



# **Some Methodological Aspects of the Process for Developing the Shared Departmental Agendas in Chimaltenango and Alta Verapaz, Guatemala**

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# **Some Methodological Aspects of the Process for Developing the Shared Departmental Agendas in Chimaltenango and Alta Verapaz, Guatemala<sup>1</sup>**

## **I. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to systematize some of the impacts of the Multiparty Dialogue process at the local level in Guatemala. Specifically, this report focuses on the methodological aspects of the process for developing the Shared Departmental Agendas in Alta Verapaz and Chimaltenango in Guatemala, having used the experience of the Shared National Agenda as an inspirational basis. In addition, it also examines some of the effects of this methodology and process on participating political actors and on the political environment.

### **The Emergence of the Departmental Agendas**

The Multiparty Dialogue Programme was established in 2002 with the purpose of supporting political parties in generating a vision of how to develop Guatemala on the basis of multiparty agreements. With the support of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (nIMD), the Programme worked with twenty of Guatemala's main political parties to create the Shared National Agenda, a united long-term vision for the country based on the 1996 Peace Accords and the UNDP National Human Development Reports. The process of developing this agenda was aimed at improving the capacities of political leaders and parties in multiparty dialogue and the formulation of political programs and agendas.

After observing the positive influence of the development process of the Shared National Agenda, the Multiparty Dialogue Program brought this experience to the local level, focusing on the specific needs of departments in Guatemala. The process of the Shared Departmental Agendas began in 2004 when the Organization of American States (OAS), in conjunction with Rafael Landivar University, decided to develop a political training course for politicians in certain departments of Guatemala. To ensure that this course would have a strong impact, the departments that were chosen to participate, namely Chimaltenango and Alta Verapaz, met the following criteria:

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared by Michelle Kissenkoetter, Intern from the McGill University, and Nicole Reichenbach, Intern from the Columbia University. Both worked as interns for the Democratic Dialogue Regional Project during 2007.

- 1) Large voter population
- 2) Organized political parties at the local level
- 3) Linguistic variety

The course contained four modules on political formation and a fifth module on the Shared National Agenda, which was developed and taught by the Multiparty Dialogue Programme. The focus of this last module was not so much the agreements of the National Agenda, but the process of creating a multiparty dialogue. The participants were so inspired by the idea of the Shared National Agenda that some of them approached the Multiparty Dialogue Programme with the idea of creating a similar agenda on the local level. After completing a FODA<sup>2</sup> analysis in 2005, the Multiparty Dialogue Programme defined a work plan and began the process of assembling working groups for these agendas.

The political parties who were invited to join the Departmental Agenda process had to be formally organized and have representation in their respective departments, with institutional branches to ensure a chain of command that could approve the delegates' contributions to the agenda. The Multiparty Dialogue Programme first approached the national leadership of the political parties who would potentially be involved in the Departmental Agenda process to ensure the support for this project from the political parties' highest authorities. Consultative sessions and meetings in order to verify conditions were then arranged with the departmental Secretary Generals of the parties. These departmental authorities were then responsible for selecting four delegates each to participate in the development of the agendas.

The selection criteria for the delegations, established by the Multiparty Dialogue Programme, were the following:

- The delegation must include at least one female representative
- Delegates will preferably have some form of educational background
- All delegates hold departmental leadership positions in the party

Additionally, the departmental party authorities were provided with a list of party members who had completed the five module political training course. This list was to be used as a guideline in the selection process, although it was not mandatory for those participating in the agenda process to have completed the course. The reason the parties were encouraged to select course graduates as their delegates was not only due to the technical training they had received, but more so due to their interaction with members of other political parties during the training course. The relationships that emerged were an essential basis to any multiparty dialogue process. The final working groups for the Shared Departmental Agendas consisted of 14 political organizations in Chimaltenango and 11 political parties in Alta Verapaz.

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<sup>2</sup> FODA is an acronym for "Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, and Threats" based on its Spanish equivalent. It is an analysis tool used to assess working conditions prior to initiating a project.

## II. Methodological Aspects

In both the development of the Shared National Agenda and the Departmental Agendas, the Multiparty Dialogue Programme relied on the use of essential dialogue tools in order to promote consensus building and to find common points of interest. The following are basic methodological elements used during the National Shared Agenda process that were also applied during the development of the Departmental Agendas.

