

advocating for real change – the feminist way



The decks are often stacked against women in Sudan's patriarchal legal system. Zeinab (left) works with Inter Pares counterpart SORD to navigate family courts and secure good outcomes for the women she represents, like Najwa, pictured here with her.

READ ABOUT HER WORK ON PAGE FOUR.

Photo credit: Rita Morbia/Inter Pares

Big or small, advocacy done right can change lives for the better. In this *Bulletin* all about feminist advocacy, meet groups demanding respect for women in their community, lawyers working to change an unjust legal system from within, and young people fighting for their right to sexual education.

Fighting for sex-ed in El Salvador

Wendy Barerra is 22, studies law, and is passionate about sex-ed.

“We’re talking about rights, we’re talking about our bodies, we’re talking about something that is part of every stage of our lives.”

Wendy is part of a network of young people advocating for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in El Salvador. The Youth Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health, supported by Inter Pares’ local counterpart, La Colectiva Feminista, is working to ensure young people can access accurate and fulsome sex-ed through their schools and health services. ►

◀ “Learning about CSE not only changed me professionally but also personally,” says Wendy. “It changed my relationship with my body because it gave me autonomy... I started to have more confidence.”

Advocates of CSE, like Wendy, want to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancy in the country. In recent years, one-third of pregnancies in El Salvador were to an adolescent mother – a figure further exacerbated by the pandemic. For many girls and young women, these pregnancies are often also associated with sexual violence.

In an effort to address this, El Salvador created a national sex-ed curriculum in 2009 – but its implementation is spotty at best. Many children and youth have yet to access CSE and even fewer teachers have received training on how to actually teach it.



Wendy Barrera advocates for comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in El Salvador through an Inter Pares-supported youth network. Here, she speaks at a forum on adolescents' right to CSE.

Photo credit: La Colectiva Feminista

But Colectiva is changing that by teaching educators like Roberto Flores Granados how to add CSE to their lesson plans.


“The training helped me a lot,” says Roberto. “It took away the mental barrier I had to talking about sexual health.”

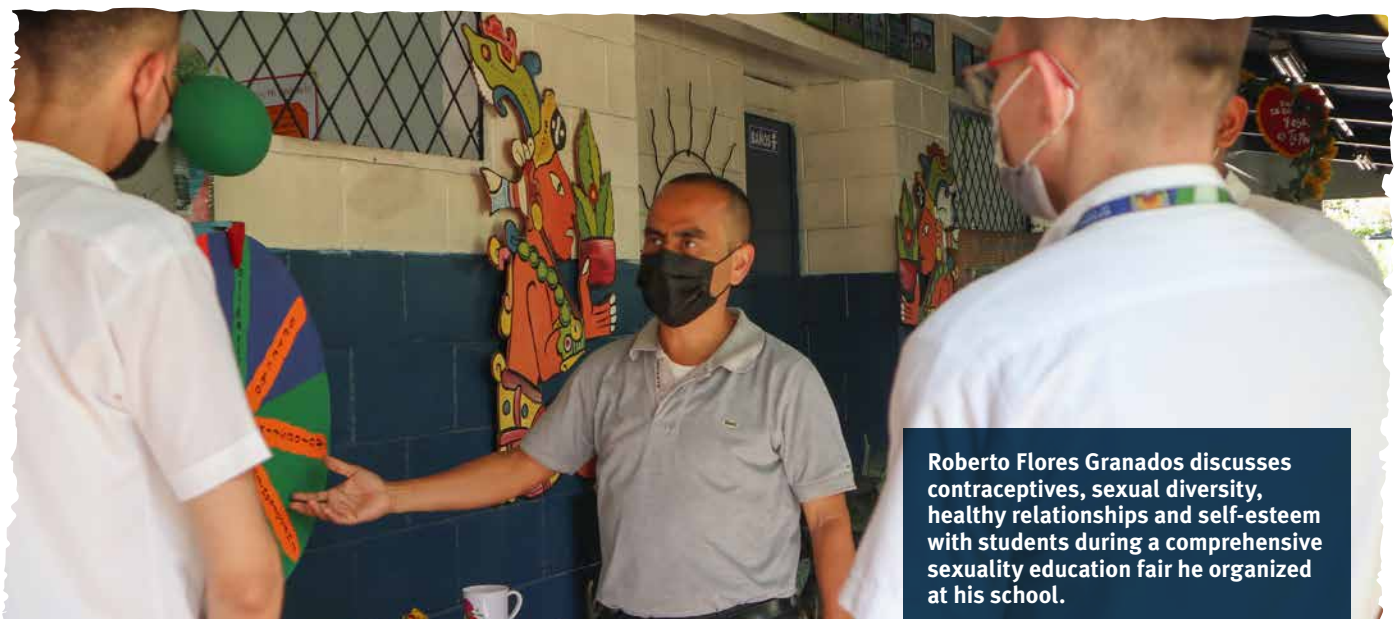
Roberto recently held a CSE fair at his school where students discussed contraceptives,

sexual diversity, healthy relationships and self-esteem. Inspired by the changes he has made to his teaching, Roberto also joined a network that, with Colectiva’s support, advocates for getting CSE into more schools. The network brings together teachers, members of school boards, public health workers and more.

