



voices

THE VOICES
OF COED



Oscar Xinico, 24, credits CoEd programs with helping him rise out of poverty. *Chipiacúl, Guatemala, 2009.*

Oscar Xinico: On the road to a better life

Oscar Xinico knew he was poor. This knowledge never really bothered him. Everyone in his small, rural community of Chipiacúl—in Guatemala’s remote Western Highlands—was just like him. They farmed the land, lived in small huts with dirt floors and no running water, and lacked education, health care, and opportunities of any sort. They worked hard, and generally died young. This is the only life Oscar and his family ever knew.

But the harsh reality of his circumstances hit home one day, when, on the way to help his father in the fields, a well-dressed man sped by him on a motor bike, literally leaving Oscar in the dust.

“I remember thinking in that moment that there was more to life,” Oscar recounts. “I vowed to become like that man, to have the things my parents never did.”

Oscar’s dreams quickly faded. The son of an illiterate mother and a subsistence farmer, Oscar seemed doomed to repeat their fate.

“My family was very poor,” he adds. “I knew there would be no money to go to school past the sixth grade.”

Like all parents, Oscar’s wanted more for their children. They had little to offer them, other than assurances that they would sacrifice to keep their kids in school. This was no small promise in a country where two-thirds of children in rural areas drop out of school before reaching the sixth grade.

Oscar made good on every opportunity that presented itself. In the seventh grade, CoEd came to his school and gave him his first ever set of textbooks. The books opened up a new world to him. Like many indigenous Guatemalans, Oscar grew up speaking his native language (Kaqchiquel). The textbooks helped him improve his Spanish, a vital skill if he wished to continue his education to higher levels. Other subjects, including math, also started making sense.

“The books helped me learn the formulas,” Oscar recalls. “It came easy to me, so I decided to become an accountant.”

When Oscar reached the ninth grade, CoEd set up a computer center at his school. He quickly learned to do bookkeeping in Microsoft Excel.

Oscar entered diversificado (vocational high school) with an advantage over other students.

“Kids who didn’t have a CoEd lab in their schools were completely overwhelmed. I did my best to share what I had learned—to help them as I’d been helped.”

Today Oscar—ever mindful of his humble roots—continues to give back to others. He works for a government aid program that provides microloans to impoverished farmers. Oscar’s job is to teach them to manage profitable small businesses.

“They trust me because I grew up just like them,” he says. “I see them with their kids in the fields and I tell them about the importance of education. This is what I am most proud of in my life.”

Now 24 years old, Oscar is married, but waiting to start a family of his own.

“My father wanted a better life for me. Now I want the same for my children.”

With that, Oscar excuses himself, adjusting the strap on his helmet. He mounts his motorbike and waves to a curious, shoeless child kicking a ball down the dusty road. Perhaps Oscar will inspire this boy—just as he was once himself moved—to rise above the limited circumstances into which he was born.