

"EDUCATION: A GATEWAY TO EMPOWERMENT"

*Qualitative
impact report*



Adela



MAIA

At MAIA, we are demonstrating through the leadership of Indigenous women and the implementation of programs with high-quality standards and respect for identity that it is possible to contribute to reducing inequality.

By focusing programs on girls and empowering their talents, we achieve conscious and powerful leadership with the capacity to break cycles of poverty, violence, and discrimination and build more prosperous communities where women are also agents of change.

At MAIA, our motto is Empowered Women, Infinite Impact! We know that when girls have the tools they need, they achieve their dreams, and there are no limits for them to become the women they decide to be. And so we rewrite our story.

This report is a sample of the impact that the MAIA model has on the lives and families of the Girl Pioneers, from the testimonies of the Girl Pioneers themselves. That is why we are proud to share it with all of you.

-Andrea Coché and Lidia Oxí, Co-Executive Directors of MAIA





Credits

This report demonstrates the impact on the students at the MAIA Impact School from 2017 to 2022, generated by MAIA through its model and programs. For this purpose, a qualitative research process called The Most Significant Change was conducted, aiming to systematize the impact and the new trajectory they experienced.

The present report has been prepared by the Monitoring and Evaluation Department of MAIA with the advice and contribution of the Population Council Guatemala - Abriendo Oportunidades Program. The writing process was conducted by consultant Mariafernanda González Vásquez; MAIA's Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator Mayra Choc; and MAIA's Co-Executive Director Andrea Coché. The document was also revised by Ángel del Valle-Guatemala Country Representative, Population Council - Abriendo Oportunidades Program.

For further information, please refer to:
www.maiaimpact.org

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I. Abstract

The MAIA model has proven to have a significant impact on the lives of the Indigenous young women who take part in its programs. MAIA is committed to valuing the integrity and transformation of the girl, her family, and her community. In addition, the holistic approach of the model contributes to the learning process of the young participants. This research highlights the assessments and impact of their most significant changes. The methodology was built on the foundations of the Most Significant Change Theory and collected qualitative

data on the stories of change and personal experiences of the girls who have been part of MAIA. The research started with this question: What has been the most important change in the girl's life since she became part of MAIA? The research was complemented with individual interviews that probed other areas of impact on the lives of the participants, such as socioemotional and personal mentorship, and the development of skills such as critical thinking, resilience, and their empowered voice (the latter is also an important element of MAIA).

The results indicate that the most significant changes are related to the experience of an alternative education provided by MAIA, the personal transformations associated with resilience and empowerment, and the changes in their family and community environment. One of the most outstanding results is that education is a gateway to empowerment. In conclusion, the research findings point to the fact that the stories collected through the Most Significant Change technique confirm the impact of the MAIA model on the dimensions of agency, personal growth, self-concept, and resilience in the human development process of the girls.



II. Introduction

MAIA is an organization led by Indigenous women for Indigenous girls. MAIA aims to connect talent with opportunity, maximizing the potential of young Indigenous women to create transformational change in their lives, families, and communities. MAIA calls them Girl Pioneers because they will be the first in their families to graduate from high school, and because they are the solution to creating a better world for ALL.

MAIA exists because it looks to break these cycles of poverty, discrimination, and injustice. Of Guatemala's 4 million Indigenous women¹, 48% do not know how to read or write² and for every 10 girls, 3 will be forced to marry before their 18th birthday³. Only 20% of them will graduate from high school and 77% of them live in poverty. A growing body of data indicates that when a woman has access to education, the world improves for ALL. For every year in school, a woman's income increases by 20%, her health is strengthened, she is freer to decide her own future, and her family is more likely to have access to education as well.

The holistic model of MAIA integrates high-quality education, socioemotional and family mentorship, and cultural identity through an egalitarian approach in academic and cultural

training, identity, socioemotional intelligence, personal development, family participation, leadership development, use of an empowered voice, resilience, a support network, and critical thinking. It works with Indigenous young women between the ages of 13 and 19. The model is reflected in the multi-award winning MAIA Impact School, located in Sololá, one of the departments with the highest rate of poverty in Guatemala. At MAIA Impact School, there is a yearlong academic leveling program before entering middle school, called Project Impulso. Then the girls continue their studies from 7th to 11th grade. Once the Girl Pioneers complete the 6 years of the educational program, they continue for 1 more year in the Launch Program. In the Launch Year, Girl Pioneers develop professional skills, receive university coaching, and have workplace experience through internships.

In the long term, MAIA's mission is to unlock and maximize the potential of Indigenous young women to lead transformational change. It aims to achieve 4 main goals: each graduate achieves a minimum of 15 years of schooling; she forms a family on her own terms and is at least 25 years old before marrying and/or starting a family; she is financially independent and earns an income equal to or greater than minimum wage; and she

¹ <https://agn.gt/guatemala-conmemora-el-dia-internacional-de-la-mujer-indigena/>

² <https://lac.unwomen.org/es/donde-estamos/guatemala>

³ https://www.girlsnotbrides.es/documents/1771/MUITF_en_Guatemala.pdf

has developed skills that enable her to take on leadership and/or community impact positions, and empower other young women.

In the process of measuring MAIA's impact on the Girl Pioneers, this research was proposed to identify and determine the most important and relevant changes in their lives resulting from their participation in MAIA, based on a rigorous, qualitative, and participatory perspective that evidences the real impact. Therefore, we chose to replicate **the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology** that has been previously implemented with Indigenous girls and young women in Guatemala (Lunch, 2014)⁴.

In MAIA's context, the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique was implemented as a study that included the identification of the changes generated by MAIA's intervention in the lives of the girls (and their families) who were enrolled in the school at the end of the 2022 school year. To

collect the data, MAIA recruited 12 facilitators who met the desired profile and a team of 6 analysts with expertise in anthropology.

The findings were analyzed using the competency framework that MAIA sets as institutional impact goals (see Appendix 1) in the personal, academic, and emotional aspects. This MSC research is complementary to other MAIA initiatives that document the impact of the model, which include a measurement of the attainment of the 4 institutional goals relative to national data, a study of graduates regarding the 4 institutional goals, a comparative study between freshmen and seniors in relation to the 4 institutional goals, case histories, measurement of agency development in the girls, evaluation of academic standardized test scores, and measurement of the development of soft skills in all groups of students joining MAIA, also called "cohorts."



⁴ Lunch, C. (2014, February 6). *Video girls for change project*. The Communication Initiative Network. <https://www.comminet.com/africa/content/video-girls-change-project>

III. Research Question

changes in girls' lives since they were trained in the MAIA model from 2017 to 2022?

- To compile the most significant changes in the lives of the girls who have been trained in the MAIA model from 2017 to



IV. Research Objectives

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

a. Research Setting and Inclusion Criteria

Guatemala is one of the Latin American

V. Methods

countries with the highest rate of Indigenous population, as about 43.8% self-identify with one of the Indigenous peoples (INE, 2018).⁵

In spite of representing almost half of the population, Indigenous peoples have not benefited from social investment to the same extent as non-Indigenous peoples, which results in significant lags in education and learning (PNUD, 2022).

