

# Strategic Partnership Project



October-November 2010

## SUPPORTING INFORMED DIALOGUE ON SECOND-GENERATION EDUCATION REFORMS IN GUATEMALA

In collaboration with the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL), the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) in Guatemala designed and implemented the project “Supporting Informed Dialogue on Second-Generation Education Policy Reforms” from 2008-2010. Through studies, workshops, discussions, consultations, and other ways of raising awareness and policy advocacy, the project addresses three central themes of education reform: teacher training, modernizing management processes, and strengthening intercultural and educational concepts.

### GUATEMALAN CONTEXT

After prior efforts to reform Guatemala’s education system through its curriculum and enrollment policies, much attention has turned towards policies aimed at improving the substantive quality and relevance of schools. Such proposals are considered “second-generation reforms” because they stem from the challenges left over from the first set of reforms implemented in the 1990s and early 2000s. Progress in these areas is not easy, however. In Guatemala, there have been several attempts to reform the National Education Act and other related legislation to meet the new demands and challenges of the education sector in the country. These attempts have fallen short, however, in part because of insufficient popular consensus and political support for deciding on the more intractable question of “how to move forward.”

### SECOND-GENERATION EDUCATION REFORMS: INFORMING THE DIALOGUE

Based in part on the degree of fractious policy dialogue in Guatemala, PREAL, FLACSO and other project collaborators perceived the need to work towards a basic agreement on necessary reforms in primary and secondary education. Since 2003, FLACSO has worked closely with the Guatemalan Congressional Education Commission, the Ministry of Education, and the National Teachers Union Assembly (ANM) in identifying policy reform options in the education sector. Continuing in this line of work, PREAL began a Strategic Partnership Project in 2007 entitled “Supporting Informed Dialogue on Second-Generation Education Reforms”. The project was designed to strengthen the quality of the national debate on key areas of reform, and to establish areas of common ground between key education stakeholders.

### PROJECT GOALS

To achieve its objectives (See Box 1), the project team formed partnerships with a diverse set of Guatemalan civil society institutions that have been linked to the educational reform process, including the Santiago Development Project (PRODESSA), the National Economic Research Center (CIEN), and the Association for Research and Social Studies (ASIES), from which representatives served on the project’s Technical Advisory Committee. Together with these strategic partners, the project team worked towards four objectives:

- Identify cross-cutting education issues that second-generation reforms could address.
- Develop position papers on identified key issues or national consensus building.
- Conduct a series of focus groups and discussion workshops in five regions of the country, involving representatives from each key social sector on the particular issues identified.
- Identify policy areas that will benefit from specific legislative action and necessary political negotiations within the legislature and between key stakeholders, and will have an impact on education quality in Guatemala.



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Work on the first objective resulted in identification of the following three main substantive areas of second generation education reform, and the subject of four position papers (one per organization on the Technical Advisory Committee):

### 1. Teacher training (both initial and in-service training).

The topic of teacher training has come into focus in recent years, in large part because of disagreements between the ANM and advocates of legislative reform over the proposed dismantling of the traditional normal (non-university) school system of teacher formation in Guatemala.

At the same time as project consultation was underway, the School for Secondary Education Teacher Training (EFPM), together with the ANM and the Ministry of Education (MOE), collaborated on a proposal for a national system of elementary teacher training through the Academic Program of Professional Teacher Development (PADEP-D), which was approved for funding in mid-2009.

### 2. Updating and modernizing school management processes.

There is a belief that education decentralization processes can contribute to the empowerment of local communities, effectively improve and devolve the role of the state, and increase the relevance and quality of education services. At the same time, the debate on decentralization programs in Guatemala – as in much of Central America – has been fractious and relatively lacking in rigor. This topic was identified in the context of the formal closure of the National Self-Management Program for Educational Development (PRONADE) in late 2008.

### 3. Intercultural and bilingual education

Given the large number of distinct indigenous communities in Guatemala and their high rates of poor educational attainment, the project team identified this as a key, cross-cutting topic in need of revision in second-generation reforms. Conception of the topic's parameters includes ways to educate in local languages to preserve and further develop native cultures, while still systematically providing all children access to quality, modern education that prepares them for opportunities outside of their local context. Work in this area aims to reach a governmental agreement on bilingual education and crafting updated, appropriate legislation.

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#### Box 1

### Supporting Informed Dialogue on Second-Generation Education Policy Reforms

#### OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen the capacity of political actors, selected from various sectors, to advance the search for consensus in identifying necessary legislative measures to strengthen and advance the education reform process in the country.
- Advocate for Congress to decide on legislative measures needed to advance the educational reform process, whether they are amendments to existing legislation or drafting new legislation that fits expectations and has the support of stakeholders involved in the process.

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Establish a basic agenda to promote education of second-generation reforms.
- Build trust between the social actors involved in the process of educational reform.
- Provide quality information to those actors and update them on strategic areas of educational policy.
- Raise awareness among parliamentarians of the Committee on Education on the importance of participatory consultation processes to develop the theme that is part of the core agenda defined.
- Support members of the Commission in preparing proposals for amendments to the Education Act, or drafting new legislation, as well as conducting other legislative responsibilities related to the process of educational reform.

## THE CHALLENGE OF SECOND-GENERATION REFORMS

The Strategic Partnership Project began shortly after Guatemala's Congressional Commission on Education organized a conference to identify the issues on which they will focus their legislative discussions, and to allow the Ministry of Education to issue its policy positions on the matters.

As a result, two different diagnostic documents were prepared through the project: a report of the historical risk factors on reform related to the reform issues and a report on the current education policies of the legislature. Both provided an overview of the different ideological positions on the topic of education and educational reform.

