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GUATEMALA

SUCCESS STORY

Building Institutions to Link Community Groups to Local Government

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



Located in the highlands of San Marcos Department, the Municipality of Tajumulco has 49,363 residents, of which 82 percent live in extreme poverty. The Municipality was one of the most severely affected by Hurricane Stan, with damage to bridges and roads connecting its residents across ravines.

After the devastation of Hurricane Stan, more than 100 community groups attempted to rebuild. However, the scale of damage was too great for these small groups. PDGL has helped establish the Municipal Development Council, which can now coordinate the large infrastructure projects.

Before Hurricane Stan devastated the Municipality of Tajumulco, more than 125 community groups (COCODES) had been established across 20 micro-regions of the municipality. However, the Municipal Development Council (COMUDE) had yet to be fully established. As a result, the municipality was ill-equipped in the aftermath of the hurricane to supervise and implement Government-financed infrastructure rehabilitation projects in a way that involved citizen participation.

As part of its Hurricane Stan program, USAID Guatemala's Decentralization and Local Governance Program (PDGL, acronym in Spanish) is helping the municipality of Tajumulco to strengthen its planning and project execution capabilities. A key component of this technical assistance has been helping the municipality to form a COMUDE. Tajumulco is dispersed over a large territory separated by ravines and cliffs, so a COMUDE is essential to uniting the municipality's more than one hundred diverse community groups in their efforts to rebuild.

PDGL technical assistance included helping to build the political will among elected municipal officials and community leaders to establish the COMUDE; addressing the legal aspects of its formation; and providing assistance in organizing the election of the COMUDE members.

As a result of USAID assistance, on 2 May 2007 the Municipality of Tajumulco held a citizen assembly in which representatives from 135 COCODEs selected 20 community representatives and 20 alternatives to the COMUDE, following the process established by the Citizen Participation Law. This selection took into account the issue of balance in regional representation, ensuring that the diverse communities of Tajumulco will have equal voices in the COMUDE.

In July 2007, the COMUDE will hold its first meeting and begin facilitating the management of three large bridge re-building projects funded by the national government, as well as other projects financed by the Social Investment Fund.