MAIA is located in the department of Sololá, Guatemala. In its institutional coverage strategy, it evaluates the 72 communities in the department of Sololá. MAIA opened its doors to girls from 39 communities based on the following criteria: access routes, distance, time of arrival, socioeconomic, cultural and academic factors, and nongovernmental organizations in the area.

According to the last census (INE, 2018), 43.8% of the population identifies itself as Indigenous and from the Mayan people, and 17% belongs to the Kaqchikel ethnolinguistic group. According to the latest Survey of

Living Conditions (ENCOVI, 2014)⁶, in the department of Sololá, 81.5% of the population lives in poverty and 34.5% in extreme poverty. Regarding basic services, 67.8% of households do not have access to potable water and 33.7% lack adequate sanitation, which increases the risk of infectious diseases. In addition, 47.2% are illiterate and 78.7% have not completed elementary education.

In terms of inequality at a national level, women with access to middle school have an average of 2.2 children. In contrast, women with no education have an average of 6 children, and women who have only had access to elementary school have an average of 3.6 children. This picture makes clear the relation and relevance of education in young women. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), girls from ethnic, marginalized, uneducated, impoverished, remote, and rural areas are three times more at risk of unplanned pregnancies⁷. The Reproductive Health Observatory of Guatemala (OSAR) reports that in the first trimester of 2023, 117 births have been registered in girls and young women

⁵ Estadística, I. N. de. (n.d.). XII Censo Nacional de Población y VII Censo Nacional de Vivienda. 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala. <https://www.censopoblacion.gt/cuantosomos>

⁶ Estadística INd. XII Censo Nacional de Población y VII de Vivienda. . In: Guatemala CdG, editor. Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala, INE: Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala INE; 2018.

⁷ Unicef. (2020). Consecuencias socioeconómicas del embarazo en la adolescencia en Guatemala. Obtenido de https://guatemala.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/consecuencias_socioeconomicas_del_embarazo_adolescente_en_guatemala_final_diagramado.pdf

between 10 and 19 years of age. This data reveals the importance and need for educational programs with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health for girls and young women.

In MAIA, 97% of the girls identify themselves as Indigenous Kaqchikel women, most from rural areas, and 100% are from the department of Sololá.

b. Most Significant Change Methodology (MSC)

The MSC methodology proposes to highlight the individual value of the girls' personal stories while finding the collective value of MAIA's impact on their lives. The girls use writing and interviews to develop their own stories and share the most significant changes they have experienced. Then the MSC is analyzed by using a platform of qualitative data analysis (Davies, et al. 2005).

The MSC methodology proposes to highlight the individual value of the girls' personal stories while finding the collective value of MAIA's impact on their lives. The girls use writing and interviews to develop their own stories and share the most significant changes they have experienced. Then the MSC is analyzed by using a platform of qualitative data analysis (Davies, et al. 2005).

In this case, the project participants and interested parties are involved in the process and in the identification of the most significant changes to be recorded for analysis. This also contributes to the evaluation of the project, as it provides information on impact and results that can be used for the evaluation and performance of the whole program, as well as to learn the factors that have made a difference. This technique is very comprehensive as it contributes to the monitoring and identification of expected changes based on the same participants.



At the same time, it takes into account the different organization levels and interested parties. The participatory nature of this methodology makes it flexible enough to identify unexpected changes.

Principles of Methodology Implementation

By using the MSC technique, the importance of keeping the individual value of the stories of their personal experiences and also finding the collective value of the change brought by MAIA to the lives of the Girl Pioneers predominates. The narratives enhance the information content in order to share this experience with a wider audience—donors and strategic networks with which MAIA works. Likewise, it allows us to analyze the changes or dynamics in order to avoid

simplifying the image of the most important changes into simple numbers. It also allows us to develop new concepts and learn about the contribution of MAIA in the girls' lives.

How was the Most Significant Change—MSC—technique implemented by MAIA?

This section provides details about the methodology applied to determine the most significant change based on the experience of the Girl Pioneers of MAIA. It is not easy to talk about the most significant change because the details of these changes should be obtained from the primary source: the Girl Pioneers who are part of MAIA. They are the most reliable source to share firsthand experiences about the impact generated in their lives and the results

The Most Significant Change technique manual⁸ establishes a series of steps. MAIA adapted them as follows:

1. Establish leaders to participate in the process and get familiar with the research approach.
2. Establish that the domains of change would not be predefined but, in line with the Grounded Theory framework, would be identified at the end of the analysis process. This was renamed Transformational Themes. This change was considered necessary due to the negative connotation that it can have. The aim was to bring the MSC process closer to the cultural perspectives of the community, which could lead to a positive perception for future evaluations.
3. To define the reporting period: 2017 to 2022.
4. To collect self-described narratives of the most significant change of the participants. It was developed at MAIA's facilities in person.
5. To discuss and select the most relevant stories and when selecting the most representative story, express why it has been chosen.
6. Perform an analysis process based on the Grounded Theory methodology to identify the most significant changes.
7. Provide feedback to the organization from the grassroots level to the top management level for future organizational initiatives and processes of the institution's programs and strategies.

The methodologies used for the MSC are explained below. These were written as an introductory exercise for Girl Pioneers to elaborate their own story and narrate the changes considered most significant. Interviews were conducted to enhance the story with complementary information using the Most Significant Change technique, which was later analyzed with the help of a data analysis platform.

⁸ Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). The 'most significant change' (MSC) technique. A guide to its use.

Methodological process of the Most Significant Change in MAIA



Note. This table shows the steps used in the application of MAIA's Most Significant Change. Table created by the authors (2023).

c. Sample Selection for MSC

Following the sampling theory of Creswell (2007)⁹, the study sample is a combination of qualitative, homogeneous, theory-based and criteria-based types. These types of sampling allowed us to focus the group, implement a theoretical construct, and have the selected girls identify significant changes. The MAIA team worked with an external consultant to form a group of 47 participants, all Indigenous girls between the ages of 13 and 20, who are or were students at the MAIA Impact School, belonging to six cohorts that joined the institution between the ages of 13 and 14. The process of sample selection is described below:

- MAIA team identified the most relevant characteristics in the girls' trajectories of change, including descriptions such as they are young women who break with some of their family's stereotypes by seeking a more dignified life (for example: gender, cultural, and economic roles). They are also aware of patterns or roles that denigrate human and women's lives; they are resilient and tenacious. They are usually the first women in their family to study and demonstrate clarity in their goals. They are self-controlled and focus on their classes. They are distinctive because there is something that makes them outstanding, they are "visible" girls who show self-confidence. Their families have learned about the importance of education. They are girls with high expectations, have high participation levels, and are autonomous and have demonstrated some significant change.
- There are also stories that are not so successful (because of the academic level of the girl) but may include interesting changes. She may have one or more of the highly successful profile characteristics but has had academic challenges. She could also be underachieving, with emotional, health, and/or family problems. But even with her challenges, the girl has continued at MAIA. She demonstrates a commitment to continue her studies at MAIA Impact School or to stay on track with her personal, academic, and/or career goals (in the case of Launch Year).
- Having identified the characteristics, the MAIA team worked to identify the girls who could narrate some of the most significant changes. The population was narrowed from 225 girls (the total MAIA enrollment as of 2022), to a pre-selection of 93, including girls with successful trajectories and those who face the most challenges in the learning process at MAIA.
- The pre-selection of 93 girls was reduced to 54 girls, according to a final filter of emotional management, to avoid any discomfort in the participants. The final sample included 47 girls who participated in the research on a voluntary basis and with the proper parental approval. Table 2 shows the characteristics.

