

2014–2020

Changing Gender Attitudes, Empowering Girls

Our shared lessons learned: a contribution to gender justice and diminishing violence against girls and women through the promotion of healthy masculinities

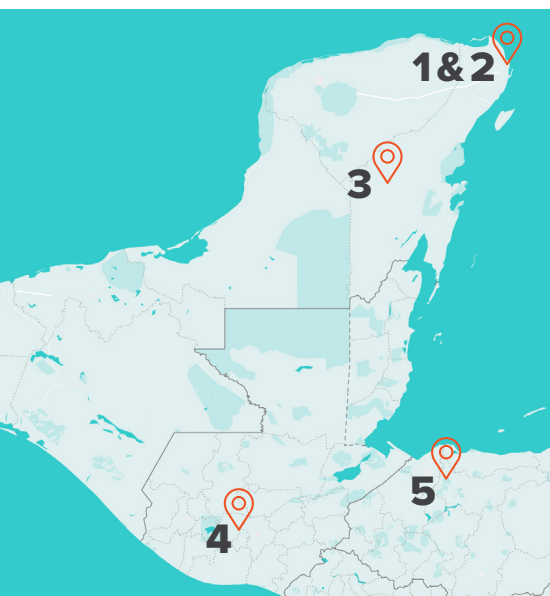
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ciam
cancún a.c.

MÉXICO Y CARIBE
JOVENES, A.C.

OYE
Organization for Youth Empowerment

Generando
Healthy, Stronger & More Resilient



- 1 Red + Positiva de Quintana Roo A.C.**
Cancún, Quintana Roo, México
- 2 Centro Integral de Atención a las Mujeres (CIAM)**
Cancún, Quintana Roo, México
- 3 México y Caribe Jóvenes A.C.**
Chunhuhub, Quintana Roo, México
- 4 Asociación Generando (ASOGEN)**
Chimaltenango, Guatemala
- 5 Organization for Youth Empowerment (OYE)**
Progreso, Honduras

In 2014, a group of organizations that were committed to promoting gender equality in Mesoamerica began an exploratory collaboration. All have deep experience working to empower girls and women, and at the same time, they feel a nagging worry about limiting their direct engagement to only women and girls. Together they seek to discover, test, and learn different ways of influencing boys, adolescents, and young men toward a vision of alternative, diverse, non-hegemonic, and anti-patriarchal masculinities.

They see working with boys and young men in this way as a strategy to go directly to the potential future sources of the gender violence that holds girls and women in the region down. They also believe that boys and young men who develop different ways of expressing their masculine identities, and who internalize the paradigms of gender equality and non-violence, will be positive influences on their peers. At the same time, their strategy acknowledges the damage caused by *machismo* in the hearts and lives of children and young people and the need to heal and prevent these wounds.

The Changing Gender Attitudes initiative explores the potential to change the relationships and outside environment that affect girls and women with an investment in gender and masculinities programs with boys and young men that does not ignore the need for greater investment in support for girls and women. It seeks to transform relationships, norms, attitudes, stereotypes, and institutional practices that promote a hegemonic and violent masculinity, using an integrated approach for systems change that starts from the individual level and radiates behavioral and relational changes outward, with youth leadership at the center of this social change, and with a commitment to collaboration and continuous learning.

After 6 years of collaboration, Global Fund for Children (GFC), Asociación Generando Equidad, Liderazgo y Oportunidades (ASOGEN), Centro Integral de Atención a las Mujeres (CIAM) Cancún, México y Caribe Jóvenes AC, the Organization for Youth Empowerment (OYE), and Red + Positiva de Quintana Roo A.C. reflect on and share what they have learned in the hope of inspiring others to consider how to integrate gender transformation into their programs, both with and for girls, as well as with, and yes, also for boys.

NETWORKS

- Advocacy and collaboration
- Regional masculinities networks

COMMUNITY

- Safe spaces for reflection
- Cultural festivals and public arts
- Media campaigns and local advocacy

FAMILY

- Inter-generational dialogues
- “School for parents”
- Workshops with teachers

INDIVIDUAL

- Safe spaces for intimacy and emotional development
- Stories of change
- Future life planning

Said and done ...



