



USAID/GUATEMALA PEACEBUILDING PROJECT

The Peacebuilding Project, known as the *Tejiendo Paz* project in Spanish, is a five-year USAID project implemented by Creative Associates in partnership with PartnersGlobal and ProPaz. The project is designed to reduce social conflict and violence and strengthen social cohesion at the community and municipal levels in four departments of the Western Highlands of Guatemala (Huehuetenango, Quiché, San Marcos, and Totonicapán), as well as strengthen the Government of Guatemala's (GoG) capacity in managing and responding to local conflicts.

THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

Social conflict pervades Guatemala, particularly affecting rural communities in the Western Highlands. How can we effect change at the individual and community levels, as well as at the socio-political level, to increase social cohesion and reduce violence?

THE RESPONSE

Social conflicts manifest in many ways. Roadblocks and public protests are common examples, but many cases escalate into further conflict and violence. These tensions, perpetuated by entrenched corruption, play out against a backdrop of endemic poverty, inequality, insecurity, and weak institutions. GoG institutions, many of which have been recently restructured, struggle with low levels of citizen confidence due to challenges in serving rural communities. The historic marginalization of indigenous people in Guatemala magnifies these issues and has weakened the social fabric of these communities. Having suffered devastating losses during the internal armed conflict, communities in the Western Highlands are particularly vulnerable to conflict and violence. This unbroken cycle of insecurity and conflict feeds directly into the high levels of migration from this region of Guatemala.

The project addresses the underlying causes of social conflict by focusing on four general categories: 1) youth, gender, and families; 2) governance; 3) land; and 4) natural resources. Through a community-based development approach, *Tejiendo Paz* engages community authorities and leaders, women and youth in transforming conflict, restoring the social fabric and building peace in their communities. *Tejiendo Paz* strengthens the capacity of statutory and traditional governing institutions to respond to local conflicts and builds their partnerships with communities, repairing trust



and supporting social cohesion within and between communities. The project has identified 130 potential partner communities in 15 municipalities in four departments. During FY2020, the project engaged with 27 communities in four municipalities and developed relationships with key GoG institutions.

BEST PRACTICES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Tejiendo Paz strengthens relationships within communities to increase peaceful cooperation. Through participatory processes, community members identify local conflicts, establish peacebuilding priorities, and devise strategies to advance them, culminating in action plans known as “community visions.” Implementing these visions provides opportunities for constructive engagement and serves as a tangible result of peaceful cooperation. *Tejiendo Paz* also strengthens governmental and non-governmental actors at municipal, departmental and national levels, leading to improved institutional effectiveness and legitimacy in addressing conflict through established conflict resolution mechanisms.

The project focuses on engagement with indigenous peoples as partners, which aligns with the USAID/Guatemala Indigenous Engagement Strategy. The participation of indigenous communities is essential for peacebuilding and transforming conflicts. Indigenous authorities are key partners in resolving social conflict and preventing violence. Their ancestral knowledge, systems, and practices are fundamental for the implementation of effective, alternative mechanisms of dialogue, mediation, and negotiation.

Tejiendo Paz and its consortium’s implementation approach is guided by three key pillars: 1) **Systems approach to peacebuilding**: the consortium partners examine not only contextual factors but also the interconnections of institutions, behaviors, and relationships; 2) **Resilience-oriented design**: the project design leverages existing resiliencies at the community and institutional levels to strengthen the social fabric of vulnerable communities; and 3) **Emphasis on prevention**: *Tejiendo Paz* believes that sustained peace is built upon long term efforts to avoid the escalation of grievances and focuses on increasing understanding of prevention as an alternative paradigm to reactive behaviors.

PROJECT IMPACT IN FY2020

During FY 2020, the Peacebuilding Project engaged with 1,676 people in activities that addressed the peaceful management and resolution of conflicts. Of the project participants, 45 percent were women, 32 percent were under 30 years old, and 68 percent were indigenous. The project worked with 876 community members to develop 26 community visions that identify sources of conflict and potential responses. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project delivered prevention kits to community leaders, actively engaging youth in the process. The project also began forming a network of mediators that will serve as a resource that local authorities can call upon to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution. Similarly, the project formed and trained a youth network for peace comprise of 42 young people. The project held 43 coordination meetings related to preventing, managing, and resolving conflict with GoG and civil society representatives. In collaboration with the GoG, the project implemented a campaign to prevent stigma towards migrant returnees during the COVID-19 crisis.

USAID Office: Democracy and Governance
Prime Implementing Partner: Creative Associates
Life of project: May 2018 – May 2023

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