

Culturally Sensitive & Empowering: Sexual & Reproductive Health for Girls May 2025 Fact Sheet

About the Together Women Rise Grants Program



The Together Women Rise Grants Program has two key components that support our overall mission to achieve global gender equality. **Featured Grants** are largely focused on delivering **direct services** by funding grassroots organizations that empower and support women and girls in low-income and marginalized communities in the Global South. Our **Transformation Partnerships** are designed to invest in areas where we can make the biggest impact on achieving global gender equality by addressing **the root causes** of gender inequality.

Through our Featured Grants Program, we highlight a different organization/project each month, providing a variety of learning materials on the issue and how the grant will be used. Through the Featured Grants program, we support capacity building, new programs, or expansion of existing programs. The following is information on the grant we are featuring for May 2025.

The Global Issue: Sexual & Reproductive Health Education for Girls

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education addresses sensitive topics such as consent, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early pregnancy, and delaying marriage – all critically important to girls' long-term health and stability. Addressing cultural and linguistic practices unique to a community is vital for ensuring that SRH education is relevant and sensitive.

In many low- and middle-income countries, comprehensive sexuality education has become a key source of information for adolescents, especially those in school. Comprehensive sexuality education aims to provide an age-appropriate, culturally relevant program aimed at equipping students with sexual health information and skills to improve SRH outcomes. This type of education has many benefits, including delayed initiation of sexual activity, reduced rates of teenage pregnancy, and improved health outcomes. By ensuring that educational content is inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural backgrounds, it can effectively address health disparities and support adolescents in making informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health, including decisions regarding marriage. Using **culturally specific tools** such as storytelling, local history and literature, curricula can be tailored to diverse communities with greater success.



In the Cusco region of Peru, over 29% of young women between the ages of 15-24 are not able to continue their education because of pregnancy or marriage.

About This Month's Featured Grantee

Together Women Rise is funding a \$40,000 Featured Grant to Sacred Valley Health, an organization we previously funded in 2018. This is a project grant that will fund leadership training for girls from Indigenous Peruvian communities.

Though broad access to comprehensive sex education is supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, many children and adolescents in the U.S. do not have access to it. There is significant variation in the content taught in U.S. schools, and rates of formal sex education are declining.

SACRED VALLEY HEALTH

Founded in 2012, Sacred Valley Health is a community-based, public health nonprofit that partners with vibrant, Indigenous communities in the Andes of Peru. Its core purpose is to improve the health care access and equity of these underserved, marginalized communities through a community health worker (CHW) program that empowers local women with education, resources, professional development, and economic opportunities. Its vision is to empower cohorts of women with health education and vocational training and provide women and girls with safe, supportive spaces to learn

about their bodies, ask questions, and share experiences. Through these efforts, Sacred Valley Health aims to create generations of women who are empowered to make choices about their reproductive health, have greater access to education, and are advocates of gender equality – all of which can positively influence generations to come.

Sacred Valley Health makes local culture and practices the center of their health education curriculum. As a result, it is working to become the first nationally recognized certification program for Quechua-speaking trainers in Peru. It works with Quechua communities that have historically been marginalized and excluded from national economic development, but that possess an invaluable wealth of ancestral wisdom and culture.

Sacred Valley Health's programs include women's health, nutrition, wilderness medicine, Community Health Worker training, a train-the-trainer CHW program, and more.

Sacred Valley Health received a previous project grant from Together Women Rise in 2018 supporting its nutrition-focused, train-the-trainer program to increase education about best practices in nutrition and combat child malnourishment. The project was extremely successful and very popular among participants, and information learned from that project formed the basis of this new effort.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT SACRED VALLEY HEALTH.](#)



Life Challenges of the Women & Girls Served

Poverty is the biggest challenge for women and girls in Peru. More than 30% of women in Peru make no personal income. Those who do earn income make 30% less per month than men.

Recent years have been extremely difficult ones for Peru and, subsequently, for Sacred Valley Health. Peru was one of the hardest hit countries during COVID, and the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing barriers to health. By the end of 2021, Peru had the highest COVID-related death rates per capita in the world. In December 2022, just as the country was recovering from the pandemic, Peru fell into the worst political crisis it had seen in decades.

The Cusco region, where Sacred Valley Health operates, was hit particularly hard. Coming on the heels of the worst drought the region has experienced in more than 50 years, deadly protests, regional roadblocks, and disrupted supply chains paralyzed the entire region for nearly three months.



The economy, which relies heavily on agriculture and tourism, suffered significant setbacks once again.

Sacred Valley Health's partner communities are 9,000 to 14,000 feet above sea level in the Peruvian Andes. Education about sexual and reproductive health is limited in the public school system and is often considered taboo in a cultural context. Gender discrimination is heavily embedded in Andean society, which means girls and women, especially Indigenous girls and women, have fewer opportunities for both secondary and vocational education. This limits their agency and participation in shaping circumstances that directly impact their well-being.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT PERU](#)

How Our Grant Will Be Used

Together Women Rise will fund the Adolescent Girls Empowerment Initiative, which aims to train and empower adolescent girls from Indigenous Peruvian communities to become leaders in the field of healthy gender relationships and reproductive health within their communities.

