Joint programme for the support of human security in Honduras

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Fast Facts

Country: Honduras

Duration: June 2008 to February 2010

Implementing UN Agencies: UNDP; UNICEF; PAHO/WHO; FAO; UNFPA and UNV

Other Implementing Partners: Local municipalities; governmental institutions and civil society groups

Budget: $1,283,095.54

Key Words: Violence; youth; crime prevention; gender; capacity building

BACKGROUND

In 2005, Honduras was the most violent country in Latin America with the highest per capita murder rate. The root causes behind this trend were a string of civil wars and violent conflicts that had occurred around Honduras in the 1980s. Sharing borders with three countries that were experiencing protracted conflicts, Honduras became a transit point for the supply of weapons during this period. Over time, these supply routes were transformed into transit lines for criminal networks involved in a growing and lucrative trade in illicit arms, drugs and trafficked persons. Meanwhile, new actors such as the *maras* (gangs) as well as the *pandillas* (youth gangs) brought additional demand for arms and other trafficked products. The combined impact of these developments resulted in the continued rise in common crimes, violence and organized criminal activities that far exceeded the capacity of the State to respond, leaving the country and its people in an increasingly vulnerable and insecure situation. Youth - who represented the greatest number of both offenders and victims - were particularly vulnerable to the growing rise in criminality and gang-related violence.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The project's overall goal was to contribute to preventing and reducing the levels of violence in Comayagua, Choluteca and Juticalpa municipalities.

More specifically, the project aimed to identify, create and strengthen local networks that could help prevent and reduce youth and gender-based violence.

BENEFICIARIES

The direct beneficiaries of this project included adolescents between 12 and 19 years of age from three local municipalities who were selected because they were considered to be vulnerable to or at-risk of becoming involved in violence. Beneficiaries from the municipalities of Comayagua, Choluteca and Juticalpa also benefited from the general reduction in violence.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) The project successfully established a wide variety of youth networks at middle school, high school, public and private university levels. In establishing these networks, emphasis was placed on creating avenues of dialogue and learning on topics such as 'culture of peace', the prevention of violence, and improved gender relations. By adopting a horizontal structure, these networks proved important in facilitating the exchange of information among municipalities, relevant institutions and citizen

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networks. They also provided an enabling environment for at-risk community members to find solutions to the problems they faced and to contribute to the development of effective policies at the municipal level.

(ii) The project enhanced the social and economic potential of adolescents by increasing their self-esteem, by helping them understand the challenges posed by their environment, and by providing alternative opportunities for leisure and professional pursuits. Young people learned about teamwork and business development; they received occupational training and acquired knowledge about self-employment; they gained insight into how drug use

and gang life could prevent them from reaching their full potential; and in some cases were given access to rotating funds for income-generating activities.

(iii) In addition, the project developed an information and surveillance system on social and gender-based violence in each of the three municipalities. Data was gathered from a variety of institutions including hospitals, the local police, the General Criminal Investigation Bureau, and the courts and resulted in the creation of evidence-based information on violence-related trends and activities. Such information allowed the relevant actors to address the root causes of violence in their municipalities and to formulate better targeted interventions and policies.

LESSONS LEARNED

Overall this project bolstered the capacity of the Government and civil society to prevent and tackle violence through a protection-empowerment framework and a sense of shared responsibility. Too often, positive contributions from at-risk community members such as adolescents are ignored in policy and decision-making processes. However, through this project, the empowerment of young people and their

collaboration with committed mayors and municipal authorities played an important role in strengthening communal relations and reducing criminal activities by at-risk adolescents. Combined with improved data collection, the project exemplified the added value of a participatory, context-specific and targeted human security approach that can result in a comprehensive and sustainable response to crime prevention.