

HONDURAS

JOURNEYS OF COURAGE

Pains and triumphs of diverse women and girls
in accessing and enjoying SRHR in Honduras

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Foreword

Planting Seeds, Nurturing Change

Women and adolescent girls in Honduras face major challenges in fully exercising their sexual and reproductive rights. From the lack of comprehensive sexuality education and limited access to accurate information, to the multiple barriers that prevent them from using sexual and reproductive health services.

These challenges are even greater for young women with disabilities, those living with HIV, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and migrant women; groups that society often places in conditions of heightened vulnerability. Women with disabilities are frequently overprotected by their families, denied the opportunity to express and live their sexuality. Women living with HIV continue to face stigma and discrimination that even deny them the right to motherhood when they choose it. Living one's sexuality outside the heterosexual norm remains a source of stigma and guilt. Migrant women—often driven by a lack of opportunities—face sexual violence and limited access to adequate health services before, during, and after their migration journey.

This is why the success stories presented in this Journeys of Courage hold deep meaning for the Honduras Community of Action (CoA). They represent collective triumphs within a deeply conservative context, where political will to ensure sexual and reproductive rights has been limited. These achievements are the result of sustained effort, strategic alliances, and the strength of rightsholders themselves. Women who have led advocacy and action so that Honduras can move closer to guaranteeing the right to sexual and reproductive health for all.

A powerful example of this ongoing struggle has been the reinstatement of access to emergency contraception, which was banned for more than a decade following the coup d'état. In a country with one of the highest adolescent pregnancy rates in Latin America—where more than 70 girls under the age of 18 give birth every day in public hospitals—this victory represents both hope and justice. We know that many of these pregnancies are the result of sexual violence. For this reason, the



← reauthorization of emergency contraception and the approval of a comprehensive care protocol for victims and survivors of sexual violence mark historic milestones for the country.

We firmly believe that meaningful change can only happen when women themselves, in all their diversity, raise their voices and lead the transformations they need. At We Lead, we celebrate their strength, resilience, and achievements. This booklet gathers some of those inspiring success stories that fill us with pride and motivate us to keep fighting for a world where every woman can freely decide over her body and her life ■

Ligia Destephen

Community of Action Facilitator

We Lead Program, Honduras

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Many thanks to our consortium partners: Positive Vibes, Restless Development, Marsa, FEMNET, and the Central American Women's Fund. Your support and thoughts contributed to changing the lives of hundreds of women in the countries we intervened in. To the team at Hivos, the Lead consortium partner: thank you for your tireless efforts that ensured the program was implemented seamlessly. To M&C Saatchi World Services, thank you being our much-valued technical partner.

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Because when We Lead, change blossoms.

Women with disability overjoyed with their SRHR sign language dictionary



The deaf women of Honduras struggle with compound challenges that dominate their lives: the inability to hear, to exercise their sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), and to communicate their feelings and desires. Each day is a struggle for them to enjoy their SRHR – something that for many people is a routine affair. Complicating

the situation is the fact that their community and families often can't figure out what these women need and want. The problem: nobody was speaking to them about SRHR issues in a language they could understand. The result was continued ignorance about sexual violations, forced use of contraceptives, and a worrying trend of sexually transmitted



← diseases among deaf women. The end of the tunnel in sight

So it was heartening when FENAPEDISH reached out to these women in January 2023 and started to co-create solutions to their problems with funding from We Lead Program. Their consultations led to one of the most groundbreaking solutions to the communication and awareness difficulties the women were facing when it came to SRHR issues: the first ever sexual and reproductive health Sign Language Dictionary. With it, the SRHR knowledge gap they had experienced for many years closed. They could now make their own informed decisions on matters of reproductive health. Translating complex concepts into understandable gestures

The journey to developing this dictionary was led by two organizations, FENAPEDISH and Fundación Llaves, together with deaf women rightsholders. They started off holding meetings with representatives of the Honduran Association of the Deaf to identify relevant SRHR words that needed to be coded into Honduran sign language. This was followed by a meeting between the We Lead team and Fundación Llaves to consider two things: the contents of the dictionary and the financial and technical support to develop it. "Translation was not just about choosing any word to go into the dictionary. We had to reflect on complex concepts like consent, menstruation, pleasure, violence, and find the associated visuals that made them understandable and meaningful to the deaf population," →



explained Luis Alberto, interpreter, and member of the Honduran Association of the Deaf.

