

Women and the Right of Access to Information

Guatemala



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This document presents a draft version of the preliminary findings of a mixed methods study conducted by the Carter Center and Accion Ciudadana in six departments of Guatemala between July and September of 2014. The study was made possible by the generous financial support of Irish Aid. Please do not cite.

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Project Background

What is Access to Information?

Access to information is a fundamental right listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is needed for people to exercise their political and economic rights. It is a tool that provides the power to make sure that social services reach those who need them. Access to Information supports true government accountability by helping people know more about government practices and policies. Projects that have focused on access to information have increased people's ability to engage with their governments in accountability processes. Democracy depends on how much the citizenry knows, whose access to a range of information enables them to participate more fully in public life, help determine priorities for public spending, receive equal access to justice, and hold their public officials accountable. Inadequate access to public information allows corruption to flourish, and back-room deals to determine spending in the interests of the few rather than many.

Known Issues Women Face in Accessing Information

Often in our societies it is the most vulnerable populations who suffer the greatest due to limited access to information, and this is very true for women. Even in countries with laws and rights to information, it seems that women are less likely to receive and access needed information. While women are the least likely to demand access to information, they are perhaps the most in need. Although women perform 66% of all the work, they continue to form the largest block of the world's poor, representing an estimated 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty. Economic opportunities for women are few. According to UN Women, while women dominate employment in agricultural production for Latin America, more lucrative opportunities in export-oriented industries are still dominated by men. And while over the past decades, enrollment of girls in primary education has increased, it is still not universal. With real access to meaningful information, women can make more effective decisions and harness the opportunities available for education, land, agricultural production, and starting a business.

Purpose of Research Study and Importance

The purpose of this research project is to study and analyze women's access to public information in Guatemala. This study is the second of a larger multi-country research project. The first full study took place in Liberia in early 2014. Following that study, a review with the local researchers was held to consider the methodology and the questionnaire/survey instrument. A number of modifications have been made, and the refined methodology and new questionnaires have been used in Guatemala. The study also will be applied in Bangladesh, as well as potentially other developing countries. The research design is multi-method, relying on several types of data.

Triangulation among the data sets facilitates drawing conclusions for the final report.

- Access to Information is a valuable tool for holding government accountable
- Women seem to have less access to important information than men
- When women do access important information, they have used it to improve their economic status and to promote/protect fundamental human rights
- This study specifically considered women in Guatemala and their access to important information for economic empowerment and exercise of rights

The Carter Center worked with an in-country team of researchers in six departments. The Guatemalan research team gathered the initial data and worked with the Carter Center staff to validate and understand the findings.

Research Questions

- (1) Do women access critical public information less frequently than men?**
- (2) What are the main obstacles facing women in the exercise of the right to information?**
- (3) What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment, with particular emphasis on education, land, agriculture and starting a business (and perhaps related to gender-based violence)?**
- (4) If the identified obstacles are overcome and meaningful information is accessible, would that contribute to increased economic empowerment (and/or reduce gender-based violence)?**

