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**EL SALVADOR**

## FIRST PERSON A Special HIV/AIDS Counselor

**One counselor's workshop teaches more than HIV/AIDS prevention**



Photo: USAID/ Ana Josefina Nuila

Dr. Belisa Lucila de Sanchez is a visually impaired counselor and specialist in HIV/AIDS.

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***On the contrary, it can be a strong motivational force for developing unique and valuable skills.***

In an effort to reduce HIV/AIDS transmissions in El Salvador's National Civilian Police, USAID is working with police officers, administrative personnel and their families to improve their understanding and awareness of the disease. Doctor Belisa Lucila de Sanchez — Lucy — is a visually impaired psychologist who runs the HIV/AIDS program and provides counseling services.

In September 2003, health professionals in each precinct's "workplace clinic" conducted a workshop on voluntary counseling and testing. Developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and supported by USAID, the training placed a strong emphasis on HIV/AIDS prevention. Given her expertise in the subject of HIV/AIDS, Lucy's participation in the training was extremely useful to participants.

But her contribution went beyond that when the training showed participants how to use cue cards in the counseling process. These cards ask key questions that counselors need to review with their clients during counseling conducted before and after their HIV/AIDS tests. As a personal challenge, Lucy transcribed her cue cards into Braille and used her own materials in the counseling role playing exercises.

Lucy gave the trainees two important lessons: She proved that visually impaired people can be trained as HIV/AIDS counselors, and she demonstrated that visual impairment is not an obstacle for becoming an efficient and professional counselor.

Lucy is living proof that a physical limitation does not prevent a person from doing an excellent job. On the contrary, it can be a strong motivational force for developing unique and valuable skills.