The transformative outcome of these efforts became a reality in May 2023, when the dictionary, as part of a toolkit, was published and launched. Some of the topics covered in the dictionary are human diversity, sexual and reproductive rights, and sexual violence. The toolkit also includes informational materials such as a Guide to SRHR, a comic strip with conversations about the reality of women with disabilities, and SRHR brochures. A turning point

For many young women with hearing disabilities, this toolkit marked a turning point in their lives. It not only improves access to information, but also opens doors for them to participate in SRHR discussions, rights advocacy initiatives, and enjoy personal autonomy.

“Now I can finally name what I feel. And when I can name it, I can defend it,” one of the deaf women said full of excitement at her newfound freedom and knowledge to express her SRH needs and rights.

Another young woman agreed: “Before the publication of this dictionary, I was in the wilderness about SRHR issues. Even when I attended a meeting discussing these issues, without a translator to help me, I was at a loss. Now, with the dictionary, I can follow

such conversations, ask questions, and even explain to others what I have learned.”

Some of the women who have followed the We Lead-supported training are now using the dictionary and the toolkit to help train other deaf women in SRHR matters.

Besides strengthening their abilities to advocate for SRHR and coordinate strategic actions with decision makers in state institutions, the dictionary and the toolkit form a major life-changing resource. An invaluable resource

In training, the toolkit has become an invaluable resource to help young deaf women appreciate their SRHR. It is now being integrated into comprehensive sexuality education programs, health care services, and political advocacy efforts by state and non-state actors in Honduras.

Organizations such as Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL), Secretariat of Human Rights (SEDH), The City Women Program in Honduras, Llaves Foundation, Mariposas 88 Collective, and Youth Action use the toolkit in their courses for women with disabilities.

FENAPEDISH is now exploring how to replicate the toolkit in other regions where health professionals and educators are in dire need of training materials for advancing the rights women with disabilities ■

From silent observers to policy makers: women with disabilities in Honduras claim their decision-making power



As communities and governments make decisions on political, economic, and social issues affecting their populations, one group has consistently remained a silent observer in these conversations: women. The story becomes even more troubling for women with disabilities, whose views and voices are rarely recognized in decision-making spaces. This is what the National Federation of Parents

of People with Special Needs of Honduras (FENAPAPEDISH) and Mariposas 88, together with other groups in Honduras, set out to change.

Creating space for voices

In November 2022, FENAPAPEDISH and Mariposas 88, with funding support from the We Lead program, joined other organizations to create the first Women and Disability



← Roundtable—a formal decision-making space led by and for women with disabilities in Honduras.

This space creates opportunities and empowers women with disabilities to share their views on matters affecting them and articulate what they want the government and other actors to do for them.

The five women with disabilities and their caregivers who sit on this roundtable are chosen based on their knowledge of women's sexual and reproductive health needs and rights.

They work closely with Wendy Aguilar, a government officer who communicates their decisions and recommendations to key government organs. Aguilar, who works at the Ministry of Social Development within the Ministry of Health, serves as the link between women with disabilities and the Ministry on political matters and actions that address these women's needs.

The Ministry of Social Development is tasked with ensuring greater efficiency and effectiveness of the social protection system, guaranteeing the enjoyment of social, economic, cultural, and environmental rights for vulnerable groups. Targeting legal reform

One of the key reforms women with disabilities are seeking is the amendment of the Integral Disability Law, known as Ley Integral de Discapacidad.

Other areas the women have singled out for government attention include a comprehensive reform of the Law on Equity and Comprehensive

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Development for Persons with Disabilities (Legislative Decree 160-2005.