More than

30,700

young people reached with gender programs since 2015

“

Thanks to my conversations with Red + Posithiva, I have learned that I should not let my boyfriend tell me who I can and cannot talk with.”

14-year-old participant,
Tres Reyes, Cancún, Quintana Roo
(Red + Posithiva)



More than

\$525,000

directly invested in Central America and Mexico under the Changing Gender Attitudes initiative

“

The learnings have helped me to control anger, jealousy, frustrations, and everything that made it difficult for me to identify and process. I have learned to have the confidence to speak openly with my family, and not to hold back any emotion or thing that I see or feel.”

18-year-old participant of the
J-Xiibal Collective, Chunhuhub,
Quintana Roo (Mexico y Caribe Jovenes)



In CONALEP 2
High School in Cancún ...

34 early pregnancy cases
in 2011 were reduced to

29 in 2015,

18 in 2018, and finally

10 in 2019

CIAM and Red + Posithiva

“

We question the belief that our fathers and mothers imposed on us that what belongs to men has to be done only by men; what belongs to women, only can be accomplished by women.”

Focus Group, Guatemala
(ASOGEN)



Gender programs
conducted in

47 schools and

92 communities since 2015

“

We cannot leave all the responsibility of change to women, because men are the ones who commit violence; we must also participate.”

Focus Group, ages 16-22,
Guatemala (ASOGEN)



6

organizations strengthened
their networks to

180

more through their shared work

📍 Progreso, Honduras

Organización para el Empoderamiento Juvenil

Organization for Youth Empowerment (OYE)

OYE seeks to strengthen youth leadership in its youth programs: **Art in the Streets**, **OYE Communicates**, **OYE Designs**, and **Sports in Action**. In addition, OYE also aims to foster comprehensive sexuality education and political activism. Its youth participants acquire technical and social skills to lead change both inside and outside the organization. Through a gender mainstreaming approach, OYE's young people share experiences that have shaped their own self-perception and the way they interact with people who have distinct sexual identities and gender orientations. Youth participants reflect on how their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors affect them on a personal level, their relationships, and the communities to which they belong.

OYE's youth activist groups have experienced noteworthy success promoting **comprehensive sexuality education with a gender approach**. These young people have become agents of change, leaders, and workshop facilitators in their communities. It is equally important to note that they are also the ones who influence change within their families and other young people in their environment.

Another initiative that continues to grow and evolve is OYE's **Young Men's Circle**. In these small group conversations, young men discuss different forms of toxic masculinity and their consequences, in addition to exploring healthier masculinity models. To broaden the initiative's reach, the group leaders also carry out conversations with participants' mothers and teachers.

Lesson learned

Be flexible with the quantitative goals for the program and its participants, so that you can focus on small groups, their energy, and stories, and identify with whom you can meet on a regular basis to generate the greatest impact.

Accomplishment

OYE has become a regional leader in healthy masculinities. OYE's youth have participated in or facilitated workshops and forums in the CONFIO Project and MenEngage Latin American Network of Masculinities and Youth, sharing their experiences with organizations in Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and across the Mixteca Oaxaqueña region.

Obstacle

The educational system does not prioritize comprehensive sexual education and values even less any space for reflection on gender or masculinities. Each year, OYE has less access to educational centers and is offered less space and time for this type of reflection. Our effort has been redirected toward serving youth within the organization.

Challenge

There are few examples of adult men inside and outside families, or on the global stage, who represent alternative models of masculinity. It's difficult for our conversations about healthy masculinities to go beyond our organization's activities and become part of everyday conversation, either in person or on social media.

Photo: OYE Honduras



Anderson Chávez

21 years old, Progreso, Honduras



Anderson Chávez began participating in OYE's Creating Friendly Spaces program when he was 15 years old. He recently became a program coordinator of the young men's small group conversations as part of the OYE team.

I describe myself as a young man just like everyone else, who has learned a lot but is still trying to improve.

In my adolescence, I was uncomfortable hearing my cousins speaking harshly to women. I thought differently, but peer pressure was still an influence on me. In fact, I had normalized the thought “because women dress in very low-cut clothes, it gives men a reason to harass them.” Inside my house, the men got used to doing the heavy-lifting work and the women got used to doing the simpler work.

