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Case Study: A Communication Approach to El Salvador's EDUCO Education Reform Efforts

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Case Study: A Communication Approach to El Salvador's EDUCO Education Reform Efforts

A well-designed communication plan proved to be critical in implementing successful education reform efforts in El Salvador (World Bank 1998). El Salvador's experience with the Education with Community Participation Program (EDUCO) demonstrated that special emphasis on communication strategies can build consensus, inform communities, and improve public support for complex reforms.

During the 1990s, efforts to reform El Salvador's failing schools mobilized a number of actors that included rural communities, education stakeholders, and government officials. The country's education sector faced a number of challenges, including low enrollment; high dropout and repetition rates; inefficient management; and low fiscal allocations (World Bank 1995). According to the task team leader of the EDUCO project, surveys were administered to parents, teachers, and principals that brought to light the state of El Salvador's poorly run schools. The results revealed acute shortages in basic resources that were largely tied to conditions caused during El Salvador's civil war (1980–92). At that time, many public schools in rural areas were forced to close because of security concerns and lack of public resources. The teachers that were contracted were not paid consistently and often unable to teach in the impoverished conditions.¹

Consequently, a number of citizens established their own community-administered schools to provide basic education in areas where the government was not providing this. Soon after the communities created these schools, the government institutional-

ized the program that became formally known as EDUCO (*Educación con Participación de la Comunidad*). This project was financed by the World Bank along with other multilateral organizations from 1995 to 2007 (World Bank 2007). In this program, local school-based parent associations (community education associations [ACEs]), given appropriate training, were granted control over the administration of schools. This proved to be a challenge as low literacy rates were common among members of the ACEs. A lot of parents—especially mothers—were not able to read and write. Therefore, a training program was developed to improve literacy among parents and increase the participation among women. Financial management was also a part of these capacity-building efforts, where parents were trained to manage the funds of the associations.²

The successful education reform effort in El Salvador was facilitated by the political developments in the country. At the time of the reforms, right after the civil war, the political system shifted from an authoritarian military regime to a more accountable electoral system. This provided Salvadorans with a more prominent political voice and the government with a heightened sensitivity to the country's social inequalities. For these reasons, the government embarked on an aggressive program to extend basic education to its population.

Consensus Building in Reform Efforts

Despite the enabling political environment, a number of communication challenges threatened to un-

dermine the education reform efforts. To begin with, the reforms faced opposition from various groups, including the teachers' unions—Andes 21 de Junio and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front [FMLN]—who saw EDUCO as a move to privatize education and a threat to the job stability of teachers. “At the beginning of the project, a big effort was made to persuade people of the benefits of the EDUCO education reform program and minimize the propaganda of the opposition groups.”³ However, there was a lack of widespread awareness and support for the reforms within the wider community.⁴ To address this, El Salvador's Ministry of Education worked alongside donors to embark on a consensus building effort to strengthen support for the education reforms (World Bank 2007).

According to the task team leader, “the resistance of the guerilla movement and teacher unions posed considerable risk to the reform efforts.”⁵ Specifically, the guerillas had their own community school program called *scholar comunidad*, which was formed to serve failing schools in the guerilla areas. Unfortunately, these schools used very poorly trained and unqualified teachers. Despite this, the guerillas fought to maintain these schools and saw EDUCO as a threat.

A critical part of the consensus building effort was the early engagement of key education stakeholders, who shaped the development of a 10-year education plan. A consultation process led by El Salvador's Ministry of Education from 1993 to 1995 took place among teachers, parents, students, foundations, universities, and other members of civil society. This enabled the government to obtain and maintain the trust of the participants and facilitate an inclusive process that made important actors feel included. Ultimately, the consensus building efforts strengthened participation and built solid national consensus around changes in education (World Bank 2007).

Furthermore, negotiations and bilateral meetings with opposition groups was another key strategy, and the World Bank played an important mediating role. The task team leader met with the

guerillas and invited them for lunch and meetings. In describing this, she stated, “I held very open and frank discussions about the developments and plans of the Ministry. The guerillas made it clear that they were not against the Bank. However, they had a number of issues with the government, which made it vital for the Bank to remain a neutral and convening party in the matter.”⁶ The negotiations with these opposition groups took a long time, but they finally succeeded in persuading these groups that most parties shared the same goal—providing education to the poorest communities. All the while, the World Bank maintained a very good relationship with the opposition and the government.⁷ The guerillas were treated as a critical stakeholder, and the inclusion and participation of this group was a key part of the communication strategy.

