

Lessons learned and good practices

in the project:

“Political participation of indigenous and Non-indigenous women in Guatemala”

Contract: DCI-NSAPVD/2008/163-164

*Implemented by CODEFEM-NCA
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CMM	Municipal Commission of Women
CODEFEM	Collective for the Defense of Women's Rights
CONAPREVI	National Coordinator for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
DEMI	Defense of Indigenous Women
EC	European Commission
GGM	Guatemalan Group of Women
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
OMM	Municipal Office for Women
SEPREM	Presidential Secretariat for Women
VAW	Violence against women

I. Introduction

The project: an experience that we have reflected upon

As partners that have worked together for several years, NCA and CODEFEM implemented the Project "*Political participation of indigenous and Non-indigenous women in Guatemala*" between December 2008 and December 2011. This project had funding from the European Commission under budget line 21.03.01 of the Non-State Actors program, and from NCA itself.

The objectives that guided the actions taken were:

1. To strengthen the knowledge, skills and capabilities of indigenous and non-indigenous women to ensure that they influence municipal management processes.
2. To help strengthen the capabilities of municipal and state-level officials to institutionalize standards and mechanisms that guarantee participation and organization by women in the municipality.

The project drew strategic lines of action to support the exercise of citizenship of women's participation in public affairs that affect their rights, and to this end, we supported the development of individual and collective capabilities. We also sought to change municipal official's attitudes and visions in the relationship between men and women, particularly in: men in positions of community authority and men living close to women (partners, children). Likewise, the project promoted processes aimed at accomplishing the implementation of public policies and to institutionalize spaces mandated to address the requirements and needs of women, all of this focused on the municipal level.

A qualitative diagnosis, or baseline for each location in the area of coverage was done during the first year, and based on it, means and content were designed to give assistance to project beneficiaries according to their situation. This effort also guided the content, ways and conditions in which education/training processes would take place based on the needs and conditions of beneficiary groups. Education/training was aimed at specialization and for extension workers. In other words, a large number of women (and men) were able to benefit from education activities, exchanges and other forms of learning in communities thanks to the fact that another group of beneficiary women that participated in a specialized course supported this huge effort.

Also during the first year, processes for municipal level advocacy started around the demand to establish Municipal Offices for Women (OMM in Spanish) and give them resources. Efforts were made to place beneficiary women in contact with public agencies working around the topic of prevention, sanction and care mechanisms related to violence against women.

The baseline study led to the incorporation of three methodological variants as of the second year, namely:

- A strategy to approach the men who are in close relation to women such as husbands, partners and children, through education and awareness-raising processes. During the course of this action, men with community or municipal responsibilities joined the process. The original idea, to have a separate discussion with these authorities, did not take place.

- Systematic care for boys and girls who participate with their mothers in training activities by offering them care and child development activities with dedicated personnel and material prepared specifically to this end.
- The inclusion of group healing techniques as a way to address violence against women and help them recover trust in themselves.

These three actions reinforced the comprehensive approach of the project, representing innovations that added strategic value and are the aspects most valued by women in target groups.

Another major change in the project was the concentration of the geographic area covered by the project originally planned. First, because in some municipalities, the new elected authorities did not demonstrate readiness to cooperate with project objectives, or conditions to work with groups of targeted women were not found. Second, logistical difficulties caused some geographic dispersion shown by the monitoring of the EC (30.03.2010), and finally and more importantly, precisely this wide area of intervention challenged the development of a community intervention model with diversified strategies that CODEFEM had opted for after the baseline study was performed.

Thus, the project was carried out in twelve municipalities with women's organizations, on two levels:

- Municipal level women's organizations in 7 municipalities: San Juan Ermita (Chiquimula) Cuchumatán Cuilco and Todos Santos (Huehuetenango), San Andrés and San Bartolo Sajcabajá Jocotenango (Quiché), San Pablo La Laguna and Santa Clara La Laguna (Sololá)
- Community level women's organizations in 5 additional municipalities: Communities of Palestine (Solola), Santa Maria (Quiché); Sacchumbá (Huehuetenango), Piedra Parada and Dos Quebradas (Chiquimula)

Municipal organizations are organizations that include women's groups in all the communities of a municipality, for example, municipal women's committees or municipal networks of women's groups. The second is clearly a community expression of the association or group. However, in every case, advocacy activities were carried out with municipal governments and public institutions were approached in the municipality. On the other hand, even when the women's organization is a municipal organization, the project maintained community support in coordination with OMM, CMM or other organizations.

Despite the experience of more than ten years that CODEFEM already had in the field of women's organization, political advocacy, specialized training models, and innovations that it had included in fighting violence against women, this project challenged its methodological and political capabilities, and as a result, certain areas became their way of doing and thinking strategies and projects, and strengthened them.

