilingual environments (Richards 2010). There are also serious questions about teaching quality, as in 2012, only 5.9 percent of public school students passed national middle level math tests, and only 23.7 percent passed the reading comprehension test (United Nations 2014).

Crime and violence are rising, undermining the economy and driving migration. Young people in Guatemala are increasingly the victims and perpetrators of violent crime (CDCS). For those under 18, the leading cause of death is gun violence (United Nations 2014). Young women in Guatemala are at high risk of gender-based violence, including *femicidio* and sexual violence. As the UNDP points out, "Violence affecting young people enormously increases the costs of health and social assistance services, reduces productivity, diminishes property values, disorganizes a variety of essential services, and, in general, undermines the structure of society" (UNDP 2012).

Political engagement of young people in Guatemala, as throughout Latin America, is low. A report prepared by FLACSO Chile, "Youth and Political Participation in Latin America: Current State and Challenges," reports that only 10 percent of Guatemala's 16 to 29 year olds have high confidence in Congress. While only 27 percent reported not voting in the last presidential election, their voting patterns do not translate into other kinds of political engagement, as only seven percent participate in protests or other mobilizations. While noting that not all young people have access to technology, the

report sees information and communication technology as a promising tool in engaging and mobilizing youth (FLACSO 2013).

The USAID Youth in Development Policy affirms two objectives: “Strengthen youth programming, participation, and partnership in support of Agency development objectives,” and “Mainstream and integrate youth issues and engage young people across Agency initiatives and operations.” The policy puts particular emphasis on consultation with youth, noting that, “youth participation not only reduces passivity and apathy among youth but also promotes a positive view of young people in the wider adult community” (USAID 2012).

II. Introduction

USAID Nexos Locales seeks to transform local governance in 30 municipalities in the Guatemalan Western Highlands by engaging municipal governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector in strategic activities designed to improve social conditions. Critical to these efforts is a process to ensure that patterns of social exclusion do not undermine the project, but rather that traditionally excluded groups, including women, young people, and indigenous communities, find ample space to influence and benefit from local economic and political decisions.

The project contracted with Iris Group, a gender and social inclusion consulting firm, to conduct a rapid assessment in February 2015, to discern the challenges and opportunities couched in the dynamics of gender, age, and – where possible – variations by ethnicity that are critical to reaching desired results in the Western Highlands. This report offers detailed recommendations about how USAID Nexos Locales should take these factors into account in the development of project activities to optimize project success and promote gender equality and social inclusion.

The report presents the findings of the rapid assessment – reflecting the information gleaned from key informants and presented from their perspective – and a discussion of the *general* recommendations by project component. **Annex A** (GAIM results) presents *detailed* information on the gender and youth analysis questions that arose during the assessment, the findings from the key informants related to those questions, suggested responses that can be incorporated into planned project activities and suggested indicators for monitoring progress on the project’s efforts to integrate gender and youth in its work. This main body of this plan, therefore, is meant to give an overview, while readers interested in the specific actions by result area should consult Annex A.

Annex B presents the interview guide used in the key informant interviews. **Annex C** presents the list of persons interviewed. **Annex D** is the chart of potential partners to engage with on the topics of youth and gender. **Annex E** presents the agenda for the strategy session held with Nexos Locales staff on February 26, 2015, at the end of the rapid assessment visit. A **reference list** identifies the main documents consulted during the brief desk review of the literature.

III. Methodology

This rapid assessment of youth and gender took place during February 2015: a very brief desk review was followed by a two-week visit by a two-person team, consisting of a gender and a youth expert both with prior experience in their specialty in Guatemala, to conduct key informant interviews. The short time frame and other constraints are detailed in the limitations section that follows below.

