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

Writing group: María Faget Montero, Regional Adviser, Family Care International and Ariadna Capasso, Senior Program Officer, Family Care International with support from Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli, Scientist, World Health Organization.

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, 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 to the Guatemalan context by incorporating the tenets of popular education, which empowers participants as rights holders (van Vijfeijken 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) that communities underwent profound social change, uniting in their commitment to adolescent development. About 40% of those trained became peer trainers; 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," Plan partnered with authorities to include Paso a Paso in the national sexuality education.
curriculum, and is scaling up the initiative in Latin America through a regional course for educators.

REFERENCES:


