

# EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS

## REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH IN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS Summer 2016

We are working with women and girls to help them secure their rights and empower them to bring about change. All this is made possible through your church's generous and faithful support. Thank you!

### Alicia's hope

At 37, Alicia Hernández doesn't feel old enough to have a five-year-old granddaughter. She worries about the future for the girl, and also for her daughter, who became a mother aged just 10.

Determined to give her granddaughter and other children more opportunities, Alicia set out to increase her understanding of the issues facing women and girls in Honduras.

Alicia comes from a culture where women have had few opportunities to make decisions about their lives. Our partners are strengthening women's role in their communities through workshops, radio broadcasts, community health groups, and training, helping women to learn more about their health and rights.

Over the past few months, our partner the Christian Agency for Integral Development of Honduras



Alicia leads two health committees where women learn vital information about their rights and sexual health.

(OCDIH) has organised 38 local health committees and established 37 local family planning posts, where women can find out information about their rights as well as their options around planning a family.

**'I dream of seeing prosperity and development in my community'**

- OCDIH has helped to put Reproductive Health Rights into public education: already 280 teachers and 245 students have learned about sexual and reproductive health.
- Radio programmes have been broadcast about HIV, sexually transmitted infections, gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and the risks and prevention of young pregnancy.
- In the past year, there have been no pregnancies reported from the educational centres where teachers and students have participated in reproductive rights workshops.

'OCDIH has a lot of experience supporting vulnerable people to improve their lives,' Alicia explains. She says OCDIH has taught her more about gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and family planning.

Alicia is now a facilitator of mothers' groups in two communities, where the women are able to share their experiences and learn more about their rights and healthy practices. She wants more girls to learn about their sexual and reproductive rights. 'I dream of seeing prosperity and development in my community. I hope that girls will not become pregnant at an early age: we must encourage them to study so that they don't risk their health and futures.'

With your support, this project is helping women and girls know that they have a choice and a right to sexual health. Alicia is grateful for that knowledge and for the hope it brings – both for her family and for the future of girls and women in Honduras.



Educating children about the rights of women and girls will build a more just and equitable future for everyone.

## Building a better future

Like Alicia, Haydeé Cecibel García wants to rewrite the future for women and girls.

Each day, before she goes to work as a community health worker, she wakes up at 4am to feed her ducks and chickens, and to prepare food for her husband and her mother, who is 80 years old and lives with her. Haydeé feels respected by her husband, but this hasn't always been the case.

In 2008, Haydeé left her husband because he beat her. In fact, her youngest child was born premature because of abuse Haydeé suffered. Haydeé says that sadly, domestic violence is not uncommon. 'Many of the women I visit suffer from violence. But organisations like Organisation of Salvadoran Women for Peace (ORMUSA) inform women about

### Please pray with us

- Pray that the rights of women and girls in El Salvador and Honduras are recognised throughout society – at family, community, and national levels.
- Pray for brave women like Alicia and Haydeé, working to bring about a brighter and more just future for women and girls.
- Pray for the work of ORMUSA and OCDIH, that they will be able to affect change and foster peace and justice in their communities.

our rights and tell us that we have a right to a life free from violence.' The machismo culture in El Salvador means that women are often treated like second-class citizens, both in the family and in wider society. ORMUSA is working to change that, and great strides have been made through the support of this project.

**'Knowing our rights enables us to take decisions about our lives'**

### From local to national, making change happen

ORMUSA has been instrumental in putting forward a bill that is currently being considered by the Legal Secretary of the President of El Salvador. Prepared by charities and government institutions, the bill calls for improved sexual education in schools. The prevalence of religious fundamentalism and machismo culture mean that reproductive and sexual rights are often violated, with women and girls as the primary victims. But legislation guaranteeing an educational framework for sexual and reproductive health would provide a foundation for young people to learn and make better decisions.

ORMUSA has also established health groups in 24 communities, where group members learn about their rights and how to analyse public spending. Almost 500 people have taken part, the majority of whom are women. Each group has a female leader who acts as a link between the group, the community, and ORMUSA. These groups are a valuable hub in their communities, providing support for people to understand their rights as well as holding local governments to account for their health spending.

By addressing gender-based violence and discriminatory attitudes towards women across the spectrum – from national policy to indigenous community groups – ORMUSA is helping to ensure that women, girls, men and boys all have a chance to live more equal lives and realise their potential.

'ORMUSA teaches us about the many skills we have as women and that we are capable of doing many things. And now we know our rights,' Haydeé explains. She says that being a part of this project has improved her self-esteem – now she feels confident and able to speak with her husband as an equal.

**'Thank you for your support; I hope God continues to bless you'**



If there is any way we can help your group, please contact your local Christian Aid office, email [partnership@christian-aid.org](mailto:partnership@christian-aid.org) or visit [christianaid.org.uk/partnerships](http://christianaid.org.uk/partnerships)