Document Review

The team reviewed relevant publicly available documents related to the USAID Nexos Locales project, including USAID Guatemala strategic documents such as the CDCS and PAD, the Nexos Locales work plan and gender and equity plan. These documents shaped the interview guide development, in order to identify the most relevant questions that will identify gender-based and social barriers and opportunities to address/capitalize on to optimize project success. The team also drew on standard gender assessment methodology to develop the questionnaire, including the USAID/WDC-recommended approach as detailed in the IGWG publication, *A Practical Guide for Managing and Conducting Gender Assessments in the Health Sector* (Greene, M. 2012). To provide background, further contextualize findings during analysis and shape recommendations, the team also reviewed national and international documents and data relevant to the technical and geographic scope of the project and this assessment, as well as relevant data and assessments provided by interviewees (including public authorities, CSOs, and USAID implementing partners). A full list of consulted documents follows.

Key Informant Interviews

The team conducted 17 interviews including 36 people in Quetzaltenango and Huehuetenango with representation from three key sectors: public, civil society organizations, and USAID implementing partners/other development organizations. Iris Group reviewed lists of key stakeholders compiled by project staff, and received suggestions from the USAID Nexos Locales COR, the USAID Guatemala Gender Focal Point, and other key informants in the Western Highlands. For many key informants selected, USAID Nexos staff facilitated introductions. For others, Iris Group sent out requests for interviews by email, attaching a letter of introduction from USAID Nexos Locales in order to improve the odds of obtaining a positive response to the request for an interview.

The team developed interview guides based on the above-mentioned strategic documents—primarily the USAID Nexos Work plan and relevant sector recommendations from USAID Guatemala-- to ensure consistency in the type of information gathered. They tailored the interview guides to each sector, but all seek to answer the **three main research questions** of the assessment:

- 1) What are the barriers/opportunities for this project related to gender and other social factors (age, ethnicity, area of residence, etc.)?
- 2) What are potential differential impacts that this project could have for different subgroups of beneficiaries, depending on gender and other social factors?
- 3) What are optimal ways for this project to promote gender equality and social inclusion?

Upon completion of the interviews, the team used manual qualitative coding methods to code the interview notes according to the research questions, and reviewed the results to identify and categorize common themes. The analysis of findings guided the formation of recommendations for future work, detailed below.

Strategy Session

Iris Group led a three-hour gender and youth strategy session for 20 Nexos Locales staff members and consultants on February 26. The session's objectives were:

- To socialize preliminary results and top-line recommendations from the rapid assessment on gender, youth, and social inclusion.
- To jointly determine integration points for gender, youth, and social inclusion within the USAID Nexos Locales project.
- To begin to form a concrete and measurable plan of action for the integration of gender, youth, and social inclusion in USAID Nexos Locales project.

At the end of the session, staff and consultants worked in groups to propose ways to address the issues raised in the rapid assessment and integrate gender and youth into project activities. These results were subsequently incorporated into the Gender Analysis and Integration Matrix (GAIM, Annex A), which serves as a reference for technical staff as they work to address gender and youth in their

IV. Limitations of the Rapid Assessment

Several constraints limited the breadth and depth of the assessment and are detailed here. Two are worth noting in particular: the short duration of the in-country visit restricted the team's ability to respond and adapt to unforeseen events, and the project team's decision to omit Quiche as an interview site (due to resource and time constraints) meant that a sizeable subpopulation with unique characteristics was not included in the assessment.

