



SUCCESS STORY

Zero Tolerance for Impunity

Citizens demand accountability from a public official



Photo: Zero Impunity Citizens' Group

Frustrated with the lack of transparency in local governance, as well as evident corruption among public officials, residents of Capitan Miranda, a town in Paraguay’s southern region of Itapúa, joined forces to create a local citizen watchdog called the “Zero Impunity” group.

The group’s first priority was to demand accountability from the town’s justice of the peace. For five years, as the head of the local registry office, she had failed to record several hundred births, deaths, and marriages in the public record. Moreover, civil registry officials were notorious for charging arbitrary fees well above the official charges for those services.

The group organized a peaceful demonstration and demanded three changes: the justice of the peace’s resignation; amended public records that accurately reflect the births, marriages, and deaths that had not been registered; and an investigation into all other irregularities committed by the justice during her tenure. The first objective was achieved almost immediately; in light of the strong citizen outcry, the justice resigned. This was a significant victory for residents of Capitan Miranda — their first attempt at citizen oversight had caused a rupture in a long legacy of unchecked privilege enjoyed by public authorities.

The Zero Impunity group is now gearing up to follow through on the other two objectives: to ensure that the public records are corrected and that the justice of the peace is investigated and held accountable for her misdeeds.

Capitan Miranda’s citizenry has awakened and residents are ready to play a key role in strengthening democracy in their community. Through the citizens’ group, they pledge to continue demanding honesty, transparency, and efficiency from their government.

Watchdog group members demanded accountability from a public official during their first demonstration. The sign reads “Capitan Miranda ‘Zero Impunity’ Citizen Watchdogs.”

USAID supports citizen watchdog groups such as this one in the town of Capitan Miranda. Over 60 local chapters of watchdog groups are connected through the National Network of Citizen Watchdog Groups, a USAID partner.