My training at OYE has helped me a lot. For example, the men's group sessions helped me not to think of other men as rivals; to understand that each one is different, and no one is “more of a man” than anyone else. In my family, I express my feelings to my mother. I have improved the way I behave, [and manage] my impulses and anger. There are still attitudes that I need to work on, but I believe admitting when I'm wrong is a good start. In some cases, I reiterate to my family that toys have no gender and that my nephews can play freely.

I have learned to show affection with my male friends: to tell them, “Hey, take care of yourself, I love you!” And they have responded positively to my words. I have noticed that they seek me out to talk about their emotions, and that makes me feel very good. When I have discussed the concept of gender roles with my female friends, I tell them that our perceptions are due to lessons we learned dating back to our childhood.

I have had the opportunity to share my experiences and knowledge at forums, small group discussions, and other spaces where I have been able to share my belief that men can express their feelings, control their impulses, and learn to establish healthy relationships.

Personally, I think I am now able to identify *machista* attitudes that I still have, but these are becoming less frequent. I can now share my opinions freely and express my emotions, disavowing the idea that men do not cry or do not need affection. I can now enjoy my masculinity and sexuality freely, but in a conscious, responsible way.



 Cancún, Quintana Roo, México

Red + Posithiva de Quintana Roo A.C.

At Red + Posithiva de Quintana Roo A.C., we consider it a noteworthy success to have expanded our work with adolescent youth to include topics of gender and healthy masculinities – an accomplishment that on its own feels worthy of celebration. The initiative, with the financial support and collaboration with other Central American partners organized by GFC, created the opportunity to gain experience on masculinity and gender work with adolescents. The initiative also opened new opportunities for Red + Posithiva to develop as an organization, covering costs to hire external consultants and to pay registration fees for workshops on sexual education, fundraising, and social program management. With the help and support of GFC, Red + Posithiva has also consolidated and implemented an effective safeguarding policy for children, which now provides both donors and beneficiaries greater security and assurance in our work.

With the stability offered by GFC's long-term funding, Red + Posithiva implemented a three-year program on comprehensive sexual education in the Satellite Secondary Schools of the Tres Reyes and Avante neighborhoods in Cancún, Quintana Roo. Red + Posithiva was able to expand its efforts to integrate mothers, fathers, and teachers in the learning processes, which has significantly improved the program's results. In 2015, Red + Posithiva identified 9 cases of early adolescent pregnancy from both schools; by 2018, this number had dropped down to zero cases. Red + Posithiva also began offering therapy with a team of trained psychologists in all program-targeted schools over the last six years. During this time, Red + Posithiva improved its counseling services by honing its expertise on sexual and reproductive health, while also opening referral channels for relevant cases to state and municipal authorities on health, education, and family and social welfare.

The organization continues to experiment with new ways to bring comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to all possible places, most recently by launching community radio programming, made possible by a GFC Emergency Grant with the goal of addressing new or exacerbated barriers due to the pandemic.

Without a doubt, Red + Posithiva's most significant challenge was overcoming teachers' negative attitudes toward sexual diversity and sexual and reproductive rights. Many teachers, influenced by culturally embedded religious conservatism in the community, did not consider the program's interventions necessary and on some occasions characterized them as offensive to their own beliefs. Above all, this is a challenge that contributes to the difficulty of advocating for integrating CSE into the educational system with state education authorities. As a result, Red + Posithiva is constantly seeking entry points to provide services on the school campuses, cultivating trust and commitment with each school's administration. These challenges remain relevant, since the continuity of teaching CSE depends on the sustainability of the organizations and their capabilities, not only in their technical capacity, but also in their advocacy and negotiation efforts, in order to integrate CSE into the school curriculum at both the state and federal levels.

Red + Posithiva has become a reference point on issues of masculinities and gender, which has opened new financial opportunities with national programs and foreign funding that support work on issues of inclusion, diversity, and human rights in general. The government is also now listening: in 2017, Red + Posithiva presented an abstract to the State Congress of Educational Planning of Quintana Roo on how comprehensive sexual education and sexual health counseling reduce school dropouts with supporting data collected in Cancun.