- Given that there is a wealth of international and local research on gender and youth issues in Guatemala and in particular in the Western Highlands (see References), by nature, this was intended to be a rapid assessment capitalizing on existing knowledge. As such, the objective of primary data collection for this assessment was to confirm existing research with stakeholders and potential partners in the project municipalities and to identify where and how responses contradict or differ from existing research.
- The desk review was very brief, comprising two days of labor. It was not intended to be comprehensive; rather it was to scan the existing literature and get a sense of what information was already available to inform the assignment.
- The scope for this research did not include a full investigation of indigenous issues therefore we cannot claim that this is a true social inclusion analysis. That said, the research team specifically probed for risk and resilience factors at the intersection of gender and or/age and indigenous culture. There were several women's and youth groups among the respondents.
- Due to other project activities, visiting staff and a leadership transition during the two-week in-country visit, the research team had limited engagement with senior leadership and project staff to refine field research details on forthcoming activities and gather project staff perspectives.
- The research team did not control site selection. Because this was a rapid assessment, it appears that the sites selected for research were based on convenience, time and resource constraints, rather than representativeness in the projects. The omission of Quiche, with 33% of the population and a very different context, does limit the potential usefulness of the assessment findings to that region.
- Respondent selection depended heavily on project staff recommendations; however several additional respondents were added based on USAID and Iris Group recommendations. Respondents were limited in number and geographic area based on the rapidity of the assignment.
- In some of the result/sub-result areas, the team was unable to provide specific integration recommendations for various project activities, as program activities were still being determined by project staff and pending the results of other assessments.
- This assessment was conducted after an in-depth gender assessment of all 30 municipalities. The rapid assessment team was not able to take advantage of that earlier opportunity to insert additional questions that would have shed more light on gender issues in all 30 municipalities.

V. Findings

The findings from the rapid assessment affirmed some of the assumptions already guiding the Nexos Locales project, and challenged or provided important caveats to others. As this was a joint assessment, the findings for youth and gender are provided together under each topic. For more detailed treatment by category (youth, gender), see Annex A.

a. Political Participation

As identified by informants, political participation at the municipal level for women and youth is heavily constrained in the Western Highlands. Barriers to participation include:

- **Individual Capacity and Self Esteem:** While there are groups working to develop individual leadership capacity among women and youth, many informants also observed that capacity gaps still exist. There is still a tendency for women (including young women in youth groups) not to speak up in mixed groups, in part because they do not feel appropriately equipped to do so. A youth leader mentioned that his group lacked experience with proposal development when they first started to develop an idea for a campaign. While institutional and community discrimination must be addressed as well, women and youth face a persistent gap in confidence and capacity that will need to be overcome to achieve full participation. (See Annex A for more details)
- **Bias and discrimination in communities:** Informants reported that, due to widely held assumptions about the capacity of women and youth to contribute substantively to decisions, communities are reluctant to elect women and youth into key institutions that influence decision making, such as COCODEs and COMUDEs (community development councils). All informants noted a very low percentage of women and youth participants in these institutions. The formal political system is equally exclusive. There are currently no women mayors in the region, for example. (See Annex A for more details)
- **Gender-Based Violence:** Informants reported that gender violence, including sexual violence against women and girls, prevents women from involvement in CSOs and municipal government (e.g., citing safety concerns for women traveling to meetings). Many spoke about women who commonly say they need “permission” to leave the house, making it difficult for them to engage in public activities.
- **Bias and discrimination within political institutions:** Even those few women and youth participants in COCODEs and COMUDEs do not have a prominent voice. Informants agreed that women and youth generally serve as “filler,” and that they don’t have “voice or vote.” They are rarely elected to leadership positions or influence COCODE and COMUDE decisions. Women’s commissions that present projects at the COCODE and COMUDE level are typically ignored in the final vote. For example, one informant reported that a women’s commission had presented a project to improve the community’s water supply, but a competing proposal to fund a soccer field won the commission’s final vote. A young indigenous CSO representative reported that she had been invited to COMUDE meetings, but stopped receiving meeting notices after she started raising questions and challenging decisions.
- **Structural Barriers to Participation (timing, location, cost):** Even if bias and discrimination against women and youth were reduced, the timing and location of meetings for COCODEs and COMUDEs often puts women and youth at a disadvantage. For women and girls, traditional roles in the home keep them from participation, and travel to meetings on their own can be dangerous. For young people, and all those persons living in deep poverty, time taken to participate has a significant opportunity cost, as it could be spent instead in economically productive activities.
- **Entrenched Power Structures:** Many informants reported that mayors continue to play a power broker role in relation to citizen initiatives, the development councils, and the Municipal Women’s Offices (OMMs). Respondents reported that although they understand that OMMs are allotted a

certain percentage of the funds by law, these allocations are not always made available, and when they are, mayors sometimes use these offices and their budgets to carry out logistical or clientelistic projects that do not advance women's economic or political empowerment. In some cases, mayors also heavily influence COCODE and COMUDE decisions, with several respondents calling these decision-making processes "politicized." Interviewed CSOs characterize mayors and political parties as driven by power and corruption, rather than public service. One youth group interviewed had presented a proposal to the mayor to address an illegal dump in their community, but their proposal was rejected. When they worked with a local women's group and took their own initiative to close off the dump, the mayor reopened it, saying they were "interfering" with municipal affairs. While dominance by political parties likely affects all CSOs, women's groups and youth groups face a particularly large obstacle given their low position in the power structure.

At the same time, informants identified critical areas of opportunity to advance political inclusion of women and youth:

- **Development Commissions and OMMs:** Despite the flaws, interviewed CSOs clearly see the COCODEs, COMUDEs, related women's commissions, and Municipal Women's Offices (OMMs) as areas of opportunity for advancing inclusive development. Several CSOs have focused capacity building and advocacy efforts on these institutions. For example, AMUTED works with the OMMs to provide gender training and educate them about legal requirements for their budget and municipal role. AMUTED claimed that, as a result, they have found higher OMM budgets in areas where they've trained OMM members.
- **CSO Capacity:** CSOs that focus on youth and gender in the Western Highlands have successfully developed strong capacity in problem definition, project development, and advocacy. Several of them have established relationships with power brokers at the municipal level and have effectively advanced proposals for the opening of municipal youth offices or nongovernmental youth councils, to increase budgets for OMMs, or to shift community values on women's political participation, for example. Indigenous authorities, such as 48 Cantones, exercise tremendous convening power within their communities and have an expressed interest in improving the lives of women and youth.
- **Mayan historical view of equality:** When asked whether indigenous traditional values conflict with gender equality, indigenous respondents unanimously disagreed. Several pointed out that Mayan cosmivision emphasizes equality and collaboration between the masculine and feminine, in human beings and in nature. Effective gender programs among Mayan communities embrace and emphasize this historical balance among men and women. These Mayan beliefs, and the potential role that Mayan women can play in changing attitudes and social practices in their communities, warrant more analysis to identify how to capitalize on this opportunity as a platform for change.

b. Economic Participation

Poor relative economic status for women and youth is deeply intertwined with their political exclusion. Economic barriers for women and youth noted by interviewees include:

- **Control over economic resources:** Several respondents agreed that economic development projects targeting women in the region often incorrectly assume that women will control the final income from the project. One informant recounted that one project had women raising pigs, and the women invested significant time in the process. Yet men were the ones who sold the pigs at market, and they kept the money. Another informant said that even if the men have migrated, their wives don't always control the remittances, as brothers-in-law or other relatives of the husband decide how it is spent.

- **Marketing and bottlenecks:** Informants report that those who implement economic projects for women often have not thought through the value chain sufficiently, leaving crafts projects, for example, with no market for the end product. Intermediaries, who are almost exclusively men, end up with most of the profits in some projects.
- **Low economic opportunity for youth:** Interviewees confirmed that young people have dismal economic prospects. Those who have completed secondary schooling rarely have the resources to go to university. Scholarships are scarce and seen as politicized. Those who do manage to go to university often find that their degree gives them no advantage in the job market. In the words of one young leader, “You don’t gain anything by studying,” losing both time and money. Informants strongly associated this lack of economic opportunity for youth as a main driver of migration.
- **Differential levels of engagement among youth:** One youth leader pointed out that efforts to engage youth to prevent migration can be difficult, given what he described as three different subgroups. The first group includes those who participate in youth-led or youth-serving organizations. They are politically aware and committed to staying in Guatemala to improve the country. A second group has little to no political interest. They are interested in their friends and not in any context outside themselves. The third group is living day to day, struggling to survive. They are most likely to migrate, yet difficult to engage in youth organizations because of the real and opportunity costs of participation. This categorization by the youth leader is enticing, and presented as is; further analysis by the project may be warranted to understand the structural causes behind these trends, develop a conceptual map, and review the relevant data prior to recommending any strategies to address the phenomenon.
- **Lack of interest in agriculture among youth:** Many of those interviewed noted that young people lack an interest in continuing family farms. One of the youth interviewed said he helps out on the farm, but only out of family obligation and lack of other ways to make money. One CSO leader said “we need to re-value agriculture” to bring young people back to it. Another expressed fear that food insecurity will worsen as fewer and fewer people in the region know how to work the fields.
- **Organized Crime:** Crime was not reported as a common issue across the board by those interviewed. It was more likely to be mentioned as a significant draw for youth in certain areas, including San Marcos and those closer to the border with Mexico.