### The Informal Environment

In both the national and departmental processes, a key factor in promoting discussion among the delegates was to encourage the emergence of an informal environment where they could discuss outside the confines of formal sessions. Providing a space wherein participants could interact casually contributed not only to the methodological and cultural process of the agenda, but also to the efficiency of discussions within the formal sessions. In order to create this kind of environment, facilitators would organize two-day overnight workshops, with the specific intent of bringing delegates together outside of the formal working environment. Mealtimes and social interaction in between training sessions were essential to encouraging non-partisan discussion in order to foster a friendly atmosphere.

This informal environment was efficient due to the clear demarcation of lines of respect. Facilitators worked with the group to define and set clear guidelines of respect from the beginning of the process and if these were disregarded, delegates were strongly reprimanded by the group. In general however, the delegates were respectful of the ground rules, and took advantage of this informality to develop personal relationships that facilitated the rest of the agenda process, as well as a continued interaction in the political arena.

### Consensus Building Techniques

There were several core techniques for consensus building that supported the development of the shared agendas. Delegates would receive information and would determine which themes, topics and subjects were most important to them through an exercise called 'Prioritization of Key Factors'. This information was organized by content areas and constructed into matrices based on the fundamental views of the delegates. The delegates then took these matrices back to their departmental leadership for consultation, so as to verify if these points corresponded with their parties' ideology and principles.

The next phase in the development of the agendas was the analysis of the approved matrices for building commitments from them. In order to do this, a

process was used to convert the matrix statements into one of three dimensional areas:

- 1) Contextual information
- 2) Objective / goal
- 3) Partisan commitment / action

Once completed, the Multiparty Dialogue Programme would use the information to draft the agenda proposal. The working group would then edit the proposal collectively, until reaching a consensus on the text of the agenda. This final copy would then once again be sent to the party leaders for formal approval.

### **Attendance Logs**

During training and consensus building sessions, facilitators maintained an attendance list of participating delegates. Several times throughout the process, this information was communicated to the national and departmental secretaries of the parties in order to report the delegates' attendance levels. This cross-referencing monitoring system enabled the Multiparty Dialogue Programme to report to the national leadership what was happening at the departmental level, as well as inform those in the departments about the level of interest and attention that the national leadership was giving to the departmental agendas. This process aided in improving internal party communication, a critical component of party institutionalism and organization.

### **Training and information sessions**

The above techniques were essential to the development of both the National and Departmental Agendas and are at the core of the multiparty dialogue effort. While these methods have proven effective and beneficial, the methodology applied to each multiparty process must be flexible and adaptable to the context in which it is developed, all the while not detracting from the core principles of multiparty dialogue.

An example of this is the political training and information sessions that delegates participated in for the development of the agendas. Depending on the needs and interests of the delegates and the departmental context in which they were working, facilitators had to adjust the topics of the workshops and the methods used to present the information. For example, when compared to the Shared National Agenda working group, delegates assigned to the departmental agendas often lacked formal political activist training, which is essential to the agenda process. In order to address this need, the Multiparty Dialogue Programme introduced several tools for political activism into the training and information period of the agenda development process. These included activities and workshops on expression by other means, including body language; techniques and tools for the analysis of local power maps; and games, videos and movie nights showing films with political messages. The purpose of these workshops and

activities was to enable the delegates to develop their political activist skills which would in turn help them in lobbying their opinions amongst each other and with their national leadership.

### **III. Lessons Learned and Results**

#### **Timing the Completion of the Agenda Process Prior to Campaign Season**

Because the electoral period accentuates the partisan and not the multiparty effort, the process of developing the agendas needs to be completed before the start of the campaign season. While the process of developing the agendas close to the electoral process has several benefits, those involved in the development of future agendas need to ensure that the process does not coincide too closely with the campaign season, as this does not leave sufficient time to publicize and promote the agenda at the public and party levels. Time is needed for the socialization and internalization phase of the agenda, which includes publicizing the agenda to the public, decimating the agenda amongst party branches, and ensuring that party members are familiar with its contents. If the development phase of the agenda finishes too closely to the campaign period, the socialization and integration phase that follows is largely inefficient because party members are too preoccupied with their already established campaigns to be able to take on the internalization of the agenda. If the agendas are completed with enough time before the campaign season, party members have the opportunity to incorporate the agenda into their political discourse and the agenda agreements can influence the party's vision and political point of view.

In the case of the departmental agendas, this phase of socialization and internalization was originally scheduled for a period of a year before the hectic campaign period. However, this could not be implemented because the process of developing the agendas was extended for much longer than expected and finished during the intense campaign period. As a result, this part of the process will be completed with the newly elected authorities after the elections. The Multiparty Dialogue Programme has already ensured funds from the nIMD for this effort after the elections, in order to support the parties that did not win and to assure that they continue forward, using the agenda as a source of inspiration.

