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# FIRST PERSON

## Women Find Justice Amidst Impunity

**50 community leaders trained as paralegals to aid their communities**



Photo: Chemonics/Kari Goetz

Vilma Dinora Morales, a champion of women's rights in Villa Nueva, attends a domestic violence training session.

***“Vilma Dinora Morales taught me how important it is to change for yourself and others. I used to be an aggressor and she taught me how important it is to evaluate my own behavior in order to better myself and my ability to help others,” said Eufrazio Gálvez López.***

Through her work, trained therapist Vilma Dinora Morales learned that violence against women in Villa Nueva (a Guatemala City suburb) was a serious problem that received little attention and often went unpunished. Community leaders and justice center professionals wanted to help women access justice, but did not know how. (Justice centers are spaces where justice operators and community members can work together to improve justice in their municipalities or department/states.) Few cases of domestic violence and sexual assault are reported; women seemed to live with violence as a way of life.

To help break the pattern and the silence, Vilma sought to build awareness of the injustice of violence, to educate leaders about women's legal rights, and help them develop the capacity to assist victims of violence. A graduate of the Gender and the Law program (developed by a USAID women's legal rights project), she successfully implemented an advocacy project at the Villa Nueva Justice Center to combat domestic violence. She trained 50 community leaders from 14 Villa Nueva communities with high crime rates on women's legal rights.

Inspired by her commitment and their new knowledge, the community leaders pursued further education and earned paralegal certifications to help meet the community's needs. According to the paralegals, Vilma's support and leadership served as the driving force behind the success of the projects and their work.

Nearly 50 community leaders are now applying their knowledge to implement advocacy projects in each of their communities. They facilitate the provision of better services with justice sector institutions and use a manual on inter-family violence that they developed together to raise awareness, educate the public about the law, understand legal mechanisms and resources, and help victims in crisis. “The authorities are willing to help, but they can not do it alone. We must help them help us,” said María del Carmen Aguilar, a new Villa Nueva community paralegal.

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