Photo: Red + Posithiva



Marcos Gámez Sánchez

Program and Project Coordinator,
Red + Posithiva de Quintana Roo A.C.

From the first year of the initiative Changing Gender Attitudes, Empowering Girls with GFC, our team experienced both great experiences and great challenges. That year, we had also launched our project with the CAMY Fund, and started to provide services to a large population of people through two different programs. This reality made the logistics really complicated, not to mention that it was our first year working on the subject of masculinities and gender. In addition to being new to working with international funding, I had just arrived in the city of Cancún and to the organization—and that was another great challenge that came with a great commitment to move everything forward. Fortunately, with the support and commitment of such a great team, we were able to fulfill all the objectives and commitments in a satisfactory way during the 6 years of shared work with GFC.

Photo: Red + Posithiva



Josefina Castelán

Director of Telesecundaria Margarita
Maza de Juárez (2014-2018) in
Cancun, Quintana Roo

Although I myself do not agree with many topics related to sexual diversity, [Red + Posithiva] is a great ally to raise awareness of concepts of gender, sex, and the LGBT community, and facilitate work with students, teachers, parents, and family members. Like it or not, they are necessary things for a comprehensive/holistic education, and what better way to do it than with subject matter experts. Thanks to the whole team and the organization.

Photo: Red + Posithiva

“Working as a team with Red + Posithiva has allowed us to strengthen our work on sexuality and life plan workshops that our teachers carry out every day, providing students with more complete and up-to-date information that benefits youth today and in the future.”

—Josefa Domitila, Director of Telesecundaria Rosario Sansores in Tres Reyes, Cancún, Quintana Roo.



 Cancún, Quintana Roo, México

Centro Integral de Atención a las Mujeres (CIAM)

In 2012, the Centro Integral de Atención a las Mujeres (CIAM) in Cancún shifted its organizational work from being a refuge for women victims of violence and their daughters and sons, to become a community education center for peace. As a result of this change, we noticed a real need to integrate boys and young men into the active struggle for gender justice. It was not enough to respond to the consequences of violence; it is necessary to launch processes that will transform social relations and address the structural causes of *machismo* and gender inequalities at an early age.

To this end, and in an effort to link the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights with the strengthening of youth leadership, we began to work in a high school located on the outskirts of Cancun in 2015, the National College of Technical Professional Education Cancún Campus 2 (CONALEP), with the aim of reducing the high rate of unplanned pregnancies among its students. From that moment on, the growth has been exponential, and the learning process has not stopped. Our program *In My Body, I Decide*, which began as workshops for young people to talk about gender and sexuality, has grown year after year.

Little by little, and facing initial obstacles like low participation and resistance from the teaching staff, we have integrated a community approach to our work and forged new alliances in the process. Among other things, we created the Diploma in Education for Peace and Sexuality for teachers, and organized safe spaces for reflection called Masculinities Groups aimed at young men and school staff, where we also foster youth leadership efforts to advocate for their rights through the provision of trainings.¹

At the same time, we began to provide emotional support to youth, improve our monitoring and evaluation systems, and conduct participatory action research to hone our program methodologies and identify opportunities to advance our advocacy efforts.

Currently, we work in 3 educational centers, and we have carried out a study in 10 schools across Benito Juárez (the municipality where Cancún is located). This study has allowed us to understand young people's lived experience with sexuality in the region, and thus adapt our ways of intervening in the identified priorities. Based on our work with over 500 youth per year, we have noticed an annual increase of approximately 22% of women and 7% of men who made consistent use of contraceptive methods in their first sexual relationship. This increase motivates us to continue working on empowering women about their bodies and training men in healthy masculinities.

In 2020, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we launched an action guide for women in situations of violence during quarantine, which also includes preventive measures with specific responsibilities for men. Despite the difficulties, we have remained in contact with young people, providing emotional support and conducting activities virtually.

We have many challenges ahead of us, including the incorporation of a sexual diversity approach and the mainstreaming of a gender and masculinities approach in all our advocacy strategies. We all have a lot to contribute to the fight for gender equality. More than a project, it is a commitment toward the construction of comprehensive life plans for each of our youth.

