

Human security for adolescents: Empowerment and protection against violence, early pregnancy, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Bolivia

Duration: July 2008 to September 2010

Implementing UN Agencies: WHO/PAHO; UNFPA; UNICEF

Other Implementing Partners: Ministry of Health and Sports; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Indigenous Affairs; Ministry of Sustainable Development; NGOs; CSOs

Budget: \$1,095,600

Key Words: Youth; violence; poverty; gender equality; racial discrimination

BACKGROUND

According to the Human Development Index, in 2003, Bolivia ranked as one of the poorest countries in Latin America. Among its most vulnerable groups were adolescents who constituted 23 per cent of the population and faced a number of vulnerabilities including high levels of violence, gender and ethnic discrimination, and limited access to basic services. Of these, 32.1 per cent had either fallen victim to violence or witnessed violent acts, with schools identified as the area of greatest risk related to sexual violence.

Despite laws to protect adolescents, the weak capacity of the Government and civil society to implement and enforce such provisions had hampered efforts to implement policies developed in this area. Moreover, in regions with high rates of poverty, such as the districts of Beni and Cochabamba, the compounding impact of malnutrition, social exclusion, domestic and sexual violence, STI/HIV/AIDS and early pregnancies had left many, in particular, girls and indigenous adolescents, critically vulnerable and insecure.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Overall, this project sought to protect and empower adolescents living in Beni and Cochabamba districts—focusing on indigenous groups—to help reduce their vulnerability to risks associated with sexual and domestic violence, early pregnancies, maternal mortality and STI/HIV/AIDS. More specifically, the project aimed to (i) improve the capacity of healthcare workers to offer adolescents integrated gender- and culturally-sensitive preventive and curative care; (ii) offer health and sexual education to thousands of

teenage students at pilot schools throughout the district capitals of Trinidad and Cochabamba; (iii) empower adolescents by allowing them to exert their rights and promote healthy lifestyles and protective behaviours; and (iv) promote the development of public policies on human security for adolescents, thus reinforcing social protection mechanisms against violence, early pregnancy, maternal mortality, STIs and HIV/AIDS.

BENEFICIARIES

The project aimed to help 42,000 adolescents, especially young pregnant women and single mothers living in Beni and Cochabamba districts. By implementing a collaborative approach that engaged

the beneficiaries, communities, municipal authorities and organizations working in the region, the project also provided indirect benefits to the overall population in both districts.



NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) The project trained over 500 school teachers in Beni and Cochabamba districts, providing them with a diverse toolkit for implementing activities to increase knowledge and support healthy behaviours related to the prevention of violence, sexually transmitted infections and the use of contraceptives. As a result of the training, 50 “classroom projects” at 20 selected schools were implemented, directly benefiting 8,000 students. Furthermore, in Beni, teachers organized activities with over 100 parents to reinforce the know-how they had shared with students. This resulted in further advocacy on healthy lifestyles and protective behaviours against violence, sexual exploitation, substance abuse and other high-risk practices among adolescents and the broader community.

(ii) In addition, over 500 peer leaders in Beni and Cochabamba districts were trained on the prevention of violence, STI/HIV/AIDS and early pregnancy, as well as on the concept of human security. Subsequently, peer leaders drafted an outreach plan for other adolescents living in the 20 municipalities. The plan engaged 13 non-governmental organizations and, through peer-to-peer outreach activities, improved knowledge across different sectors of the community, including local officials, employees, Child Defenders’ Offices, Adolescent Community Centres, schools and health practitioners.

LESSONS LEARNED

Overall, this project highlighted the added-value of a human security approach for identifying the gaps in the protective and empowerment measures at the institutional and community levels. The human security analysis identified the adolescent population as highly vulnerable and often neglected in policies and programmes. In addition, it provided the framework for developing interventions that could strengthen institutional capacities for responding to the

threats facing adolescents, while also empowering adolescents to take part in promoting their own security and development. Through the establishment of multi-actor networks that complimented institutional improvements, the hybrid protection and empowerment approach directly addressed the policy gaps and created innovative and sustainable mechanisms to support and reinforce positive change at the community level.