

Advocacy toolkit case studies

REDUCING THE RISK OF VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA

THEMES:

Corruption
Health
Violence and threats

ADVOCACY APPROACHES:

Community mobilisation
Educating community members

As with many countries in Central America, Guatemala has seen a rapid growth in violence, both real and threatened. This had repercussions for one Tearfund partner there because an integral part of its community health development programme involved empowering poor and vulnerable rural communities. The partner encouraged the communities to develop a voice as a group, which they had not historically had, in order to claim their entitlements to access affordable health care when they needed it. This gave many people a sense of value and dignity, as the partner opened up opportunities and connections for them to access local authority decision-makers. However, it was also costly.

During the course of their advocacy, the partner exposed fraud and corruption on a large scale within the government. This was difficult for those involved because powerful people felt threatened. Social change made them uncomfortable, and they feared their privileges would be challenged and removed. Death threats and threats of violence and organisational closure followed, as the government tried to clamp down and stifle their voice.

As a result, the partner developed a strategic plan of action for mitigating the risks involved. For example, they agreed not to travel after dark, to install security lights at their office premises, to put only certain information into the public domain and nothing that could identify specific individuals, to always obtain receipts for expenditure, etc. They also decided to continue their advocacy, despite the ongoing risks.