

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 Crisis is particularly devastating for vulnerable communities in the Western Highlands that already experience food insecurity, have limited access to government services, and who depend on an informal economy. The deepening health crisis is exacerbating underlying conflicts and giving rise to new conflicts, particularly related to governance and youth, gender, and families. The severity of the crisis remains to be seen and depends on multiple factors that are hard to predict, but the Peacebuilding Project recognizes that the pandemic may have potentially destructive effects on the social fabric of communities, resulting in heightened tensions and an increase in social conflicts. Over the course of FY2020, the project made important advances in addressing social conflict at the community, municipal and national levels. In the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the project was able to quickly adapt its approach and implement actions that meaningfully addressed social conflict in the context of a health crisis.

The issue of external migration from Guatemala continues to be a priority issue for the United States Government (USG) and the Government of Guatemala (GoG). The Peacebuilding Project understands that social conflict is often a driver of migration and that migration can be a trigger of further conflict. The project baseline survey indicates that individuals who feel more secure in their community are less likely to want to migrate while individuals who have suffered threats of physical violence are more likely to want to migrate. If not addressed, social conflict in the context of the COVID-19 Crisis may have long-term effects on community members' intention to migrate.

The project recognizes that given underlying unresolved conflicts and the emergence of new conflicts during the COVID-19 Pandemic, there is currently a critical window of opportunity to mitigate further conflict and violence in Guatemala. Given advances and relationships established during FY2020, the project is well positioned to respond to these issues.

Summary of Key Achievements and Commitments

Institutional Strengthening: Given the combination of new conflicts emerging during the COVID-19 Pandemic, new authorities taking office following the elections, and challenges facing the institutions responsible for conflict management and human rights, institutional strengthening efforts are particularly critical and were a priority for the Peacebuilding Project in FY2020. Institutional strengthening efforts at the departmental level have been particularly well received and coordination efforts with the Departmental Commissions/Working Groups for Security and Attention to Conflict have been strong. The project signed memorandums of



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understanding (MOUs) with four departmental governments (Huehuetenango, Quiché, Totonicapán, and San Marcos) and has held coordination meetings with government institutions at the departmental level to address conflict during the COVID-19 Crisis. The project also signed an MOU with the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) as a strategic partner in supporting departmental governments.



One of the potential sources of conflict identified at the community level during the COVID-19 Crisis is that many rural communities in the Western Highlands are fearful over migrant returnees bringing COVID-19 back to their communities. There are concerns that this could lead to conflict, particularly since there were protests related to their return. In response, the project worked with the GoG to design and implement a communication campaign, known as *A la COVID-19 le Ganamos Unidos*, that encourages communities not to reject or stigmatize the migrant population and those in quarantine or treatment for COVID-19.

The Peacebuilding Project has successfully worked with GoG counterparts to increase their capacity to identify, prevent, address, and responds to local conflict. During FY2020, the project implemented a three-module (nine session) online capacity-building

program on “Crises and Conflict Management in the Western Highlands” for government officials from the *Comisión Presidencial de Derechos Humanos* (COPREDEH), *Procurador de los Derechos Humanos* (PDH), *Secretaría de Asuntos Agrarios* (SAA), *Unidad de Prevención Comunitaria de la Violencia* (UPCV), and two departmental governments. The project also implemented a virtual multi-session awareness-building program on strategic and crisis communications for the leadership and staff of PDH’s Social Communications Directorate.

One of the most effective ways to prevent and mitigate conflict and violence is through an early warning and response system (EWRS) that allows government authorities to recognize and respond to conflicts before they become acute crises. During FY2020, the Peacebuilding Project awarded a small grant for an assessment on the strengths and weaknesses of existing early warning systems and recommendations for a unified system. The assessment has been completed and is being presented to key GoG and non-governmental organization (NGO) stakeholders.

Strategic Partnerships: A key strategic actor in responding to and mitigating local conflict are municipal authorities. During FY2020, the project signed MOUs and established strong relationships with mayors and city councils in the four target municipalities (Chiantla, Comitancillo, San Pedro Necta, and Totonicapán). In the context of the COVID-19 Crisis, municipal authorities play a critical role in mitigating conflict, particularly as related to enforcing prevention measures. In FY2020, the project implemented four municipal inter-



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Firma de MOU Totonicapán.



institutional meeting (one in each target municipality) to support local authorities in coordinating responses to emerging social conflict during the COVID-19 Crisis.

Another key strategic actor in addressing social conflict is the private sector. Over the course of the year, the project has strengthened relationships with the *Asociación de Exportadores de Guatemala (AGEXPORT)* and *Centro para Acción de la Responsabilidad Social Empresarial (CentraRSE)*. The Peacebuilding Project and AGEXPORT signed an MOU in September 2020, which outlines concrete initiatives such as a training on peaceful management of local markets as municipalities are re-opening and implementing COVID-19 prevention measure. This was a common source of conflict identified in all project municipalities and has escalated into violence in some places in the country (please see the Context and Analysis section). The Executive Director of CentraRSE, the largest coalition of private sector companies in Guatemala that supports corporate social responsibility, joined the project Consultative Committee this fiscal year.