⁹ <https://academia.utp.edu.co/seminario-investigacion-II/files/2017/08/INVESTIGACION-CUALITATIVACreswell.pdf>

Description of MSC MAIA participants

L1-Impulso (13 to 14 years old)



- The girls in Project Impulso have just been chosen for the MAIA Impact School scholarship.
- They are completing a yearlong leveling program in key areas like English, technology, math, reading, language arts, and socioemotional and individual mentorship.
- It is important to know about these changes as an initial stage of MAIA's intervention.

L2- (14 to 15 years old)



L3- (15 to 18 years old)



L4- (16 to 17 years old)



- The girls at the intermediate level are already in the MAIA Impact School with its competency-based approach (level 1 and 2).
- The purpose is to learn about the impact MAIA had on the Girl Pioneers to identify knowledge and experiences regarding the MSC at the intermediate level.

L5-(17 to 19 years old)



- The Pioneers in the 11th grade are in their last year and are close to graduating from high school.
- They have had at least 5 years of experience in MAIA and the different strategies: knowledge, skills, resources, and opportunities.

L6-Launch Year (18 to 20 years old)



- The participants in this program are graduates of the MAIA Impact School.
- The girls are in a process of professional skills development, university coaching, and gaining real workplace experience in formal internships.

Note. L1 to L6 refer to the participant groups. Table created by the authors (2023).



d. Interpretation Process of the Most Significant Change

The Most Significant Change technique was helpful as a complement to quantitative methods, as it is a slow, participatory, and intensive endeavor that builds capacity while being applied. This makes the MSC a useful monitoring tool for programs with participatory and empowering objectives (Polet, et al., 2015).

For the interpretation process, Grounded Theory was used as a reference because this research aims to build a theory that emerges from the stories (data) of the Girl Pioneers.

Grounded Theory is constructed through a process of qualitative analysis aimed at discovering concepts and relations based on the raw data, which is then organized into a theoretical explanation scheme. In this process, data is conceptualized and reduced, categories are elaborated ("transformational themes"), and they are related by propositional sentences.

This allowed us to conclude with a **Codebook** about the changes in the voices of the girls, which are the **Transformational Themes** and the impact that MAIA has produced in the lives of the Girl Pioneers.

The main transformational themes identified by the girls who participated in the MSC-MAIA



Education

The girls and/or their families recognize the importance of education for their holistic development. The goal is to achieve a minimum of 15 years of schooling. Girl Pioneers are often the first in their families to obtain a high school education.

Educational Experience at MAIA



Knowledge acquired

Ideas and knowledge held by the girls on a particular topic

Educational Experience at MAIA



Resilience

Manage Emotions (MAIA Concept)

Resilience Self-concept



Empowerment

The girls' confidence in their self-esteem, abilities, and support network. This confidence is communicated through their voice so they can express their ideas and opinions in different environments (community, family, church, conversations, etc.).

Empowerment process through the exercise of empowered voice



Empowered voice

Confidence to communicate their ideas and opinions in different environments: family, school, communities

Empowerment process through the exercise of empowered voice



Changes in family

Modifications in family dynamics, and support for girls, including when they have significant losses

Changes in my environment

Note. Table created by the authors (2023).

VI. Results

The main results obtained from the data analysis are presented below. These results are constructed from the perceptions and meanings of the participants in relation to the most significant changes they have experienced during their time at MAIA.

First, it presents the most significant changes for the Girl Pioneers, which represent the connection with the MAIA goals. Then, the results are displayed by the stage of the Girl Pioneers' trajectory, showing the changes that have been generated in a 3-year interval (which is the distance between each stage). Finally, the changes obtained in each cohort are outlined.

a. Results According to MAIA Goals

In this section, the research results are classified according to the expectations of the MAIA model, as set forth in the institutional guidelines.

These include Girl Pioneers having access to a good quality high school education, mentoring, and emotional support at the individual and family levels. In addition, graduates are expected to be economically independent and upwardly mobile, be an average of 25 years old before they marry and/or start their families, have at least 15 years of schooling, and develop the

internal strength, skills, and emotional intelligence they need to lead.

The research results evidenced 3 main themes:

Initially, the Pioneers emphasize how the **educational experience** at MAIA has been the most important change in their lives—the opportunity to continue their formal education and recognize that MAIA has provided them with a holistic and nontraditional education that has enriched their trajectory in a comprehensive way. They mention the knowledge acquired, such as access to reproductive health and English, but especially highlight the Empowered Voice exercises, which have helped them to overcome shyness, gain confidence, and communicate their ideas in a safe way. They also highlight a change in their worldview.

Secondly, the 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 has been negatively affected by several factors, including discrimination for being women. In relation to self-concept, the girls identify themselves as resilient since they mention having developed the ability to

understand and manage their emotions. This led them to 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 them and advocating for them to be taken into account.**

Finally, the third point expressed by the girls is that **they are aware of what is happening in their environment** (family and community). This is related to different aspects such as family dynamics, social expectations, and gender roles. They question prevailing social stereotypes and values by demonstrating a reflective and critical attitude of their environment. For example, they discuss inequality in access to education for women and equal rights, indicating awareness of social injustices and their quest for positive change. The Girl Pioneers highlighted parental support, particularly regarding the importance of access to education and women's empowerment. These reflect the transformation and growth experienced by the girls and their families as a result of MAIA's support, especially from their mentors.