Mixed methods study

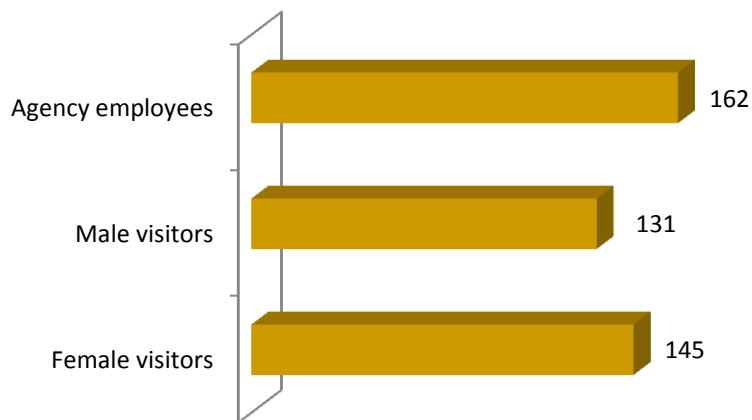


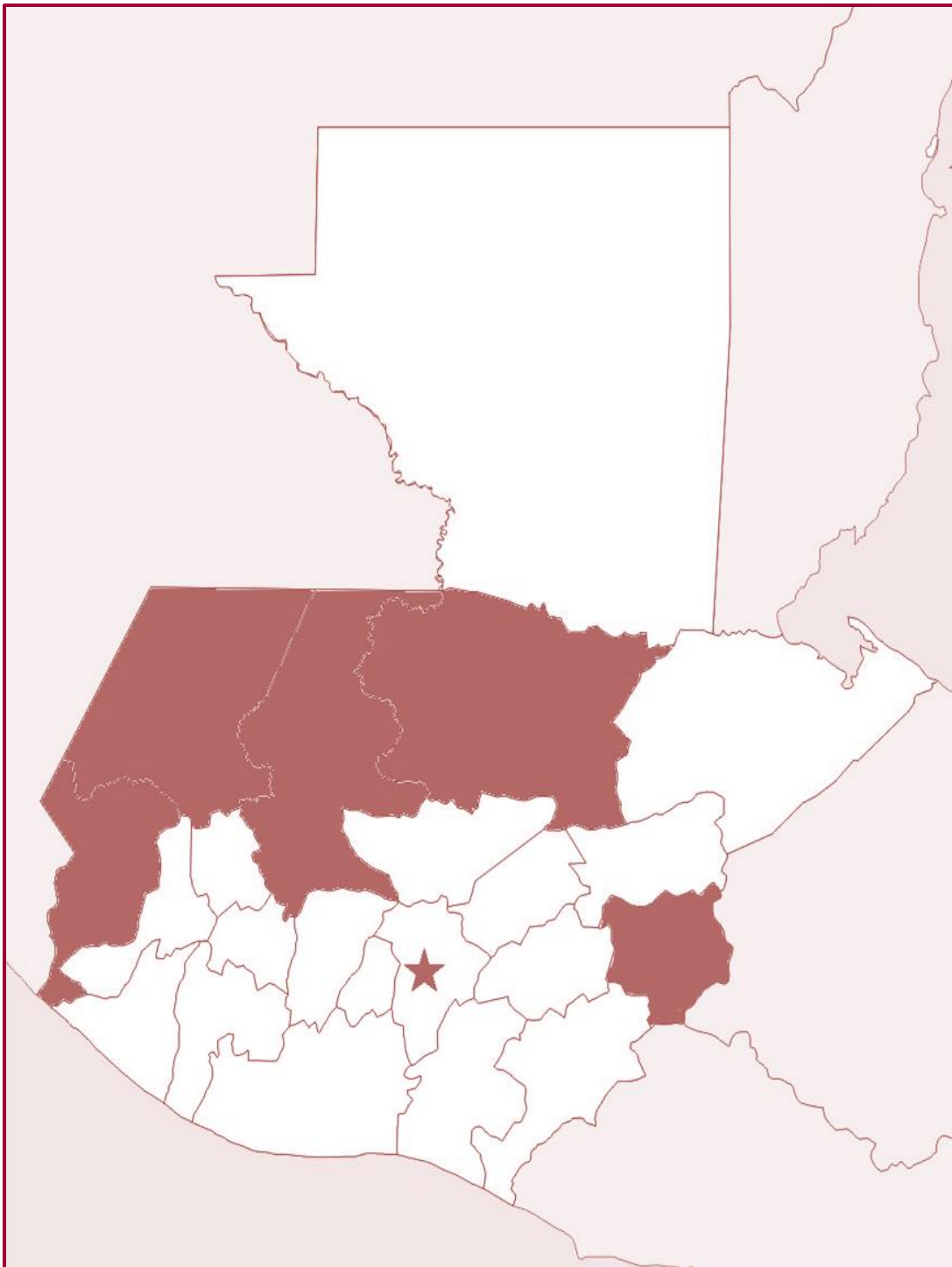
by gender



*4 did not respond

Non-participant observation in 47 agencies





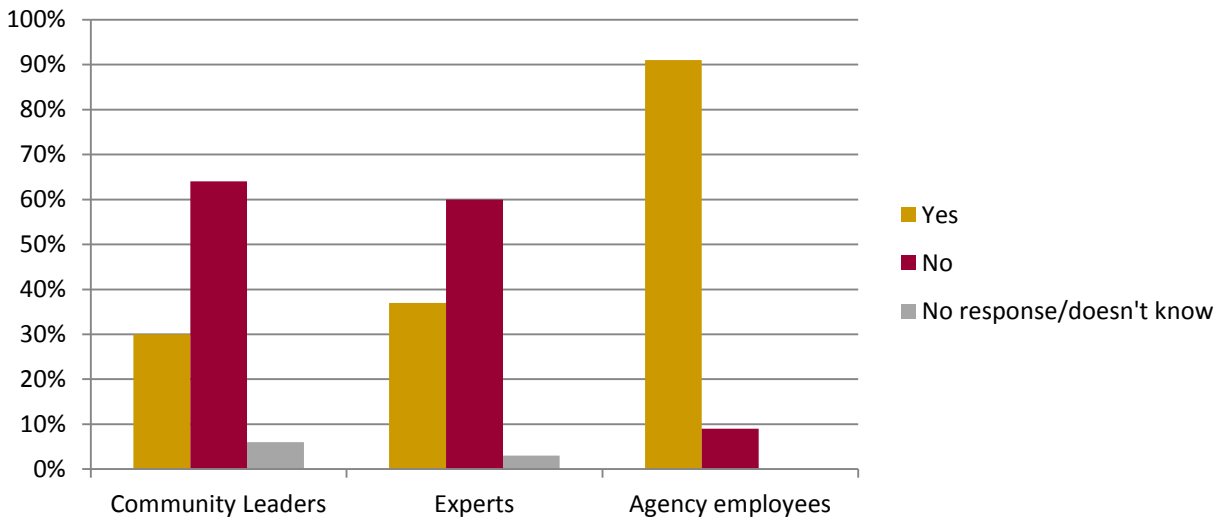
Research conducted in 6 departments:

