



NES

**NATIONAL
ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY**

LEARNING FROM NES GUATEMALA

**GOOD PRACTICES FROM A
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM**

**INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION**

NES

NATIONAL
ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY

SUMMARY

NES Guatemala -*Strategy of Inclusive and Sustainable Land Governance for Food Security in Guatemala* is promoted in a complex context characterized by active agrarian conflict and the criminalization of human rights defenders working on land and territorial issues. Despite difficulties, NES Guatemala has made significant progress since it started in 2013, contributing to rural development and to a safe and equitable land access for peasant and indigenous populations in the country.

The National Engagement Strategy (NES) has been strengthened with the *Frente Indígena Campesino* -Indigenous Peasant Front-, an alliance bringing together several grassroots organizations. The *Frente* facilitates negotiations with agrarian institutions in order to seek solutions to landgrabbing, land conflicts and the limited access to land for peasant and indigenous populations. NES has successfully promoted consultancy work and support in cases of human and land rights violations, training hundreds of community leaders -404 in 2018- to defend their rights. Furthermore, it has established key cooperation agreements, such as the accord with the Secretariat of Agrarian Affairs (SAA), to negotiate conflict resolution and agricultural policy.

Relevant proposals have also been addressed to public institutions. A recommendation to promote family farming has been submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA, by its Spanish acronym). The MAGA's budget is subject to constant monitoring. There is a line of research to reinforce evidence-based advocacy work and fomenting, amid multiple actors, the debate of critical issues such as rural unemployment. Another significant effort is the strategic use of communications through radio community campaigns, public forums and social media.



NES GUATEMALA

GOOD PRACTICES

TOWARDS MAKING LAND GOVERNANCE MORE PEOPLE-CENTRED

The ILC's Database of Good Practices (<https://www.landcoalition.org/en/good-practices>) is an initiative that documents and systematises ILC members and partners' experience in promoting people-centred land governance, as defined in the Antigua Declaration of the ILC Assembly of Members.

Further information at <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/what-we-do>

The activity of NES Guatemala supports people-centred land governance, as it contributes to:



COMMITMENT 1

Respect, protect and strengthen the land rights of women and men living in poverty



COMMITMENT 4

Ensure gender justice in relation to land



COMMITMENT 5

Respect and protect the inherent land and territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples



COMMITMENT 7

Ensure that processes of decision-making over land are inclusive



COMMITMENT 8

Ensure transparency and accountability



COMMITMENT 10

Respect and protect the civil and political rights of human rights defenders working on land issues

BACKGROUND

NES Guatemala emerged in 2013, promoted by ILC member organizations in the country: the indigenous and peasant grassroots organizations CCDA -*Comité Campesino del Altiplano*-, CODECA -*Comité de Desarrollo Campesino*-, UVO -*Unión Verapacense de Organizaciones Campesinas*-, and Coordination of NGOs and Cooperatives - (CONGCOOP, by its Spanish acronym), the latter mostly engaged in research work. Currently, the association of *Ch'orti'* indigenous peasants *Nuevo Día*, which is also an ILC member, and the Organization of Guatemalan Women *Mamá Maquín*, are also members of the NES Platform.

All platform members participated in the definition of NES central axes: promoting the integral rural development of the rural sectors - peasants, Indigenous Peoples and rural women - in the face of landgrabbing and plunder of natural resources. The NES platform seeks to facilitate talks between the State and civil society, and developing capacities of member organizations to contribute to a more inclusive land and natural resource governance.

Guatemala is experiencing a governance crisis that stems from the corruption events unveiled, in 2015, by an investigation of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG, by its Spanish acronym), a key institution

in the fight against corruption in the country. The current Jimmy Morales-led government, however, has discontinued the CICIG mandate.

Moreover, the country is witnessing a considerable escalation of assassinations, persecutions and criminalization. The victims are territorial and land rights defenders who oppose major projects and/or investments limiting the possibilities of rural communities to achieve a dignified life. There are even law initiatives, such as Law 5522 "Anti-invasions" and Law 5239 "Against Terrorist Acts", which criminalize peaceful struggles and resistance demonstrations organized to defend land and territorial rights.

Taking all the above mentioned into account, NES Guatemala actively participated, in August 2018, in an international mission that visited the country and was led by ILC, Front Line Defenders and CIVICUS, with the support of UDEFEGUA and the National Land Pastoral of the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala. An outcome of the mission was the report "**Losing one's life to defend the land**", which presents recommendations to different actors on how to end the climate of violence faced by land and human rights defenders in the country.

