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**HEALTH POLICY
INITIATIVE**

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Guatemala Congress Establishes Policy Monitoring Board

New board will monitor implementation of FP/RH and HIV policies



A WOMAN AND HER TWO DAUGHTERS
WAITING AT THE HEALTH CENTER IN
CHICHICASTENANGO, QUICHE, GUATEMALA
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“This study draws attention to the idea that in Guatemala now, health is a comprehensive problem that involves many groups and is not just a health sector issue.”

- Rossana Cervantes,
SEGEPLAN

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In March 2008, the Congress in Guatemala signed a Memorandum of Understanding that established a Monitoring Board for Reproductive Health (RH). The board’s mandate includes:

- monitoring implementation of the *Social Development Law*, the *Policy on Social Development and Population*, the *Law on Universal and Equitable Access to Family Planning*, the *Law on Combating HIV and AIDS*, and all related international agreements;
- finding new sources for RH funding (and ensuring that designated funds from the alcohol tax reach RH programs); and
- spreading awareness about reproductive health as it pertains to gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

A major catalyst for this action was application of the Policy Implementation Assessment Tool (hereafter “the tool”), designed by the USAID | Health Policy Initiative. “Policy implementation” refers to the mechanisms, resources, and relationships that link health policy to program delivery. Policies are not always implemented after they are adopted, and often do not achieve desired results. Therefore, the Health Policy Initiative identified the need to create a user-friendly approach to monitor policy implementation. The objective of the tool is to engage in-country stakeholders in a discussion about the nature and extent of implementation of a specific policy.

The assessment team in Guatemala consisted of representatives of the Ministry of Health’s Reproductive Health Program, the General Secretary for Planning (SEGEPLAN), the Guatemalan Association of Women Physicians, and the Health Policy Initiative.

The core team assessed the implementation of the *Social Development and Population Policy* (SDPP). Because of the SDPP’s broad scope (the policy encompasses five complementary areas of social development), the study focused on the reproductive health portion of the policy, which calls for reducing maternal and infant mortality. The study team identified the two departments with the highest (Alta Verapaz) and lowest (Sacatepequez) maternal mortality rates in Guatemala to conduct the study. The findings show that the tool provides a

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The Health Policy Initiative created and applied an eight-step approach in Guatemala:

- (1) Select the policy based on specific criteria
- (2) Form a country-based, multisectoral team to lead each stage of the assessment process
- (3) Determine parameters and expectations, based on the time period and resources available and the scope of the policy
- (4) Adapt questionnaires to fit the local context and policy
- (5) Select key informants, including policymakers, implementers, and other stakeholders
- (6) Conduct interviews
- (7) Organize and analyze the data identify key themes
- (8) Disseminate and discuss the findings

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straightforward, relatively inexpensive, and participatory approach to capture information about implementation.

After conducting 36 interviews with policymakers and implementers and analyzing data, the core team held a dissemination meeting to present the study's findings to about 50 stakeholders. Presenters and attendees at the meeting included representatives of civil society groups, department-level authorities, donors, and universities, among others. The Vice Minister of Health opened the meeting, highlighting the health ministry's commitment to addressing reproductive health.

A CATALYST FOR ACTION

The Policy Implementation Assessment Tool proved to be a catalyst for action in Guatemala. As a result of the dissemination meeting in March 2008:

- The team drafted a brief that details the findings of the assessment and outlines steps for improving implementation. The brief has sparked dialogue among NGOs, members of Congress, Departmental Development Councils, and MOH and SEGEPLAN at central and decentralized levels.
- The Congress in Guatemala signed a Memorandum of Understanding with civil society to form a national Monitoring Board for Reproductive Health in Guatemala.
- Using the results from the assessment, the Health Policy Initiative is helping a local committee draft a monitoring and evaluation plan for the SDPP.
- Due to interest generated by follow-up policy dialogue, the tool is now being applied to HIV laws and policies in Guatemala and El Salvador.

LESSONS LEARNED

The tool's application in Guatemala confirmed the value of local stakeholder involvement and the importance of multisectoral dissemination and discussion. By incorporating these elements, the Health Policy Initiative assured that the tool became, and can continue to be, a catalyst for action.