The Peacebuilding Project acknowledges the strong correlation between family-level violence and community-level violence. The Western Highlands suffer from high levels of intra-family violence, particularly against women and children, and this issue is being exacerbated by the COVID-19 Crisis. It was also a source of conflict identified in all project communities. In response, the Peacebuilding Project awarded a small grant for the design and implementation of a communication campaign for the prevention and reduction of domestic violence. The campaign was designed in FY2020 and will launch in early FY2021.



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Community Implementation: During FY2020, the project engaged in conflict mitigation and peacebuilding activities with 27 communities in four municipalities. Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the project was implementing the in-person conflict and resilience analysis (CRA) and forming groups of youth and women community members. As of mid-March, in-person activities were suspended for the safety of project participants and staff. However, the community implementation team was able to successfully maintain regular contact with communities via WhatsApp chats, telephone calls, and virtual meetings. The team adapted the original methodology and instead held remote key informant interviews and focus groups. As such, the project was able to finalize drafts of 26 community visions (CVs).



Although there are delays in the implementation of the actions identified in the CVs due to the COVID-19 Crisis, the project worked with community members to identify strategies to address sources of conflict during the pandemic.

As a result, the project delivered prevention kits to community leaders in the 27 communities so that community authorities can continue to engage in governance activities and respond to social conflict during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The project received a matching contribution from the Swiss Embassy for the kits.

A strong community implementation team is key to the success of the Peacebuilding Project activities at the community level. Building local capacity is one of the project's core implementation principals and is critical to building long-term sustainability. The project recruited and trained a team of community facilitators (CFs) that speak Mayan languages and have a strong understanding of Mayan ancestral knowledge, systems, and practices. These skills and knowledge are fundamental in the implementation of effective, alternative mechanisms of dialogue, mediation, and negotiation in the Western Highlands.

Summary of Challenges and Lessons Learned

The main challenge faced during FY2020 was adapting to working virtually and identifying mechanisms to keep implementing the project and supporting communities and partners during the COVID-19 Crisis. The Peacebuilding Project worked remotely from mid-March through the end of the fiscal year. Once the restrictions began to be lifted, some staff opted to return to the office on a limited basis. Project staff attended small, in-person meetings when those meetings were requested by project participants and other key stakeholders and when in compliance with sanitary and social distancing requirements.

FY2020 was marked by governmental transitions and institutional changes, creating challenges related to relationship building and institutional strengthening initiatives. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 Crisis, the project began meeting with incoming GoG officials to present the project and define areas of collaboration. The pandemic initially led to some



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delays in establishing relations and implementing activities, but as noted, the project was able to shift to a largely virtual mode of implementation. By the end of the fiscal year, the project had established strong working relationships with officials at the national, departmental, and municipal levels. These officials have requested continued support from the project in addressing social conflict in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 Crisis.

In July, President Giammattei announced significant changes to institutions responsible for responding to and managing social conflict, including institutions that the project was working closely with. The executive order resulted in the closure of three institutions (COPREDEH, SAA and *Secretaría de la Paz, SEPAZ*) and the creation of the *Comisión de Paz y Derechos Humanos (COPADEFH)*. Without an orderly transition between the recently closed institutions and the new commission, there is the potential for a loss of institutional information and an escalation of conflicts.

Key lessons learned include:

- Entering communities and municipalities using a staggered approach (rather than entering all 15 municipalities and 130 communities at the same time) allowed the project to be strategic in making decisions regarding implementation in the face of funding restrictions and the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting municipal authorities is an even higher priority; working with them is more feasible – both remotely and in small groups -- even when community level activities need to remain on hold.
- Despite challenges related to the COVID-19 Pandemic and institutional changes, GoG representatives remain committed to mitigating and responding to social conflict. Relationships at the departmental level have been particularly strong.

Indicator Data

Key indicator data results during FY2020 include:

- A total of 1676 individuals (746 women and 930 men) participated in project activities that addressed the peaceful management and resolution of conflicts.
 - 314 women participated in a substantive role or position in a peacebuilding process support with USG assistance.
 - 892 individuals (487 women and 405 men) engaged in cooperative community dialogue.
- Of the 27 project communities, 26 have completed the development of community visions in an inclusive and participatory manner.
 - 100 percent of the community strategies (CVs) implemented to address identified sources of conflict were implemented with external support.
- During FY2020, the Peacebuilding Project held 43 coordination meetings related to preventing, managing, and resolving conflict with GoG and NGO representatives.
 - 45 national and local authorities demonstrated an increased capacity to respond to and resolve conflicts at the local, municipal, and/or national levels.



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