Successful completion of the Strategic Partnership Project faced some external obstacles, which forestalled its stated goals of impacting legislation within the short term. These obstacles included a heightened climate of instability related to education reform issues, and an unexpected turnover within the Ministry of Education and within the Congressional Commission on Education.

Nevertheless, progress was made on developing public policy options and attempted consensus building. In 2010, the project's results were presented to the Congressional Committee on Education, and the project team held meetings with each of the three ministers of education and their top staff, which began a process of adjoining the reform priorities of the ministry, legislature, and civil society.

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PROJECT RESULTS

Below is a summary of the project's principle achievements to date:

- Definition of three cross-cutting themes slated for current and future legislative reform, defined by the Technical Advisory Council and other collaborators.

- Increased dialogue and understanding between education stakeholder and civil society groups involved in the educational reform process, to the extent that there is a registered and collective interest amongst project participants to continue an increasingly cooperative relationship towards reform.
- A set of widely distributed and high-quality documents that have generated important inputs for discussions on the reform agenda

Other less tangible, but noteworthy, results of the project included:

- The introduction of the concept and meaning of “second-generation educational reforms” to the national debate on education quality.
- Effective integration of relevant actors, which has led to a significant increase in the level of trust and understanding that is likely to be carried forward through ongoing collaborations and partnerships.
- The mobilization of education stakeholders outside of the capital city area, including the mapping of and continued engagement with teacher-training organizations across the country.
- The texts provided quality, up-to-date information on the major issues identified, not only for the sectors related to education reform, but for all who want to approach the issues. Requests were received by school teachers and teacher-trainers interested in using them with their students.
- Broadly, the project successfully created the necessary environment to work on defining common strategies to begin implementing second-generation educational reforms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

The progress, understanding, and agreement generated by this project are intended to serve as a baseline for current and future efforts at shaping the legislative agenda with respect to the identified second-generation reforms.

It will be important to continue to disseminate and discuss the project documents – particularly in the country’s often neglected interior – which represent concise and comprehensive overviews of the range and state of thinking on the given topics in Guatemalan society today. This will help strengthen local capacity to contribute to the formulation and implementation of a more fully integrated, well informed, and dynamic national education community.

Aligning ideological considerations, political realities, and efforts, as well as finding commonality through policy dialogues, must become a practical as well as an intellectual exercise, and should stay rooted to the desired results that all Guatemalans wish for their education reform through second-generation, quality- and equality-focused improvements.

### Box 2

## Strategic Partnership Project documents

- 1. A teacher training manual**, including an analysis of Guatemala’s current system and proposals for its reform of both formation and in-service training. It emphasizes legal and institutional changes required for the implementation of the recommendations.
- 2. An overview on the modernization of management processes**, which includes recent policies on decentralization as well as related benefits and challenges. This document also analyzes the design and implementation of educational projects that strengthen school systems as units of decision-making and the principal’s role as manager of the educational community.
- 3. A document reviewing the development and consolidation of intercultural education** as a guiding principle for Guatemalan education reform. It contains analysis from various institutions on issues related to the legal framework, evolution, and conceptual details of intercultural and bilingual education, as well as includes concrete proposals for its advancement in the country.
- 4. A summary of all the related documents for the project “Supporting Dialogue on Second-Generation Education Reforms in Guatemala.”** It provides a summary of the main issues addressed in the three texts listed above.

These documents were published by PREAL and FLACSO-Guatemala for the Strategic Partnership Project, and are available online at [www.flacso.edu.gt](http://www.flacso.edu.gt)

To this end, it will also be important to establish links between political actors and civil society organizations committed to the identified topics in order design reform and legislative agendas that are more in tune with Guatemala’s challenging political landscape. In this respect, it will be important to take into account not only substantive policy options, but also the time and timing necessary for successful reform. ©

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### Box 3

## Lessons Learned from Project Implementation

- The participation of organizations with different ideological orientations – in some cases openly divergent – on collaborative work and in search of a common goal is a complex and deliberate process. However, if well-managed, it enables a broad, substantive and productive discussion, which not only reveals the underpinnings of each position, but also shows that in many cases there is more agreement than previously understood.
- While the project proposed ambitious objectives in terms of political and legislative impact, reform plans on these topics require a sustained long-term effort, a clear political strategy, and support from committed leaders. The project generated many necessary conditions to create this impact, though was unable to convert the outcomes into short-term policy changes.
- Education policy reform is highly prone to and influenced by many political limitations, in many cases due to poor dissemination of objective information. Primary and secondary education reform is also subject to political and socio-economic elements from other sectors of the country, including higher education, social welfare and poverty-reduction strategies, and labor and union relations. Each of these considerations, and the relevant stakeholders, therein must be accounted for in any effective policy reform strategy.
- Knowledge production is a complex process that requires considerable time on behalf of the organizations, even those that already work consistently to address the issues. This is mainly because, although the institutions work on issues related to education, they do not always have a defined ideological position on these issues. Consensus building needs to focus on transforming these positions on the bases of informed dialogues, discussion, and analysis that cannot be framed in a short time period because it would lose its original purpose.
- Actors involved in secondary education, particularly in the country's interior, are more receptive to work on ideas and proposals. This can create impact on a local scale, and projects such as this one are highly appreciated since they involved often-neglected, rural areas.
- For some actors in the country's education policy debate, it is still extremely difficult to judge a text and criticize its content, as opposed to impugning the perceived ideology behind it or the character of its author. This type of resistance contributes little to the debate on education, and must be overcome in order to advance the substantive level of education policy debate.