Association CoCoSI – Committee Against AIDS, A Dynamic Youth Group in Cabañas, El Salvador
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Background - HIV
- Approximately 0.55% of Salvadoran population is living with HIV
- 33,184 reported cases since 1984; 779 new cases since 2016
  - Most at risk populations are MSM, transgender women, teens, incarcerated people (24 Prisons with capacity 10,035, current occupancy 31,800)
  - 99% of HIV transmission is via coital relations

Background – Gender Based Violence
- Femicide rates in Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) represent some of highest in world
- More than half of all Salvadoran women have suffered some form of violence in their lives. Over a quarter of these women were victims of sexual or physical violence.
- Violence largely goes undocumented due to societal pressures on victims, fear of reprisal, and belief among victims that laws will not be enforced.

Background – Violence Against LGBTQI
- Over 600 murders of LGBTI individuals since 1993
- Gender variant persons in El Salvador at higher risk of becoming drug addicts, living on streets as sex workers, acquiring HIV and landing in prison.
- Lack of investigation/prosecution of violence against LGBTQI particularly when police officers were named in complaint.

Purpose
- CoCoSI provides comprehensive approach to HIV prevention and Gender-Based Violence.
- Salvadoran youth and young adults aspire to eliminate new HIV infection and gender based violence by addressing root origins of discrimination, exclusion and hate crimes in rural communities, homes, schools and institutions in Cabañas, El Salvador.
- Many factors put people at risk of contracting HIV, including poverty, discrimination, gender and sexual identity, machismo, and lack of access to education.

CoCoSI Programs
- **Prevention**: provides education to the most marginalized populations of Cabañas
- **Accompaniment and Mitigation**: attending needs of the impoverished living with HIV in rural communities
- **Social and Political Advocacy**: accompanies persons who are victims of violence and promotes the work of CoCoSI through social media

‘Popular’ Methodologies
- **Roll Playing and Participatory Teaching Techniques**: ‘Popular’, for the people by the people, teaching methods are employed in rural communities where there is poor access to education.
  - Children, teens and adults learn better and are motivated when activities are engaging and memorable.
  - Roll playing helps people understand the relationships among important events in their lives.
  - Engaged activities help people identify options, solutions and manage conflict; they enhance behavior change.
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Methodology and Projects

- ‘Reality on Stage’ CoCoSI’s theater troupe:
  - Street theater in rural communities, schools, for local and national events.
  - Innovative teaching tool allows difficult topics such as HIV, gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health rights, non-binary gender and human rights to be addressed.
  - Addresses myths that promote rape and hate crimes against children and gender non-conforming persons, women and persons living with HIV.
  - Promotes audience participation.

- Massage and Physical Therapy: provided by our Rehabilitation Center in Santa Marta; holistic treatment to victims of violence and persons living with HIV.

- Educational forums in rural communities
- Gatherings for Experiential Exchange and Festivals in rural communities, schools and prisons

Methodology and Projects

- Self-Support Groups of persons living with HIV.
- Self-Support Groups in the Sensuntepeque Prison.
- CoCoSI advocacy led to establishment of AIDS Clinic in Cabañas.

- HIV testing in parks and rural communities
- Distribution of condoms during community and state activities.
- Womyn’s Space – rural women’s safety net groups provide a safe environment to empower women and discuss male dominance and oppression in their daily lives.
- Men in the Gender Process – men working with men to understand their gender construction and change machista attitudes

Results

- Teen pregnancy rate in the Santa Marta school where CoCoSI works has the lowest incidence of all the rural schools in Cabañas.
- Women are challenging their abusers and taking steps to denounce them and change their situation.
- CoCoSI trained peer facilitators in prisons are now conducting educational sessions on HIV, STI and Tuberculosis; they also provide pre and post counseling during HIV testing campaigns.
- Prison staff and inmates recognize and respect individuals with non-conforming gender identities.
- In communities and schools where CoCoSI has conducted its activities, people are more accepting of other people with non-conforming gender identity, and bullying has diminished.
- Cabañas has one of the lowest HIV prevalence rates in El Salvador.
- Since its inception in 2003, hundreds of boys and men have benefited from CoCoSI’s Men in the Gender Process workshops. They participate in household chores and raising their children, changing their violent and machista attitudes and violence against women.
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Defenders of Human Rights
Human rights defenders of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities and those defending and promoting sexual and reproductive rights face increasing risks and particularly suffered violence and intimidation from state agents, individuals and gangs.