**Alta Verapaz, Chiquimula, Huehuetenango,
El Quiché, San Marcos, y Guatemala**

Preliminary findings: National



Do you think women access government-held information at the same rate as men?



What are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information?



Community Leaders

1. Poverty
2. Lack of time/access issues (transportation, distance etc.)
3. Illiteracy



Experts

1. Illiteracy
2. Lack of knowledge of the law, rights
3. Lack of time/access issues (transportation, distance etc.)



What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights?



1. Business
2. Rights (general)
3. Education
4. Women's Rights
5. Jobs



What kinds of information, on rights and economic empowerment, are women generally not able to access?



1. Business
2. Land and titles
3. Women's rights
4. Rights (general)
5. All information
(no information is accessible)

Preliminary findings: Alta Verapaz

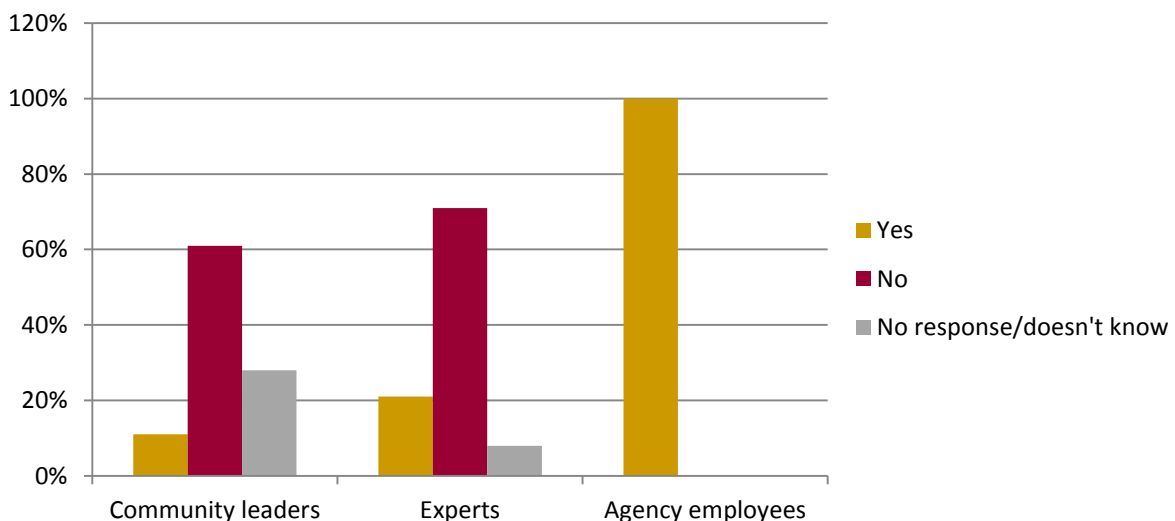
Observations, Alta Verapaz:

In Alta Verapaz 14 experts and 18 community leaders were interviewed. Additionally, 7 visits were made to public agencies to speak with visitors and public employees. As was the case in other departments, a majority of respondents (61% of Community leaders, 71% of experts) agree that women do not access information with the same facility as men.

When citing obstacles, illiteracy is highlighted by respondents as a large obstacle, however in both the qualitative responses as well as in the validation meetings, it is unclear if respondents feel that the issue is illiteracy or monolingualism. Several of those interviewed inform that in agencies women are not well attended to and are told things like, “get a translator”. In validation meetings, participants did feel as though in agencies where there were translators, there was also a better level of service. In qualitative responses, several respondents note that the power dynamics that exist between men and women is a limiting factor in the exercise of the right of access to information. This both manifests itself more directly, as violence against women, or more indirectly, as generalized attitudes on the part of men who are uncomfortable when women leave the home. In some cases men may prohibit women to leave the home to participate in public life until she has fulfilled her “domestic duties”. In light of this, it may be relevant to ask whether or not women even get to the point where they are able to request information.

