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GUATEMALA

SUCCESS STORY

Working to Increase Voter Participation of Disadvantaged Groups

USAID supports the goals of the Election Commission in Quiché, Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz and Chimaltenango



[RENAP, PDGL, 2007]

Elections in Guatemala will be decentralized to local communities for the first time in 2007. Though this presents an opportunity for greater voter turnout, it has also caused confusion about polling locations. PDGL is working with TSE to inform voters about where they can go to cast their ballots in an effort to increase voter participation, especially among women and indigenous people.

"We are grateful for the activities that are taking place, because we had very little information about the elections and where to go to vote. Now we know where to go," said Juana Osorio, resident of the community of Chuacamán II in Santa Cruz del Quiché

During Guatemala's 2003 elections, participation by women in the electoral process was startlingly low. In numerous municipalities, less than 26 percent of women voted. USAID's Decentralization and Local Governance Program (PDGL, acronym in Spanish) is providing crucial support to Guatemala's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE, acronym in Spanish) in the effort to increase indigenous and women's participation in the 2007 elections in 13 selected municipalities in the departments of Quiché, Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz and Chimaltenango.

In order to improve these dismal participation numbers, the TSE, with the help of PDGL, launched an electoral promotion campaign targeting women and indigenous people on July 17 and 19, 2007, in the cities of Santa Cruz del Quiché and Chiquimula, respectively.

In order to inform the population about various aspects of the 2007 election process, PDGL has helped carry out several activities. These include organizing roundtable discussions and establishing information kiosks directed toward community leaders who can then act as agents to further disseminate the information in their communities.

During these informational sessions, citizens can learn about the basic aspects of the electoral process, including voting requirements, the importance of voting for a democratic society, locations of polling stations, decentralization of voting, etc.

"We had some information about the elections, but we also had many questions. Through this activity, they were answered," said Lázaro Osorio, resident of the community of Chuacamán II in Santa Cruz del Quiché. To date, five roundtables have been held. All of them had significant levels of women participation, and where relevant, as in San Antonio Ilotenango, were conducted in the local language of K'iché in order to be more accessible to indigenous residents, particularly women.

In order to reinforce the information provided in the roundtable discussions and at the informational kiosks, mass media were also used, including radio, television, and print media. This has helped to get the word out to more members of the communities, which in the end will result in greater participation in the elections.