



WOMEN AND THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN GUATEMALA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

On February 18th, the Carter Center, Accion Ciudadana, the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman, the Presidential Secretariat for Women, the Office of the Ombudsman for Indigenous Women, and UN Women organized a joint stakeholder meeting to generate creative solutions to address inequities faced by women in the exercise of the fundamental right of access to information. Over 60 government representatives, community leaders, and civil society champions working to advance transparency, accountability, freedom of information, and women’s right came together to discuss the findings of the recent Carter Center study “Women and the Right of Access to Information in Guatemala.” Participants engaged in constructive dialogue related to asymmetries in access that women face in exercising the right to information, the primary obstacles, and potential solutions.

During this stakeholder meeting, there was broad concurrence regarding a number of considerations related to women and access to information. Access to Information was identified as a fundamental human right and a crucial link to other rights, yet agreed that deep gender inequities exist in the exercise of this right. Participants confirmed the study’s principal finding that women in Guatemala do not access information with the same facility as men. Moreover, it was believed that this inequity is rooted in deep structural and cultural norms, and will require a sustained effort by all actors to address and overcome. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants committed themselves to actions that would reduce the inequities, help mitigate the obstacles, and support the advancement of the right to information for women in Guatemala.

In the meeting, following a brief presentation of the national and department-specific findings of the study on Women and the Right of Access to Information, participants divided into working groups to consider the primary obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information in Guatemala. Each group was tasked with considering the various facets of each obstacle, developing creative, practical and achievable recommendations for overcoming the barriers, and identifying the stakeholder group (government, civil society, or joint) most responsible for implementing the defined action.

The following represents the consensus agreement of participants on urgent action steps necessary to advance the right of access to information for women in Guatemala.

Recommendations:

The Government of Guatemala should:

1. Create an Inter-Institutional committee, led by the Human Rights Ombudsman, the Ombudsman for Indigenous Women, and the Presidential Secretariat for Women, via a memorandum of understanding, and including key government representatives who work on women's economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of human rights that will focus specifically on the issue of women and the right to information. The committee should seek to identify opportunities, make recommendations, share lessons learned, and assure better coordination in advancing the right of access to information for women.
2. Develop information campaigns, using culturally sensitive accessible terminology and local languages, to raise awareness among the women of Guatemala of their equitable right of access to information and to encourage women to exercise their right to receive information that could help increase economic empowerment and protection of human rights.
3. Provide gender sensitization and human rights training for all public officials, particularly those responsible for access to information in government agencies.
4. Establish and deepen mechanisms to assure that information more effectively reaches women, including but not limited to:
 - a. Further identifying the specific information needs for women;
 - b. Increasing proactive publication of relevant documents and applying creative mechanisms, such disseminating the information through community radio or making available where women often meet, to ensure that women may access the information;
 - c. Create information in ways that is more accessible (clear, timely, and understandable) for women, with a focus on use of local languages and pictures, where appropriate;
 - d. Develop a free telephone hotline specific for women to seek information;
 - e. Set-up kiosks at public markets, where women often gather, staffed by public servants mandated to speak the local language to receive requests for and provide information;
 - f. Seek means to simplify the process for receiving requests and providing information to women, including support for woman requesters and guarantees so that women feel safe making requests.
5. Monitor the state's effectiveness in providing meaningful and timely information to women, including through a registry of information requests and agency responses disaggregated by sex, a yearly analysis of the degree of effectiveness and efficiency of information provided by the government, and the generation of relevant reports, disaggregated by sex.
6. Seek budgetary support for public offices to advance access to information and gender equality.

7. Support municipal information liaisons, including identifying a person within the Municipal Women's Offices (OMM) designated to work with and assist them.
8. Create a public policy for access to information for all, including the formation of an inter-institutional network charged with contributing to and validating this access to information and transparency public policy.

Civil Society Organizations should:

1. Develop information campaigns aimed at women, as well as human rights and women's organizations, to increase awareness about the right of access to information and the value of information for increasing economic empowerment and the promotion and protection of rights.
2. Provide training and capacity building for civil society organizations, particularly relevant organizations that to date have not been engaged in promoting the right, to enhance their ability to utilize the right of access to information and to support women in making requests for and seeking information.
3. Increase engagement of community radio as a means of more effectively reaching women. Community radios should be used as part of information campaigns to raise awareness about the right to information and its value, to disseminate relevant information, and to share good practices and success stories of the impact of information on women's economic empowerment and protection of rights.
4. Establish liaisons at the municipal level trained to assist women in making requests, to seek information on behalf of women at public offices, and to share published government information. The municipal information liaisons should be equipped with a computer containing relevant public information which is frequently updated and, when the desired information is not readily available, transmit requests to the appropriate local agency.
5. Broaden the existing human rights defenders networks to include protection and support for any women threatened for seeking information or who is fearful of making requests.
6. Monitor the right of access to information for women, including social audits and mechanisms for holding the government accountable for assuring an equitable right of access to information.

Stakeholders jointly should:

1. Establish a Stakeholder Committee, including key government ministries and civil society organizations, to encourage mutual commitments, reflect on continuing challenges facing women, and share lessons learned and best practices.

2. Develop a joint campaign addressed at men, to raise awareness about the value of access to information for women, families and their community. These specific campaigns should seek to engage male leaders, including traditional leaders.
3. Periodically review the Guatemalan access to information law, regulations, policies, and related norms to identify provisions and practices that may serve as deterrents or obstacles to women's exercise of the right of access to information, and consider potential modifications.

The participants of the meeting on women and the right of access to information committed themselves to promoting equitable access to information for all Guatemalans. These recommendations serve as a roadmap of concrete and viable actions to further guarantee the right to information for the women of Guatemala.

February 18, 2015
Guatemala City, Guatemala