In Alta Verapaz information relating to education and business were considered the most important for the exercise of rights and economic empowerment.

Do you think women access government-held information at the same rate as men?





What are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information?



Community Leaders

1. Illiteracy
2. Lack of time/access issues
3. Poverty
4. Language
5. Fear of asking/retribution



Experts

1. Illiteracy
2. Lack of knowledge of the law, rights
3. Fear of asking/retribution
4. Doesn't know how/where to request
5. Self-esteem/confidence



What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights?



1. Business
2. Education
3. Health
4. Jobs
5. Women's rights



What kinds of information, on rights and economic empowerment, are women generally not able to access?



1. Business
2. Rights (general)
3. Agriculture
4. Land and titles
5. Education

Preliminary findings: Chiquimula

Observations, Chiquimula:

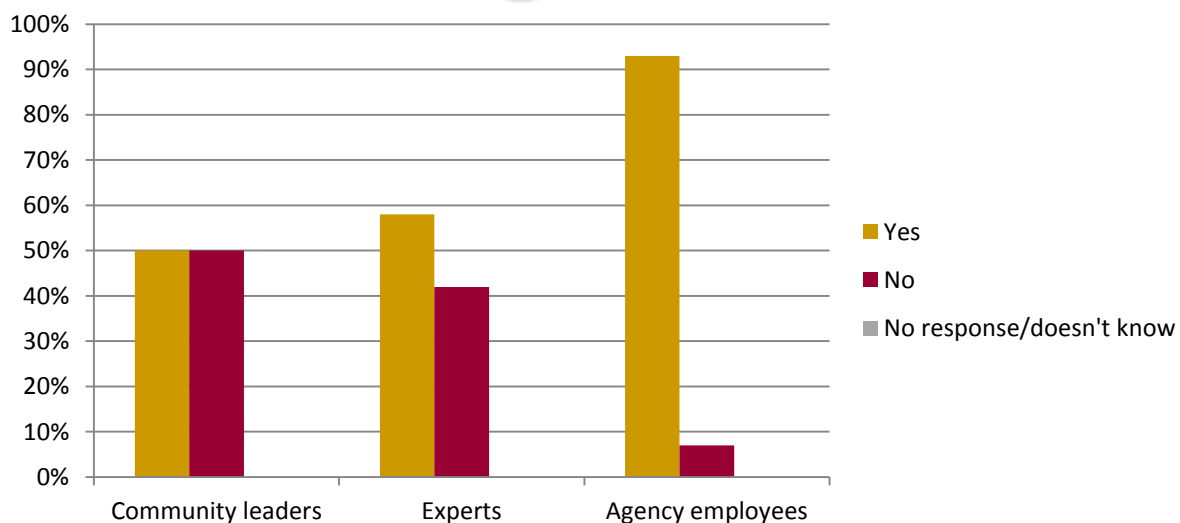
In Chiquimula 12 experts and 20 community leaders were interviewed. Additionally, 10 visits were made to public agencies to speak with visitors and public employees. In this department, results of the quantitative study do not clearly express the assertion that women do not access information with the same facility as men. However in both the qualitative responses as well as in the validations meetings, there was in fact agreement that women are unable to access information with the same facility as men. Participants in the validation meeting noted that in their experience “space for women is deficient – attention is minimal, they give more spaces to men”. Those women who do seek information are often exclusively those who have received training, or are community leaders. “A person who isn’t a leader doesn’t know how to request information.”

Moreover, of the categories of information that women are NOT able to access, it’s interesting, and unfortunate to note that in Chiquimula the second highest category of information is “all information, no information is accessible”

In looking at the barriers to accessing information, in Chiquimula there is agreement between experts and community leaders. Both cite poverty, fear, no time/access issues, and a lack of knowledge of the law/rights, as the obstacles that are the most significant in the department. As a barrier, the category of “poverty” includes the lack of resources to travel to a public agency, the cost of photocopies, and the costs associated with not doing housework. The validation meeting touched on several interesting points, among them the lack of political participation by women as a result of being restricted from stepping outside the domestic sphere and not having information about the possibility of participation.

Once again, we see a correlation between the information that respondents see as most important for the exercise of rights and economic empowerment and the types of information that women are most NOT able to access – this in both cases being identified as information relating to business.

 **Do you think women access government-held information at the same rate as men?**





What are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information?



Community leaders

1. Poverty
2. Lack of time/access issues
3. Fear of asking/retribution
4. Someone in the family doesn't support/impedes
5. Lack of knowledge of the law, rights



Experts

1. Lack of time/access issues
2. Lack of knowledge of the law, rights
3. Illiteracy
4. Fear of asking/retribution
5. Poverty



What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights?



