

# SHE DECIDES

Preventing adolescent pregnancy in rural Peru

YEAR 4 UPDATE



THIS PAGE: Aerial view of Iquitos, Peru, also known as the Capital of the Peruvian Amazon. It's the largest city in the world that is not reachable by road.

COVER: Smiling participant from the She Decides project.

# Contents

<a href="#">The First Word</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">The Scene</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">The Rundown</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Report Card</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Story of Change</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">The Last Word</a>	<a href="#">14</a>



Kassandra, She Decides project participant.

# THE POWER OF CHOICE

Welcome to the fourth year of the She Decides project in Peru.

In Kassandra's hometown, it's not uncommon for adolescent girls to abandon their studies due to an unplanned pregnancy – in fact, it's considered "normal." "People say that girls who move to my area end up pregnant," says Kassandra, 16. "During the time I have lived here, I have seen many adolescents in that situation."

Kassandra is well on her way to changing things – as are the 71,396 children, youth, parents, teachers and community and government leaders already reached by the She Decides project. You'll meet Kassandra later in this report and learn about her brave efforts to raise girls' and women's awareness of their rights so they can make informed decisions about their bodies and lives.

You'll also learn how the She Decides project has improved access to sexual and reproductive health services and promoted gender equality throughout communities to ensure that women and adolescent girls are safe and supported in their choices.

**She Decides is an \$11.5 million project that began in April 2018 and is expected to end in September 2023.**

Already, your generosity is helping make a difference: 87% of girls and young women who've participated can now access contraception, and 75% feel confident in asserting their rights.

**(See more results on p.11)**

## THE PROJECT HAS THREE GOALS:

- 1** Empower adolescent girls to take control of their sexual and reproductive health through comprehensive sexual education and improved health services.
- 2** Improve sexual and reproductive health services by training health workers on the specific needs of adolescent girls and young women and Indigenous peoples.
- 3** Help health institutions and governing bodies better respond to the sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescent girls and boys.