The interviews found that Nexos Locales has some important foundations on which to build economic opportunity for women and youth. While a formal mapping of resource organizations in the region was outside the scope of this assessment, the team identified several potential partner organizations for the project and included the list as Annex D.

- **Political commitment and resistance to crime:** One youth group reported that young people who are politically aware are better able to resist crime because they have a strong commitment to improving their country.
- **Economic capacity of select CSOs:** The Western Highlands has some successful economic development organizations that are committed to gender equality and youth integration. (see Annex D)
- **High interest among youth and women:** It was clear from the interviews that youth and women are highly motivated to increase their income and participate in productive projects. As one interviewee put it, women feel they’ve had enough trainings, they just want to work on projects.

c. Participation in Social Issues (Water, Climate Change, Food Security)

As described above, women and youth face significant barriers to influencing community debates in general. On social issues critical to Nexos Locales results, such as water, climate change, and food security, the absence of political strength by women and youth conveys a particularly high cost.

- **Adult men control water decisions:** Few interviewees seemed to know much about municipal water councils, but those with some knowledge said that the councils tend to include representation exclusively from heads of households, which tend to be adult men, with women and youth much less likely to participate. Yet women are highly affected by water safety and source locations, as their traditional roles in the household require constant interaction with water. By excluding women's voices in water decisions, communities are limiting the identification of problems and effective solutions.
- **Gender impact of environmental damage:** Respondents highlighted the important gender dimensions of deforestation, given that women and girls have to walk farther for wood, putting their safety at risk and taking time away from their other responsibilities. Reforestation, however, also needs to be balanced with food security, as one representative interviewed noted that deforestation increasing land available for food production. The delicate balance between needing land to raise household crops, and needing forested areas for wood/energy, presents a particular intersection of problems for women, who have large responsibilities in both areas.

At the same time, women, youth, and indigenous communities hold enormous potential to drive positive change on water, climate change, and food security. Many of these issues related to territorial integrity are being discussed at the local, national and international level, with examples including the Consulta Comunitaria de Buena Fe, respondents in this assessment did not go into detail on that question.

- **Interest by women and youth in issues:** Several interviewees mentioned the projects promoted by women's groups and youth groups – to local mayors, COCODEs and COMUDEs, for example – that address water, food security, and the environment. While current domination of development funds by adult males has resulted in prioritization of road projects, a shift in power dynamics toward women and youth could lead to increased financial and human resource investment in diverse development projects. Youth groups mentioned environmental projects – such as reforestation – as being particularly attractive to them, in part because they provide quick, visible wins.
- **Mayan Cosmovision:** As has been noted widely, the Mayan cosmovision emphasizes harmony with the environment. Indigenous women, in particular, have a close relationship with water. Project activities seeking to raise consciousness about water use and human impact on the climate have an opportunity to make connections to and build on traditional values, as a platform for adapting present-day behaviors to climate change. Engagement with Mayan women leaders in project activities, and opening effective channels for their voices, will help the project identify appropriate strategies, messages and interventions.