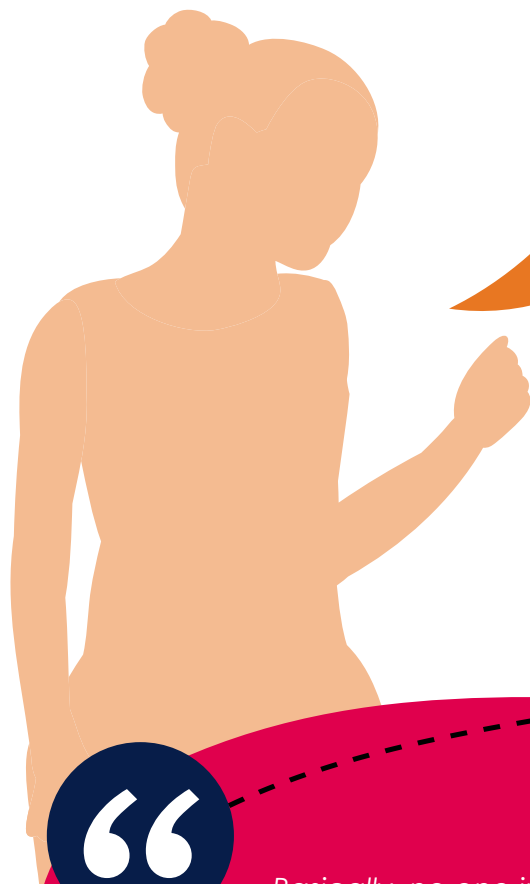
The following is an in-depth description of the three results:

Result 1. Education: A Gateway to Empowerment

According to the stories collected in the MSC exercise, the most important change for the girls is the educational experience at MAIA, the possibility of continuing their studies at the secondary level due to the scholarship. Access to education is the most predominant change for the participants because with the opportunity to study at MAIA, they have had access to a holistic, nontraditional education that enhances their process in an integral way. This has resulted in changes in the participants' lives.

The girls reflect on their previous experience within the public education system and compare it with the new knowledge and subjects such as English, mathematics, and language arts. They find greater challenges due to the rigorous nature of the education. Likewise, the girls mention the relevance of the safe environment in MAIA, which is an ecosystem that generates the conditions for their growth and integral development, so they express feelings of joy and accomplishment at having joined MAIA.

Educational empowerment is considered the most important instrument for sociopolitical and economic transformations. Education is a hope that generates security, self-esteem, and self-reliance in a person. It also increases their intellectual, social, political, cultural, and religious consciousness, strengthening their capacity for analysis and reflection (cited in Mandal, K. C. 2013).



“

TESTIMONIAL 1.1

Being at MAIA is a privilege for me. The greatest change that I have had during this year is increasing my knowledge. Before MAIA, I felt limited. I did not know anything about English, language arts, or mathematics, here at MAIA learned even more.
(Berta, 14 years old, joined MAIA in 2022).

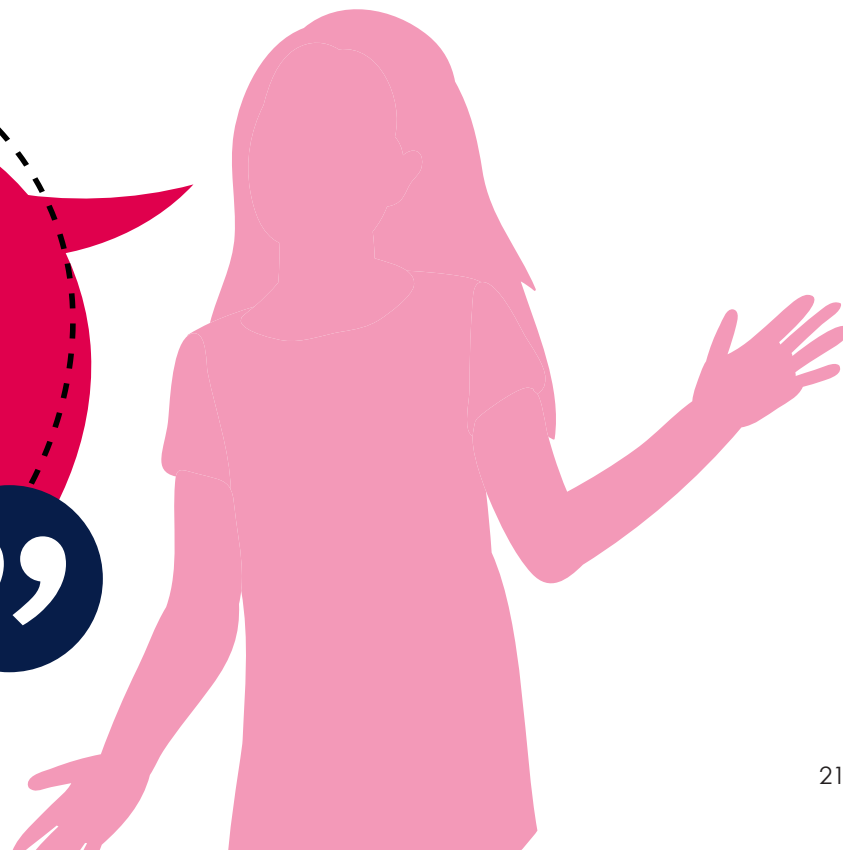
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TESTIMONIAL 1.2

Basically, no one in my family had access to education. No one 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, because my parents didn't have the economic resources to pay for my education. But I broke that cycle and continued studying, I know that my younger sister is going to study because I did it and because I want a better future for her (Rocío, 17 years old, joined MAIA in 2018).

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TESTIMONIAL 1.3

When I was in my previous school, I didn't participate and didn't share my ideas or views. Now at MAIA, I'm happy because every day I feel more confident and heard. (Dinora, 13 years old, joined MAIA in 2022).

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TESTIMONIAL 1.4

In the 6th grade, I also had a bad experience with two classmates who wanted to assault me. My school is a little far, so I walked every day. One day they approached me and wanted to hurt me. They threw me on the road, but nothing much happened 'cause I quickly got up. I knew they wanted to do something bad to me. It was horrible.

To find this school was very nice for me. Because I am studying with women and girls, I feel more confident, protected. I know that I will no longer have any experience like the one I had before at my school. (Ixchely, 18 years old, joined MAIA in 2018).

”

TESTIMONIAL 1.5

Another change I have had is that I feel that I am safe at school. I have more support from the mentors and the educators. They support us, they motivate us to follow our dreams (Yamanik, 14 years old, joined MAIA in 2022).

“

”



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

The girls identify a condition before and during their experience in MAIA. **Resilience** is a competence that they have developed from several difficult experiences that have allowed them to build their **empowerment**. The girls describe how after difficult moments they know their strengths and have the determination to complete their studies and graduate. They are aware of the support and opportunities. According to the International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), resilience is a dynamic process in which there is an interaction between risk factors and protective factors that can facilitate or hinder it. The environment, and the surroundings, must also be taken into account and strengthened. Understanding this factor is a vital part of the psychosocial educational process to promote the resilience process.¹⁰

An important element of MAIA is the **support** provided by the mentors and educators. The personalized individual and family mentorship for each Girl Pioneer is a key factor for the transformations in their environment and for themselves. According to psychologist Daniel Goleman, emotions provoke different physiological responses. For example, the

¹⁰ Bice.org (MOD)

happiness and stability mentioned by the Girl Pioneers can have a direct impact on their development. Happiness gives the body a general rest (without stressors) and enthusiasm for whatever task is at hand and for striving toward a great variety of goals. (Goleman, 1995).