This created the first Public Care Policy for caregivers of persons with disabilities, establishing a partnership state institution to create a training and capacity-building program on the proper treatment of persons with disabilities, and establishing a space in the Technical Care Roundtable (MECUIDA) to promote the Public Care Policy.

In 2024, reforms on the law began, with the Libertad Refundación (LIBRE) Party Caucus of the National Congress of the Republic of Honduras receiving memorandums from interested parties. Organizations working with people with disabilities sent proposals that, among other things, addressed recognizing the SRHR of women with disabilities and the need for caregivers for people with disabilities. From →



← conversation to action

The creation of decision-making spaces involving women with disabilities is considered one of the most significant initiatives in developing comprehensive national norms and policies that address the wellbeing of women with disabilities in Honduras. Aguilar notes that establishing the Roundtable has improved the real representation of the voices and views of women with disabilities on matters that affect them. For the first time, she adds, women with disabilities have a direct voice in shaping public policies that affect their lives, such as the urgent reform of the Comprehensive Disability Law. “Before, we did not have a place to

express ourselves, let alone being considered. Now, we are part of the process to design the solutions,” said Anita Josselin Antúnez, who is deaf. A model for change

The Women and Disability Roundtable has been recognized as a model that guides how to take part in and influence public policies on matters related to rights, inclusion, and social justice. From silent observers to active policy makers, Honduras’s women with disabilities have not just found their voice; they’ve created a platform that ensures it will be heard by those who make the decisions that shape their lives ■

Breaking the silence: When a seat at the table became a voice for Honduran survivors

For years, Nosotras Lideramos had been raising awareness about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Honduras. They documented the lack of justice for survivors of sexual violence, spoke at forums, and pushed for change. But the work felt like shouting into a void, a lonely fight with little to show for it.

But one day in 2021, the Honduran government listened to the calls of Nosotras Lideramos and other civil society organizations for action on this matter. It decided to act to end the pain and sorry of many survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

It set up a technical working group to develop a Comprehensive Care Protocol for Victims and Survivors of Sexual Violence.

Nosotras Lideramos, and other We Lead partners who actively advocate for this form of justice, were among the first invited by the government to join the group and give technical advice on the nature and content of the protocol.

Their years of advocacy were finally being recognized. This was the moment they had been working toward: a seat at the table where policy would be written and where lives could be changed.

Making every word count

The inclusion gave Nosotras Lideramos the opportunity to influence the structure and

content of some of the provisions of the protocol.

Together with other We Lead partners who participated in the review, they prepared for what would become a spirited fight to make SRHR issues, especially of marginalized groups like the trans population, part of the protocol.

But one provision in particular became the focus of their efforts: access to Emergency Contraception Pills (ECP) for victims and survivors of sexual violence.

For a long time, access to such pills for survivors had been opposed by certain sectors, even though this led to unwanted pregnancies and emotional torture for women who had suffered such violations. The stakes were clear. For survivors already grappling with trauma, being denied this option meant compounding their suffering.

“Advocating for its [ECP] inclusion meant confronting conservative narratives, myths, and institutional resistance,” Nosotras Lideramos explains. “But thanks to technical backing, solid evidence, and the power of feminist organizing, it was achieved.”

The final protocol now says that the ECP is “one of the components of comprehensive care is the prevention of pregnancy resulting from sexual assault, which includes Emergency contraception with levonorgestrel.”



← A major tool to address sexual and gender-based violence

The protocol was launched in December 2022. It is seen as a major intervention to address the pandemic of sexual and gender-based violence in Honduras.

Other issues addressed in the protocol are: confidentiality and informed consent of individuals; differentiated care with a gender perspective; creation of an inter-institutional support network of civil society organizations, justice operators, and health personnel; and training for health providers at all health centers on how to apply the protocol.

According to the Violence Observatory of the Women's Rights Center and other human rights groups in Honduras, one in every four adolescents under the age of 19 has been pregnant at least once, most of them as a result of sexual violence.

Even more worrying is that every three hours, a woman reports experiencing sexual violence, with most of the cases involving women aged between 19 and 30

A breakthrough moment

Honduran women and girls expressed joy at the inclusion of the clause on ECP in the protocol.

