

UNICEF-GPIA International Conference 2010

“The Adolescent Girls’ Advocacy & Leadership Initiative (AGALI): A Review of the Program Model and Lessons Learned”

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Executive Summary

The Adolescent Girls’ Advocacy & Leadership Initiative (AGALI) builds the capacity of senior civil society leaders in Latin America and Africa to advocate on behalf of marginalized adolescent girls. AGALI was developed within the framework of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Adolescent Girls (IATF), and works in IATF priority countries to implement a comprehensive advocacy training program that incorporates workshops, technical assistance, institutional strengthening, a structured dissemination process, and seed grants. The experience of implementing AGALI has highlighted the need to build civil society competence in advocacy, the importance of socio-political context at the national level for effective local advocacy implementation, and the importance of involving girls in these processes within a supportive programmatic framework.

Global Context

The world’s total population includes 750 million girls and young women between the ages of 10-24; this crucial group remains one of the most socially marginalized and

economically excluded.¹ Because existing policies and programs have not effectively addressed the needs of adolescent girls globally, they disproportionately bear household burdens, are often unable to access economic and educational opportunities, suffer from social, physical, and psychological violence, and are subject to legal and political frameworks that marginalize and negate their basic human rights. Further, unwanted pregnancy, early childbearing, unsafe abortion, and HIV/STI infection are widespread realities among adolescent girls around the world. For example, 75% of HIV-positive African youth are female, due to girls' increased social, economic, and biological vulnerability to the disease.² Approximately 3.7 million women and adolescents suffer the consequences of unsafe abortion in Latin America; young women ages 15-24 years old make up 43% of those who undergo unsafe abortions.³ Finally, 70% world's 130 million out-of-school youth are girls; this limited access to basic education drastically reduces girls' and young women's lifetime economic, political, and social opportunities.⁴

Responding to these stark challenges requires leadership and leverage among policymakers, practitioners, and youth leaders who are committed to advancing the human rights, health, and socio-economic wellbeing of adolescent girls, as well as the active engagement of young women in addressing their own needs. Civil society leaders and social change agents must build their knowledge of policy and program advocacy in order to work more effectively on behalf of girls and young women.

¹ *Girls Count: A Global Investment & Action Agenda*. Center for Global Development 2008.

² *Girls Count: A Global Investment & Action Agenda*. Center for Global Development 2008.

³ *Unsafe Abortion Facts and Figures*. Population Reference Bureau 2006; *Development and the Next Generation*, World Bank 2007.

⁴ *Promises Broken*. Human Rights Watch 1999.

Despite the existence of international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child that mandate protection of girls' rights and promotion of their socio-economic development, the legal and political frameworks in many developing countries do not adequately reflect these commitments. Furthermore, implementation of existing laws and policies that promote girls' welfare is often constrained by budget limitations, lack of political will, and social instability.

Adolescent Girls and the United Nations

The Adolescent Girls' Advocacy & Leadership Initiative (AGALI) seeks to improve the legal and political frameworks that support and protect adolescent girls by building the capacity of civil society leaders to advocate on their behalf. This global program is funded by the United Nations Foundation and implemented by International Health Programs (IHP) of the Public Health Institute (PHI), in collaboration with local partners. AGALI was developed by IHP/PHI as a pilot program in Guatemala, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Malawi – the priority countries identified by the United Nations Inter-Agency Taskforce on Adolescent Girls (IATF). The IATF was established in 2007 to support United Nations' efforts to improve the political and programmatic framework supporting marginalized adolescent girls worldwide. In collaborating with the IATF, the UNF has invested over \$43 million over the last ten years in programs that advocate for girls, support girl leaders, and mobilize resources for programs that address girls' needs.⁵

⁵ *Investing in Adolescent Girls*. United Nations Foundation. Accessed April 16, 2010 from: <http://www.unfoundation.org/global-issues/women-and-population/investing-adolescent-girls.html>

AGALI works in IATF-designated priority countries to advance the UNF and IATF frameworks for action on adolescent girls' issues, while contributing to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 2, 3, and 5. Achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, and improving maternal health at the national and regional level can only occur with the support of engaged civil society leaders advocating for greater governmental accountability and improved investment in adolescent girls.