The **Tzijonem—Voices of Change** conversation project is frequently mentioned by the girls because they put the empowered voice competency into practice in this space. Combined with critical thinking, the girls achieve full development.

The girls perceive an improvement in their **self-esteem** and self-confidence. This had been undermined by gender discrimination for being girls and women. Joining MAIA has helped them to value themselves, form their identity, and recognize their intrinsic value. They recognize their rights and use their critical thinking to handle situations.

This new educational experience also reveals another important change: the girls are beginning to express their opinions, both at school and at home, participate, and make their voices heard.

They also develop the capacity to identify different situations with emotional intelligence, by understanding and managing them better. They are critical and analyze based on their emotions and ideas. The formation of self-concept is evident; the Girl Pioneers are resilient and recognize their identity.

The girls initiate an **empowerment process**. According to Sahay, empowerment is an active, multidimensional process that enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life (Sushama Sahay, 1998). The author emphasizes the importance of women's health, education, and self-esteem.

Furthermore, Rodríguez and Caño compliment and define **self-concept** as a system of beliefs considered true by the individual with respect to him/herself, which are the result of an analysis, integration, and evaluation process of the information derived from his/her own experience. In contrast, the term self-esteem has been used mainly to refer to the global component of self-concept, which depends on the context of the individual (Rodríguez and Caño, 2012).

According to Santiago Bastos, the linguistic factor is not simply a means to communicate information, but it is also an integral part of people's culture and identity. Identity has a direct relation with politics and power (Bastos, S. 2007).¹¹

¹¹ Bastos, S. (2007). Educación y sistemas de dominación étnica: la interculturalidad como pregunta». *Laberintos: educación bilingüe e interculturalidad*, by Virgilio Álvarez Aragón, 145-60.

“

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 state that women are equal to men, and we have the same rights (Rosa, 15 years old, joined MAIA in 2021).

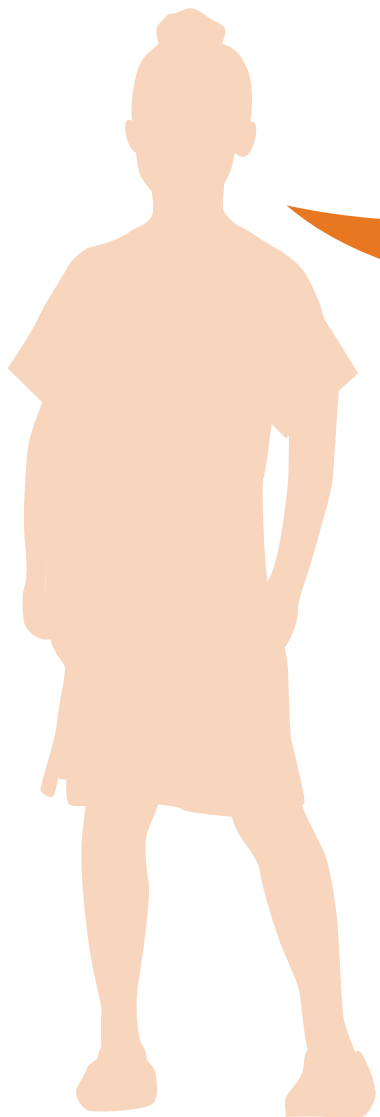
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TESTIMONIAL 2.2

I hand in assignments on time and bring what is asked of me in the courses. If I compare to my past self and we are not the same person. I am proud of myself for being where I am now, for being resilient in the face of every obstacle that has come my way. I have stumbled a few times but I have always gotten up, I am happy with myself for not running away from problems and for facing them (Anayansi, 15, joined MAIA in 2020).

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TESTIMONIAL 2.3

When I was a child, I remember being treated as less because I was poor, because I was an Indigenous girl. When I was in elementary school, many made fun of me for being poor and for being Maya because most of my classmates were ladino and they made fun of me because when I wore pants, I didn't know how to wear them. I didn't know how to dress, and they made fun of me. I rarely had friends. Until a friend helped me and shared her food with me. She was the only person, the only ladino friend I had in elementary school.

When I joined MAIA, I realized that here most of us are Indigenous, so I am no longer ashamed. Before I felt bad when they said you are like this, you are like that, so it hurt me a lot and not only at school, also with my mother. They made us feel less, they told us: "you never bathe, you smell bad", and that was very awkward for me (Isabela, 14 years old, joined MAIA in 2021).

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TESTIMONIAL 2.4

The most important change for me is to raise my voice because in the past I was afraid to do so. I was afraid to express myself, as I felt that people would make fun of me. And here at MAIA they have shown us that we must not be afraid, that we must raise our voices and face the obstacles that life brings us (Emma, 14 years old, joined MAIA in 2022).

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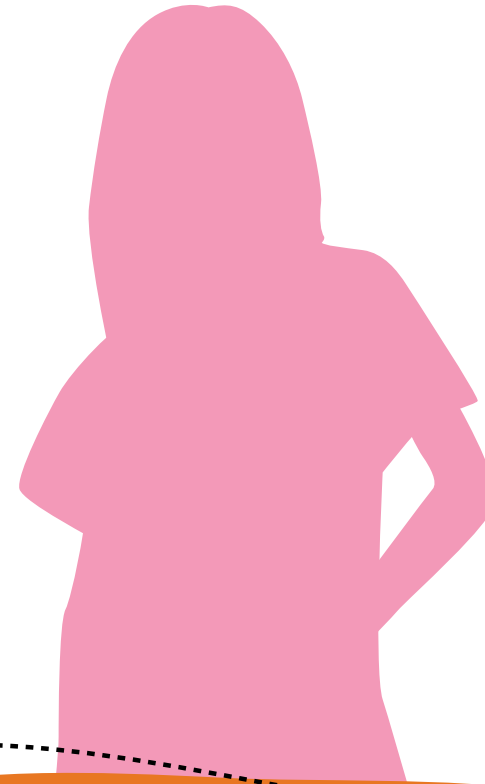
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TESTIMONIAL 2.5

I would say that the most significant change that MAIA has made for me is to be analytical, to think about things responsibly, especially because I used to be a little shy before

I joined the school, I was impulsive and sometimes I didn't think or analyze what I said (Juanita, 16 years old, joined MAIA in 2020).

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TESTIMONIAL 2.6

In MAIA they taught me to have critical thinking and to not give up, this has helped me a lot because it has encouraged me to take my past, the things that have happened to me, as a magic mirror and remind me where I should not fall, where I should not return, and to have something that tells me that y! better take another path, and that motivates me every day (Cindy, 17 years old, joined MAIA in 2020).

