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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Honduras

PHOTO: USAID

The women's political participation and leadership (WPPL) assessment in Honduras, one of an eight-country pilot under USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Learning, Evaluation, and Research (LER) II activity, uses the latest iteration of USAID's **WPPL Assessment Framework**. The Honduras WPPL assessment investigates the barriers to and opportunities for expanding women's participation and leadership in Honduras along socio-cultural, institutional, and individual dimensions. There are promising WPPL indicators in Honduras: women make up a majority of voters and hold elected positions at all levels of government, including the presidency, thanks in part to the gender quota. However, political parties are a major space of exclusion for women, and violence against women in politics, and gender-based violence in general, is pervasive and a key barrier to women's full and equal participation.

The assessment findings and recommendations are derived from a desk review of relevant literature and documents, a survey of 21 politicians, and 40 key informant interviews and seven focus group discussions with politicians, civil society, and media in Tegucigalpa, Tocoa, and La Ceiba. The Honduras WPPL Assessment Report can be used by the relevant stakeholders to identify priority areas in which their investments in programs and initiatives to support WPPL are likely to have the greatest and most meaningful impact.

FINDINGS

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Political parties prefer men candidates, and most parties lack gender-sensitive bylaws and internal policies.
- Policies in Congress do not recognize the different needs of women and men elected officials; the lack of a proxy vote disadvantages women, who are more likely to be absent due to domestic responsibilities. Additionally, women in Congress do not receive equal financing to run their offices.
- Violence against women in politics (VAWIP) is common and legal protection for women is weak. Government institutions also lack sexual harassment policies or internal mechanisms to report violence.
- Cultural norms and expectations often prevent women from being perceived as capable and legitimate political actors. Women are viewed as caregivers and limited to domestic work, discouraging them from political participation and stigmatizing women who do pursue political activity.
- Women often lack the knowledge, skills, or confidence to enter politics due to harmful gender stereotypes and fewer opportunities to gain experience outside the home. There is also a lack of adequate training for women to gain the necessary skills for campaigning or drafting legislation once they are elected.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Honduras has signed several international and regional conventions to protect the rights of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Additionally, the constitution guarantees equality to all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on sex. Although loopholes to these legal structures prevent them from achieving their potential, they provide a framework for supporting and promoting WPPL.
- The government has shown a willingness to dedicate resources to gender equality, such as through the establishment of the Women's Prosecutor and Family Councils through the Ministry of Health, reforms to existing laws such as the Penal Code and the Family Code, and the creation of the National Institute for Women.
- There is broad women's participation in civil society—especially within organizations that advocate for women's rights and the protection of reproductive rights—which could translate to increased participation in formal politics.

In the 2021 elections, 62.8 percent of women who were registered to vote voted. Barriers to voting are especially prevalent for women who are also part of other marginalized groups such as women with disabilities, women from rural areas, LGBTQI+, and Indigenous women.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- International donors and relevant national stakeholders should focus on working with and engaging men political and religious leaders to educate them on the benefits of more diverse participation as well as the influence and impact of misogyny and political violence on gender equality and women's political rights.
- International donors and civil society organizations (CSOs) should train journalists and other media professionals on how to cover women in politics in a gender-transformative way.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- The government of Honduras and the National Electoral Council (CNE) should conduct a formal review and revision of national electoral laws to better support women's access to and leadership in political life, including applying the gender quota law to both primary and general elections, amending electoral law to require any vacated elected seat to be filled with either someone of the same gender or someone from the underrepresented gender, instituting reform to specify that candidates for mayoral seats must alternate gender every election, and developing sanctions on political parties for not appointing women. Electoral institutions should also mainstream gender considerations into their internal operations and external programming.
- Congress, the CNE, and political parties should take steps to develop policies and protocols that are sensitive to the needs and experiences of Honduran women, including sexual harassment policies and mechanisms for their enforcement and rigorous measures to monitor compliance with laws on gender equality.
- CSOs should strengthen their coordination and advocacy efforts around passing laws to address VAWIP, such as the draft Law Against Political Violence. International donors should continue to invest funding in supporting local CSOs, particularly those not based in the capital or that represent women from marginalized groups.
- Stakeholders should work to combat gender-based violence as a whole to reduce instances of VAWIP, for example by eliminating impunity for perpetrators and providing support for survivors.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- The Secretary of Education should create gender-sensitive civic education programs in government schools to build girls' leadership skills and demonstrate to young boys that girls' and women's participation in public life is normal and important.
- National political parties should support youth committees to create advocacy campaigns aimed at motivating women—in particular young women and girls—to participate in politics and raise their awareness of the benefits of women's political participation and gender equality.
- The CNE should prioritize its partnerships with CSOs to develop sustained and localized leadership and capacity-building programs for civil society and women in both rural and urban contexts through its National Institute for Political and Electoral Training.
- Electoral institutions, CSOs, and international donors should provide candidate training to women running for office and for recently elected women leaders. This training should focus on skills necessary to seek office and to be an effective public official once elected.