VI. Recommendations

The transformative change sought by USAID Nexos Locales cannot happen with periodic inclusion of women's groups or a handful of youth workshops. Because of the deep seated nature of individual and institutionalized discrimination faced by women and youth, as demonstrated by the findings and literature review, attention to gender and social inclusion should be interwoven throughout the management and implementation of the project.

The recommendations articulated below are organized into several cross-cutting themes, and include general recommendations by theme. Specific recommendations by result area where indicated are included in Annex A. The inclusion of a recommendation does not necessarily mean that the project has to date inadequately considered the recommended action. Some of the recommendations may already be appropriately integrated by project leadership and staff. This full set of recommendations is meant to provide project leadership and staff a comprehensive map of indicated actions on gender and social inclusion that can be used to track and document progress on these issues.

USAID Nexos Locales should incorporate the following recommendations into project management and activities in order to promote gender equality and social inclusion, and reach anticipated objectives:

Capacity Building

The findings strongly indicate that capacity building – for individual and institutions – is essential for the project to effectively pursue gender equality and social inclusion. While women’s groups and youth groups have had some success building leadership and economic development skills among their members, the refusal of power brokers to recognize the critical inputs of women and youth reflects an urgent need to deconstruct discriminatory attitudes and behavior predominant in the larger social and political environment. As anticipated in the work plan, the bulk of capacity-building work will be conducted by third parties, generally CSOs. Because so much capacity building is planned within the project, the recommendations below should be interwoven through contracting mechanisms when appropriate and possible. As a general rule, any capacity building supported by Nexos Locales should reinforce gender equality, women’s empowerment, and constructive male engagement messages.

General Recommendations

- Throughout the life of the project, Nexos Locales should organize gender trainings, building on past, successful experiences and modules and using a local co-facilitator whenever possible, in order to build local capacity and contribute to sustainability. Program technical and administrative staff (including project management and field staff), local technical partners, program partners (such as grantees) and beneficiaries should receive gender training over the life of the project. Topics should include gender equity and diversity, gender analysis and integration, gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation, preventing gender-based violence, examining gender roles and responsibilities, new constructions of masculinities, and others.
- There is an urgent need for capacity building around masculinity and gender directed toward men – including partners of emerging women leaders, community gatekeepers, and authority figures (mayors, heads of COCODEs and COMUDEs, indigenous authorities, youth group leaders). There are some groups that have taken this on, but more – and more targeted – training will help increase women’s influence over key decisions.
- Some potential leaders among women and youth need capacity building in message formulation, advocacy, and campaign development. The project should support needs assessments to pinpoint exact capacity gaps, and capacity-building workshops provided by the region’s experienced CSOs.
- As part of the larger capacity building effort targeting municipal leaders, messaging on youth and women’s participation should be specifically adapted to ensure these leaders understand the benefits such participation can bring to them. For example, if previously excluded groups feel heard and understood by elected officials, there will be fewer conflicts within a community and increased support for municipal government.
- Messages within capacity building sessions should balance an emphasis on rights with an emphasis on community improvement. In other words, while articulating the responsibilities of duty bearers, trainings should also provide concrete examples of how participation by youth and women improves conditions broadly.

Representation/Participation

Youth and women’s participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of project activities was a recurring theme among interviewees, and is a critical aspect of USAID gender and youth policies. Authentic representation and participation comes with considerable challenges, but it cannot be

shortchanged without risking project outcomes. As a youth leader said, “Young people struggle for youth causes – not for institutions’ causes.” In other words, if young people sense that they are being used or co-opted, they will quickly withdraw their support. A women’s leader reinforced this, saying “women will participate to the degree to which the project improves their lives.” At the same time, as noted in the findings, engaging women and youth authentically will bear substantial fruit, as they are deeply motivated and capable of driving change.

