



# "EDUCATION: A GATEWAY TO EMPOWERMENT"

## Qualitative Impact report

### Executive Summary

### Why measure impact in a qualitative way?

At MAIA, we aim to connect talents with opportunities, maximizing the potential of Indigenous young women to lead transformational change in their lives, families, and communities.

Since 2017, with the launch of the MAIA Impact School, the flagship of our work model, we have demonstrated a significant impact on the lives of the Indigenous young women whom we call Girl Pioneers. We have systematized this impact mainly in numerical and statistical terms. But we also sought to measure this impact from the girls' voices and thus learn about the most significant changes in their lives and their trajectory.

Therefore, in 2023 we decided to employ the **Most Significant Change (MSC)** methodology as the basis for a qualitative evaluation study, combined with an interpretation process that follows the Grounded Theory (this allowed us to conclude with a codebook for the systematization of the results), from a participatory, qualitative, and rigorous perspective that evidences the real impact.

This report systematizes the testimonies and evidence of impact from the voices of 47 Girl Pioneers, all of whom are Indigenous young women between 13 and 20 years old, who are or have been students of the MAIA Impact School and belong to 6 generations.

### What was the research question?

**What has been the most important change in the girl's life since she became part of MAIA (since 2017 to 2022)?**

### Report Objectives

- To compile the most significant changes in the lives of the girls who have been trained in the MAIA model from 2017 to 2022, based on their own interpretations and experiences
- To identify the girls' stories that evidence the most significant changes during their trajectory in MAIA
- To validate the institutional goals proposed by MAIA and its holistic model in relation to the most significant stories of change from the personal perspectives of the girls

## How was it implemented and analyzed?

In MAIA's context, the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology<sup>1</sup> was implemented as a participatory qualitative evaluation study that included the identification of the changes generated by MAIA's intervention in the girls' lives and their families, from 2017 until the end of the 2022 school year. To collect the data, we recruited 12 facilitators for the focus groups and interviews, and a team of 6 analysts with expertise in anthropology to conduct the analysis process.

The findings were analyzed using the competency framework we established at MAIA as institutional impact goals in the personal, academic, and emotional aspects as a reference. This MCS research is complementary to other MAIA initiatives that document the impact of our model, which include: a measurement of the achievement of the 4 institutional goals relative to national data, a study of girls graduating regarding the 4 institutional goals, case histories, evaluation of academic standardized test scores, and measurement of the development of soft skills in all groups of students joining MAIA, also called cohorts.

## RESULTS

The research results reveal three main transformational themes: educational experience, identity and self-concept, and finally, changes in the family and the community.

<sup>1</sup> Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). The 'most significant change' (MSC) technique. A guide to its use.

## Result 1. Education: A Gateway to Empowerment

The Girl Pioneers emphasize how the **educational experience** at MAIA has been the most important change in their lives; **having access to education is the predominant change for the participants**. They say that MAIA has provided them with a **holistic and non-traditional education** that has enriched their process in a comprehensive way. Likewise, the participants mentioned feeling safe in MAIA.

### TESTIMONIAL 1.2

“

*Basically, no one in my family had access to education. Nobody even went to middle school. Only one of my four sisters finished elementary school, and the others never did. So, I would have ended up like that. But I broke that cycle. My parents didn't have the economic resources to pay for it, so they couldn't. At that time, I simply didn't have the chance to get a secondary education. So, I feel that by doing that act of rebellion, I broke that cycle. And I know that my younger sister or my little sister is going to study because I did it and because I want a better future for her (Rocío,<sup>2</sup> 17 years old, joined MAIA in 2018).*

”

<sup>2</sup> Fictitious name

## Result 2. MAIA Competencies as Boosters of Self-esteem and Empowerment

The Girl Pioneers mention that being in MAIA has helped them to recognize their **intrinsic value and identity, improving their self-concept**. They perceive an improvement in their self-esteem and self-confidence, which had been negatively affected by several factors, including discrimination for being women. In relation to self-concept, they identify themselves as resilient because they mention having developed the ability to understand and manage their emotions. **Resilience** is a competence that they have developed from several difficult experiences they have lived through. They recognize their rights, defend them, and use critical thinking to have an impact on their environment (family and community). **They have also lost the fear of expressing their own opinions, defending, and advocating for themselves to be taken into account.**