The AGALI Model

The goal of the Adolescent Girls' Advocacy & Leadership Initiative (AGALI) is to advance the human rights, health, education, and socio-economic wellbeing of adolescent girls by strengthening the capacity of emerging and established leaders globally. Since its creation in 2009, AGALI's primary objective has been to strengthen the capacity of national and regional leaders in Latin America and Africa to advocate on behalf of adolescent girls.

AGALI builds the capacity of Latin American and African leaders to create, implement, and advocate for programs and policies that improve the human rights, social and economic wellbeing, and sexual and reproductive health of adolescent girls and young women in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mexico, Liberia, Malawi, and Ethiopia through an intensive regional training program.⁶ The program enhances these leaders' efforts to strengthen the capacity of adolescent girls to advocate for their own

⁶ Participating countries included in AGALI correspond to priorities identified by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Adolescent Girls

interests, as well as increase the ability of their own institutions and other local organizations to advance adolescent girls' human rights, health, and socio-economic wellbeing. Through a structured dissemination process that offers small stipends to facilitators, AGALI supports participant efforts to share their knowledge on advocacy with partner organizations and girls' groups. Finally, AGALI funds the implementation of advocacy strategies designed by participants to improve the wellbeing of adolescent girls at the local and national level.

IHP/PHI selects groups of strategic leaders who are committed to implementing progressive multi-sectoral strategies to advocate for programs and policies that benefit adolescent girls at local and national levels within their own countries. AGALI participants include leaders who work directly with adolescent girls, policymakers, health care providers, educators, advocates, indigenous leaders, and religious leaders who recognize the benefits and importance of investing in adolescent girls, and the need to improve government and civil society commitment to meeting their needs.

To date, AGALI has trained 21 senior leaders from Latin America to advocate on behalf of adolescent girls, and has funded six advocacy projects in Guatemala aimed at improving the health, education, and human rights of girls and young women. AGALI has also selected a group of 18 senior African leaders who will begin the capacity building and seed grant process at the June, 2010 AGALI workshop in Alexandria, Egypt.

IHP/PHI partners with regional experts to conduct seven-day capacity building workshops for selected leaders. Building upon participants' existing knowledge of the challenges facing adolescent girls, these workshops highlight strategies to respond to the specific social, health, and economic needs of adolescent girls and young women. The workshops also focus on specific approaches to advocate for adolescent girls' human rights, health, and socio-economic wellbeing, including ways to strengthen national and regional advocacy networks and advance public policy campaigns and girl-friendly legislation; efforts to utilize national legal frameworks, international policies, and regional conventions; and campaigns to advocate for the allocation of global and national resources, as well as engagement of governments, UN organizations, multilateral donors, media, and the corporate and nonprofit sectors.

The workshops also serve as an opportunity for participants to share lessons learned and best practices from their own work with adolescent girls, as well as network with other leaders working on a range of critical issues affecting adolescent girls from within their own countries and throughout the region. Based upon their own institutional analyses, participants develop specific institutional advocacy strategies to strengthen the work of their organizations to advance adolescent girls' human rights, health, and socio-economic wellbeing. Through a guided facilitation process that incorporates ongoing feedback and coaching, the AGALI training culminates with all participants developing institutional advocacy strategies that include specific project goals, objectives, activities, and

evaluation mechanisms to respond to the needs of adolescent girls and young women within their own local or national context.

Upon completing the AGALI workshop, participants collaborate with staff within their institutions and in key partner organizations to finalize their advocacy strategies. Based upon the unique capacity and needs of each institution, these advocacy strategies strengthen organizational efforts to address the comprehensive needs of adolescent girls and young women. IHP/PHI provides technical assistance to AGALI participants and their institutions to maximize their capacity to improve adolescent girls' human rights, health, and socio-economic wellbeing through their institutional strategies. This technical assistance includes support for participants' efforts to expand institutional advocacy efforts focused on the needs of adolescent girls, develop strategic collaborations with local partners and networks, solicit financial support from local and international donors, and implement the new advocacy projects.

