

Reproductive Health in El Salvador and Honduras Final update: September 2018

Reproductive and sexual health services are improving; advocacy is yielding positive results. In our final update, we share how your support and prayers have helped empower Central American communities.

El Salvador: achievements at local level

Twenty-year-old youth leader, Reina Isabel Benítez, is a member of a local women's association in the San Pedro Masahuat municipality. Her words sum up the impact of the project: "[It] has provided guidance and support so that women of all ages learn about their rights, their sexual and reproductive health and can take better care of ourselves and demand respect."

Eight youth organisations and 14 health associations have developed an operational plan, and strengthened their capacity to advocate for sexual and reproductive rights.

Fifteen women collectives, 24 Health Commissions and 21 participation, action and learning groups have initiated processes to audit health services, and take action to improve the sexual and reproductive health of local women. Also, 120 leaders and volunteers have been trained in sexual and reproductive health. They're now ready to promote educational activities at community level.



"This is one of the few projects which focus on the needs of young women and girls. It has inspired me to learn and to help other women to do the same. Thank you to everyone who has made this possible."

Reina Isabel Benítez

Achievements at a national level

A national network, an alliance of sexual and reproductive health organisations, and a forum working on HIV/AIDS have agreed on joint advocacy activities.

Thirteen organisations of the National Sexual and Reproductive Health Committee, which works with the Ministry of Health, now have a strategic plan to promote sexual and reproductive rights at governmental level. Five heads of Communal Units of Family Health, one in each municipality of the project, have changed their approach. They're now committed to offering better services to women, including comprehensive services for women victims of violence.

In Olocuilta, a Preconception Unit has been established and serves all surrounding municipalities, while in Santiago Nonualco and El Rosario, friendly spaces for youth are functioning with funds from central government. Fifteen schools have included the theme of sexual and reproductive rights as part of their curricula.

Honduras: respect for cultures and indigenous people's health improved

In Honduras, the project has focused on the indigenous and marginalised communities of the Mayan-Chortí people, where sexual and reproductive health has been exceptionally poor.



Juan Aguillon, member of a youth group trained by the project

Over the course of the project, there have been some incredible changes in attitudes to sexual health. One achievement is the positively changing behaviour of young people, and the general population, around issues of sexual and reproductive health, through the training sessions which were initiated. Another achievement follows the installation of 31 contraceptive delivery points – contraceptive use has increased from 35% of couples, at the beginning of the project in 2015, to 48.5% in 2017.

The project has introduced intercultural awareness into the daily work of health workers. This has encouraged a respect for traditional practices, and for the culture of the Chortí. Dialogue with them is now undertaken with an understanding and respect for cultural differences; greater openness is shown in the use of remedies based on traditional medicine. Traditional Chortí midwives are also being given more relevant roles in health management.

"These sexual and reproductive health projects have taught us to prioritise sexual and reproductive health issues in our communities, but also to advocate with local governments and other entities. Now, we have an open dialogue with health workers." Juan Aguillon

Neonatal deaths halved

Work with 35 mothers' groups supported by the project has empowered the Chortí women in their sexual and reproductive rights. As a result, the culture of not reporting abuse has been reversed, making it possible to effectively confront this problem.

Also, the proportion of women in pregnancy and postpartum attending health centres has increased considerably. This process has contributed to maintaining a zero maternal death rate, and a decrease in neonatal deaths, from 16% in 2016 to 7.8% in 2017.

Local advocacy has led to improved health services

Advocacy processes with local authorities have also yielded invaluable results. One highlight has been a municipal budget of over £10,000 being approved for a teenage pregnancy prevention programme in the Las Flores municipality. Another highlight is seeing improved user satisfaction in the health service, through the ongoing monitoring of health centres.

Each of the 36 health committees have advocated for improved health services in their communities. This has included the installation of sanitary units (San Rafael), a water tank (La Pintada), and the construction of a basic health centre (Mercedes Pecanera).

Please continue to pray for these communities in Honduras and El Salvador:

- Pray that the progress made in the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls in Latin America will continue to improve, and that the rate of neonatal deaths falls even further.
- Pray that health professionals and community groups will be able to continue to work together with a mutual respect and understanding; that the groups that liaise on a national level will continue to have influence.
- Pray for the continued empowerment of women in marginalised communities; that they will feel safe and able to report abuse; that the younger women will learn how to speak up for their rights as women, and advocate for good health provision and other services.



If we can help your group in any way, please contact your local Christian Aid office, email cpartnership@christian-aid.org or visit caid.org.uk/partnerships