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TESTIMONIAL 2.7

I went through a very strong experience, which was the loss of my father. I thought that I was going to be the same as all the girls who had lost their father—who left their studies, who felt that the world had fallen, who did not look for another way to be strong or to look for other tools. Even though it was the most painful moment in my life, and I would carry that pain for a long time, I could also see it in a positive way, which helped me. I had the opportunity to continue studying. It showed me that I could be strong even at that moment, that I could move forward and that this would be, let's say a consequence, that I could face any challenge, and see everything in a positive way. The complications, also have answers. As many people mentioned, if things are repeated or happen in the same way, you always have to change some little things to keep in mind (Felisa, 18 years old, joined MAIA in 2017).

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TESTIMONIAL 2.8

I admire the fact that now you have found the courage to share what you have been through, because sometimes we are afraid to say everything we have been through in fear of what others will think. But I know that here we connect a lot and I feel connected with you and I admire you too. I also think it is important that every day we look forward. We are women and we must support each other, and as I have always heard, we are not the problem, we are the solution, so let us show them that we can do it (Testimonial representing the 3rd Cohort circle).

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Result 3. Individual Transformation and Family Cohesion

There are two main aspects regarding the changes in the environment of the participants: changes in the family and community environment, and the importance of parental support in their lives.

Girl Pioneers recognize and are aware of changes in their environment, both at the family and community levels. These changes may be related to different aspects such as family dynamics, social expectations, and gender roles. By questioning prevailing social stereotypes and values, Girl Pioneers demonstrate a critical and reflective attitude of their environment. For example, by discussing unequal access to education for women and equal rights, they are becoming aware of injustices and seeking positive change.

In addition, the importance of **family cohesion** is highlighted as a result of the positive changes that have taken place. Through weekly follow-up and mentorship, the Girl Pioneers have acquired tools and skills that have allowed them to strengthen family ties and build confidence in their families. These tools may include communication skills, conflict resolution, and empathy, as well as others. Overall, they highlight the positive impact of the techniques and skills learned on family integration.

On the other hand, another key aspect is the importance of **parental support** for the girls, which is identified as a crucial change in their lives. The fact that the parents of some girls support and back up their daughters' decisions is essential for their personal and professional growth. By mentioning access to education for women and the opportunity to leave home to study, it is evident that these girls are challenging traditional norms and are being supported by their parents in this process. This parental support can be crucial in overcoming barriers and obstacles that may arise in their journey in education and empowerment.

Therefore, the Girl Pioneers have identified changes in their family and community environment and have questioned stereotypes and social values. In addition, they emphasize the importance of parental support in their lives, especially in terms of access to education and women's empowerment. These aspects reflect the transformation and personal growth experienced by the girls and their families through the opportunities and support provided by their environment and mentors.

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TESTIMONIAL 3.1

MAIA has helped me and my mom to have more communication, and I think that is the most significant change that I have experienced here at MAIA. I have also learned and grown in different areas both emotionally and academically (Clara, 15 years old, joined MAIA in 2020).

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TESTIMONIAL 3.2

The most significant change in the years that I have been at MAIA, is that my family is closer. MAIA has given each group a mentor, who visits the families every month on Sundays or depending on the situation of each family, every two months, and that has helped us to be closer as a family (Anayansi, 15 years old, joined MAIA in 2020).

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TESTIMONIAL 3.3

“This means that I can also do it. Although I did not have studies, I still can do it,” this are the words from my mom. My mom told me that she was also afraid to raise her voice, but she says that when she did the empowered voice exercises (the blender, the wave), she felt free, and the surprising thing about my parents is that they not only do it when they are with MAIA, but they also do it outside MAIA. They share them with more people. So that's what I like most about them, that they don't just share it or just do it because we are at school or because we are at home, but they do it outside, at church, in the community. They express their feelings, their emotions, what they feel about something they disagree with (Lila, 18 years old, joined MAIA in 2018).

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TESTIMONIAL 3.4

MAIA has not only made a difference to me, but also to my family. Through classes, workshops, trainings, and through everything. In the past, as I mentioned before, it was not the fault of our parents, but more because of society or the time in which they grew up. They were educated in a different way. They used to think that a man is a man and he can do this or that; a woman is a woman and she can do this, but not that. So, unfortunately, yeah... my family was one of those people. My mom was one of those people, and my dad was also one of those people. We are six sisters and unfortunately, my dad left home when I was a child, so for that reason my mom and I looked for scholarships to continue studying. My mom had this idea that women could not study but that they must be more involved in the housework.

She used to say: "You should serve your uncles because they are men," and we had no knowledge, so we used to do it. But when we joined MAIA, my mother came to the sessions with the mentors and they explained to her and she sometimes came home and explained it to my grandmother, to my aunts, and also to my uncles, and they learned about it. Nowadays, thankfully, everyone does things regardless of whether they are men or women. They do the housework, they wash the dishes, and sometimes they help in the kitchen, but it is something that is changing little by little, step by step

(Eleonor, 18 years old, joined MAIA in 2017)

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TESTIMONIAL 3.5

So are our parents, they are also learning with us. We have a mentor and she goes to our house, talks to us, and teaches our parents that women have the right to continue studying. And also that they should not stop supporting us to continue our education. We should continue. I see that it is also important for me and my parents because before they couldn't speak or understand Spanish. But now they do; they understand Spanish. They also have free time and they can play. They have information, which is very important, and they also share it with my whole family. (Celia, 19 years old, joined MAIA in 2018).

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TESTIMONIAL 3.6

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 achieve everything. And well, I feel very proud and happy of what I can be, of the impact I can make in different areas: work, on my social life, and more (Testimonial representing the MAIA Graduates circle).

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b. Results According to the Stage of the Girl Pioneers' Trajectory

The main results are developed differently at each level in the MAIA Impact School. These three results are detailed below in the initial stage (Project Impulso), Intermediate (7th grade to high school), and the final stage (Launch Year).

Table 1. Development of the most significant change for the girls as a result of their trajectory in MAIA

Themes	Description by stages		
	Initial Stage	Intermediate Stage	Final stage (retrospective)
Educational Experience at MAIA	The Girl Pioneers emphasize the opportunity to have access to education. They have new knowledge in English, language arts, mathematics, etc. MAIA is a safe space, with a trusted network of women. They reflect on their previous experience in the public education system. They also identify challenges due to the rigorous nature of education. There is closeness and support from the educators.	They recognize the life change generated by studying at MAIA. The competence of critical thinking is highlighted as an important change in this process. They also find the challenge of how to improve their punctuality. The girls reflect on their context and social reality.	They value and are aware of access to education in a safe space. In addition, they are enhanced by an academic and emotional learning process.
Resilience: a. Empowerment, through their voice b. Self-concept	In this new educational experience, the girls begin to express their opinions at MAIA and at home. They participate and recognize that they have lost their fear and now raise their voices and share their ideas. They now have the knowledge and know their rights. They reflect on their capacity to face challenges in life.	The girls recognize their process and their resilience. They participate and use their voice in their community and in the country. They recognize their power and capabilities. They are committed to graduating.	The girls recognize coping strategies in their emotion management, such as the "emotion thermometer" (unique element of MAIA), dialogue, and trust circles. They reflect on their self-concept.

Themes	Description by stages		
	Initial Stage	Intermediate Stage	Final stage (retrospective)
Changes in my environment	The girls and their parents are supported by the mentors at home.	They point out changes in the family, such as improved communication and greater integration. This is based on the weekly socioemotional support provided by the mentors.	Many of them have been the first women in their families to study in high school. They feel responsible and are agents of change in their community. They participate and support their family so that other women also study. The mentorship in the family has been essential to question taboos and stereotypes in their community.

Note. This table presents the significant changes and their development in three key moments: initial, intermediate and final. Table created by the authors (2023)

c. Results by Cohorts

With the objective of exploring the most significant changes in the girls' lives, the data collection was performed by cohort, as previously mentioned. Forty-seven girls participated in this process. The following is the conglomerate of the girls' responses, according to the methodological phases of the research on the most significant change and the six cohorts that participated in the MAIA experience.

The different experiences, motivations, and personal interpretations of the girls were identified. These personal stories showed the changes from the I-perspective, from their self-concept, also at a collective level, changes in the family and in

the community. This also reveals the type of mentorship that each of the Girl Pioneers has received, which is crucially important for MSC in the lives of the girls in the six cohorts.

As mentioned above, this before and after MAIA experience for many girls has involved building self-esteem and self-concept. They recognize the road they have traveled and are resilient to the challenges they have faced along the way. The girls identify their skills and the competencies they are developing in MAIA. The most significant changes for the girls are in the construction of a self-concept, a family, a community, and the support and holistic education provided by MAIA.

Tabla 2. Most significant changes by grade levels in MAIA during 2022

Cohort	Results in the MSC process - MAIA Themes identified by cohorts
Project Impulso	Access to the scholarship and educational experience at MAIA. Awareness that they are in a safe space with the right conditions for learning. The girl has more knowledge in the courses. Emphasizes the English course and the support of the mentors and educators. There is a yearning for the future and a personal commitment to continue studying.
8th Grade	They participate and recognize that they have lost their fear and now speak out and share their ideas. Now they have the knowledge and are aware of their rights. They reflect on their capacity to face challenges in life. They recognize the relevance of MAIA's formative experience and the role of the educators and mentors.
9th Grade	They have developed different knowledge from the educational experience at MAIA. They are punctual, participate, and lose their fear of participating. They are proud of themselves. They are resilient in the face of adversity. They apply their critical thinking to their experiences. They recognize their capacity for resilience and actively participate in their family and community.
10th Grade	They have lost their fear and now have the confidence to speak in public, as they have the tools to do so. They recognize their power and capabilities. They now relate to more people. They recognize the academic opportunities they have had at MAIA Impact School. They recognize coping strategies in their emotion management.
11th Grade	They recognize the opportunity to study at MAIA and continue their education, since this opportunity was not possible for them due to socioeconomic factors. They feel safe to study with women and learn new skills and values, receive and emotional support. They recognize the privilege of access to education and seek to generate a change in their family and community so that more girls and women have access to education.
Launch Year	They recognize the opportunity to continue their education. They are the first women in their families to study at high school. They have broken stereotypes that prevented their other family members from studying, they are leaders and have initiative. They project themselves as active agents in their community. They have access to networks and are seeking economic independence.

Note. Table created by the authors (2023)

VI. Conclusions

- The research gathered 47 stories of change experienced by the Girl Pioneers during their time at MAIA, with some having been at MAIA for 1 year and others for up to 6 years.
- The Girl Pioneers identify the powerful impact of access to education through MAIA and the changes resulting from this opportunity. The stories selected by the girls reveal changes in their self-concept and self-esteem, and also at the collective level, changes in the family and in the community. This is evidence of the personal and socioemotional mentorship that each Girl Pioneer and her family have received. In addition, the girls identify their skills and the competencies they are developing in MAIA. Critical thinking and resilience are some of the skills most mentioned by the girls.
- The MSC technique, as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation strategy of MAIA, is a methodology that preserves the individual value of the experiences in the personal stories and also the collective value of the change in the lives of the girls.
- At the initial stage, the girls show enthusiasm for accessing education through MAIA. They learn new knowledge and skills and find a safe space in MAIA with a trusted network of women. However, they also face challenges due to the rigorous nature of the education.
- In the intermediate stage, the girls recognize the significant change that studying at MAIA meant for them. They highlight critical thinking as an acquired skill and face new challenges. In addition, they reflect on their context and social reality, which allows them to value and be aware of access to education in a safe space.
- In the retrospective stage (Launch Year), it is evident that the girls have developed resilience, the use of their empowered voice, and the building of good self-esteem. They have discovered their voice and express their opinions with more confidence at school, at home, and in their community. In addition, they recognize their capacity to face challenges in life and participate and use their voice in the community and in the country.
- Finally, it is noteworthy that MAIA's mentorship in the homes of the girls has had a positive impact on communication and family integration. The girls also feel responsible and are agents of change in their community, supporting other girls and women to study, and questioning taboos and stereotypes.
- The girls involved begin a process of empowerment that allows them to recognize their identity and power in all spheres of their lives.
- MAIA has had a positive impact on the personal, academic, and emotional development of the girls. They have acquired new skills and competencies and have developed greater resilience and empowerment. Regarding the families, the girls share that they have improved family communication and integration.

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Appendix

Appendix I. MAIA Organizational Goals (Theory of Change)

Needs	Internal Control		Area of influence	
	Strategy	Achievement	Result	Impact
Indigenous girls who live in rural areas live below the poverty line and have the possibility to complete the MAIA educational program as well as support their families. They take on tasks at home that limit their socioeconomic opportunities (housework, taking care of their siblings, etc.). They marry and have families at a young age. They drop out of school without having completed their middle/high school education. They do not get into college because they don't pass the entrance tests.	Access and support: - Girls selection - Individual support/mentorship - Family support - Empowering leadership through mentorship - Technology, educational resources, networks - Innovation lab for other organizations - Open source model - Connecting girls' talent with opportunities Knowledge: - High-quality education - Empowered voice - Leadership - Tools for life - Leveling (Project Impulso) - Content management - Curriculum - Evaluation - Pedagogy - University access	The girls have access to quality education at the middle school and high school levels, access to mentorship, and emotional support at the individual and family levels.	1. Economic Autonomy: Graduates are economically independent and upwardly mobile. They obtain a formal job with an income equal to or higher than the minimum wage. 2. A family on her terms: Graduates are at least 25 years old before they marry and/or start their families. They are in a stable position to support a family. 3. Lifelong Learning: Girl Pioneers will achieve a minimum of 15 years of schooling. 4. Empowered to empower: Graduates have developed the internal strength, skills, and emotional intelligence they need to lead and take on leadership positions. Demonstrating leadership in the environments in which they operate, they are active members of their community.	A new generation of empowered Indigenous women in leadership positions before the age of 30. (Systemic Change)

Source: Created by the authors based on internal planning papers (2023)

Four MAIA Goals:

MAIA focuses its efforts in Guatemala, a country with the worst gender equity gap in the Americas and where nearly 80% of the Indigenous population lives below the poverty line. Fewer than 20% of Indigenous girls will graduate from secondary school, and fewer than 2% continue to university. All of the programming and innovation is aligned with the goals of and for Girl Pioneers. Each goal is monitored through incremental growth measured annually to ensure each Girl Pioneer is on a trajectory to meet her true potential.