"This inclusion means immediate care, access to emergency contraception, infection prevention, and psychosocial support," said one woman, a survivor of sexual violence.

Health service providers shared their enthusiasm as well. "Before, there was no clarity; everything was improvised," said a healthcare professional from Tegucigalpa. "Now, we have a clear guide that respects the dignity and rights of each survivor."



From paper to practice

But Nosotras Lideramos knew that a protocol on paper meant nothing if it wasn't implemented. The headache for the organization and others was how to ensure the government lived up to the expectations of these women and service providers.

To achieve this, Nosotras Lideramos has put in place a robust training program for medical personnel, established measures to monitor compliance in the implementation of the protocol, and pushed health facilities and service providers to embrace survivor-centered approaches in managing survivors of sexual violence ■

From silence to voice: the journey of Eva Ramirez

Eva Ramirez sat in the training room, a quiet woman carrying an unbearable weight. For months, her son had been missing, vanished somewhere along the treacherous migration routes that swallow so many Hondurans seeking better lives.

The government offered little help, citing the absence of a legal framework to search for the missing.

As advocates launched campaigns demanding a law to protect missing persons and their families,

Eva remained on the sidelines, her grief too heavy, her confidence too fragile.

A nation of waiting

Eva was not alone in her anguish. Dozens of families lived in utter despair, not knowing when their missing sons, daughters, husbands, and sisters who disappeared while migrating would be found. According to the Honduran Public Prosecutor's Office, more than 2,100 cases of missing persons were reported by late 2025. Previously, the 2023 Women's Rights Center





← investigation “Disappearances of Women in Honduras” found that out of 9,800 people reported as missing, 38 percent were women.

Hundreds of hopeless women wanted to act, but they didn’t know how.

Discovering her voice

Things started to change for Eva in 2024 when she and 23 other women were selected for training sessions funded by the We Lead program to empower young women to advocate for their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

It never occurred to Eva that attending this kind of training would transform her into a leading advocate for broader rights in Honduras. Yet here she was, discovering her voice when she needed it most.

Conducted by the Committees of Families of Missing Migrants (COFAMIDEAFE), a We Lead partner that also focuses on women’s rights, the training aimed to increase the knowledge and confidence of Ramirez and other women in order to effectively demand their rights.



← The timing was pivotal. While the training sessions unfolded, COFAMIDEAFE was leading advocacy to get the National Congress of Honduras to enact the Legal Protection for Missing Persons law. Taking the lead

"After going through the sessions and learning how to demand my own rights and those of others, I felt a new sense of confidence to confront any challenge," Eva recalls. "With this newly gained confidence, the first thing on my agenda was to demand a search for my missing son." Armed with knowledge and confidence, Ramirez was ready for action. She joined an advocacy group led by COFAMIDEAFE that met with a parliamentary group bringing together different political parties to influence them to act on the matter.

During the meeting, Ramirez was at the forefront of those demanding that Congress enact the bill into law. Her conduct inspired other young women human rights advocates to pursue their agenda of broader rights in Honduras.

"For the first time, a young human rights defender led the proposal of legislation aimed at providing real tools to families demanding justice and the search for their loved ones," COFAMIDEAFE noted.

It's about humanity

Ramirez understood what was at stake. "This law isn't just about procedures," she says. "It's about humanity. About not abandoning those who are still waiting for answers."

The proposed law, which was still being developed in late 2025, offers clear institutional mechanisms for the effective search, identification of missing

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persons, and accompaniment in cases of disappearances within the migration context.

It also seeks to guarantee access to justice and reparations for families, recognizing their central role in the process. The law further calls on the Honduran government to provide psychosocial support to families of missing persons, ensure respect for human rights, and prevent the re-victimization of those involved.

Ripples of change

Ramirez's leading role in pushing Congress to enact this law has inspired many people, especially the youth, to come out and speak loudly about their rights.

It also demonstrates the abilities of young women advocates to shape national policies, laws, and conversations when they are well-capacitated and given the opportunity to lead ■