1. Business
2. Rights (general)
3. Jobs
4. Education
5. Government and public administration



What kinds of information, on rights and economic empowerment, are women generally not able to access?



1. Business
2. All information (no information is accessible)
3. Government and public administration
4. Rights (general)

Preliminary findings: Guatemala City

Observations, Guatemala City:

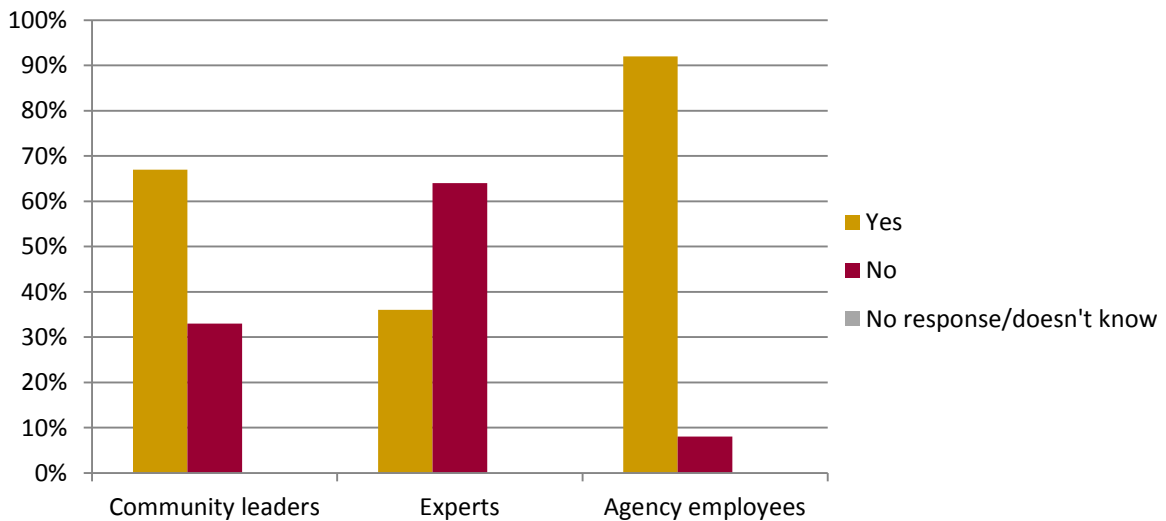
In Guatemala City 11 experts and 15 community leaders were interviewed. Additionally, 7 visits were made to public agencies to speak with visitors and public employees. The preliminary findings show an interesting departure compared with other regions of the country where the research study was conducted. In general terms there is less consensus around the difficulty that women experience in receiving information. Guatemala is the only department where the study was conducted that a majority of community leaders (67%) expressed that they believe women can access information with the same facility as men.

Similarly, regarding the types of information that are important for women, in addition to responses that appear much more directly related to income generation and rights, we also see responses like "information about ICT", "about scholarships abroad", y "college education and graduate school". That said, in the validation meeting, the importance of not overlooking the diversity in Guatemala City was emphasized. There is broad ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity in the city, due to waves of migration from all regions of the country. Because of this, in addition to issues one might consider more "capital city issues", it is also common to see concerns that could be categorized as more "rural" in nature. One participant at the validation meetings, noted "migration of Maya peoples into the city in search of opportunities mean that you see many of the same limitations on women's access to information in Guatemala City as you see in the departments".

Although machismo does not show up as a significant barrier to information in quantitative data, at the validation meeting, it was agreed that machismo, in the home as well as in institutions, is one of the principal obstacles to accessing information that women face in Guatemala City. Illiteracy was identified as the greatest barrier.



Do you think women access government-held information at the same rate as men?



What are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information?



Lideres Comunitarios

1. Poverty
2. Lack of knowledge of the law/rights
3. Doesn't know how/where to request information
4. Illiteracy
5. Machismo
6. Fear of asking/retribution



Experts


1. Illiteracy
2. Language
3. Discrimination
4. Fear of asking/retribution
5. Lack of time/access issues



What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights?