# The Scene

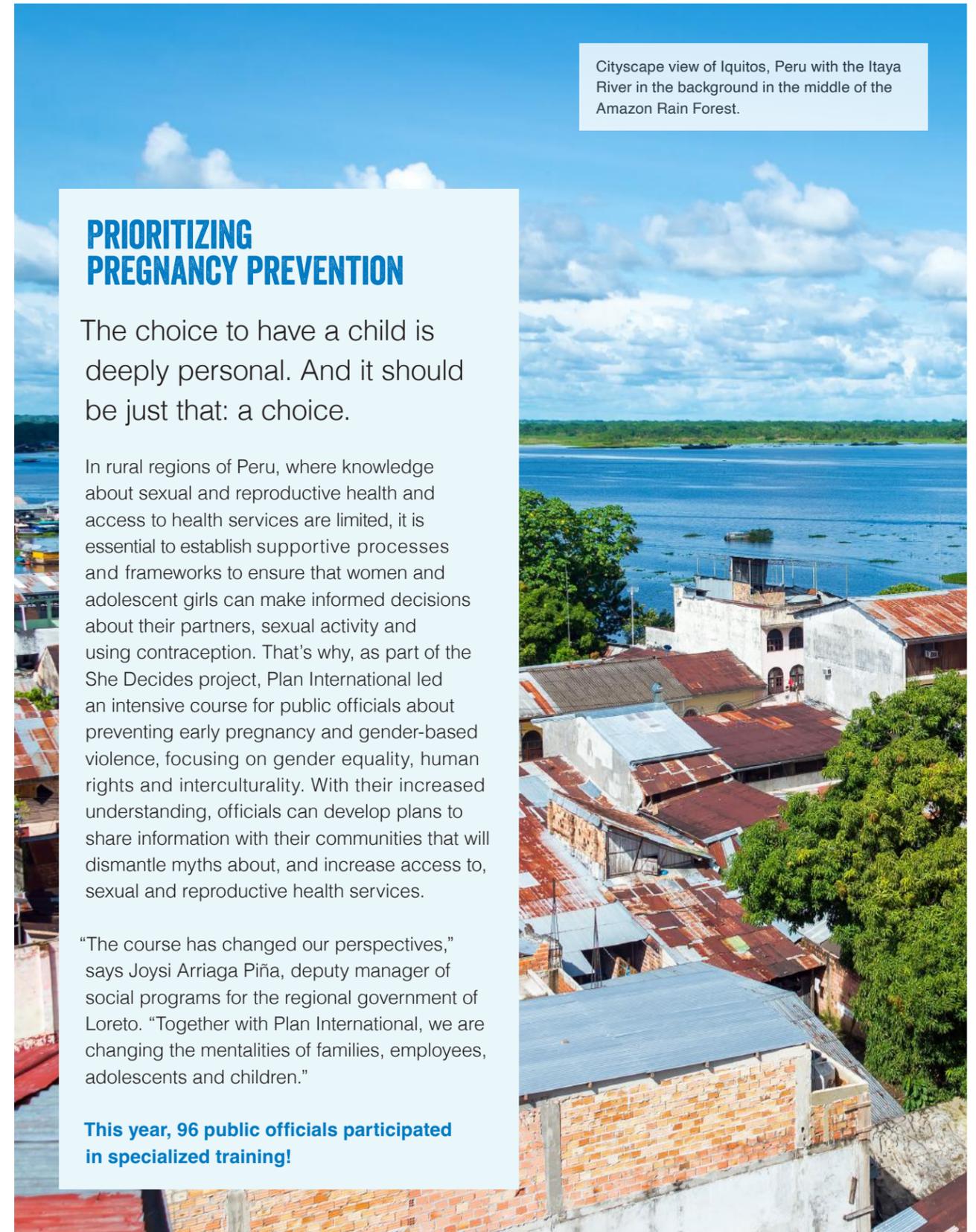


Peru is a country with vast landscapes and vast inequalities.

**PERU IS THE THIRD-LARGEST COUNTRY IN SOUTH AMERICA** and home to numerous Indigenous peoples who help steward the lands near the Incan city of Machu Picchu, the seven-coloured Rainbow Mountain and the lush Amazonian jungle.

Its 51 Indigenous groups comprise 45% of the country's population, but, like many of the world's Indigenous populations, they don't have the same access to rights as settlers. Necessities like sexual and reproductive health care and education are especially limited in rural regions, where the majority of Indigenous peoples reside. Without comprehensive education and services, girls and women are at an increased risk of early pregnancy and gender-based violence.

- 47% of Peru's Indigenous population is under 15 years of age.
- Complaints of sexual violence increased by 130% during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020.
- 30% of school-aged adolescent girls in the project region of Loreto are pregnant – the highest adolescent-pregnancy rate in the country.



Cityscape view of Iquitos, Peru with the Itaya River in the background in the middle of the Amazon Rain Forest.

## PRIORITIZING PREGNANCY PREVENTION

The choice to have a child is deeply personal. And it should be just that: a choice.

In rural regions of Peru, where knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and access to health services are limited, it is essential to establish supportive processes and frameworks to ensure that women and adolescent girls can make informed decisions about their partners, sexual activity and using contraception. That's why, as part of the She Decides project, Plan International led an intensive course for public officials about preventing early pregnancy and gender-based violence, focusing on gender equality, human rights and interculturality. With their increased understanding, officials can develop plans to share information with their communities that will dismantle myths about, and increase access to, sexual and reproductive health services.

"The course has changed our perspectives," says Joysi Arriaga Piña, deputy manager of social programs for the regional government of Loreto. "Together with Plan International, we are changing the mentalities of families, employees, adolescents and children."

**This year, 96 public officials participated in specialized training!**

Shutterstock 445049617 by Jess Kraft

# THE RUNDOWN

Check out the incredible progress you've helped make possible in four years of the five-year She Decides project!

## 133,229 PEOPLE

were reached through podcasts, radio programs and an awareness-raising event with information about responsible sex and contraception, violence-free relationships and preventing early marriage.