Contributing Factors To A Lethal Atmosphere:
- Widespread government corruption
- Weaknesses in the judiciary system
- Isolated unlawful killings and cruel treatment by security forces
- Lengthy pretrial detention
- Harsh and life-threatening prison conditions

Gender Based Violence in El Salvador
- "Femicide rates in the Northern Triangle of Central America, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras represent some of the highest in the world among countries not at war, and is increasing as a result of transnational organized crime, human trafficking …
- Domestic violence and against women are considered socially acceptable by a large portion of the population.
- More than half of all Salvadoran women have suffered some form of violence in their lives. Over a quarter of these women were victims of sexual or physical violence.
- Femicide in El Salvador has increased 140% during the first third of 2016 compared to the first third of 2015.
- Violation of gender based violence largely goes undocumented due to societal pressures on victims, fear of reprisal, and a belief among victims that the laws would not be enforced.
- Impunity for femicide is about 77%

Who We Network and Coordinate With
- Rural Schools and communities
- CONASIDA • Entre Amigos • COMCAVIS
- National AIDS Plan • Ministry of Health
- National Civil Police - UNIMUJER
- Mission Education Cabinet
- ISDEMU – National Institute for Women
- CONNA– National Council for Children and Adolescents
- Ciudad Mujer – government initiative unified services for women
- Local Health Clinics and Hospitals
- Ministry of Justice and Security
- Ministry of Education
- Radio Victoria • ADES • Santa Marta Women's Group

Gender Based Violence and HIV Prevention en a Cabañas Prison

HIV Prevention en a Cabañas Prison
Salvadoran Prisons
24 Prisons with a capacity of 10,035. Current Occupancy is 31,800
HIV Prevalence in Salvadoran prisons remains high

Gender Based Violence in El Salvador
- Persons gender nonconforming are forced to flee their homes due to bullying, threats by family members, police and gangs.
- Over 600 murders of members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Intersex (LGBTI) community since 1993
- Gender variant persons in El Salvador are at higher risk of becoming drug addicts, living on the streets of San Salvador as sex workers, acquiring HIV and landing in prison.
- There is a total lack of investigation and prosecution of violence against the gender non-conforming community, particularly when police officers were named in the complaint.

Conclusions
Since 2000, CoCoSI has been instrumental in transforming the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS, victims of domestic violence, non-conforming gender identity, and people in prison through creative preventive and curative ways.

Affiliations
- Doctors For Global Health (DGH) – US
- Primate World Relief and Development Fund of Canada (PWRDF)
- AIDS Health Foundation (AHF) - US

Team CoCoSI

Cesar Gamez, educator; Aracely Méndez, educator; Carmen Jovel, Accompaniment Coordinator; Mayra Méndez, Prevention Coordinator; Isabel Rivas, educator

Marina Sorto, Radio
Luis Alonso Argueta, Social Prevention and Political Coordinator
Wilmer Abel Sibrian, Account & Financial Administrator

Quotes
"We need to take advantage of this time and the lessons we learn, and then apply those lessons among ourselves here in the prison."
“I have heard people say many times that a man looks ridiculous carrying his daughter, but they do not say that when he is carrying his son; what is happening is that there is a lot of machismo among us men."

Gender Based Violence and HIV Prevention en women’s sector of prison

We dedicate this poster to CoCoSI’s Eduardo Jonael Méndez
Ago. 21, 1996 – Nov. 13, 2015