

Almost Universal

Twenty years have passed since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo where 179 governments, including Guatemala, championed universal access to family planning and reproductive and sexual health services. Cairo was a pivotal moment in the struggle for reproductive health because the ICPD went beyond the impacts of population growth on economic prosperity by recognizing the importance of rights, women's empowerment and gender equality.

In these twenty years, Guatemala has seen important improvements in reproductive health. The government approved legislation supporting universal access and safe motherhood, unmet need for family planning is declining as are maternal deaths, and women are having fewer unwanted pregnancies.

However, as WINGS knows all too well, these improvements are far from "universal" with the wealthier urban populations enjoying a disproportionate advantage. In our second year working in Alta Verapaz, WINGS' educators, nurses and network of volunteer family planning promoters continue to help women, men, and youth in rural communities access vital information and services so they can live healthier and happier lives.

In this newsletter, we share stories from these individuals who are benefitting from our programs in Alta Verapaz and highlight what remains to achieve universal access and reproductive rights. Your support is vital to our work and we are grateful that you choose to invest in WINGS. Thank you for standing with us as we strengthen Guatemalan families through reproductive health.



Family of a promoter in Chisec.

Julia

The WINGS talk was very helpful. The information presented to us is important for our development as women, for our families and our community. Now I feel capable of answering my three children's questions about family planning and working with them to ensure that they use the family planning methods that are right for them. The information about the Depo-Provera shot was very valuable, as I have been using this method for four years and learned it is recommended for only two years of use. Because of what I learned, I decided to begin using the Jadelle, a sub-dermal implant which lasts five years.

Our community still lacks education, which results in dangerous errors where our health is concerned. Just as I was attempting to plan my family and was using incorrectly my method due to lack of information, there could be other women in the same situation. Through these workshops, we leave behind our doubts and can make responsible decisions. I am thankful to WINGS for providing our community with family planning education and helping us have a better quality of life. Being able to have these health services in our communities is an immense benefit. We can access services without worrying about the costs and distance!

Involving Men in Alta Verapaz to Make Small Successes Permanent

Working at the community level in Alta Verapaz, where different mindsets and traditions exist, it can be difficult to address why family planning is a good thing.

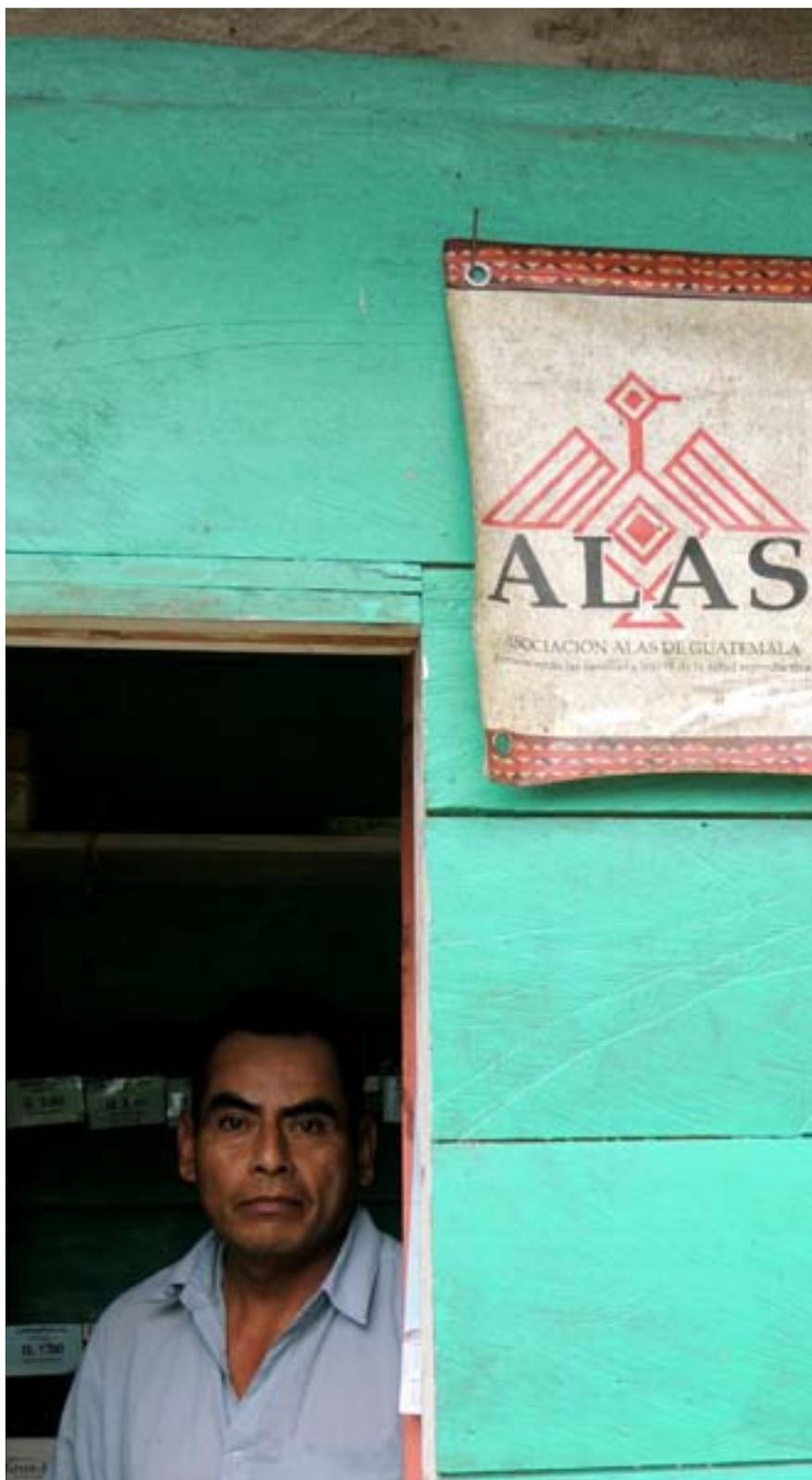
WINGS staff start small—we know that long-term change begins with transforming attitudes and behaviors of men and women. So we facilitate educational community workshops and reproductive health clinics; at our capacity-building workshops, a willing representative chooses to become a promoter in his or her community and provide information and short-term family planning methods to individuals.