Of course, women and youth are not monolithic groups. As pointed out above, some of the most critical audiences to engage are the most difficult and time consuming because of their economic status and political awareness. The hurdles are considerable: they must believe that they are capable of participating, that participating is safe, and that institutions are potentially responsive enough to them (or people like them) that their participation matters. Even under these conditions, and even if every meeting is local to them, these women and youth would have to give up time that could be spent in generating income or performing household tasks in order to participate. Engaging participation from these groups must be subsidized, must provide quick rewards, and must be shaped around their constraints. General recommendations are included below and more detailed recommendations are presented in Annex A.

General Recommendations

- Nexos staff need to consistently ensure that project activities are inclusive of women and youth who face considerable economic and time barriers to participation. Transport subsidies are critical, as is understanding how timing of meetings (i.e. on market days) affects potential participation. Staff should also be cognizant of the many pressures on time that women and adolescent girls face, and that participation in project activities will necessarily come at the expense of something else. Nexos should seek to incorporate other mechanisms to ensure women and adolescent girls have time to participate, perhaps by promoting community mechanisms to alleviate child care or other household responsibilities.
- Young people in particular need to see visible, quick wins or they can lose enthusiasm or feel that their time is wasted. Youth-specific activities, such as the proposed Youth Congress, should feature strong youth leadership, and will engage participants more effectively by integrating cultural and recreational aspects.
- Nexos Locales can build trust among women and youth through transparency, making sure CSOs representing women and youth are kept abreast of project activities and major decisions. Also, bodies such as the Area Advisory Councils should be certain to include women and youth who are widely perceived as trusted representatives of their communities.
- Nexos Locales can also work closely with youth and gender organizations with strong advocacy capacity and established successes with decision makers (A list of some groups that the team identified is in Annex C). These groups can play a critical role in spreading their capacity to others and identifying persistent gaps in inclusion of women and youth. The small grants process should actively seek out, recruit, and support participation of such groups to overcome the barriers these groups encounter (related to time and resource constraints, among others).
- In interactions with municipal officials, the project can play a strong role in advocating for representation by women and youth in local decision-making bodies, such as water committees, and in issues critical to women, such as reforestation. Women’s connection to water and safety issues that arise when they have to travel for firewood or water make it essential that their voices are heard and considered on these issues.
- The project should also look for opportunities to capitalize on the existing knowledge that indigenous women, in particular, can bring to the table. Their insights about climate change, water issues, and food security should not be overlooked. Appointing key indigenous women to

serve as special advisors to the project would both reflect the esteem with which Nexos holds their knowledge and model the importance of gender equality.

- Local economic development plans must incorporate youth participation in order to effectively understand and address their low economic opportunities, and stem migration flows. The proposed Youth Congress can serve as a critical meeting point between youth entrepreneurial leaders and both municipal leaders and the private sector, helping build both the political will and capital necessary to support and sustain youth economic opportunities.
- Interviewed youth organizations had high interest in environmental projects. The project should leverage this interest and energy by engaging youth groups, yet at the same time ensure that these activities are adapted to youth needs and interests.
- Solutions that hastily lump women's issues together with youth or children's issues should be carefully examined. Adult women and adolescents may have very different interests and needs, and while these can intersect, combining approaches to these groups (i.e. in a single government office or committee) can lead to glossing over important distinctions, or appear dismissive to the rights of one of the groups.

Diagnostics/Research

The varied aspects of gender and social inclusion and how they interrelate in each of the 30 target municipalities certainly could not be ascertained in a rapid assessment. Yet moving forward, it will be essential for Nexos Locales to develop deeper understanding of how women and youth can best benefit from and participate in the project in each community.