For this reason, NCA and CODEFEM decided to engage in an exercise through consultation services to identify lessons learned from project successes and failures or experiences in general, as well as to identify aspects that may be considered to be good practices. This seeks to increase work quality through learning and the institutionalization of good practices in work with women.

II. Summary of lessons learned and good practices

The purpose of this section is to offer a reading of lessons collectively identified by participants, namely:

Institutional learning culture

CODEFEM is an organization that promotes new ideas provided that they are tested in the field. It takes risks to innovate and is open to admitting mistakes. It is a good practice to constantly promote the professional and political education of the staff because it involves a long-term commitment with women's rights.

The horizontal institutional management model allows the empowerment of every person as well as collective learning although, at times, this model encounters difficulties to make decisions or to ensure compatibility in issues which must include managerial treatment.

Among the limitations in learning, the broad and detailed system of information records available is not developed to the point to allow the efficient recovery of this information. Other limiting factors are the lack of documented institutional memory and opportunities for more regular thought processes.

Design and planning; context management

To produce a diagnosis or baseline directly with women is a good practice because of the relevance and effectiveness due to the strategy that a baseline involves. In systematizing this process, however, time frames must be reduced to do it in a way that the value of opportunity is not lost. At any rate, before completing the diagnosis, the organization can act on the basis of clearer initial diagnosis indications.

In project design and development, experience showed that it is necessary to establish a more adequate internal mechanism that makes it possible to receive contributions from right persons with an initial and ending process plan, to be more realistic with objectives and time frames and ultimately enhance capabilities to better think of indicator formulation.

Institutional capabilities to operate the project

The lesson learned is that a good starting point for the project depends on good preparation to set up administrative and logistical systems and schedule reviews. Operations starting date should be better estimated on the basis of this and substantial issues must be negotiated in the case of amendments to the project.

In the area of accountability, good practices have been the coordination between administrative and programmatic teams to cross information and confirm budget execution jointly; there is also the internal tradition of jointly producing and validating administrative instruments, to ensure ownership, as well as the use of an integrating financial accounting system. Limitations were: internal capabilities to make the production of reports and the use of adequate formats more

efficient. Learning focuses on the need to complete the registration system with means that make it possible to recover information efficiently.

Good practices in the area of personnel management (human resources) now favor the development of a policy which is consistent with rights, that includes personnel education and development; the choice of persons who know the language and culture of each location; performance development, job descriptions with a clear profile of what CODEFEM expects from each person working there; standardized compensation and benefits and particularly securing resources for medical care and pregnancies.

Education and organization processes with women. The fight against VAW

The best training strategy emerged to make the diagnosis with care and to create an environment of trust and respect with women. It is still necessary to have work guidelines for healing, political identity and advocacy while recovering the knowledge and experience of the project. This would complement already available methodological documents.

Regarding training, the following are considered to be good practices:

- The trust process developed with women that made it possible to better understand their situation and specific needs.
- Inclusion of children who participate with their mothers, in activities for their own development to find joint solutions to cover materials and food needs together with groups of women.
- Inclusion of healing and identity in the training process to address and link the situation of violence against women with the conditions to participate and exercise their citizenship.

Regarding support for organizational efforts by women, CODEFEM implemented the practice of avoiding presenting itself with preconceived ideas on organizational models. It supported the various forms of organizations through which women build their citizenship in full respect for these forms of organization and support with clear criteria as to the collective nature of the work, shared leaderships, renewal, communications and role distribution. Whether at municipal or community level, support was provided to transform relationships among women and between them and authorities.

Good practices of the project are: working more from the community level by building identity and a sense of belonging, common interests and their own language. Building agendas or prioritized needs is good exercise for several dimensions of the organization.

In the fight against VAW, the most important lesson was the need to verify how important and beneficial it was for women to address traumas and build identity; it allowed opening the road to participation since it is important to address emotions, to “feel affection, appreciate their body, reduce stress, and get rid of everything that violence through life has left as a mark”¹

¹ Learning workshop, January 26, 2012

Awareness-raising among men and communications campaign

The use of awareness-raising and education plans with men taught us that in the fight for equality, both the work of women as of men is necessary. The same is true of inter-ethnic relations. It may be more effective to address the subjectivity of men than to threaten with enforcing the law in cases of VAW.

Regarding activities that seek to inform and sensitize the public in general about the problems of inequality and discrimination against women, the project taught that it is necessary to pay more attention to how to evaluate the impact that these activities have, and how they can be linked to the various activities that seek to transform ideas, beliefs and attitudes that oppose women's rights.