Communication Campaigns in Reform Efforts

Although there was consensus that the education system should be changed, fragmented information flows within the Ministry of Education undermined the rapid implementation of reforms (World Bank 1995). Consequently, the ministry's institutional modernization efforts put a special emphasis on internal communication strategies that would improve information sharing and coordination.⁸ In addition, the external communication with teachers, supervisors, and principals was constant, but not necessarily efficient; and communication with other stakeholders was very limited, despite the proven effectiveness of the EDUCO program. This lack of communication led to public misconceptions of the reforms and prevented the stakeholders from developing a sense of ownership (World Bank 1995). As a result, the ministry set out to establish better channels of communication among the communities by creating an active communication campaign that would increase public awareness and support for the basic education reforms (World Bank 1998).

The major components of the communication campaign⁹ consisted of an integrated media and out-

reach strategy with programming in print, radio, and television. Six thousand newly hired EDUCO teachers served as primary spokespersons.¹⁰ The Ministry of Education also developed campaigns promoting community participation and held a series of pedagogical conferences aimed at teachers and other education stakeholders (World Bank 2007). These efforts were part of the project's institutional strengthening and modernization efforts, designed with the goal of increasing public awareness and support for the reforms (World Bank 2007). The communication interventions made an impact on stakeholder relations, including those originally opposed to EDUCO. "Strengthened relations between the government and members of the community disempowered some of the remaining opposition and the communication campaign was largely responsible for the stronger ties,"¹¹ stated the task team leader of the project.

Because of a more open media environment, EDUCO teachers and parents were able to establish good relationships with the press. These efforts led to wider coverage. Regular reports were published on the education page of the weekly Sunday newspaper, which had a short journal annex with information on the progress of projects and the results of enrollment by region. This helped the community stay informed about what was taking place in different regions; and, through competitive pressure, people could see that other regions were doing better.¹² Additionally, televised debates on the EDUCO program provided the community with essential information that represented different views and gave viewers a chance to come to their own conclusions.

Lessons Learned from Consensus Building Efforts and the Communication Campaign

- *Engage stakeholders early in the process.* The project preparation included participation of communities and the consultation of key

stakeholders to ensure that their concerns were included in the design of the project. This is a critical example of how communications was handled in an upstream way.

- *Enable strong ownership of reforms.* Because EDUCO evolved out of preexisting grassroots practices, the community's commitment and ownership of the reforms was quite strong. Additionally, the government took strong ownership of the reforms, in line with their own national objectives of addressing the country's social inequalities.
- *Ensure negotiation and dialogue as key elements of consensus building efforts.* A key reason for the successful implementation of the education reforms was the consensus building among stakeholders. A series of meetings were conducted with teachers' unions and members of the guerilla movement, and the meetings brought them to agreement.
- *Establish key messengers who can work as spokespersons for a campaign.* The teachers who acted as the key messengers in the campaign were critical voices who advocated the benefits of EDUCO's program to the wider community. Their advocacy was particularly important because teachers were perceived to be one of the most vulnerable groups in the reform. Therefore, this key role was an important way to reach out to other critical education stakeholders.
- *Strategically highlight key aspects of a program into succinct messages.* Because of the participatory nature of the EDUCO project, parents and other members of the community became more empowered and engaged in their children's day-to-day educational activities. The public awareness campaign, which resonated with target audiences, focused on this critical facet of the project. The messages that centered on community participation evoked a strong sense of voice and shared responsibility in the education reform process.

Details on the Consensus Building Efforts and Communication Campaign

An extended interview with Maria Dos Santos, the task team leader of the EDUCO project, revealed some of the communication methods that were used to reach the key audiences during the campaign. The details surrounding these methods are provided here.

Communication Team and Resources

- El Salvador's Ministry of Education had a communications specialist on its team. The ministry also used firms to carry out various parts of their campaign, including the advertising component. The ministry was also very open minded and willing to try various communication methods to address challenges.
- The communication activities, which started during project preparation, continued through project implementation and covered almost five years. Initially, the project supported the development of a communication strategy specifically for EDUCO from 1995 to 1999, which is the primary focus of this case study. The total funds¹³ allocated for that period was \$1.3 million (World Bank 1995). In 1998, the total funds allocated for the following phase of the communication campaign was \$0.7 million, which covered the period between 1999 and 2001 (World Bank 1998). During that period, a number of the efforts were focused on communicating about the larger national education reforms.
- The World Bank team did not have a dedicated communications person working on this project. However, the task team was acutely aware of the importance of integrating communications in the project. When dealing with resistance, they worked alongside the ministry to develop a strategy to help mitigate the risks involved in the project.