General Recommendations

- In every diagnostic study undertaken by the project, it is likely that gender and other social inclusion issues will affect the result. By explicitly paying attention to these issues, Nexos Locales increases the likelihood of achieving its objectives. For example, capacity assessments must look at whether an institution knows how to conduct a gender analysis, or whether a representative body understands how their decisions impact youth differently. Economic projects must consider roles and responsibilities in the household, and how any proposed project will affect people differently based on age and gender. Any mapping done must examine power relationships, and how able women and youth are able to influence decisions. The integrated assessments on water, local economic development, and climate change must consider both differential impacts on and current/potential participation in decision making by women and youth. Such information will provide greater clarity on activity design.
- Consultation with women's groups and youth groups will help immensely in integration of gender and youth issues into research. These groups will also be helpful partners in disseminating results, assisting with Nexos' transparency in these communities.
- Nexos staff should also assess the factors that have contributed to positive outliers – for example, where a young person has been elected to a municipal council, or any past examples of a woman elected as mayor and so leader of a COMUDE. Lessons from these successes should be examined for potential application in other municipalities.

Communications

In a project with this kind of reach, spanning different populations and different language groups, designing communications that can reach women and youth effectively is an enormous challenge. It is important to keep in mind the diversity in these audiences when considering message, tone, messenger, and delivery mechanism.

General Recommendations:

- Social media can be a good way to target some youth, but not all have access to cell phones and internet, especially poorer youth in rural areas.
- Language and translation is critical, but as one interviewee described, so is the “cultural code” that conveys meaning (positive or negative) based on cultural context to different terms. For example, most indigenous interviewees said they don’t use the term “gender” in workshops in Mayan communities because it doesn’t have a meaningful positive translation.
- Youth groups said that they would be the most effective messengers to other youth, as they know how best to use language and concepts that appeal to them.
- Radio has been used effectively by many organizations effectively to reach illiterate or monolingual groups, but it’s important to examine the gender dynamics to see if women have access to radio programs. This is especially critical when designing Early Warning Systems to ensure women as well as men are warned in advance of natural disasters.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To adequately answer the question of how well this project is serving or has served the needs of women and youth, it is essential to go beyond disaggregated data. As many interviewees commented, women and youth are at times used as tokens by political institutions, and their presence in a meeting room does not reliably predict transformative behavior or decisions.

General Recommendations

- Disaggregated data (sex and age) for all project activities will give a glimpse at trends, and is a good indicator of whether structural changes (to meeting times, to subsidized transport, etc) have had an effect on participation. Disaggregated data will help project staff detect meaningful differences across generations and within subgroups. Any time people are counted, data should be disaggregated by sex and age.
- Gender-sensitive indicators should also be used. For example, an economic development project’s impact cannot be judged just by an increase in household income, but in an improvement in shared economic decision making, or increased expenditures on nutrition. A water project can’t be assessed just by how clean the water is, but must also include an assessment of how far women and girls must now walk to collect water.
- The project should also develop indicators that serve as better measurements for active participation: supplementing the current indicator of number of women or youth (15-24) in leadership positions, the project could add a measure of active/meaningful participation. Many projects measure participation using attendance rosters, but having at a seat for women and youth at the table is not a proxy for participation, as detailed above. Measurements of active participation, for example, explore whether youth/women actively engage in meetings (by raising new points, questioning others, and shaping debate), whether they feel they are being listened to, whether their interventions influence decision making, and whether they are themselves in decision-making roles within these bodies. Given that this type of participation is critical for good governance and inclusive development—pillars of the Nexos Locales project—it should be measured in detail.
- Nexos should monitor and use disaggregated and gender-sensitive data for decision making throughout the life of the program, to identify and integrate any changing or previously unidentified gender issues.
- As part of the monitoring and course-correction process, it is critically important for Nexos to look for unexpected results of this project. These can be positive or negative. Nexos staff

should be most vigilant about whether an unintended result of increased women's empowerment activities includes an increase in gender-based violence. Any indication of this should be immediately addressed.

VII. Conclusion

USAID Nexos Locales' expressed and demonstrated commitment to gender and social inclusion is a critical component to the project's success. As evidenced through the literature and interviews with stakeholders, the exclusion of women and youth from political and economic participation has undermined development progress in the Western Highlands. By interweaving gender and youth considerations into capacity building, representation/participation, research, communications, and monitoring and evaluation, Nexos Locales will ensure equitable distribution of the project's benefits and more just representation

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