Indigenous adolescents in Peru report a lack of intercultural respect from staff who care for them in public health centers, reporting cases of mistreatment and mockery due to their way of communicating, their traditional clothing, and the use of traditional practices to prevent pregnancy. Recognizing the importance of addressing the specific health needs of Indigenous populations, this project seeks to promote a culturally sensitive and participatory approach to address barriers to sexual and reproductive healthcare, respecting cultural and religious patterns of the communities with the following primary program activities:

- **Training workshops:** Interactive and participatory workshops on sexual and reproductive health will be organized and adapted to the needs and cultural contexts of Indigenous communities. These workshops will address topics such as the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, the promotion of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, contraception, STIs, and the importance of maternal and child health services, as well as practical supplies like menstrual pads and cups.
- **Leadership development sessions:** Training sessions will be held to develop leadership, communication, and advocacy skills so these young women can advocate for equitable access to reproductive health services and become agents of change in their communities.
- **Creating networks of young leaders:** Groups of young Indigenous leaders will be established to facilitate the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and good practices in sexual and reproductive health. These networks will serve as platforms for collaboration and coordination of joint actions.
- **Awareness and advocacy campaigns:** Awareness campaigns will be organized in Indigenous communities to promote the importance of sexual and reproductive health



and to advocate for equitable access to quality services. Young leaders will play an active role in the planning and execution of these campaigns.

Sacred Valley Health's program is customized for and co-created by Indigenous, Quechua-speaking health workers. They collaborate with a local graphic designer to develop culturally competent images for the curriculum and use a curriculum guide created by Quechua-speaking staff to ensure teaching methodology for each topic is effective and accessible. Teaching activities focus on the use of storytelling (an important aspect of local learning culture) and discussion prompts to promote critical thinking and problem solving. In previous years, lessons focused specifically on individual behavior change with limited interventions. Now more materials and activities include the social determinants of health and how they affect entire communities. This has provided more room for problem-solving interventions that work best for each person and each community based on their specific context and condition.



Through community surveys and extensive conversations with Peruvian health workers, Sacred Valley Health found that one of the biggest barriers to contraception for women is not the lack of availability – most methods are available for free in government clinics – but it is a lack of understanding about what the different methods are, how they work, what the possible side effects are, and why they occur. This is an area where Sacred Valley Health has a significant impact.

Baseline data collected in 2023 for Sacred Valley Health's Women's Health Program showed major knowledge gaps in reproductive health education among women of all ages in the partner communities. In fact, many Sacred Valley Health's Community Health Workers stated that the primary reason they wanted to train as a health worker was because they wanted to learn about women's and reproductive health. There is myriad data showing both the need and desire for spaces where women and girls feel safe to learn about their bodies and their health so they can be empowered to make informed decisions about their life and their well-being. This project aims to create this space for young girls so they can be leaders for gender equality and reproductive rights among their peers.

IMPACT – Direct: 50 women and girls; Indirect: 800 women and girls

“...It (public speaking) has been difficult for me because I was very shy, but now I can speak without problems on any occasion...I thank you very much for giving me education in my language [Quechua], and I really appreciate the effort you made in preparing the materials with many images, because that has helped me a lot in my life.”

– Beatriz, Community Health Worker

Budget

Item	Description	Cost
Portion of personnel costs	Program director, Women’s Health program manager, program assistant, administrative coordinator, monitoring and evaluation director, graphic designer for culturally relevant training materials to facilitate visual learning	\$10,600
AGEI Program Coordinator	Goal: experienced Sacred Valley Health worker through SVH professional development program - local, Indigenous woman familiar with SVH programs	\$10,000
Materials	Training materials for participants	\$5,000
Transportation	Includes transportation for program participants to and from SHV training headquarters in Ollantaytambo, transportation for community project support (for projects implemented by participants), etc.	\$4,700
Miscellaneous support	Project and core mission support	\$4,200
Networking and findings	Networking fairs, publication and dissemination of key learnings	\$3,500
Food and supplies	Healthy meals provided to program participants on training days	\$2,000
Total		\$40,000

Why We Love This Project/Organization

We love that this program for adolescent girls utilizes culturally sensitive practices to delay marriage. The program has been so successful that much of their staff is made up of alumnae who advanced through their professional development model.

Impact Story

MEET BRISAYDA

Eleven-year-old Brisayda is the youngest daughter in a large family. She lives in the community of Quelqanca. To receive any health services, she must trek an hour and a half by public bus and then hike for many hours to arrive at the community of Ollantaytambo.

Fortunately, Brisayda's home community has a small public school where she can attend through sixth grade. In her home, she speaks Quechua with her family. She is learning Spanish now at school, but still feels more comfortable in her native language. The pandemic also affected her schooling, since the government programs during school closures only arrived to her community through radio transmissions which were unable to help her learn how to read.

Brisayda's older siblings moved to the city to continue their education as they became old enough to do so, but without Sacred Valley Health, Brisayda would not have access to resources in her native language that can guide her through growing up and the changes she will experience once moving.

But a different path is available to Brisayda through her connection to Sacred Valley Health. She will receive transportation to Ollantaytambo where she will meet with other girls from many communities. Together they will be guided by a mentor to prepare for their lives ahead by learning about puberty, cultural identity, healthy relationships, their governmental rights, and financial literacy. Brisayda will be able to grow in her self-esteem and ability to connect to her own values while navigating her adolescence. She is excited and anxious about this program and the doors that are opening before her.

Learn More

[Shop! Watch! Read! Listen!](#)

[Proven Platter](#)

[Recipes](#)

Source Materials

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

[ECPAT](#)

[National Library of Medicine](#)

[Sacred Valley Health](#)

[ScienceDirect](#)

[Taylor & Francis](#)

[The Borgen Project](#)

[Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals, Vol. 7 \(1\)](#)

[Parents' Sources of Adolescent Health Information](#)

Glossary

AGEI: Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Initiative

CHW: Community Health Worker

CSE: Comprehensive Sexuality Education



STIs: Sexually Transmitted Infections

The Global South: **The Global South** includes the countries that experience higher levels of poverty, income inequality, lower life expectancy, and harsh living conditions compared to the wealthier nations in the “Global North” – located mostly in North America and Europe. The Global South **primarily** includes many of the countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and the Middle East.

