



The Participation and Civic Engagement Team works to promote poverty reduction and sustainable development by empowering the poor to set their own priorities, control resources and influence the government, market and civil society institutions; and influencing governmental and private institutions to be responsive, inclusive, and accountable.

Note No. 79

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Case Study 3 – El Salvador: Participation in Macroeconomic Policy Making and Reform

El Salvador: Basic Education Reform

Background

1992 was both a year of bitterness and hope. A decade of civil war had devastated the country but left no clear winner or loser; it was time to try peace. The governing ARENA party and the FMLN rebels signed peace accords requiring the demobilization of the FMLN and its incorporation into the political process in return for democratic reforms by state institutions. The need for “concertación” or consensual-decisionmaking was often invoked but, given deep divisions, not easily achieved.

Cecilia Gallardo de Cano had been in office since 1989 as Minister of Education and her country was changing quickly. Her party’s most vociferous opponents were coming down from the mountains and into the office buildings and conference rooms of San Salvador. She was a reform proponent from the “modernizing” wing of the conservative ARENA party. Her ministry, perhaps more than any other, found a way to reach across the chasm of distrust and build effective partnerships for reform.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) quickly identified expanding access to and quality of basic education as a central policy objective both to rebuild national unity in the post-war era and to promote the long-term economic development. During the war, the government had no effective control over large parts of the country and no public education services had been offered there. An ad hoc system developed in its place. Communities recruited local teachers and established community schools, bearing the cost themselves, paying teachers when they could. These schools functioned intermittently and under difficult circumstances. At the end of the war, approximately one million children (20% of the entire population) were not in school.

Despite political commitment from the government, the formal education system could not gear up to meet this tremendous demand. Even if the institutional capacity existed, the government and Ministry faced distrust from these communities and from organized groups such as the National Association of Teachers (ANDES). Many in the opposition greeted the return of ministry officials to

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isolated areas with deep distrust and, while supportive of the resumption of public services, felt the government's agenda was to reassert national control and build political support in opposition-dominated areas.

While it addressed this short-term emergency, the Ministry of Education also began a comprehensive reform of El Salvador's traditional education system. The government's objectives were to decentralize, improve both the quality of education as well as coverage at all levels, expand administrative capacity and promote participation by the private and nongovernmental sectors. This would require support from all key stakeholders¹ in the education system, including ministry staff, parents, teachers, and students.

Process and Institutional Arrangements

Expanding Coverage to Rural Areas and Piloting New Approaches

One of the first steps taken by the Ministry was to pilot a new decentralized model of service provision in rural areas, the Community-managed Schools Program (EDUCO). This program targeted the poorest 78 (out of 221) municipalities and was driven by the urgent need to restore basic education services quickly.

The EDUCO program built on the demonstrated willingness of communities to participate and, while providing technical assistance to build capacity, delegated the management of new rural pre-school and primary schools to parents and community organizations. In the course of developing the program, the Ministry began to work, for the first time, with local NGOs that supported program implementation. The Ministry selected only some of the "popular schools" operating during the war to be converted into EDUCO schools. Some in the opposition argued the criteria for selection of schools was political and that the financial obligations imposed on communities were unfair. Minimum standards for teachers also excluded several young teachers who had been trained informally to work in the community schools. The MOE argued that local participation and management were not inconsistent

with the government's constitutional requirement to provide free and compulsory basic education.

By 1993, however, the program could demonstrate some clear results in restoring services to the poor and empowering local communities. Parents reacted very positively to being taken seriously and given key responsibilities, such as the hiring and firing of teachers. Enrollment rates in rural areas had increased from 76 percent to 83 in 1993.

Despite the successful pilot, the Ministry found little support at the national level. The EDUCO experience had changed some attitudes and perceptions among officials within the Ministry but the new approach was not well understood outside. There had been little public discussion or consultation when the program was developed. In general, policy changes were made in an unsystematic way, contributing to a lack of transparency and continued skepticism by teachers, communities and political opposition groups.

The Ministry of Education then began to organize seminars with teachers and other key stakeholders to discuss the EDUCO experience and its use as a model for broader efforts to promote a decentralized approach. The teachers' association, ANDES, feared that new authority given to parents might lead to arbitrary hiring and firing and expressed strong opposition. But this was dented by dissemination of the EDUCO experience, creation of new job opportunities for teachers, and EDUCO teachers themselves who defended the decentralized approach, citing the increased involvement and support of parents.

Joint Assessments and Diagnostics

In the next two years, a series of participatory assessments and other processes were undertaken which slowly helped to educate key constituencies about problems confronting the national education system and to construct some common ground on proposed solutions.