## 140 HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

have been trained to deliver culturally sensitive and gender-sensitive sexual and reproductive health care for adolescents, and a module has been developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to be integrated into the training curriculum for health workers.

## 564 ADOLESCENTS

were trained and mentored through the Champions of Change program to gain leadership, life and advocacy skills and learn about gender equality.

## 38 HEALTH FACILITIES

have been refurbished and equipped to provide sexual and reproductive health care that's sensitive to adolescents' needs, with medical equipment and informational materials as well as dividing walls to increase privacy.



## 41,076 GIRLS & BOYS

learned about sexual and reproductive health through "edutainment" activities like video games, colouring books and plays.



Medical supplies are delivered to a health facility in Loreto.



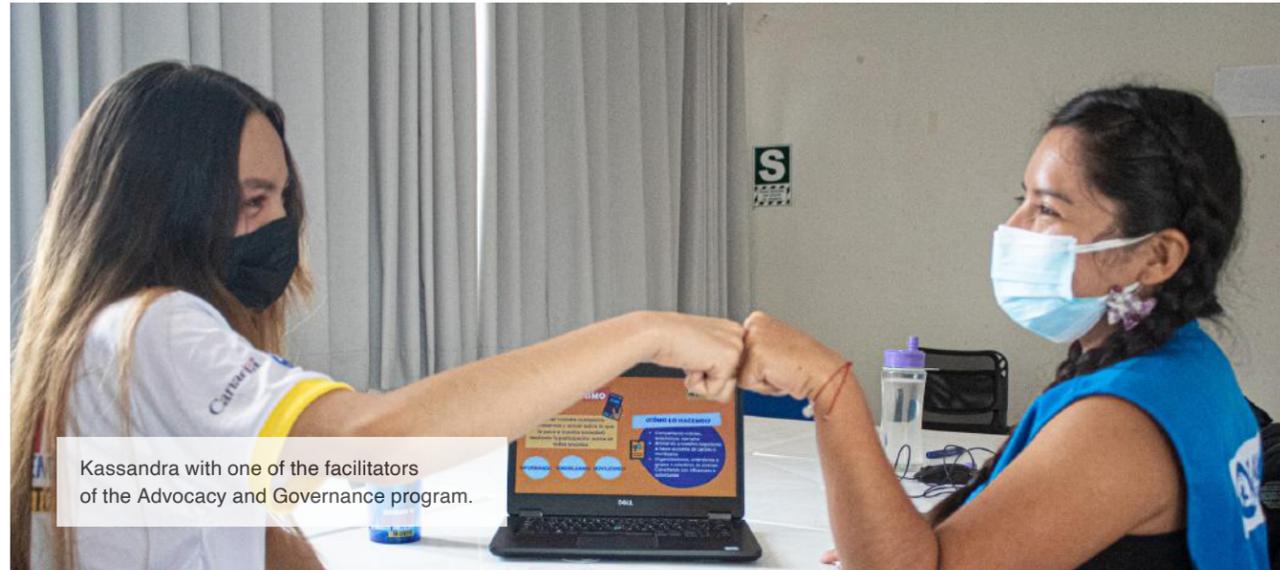
Group of participants from the She Decides project.

# The Report Card

Your generosity is already making a difference for adolescents in Peru!  
Check out these results from the four-year mark of the She Decides project.