¹ Read the story of one of the youth leaders and community activists here:
<https://globalfundforchildren.org/story/i-want-to-study-to-be-a-better-man-benjamins-story>



Deni Quetzali García Ojeda

19 years old, Cancún, México

I got to know these workshops because they were given at my school. We had someone who gave us the workshops, and that's how I also got to know CIAM. The work that the organization does was very interesting to me. It left me very moved to see how they dealt with the issues of sexuality and self-esteem. It did leave a great impact on me, because the way they talked about all these issues, it was not vulgar at all. They used concepts that were well-explained; they used all the appropriate words; they did everything based on research and information. In any case, they talked about subjects hardly spoken about today. It was a very rewarding experience because I learned a lot about protection in sexual relationships, our bodies, talking about love, and much more.

I think it is important for the youth to learn about their sexual and reproductive rights, because until these workshops, even I did not know about these concepts. CIAM gave me a booklet and explained to me what my sexual rights are. I did not know them beforehand; I did not know that such rights existed.

I was very surprised that they spoke about romantic relationships. It helped me a lot because I was in a relationship at that time. So, it made us realize so many things that happen in relationships. I remember that he would come to my house and tell my parents about the workshops, and we would talk about the topics we discussed in them. My parents said it was good that they were giving me these workshops, because schoolteachers are not allowed to talk about such issues, and there is no class devoted to addressing sexuality and sexual rights. I feel that I can share these learnings with others. Even after the workshops were over, I kept on talking about it with other people.

It is very important that young people learn about these issues because misinformation can lead them to wrongful actions or lead them to falsely believe that completely normal behavior is wrong or bad.

Currently, I am studying to be a teacher, and I think it is important that these topics are taught in elementary school, obviously in an appropriate way that children can understand. But they should know what these concepts are and how to avoid common misconceptions to prevent future generations from falling into their parents' pitfalls [...]. Although we are a new generation, the necessary information is not always available.



Cover page of the “Adolescents’ and Young People’s Sexual Rights” pamphlet adapted by CIAM Cancun



📍 Cancún, Quintana Roo, México

México y Caribe Jóvenes A.C.

“Youth are not simply perpetrators of our culture. We are creative agents, leaders, and protagonists of social change.”

For México y Caribe Jóvenes A.C., our work to promote healthy masculinities goes hand in hand with efforts to strengthen youth leadership and train young activists in Mayan communities. For the organization, the promotion of non-violent masculinities is a form of intervention that has enabled us to address various community issues, including preventing adolescent pregnancies, mitigating sexually transmitted diseases, and strengthening Indigenous identities.

In 2014, the J-Xiibal Collective, a México y Caribe Jóvenes program, was founded in the community of Chunhuhub, Quinas, by a group of Mayan youth who aimed to promote gender justice, ethnic inclusion, and education equality. To date, the J-Xiibal Collective has conducted workshops reaching more than 200 young people between the ages of 13 and 15. The organization also launched a youth-led group of community promoters, which is composed of 30 young people between 13 and 19 years old from rural communities in Quintana Roo.

At the same time, and thanks to the support of México y Caribe Jóvenes, J-Xiibal Collective has participated in the project Laboratory of Proposals, an innovative strategy for the creation, planning, and management of efforts for the defense and promotion of human rights. To date, 11 members of the J-Xiibal Collective have actively participated in the project's activities; 7 members report more positive attitudes and increased engagement in favor of gender equality, and 8 members report a wider variety of tools to develop strategies to defend and promote sexual and reproductive rights.

Among J-Xiibal Collective's main achievements, the Xe'ek Fest is a noteworthy feat—an annual community festival that brings together young artists who, from music, dance, painting, and other artistic expressions, reclaim their Mayan identity and create future strategies to continue strengthening their Indigenous identity. In 2020, the Xe'ek Fest led to the organization of the First Meeting of Rural Youth, with the participation of more than 50 young people from 4 Mayan communities. In this meeting, youth gathered to share their experiences and good practices, and to advance in processes of deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity.

The J-Xiibal Collective is a founding member of the MenEngage Latin American Network of Masculinities and Youth, which was launched in 2019 and brings together 38 grassroots organizations in Latin America. As part of the network, the organization has supported regional campaigns for the prevention of gender violence and the promotion of responsible fatherhood for young fathers.

