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In the rural Padre Abad district of Peru's Ucayali region, located in the Amazon Rainforest, teenage girls are nearly twice as likely to have an early pregnancy between ages 15 and 19 than their peers across the country.

Recently, Management Sciences for Health (MSH) gave an Innovation Challenge (INCH) Fund award to the Healthy Communities and Municipalities Project II project II ^[1] (HCM II) in Peru ^[2] to work on challenges related to adolescent health issues, including early pregnancy. The HCM II project is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development ^[3] (USAID) and implemented by MSH. The project's goal is to improve maternal-child health, family planning, and reproductive health through the promotion of a range of healthy practices, working with community members, health personnel, and local governments in the areas where the project is implemented. MSH's INCH fund aims to identify promising innovations

that have the potential to improve health outcomes and help replicate and scale tools, models and approaches that have proven effective.

The HCM II staff worked with 10 communities in the Padre Abad district over a period of four months to promote healthy family relationships between parents and adolescents; reinforce strategies to consider educational activities for adolescent development; and add prevention of teenage pregnancy to the agenda of the local government. Within the Ucayali region, the Padre Abad district has one of the highest percentages of adolescents that are pregnant or have given birth to at least one child.

Through a series of meetings and workshops focused on three groups—the family, the community, and the municipality—activities were organized that included family visits, workshops for parents to discuss adolescent and family health and communication, leadership workshops for teens, art contests, communication campaigns, and meetings with local officials. During one workshop, a teen from the Margarita community remarked, “If we became pregnant, all of our dreams will turn to water...nothing would be simple.”

By the end of the intervention, the 234 teens reached during the intervention noted improvements in terms of their communication with their parents, self-esteem, leadership skills, and knowledge of family planning methods. Following communications and leadership skills building exercises, one teen from the Divisoria community commented, “Now we know that we must work together for the development of the community...they should provide us with a space to be able to give out opinion about things that we want, such as our football field.” Another noted, “I learned to value myself and love myself as I am and not feel as though I am less than others.”

A key success factor in this intervention was the role played by the district’s Neighborhood Councils, which facilitated community activities and outreach to parents on communications with their children and sexuality. At the municipal level, a proposal was developed for a resolution in favor of activities that promote healthy lifestyles for adolescents. A public investment proposal was also developed to support healthy lifestyles for adolescents. An unexpected benefit from the intervention was the leveraging of over 60 percent of the total budget from community investment. Of the total budget, INCH funds covered just under 40 percent.

The benefits go beyond the financial gains. As HCM II Sexual and Reproductive Health Specialist Evelyn Torres Camacho said,

Taking on this work allowed us to introduce strategies aimed at raising awareness and mobilizing resources for adolescents, parents, and Neighborhood Councils on issues that affect family life in the interaction between adolescents and in the development of their own citizenship through leadership and self-esteem. The motivation drawn from the family and community participation was key for the local government to redirect its focus and consider adolescents in their public agenda.

Source URL: <http://www.msh.org/news-events/stories/reducing-teen-pregnancy-in-rural-peru>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.msh.org/our-work/projects/healthy-communities-and-municipalities-ii>
- [2] <http://www.msh.org/our-work/country/peru-0>
- [3] <http://www.usaid.gov>