1. Business
2. Education
3. Rights (general)
4. Development projects
5. Training

 **What kinds of information, on rights and economic empowerment, are women generally not able to access?**



1. Business
2. Land and titles
3. Women's rights*
4. Government and public administration*
5. Rights (general)*
6. Education*
7. ICT*
8. All information (no information is accesible)

*numbers 3-8 received the same weighted value

** the response with the second highest weighted value in Guatemala City for this question was: "There is no restriction on women accessing information – all information is accessible" however, given that this response does not answer the question posed, it was not included in the list of top responses

Preliminary findings: Huehuetenango

Observations, Huehuetenango:

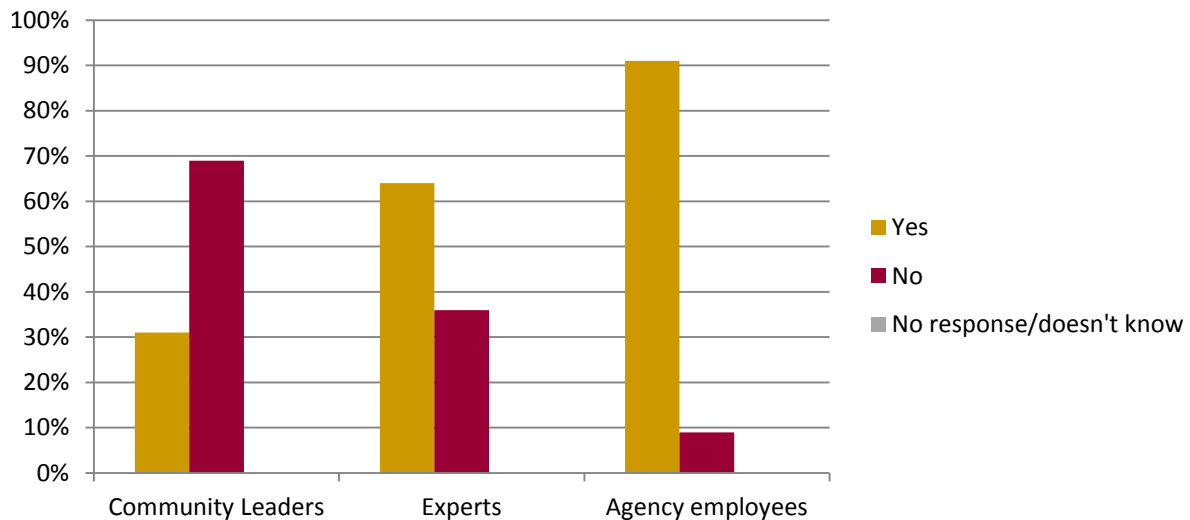
In Huehuetenango 11 experts and 16 community leaders were interviewed. Additionally, 7 visits were made to public agencies to speak with visitors and public employees. In this department, community leaders clearly express (69%) that women do not access information at the same rate as men. During the validation exercise, participants discussed the many difficulties that face women who attempt to access information, including machista and patriarchal attitudes that still exist in many homes and public agencies. Participants noted: “they leave you in line – they tell you that they are going to attend to the men first” and that “in the case of those women that are able to request information – they are the ones that have been able to receive training – other women are afraid.”

While there are some similarities with other departments, like the fact that illiteracy is cited as one of the primary barriers to access, one particular observation stuck out in Huehuetenango. In qualitative responses and conversations at the validation meeting, the issue of the politicization of access to public services, including requesting information, was raised. According to participants, party affiliation (or not), has an impact on one’s ability to access information.

The preliminary findings in Huehuetenango show that for respondents information regarding the managing of finances and information about business are of primary importance for the exercise of rights and achievement of economic empowerment.



Do you think women access government-held information at the same rate as men?





What are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information?



Community leaders

1. Lack of time/access issues
2. Illiteracy
3. Poverty
4. Doesn't know how/where to request
5. Lack of knowledge of the law/rights



Experts

1. Illiteracy
2. Lack of time/access issues
3. Machismo
4. Education
5. Poverty



What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights?



1. Financial management
2. Business
3. Rights (general)
4. Women's rights
5. Training



What kinds of information, on rights and economic empowerment, are women generally not able to access?



1. Business
2. Security/violence against women
3. Health
4. Women's rights*
5. Rights (general)*
6. Education*
7. Agriculture*

*numbers 3-7 received the same weighted value

Preliminary findings: El Quiché

Observations, El Quiché:

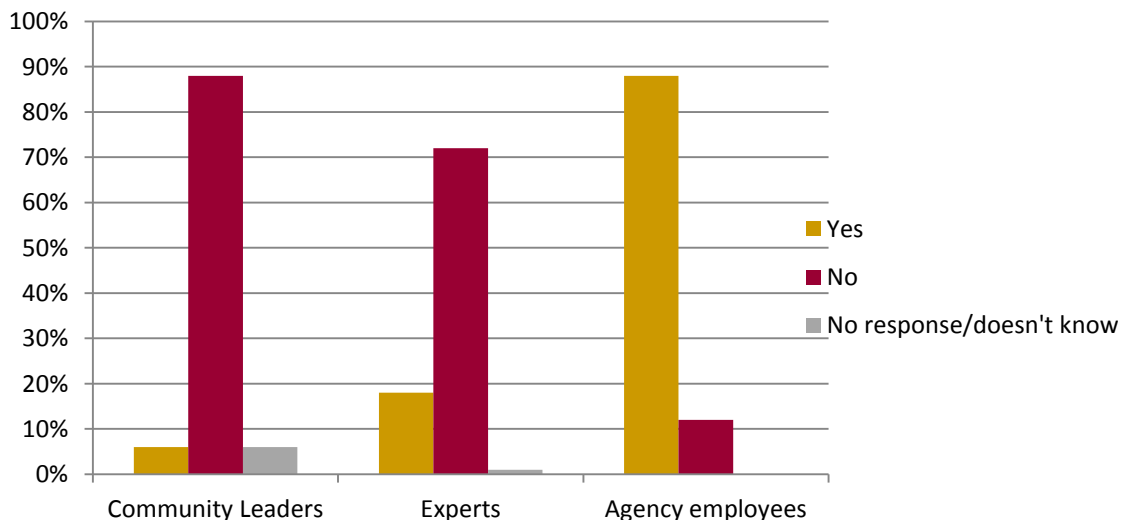
In El Quiché 11 experts and 17 community leaders were interviewed. Additionally, 9 visits were made to public agencies to speak with visitors and public employees. El Quiché was the department that most strongly expressed that women are in fact unable to access information with the same facility as men (88.2% of community leaders, 85.7% of experts).

Regarding the barriers to access, community leaders expressed that the principal challenges were poverty and language, while experts added machismo to that list. The validation meeting focused heavily on machismo, and some participants expressed, "People in communities don't use the concept of machismo, because they don't know it, but it is in fact, a big obstacle" Participants noted that women are often asked to submit requests in writing, and are asked why they want the information, while men are simply attended to without being bothered.

During the validation process, some participants expressed the hypothesis that the politicization of local government results in a decreased capacity to be able to provide good service, which affects women. In addition to machismo and the politicization of local government, language and ethnic discrimination were identified as challenges for women to access information in this department.

According to community leaders in El Quiche, the most important information for women to access is information about rights, education and business. The most difficult to access is information about women's rights, information about government and public administration, and information about access to information.

 **Do you think women access government-held information at the same rate as men?**



What are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information?



Community leaders

1. Poverty
2. Language
3. Lack of knowledge of the law/rights
4. Lack of education
5. Lack of time/access issues



Experts

1. Machismo
2. Poverty
3. Lack of education
4. Illiteracy
5. Lack of time/access issues

What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights?



1. Rights (general)
2. Education
3. Business
4. Women's rights
5. Access to Information

What kinds of information, on rights and economic empowerment, are women generally not able to access?



1. Women's rights
2. Government and public administration
3. Access to information
4. Land and titles
5. *

Preliminary findings: San Marcos

Observations, San Marcos:

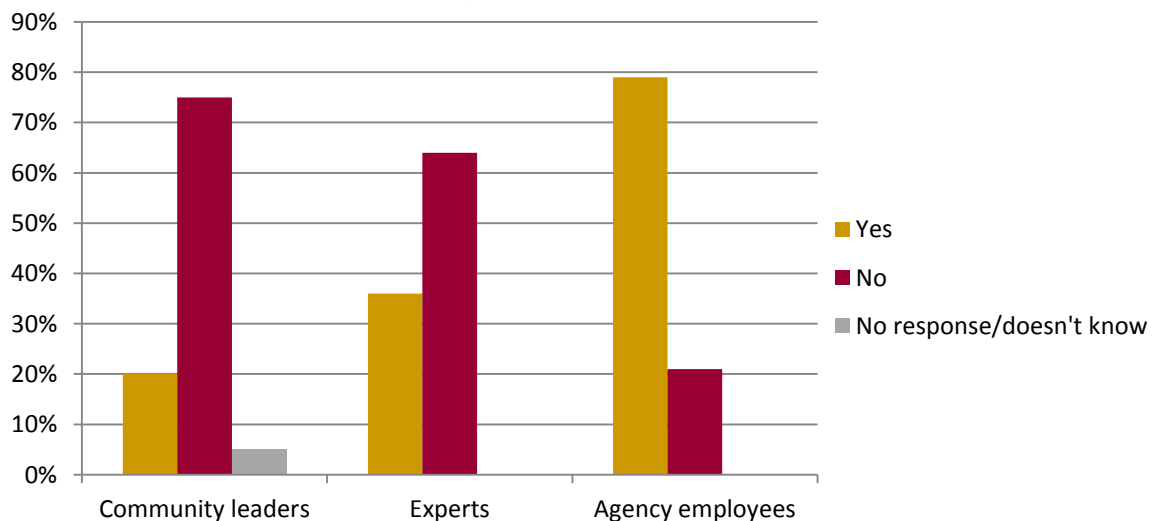
In San Marcos, 11 Experts and 20 Community Leaders were interviewed. Additionally, 8 visits were made to public agencies to speak with visitors and to interview employees. In this department, it was clearly understood that the information held by the local and national government is a key factor in improving the lives of women. One hundred percent of those interviewed responded affirmatively to the question, “Do you believe that the government (local and national) has information that women need to improve their lives?”. However, despite the importance they place on information, the respondent still perceived problems with accessing information. When Community Leaders were asked about a situation when they tried to access information, only 30% reported being able to receive the information they requested. They reported that in cases where women were able to access information, “they are women who are supported by organizations or are organized in groups, because it isn’t common for women to seek out information by themselves.”

