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SUCCESS STORY

Cobán Bets on Communication to Improve Municipal Services

USAID supports local initiatives to invest in people and meet basic needs.



The Municipality of Cobán, Alto Verapaz, with the technical and financial support of PDGL, developed a “Communications Strategy” that will serve as a guide for initiating changes in the way services are provided to its citizens.

“The meetings that will take place in towns (aldeas) of the municipality will be very important because they will help us to know if what we are doing is right or wrong. This motivates us to move forward,” said Lily Caal, head of the Social Development Unit in the Municipality of Cobán.

The Municipal Council of Cobán is conscious of the need to promote dialogue and transparency in order to improve municipal employee performance and foster good relations with citizens. With this in mind, the municipality initiated the development of an “Internal and External Communication Strategy” with the support of USAID Guatemala’s Decentralization and Local Governance Program (PDGL, acronym in Spanish), in May of 2005.

One of PDGL’s lower level results is to introduce innovative means of communication at the municipal level. As part of the assistance to Cobán, the task of developing a communication strategy has been a central focus. The Program placed short-term advisors who worked with the municipality to compile information using surveys and interviews of citizens and municipal workers, as well as conducting several participatory workshops with municipal employees.

The time-consuming and arduous work produced results as exemplified during the public ceremony to present the finished document on March 23, 2007. Municipal employees, workers, council members, and journalists were in attendance. During the event, Hugo Urizar, an employee who gave his testimony said: “Definitely, human relations are essential to improving service for the people. I, as a municipal messenger, for example, must practice tolerance.”

Internally, meeting minutes, the “employee of the semester” program, the Job Description Manual, and the Public Relations Unit are some products of the communication strategy that are already improving the work of municipal employees. At the external level, the news bulletin “Bolemuni” is helping to keep citizens informed about municipal affairs. In addition, workshops have been set up to help municipal employees improve their customer service skills.

“This is only a first step, but to meet the objective of improving internal and external communication, it is necessary that the municipality commits itself to the implementation [of the strategy] so that it indeed becomes a vehicle which allows the municipality to better serve the population,” concluded Carlos Loría Chaves, the director of PDGL, when presenting the strategy.