Although J-Xiibal Collective members have faced numerous challenges—including the need to involve other community actors (e.g., adults and local women leaders), stigma and discrimination, and technological and communication challenges when working with rural youth—they have learned that their Mayan identity is strengthened when young people can link it to broader community development processes, such as the defense of human rights and the promotion of healthy masculinities.

Photo: México y Caribe Jóvenes A.C.



“¡Todo! ¡Todos los días, viejo!” —Message of solidarity from Luis to Carlos Can.

Luis Enrique Martín Tuz

24 years old, Quintana Roo, México

I started attending the J-Xiibal Collective when I was 12 years old, and I still remember my first day. One night, I was watching television as usual and suddenly heard someone calling me from the street. I went out and noticed it was my new friend from secondary school, Jorge Can, who proposed we go for a walk. I accepted — of course, I asked permission — and went out.

As we were walking, I asked, “Where are we going?”

“You’ll see soon,” Jorge said.

When we arrived, I could see that other boys from the village were there. They invited me to come in and I sat down, and that’s when I saw that they were working with seeds. Suddenly, someone approached me. He gives me some tweezers and says, “Here, help us get the seeds out.”

He was the coordinator of the collective, Carlos Can. That was how one night, taking apart seeds from the “pitch” tree to make necklaces, one of the most beautiful stages of my adolescence began.

The Independent Youth Space Collective, as it was called at that time, had several training programs, of which my favorites were on sex education and handicrafts. Every night, we would attend workshops, where we would participate in group activities and games. Every so often, we would go to camps. The camps were very fun — since in those days they were for boys only, it was pure chaos.

Thanks to the Collective’s workshops, I was able to get to know myself; I was able to strengthen my self-confidence and leadership skills; and, I was able to deepen my relationship with my younger brother while also questioning certain family dynamics. The Collective became like a second home for me, and those who were part of it, like a second family where I could express myself, learn, have fun, and even cry.

Can the Collective help fulfill dreams? Yes, of course.

Attending the youth camp Let’s Reforest Mexico in Villa del Carbón was one of the experiences that changed my life. In addition to fulfilling my greatest dream of traveling by plane, I was able to share with and learn from young people who were actively involved in community development from all over the country. This experience completely changed my whole outlook — and what I wanted to do with my life.

Without a doubt, the Collective has enriched my life. Thanks to what I experienced, learned, and accomplished in the Collective, I am currently a fourth-year Social Anthropology student at the University of Quintana Roo. I’m also a human rights activist, and I am actively working with young people from Quintana Roo. It will always be a pleasure to return to the J-Xiibal Collective to share and give back a little bit to the girls and boys who are part of it today.



Chimaltenango, Guatemala

Asociación Generando (ASOGEN)

Asociación Generando (ASOGEN) focuses its mission on addressing the problem of violence against women in a comprehensive and multidisciplinary manner; providing quality services with human warmth, ethical professionalism, and confidentiality; and integrating empowerment efforts into its intervention strategies. It offers differentiated attention to girls and adolescents to contribute to making them visible as the subjects of rights and to contribute to their empowerment and development of skills that promote their reintegration into different social circles and restore their sense of purpose. ASOGEN values participatory methodologies and peer-to-peer techniques to raise awareness, spark interest, and change behaviors on a variety of issues facing adolescent girls, such as unplanned pregnancies, early marriage, and gender-related violence.

ASOGEN considers the personal growth of girls, adolescents, and young women one of its greatest achievements. Through the provision of psychosocial support, along with refuge and protection, the organization has provided holistic care to women and their children to avoid re-victimization and guarantee a reclamation of their human rights. ASOGEN has strengthened the construction of social and community protection networks that safeguard girls, adolescents, and women, and has catalyzed and supported the Sololoteca Organization for the Rights of Young Indigenous Women (OSDMJI) of Nahualá, Sololá to develop its own projects for the empowerment of Indigenous women in the region.

Within its department, ASOGEN is the only organization that works on the issue of new masculinities, focusing on male transformation and changing aggressive, misogynistic, and machista behaviors.