1. **Lifelong Learning:** Indigenous women in Guatemala average 3 years of education. Our goal is that MAIA graduates achieve 15 years of schooling. MAIA knows that each Girl Pioneer has different ambitions, so we work with them to find formal and informal programs that meet their unique needs after graduating from the MAIA Impact School.
2. **Family on her terms (after the age of 25):** Approximately 57% of young Indigenous women are married or become mothers by the time they are 20 years old. In order to have a healthy family and achieve their personal goals, MAIA graduates are on average 25 years old before getting married and/or starting their families. This goal also includes the promotion of managing emotions, all the competencies described above, and psychological sessions, as well as

the girls' learning about sexual and reproductive health and the protection of children and youth. Briefly, the goal is for the girl to have the autonomy to decide about her life project, when, how, and where to start her family life as she has planned it.

3. **Economic Autonomy:** MAIA aims for the graduates to become economically independent and become part of the formal economy of the country (Q36,000.00 annual income). MAIA knows that the achievement of the Girl Pioneers' goals will greatly depend on their economic potential and that the Girl Pioneers will have greater possibilities to make and act on their decisions, as well as to break the cycle of poverty. Economic autonomy is an important factor for the girl to be independent in other areas of her life, such as deciding to continue her studies.
4. **Unlocking Leadership Potential:** Guatemala has the lowest level of female political participation in the hemisphere. Through the socioemotional and family mentoring, the creation of peer-to-peer support networks, and holistic education, the Girl Pioneers develop the internal strength, skills, and emotional intelligence they need to lead; they are empowered to empower. The Girl Pioneer is a young woman who occupies leadership positions and has an impact on the different areas in which she operates: family, community, national, and global levels.

Appendix II. Description of Transformational Themes

Theme	Description
Educational Experience at MAIA	• MAIA education as a formative experience that provides them with new knowledge, MAIA community (educators, mentors, peers). • The girl is aware of her rights and MAIA competencies, highlighting the development of critical thinking. • Access to education, recognizes the importance of education. Graduate.
Resilience	• Power of the girl to go out and face difficulties.
Self-concept	• Built through resilience. From the girl's context, where she lives or where she grows up. • The girl knows who she is and is aware of her behaviors and attitudes. • Empowerment process through the exercise of an empowered voice. • The Pioneer recognizes her abilities to cope with difficulties. MAIA as an empowerment space for girls. • They recognize their potential in different areas. • The girl uses her voice to communicate her ideas and opinions in different environments: family, school, and community. • The girl is confident and has lost her fear of raising her voice. • The empowered voice exercise as the result of this process of empowerment of the girl from her experience in MAIA.
Changes in my Environment	• Changes at a family and community level as a result of MAIA's training experience. • Changes in family dynamics, support for the girls and important losses. • Change in the community. • Adaptation and new experiences or changes in practices, values, or processes in community areas.

Appendix III. Theme Transformation by Cohort

Results in the MSC process – MAIA Themes identified by cohorts			
Cohort	Phase 1: Themes according to Girl Pioneers (story selection by cohort)	Phase 2: Themes by facilitators (focus group guides)	Phase 3: Themes by analysts (coding level 1, 2 and 3 - results)
Project Impulso	• Education • Advocacy and impact • New knowledge • Support for educators	Access to the MAIA scholarship. The girls are more knowledgeable in the subjects. They emphasize the English class. They have a yearning for the future. A personal commitment and decision to continue studying.	• Educational experience at MAIA • Empowerment • Changes in my environment
8th Grade	• Empowerment • Empowered voice • Resilience • Awareness of her rights	She no longer allows others to belittle her for being a woman. She is no longer afraid to express herself. She is aware of her rights as a woman and raises her voice, recognizes and values gender equality.	• Educational experience in MAIA: Educators and mentors role • Resilience • Empowerment • Self-concept
9th Grade	• Resilience • Educational experience in MAIA (access to education) • Lose the fear of participating	She developed knowledge from the educational experience at MAIA. She is punctual, participates, and has lost her fear of participating. She is proud of herself. She is resilient in the face of adversity.	• Educational experience at MAIA • Self-concept • Competencies: critical thinking • Empowerment
10th Grade	• Resilience • Empowerment • Changes in my environment • Educational experience at MAIA	She has lost her fear and now has the confidence to speak in public, as she has the tools to do so. She now interacts with more people. She recognizes the academic opportunities she has had at MAIA School.	• Educational experience at MAIA • Empowerment • Participation and networking • Self-concept

Results in the MSC process – MAIA Themes identified by cohorts			
Cohort	Phase 1: Themes according to Girl Pioneers (story selection by cohort)	Phase 2: Themes by facilitators (focus group guides)	Phase 3: Themes by analysts (coding level 1, 2 and 3 - results)
11th Grade	• Educational experience at MAIA • Competence: Resilience • Changes in my environment • Economic autonomy • Safety: Support network	The opportunity to study at MAIA and continue her education, since this opportunity was not possible for her due to socioeconomic factors. She feels safe studying with women and learning new skills, values, and emotional support.	• Educational experience at MAIA: social mobility • MAIA: a safe space. • Spilling information: The Girl Effect • Changes in my environment
Launch Year	• Educational experience at MAIA • Empowerment • Changes in my environment: directly through the mentor's family support • Self-concept • Competencies (leadership)	Opportunity to continue her education, first woman to study in high school, broke stereotypes that prevented her other family members from studying, is a leader, and has initiative.	• Educational experience at MAIA • Competences (autonomy, self-esteem, hygiene) • Changes in my environment

Note: Consolidated results of themes and processes of the MSC of MAIA Table created by the authors (2023).

Appendix IV. Other important definitions

Girl Pioneer: A person who can achieve her dreams and goals through her skills and abilities. She is usually the first woman in her family to have access to education and to graduate from high school. She is a source of inspiration for many girls in her community because through her (empowered) voice and education, she is making changes and eliminating social stereotypes with every step.

Mentor: A vital part of the MAIA team, she supports the Girl Pioneers in overcoming the challenges they face. Mentors provide monthly family visits with the goal of motivating and connecting families and encouraging the family to be a strong support network for the girl to achieve her goals. This ensures that a Girl Pioneer does not have to choose between a prosperous future or her family; she can have both.

Empowered Voice: For MAIA, it is the ability to express emotions, feelings, and thoughts in an assertive way. The Girl Pioneer generates a positive impact on herself and her community.



MAIA