Even more worrisome, in the validation meeting for our findings, participants discussed how many women appeared to not be able to even travel to the agency to ask for information, sometimes as a result of sexism. “The problem begins in the home with attitudes from the men that prevent women from leaving their homes due to ‘traditional obligations of caring for the home’”. The established gender roles limit the possibilities of women to enjoy fully participating in public life as right bearing citizens.

In San Marcos, there is also evidence of a strong and lamentable correlation between the information considered important in exercising one’s rights and economic empowerment and the information that women cannot access. The respondents expressed that information about ‘Women’s Rights’, ‘Business’, ‘Land and Titles’ are the types of information that are most important and most difficult to obtain. As part of the non-participant observation in San Marcos, the investigators noted that there still exists a fear on the part of users to speak against the state. Many of the women, when they were approached to speak about their solicitations for information, appeared to not want to speak or did not speak with the researcher out of fear.



Do you think women access government-held information at the same rate as men?



➔ What are the greatest barriers facing women with respect to accessing information?



Community leaders

1. Machismo
2. No time/access issues
3. Poverty
4. Someone in the family doesn't support/impedes
5. Doesn't know how/where to request



Experts

1. Illiteracy
2. Machismo
3. Lack of knowledge of the law/rights
4. Poverty
5. No time/access issues

➔ What information would be most valuable to women for achieving greater economic empowerment and rights?



1. Women's rights
2. Business
3. Rights (general)
4. Land and titles
5. Health*
6. Agriculture*

*tied, with same weighted values

➔ What kinds of information, on rights and economic empowerment, are women generally not able to access?



1. Women's rights
2. Land and titles
3. Business
4. Access to information
5. Development projects

Limitations of the study and considerations

- The methodology design, including lack of randomized sampling, results largely in perception-based findings to demonstrate the hypothesis that inequities exist and highlight trends related to women's access to information.
- Nonparticipant observation sites were selected to provide illustrative examples of the interactions that take place within agencies representing key economic empowerment areas and rights. Due to variations in agency structures, the number of employees working on any given day, and other external factors, more interviews may have occurred at certain agencies, compared to other agencies in the sample.
- Employees at nonparticipant observation sites were asked to comment only on access to information within the context of their agency or office. Therefore, in responding to the interview questions, employees may not have been considering barriers to women's access to information that occur outside of the agency's walls. Had the question been formulated to generate speculation about external barriers, it is possible employees might have been less likely to answer that women access information at the same rate as men.
- The ways in which the questions were posed in agencies may have lead some employees to answer more in the ideal, than in the practice.
- All data collection occurred in the field with limited supervision from the Carter Center's Access to Information team. Once researchers had been fully trained on the methodology and best research practices by Carter Center staff and the final interview and nonparticipant observation site lists had been approved, researchers independently implemented the methodology in their departments of origin. As such, variation in the application of the methodology may have occurred. When these variances were identified, The Carter Center attempted to mitigate their impact when possible.
- Some questions, while broad enough to capture diverse responses and priorities, might have benefited from a more narrow scope. For example, a number of the questions may have been interpreted differently. Moreover, it appears that for some of the questions, researchers used "prompts" to help the community leader's comprehension. This may have led to some bias in the responses.
- In some agencies, researchers reported reluctance or even fear on the part of women to divulge details regarding their experience accessing information or even speak to the researcher at all. This may have skewed non participant observation results towards an over-reporting of successful attempts to access information.
- Not reflected in the quantitative data is the fact that frequently women visiting agencies were accompanied by men. This may account for a greater ease in accessing information. In other words, in many cases women may be receiving information simply because they are accompanied by a man.
- The selection of civil society and expert participants in some cases may have colored the nature of responses. Community leaders may have responded more from their own experience more than on behalf of their communities. And both community leaders and experts may have highlighted their own areas of expertise.