ASOGEN designed, published, and implemented a methodological guide called “Finding My True Self” to transform gender roles and masculinities for youth and adolescents. The organization has noted an increased awareness in participating adolescent boys and young men of new masculinities, and a significant change in attitudes and behaviors, such as: greater participation in domestic labor, more involvement in their partners’ sexual and reproductive health, and more clearly identifying high-risk situations for girls and women. Despite this progress, there is much work to be done. The organization’s success needs to be studied and documented to share its positive results in attitudinal and behavioral change externally. Creating spaces for boys and young men to continue the work of identifying gender stereotypes and forms of inequity in romantic relationships, which will help address the root problem, continues to be a challenge.

ASOGEN has expanded its work beyond Chimaltenango. The organization has forged alliances with the National Network for International Protection, which addresses migration issues involving children, adolescents, and women. ASOGEN is a part of the Girls Not Brides global partnership that aims to prevent child marriage. ASOGEN is also a member of the global Equal Measure 2030 alliance that monitors the Sustainable Development Goals and develops advocacy efforts based on data-driven strategies.

In 2019, Global Fund for Children (GFC) presented ASOGEN with the Juliette Gimón Courage Award, which recognizes organizations that have demonstrated resilience in the face of social, political, and economic adversity for the benefit of children and youth.

Photo: ASOGEN

Manuela Wendy Ramírez Cotiy

29 years old, Sololá, Guatemala



Wendy grew up in a village in the municipality of Nahualá, Sololá, surrounded by *machismo*, patriarchy, and physical violence toward her mother, in a family of very low economic status. She began her preschool education at the nearest school with the dream of one day becoming a pediatrician, despite the negativity of her father, who often would say: “only the ‘little men’ in my house should study, since little women should only learn to be housewives.”

She completed standard education after making great sacrifices and risking the safety of her mother, who supported her with a part of her tuition. At the age of 18, she decided to study education, because since it was public service, it was the only viable career. As a result, Wendy had to move to the department of Totonicapán and work to support her studies. With much care and sacrifice, she managed to graduate with distinction and with the admiration of her professors. At age 21, Wendy got happily married, believing she would finally receive tenderness, understanding, love, support, and respect from a man. From this marriage, a beautiful girl was born, premature and with tachycardia. It was very painful for Wendy to realize that her experiences with patriarchy would repeat themselves in her own marriage: the family of her daughter’s father reproached her for not having a male firstborn. Her husband abandoned her for another woman when she most needed his financial and emotional support.

It was a time of mending. Wendy withdrew from social and professional life for several years to rebuild herself as a mother and as a woman. By selling her artisanal embroideries, which was always a recourse in times of need, Wendy was able to regulate her daughter’s health through various treatments suggested by the cardiologist and pediatrician. In 2018, she participated in an ASOGEN training process on leadership and youth empowerment in the prevention of violence against women, with a group of adolescents from the municipality of Nahualá, Sololá.

“[I remember] it was a very educational experience for young people, living with [the organization] GENDES and the teachings of Francisco Luna; it touched many minds and hearts. [I learned] one must break paradigms and prejudices in order to pursue one’s goals; that gender equity is a right, not a privilege; [that] to lead a group, the leader must always be authentic, fair and thoughtful; [and] that the patriarchy should be first confronted in the home with the little ones, distributing the household chores and responsibilities equitably. [Now I see] women are slowly diminishing the patriarchy with their children, they already dress them according to the children’s own color preferences; there are already little boys wearing pink or lilac sandals, something that was not seen before due to prejudices. [I also see] that there are more young women working in banks, there are even a few women lawyers, and some are beginning to report domestic abuse.”

Recognized as a youth leader, Wendy was elected to ASOGEN’s Board of Directors, a role she also plays in the Oxlajuj Kej Association of Nahualá, Sololá.

“[I decided to join ASOGEN’s Board of Directors] to support more women, youth, [and] children, and at the same time be able to reciprocate ASOGEN’s trust in me. I also wanted to continue training and empowering myself. [I want to teach young people] that it is very important to become aware of wrong decisions, caring for the environment, gender equality, health and sexual responsibility, active parenting, and motherhood without violence of any kind.”