- The project also allocated funds¹⁴ to develop communication efforts for the country's comprehensive education reforms.

Spokespersons

- There were six thousand recently hired EDUCO teachers who served as spokespersons in media efforts. At times, this was difficult because the teachers and parents had to be carefully managed. There was a point in the reforms where parents were pushing full-steam-ahead on implementing the campaign. They were very engaged, entrepreneurial, and often wanted to take charge of situations; but they had to slow down their efforts to get the message across more effectively.

Print Media and Promotion

- There was a very open media environment in the country, including three newspapers with which the parents established good relationships. When parents were disgruntled with teachers, they talked frequently to reporters. This provided them an opportunity to explain any issues they had with teachers.
- Additional components of the program that may not have been documented in the project report were flyers produced as part of the public awareness campaign that were distributed by the community to different groups.

Radio and Television

- The media outlets that were particularly useful in the communication efforts were television and radio. They were initially used as a vehicle to counter the opposition groups—teachers unions and members of the guerilla movement. The six thousand recently hired EDUCO teachers also served as spokespersons in media efforts.
- There were televised debates on EDUCO where opposing sides would discuss their views.

Advertising

- Advertising was another important area of the media strategy. The ministry made arrangements to place different advertisements, where supervisors would explain the program. Teachers were also featured. They talked about how happy they were with the program. The government contracted with a firm that ran the advertising campaign.

Survey Tools

- The primary purpose of the surveys was to demonstrate the state of education in El Salvador. When the government took over, it saw a lot of problems with lack of supervision and with absenteeism. The United Nations Children's Fund was one of the organizations that administered the surveys to reveal the state of the educational system.

Other Important Aspects of the Education Reform Efforts

- A number of similar decentralization efforts during this period were approached from the top down. However, EDUCO was one of the only ones that did so in this period from the bottom up. The decentralized strategy used here had a strong framework in place. It demonstrated that the community can have an effect on the quality and provision of educational services.

- In terms of lessons learned, it is important for the World Bank to use caution when introducing reforms. The World Bank has a tendency to be ambitious and try introducing various components all at once. It is more important to approach reform efforts step by step. With this in mind, the widespread reforms for the EDUCO program only took place in its second phase. The first phase was more gradual.
- In their approach to these decentralization efforts, the three principles that this project followed were the following:
 1. It is important to be specific in the definition of roles; the roles and responsibilities of each actor were clearly defined, with no gray areas.
 2. It is imperative that all the resources are in place.
 3. It is critical to incorporate technical assistance at all levels. A lot of parents were illiterate and relied on the teachers, so a great deal of capacity building had to take place there. The ministry also had to undergo this capacity building.
- In 2008, the task team leader went back to El Salvador and found an EDUCO school still being run by the community. This shows the level of institutionalization that has taken place. At this time, it is unclear whether the new government will continue to support the EDUCO model.

Annex: Logic Model for El Salvador's EDUCO Education Reform Efforts

Consensus Building Efforts and a Communication Campaign

A logic model is a representation of how an intervention is expected to work. It illustrates the chain of events that must occur to achieve a desired change, makes explicit the implicit assumptions of how impact should occur, provides stakeholders with a vision of different components in a project, gives managers guidance on where to invest their resources, and offers evaluators clear guidance on what elements they should track to determine a project's success (CommGAP 2007).

This logic model for El Salvador's EDUCO project provides structure to the contribution of communication techniques to a development project. It does not exist to replace the prose case study, but stylizes the analysis. It also draws attention to the centrality of the evaluation process and the critical role of indicators.