“

### TESTIMONIAL 2.1

*The greatest change in my life during my time at MAIA is that I don't let people look down on me for being a woman and I actually have the power to change anything that seems wrong. Since MAIA supported me, I can say that I am no longer afraid to express myself and be belittled in society by both men and women. In the past, I was afraid of what people would say, but now knowing more about my rights, I can't let anyone silence me. Now I raise my voice, I give my opinions, and I am not afraid of people's thoughts, I just know that I cannot be silenced and see how other women and girls suffer, I cannot be easily silenced in the face of injustice. I am willing to clarify that women are people like men, and we have the same rights (Rosa, 15 years old, joined MAIA in 2021).*

”

## Result 3. Individual Transformation and Family Cohesion

The Girl Pioneers express changes in their families and community as a result of the psychosocial support provided by MAIA. They identify **awareness of what is happening in their environment** (family and community). **They question stereotypes and social expectations within family and community dynamics such as gender roles.** For example, they discuss inequality in access to education for women and equal rights.

They also mentioned an **improvement in family cohesion**, which is reflected in greater trust among family members. They highlighted a **positive change in parental support**, especially regarding the importance of education and the empowerment of women. In addition, they say that they have greater support from their parents to continue their studies, as well as in other decisions about their future.

“

### TESTIMONIAL 3.1

*My dad also agreed that I could achieve my dreams, I could achieve my goals, and now he tells me to keep going, not to stop, that I can give more, that I can achieve even more. And well, you feel very proud and happy of what you can be, of the impact you can make in different work, social, and personal areas (Valentina<sup>4</sup>, 20 years old, joined MAIA in 2017).*

”

<sup>3</sup> Fictitious name

<sup>4</sup> Fictitious name

## Main Conclusions

- **Access to a holistic education:** For the Girl Pioneers, this has been the opportunity to continue secondary school. **The MAIA ecosystem has created the conditions for their integral and holistic growth and development.** Access to education provided by MAIA is impacting the development of the participants' skills. In the Guatemalan context, where the average years of schooling for women is 5.3 years<sup>5</sup>, MAIA has become a space of opportunity to bridge these gaps. As a result, the girls recognize this as a change relative to the reality of the community.
- **Individual and collective transformation:** Girl Pioneers demonstrate a high level of agency, which is the ability of Girl Pioneers to define their own goals and act on that life project<sup>6</sup>. For example, the participants indicate that their families respect and support their decisions aimed at a better future, demonstrating autonomy. In addition, they have lost their fear of expressing their opinions. The Girl Pioneers express two important elements that have contributed to this agency since the intervention of MAIA:
  - 1) Their self-esteem has been improved, as they recognize themselves as valuable and capable women, overcoming the discrimination for being women that is experienced in their context. This means that MAIA is having an impact on the development of leaders who can generate greater influence.
  - 2) They recognize themselves as resilient because they understand and manage their emotions better; this has enabled them to express and defend their rights. However, the agency can have an effect at a societal level. As Girl Pioneers impact the family and community, it becomes empowering. Participants are showing greater awareness of what is happening in their environment and are questioning stereotypes and social expectations (for example, gender roles). They are having conversations about inequality experienced by women, about social injustices, and are proposing solutions. They have become more reflective and critical of social norms that they did not question before. Considering these elements, the Girl Pioneers are on the road to empowerment as they have developed proactive life skills and an understanding of the sociopolitical, cultural, and economic context of their environment.
- **Family transformation:** As previously mentioned, the Girl Pioneers are questioning traditional norms, which also represents a change in family history, and this disruption is not always welcomed by the community. With the intervention provided by MAIA in the families, these interventions have become a support network for them; there is more cohesion and trust. The girls feel this support, which is fundamental for the empowerment of the participants.

<sup>5</sup> INE (2019) XII Censo Nacional de Población y VII Censo Nacional de Vivienda. Guatemala.

<sup>6</sup> Pick, Susan et al (2007) Escala para Medir Agencia Personal y Empoderamiento.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.