

Reality of rural education in Guatemala

- 75% of indigenous Guatemalans live in poverty
- 10% of indigenous children are child laborers by age 10
- On average, indigenous girls drop out after 1st grade and boys after 3rd
- 19% of men and 27% women are illiterate
- Only 5% of indigenous girls finish high school

Source: UNDP

They began with 6 students and have since grown to over 500, with 500 more on a waiting list. The ratio of girls to boys continues to equalize as more families understand the value of educating their daughters.

Classroom Learning

Nationally recognized degree programs

We offer 3-year degree programs in Sustainable Tourism and Rural Community Development. These programs not only prepare students for local job markets but to respond to their communities' needs and create solutions.

Rural appropriate

Ak' Tenamit adapted Guatemala's national curriculum so that courses respond to the realities students face in their rural communities and prepares them to be leaders. Sample courses include organic farming techniques, project management, environmental protection, and human rights.

Cultural awareness

Students learn about Mayan history, language and culture as part of our mission to preserve a culture that is quickly disappearing.

Bilingual instruction

Courses are taught in Spanish and students' native Q'eqchi' Mayan, and English classes are required. In addition to English, many students also learn Spanish at Ak' Tenamit because they only speak Q'eqchi when they enroll.

Practical Classroom

In the field

Students earn 3,000 hours of on-the-job experience through our work-study program. They complete short internships throughout their schooling and they experience the world of tourism and community development first hand through internships in restaurants, hotels or as tour guides, in nonprofit organizations, and in Ak' Tenamit's various departments.

Student Life

The majority of students live in the on-site dormitories because their families do not live close enough to allow them to live at home; those who live close enough may travel over one hour each day in canoe or on foot just to get to the school.

Students learn to appreciate and take responsibility for their education by **performing much of the work needed to keep their school running** – growing their food, maintaining buildings, performing clerical work and more. They dedicate three weeks of manual labor before each school year and at least 15 hours each week during the school year.

Each student receives a scholarship for 80% of his/her tuition and boarding fees. These scholarships are made possible through our Student Sponsorship program, which allows donors to sponsor a student for only \$1/day.

No student is turned away because they are unable to pay the balance of their fees. If they cannot pay they can contribute by:

- provide an equivalent quantity of corn, which is used to make the tortillas served during the students' lunch
 - work extra shifts in the school's work-study program
- \$1/ day determines whether a student will graduate or return to a life of poverty.

Educating the Girls

Increases

- Household incomes
- Agricultural productivity
- Economic growth
- Gender Equality

Decreases

- Childbirth mortality
- Infant mortality
- Teenage birthrates
- HIV/AIDS incidence
- Malnutrition

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How do we work with girls at Ak'tenamit:

The Ak' Tenamit staff and high school female students visit local villages to promote the importance of having girls stay in their local schools through the 6 th grade and encourage them to continue on with a middle and high school education at Ak' Tenamit. They talk with parents, teachers and community leaders about why it is important for a girl to continue an education.

Annually a Girls Education Workshop is held at the AK' Tenamit school campus. Girls are invited to the site for a motivational weekend of talks led by indigenous women leaders, alumni,

current students and staff. Activities are held to build self-esteem, and teach the girls about their basic rights, and cultural pride among other topics.

Because traditionally girls are not encouraged to leave their homes or finish an educational career, extracurricular activities are planned to motivate and support the girls during their time at Ak'Tenamit. Activities include remedial classes, bonding and recreational activities, self-esteem building and counseling. Many have never left their homes and maybe the first girl or even the first child to attend a secondary education school. With very little or no resources, trips back home for a visit are infrequent. Many come from totally different physical environments (high, cold highlands) and adapting to the hot, humid river can be difficult. Having this extra support for the girls has become an extremely important factor in keeping them in school and having them obtain a high school diploma.

"I never studied. My parents didn't give me the opportunity to move ahead and that is the reason that now I am the mother of 10 children. That's why I insist that you all [the girls] continue studying because it's the most important thing in a woman's life."

– Lucia Xol, age 35, mother who spoke to girls during workshop

Closing the Gender Gap and Reducing Domestic Violence

Discrimination against women pervades all levels of Guatemala, from the countryside to the capital. This inequality, however, is strongest within indigenous communities and domestic violence against women is far too common.

At Ak' Tenamit, we make a point to promote gender equality in everything we do and improve local gender relations.

"The men and women at our workshops say that talking about [gender equality] is very important for their communities. The women don't know where to turn to resolve domestic problems and, as a result, their families fall apart."

– Ana Consuelo Tzalam Paquiun, Gender Based Violence and HIV Program Coordinator, Ak' Tenamit

Promoting gender equality

Within Ak' Tenamit's leadership

- Our statutes require the Board of Directors to be half women and half men
- Leadership in student organizations is 50% female and 50% male

At Ak' Tenamit's secondary school

- Actively encourage girls to stay in school through the We Must Educate the Girls program
- Students attend national conferences related to the role of indigenous women and women's rights

In local villages:

- Our health program prioritizes women's health
- Much of our community development work is aimed at improving women's livelihoods
- Organize alternative income projects for women

Discouraging gender violence

- Organize workshops that discuss women's rights and discourage violence against women and children
 - With Ak' Tenamit's students and teachers
 - With local health promoters and midwives
 - With community members
 - With teachers from surrounding schools
- Make public service announcements on local radio stations discouraging violence
- Provide support for women suffering violence
- Publicize where abused women can find help
- Health promoters and midwives talk to patients about gender violence and help victims find solutions

Riverside Clinic health services

Ak' Tenamit provides 24-hour care in its riverside health clinic. When they are able to, medication is charged at cost +10% to create funding to purchase more but most patients are not able to afford even

that. It is staffed by an experienced team of local, Q'eqchi' health promoters and international medical volunteers. We provide treatment and care in the following areas:

- Malnutrition and dehydration
- Gastrointestinal ailments
- Fractures and broken bones
- Skin infections
- Flu
- Malaria
- Pre-natal care
- Gynecological care
- Childbirth
- Pediatric check-ups
- Emergency boat ambulance

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At times, patients arrive at the clinic in critical condition or complications arise during treatment. In these cases our doctors transport the patient to the nearest hospital via speedboat. Without this service it would be impossible for the patient to receive emergency care because they do not have the means to reach the hospital.

Unfortunately, the clinic often lacks funding for the gasoline needed to make the 1.5 hour boat ride to the hospital and must dock at the municipal Health Center (half-way to the hospital). Here, doctors examine the patient to determine whether hospital care is needed and if so, absorb the gasoline costs to transport the patient from the municipality to the hospital. This process wastes critical time and endangers the patient, especially those with head wounds, because s/he must be moved from boat to boat

Ak'Tenamit provides ongoing training for rural midwife and health promoters. These provide the 1st line of serving in outlying villages.

Our floating dental clinic is located on a refurbished houseboat. Staffed by a trained Q'eqchi dental technician patients are treated for emergencies and basic dental care. International volunteers who visit Ak' Tenamit will take the boat out and dock it at other villages to provide additional care.

Creek Calix Convergence Center

With the support of Rotary International a small rural health clinic opened in early 2016 providing basic healthcare to about 2500 people from 6 communities. Staffed by Ak'Tenamit trained midwives, they

provide basic preventative and emergency care as well as pre-natal and delivery. Patients in need of more advanced care are sent to our riverside clinic.