This was important both for the Ministry itself and for outside partners. Even though government budget resources were severely constrained, some external resources were available for the education sector in this period. Most school construction and other physical improvements were financed through

¹ Stakeholders are defined here as all those individuals and social groups who potentially would be affected by the reforms either directly or indirectly.

a variety of mechanisms outside the Ministry² which contributed to confusion and the perception from outside the government that the process lacked transparency.

In late 1993, Harvard University undertook an assessment of the education sector aimed at identifying options and priorities for policy reform.³ Harvard researchers proposed a joint study team of the Ministry of Education and two local institutions: the Central American University (UCA), a vocal critic of the government, and FEPADE, an education foundation set up by the business community. Expanding dialogue and building broad-based ownership of results was an explicit goal which the Ministry supported, particularly in light of approaching national elections. All working drafts were produced in Spanish.

An advisory committee was formed with some fifty representatives of more than thirty organizations, including the Ministry, the Legislative Assembly and members of the opposition. The mix of sponsoring organizations was critical to reassuring participants that there would not be an ideological or party bias in the effort. According to one FEPADE representative, the committee was more important for long-term reform efforts than the final report itself. The committee continued to operate after the assessment was completed and became a partner with the MOE in subsequent reform initiatives in basic and higher education.

The entire process served as an intensive capacity-building exercise as well. Several of the key players in future policy debates systematically worked through, point by point, the key policy areas with facilitation by Harvard experts.

In January 1994, a series of workshops was held to discuss the results with key groups of stakeholders, including one meeting with the presidential candidates. Education reform became an important issue in the electoral debate. The Minister of Education organized an eight-hour workshop to discuss the results of the assessment with key managers of the ministry. A meeting was held with 200 staff of the ministry from the capitol and

different regions of the country. The content of the assessment provided effective arguments to advance several policy reforms.

A new president from the same governing party, ARENA, took office in the summer of 1994 and the Minister of Education was asked to continue in her post even though several other cabinet posts turned over. One ministry official very active in the study became Vice Minister and two senior staff of the UCA were hired by the Ministry of Education as directors of research and of secondary education.

In November 1994-February 1995, a social assessment was undertaken during preparation of a Ministry project to support basic education reform in El Salvador.⁴ Due to the lack of formalized communication channels, the assessment provided valuable feedback to ministry officials about the perceptions and misperceptions of key stakeholders. Local consultants conducted focus groups, in-depth interviews and a case study to gather information on views within the Ministry of Education, teachers, parents, and students.

Parents were suspicious of government motives and expressed concern that the MOE was planning privatization of education or a closer link to municipal governments which are seen as highly politicized and without the capacity to manage education. The study revealed a high level of mutual distrust between the government and approximately 110 NGOs active in the education sector. But it also demonstrated that the end of the civil war and the new emphasis on democratic procedures was beginning to have a positive impact on government accountability.

Formal Consultation and Reform

The Ministry declared 1995 as the “Year of Consultation on the Reform Process”. The government established a National Commission for Education, Science, and Development which helped to launch a national dialogue about education. The commission included members from a wide range of political affiliations with strong professional capacity and it produced a report which outlined a broad, conceptual approach to reform.

² Primarily the National Reconstruction Secretariat (SRN) and the Social Investment Fund (FIS).

³ This study was commissioned by USAID but supervised by the Ministry of Education. Background for this discussion is drawn from Chapter 11, Fernando Reimers and Noel McGinn, 1997.

⁴ The social assessment was conducted by local consultants and financed by the World Bank.

This report formed the conceptual basis for a detailed, ten-year plan for the Ministry of Education which continues under implementation today, “*Plan Decenal de Reforma Educativa en Marcha (1995-2005)*”. Although some key reforms in curriculum and other areas had been undertaken previously, this marked the start of a more formalized, comprehensive reform process. It defined a set of measures and programs in support of four objectives: (i) increasing access to education and improving literacy; (ii) improving the quality of education; (iii) promoting the formation of values; and (iv) institutional modernization. The Advisory Committee created during the Harvard assessment took an active role in technical implementation of reforms in higher education. New legislation was prepared and approved in 1995 including the Law on Higher Education, the Law on the Teacher Promotion/Profession, and the General Law on Education. Reforms were undertaken within the Ministry to address administrative bottlenecks.

As implementation began, in 1996, the government launched a formal communications program to: (i) build public support for reforms, (ii) open permanent channels within the Ministry and with the public; and (iii) receive feedback from key stakeholders (e.g., ministry, parents, teachers, students, NGOs).

