

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING OF THE OFFICE FOR THE DEFENSE OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND THE PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT FOR WOMEN AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

Joint Programme: Strengthening the Institutional Environment
for the Advancement of Women in Guatemala

Thematic Window: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Main Participants: United Nations: UNFPA (lead agency),
UN Women, FAO, UNDP, PAHO/WHO; national partners:
Presidential Secretariat for Women (SEPREM), Office for
the Defence of Indigenous Women (DEMI)

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1. Introduction

The Joint Programme on Strengthening the Institutional Environment for the Advancement of Women in Guatemala (the Programme) has strengthened the Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women (DEMI) and the Presidential Secretariat for Women (SEPREM), both at national and local level, by promoting multi-sectoral and inter-agency cooperation, as well as activities with different levels of government and civil society. Thanks to the Programme, progress was made in the implementation of gender policies, in services provision for survivors of gender-based violence and for the empowerment of women in decision-making processes.

2. Initial Situation

Guatemala is a country where women still do not participate widely in decision-making processes, and have limited economic opportunities. Moreover, high levels of structural violence against women persist. In this context the institutions devoted to women's empowerment have historically had limited capacity for implementation and monitoring of existing gender policies, which is further challenged due to their weak presence at departmental level. Although in recent years significant changes have been promoted by municipal legislation, Guatemala remains a highly centralized country.

3. Strategy

The Programme identified the need to strengthen SEPREM and DEMI for better monitoring of implementation and impact of gender policies. At the same time, the Programme had a wide geographical coverage both at central and local levels, with activities in seven departments and municipalities. Through this structure, the programme aimed to strengthen activities implemented by SEPREM and DEMI mainly at local level.

The Programme worked in four focus areas: a) Institutionalization of National Policy for Promotion and Integral Development of Women 2008-23

(PNPDIM), Plan for Equal Opportunities (PEO) and the Coordinated Agenda for Indigenous Women; b) Eradication of violence, discrimination and racism against women; c) Women's economic empowerment; and d) Social and political participation of women. At the same time, the Programme developed strategic interventions with Ministries, Departments and governmental institutions, and at the local level with municipalities.

4. Progress and Results

DEMI has seven offices at departmental level working for 39 municipalities (with 68 per cent of indigenous and rural populations) for prevention and provision of legal, psycho-physical-social support (group and individual therapy) to survivors of gender-based violence. An estimated total of 9,265 cases were treated by DEMI nationwide.

Human resources have increased, including at departmental level. At least 80 per cent of staff who had been employed as consultants under the Programme have been included in the organogram of SEPREM. In DEMI, progress was made in classifying positions according to the rules of the National Civil Service Bureau (ONSEC).

Departmental Delegations of DEMI and SEPREM supported by the Programme have influenced the national planning and budgeting processes with a focus on women's rights (mainly indigenous women).

At the local level, the Programme enhanced the participation of women in decision-making processes by strengthening and expanding the presence of SEPREM and DEMI in the territories, their dialogue with women's organizations at local level, strengthening their representation in the Council System of Urban and Rural Development and providing training in aspects of governance and women's rights promoted by both partners.

The Programme strengthened institutions that promote gender policies through inter-institutional and multi-sectoral action at national level as well as in the sectoral departmental working groups.

The Programme also made it possible for DEMI to provide direct services to women survivors of violence, discrimination and racism at central and local level. The Programme enhanced DEMI and Programme participants' expertise. The advocacy for community awareness at local level has been instrumental, to raise awareness around complaint procedures and characteristics of violence against indigenous women.

DEMI and SEPREM have been strengthened as public institutions, which has significantly improved their public image in the society, especially at departmental level. The political advocacy with departmental participants helped identify and position women leaders at local and community level, giving them support and training for lobbying and political negotiation.

The Programme was able to build leadership at departmental and local levels to manage the five per cent allocated within the Development Community Councils (CODEDES) budget for the development of specific training projects for women. In this way, DEMI and SEPREM have redefined their role in the departments as centers with the capacities to attend women and women's organizations needs and proposals.

5. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- In relation to participation of women in the departments, gender-based discrimination remains a powerful force in the country and within institutions. This has been a hindrance for increasing women's participation in decision-making. Concerted efforts to challenge these attitudes will need to continue in order to register greater gains.
- It is important to strengthen mechanisms for registration of cases of violence treated. Most records are not up-to-date and lack sufficient disaggregated information by ethnicity, age and municipality. It is therefore recommended to establish automated record systems.

6. Sustainability and Potential Application

DEMI and SEPREM have managed a transition process that includes the preparation of a toolkit to build capacity of their new officers, as well as the elaboration of good practices and lessons for future implementation, not only related to programme activities but also to relevant legislation.

Moreover, SEPREM will absorb 60 per cent of the staff positions that the Programme has promoted, ensuring continuity of established processes. At the departmental level, there is a need for continued support to offices that have recently opened. National partners have designed a transition plan to ensure the provision of local offices and services.

The issue of women's policies is on the public agenda. National partners should seek the support of women's organizations and international cooperation for advocacy and political lobbying as well as for monitoring the agreements established with other institutions in order to ensure sustainability.

In the area of economic empowerment, SEPREM is implementing national economic policies to promote women's access to credit, working directly with the Ministry of Finance to strengthen economic policies formulation.

7. Main Sources

Informe final "Guatemala: fortaleciendo la institucionalidad de las mujeres", October 2011. (Final Report "Guatemala: Strengthening the institutional environment for the advancement of women," October 2011.)

Evaluación Final Ventana Temática de Género y Empoderamiento de la Mujer, "Fortalecimiento la institucionalidad de las Mujeres en Guatemala," Naiara Tres-Castro Arnedo, Consultora, August 2011. (Final Evaluation of the thematic window on gender and the empowerment of women, "Strengthening the Institutional Environment for the Advancement of Women in Guatemala," Naiara Tres-Castro Arnedo, Consultora, August 2011.)