#### **Difficulty of working with parties that lack institutionalism and stability**

Because of the stability of delegates within their parties in Chimaltenango, facilitators were able to count on firm attendance criteria during the development process of the agenda. In Alta Verapaz however, this criteria had to be more flexible due to the complex volatility of the delegates and their parties. As a result, the list of participants in the Alta Verapaz agenda conforms to less rigid attendance criteria. Even so, the working group that began the process was not the same as

the one that completed it, and some delegates even appear in the agenda as members of a party to which they are no longer affiliated.

Despite this internal instability of the parties, the participants in Alta Verapaz did manage to develop a sense of team spirit and camaraderie. An example of this can be found on pages 43 and 44 of the Agenda of Alta Verapaz. Unlike the Chimaltenango agenda, the list of the working group is divided into two categories: partisan participants and non-partisan participants. Those appearing in the second group had participated in the majority of the development process and fulfilled the attendance criteria, but had pulled out of their respective parties before the agenda process was completed. Recognizing the contribution that these participants had made to the development of the agenda, the working group decided to include them in the participants list despite not being affiliated to a party.

Another reflection on the lack of institutionalization of parties and internalization of delegates of their political identity can be seen in Alta Verapaz. Many of the delegates involved in the agenda process did not necessarily perceive themselves as the representatives of political parties, but instead acted as representatives of civil society. This is logical considering the natural process of politicization: many politicians begin their political career by becoming active in social organizations and later take on a partisan role. However, it takes time for them to internalize this new role and as was observed in the Alta Verapaz agenda, many delegates did not completely identify with their parties.

### **Length of the Process**

The development process of the departmental agendas was initially planned for one year, but due to various factors, was extended over two years. One of the factors that prolonged the process was the delegates' decision to meet every fifteen days or once a month, instead of more frequently.

The training and informative phase of the agenda development process ended up including several more workshops than were initially planned. This too contributed substantially to the prolongation of the development process. Facilitators added these additional sessions at the request of the participating delegates, who saw this process as an opportunity to receive the political training and capacity building that they lacked in their own political parties. While there were many difficulties associated with an extended process, it was important not to approach the process with a rigid methodology and to accommodate the needs of the delegates. Adding these workshops resulted in a more trained and informed working group, and better prepared politicians in their respective parties.

However, when developing future agendas, facilitators must seek out a new methodology that achieves the same results and allows the delegates to yield the same positive benefits while shortening the duration of the process of developing the agendas. This is because if the development process is prolonged for too long,

participants tend to become fatigued by such a lengthy process, and begin to lose focus and concentration of the task at hand. Furthermore, lengthening the process also incurs additional costs in terms of humanpower and resources that supporting organizations such as the Multiparty Dialogue Programme had not foreseen.

### **Ideological Differences**

During the process of consensus building and the development of agreements for the departmental agendas, certain ideological differences between political parties were very clear. However, in regards to some subjects, delegates were unsure of their respective party's ideological position on the matter. With the purpose of creating an inclusive and politically relevant agenda, delegates were motivated to research and define the ideological positions of their parties. The experience of developing these multi-thematic agendas provided the participating delegates with the necessary incentive to research their party policies on issues that were previously unfamiliar to them. Aside from resulting in an agenda that reflects the full range of ideologies represented in the Guatemalan political arena, this experience also created politicians with a stronger and clearer ideological identity.

### **Positive Results**

Beyond the great achievement that the Departmental Agendas constitute in their own right, the very process of developing a shared vision between distinct political organizations, with the challenges of creating a multiparty environment and process of consensus building yield many positive effects in the political system.

The Multiparty Dialogue Programme believes that these are among the greatest achievements of the agenda process:

- ✓ fostering of team spirit and camaraderie
- ✓ understanding of different ideologies and the ability to defend one's own
- ✓ building of respect and trust between political "adversaries"
- ✓ development of emerging innovative thought.

The long-lasting goal is not necessarily the product of the agenda itself, although this is a noteworthy contribution to the development process of the country. In the pursuit of the democratic strengthening of the Guatemalan political system, the actual process of developing the agendas contributes greatly by encouraging the emergence of new thoughts, the deconstruction of the present view of reality and the emergence of a new vision. While it is difficult to measure impact in terms of people's thought processes, one can note a difference when observing participating delegates and political leaders working within their departments and their parties' national executive committees. After having participated in the agenda process, delegates demonstrated an increase in the level of their knowledge about the national and departmental realities.