For Wendy, learning about sexuality free from prejudice is a right that she’s intent on seeing all her peers access.



“Everybody should be able to know about it – and know about themselves.” 



Roberto Flores Granados discusses contraceptives, sexual diversity, healthy relationships and self-esteem with students during a comprehensive sexuality education fair he organized at his school.

Photo credit: Lise-Anne Léveillé/Inter Pares

Privacy please: Respecting community women’s health rights in Bangladesh

Hundreds of people surround a community clinic, angry about its women’s health practices. The group’s motives? Not what you might think.

These protesters in rural Bangladesh weren’t arguing against contraceptives or blocking women’s access to reproductive services. Instead, they were making one simple demand: that the clinic treat the women who go there with respect.

In Bangladesh’s patriarchal society, our counterpart organization, Nijera Kori, brings poor, marginalized women together in local groups where they learn their rights and – just as importantly – gain the confidence to demand they be respected. These women’s groups and allied men’s groups are using that knowledge and the power of their numbers to create change.

Over the past year, they have created change at their local health clinics.

Staff at village health clinics are mostly men and often come from cities, bringing with them derogatory attitudes toward rural villagers, especially women. When a woman goes to a clinic with sexual or reproductive health problems it can become a mortifying experience. Clinics



Our counterpart organization, Nijera Kori, brings poor, marginalized women together in local groups where they learn about their rights and gain the confidence to demand those rights be respected.

Photo credit: Nijera Kori


are small with little privacy. Women are often uncomfortable raising important, even dire, health issues when the entire staff and other patients can overhear them. Many prefer not to go, risking their health rather than suffer the public humiliation that such a situation entails.

But these grassroots advocates, supported through Nijera Kori and Inter Pares, are demanding that clinics change. The groups – of women and men, adults and youth – reached out to clinics and asked them to establish private spaces for consultations with women and girls.

Some clinics immediately understood and responded by setting up private areas. Other clinics dismissed the request. So, the groups surrounded

the clinics and voiced their demands until they could no longer be ignored.



These women’s health activists successfully achieved separate spaces for women and girls in 19 community clinics last year. It may seem like a small victory but it’s one that could make a life-or-death difference. And it’s another step forward for poor, rural women in asserting their rights as human beings to be treated with respect. 

Sudan's legal advocates finding their voice

When lawyers Zeinab, Wafaa and Amal recall their first experience of walking into family court in Khartoum, Sudan, they remember feeling trepidation, anxiety and anger. Not rage, but indignant anger for the depth of the rights violations they encountered.

The Sudanese constitution guarantees gender equality. But paradoxically, the “personal status laws” – which govern areas like marriage, divorce and custody – mandate a woman’s obedience to her husband. Women and girls must also have male guardians, usually a family member, who can exercise significant control over their lives – including the legal authority to consent to marriage on their behalf. In Sudan, a girl can be married as young as 10 years of age.


While the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORD) is working to change the legal framework that discriminates against women, Zeinab, Wafaa, Amal and the dozen or so other lawyers who work with SORD must still grapple with this legal system daily.



Under such a fundamentally patriarchal legal system, the lawyers struggled with how best to advocate for the women they represented. But these steadfast legal minds did not give up. With coordinated strategies, they are making change from within. And through persistence, patience and savvy legal arguments, they have made incredible strides.

SORD’s lawyers now work in four cities across the country. They have learned which legal arguments to use to gain divorces, custody arrangements

and alimony for their clients – too many of whom are survivors of forced child marriages and violence. They educate the judges and appeal to their sense of humanity. Newer lawyers learn from more experienced ones. Though they do not always have the law on their side, they use everything else at their disposal to win favourable outcomes.

Wafaa, Zeinab and Amal no longer struggle to know what to say or where to begin. They have found their voice and they are just beginning. Inter Pares is grateful to be able to support this courageous work. 



Amal, Wafa, Suhair and Zeinab (pictured here from left to right) are lawyers who work with SORD, Inter Pares’ counterpart in Sudan. They are changing their country’s legal system from within.

Photo credit: Rita Morbia/Inter Pares

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