



HEALTH POLICY PROJECT / GUATEMALA

Building capacity for improved health policy, advocacy, governance, and finance



Photo by Carla Matta, HEPP Guatemala

New Care Options for Childbirth in Rural Areas

Juana Pop is a 23-year-old indigenous mother of three from rural Alta Verapaz. “When I was close to the due date of my second child, complications developed. There was no overnight facility near the hospital so I had to return home and wait. Now, with my third child, I had complications again. This time I stayed in the maternity house for five days,” she said.

Juana recalls, “The long distance was the main reason for me to stay in the maternity house close to my due date. If I had had [to] wait at home for my labor to start, maybe I would not have had time enough to receive medical assistance.”

As a result of HEPP support for the Healthy Motherhood Law and civil society advocacy, seven new maternity houses are operational and/or under construction in areas with high maternal mortality ratios. These facilities enable more women to give birth with assistance from trained medical personnel. Funding for these culturally appropriate facilities comes from local governments, in coordination with the Ministry of Health.

Overview

Guatemala faces serious challenges in its health, nutrition, and education sectors, including high maternal and neonatal mortality, a rising number of pregnancies among girls ages 10–14, and a low number of children attending school beyond fourth grade. These problems are particularly acute among indigenous populations that experience high levels of poverty. According to the UN Development Program’s 2009–2010 *Human Development Report*, about 80 percent of indigenous people live in poverty, compared with less than half of non-indigenous people.

From 2011–2015, the USAID-funded Health and Education Policy Program (HEPP) focused on improving accountability, governance, and equity within these social sectors. Using a multisectoral approach, the program aimed to create an enabling policy environment for more targeted and efficient investment in the sectors, with the objectives of improving transparency and increasing access to high-quality services.

Greater Transparency Improves Governance

HEPP’s support promoted the transparent use of public resources allocated to health, nutrition, and education. Direct technical assistance was provided to ministries and sectoral advisory groups to analyze current policy; draft, review, and finalize policies and procedures; and gain support and consensus among key stakeholders to support legislative changes. With its partners, the program strengthened the legal framework that enables greater investment in reproductive health and education.

- Secured yearly congressional budget riders that remove import duties on essential drugs, including contraceptives—resulting in millions of dollars saved annually and a more reliable supply of reproductive health commodities.
- Established legislation requiring additional formal education for new teachers. As a result, more than 4,000 new teachers have graduated from Guatemalan training schools with two more years’ preparation than their predecessors.

Citizen Participation Leads to Action

At the community level, HEPP strengthened the capacity of civil society networks to engage with the government agencies responsible for health, nutrition, and education. As a result, civil society organizations have gained a role in discussing and creating policy and media outlets now draw on their expertise.

- Promoted civil society participation in implementation of the Healthy Motherhood Law and its regulations. Civil society’s monitoring activities, feedback on healthcare services, and advocacy for improvements have had an impact at the community level:

“Education is the key to prevent unplanned pregnancies and to make positive changes for our communities.”

Ana Nohemí Chel, member of REDMISAR-Quiché



Photo by HEPP Guatemala, Jaroslava Lémus

Selected Publications

Tracking the Innovative Use of Alcohol Taxes to Support Family Planning: Guatemala

Dos caminos: Guatemala presente y futuro

Y después de primaria, Guatemala 2010–2050

- Increased the number of maternity houses
- Created special spaces for culturally sensitive childbirth, allowing indigenous women to give birth according to their preferences
- Deployed staff who speak the community's language

Robust Information Systems Facilitate Unprecedented Access to Data

In collaboration with the government, HEPP facilitated improved data management for advocacy, analysis, planning, and policy monitoring in the social sectors:

- Developed the National Social Information System (SNIS), which enables all government agencies with social policy responsibilities to easily access timely information required for decision making, planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- Promoted the future sustainability of the SNIS by supporting the implementation of (1) a system that enables institutions to generate and manage strategic information and (2) a knowledge management system that makes capacity development resources, including self-learning courses, available to their staff.

The Way Forward

Achieving further progress in Guatemala's social sectors requires continued promotion of civil society engagement, increases in government resources and their efficient use, and a greater focus on transparency and accountability.

- **Further increase social participation and the sustainability of organized groups**
 - Strengthen national and local youth organizations to participate in policy dialogue in support of health and sex education services.
 - Expand civil society participation in local government development councils (regional, departmental, and municipal).
- **Promote increased government funding and more efficient resource allocation**
 - Stimulate policy dialogue between civil society organizations and decisionmakers about the resources required to achieve universal and equitable healthcare coverage.
 - Advocate the allocation of tobacco tax revenues to improving healthcare in rural areas.
- **Strive for greater transparency, access to information, and accountability of government institutions**
 - Collaborate with the ministries of health and education to improve information systems and planning and monitoring methodologies, and to implement operational policies that facilitate transparency and accountability.

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