BEFORE	NOW	HOW WE MADE IT HAPPEN
24% of women and 31% of men had adequate access to sexual health resources and services, including contraception.	<b>87% OF WOMEN AND 96% OF MEN DO!</b> <b>(INCLUDING ADOLESCENTS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By training health workers in sexual and reproductive health counselling – including the use of contraception – geared toward adolescents.</li> <li>By engaging communities to dispel myths and taboos surrounding adolescent sexual and reproductive health.</li> <li>By improving health facilities with specialized equipment and increased privacy for adolescents.</li> </ul>
43% of women and 39% of men could identify two ways to prevent pregnancy.	<b>85% OF WOMEN AND 96% OF MEN CAN!</b> <b>(INCLUDING ADOLESCENTS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By increasing adolescents' knowledge about sexual health decisions through workshops, discussion groups and edutainment activities.</li> <li>By advocating for comprehensive sexual education in schools.</li> </ul>
31% of women and 34% of men had adequate knowledge about protecting themselves and others against gender-based violence.	<b>86% OF WOMEN AND 60% OF MEN DO!</b> <b>(INCLUDING ADOLESCENTS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By increasing adolescents' knowledge about how to identify, prevent and report sexual violence, as well as the laws surrounding it, through Champions of Change, Advocacy and Peer Education clubs.</li> <li>By supporting communities in their efforts to establish safety processes around preventing and reporting sexual violence and make adolescents aware of the help that's available to them.</li> </ul>
15% of women and 17% of men had the confidence to assert their rights.	<b>75% OF WOMEN AND 50% OF MEN DO!</b> <b>(INCLUDING ADOLESCENTS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By informing adolescents about their rights through Champions of Change, Advocacy and Peer Education clubs.</li> <li>By conducting workshops and activities to improve self-esteem, communication skills and conflict-resolution and decision-making abilities.</li> </ul>

# Story of change



Kassandra with one of the facilitators of the Advocacy and Governance program.

## ACTIVATING THE ADVOCATE WITHIN

Kassandra is leading the fight for change in her community.

**KASSANDRA'S GOAL IS TO BECOME A DOCTOR** so she can improve the lives of girls and women in her community. "I want to become a doctor so I can detect the signs of abuse and violence in a more specialized way," explains the 16-year-old. "I know that as a doctor, my voice will reach others and I will be able to help many [survivors of gender-based violence]."

Even now, her work as an activist to reduce adolescent pregnancy and prevent sexual violence is making a difference. As part of the She Decides project, Kassandra joined Plan International's Political Advocacy and Governance program, through which she participated in leadership and activist training and learned from specialists about how to take action to create change. Recognizing that many

adolescents in her area weren't informed about their sexual and reproductive health rights but were eager to learn more, she leveraged her new skills and knowledge and founded Actívate.

Actívate is a youth-led organization that raises awareness of and shares important information about sexual and reproductive health and rights on social media.



Kassandra, right, with other Champion of Change club members.



We Decide project participants in Peru.

Kassandra and her team also took the initiative to run sexual education workshops in secondary schools, targeting neighbourhoods with a high rate of adolescent pregnancy. "It is very important to talk about comprehensive sexual education because sexual violence against girls and adolescents is very common here," she says.

Kassandra's leadership skills, motivation and creativity are abundant. Activism plays a key role in her life as a passion and part of her personality. The same drive and determination for change that live in Kassandra can be found in girls and young women around the world. However, not all of them have access to the tools or resources needed to take action and make change a reality. Kassandra is grateful for the opportunity to share her knowledge on a large scale with Actívate. "I received training from Plan International that helped me during this time and enabled me to build Actívate," she says. "The suggestions that specialists and facilitators gave us were key to our gaining the confidence to grow our organization and make public presentations."

Through the She Decides project – and many others – donors like you are helping adolescents like Kassandra discover their ability to **make real change in their own lives and in their communities.**

**THIS YEAR, 75 YOUTHS PARTICIPATED IN ADVOCACY TRAINING!**

“

The suggestions that specialists and facilitators gave us were key to our gaining the confidence to consolidate our organization and make public presentations.”

– Cassandra, founder of Actívate



Youths creating a mural to denounce gender-based violence and inequality for the regional government of Loreto.

# Thank you!

Your incredible support for the She Decides project is ensuring that girls and women can make their own choices about their bodies and lives and can do so in a safe and supportive environment. Thank you for helping prevent early pregnancy and gender-based violence in rural Peru.

*The She Decides project is funded in part by the Government of Canada.*



Two adolescents who participated in Plan International's Political Advocacy and Governance program.

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