MAIN GOOD PRACTICES

RESEARCH-BASED MONITORING AND ADVOCACY

NES-supported studies and research efforts have been influential inputs for advocacy work, and the social mobilization of peasant organizations in relation to critical issues such as malnutrition or rural unemployment.

Research findings have made possible to develop recommendations to ministries, such as those to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA) on addressing the situation of women in rural areas and prioritizing peasant family farming.

Other examples are:

- **Study on youth employment at the municipal level.**

Research into rural youth employment in the agricultural sector of Alta Verapaz, in the municipality of Raxuhá. Results will be used as the basis for debating, reaching agreements and developing partnerships between State and civil society, as well as setting out an employment programme to be presented to different government agencies.

- **Presentation of a conflict matrix.**

A tool to pressure the Public Ministry, and other human rights agencies, to review relevant cases of agrarian conflict and criminalization. The tool will be used by peasant and indigenous organizations supporting affected communities and community leaders. The matrix has been useful to unify the various cases submitted to the Public Ministry into a single tool, and to coordinate follow-up actions for each one of them.

MONITORING OF PUBLIC BUDGET

In achieving rural development, it is important to prioritize investment in technical training, technification and supplies to make land productive. Monitoring of the MAGA budget is carried out to ensure that a perspective to preserve the culture and good living

conditions of indigenous and peasant populations is incorporated into MAGA programmes.

The monitoring process facilitates access to public agencies and provides the foundation to develop follow-up actions.

COLLECTIVE ACTIONS AGAINST THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

CREATION OF THE FRENTE INDÍGENA CAMPESINO

NES Guatemala has strengthened with the creation of the *Frente Indígena Campesino* or Indigenous Peasant Front, an alliance of diverse peasant organizations which includes NES platform members, except for CODECA, to improve land access and defend territories. This initiative has held two peasant meetings: one dedicated to *Youth and Rural Employment*, and a second one on *Criminalization and Agrarian Conflict*. Representatives of the country's agrarian institutions and related social organizations were invited to both activities. The *Frente*'s commitment to collaborate includes drafting principles for action, behaviour and engagement within its member organizations, guidelines for financing and the elaboration of a workplan.

This alliance facilitates communication among organizations, political entities and social movements, also

generating changes in favour of peasant communities, land access and people-centred territorial governance. It is also a space to enable new female leadership and the learning and engagement of young people. In 2018, the *Frente* fulfilled its commitment to incorporate young men and women in its political committee.

LEGAL SUPPORT AND ADVICE IN CASES OF AGRARIAN CONFLICT

UVOC, *Nuevo Día* and CCDA have offered legal support to individuals and communities affected by evictions, repression or assassinations of social leaders, also assisting in defending communal lands and submitting cases together to the Public Ministry with other organizations -CUC and the Indigenous Peoples Legal Office-. Despite the tragedy of the murders of over a dozen human rights land defenders in 2018, work has significantly progressed: 64 cases have been singled out for receiving the support to help to

find them solutions. Accusing parties, in partnership with the Public Ministry, met with relevant territorial prosecutors to deal with cases at the local level. This process has helped to engage local authorities in seeking justice and conflict prevention, as well as raising the profile of the organizations within the country's legal system. Progress was also achieved in advising communities affected by megaprojects or monoculture farming techniques.

STRATEGIC USE OF THE MEDIA

The work of NES Guatemala has been promoted by:

1. **Community radio campaigns.**
NES community work launched a national radio campaign to give visibility and raising awareness about agrarian issues in the country. It focused on the violation of indigenous and peasant women's rights in the agrarian sector and in land access. This line of work has reached national audiences in various regions.
2. **Public forums.**
Spaces where platform members submit proposals and denounce attacks and rights violations of land defenders. This has been done through published printed texts documenting, for instance, women's experiences defending their territories - "*¡Por nuestras vidas!*"-, press releases, reports, and the magazine *Territorios on "Extractivism and Social Movements in Guatemala"*. Public forums were held in Guatemala City and in the departments where the organizations work. Municipal, departmental and central government authorities were invited to the events. Human rights violations, equal access to land for women, peasant family farming, and youth and rural employment were among the themes discussed.
3. **Social media.**
Facebook serves as a support tool for the work carried out, sharing communications and news of member organizations' activities in the different territories. NES Guatemala has a plan for social media use, which is embedded in the communication strategy.

