



## ASIES

# Reforming education in Guatemala

By promoting its policy proposal in an election year, *Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales* (ASIES) helped put large-scale educational reform on Guatemala's national agenda.

**SETTING THE SCENE** —With 70 percent of Guatemala's population under the age of 30, education is key to the country's economic growth. However, Guatemala's education system is plagued by weaknesses and inequalities, especially among indigenous populations. *The Great National Campaign for Education* emerged in 1999, beginning with a request to Congress to increase the educational budget, and over time has evolved into a social movement made up of universities, social organizations, and the media. For almost 15 years, Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales (ASIES) has advocated for improvements in education through its role as Executive Secretariat of the Campaign for Education. In that time, it has made progress in establishing the Campaign as an interlocutor and recognized mediator between the government and citizens, organizing expert forums and discussions and conducting an annual social audit of Guatemalan schools. However, the quality and reach of education remains poor, with a national average of just more than four years of schooling completed.

**WHAT ASIES DID** —The Campaign's 2011 social audit examined factors that have an impact on learning, including pedagogical methods, teacher training, and parents' participation in school. This audit led to the development of the Campaign's *National Agenda for Quality Education* (NEA). The NEA presented a vision for education reform in Guatemala focused on three strategic areas: quality, coverage, and finance and administration. It articulated short-, medium-, and long-term goals aimed at achieving a high quality, intercultural education system by 2020 that included such things as enhanced teacher training and decentralization of the school budget.

The 2011 presidential elections provided a unique window of opportunity to put the NEA's proposals for education reform on the national agenda. ASIES chose to disseminate the NEA in an election year, with the intention that the party in power might embrace the agenda as part of its political campaign. The Campaign and ASIES targeted influential groups such as donor agencies; universities; religious, business, and education



organizations; mass media; and political parties. They shared study findings at public forums and meetings and maintained regular communication with the Ministry of Education, making sure that either the Minister or a Deputy Minister attended all public launches of the Campaign's reports. ASIES also worked with the Ministry of Finance, the General Revenue Office, the Commission on Education, and the Board of Transparency of Congress to raise awareness on education issues. Television, radio and print interviews kept the issue in the public conversation.

**THE OUTCOME** —The Ministry of Education is currently acting on the changes proposed by the NEA, as evidenced by its work plan, programs and activities. In addition to its use of strategic timing, ASIES's policy influence capacity, the

experience of its consultants and researchers in the field of education, and the organization's experience in starting, leading, and participating in networks were all factors that facilitated this positive outcome.

As a result, the *Great National Campaign for Education* has also become a media reference for many topics related to education in Guatemala, and its membership has grown with the active participation of many universities and institutions, as well as other national and international organizations. Since early 2012, ASIES and the Campaign have promoted an accompanying municipal agenda, which contains updated national data and municipality-specific indicators, as well as recommended strategies and activities to support the education process.

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*You can read more about this story in *Twelve Stories of Policy Influence from Asia, Africa, and Latin America*, a working paper prepared by Grupo FARO for the conference "Think Tank Exchange" held in South Africa, June 18-20, 2012.*

ASIES website: [www.asies.org.gt](http://www.asies.org.gt)

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