Local and municipal advocacy

The project showed that through a variety of ways to approach authorities, through cooperation and political advocacy it is possible to open roads provided that women's organizations strengthen their own organizational experiences in this area at the same time. Although, in general, the conclusion is that still, for authorities to meet policies or mechanisms foreseen in the Law, it is necessary to insist in demanding that they do. On the other hand, the project taught us that women still need to make headways to acquire ownership of these mechanisms, in public policies and in the demand for proper compliance. For example, to better use OMM but to advocate so that they are allotted personnel and adequate resources.

III. Final thoughts

Relevance of the intervention model

The project that was completed is highly relevant to the problems of rural, indigenous and non-indigenous women that it proposed and sought to respond to in its objectives. On the one hand, there is the issue of lack of education and information, among other things, that limit the influential presence of women in municipal public management. On the other hand, another issue is the limited capacity of local authorities to enforce public policy standards and mechanisms that would favor this participation and attention to women's needs and demands.

The project addressed those two lines of action. However, in view of the complex problems faced by women, we seek to offer a more comprehensive response that highlights: addressing VAM and the pioneering work with men.

The original design of the project did not include violence against women as a line of action. However, it was added after producing the baseline, since CODEFEM-NCA recognizes that VAM prevent women from exercising their right to decide about their own lives or to make independent decisions, because they are subordinated or because they risk violence. The project found that many women face traumas from living a life of violence or for having endured it during the civil war. And thus, we opted for giving women specific tools and opportunities to address them, with techniques that allow them to do introspection and talk about them. Of these, the groups value particularly massages and breathing exercises that they have included routinely in their meetings and in their relationship with their daughters and husbands. In other words, something that is relevant to their needs in several aspects of life. Regarding work with men, this was directly requested by women. And although it was not sufficiently done, outcomes can be appreciated where male community authorities now have sound work agreements with women, or where the partners of women have changed their attitudes regarding the tradition about giving them permission to participate.

For this reason it is necessary to challenge the "discourse that recognizes women's participation but forget to mention the position of subordination and particularly the risk of violence they live in, which is precisely what prevents them from participating."²

Among the relevant strategies of the project, the vision that it is necessary to support all forms of participation and all possible roads through which women look for answers to their demands and needs, since this is the nature of processes to build the citizenship of women. Without a preconceived idea, we opted for supporting the different ways in which they were grouped, and to make contributions towards better leadership practices, to share tasks and to create an identity in their fight. The inclusion of identity as one of the four main themes of the education-training plan was complemented with the preference to support community organization processes, for it is there that identities that lead to greater cohesion come together.

In the light of the institutional municipal context, we can say that the project was not always able to open up an adequate dialogue with the authorities. It had to try different ways of doing this, from technical cooperation with officials from the OMM and other Municipal agencies, combining

² NCA, Regional office. 2011-2015 Program

cooperation and advocacy and including efforts for women to occupy positions in development councils; looking for partnerships with public agencies such as SEPREM and CONAPREVI; knocking on the doors of other national agencies present in municipalities, as well as more personal approaches in efforts to sensitize men and to train women.

Last, the project was relevant to institutional objectives of responsible organizations. However, it also questioned some of its program assumptions. The project's experience strengthened and at the same time challenged CODEFEM's strategic plan. For example regarding work with men, as the CODEFEM team has put it, in feminist organizations it is not addressed that way. Currently, the strategy to work with men has been accepted internally but its scope and how much it will be included is still under discussion. Other strategies like addressing VAM was not a novelty for the organization, but the project led to the consolidation of this approach thanks to the partnership with the Maya Women Group Kaqla with whom this effort was started.

When developing sensitization and education plans with men, CODEFEM delves more seriously into the field of changing ideas, beliefs and attitudes around aspects of the very strong cultural roots like inequality (gender and ethnic). Greater qualitative progress could have been achieved if this process had been linked to a communication campaign conducted on the same theme but aimed at a broader audience, particularly if both plans had had tools, even if experimental, to measure its effect on ideas, beliefs and attitudes in the groups to which they were aimed. In general, this is an area where progress needs to be made, not only at CODEFEM, in order to be aware of the scope of these campaign strategies.

A. Elements of sustainability

As shown by the reports of meetings with groups of women from San Juan Ermita and Santa María Jocopilas, benefits appear to be long-lasting in terms of knowledge and key skills acquired, trust in verbalizing in front of a group, clarity of what they want, and at the same time, of what they can expect from local authorities, and the quickness with which they included what they learned into their routine. By 2012, when the project is no longer operating, they have a work plan and ways to follow the plan, they are better connected with public agencies in relation with the rights of women, they have experienced advocacy activities that go beyond the traditional asking for things, and in many places, women's groups are more closely linked to community authorities usually dominated by men.

