



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

GUATEMALA

SUCCESS STORY

Municipal Associations Engage in Decentralization Dialogue

USAID strengthens municipal associations' participation in national policy dialogue.



The Guatemalan Mayors' National Association (ANAM) and the Guatemalan Association of Mayors and Indigenous Authorities (AGAAI) requested that studies be performed by USAID's PDGL program to keep the civil registrations in the city halls and to defend municipal autonomy.

"We are conscious that there should be a specific identification document that RENAP is pursuing, but this should not be centralized in the capital without the participation of 332 municipalities that have experience in this type of service", said Selvin Garcia, President of the ANAM.

Civil registration in Guatemala has historically been carried out at the municipal level, with city halls responsible for issuing vital documents such as birth and death certificates. The recently-passed National Civil Registry (RENAP) law centralizes this process in Guatemala City.

In response to potential problems with the law, the Guatemalan Mayors' National Association (ANAM) and the Guatemalan Association of Indigenous Mayors and Authorities (AGAAI), requested that USAID's Decentralization and Local Governance Program (PDGL, acronym in Spanish) undertake a study to assess the impact that the law would have on citizens, municipalities, the decentralization process, and law enforcement.

The study highlighted negative consequences of the law, noting that it would create chaos with its changes to the procedures for obtaining birth, marriage and death certificates. "It is inhumane that a mother who has just given birth must travel long distances in order to register her child", said Alberto Aguilar, president of AGAAI.

Through its decentralization and municipal strengthening work, PDGL has strengthened the ability of associations such as ANAM and AGAAI to engage in national policy dialogue, representing the interests of the citizens in their municipalities. ANAM and AGAAI recognized that RENAP in its original form would be contrary to those interests and voiced their concerns to the national government.

As a result of these actions, on May 15, 2007, the Guatemalan Congress delayed RENAP's implementation from September 2007 to April 2008 in order to better address the problematic aspects of the law. ANAM and AGAAI will work with the Congress to reform the law such that it takes into account the important role of the municipalities in the civil registration.

PDGL has helped these associations find their voice, and they are using it to increase the devolution of responsibilities to the local level, resulting in greater responsiveness to citizen needs.