

## Communities mobilizing for adolescents' sexual and reproductive health: the case of Guatemala

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In Guatemala, where 23% of the population is between 10 and 19, adolescents face significant challenges to the exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights (UNDP, 2012). Nearly half of all girls ages 15–19 are pregnant or already mothers; more than 1 in 3 girls under 15 report sexual abuse (ENSMI, 2010). Despite the country's significant body of human rights and health legislation,<sup>2</sup> adolescents have limited access to sexuality education, friendly sexual and reproductive health services, and life-skills programs (Plan Internacional, 2012).

In 2006, Plan launched *Paso a Paso*, a comprehensive rights-based ASRH behaviour change methodology to empower adolescents to make healthy decisions. Plan adapted the Stepping Stones package<sup>3</sup> to the Guatemalan context by incorporating the tenets of *popular education*, which empowers participants as rights holders (van Vijeijken et al, 2009).

*Paso a Paso* has been implemented in 635 rural communities in 15 poor, largely indigenous municipalities (Plan Internacional, 2012), conducting workshops with Mayan youth, parents, community leaders, teachers and health providers. It fosters community-wide transformation, empowering community educators as change agents, integrating a rich community of practice and engaging multiple stakeholders. It supports sustainable cultural and social change and creates an enabling environment for youth rights.

*Paso a Paso* has so far reached over 5,000 people. Initial evidence suggests (Barriga, 2011)<sup>4</sup> that communities underwent profound social change, uniting in their commitment to adolescent development. About 40% of those trained became peer trainers;<sup>5</sup> others engaged with authorities in program development, or in implementing teacher trainings. A national network of 32 youth organizations was formed. Communities came together to demand free HIV testing; others started reporting sexual abuse. In a conservative environment, parents urged schools to adopt an SRH curriculum and requested training themselves.

In line with the 2008 Ministerial Declaration, "Preventing through Education,"<sup>6</sup> Plan partnered with authorities to include *Paso a Paso* in the national sexuality education

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<sup>2</sup> Law to prevent, prosecute and eradicate domestic violence (Decree 97- 1996); Law to dignify and promote women (Decree 7- 1999); Social Development Law (decree 42-2001); Law to combat HIV (Decree 317-2002); Law for Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (Decree 27-2003); Law for Universal and Equitable Access to Family Planning and its integration to the National Reproductive Health Program (Decree 87-2005); Law against femicide and other forms of violence against women (Decree 22-2008); Safe Motherhood Law (Decree 32-2010) and regulations (Govt agreement 65-2012); Youth Law (in its 3<sup>rd</sup> reading in Congress); Promotion and Development of Women Policy and Equity in Opportunities Plan 2008-2023; Comprehensive Protection for Children and Adolescents Policy; National Youth Policy; Adolescence and Youth Program; HIV Prevention Program; Ministerial Agreement "Prevent with Education" between Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education for implementation of the national Comprehensive Sexual Education Strategy.

<sup>3</sup> To learn more on the Stepping Stones package see: <http://www.stratshope.org/t-training.htm>

<sup>4</sup> An evaluation is planned for later in 2013 using Outcome mapping. See:

<http://www.stepsstonesfeedback.org/index.php/page/Resources/gb?resourceid=3>

<sup>5</sup> This section is drawn from Plan Internacional Guatemala's internal program reports.

<sup>6</sup> See: [http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2008/20080801\\_ministerdeclaration\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2008/20080801_ministerdeclaration_en.pdf)

curriculum, and is scaling up the initiative in Latin America through a regional course for educators.

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