Furthermore, the development in the quality of their political discourse and activism within their own parties constitute progress in the transformation of politics and politicians. These changes can be confidently attributed to the great amount of information and knowledge shared by the large number of experts who facilitated workshops during the development process. This transfer of knowledge, aside from its evident long-term benefits, constitutes an achievement in itself.

In addition to the formation of more trained and informed politicians in these two departments, this experience brought together many politicians that otherwise would not have interacted had it not been for the process of the agendas. The relationships that emerged from this process provided an essential basis for future multiparty efforts, and contributed to the decrease in confrontation and “dirty politics” observed during this campaign period as compared to four years ago.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Prospects for the Future**

At the start of the process of the agendas the Multiparty Dialogue Programme asked: “Will this process be more than a technical procedure and contribute to the internal democratization of the parties?” Without a doubt, the development of these agendas answers this question in the affirmative, as the greatest achievement was not in the final product, but in its process and creation.

However, the Multiparty Dialogue Programme must continue to work with the parties as they still have the great weakness of not having permanent processes of capacity building for their affiliates.

The position of the Multiparty Dialogue Programme is to help strengthen the parties individually and resolve their problems of identity and party instability before developing multiparty environments. The lack of institutionalism, the weaknesses of the parties, and how the delegates perceive the role that they assume in the process are issues that need to be addressed, guided and developed.

As for future agendas, the departments of San Marcos y Jutiapa have been sampled as possibilities for future agendas. In these departments the OAS has offered a formation course. However, when the Multiparty Dialogue Programme was developing a module of the agenda, they did not find the right conditions in San Marcos as the people did not react favorably. In Jutiapa on the other hand, the idea of the agenda was welcomed, but the agenda process did not move forward due to budgetary restraints.

While the Multiparty Dialogue Programme has taken strides in the development of multiparty dialogue, as seen in the two departmental agenda processes, political parties must continue to be strengthened and stabilized in order to sustain this effort. While this profound contradiction is worrisome, the multiparty dynamic must be developed alongside the strengthening and stabilizing of individual parties, parties that must sustain this effort in order for multiparty dialogue to be effective.

While there is still so much more work to be done, the departmental agendas in Alta Verapaz and Chimaltenango demonstrate the political will to transform politics from within and continue on the path towards a stable and democratic political system in Guatemala.

## **Annex 1. Contents of the Agendas**

### **Shared Departmental Agenda for Alta Verapaz**

#### Political Dimension

#### Peace Process Dimension

- Human rights and conciliation
- Democratic security and justice

#### Environmental Dimension

- Legal aspects
- Institucional strengthening
- Environmental education
- Demographic growth
- Territorial organization
- Natural resources
- Environmental health
- Environmental agreements

#### Economic Dimension

- Resources for economic development

#### Education Dimension

#### Health Dimension

- Health: a right for one and all
- The decentralization of health
- Health education and information
- Wellbeing and environmental health
- Social security
- Reproductive health
- Nutritional security

## Shared Departmental Agenda for Chimaltenango

### Political Dimension

- Chimaltenango parties and our democracy
- Relations between the political parties of Chimaltenango
- Relations between our parties and civil society in Chimaltenango

### Peace Process Dimension

- The Peace Accords
- Dialogue and peace
- Integral development and peace
- Development councils and participation
- Human rights
- Compensation
- Interculturalism

### Security Dimension

- Democratic security

### Political Participation of Women Dimension

- Institutional tools for the advancement of women
- Judicial equality
- Fair partisan political participation
- Decentralization and political parties

### Economic Development Dimension

- The development of the agricultural industry in Chimaltenango
- Promotion of business and job creation
- Promotion of various forms of tourism
- Promotion of the tributary culture
- Assuring juridical certainty with respect to the possession and property of land
- The determining participation of women in the economy
- Rural development
- The living area

### Socio-environmental Dimension

- Territorial organization
- Waste disposal management

### Educational Dimension

### Health Dimension

**Annex 2.    Agenda Departamental Compartida de Alta Verapaz**

Access to pdf file (Spanish):

[http://www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/file.pl?files\\_id=993;folder=attachment;name=Agenda\\_Alta\\_Verapaz.pdf](http://www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/file.pl?files_id=993;folder=attachment;name=Agenda_Alta_Verapaz.pdf)

**Annex 3.    Agenda Departamental Compartida de Chimaltenango**

Access to pdf file (Spanish):

[http://www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/file.pl?files\\_id=993;folder=attachment;name=Agenda\\_Chimaltenango.pdf](http://www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/file.pl?files_id=993;folder=attachment;name=Agenda_Chimaltenango.pdf)