

Guatemala: Tackling Small Arms and Violence at All Levels

Contributed by: Arturo Matute, UNDP Guatemala

High levels of violence, weak institutional capacities and uncertain political support were some of the challenges that faced UNDP's Preparatory Assistance (PA) on Small Arms Control in Guatemala when it began in July 2005. Guatemala is a country where armed violence is recognized as a major social problem which seriously hinders the possibilities for development. In 2006, the country suffered 47 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, with this statistic rising to 110 in Guatemala City, with 85 per cent of the killings in the capital city being committed with small arms. However, possession of guns is a legal right sanctioned within the National Constitution and there is widespread acceptance of firearms among the civilian population.

UNDP's Approach to Curtailing the Impact of Small Arms

The two main objectives of the PA were to generate conditions in the medium-term to **enhance public awareness** on the dangers posed by small arms, and to **strengthen national capacities to implement** a National Disarmament Programme. These aims were partially achieved and the final report on the project, which finished at the end of October 2006, elaborates several major achievements at several levels, including:

- producing relevant information on violence issues in Guatemala;
- implementing violence prevention initiatives at the municipal level;
- contributing to public discussions on violence issues at the national level;
- enhancing networking among national and international institutions working in violence prevention issues; and
- improving knowledge on the possibilities of successful violence prevention initiatives in Guatemala.

Raising Public Awareness on Small Arms Violence

By making public the results of the initial research and findings, the PA was able to contribute to **national discussions on security and violence**. The PA study on the costs of violence to the national economy was of particular significance, catching the public's attention through good media coverage and debate. This also created an opportunity for UNDP to engage in evidence-based discussion on the impact of armed violence on a wide-range of social and economic issues with various stakeholders, including politicians, government officials, and the private sector.

Building Capacities to Improve Security

Support was also given through the PA to establish a Security Commission in the town of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, a mid-size town with high level of violence. Despite its limited resources and capacities, the municipality had strong political will to design and implement initiatives to reduce violence and improve security. The PA provided technical assistance to train municipal staff on surveys and analysis, and to support the preparation of a municipal security plan based on the evidence generated. UNDP also facilitated the formulation of the '**Municipal Public Policy on Citizen Security**', which is the first document of its kind ever produced in Guatemala. Violence levels, as measured in terms of homicides committed and other violent events reported, have significantly decreased since the start of these programmes. Santa Lucía's process is being seen as an example to follow by many other municipalities.

Although the National Commission for the Eradication of Illegal Firearms lacks adequate budget and other appropriate infrastructure and capacities to support its work, some important aspects of arms control were successfully supported by the PA. Guatemala's ability to report on the national situation in relation to small arms control and participate at international has been enhanced.

Lessons Learned:

Important lessons have been learned through the implementation of the PA. For future programmes key issues have been identified:

- the causes of armed violence have to be addressed, focusing on both the structural factors (e.g. poverty, inequality) and the weapons themselves (e.g. controlling availability)
- project design should consider coordinated action on both the supply and demand dimensions of SALW;
- emphasis must be given to awareness-raising among the public about the risks posed by the proliferation of small arms;
- alliances between civil society and government have to be seen as central to achieve improved security conditions; and
- these approaches have to be fully integrated into national development strategies, focusing on creating an enabling environment for the achievement of the MDGs.

The report identifies that UNDP can play a significant role to support these initiatives by facilitating dialogue between different stakeholders from a neutral position, and furthering the capacities of national and local actors to consider, analyze and develop effective responses.

Find more information: UNDP Guatemala, Final Report, Small Arms and Light Weapons Preparatory Assistance Guatemala