



PHOTO & CAPTION

Giving Youth What They Need to Know



Photo: USAID/RTI/Andrea Aragon

Young “replicators” at the WINGS organization in Guatemala learn to counsel other interested youth on safe contraceptive-use and other reproductive health practices.

Over the radio comes the question: “Is it true that boys must have sexual relations in order to develop physically into manhood?” Immediately, a listener calls in and says, “Yes.”

The two-hour radio program, designed to share information to correct such misconceptions on health and family planning issues among rural youth through music, games, and discussion, is an initiative of the Tan Uxil association.

The association began its work by making household visits to discover people’s attitudes and knowledge on sexuality and reproduction. Staff members recount one of the first people they interviewed, a then-pregnant, 15-year-old mother of three living with her 40-year-old partner. When asked how many children she wanted, the young girl lowered her voice and said, “I don’t want any more children but I don’t know how many God will send me.” When asked if she knew any birth control methods, she answered, “God help me if my husband finds out I am asking for information!” Three years later, Tan Uxil found that the teen had since had two more children, but decided to use contraception and was hiding her contraceptive-use from her partner, as is common in her community.

Though reproductive health education is critical in Guatemala, which has Central America’s highest birth rate among youth, the subject is still taboo. But reproductive health education for youth is slowly taking root. Through USAID, organizations with reproductive health education experience and materials like Tan Uxil have joined forces to identify best practices that they can all use with the youth they serve. This coordination allows organizations to provide services to young people who are eager for information and the means for making their life dreams and plans come true.