



MMS Bulletin #163

Teenagerschwangerschaften: Eine Herausforderung für Kommunen und Regierungen

Prevention of teenage pregnancies in El Salvador

Why "trusting each other" is no longer an appropriate concept

Von José Alexander Escobar

The Salvadorean Red Cross is working on the prevention of teenage pregnancies using a gender-transformative approach in the communities of Santa Ana and Chalchuapa. The project empowers young people, enhances their life-skills, facilitates the expansion and use of their social, economic and family opportunities and ensures that communal and state authorities step up to meet the needs of young adolescents and address teenage pregnancies.



Why

Closing of workshop. Photo: © Salvadorean Red Cross

The situation of teenage pregnancy in El Salvador is one of the main problems that the Government and institutions want to prevent. However, every day a girl and/or adolescent becomes pregnant in El Salvador. The Ministry of health is reporting 1'141 pregnant adolescents and young women in the department of Santa Ana so far in 2022. Among the causes are affective relationships between adults and adolescents- known as "ganarse la confianza = trusting each other", which encourages relationships and sexual relationships between the adult and young person.

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Three important pillars of awareness raising

The project "Social Inclusion for children, adolescents and youth in Santa Ana and Chalchuapa", implemented by the Salvadorean Red Cross, works in coordination with the Ministry of health and the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development in order to prevent

teenage pregnancies and enable the state to offer services and support. The project rose awareness among the Government and partners about the causes of teenage pregnancies and the needs of young adolescents. Jointly they developed actions in terms of prevention, support during the pregnancy and delivery, and preparation for the life of a young mother and father with a baby. Interventions with the youth aim at strengthening their self-esteem, promote good physical and mental health of girls and boys, identifying protective factors for one's life.

Another important pillar is the gender-transformative work with boys and men by deconstructing models of dominant masculinity that promote violence in different forms towards girls and women. The Salvadorean Red Cross provides resources and spaces for the local institutions (=guarantors of rights) so that they are able to provide trainings to young people in sexual and reproductive health with a focus on “unpacking” gender roles and stereotypes in the communities and schools. Young people developed a large gender campaign to sensitize through different media and health fairs about how to prevent teenage pregnancies, and where to get support.

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Fair to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent teenage pregnancies. Photo: © Salvadorean Red Cross

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Due to the advocacy with the Ministry of health, referral paths for pregnant teenagers were developed and adolescent-friendly services established. The local institutions (Guarantors of rights) assisted to found self-help groups of pregnant teenagers and young mothers, who meet regularly and exchange problems and successes with each other. The project furthermore offers support on educational and economic opportunities by the implementation of educational scholarships and productive initiatives with young people, which arise within the framework of a market study.

The importance of creating a new network

Different actions have been developed together with the partners. Hereby the Salvadorean Red Cross ensures that each partner takes its stake, and that gradually the actions and tasks are integrated into the state policy and services. For the success of the joint work, the local Government institutions and services (=guarantors of rights) were involved in the project

development. Once the project was launched, an annual operating plan was drawn up, in which the roles and functions of each of them were established, according to their characteristics. The monitoring of the plan is carried out through working groups, addressing annually and quarterly the strategic processes with the heads of the implementers (heads of departments, directorates and organisations) and at the operational level through monthly meetings of the technical teams in the field. From the onset of the project, the institutionalization of reproductive health and teenage pregnancies in existing Government structures has been pursued. The investment in creating this network took time and required patience, but proved worthwhile to ensure sustainability.

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During the second year of project implementation, the project has gained much momentum, by consolidating the linkages between the primary and secondary health providers and among the social institutions. Furthermore, community organizations are much more involved in case identification and awareness raising, as well as exercising social control.



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