CHALLENGES

It is extremely complicated, due to limitations imposed by the Morales government, to continue the negotiation process between peasant organizations and state agrarian institutions. As a result of the low interest shown in agrarian issues in the State's agenda, reaching the public entities has become increasingly difficult.

Significant progress was made to monitor classified cases of "criminalization" and "agrarian conflict", thanks to the collaboration of the Public Ministry and as part of the combined effort of the NES platform. This generated commitments and the scheduling of new meetings, by each organization and as a collective, with special attention given to negotiation and peaceful resolution of territorial conflicts. However, results are limited when considering the wave of violence and repression currently taking place against human rights defenders.

Conflicts are constant in natural resource-rich territories and there are not effective efforts to negotiate political measures. The agrarian conflict is not a temporary situation but a permanent one, becoming a challenge for the NES to address as a platform. The NES had signed a letter of understanding with the Secretariat of Agrarian Affairs (SAA) to address agrarian conflicts, promote agricultural policy and adapt the

National Integrated Rural Development Policy, which already prioritises rural and indigenous populations. It has been, however, impossible to continue. At large, the country's agrarian institutions are not prone to new approaches and reject all invitations to official meetings. Simultaneously, the assassinations of land defenders continue, making difficult to relate with state agencies.

The governance crisis in Guatemala erupted in 2015 and is linked to institutional weakening, social conflict and political uncertainty. This context limits the possibilities to generate optimal spaces to negotiate with agricultural agencies in the country, slowing down monitoring of short- and medium-term collaboration commitments among government entities, organizations and civil society. It seems evident that political and economic powers in Guatemala are unwilling to implement necessary changes to address the situation of poverty and exclusion lived by the rural populations in the country. For instance, work on the water law and the Integrated Rural Development Policy have been interrupted, while the evictions of rural communities and the criminalization of community leaders persist.

LESSONS LEARNED

DEVELOPING STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

In order to progress in the formulation, approval and implementation of adequate public policies or laws for the rural sector, NES needs to expand its level of influence on governmental decisions, by engaging and creating alliances with other organizations. NES member organizations not only improve relationships at the local level, but they also better reach partners at national or

international levels, finding solutions to specific problems through discussions within the platform and/or with external actors. Seeking strategic alliances is key, not only for political motives but also for economic reasons. Cooperation with new actors may increase the platform's possibilities to gain access to unexplored funding opportunities.

FLEXIBILITY AND PLANNING IN THE FACE OF UNEXPECTED CHANGE

The struggle of peasant movements is not new in Guatemala. The NES, as a long-term engagement strategy, adds cohesion to the efforts of its leading organizations, also strengthening their capacities to adapt to potential unexpected changes. NES Guatemala's activities have helped to reinforce nationally the unity of the peasant

movement and provided help and support, at social and political levels, to social organizations in adverse circumstances. NES Guatemala has also contributed to the vision and promotion of appropriate territorial governance, fomenting practices to demonstrate the efficiency of the people-centred approach.

WHAT IS A NES?

In recent years, equitable access to land, particularly in rural areas, has been high on the international policy agenda and is recognised as a crucial element attributing to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Innovative and progressive land policies and laws, particularly at the national level, are key to determining equitable access to, use of, and control over land and other natural resources.

The National Engagement Strategy (NES) is the first step of an approach being promoted by the International Land Coalition at country level, in order to create conditions for inclusive and people-centred land-related policy change. Jointly formulated and co-owned by ILC members and other relevant actors at national level, the NES itself is a framework for identifying key priority areas on which land-concerned actors see opportunities for catalysing change, either at the level of policy formulation or at the level of implementing existing progressive policies. The NES process also involves the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform that accompanies the implementation of the NES and makes necessary adjustments based on lessons learned.

A NES process is therefore aimed at facilitating collaborative and coordinated action amongst different stakeholders involved with land at the national level to promote people-centred land governance. Through these NES processes, opportunities are increasingly made available to national civil society actors to collaborate among themselves and with international actors, both governmental and non-governmental, and to engage with local and national governments.

Currently, NES exist in Africa (Cameroun, DRC, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda), Asia (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, The Philippines), Europe (Albania) and Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru). NES are under formulation in Honduras, Jordan, Moldova and Mongolia.



This paper is based on the 2017 Strategy, NES reports from 2017/2018 and an interview with NES Guatemala Facilitator Fredy Pérez Gonzalez.

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Last update: June 10, 2019.



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