Upon finalizing their institutional advocacy strategies with their organizations, participants submit proposals to IHP/PHI to solicit funding to implement their strategies for the period of one year. To promote the sustainability of participants' strategies, IHP/PHI award small grants to the six institutional strategies that demonstrate the greatest potential to improve adolescent girls' human rights, health, and socio-economic wellbeing within Latin America and Africa. Projects funded in 2009 in Guatemala include:

- **“Generating Political Change through Empowered Indigenous Women,”** implemented by FESIRGUA (Asociación Frente de Salud Infantil y Reproductiva de Guatemala). FESIRGUA is an umbrella organization that works with poor indigenous communities in rural Guatemala on education and sexual and reproductive health projects. This project focuses on training indigenous girls and women to participate in advocating for sexual and reproductive health programs targeting adolescents. It also calls for the creation of municipal youth commissions and for mayors to designate at least 2% of their budget to the commissions.
- **“Prevention through Education: Integrated Education in Human Sexuality for Adolescent Girls,”** implemented by Aprofam (Asociación Pro Bienestar de la familia de Guatemala). APROFAM provides sexual and reproductive health and other services through its wide network of clinics. The goal of this project is to improve the access of girl children and adolescent girls to integrated education in human sexuality and specific, specialized services for adolescents within the context of the Ministerial Declaration on “Prevention through Education,” and in accordance with the Guatemalan Family Planning Law.
- **“Integrated Care for Adolescent Girl Survivors of Sexual Violence in Guatemala,”** implemented by CONACMI (Asociación Nacional contra el Maltrato Infantil). CONACMI is a national organization that coordinates programs aimed at preventing and responding to cases of child abuse sexual violence. This project develops a plan to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Guatemalan government’s Sexual Violence Protocol in two large urban hospitals.
- **“Democratic Participation of Adolescent Girls in the Elaboration and Execution of Integrated Public Policies,”** implemented by Asociación IDEI. Asociación IDEI works on a variety of sustainable, participatory projects in the areas of health, education, human rights, and infrastructure development. This project works on involving adolescent girls in advocating for the development and implementation of integrated public policies in coordination with the National Commission on Childhood and Adolescence. The project facilitates the development of a girls’ agenda for action, and supports them as they advocate for their agenda.
- **“I Love Myself, I Care for Myself,”** implemented by ChildFund Guatemala. ChildFund is a large international non-profit that has been working on education and youth empowerment in Guatemala since 1964. This project advocates with the Guatemalan Ministries of Health and Education to finance specialized health

clinics for girls and to implement the government Reproductive Health Program in schools.

- **“Specialized Protocol for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Adolescents and Increased Birth Spacing in Adolescent Mothers,”** implemented by AGMM (Asociación Guatemalteca de Mujeres Médicas) and MISPAS (Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social). This project develops a Specialized Protocol for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Adolescents and Increased Birth Spacing in Adolescent Mothers at the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance, and advocates with the Minister of Health to endorse and implement the Protocol.

Throughout the course of AGALI, IHP/PHI supports participants’ efforts to conduct trainings for adolescent girl leaders and their advocates, as well as key local organizations and networks. This organized dissemination process provides participants with financial compensation for the trainings they conduct for adolescent girl leaders and local institutions in their countries. Complementing the in-depth impacts generated through participants’ institutional advocacy strategies, the dissemination process is designed to support AGALI participants’ efforts to directly increase the capacity of adolescent girls and strengthen the efforts of local institutions working with adolescent girls within each country. Applying lessons learned during the regional training to their own dissemination efforts, AGALI participants conduct trainings to strengthen the capacity of adolescent girls to advocate for their own interests, enhance the efforts of a broad range of institutions and networks responding to the needs of adolescent girls, and increase public support for young women’s human rights, health, and socio-economic wellbeing.

