

CEPPS Gender Assessment Report: Honduras

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Executive Summary

Summary of Program Background and Assessment Purpose

In Honduras' 2017 elections, underlying concerns surrounding electoral irregularities, lack of institutional credibility, and inflammatory rhetoric came to a head, leading to political unrest and violence. Chief among all issues was the re-election bid by President Juan Orlando Hernandez, who, under a 2015 Supreme Court ruling annulled the one-term presidential limit in the constitution. The resulting unrest exposed the pervasive cracks of a political space still marred by corruption, a lack of meaningful inclusion, and public disillusionment in national institutions' ability to deliver political services with integrity. As a result of the 2017 elections in Honduras, which plunged the country into constant social and partisan polarization, new electoral entities were created through a constitutional reform approved in 2019.

With primary and general elections approaching in 2021, the Enhanced Leadership in Elections for Citizen Confidence and Trust (ELECCT) program's goal is to build citizen confidence around Honduras' elections while increasing the ability of the country's new electoral bodies to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process in an inclusive way. The purpose of this gender assessment is to identify relevant gender considerations that will inform program activity design and implementation under this award. The assessment recommendations will be mainstreamed into subsequent assessments and activities, as relevant, to ensure that programming is consistently inclusive of gender perspectives and effectively responds to existing challenges and barriers to access and participation.

The Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) has designed an inclusive monitoring, evaluation, and learning (IMEL) approach to better ensure that an inclusion lens is integrated into all aspects of these processes. As a multi-dimensional, systematic approach utilized across all aspects of the program lifecycle, inclusion creates more responsive, representative and accountable social and political structures in which all individuals, regardless of identity, are able to fully enjoy their human rights and exercise their rights as citizens. CEPPS employs a multi-faceted technical approach to inclusion that includes the following elements:

- 1) Integrating an inclusive gender analysis into all aspects of program design, implementation, and evaluation that fully considers the ways in which individuals with multiple marginalized identities are uniquely impacted and how this affects both their access and barriers to participation in electoral and political processes;
- 2) Pursuing a dual track programming approach in which gender equality and social inclusion are both mainstreamed across all activities **and** specific activities targeting a particular marginalized group(s) are undertaken; and
- 3) Throughout the project lifecycle, key inclusion questions are consistently asked in the context of the 3 Ps of Inclusion, or our *partners, processes, and products*, or deliverables.

*CEPPS's technical approach to inclusion requires thinking about our **Partners, Processes, and Products** and asking key questions about:*

Who is included and excluded in the work we do?

What barriers exist that exclude or limit access for different groups or individuals?

How do we eliminate or mitigate barriers and increase access, participation, and representation in our work?

What should we do to increase access and inclusivity in our products/activities/deliverables?

What products/activities/deliverables would

An IMEL approach, therefore, is grounded in the important questions and issues that should be addressed from an inclusion perspective throughout the program lifecycle, beginning with gender and baseline assessments.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Rampant violence against women, harmful cultural attitudes, and restrictive gender norms impede women's ability to meaningfully and equally participate in political processes. Gaps in the legal framework and the lack of implementation of existing laws exacerbate these issues. The new electoral and political organizations law – passed on May 26, 2021 – and the newness of the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*, CNE) present both challenges and opportunities to increasing women's participation in public life. Efforts should be made to ensure that any new legal provisions around women's participation in the new electoral framework are adequately implemented and to ensure that the new CNE appropriately addresses gender inclusion in all its work. In addition, improvements can be made in the voter registration process to fully include transgender and non-binary voters, as well as in ensuring that voter and civic education address harmful gender stereotypes and challenges women have when participating in politics as voters, candidates, and elected officials. Finally, Honduras has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the region. If robust measures are not taken to address this – and particularly, to address violence against women in politics – women will not feel safe to participate in public spaces. Below is a summary of the findings and recommendations that are further detailed in the body of this report.

Category: Legal Framework

- *Finding 1-1:* The previous electoral law and regulatory framework fell short when it came to guaranteeing women's equal political participation.
- *Finding 1-2:* While the new electoral law includes important steps forward for gender equality in elections, it is critical that stakeholders ensure that the law is implemented properly.
- *Finding 1-3:* Though Honduras' previous electoral legal framework required parties to use 10 percent of their public funding for gender-related activities, parties did not implement this requirement in good faith.

Category: Election Administration

- *Finding 2-1:* Given the newness of the CNE, the Gender and Inclusion Unit is not fully staffed nor fully operational. This presents an opportunity to shape how the CNE handles gender inclusion in elections.
- *Finding 2-2:* Because the CNE has a dedicated unit for gender and inclusion, gender equality efforts seem to be siloed within that unit, rather than mainstreamed into the work of all departments.
- *Finding 2-3:* Building partnerships with civil society organizations – particularly grassroots organizations from outside the capital and that represent other marginalized groups – has allowed the gender and inclusion unit to reach out to harder-to-reach communities.

Category: Voter Registration

- *Finding 3-1:* A new national biometric identification campaign presents an opportunity to ensure that the voter registration process is inclusive.
- *Finding 3-2:* Transgender and non-binary people face barriers in trying to obtain identification cards that reflect their affirmed name, gender identity and gender expression.

Category: Civic and Voter Education

- *Finding 4-1:* While the CNE Communications Department makes an effort to use inclusive language, it does not produce any voter education messages targeted at women’s political participation.
- *Finding 4-2:* Civic and voter education is necessary to sufficiently address harmful gender norms and the culture of “machismo”¹ that hold women back from full and meaningful participation in political life.

Category: Civil Society

- *Finding 5-1:* Women’s civil society groups are often underfunded, especially smaller organizations from outside the capital.
- *Finding 5-2:* There is a lack of meaningful coordination between women politicians and women in civil society organizations due to certain ideological differences. Women politicians tend to align with their party platforms, which tend to be more conservative, while women civil society leaders tend to be more progressive in terms of women’s rights.
- *Finding 5-3:* Not all civil society organizations are trusted by Honduran citizens, in particular citizens from marginalized groups.

Category: Gender-Based Violence

- *Finding 6-1:* Women candidates face exclusion, harassment, and violence from their political opponents as well as members of their own parties.
- *Finding 6-2:* Online violence and harassment against women participating in politics has limited women’s willingness to participate in politics.
- *Finding 6-3:* In cases of violence against women, women do not have safe, meaningful access to justice. Widespread gender-based violence is a significant barrier to women’s participation in all areas of political life.



¹ “Machismo” can be defined as “a strong sense of masculine pride: an exaggerated masculinity” by the Merriam Webster dictionary. In Latin America, the culture of machismo – and the pressure of men to adhere to strict, restrictive masculine gender roles – often has negative consequences for women, who are then forced into traditionally feminine, restrictive gender roles that can limit their ability to participate in public life. Machismo often results in men’s unnecessary displays of power; men might see controlling women in their lives as “machismo,” which greatly limits women’s rights and freedoms.