In 2019, Wendy resumed her academic life, thanks to a scholarship program that ASOGEN suggested to her. Currently, Wendy is an empowered woman and an early childhood education teacher who is bilingual in K’iche’ and Spanish. She is enrolled in a Specialized Teaching Program in Learning Disabilities at the Universidad del Valle in Guatemala, at the Altiplano de Sololá campus.

Photo: ASOGEN

We learned ...

NO ONE LEARNS INSIDE SOMEONE ELSE'S HEAD

Gender work has to start from within—within oneself, within people, within teams, and within organizations and institutions—by reflecting and changing attitudes and daily behavior. Only then will we see change sustained, expanded, and multiplied at the community level through the continuous exchange of experiences, group activities, and conversations.

EVERY BOY AND GIRL IS A POSSIBLE REVOLUTION

Early work with children and adolescents facilitates the process of unlearning traditional and misogynistic gender paradigms, and propels new social dynamics based on equity and diversity. Children and youth are and will continue to be the protagonists of change.

NO ONE IS AN ISLAND

When working with children and adolescents, we cannot ignore the impact that adult influence can have on them. To create expanded and long-lasting change, we need to work in tandem with children and their family members, teachers, and school administrators.

THE MOON TRAVELS SLOWLY, BUT TRAVERSES THE WHOLE WORLD

Nobody “graduates” from gender and masculinities: it is a process of constant learning based on individual and collective reflection and self-criticism. It is not a training, a discussion, or a workshop, but a continuous process of social transformation: from the routine to the political, from the very private to the most public.

THE CIRCLE IS NOT DRAWN TO EXCLUDE; IT EXPANDS TO INCLUDE EVERYONE

Gender equity does not require scolding boys and young men, nor the taking away of rights. It means expanding spaces of freedom. It is achieved through laughter, play, collective care, and radical inclusion.

A SINGLE SPARROW CANNOT ALONE BRING SPRING

Promoting gender equity is not just for girls and women; men must also be actively involved. Working on healthy masculinities with men does not make anyone less feminist, nor does it compromise their support for eradicating violence against women. This work is part of the diversity of feminism.

IF YOU WANT TO CROSS THE RIVER, YOU HAVE TO GET YOUR FEET WET

Talking about gender and its violence always opens wounds. It is necessary to plan and integrate emotional support for children and adolescents beforehand.

IF THE DOOR IS CLOSED, LOOK FOR AN OPEN WINDOW

Sometimes talking about gender directly with children and youth does not lead to an open and safe space that gets to the core of such personal issues. You can try from other angles, like creating a culture of peace.

WE ARE MADE OF THOUSANDS OF VOICES, OF THOUSANDS OF STORIES

Changes in attitude and behavior are as varied as people, environments, and processes—there is no single indicator that demonstrates change in gender attitudes, but personal stories do.

In 2019, we conducted an evaluation of the initiative:
<https://globalfundforchildren.org/story/how-to-successfully-engage-boys-in-gender-equity>

In 2020, we shared more learnings in a webinar
(in Spanish): <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=373083473821551>

There is still work to do ...

- 1** We need to launch political advocacy efforts that recommend laws, budgets, and public policies free from patriarchal norms and that truly promote gender justice at both the local and national levels.
- 2** There is a lot still to study and document across the many methodologies developed and tested to be able to share them in detail with other practitioners in the sector.
- 3** We have a continued desire to build capacities and explore new ways of evaluating impact, learning from case studies and tracking progress within often long, unpredictable change processes.
- 4** We need to fill a gap in the opportunities for specialized training for organizational staff conducting gender and masculinities work, and especially for men who are willing to facilitate transformational processes with boys, youth, and other men.
- 5** We need to integrate the topic of masculinities into the public education curriculum, both in primary and secondary school as part of comprehensive sexuality education.
- 6** We need to take advantage of expanding access to digital platforms to reach boys and young men, both in and out of school, with dynamic and educational content on gender and masculinities. And let's not forget the critical need to create content in Indigenous languages.
- 7** The networks of organizations promoting gender equality and masculinities are still dispersed; if we want to achieve large-scale social change together, we need to strengthen and consolidate our efforts in local, national, regional, and international networks.

Photo: OYE Honduras



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Photo: ASOGEN

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