Leveraging participants’ knowledge of the issues, commitment to building adolescent girls’ capacity, and professional networks, these dissemination trainings complement the institutional advocacy strategies by enabling participants to expand their own direct work

with adolescent girls, disseminate information, and build support, visibility and commitment to adolescent girls among diverse audiences and organizations throughout Latin America and Africa.

Lessons Learned

Although AGALI is a relatively new program, interesting lessons can be learned from the two years of implementation experience to date. These lessons include the need for in-depth advocacy capacity building among leaders working with adolescent girls the importance of socio-political context at the national level for effective local and national advocacy, and the importance of involving girls in advocacy within a supportive programmatic framework.

A central outcome of AGALI program evaluation concerns the need of more training and capacity building on advocacy for civil society groups, and the mainstreaming of advocacy activities in organizations working on behalf of adolescent girls. While the majority of participants do exceptional work with adolescents and young people in the areas of service provision and program implementation, very few have extensive experience working in the area of advocacy. Therefore, IHP/PHI has sought technical assistance from regional advocacy experts to develop updated training methodologies which enable participants to apply their extensive expertise in working with adolescents while expanding their knowledge and practice in the area of policy advocacy. IHP/PHI recently conducted a strategic planning process to assess the success of this new model

and develop follow-up institutional strengthening trainings to deepen program participants' knowledge of advocacy.

Another important lesson concerns the importance of local and national socio-political context in shaping advocacy activities and determining their success. AGALI focus countries in Latin America and Africa are chosen based on assessments of greatest need for improving the lives of marginalized adolescent girls, and not based on the existence of a political environment conducive to advocacy work. Despite the importance of responding to the needs of the world's most marginalized girls, this selection criteria has presented challenges for some aspects of AGALI implementation, and made clear the need for a greater focus on specific country contexts in advocacy capacity building workshops. Perhaps the clearest illustration of the impact of socio-political context on AGALI participants' work is the 2009 passage of the Charities and Societies Proclamation Law in Ethiopia, which severely restricts advocacy and human rights activities by organizations receiving more than 10% of their budget from outside of Ethiopia. This effectively prohibits any NGO with a solid funding base and visible public profile from advocating on behalf of girls. The "NGO Law," as it is known, is part of trend in Ethiopia towards consolidating state power and silencing citizen dissent⁷. The political context in Ethiopia and several other AGALI countries make publicly engaging in advocacy activities a dangerous undertaking for civil society organizations and individual social change agents. To respond to this challenge, AGALI staff have learned to adapt the capacity building process to the legal context of each country in ways that will not put participants or their organizations in danger. In Ethiopia, for example,

⁷ *NGO Law Monitor: Ethiopia*. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, 2010.

projects implemented by AGALI participants will focus on girls' empowerment and leadership, and not on direct advocacy with government decision-makers.

Finally, AGALI grantee project implementation has highlighted the need to build a programmatic framework that supports adolescent girls' direct advocacy and community awareness building activities, builds girls' skills in advocating for themselves, and integrates girls into democratic decision-making processes. Several of the AGALI-funded projects provide clear examples of the benefits of involving girls in leadership and decision-making. In Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, the Asociación IDEI worked with 50 adolescent girls to identify key issue areas, including the creation of a scholarship fund for girls who cannot pay for school and improved access to sexual and reproductive health information. IDEI then trained them in advocacy strategies, and is now working with them to advocate with municipal government authorities. This effort has empowered rural indigenous girls while also bringing increased public support and media attention to the advocacy campaign.

Conclusions

Meeting the needs of marginalized adolescent girls in developing countries and achieving the Millennium Development Goals requires both improved direct service provision and advocacy to ensure enhanced government accountability. To this end, AGALI builds the capacity of civil society leaders to advocate on behalf of adolescent girls and promotes the empowerment of girls in their own development. Empowering civil society leaders to advocate on behalf of girls and young women strengthens national and regional networks,

raises public awareness of adolescent girls' issues, and encourages government decision-makers to meet their legal obligations to protect girls and promote equitable socio-economic development.