By working at the root, scientifically-accurate information on family planning methods and reproductive rights is spread through communities by peers, family members, friends and respected leaders—and is reinforced by WINGS staff who provide personalized attention and continuity.

Recognizing both the influence of men on women's reproductive rights and men's sexual and reproductive health needs, the 1994 ICPD recommended national efforts to incorporate men and promote their roles in responsible parenthood, healthy behaviors, and the prevention of diseases and high-risk pregnancies.

Based on our experience throughout Guatemala and our analysis of barriers in Alta Verapaz, WINGS is intent on including men in our family planning education and reproductive health services. Of our 75 volunteer family planning promoters, 15 are male; we continue to see increasing male interest in our work.

In the upcoming weeks, watch for WINGS' photo essay and interviews with promoters. Since the support of men is imperative to community and an eventual national change, these small successes are the results of WINGS' continued efforts.



Promoter and pharmacist in Semanzana.

Stories from the Field

Emilio

“I used to think that some contraceptives caused abortion. But since I participated in the workshop where WINGS explained how the different methods work, I’m convinced that these methods actually help women better care for their bodies.”

Emilio is a volunteer family planning promoter in his community. He has five children and attended a WINGS family planning workshop so that he can help his own family. After the 1st workshop Emilio decided that he wanted to help the rest of his community and is now a promoter, providing short-term methods and individual counselling for those interested in learning more about family planning.

“I wanted to help prevent maternal deaths that happen so often here,” he said. “I know now that by using a contraceptive method families will have a better life and future. Not just the family, but the whole community. I felt it was important for everyone to know what I learned.”

WINGS dispels the myths surrounding contraceptive methods in small communities like Sachikac, where Emilio lives. Communities are often misinformed about how birth control works, and rumors that symptoms do more harm than good prevent individuals from seeking information and methods.

“I found out that some symptoms are normal, but different for everyone—it’s important to find the right option, but the damage isn’t like people say. It’s more important to be able to space births and allow women to heal from pregnancy.”

Emilio is one of 15 male promoters in the Alta Verapaz region. Look for in-depth interviews and photos with our male promoters on WINGS’ blog in the upcoming weeks.



A promoter stands with his family in Tierra Linda.



The family of a promoter in Chisec.

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