Impact and Lessons

In 1996, a second social assessment was undertaken to compare key stakeholder views with those expressed in 1994 and some important changes could be seen. Teachers interviewed were generally positive regarding the MOE’s efforts to improve the quality of education; this is in contrast to the negative attitudes expressed in the 1994/95 assessment. They did not feel the central education offices were removed from the needs of teachers and both teachers in EDUCO and non-EDUCO schools expressed an interest in more open and participatory school administration. More than 90 percent of teachers and parents agreed that teachers do all they can to improve the quality of teaching. Many parents still saw a limited role for themselves in actively supporting schools but they agreed, generally, that the best way to get them to participate, either with time or money, was to take them seriously and involve them in decisionmaking. Children described school as better than home, a place to become “dignified”, a place to rest and feel safe. Children rated current teachers more favorably

than previous teachers. There were criticisms and concerns expressed as well but it was clear to parents, teachers and children that progress had been made.

In the post-war period, given the provision of external resources, *many of the most serious constraints to reforming the education system were not economic but rather social, cultural and institutional.* Dialogue and communication with key stakeholders taxed institutional resources but were essential to overcome social and cultural barriers to reform. Many Salvadorans paid “lip service” to national reconciliation, consultation and dialogue in the post-war period but few achieved the results seen in the education sector.

EDUCO communities and the MOE had found a new, effective means of collaboration. However, *expanded participation from the bottom-up (i.e., at the community level) did not automatically express itself at the national level.* Additional efforts at dialogue and dissemination of local experiences were needed as well as mechanisms at the national level to open the door to dialogue and participation.

Joint research teams including ministry officials, national academics and local NGO specialists helped to build new partnerships and increase ownership of the results of the study once completed. This was particularly important for building up substantive knowledge within the ministry itself.

The use of focus groups and other methods provided valuable and candid feedback to the Ministry about the perceptions and priorities of key stakeholders. But these had to be complemented by visible, structured opportunities for dialogue and participation, such as the National Commission and the advisory board.

The use of baseline studies, repeated at some interval in the future, also gave the Ministry the opportunity to measure its effectiveness in addressing the concerns of key stakeholders. The results of the second study were disseminated to the Ministry and NGOs and their implications for policy development were considered in a series of four meetings involving approximately 50 people.

Continuity of the Minister and her closest advisors across administrations was unusual and constructive. She remained in office until 1998 (and

is now editor of one of the main national newspapers.) Some of the lessons learned in reform of basic education were applied in the comprehensive reform efforts launched in 1995.

Several years into the post-war period, the government can point to clear successes in addressing its original post-war objective: to improve the access to and quality of education provided to the poorest communities. In pursuing reforms across the sector, informal and formal structures for dialogue and participation were constructed. Many long-standing problems, such as high drop-out rates in rural areas, undoubtedly persist and new challenges of violence and youth gangs are emerging. But some increase in cooperation across political and organizational boundaries was achieved under difficult circumstances and is built upon each year to develop more effective policy responses.

Stages and Mechanisms

I. Experimenting with Innovative Approaches

1991-93 EDUCO Pilot Program
MOE-led process to expand enrollment and increase community participation in rural schools



1993 Dissemination of EDUCO Results
MOE opens discussion of decentralized model of basic education and EDUCO approach

II. Sector-wide Assessments and Joint Diagnostics

1993 Harvard Study
 Report produced with collaboration of MOE, two local institutions and Advisory Committee



1994 Baseline Social Assessment
Gathering information on perceptions of key stakeholder in education policy

III. Broad-based Consultation and Reform

1995 Year of Consultation on Educational Reform declared by MOE



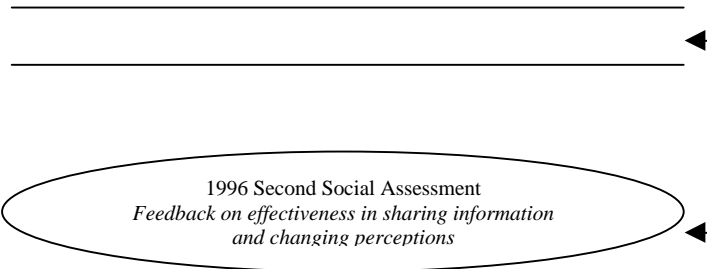
1995 National Commission on Education, Science and Development produces report



1995 MOE comprehensive "Plan Decenal de Reforma Educativa en March (1995-2005)"



1996 Ten-year Plan Begins Implementation
 Advisory Committee Collaboration
 MOE Communications Program



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