At individual level, the changes of attitude by many women has encouraged others to wish to accomplish the same. The project closing evaluation picked up several testimonies.

These elements provide sustainability more on the side of social demands than on the side of public supply, since, in general, having laws and mechanisms enacted which further the many years of work of women's organizations throughout the country has already been accomplished.

Today, the challenge continues to be to give them adequate human and material resources to enforce these laws. For example, Municipal Code reforms in 2010 that establish the obligation to allocate resources to OMM. The vulnerability over which municipal accomplishments are built is even more serious because they are rarely respected with the change of authorities.

The project witnessed experiences where the mere change of individuals meant a change in the situation of women, sometimes favorable, sometimes unfavorable.

B. Cooperation between NCA and CODEFEM

This relationship is several years strong since both share program visions and strategies in the area of women and governance and the fight against VAW. The relationship is sound also because the commitment to work with a long-term process view is shared. This is made evident through sustained though modest funding, which focuses on the priorities that have been outlined from the project's experience.

In the project "*Political participation of indigenous and Non-indigenous women in Guatemala*", both organizations made an effort to ensure that the new activities that were not considered in the original design would be covered with the same resources, although finally NCA had to contribute more financial resources than originally promised.

At the start of the project, the direct assistance provided by NCA to establish proper administrative and financial systems to respond to CE requirements was very useful. For its part, CODEFEM opened up the possibility for the internal changes involved. Among the most important lessons learned by both organizations was the need to fine-tune mechanisms for the joint development of proposals and to strengthen documentation and follow-up systems, as well as better technical development of indicators.

Finally, NCA and CODEFEM did not pass this opportunity up to identify their lesson learned and turn it into good practices that are included in their work from here on to the future.

C. Recommendations to share and institutionalize good practices and lessons learned.

In summary, the recommendation is to pay attention to some items to make better use of the lesson learned; these are still the object of internal discussions on how to define these proposals.

To institutionalize the good practices identified in the project, the proposal is:

- 1) To keep an open culture to learning in CODEFEM, by strengthening joint work practices by program and administrative teams, by broadening the flow of information among all the teams, by systematizing personnel training; by promoting methodological innovation; by documenting institutional memory; and by keeping specific moments for the thought process and learn about their own practices every year.
- 2) To keep and strengthen CODEFEM good practices in working with others, in looking for and taking advantage of partnerships with women's organizations, in the public sector and in NGOs. A good understanding of the strategic importance of working with others, in teams, their reasons to do it, and to develop ways to do it should be a permanent part of internal training plans. To have a short document of this partnership policy and of work with others will ensure common basic understanding.
- 3) To write methodological guides and material with basic content on the main themes for education and training. More than calling them "manuals", guides make it possible to keep readiness open to review and permanently improve those instruments, and not give the feeling that a manual is cast in stone.
- 4) We recommend that on issues related to greater innovation, such as addressing VAW, healing, identity, care for boys and girls, and work with men, time be invested carefully to systematize and define the methodological approach and criteria with which these issues will be addressed, and how they are linked to other program components.

- 5) To coordinate these new internal documents with existing documents to create a set of institutional policies to determine how CODEFEM carries out programs. To this end, we should clarify the internal mechanism to build, validate and make said policies official.
- 6) To develop a personnel management system (human resources) that includes good selection, hiring, compensation and social security practices, as they are described in the appropriate section of Chapter II of this document. To write this policy in times of resource crisis requires a dose of realism without sacrificing its institutional identity as a women's rights defense organization. This is a very important added value.
- 7) To institutionalize the experience of making a diagnosis for the baseline with qualitative and participatory approaches, by systematizing the process in a guide that includes successes and failures for these processes not to take any longer than needed to produce quality results without losing their opportunity value.

To improve program quality, the experience of the project suggests the need to strengthen some internal areas.

- 8) To fine-tune internal mechanisms in the relationship with NCA to produce proposals with more participants, and a flowchart indicating where the process begins and where it ends. In addition, to organize internal training to improve "smart" objective and indicator development, by drawing from our own experience the type of indicators that might be better for political advocacy and women's rights programs.
- 9) To be accountable and improve program quality it is necessary to review and improve current record-keeping and information recovery by including an intermediate moment to consolidate information and thus permit report production. On the other hand, to include report production focused on internal training outcome analysis, particularly for field reports. Experience showed that it is not enough to have a format if there is no understanding of where the importance of an action lies.
- 10) Last, but not least, to reestablish the ability to monitor indicators. Once there is more capacity to develop adequate indicators for the intention of the project which are feasible and useful to render accounts, we recommend organizing a simple and agile mechanism to confirm indicator progress once or twice per year, depending on the seasonality of each project.

Maribel Carrera/ 02.24.2012