1 Project Objectives	2 Communication Challenges	3 Objectives to Support Main Project Objectives	4 Communication Interventions	5 Outcomes	6 Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enhance access to education in the poorest rural areas; foster community participation in school-related decision making; and improve accountability between policy makers, providers, and beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance from opposition groups, including the guerilla movement and teachers unions Lack of widespread public awareness of basic education reforms Lack of widespread participation among community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve public awareness and support for the education reforms Improve public awareness of basic education reforms among members of the community Generate positive media coverage on the merits of the EDUCO model Increase community participation in school-related decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations and focus groups with key education stakeholders A series of dialogues and negotiations with opposition groups, during which the World Bank played a key mediating role A communication campaign that included participation of EDUCO teachers; important spokespersons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better awareness and support for education reform efforts among key stakeholders, including opposition groups Greater awareness among the larger community on the merits of education reform efforts Increased quantity and quality of media coverage surrounding EDUCO schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members empowered and accountability improved among policy makers, providers, and beneficiaries

- of the campaign; and
 - a television program titled “Fanja de La Calidad Educativa”
 - televised debates
 - a radio publicity campaign
 - an advertising campaign
 - an edition of the Ministry of Education’s magazine, *CLASE*, which was produced and distributed to schools each semester
 - media strategy
 - distribution of flyers
 - pedagogical teacher conferences
- Stronger community participation, including parent decision making, involvement in educational activities, and overall interest in education

Illustrative Indicators and Means of Measurement

Outcome	Indicator	Means of Measurement
Better support of education reform efforts among key stakeholders, including opposition groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement on shared objectives between government and stakeholders (including opposition groups) • Satisfactory rating as a result of good teamwork and excellent communication with the borrower and stakeholders • Number of productive consultations, focus groups, and bilateral meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interview with task team leader • Project records (the World Bank's "Implementation Completion and Results Report of 2007") • Project records and key informant interviews with task team leader
Greater awareness among the larger community on merits of education reform efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of citizens aware of EDUCO program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey administered to the public
Increased quantity and quality of media coverage surrounding EDUCO schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of print, television, and radio stories on the positive merits of the EDUCO program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media content analysis
Stronger community participation and overall interest in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of teachers participating in school-related decision making • Number of activities in support of EDUCO schools and students • Number of parents, teachers, and other members of the educational community involved in EDUCO school activities • Opinions on attitude toward education among parents, teachers, and principals • A special study conducted on levels of engagement among parents, teachers, and other members of the education community • Survey administered to education stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A special study conducted on levels of engagement among parents, teachers, and other members of the education community • Survey administered to education stakeholders

Notes

1. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
2. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
3. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
4. Compared with similar education reform efforts in Central America, levels of awareness and engagement in El Salvador were higher. Community-based education reform projects that were similar in Guatemala and Nicaragua had considerably lower levels of engagement (Di Gropello 2006).
5. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
6. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
7. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
8. For more information on the internal communications efforts, refer to World Bank (1998).
9. This communication campaign started with EDUCO reforms and then extended to support the basic education reforms that the Ministry of Education was implementing across the country. These basic education reforms had an overall goal of ensuring that at least 90 percent of the children in El Salvador successfully completed basic education (grades 1–9) by the year 2005. The program sought to achieve this by (a) increasing access to preschool education for children in the poorest areas of the country; (b) expanding the system to enable enrollment of students in the full nine-year basic education program, with emphasis on the poorest rural and marginal urban areas that have no sufficient capacity to absorb all school-age children; (c) improving the quality of education at all levels through initiatives that include curriculum development, provision of textbooks and instructional materials, and teacher development activities; (d) developing school-based management strategies to increase accountability and school performance; (e) promoting an effective decentralized decision-making process through the partici-

pation of ACEs in rural areas and school councils in urban schools; and (f) supporting institutional strengthening activities at all levels to increase efficiency, equity, and quality in service delivery (World Bank 1995).

10. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
11. M. Dos Santos, personal communication, March 23, 2010.
12. H. Garcia, notes from interview with M. Dos Santos, task team leader of EDUCO Education Reform Project, June 18, 2007.
13. These allocated funds included the contributions of other multilateral partner institutions.
14. The total funds allocated for the communication campaign was \$0.7 million. This covered the first phase of the project that ran from 1999 to 2001 (World Bank 1998).

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The Communication for Governance & Accountability Program (CommGAP) seeks to promote good and accountable governance through the use of innovative communication approaches and techniques that strengthen the constitutive elements of the public sphere: engaged citizenries, vibrant civil societies, plural and independent media systems, and open government institutions. Communication links these elements, forming a framework for national dialogue through which informed public opinion is shaped about key issues of public concern. CommGAP posits that sound analysis and understanding of the structural and process aspects of communication and their interrelationships make critical contributions to governance reform.

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