

## PARTNERING TO MAKE BUDGETS WORK FOR THE PEOPLE

### Fundación Maquilishuatl (FUMA) – El Salvador

Fundación Maquilishuatl (FUMA) is a grassroots organization that promotes equality in El Salvador by working with local governments and citizens to expand access to healthcare. Incorporated in 1985, FUMA has focused primarily on healthcare policy but promotes a broader agenda that seeks to “facilitate processes of political and social empowerment” and “contribute to local and regional participatory, fair and sustainable development.”

FUMA has implemented public education and outreach campaigns at the community level and has addressed the needs of certain communities through targeted advocacy campaigns at the municipal level. By promoting social accountability, conducting training courses, monitoring service delivery, and generating proposals for policy reforms to improve the quality of public health services for marginalized groups, FUMA has empowered citizens to demand better treatment from their government, and has opened up new channels for participation in a democratizing country.

#### FUMA Helps Eliminate Health Service User-Fees in El Salvador

For the past 25 years, FUMA has been fighting to expand access to affordable healthcare services for all Salvadorans. Citizens in rural or impoverished areas have had a particularly difficult time obtaining healthcare, as clinics in their communities are sometimes inaccessible or provide inadequate service. Government policies have also been unresponsive to the needs and concerns of local constituencies. Most decision making is done at the Ministry of Health (MoH) and, despite efforts to decentralize the system, there has been little coordination between national and municipal health authorities. Finally, the high and occasionally arbitrary prices charged by public clinics have presented an insurmountable barrier for many poor citizens.

In 2000 the MoH implemented a strategy to modernize the existing integrated healthcare program (Sistema Básico de Salud Integral, or SIBASI) with the objective of expanding coverage and decentralizing the healthcare system. This strategy was supposed to be part of a broader series of health sector reforms in El Salvador; however, it was not developed through a participatory process and did not incorporate recommendations that had been made by multiple stakeholders. Therefore, the MoH’s efforts did little to address the underlying weaknesses of the system. FUMA understood the impact a weak SIBASI had on community development and public health and began a decade-long project to monitor public health service delivery in El Salvador.



#### El Salvador

##### Open Budget Index 2010

Overall Score: 37

Government provides minimal information to the public on how it manages public resources

#### Availability of budget documents critical for effective public input:

Pre-Budget Statement	Yes
Executive’s Budget Proposal	Yes
Citizens Budget	Yes
Enacted Budget	Yes
In-Year Reports	Yes
Mid-Year Review	No
Year-End Report	Yes
Audit Report	No
<a href="http://www.openbudgetindex.org">www.openbudgetindex.org</a>	

Algunas propuestas tienen clara tendencia a privatizar la salud y no todas han nacido de un debate y concertación de varios sectores.

La pretensión de la Mesa Permanente es integrar las propuestas ya hechas y ampliar sus alcances hacia un sistema público de salud fuerte, equitativo y de calidad. Además de lograr participación democrática en la construcción de la reforma.



As part of a broader initiative to promote social accountability, FUMA developed surveys and trained community monitors to reach out to healthcare providers and patients. The surveys were conducted in 14 municipalities in the Department of Sonsonate to assess the extent of citizen participation in healthcare decision making at the municipal level, as well as the overall state of health service delivery from a citizen's perspective. FUMA's surveys represented an important source of citizen feedback on SIBASI.

After analyzing the results of the surveys, FUMA found that user fees were the biggest obstacle faced by poor people in accessing healthcare, and had a particularly negative effect on maternal health. Some women who were unable to afford the fees simply avoided healthcare clinics, risking potentially deadly home deliveries. This practice was not only contributing to high maternal mortality rates in El Salvador but

was also in stark violation of the people's right to health.

Using the results of the surveys, FUMA was able to prove both that SIBASI user fees were being charged arbitrarily, and that there was a direct link between user fees and high maternal mortality rates. FUMA brought this evidence to the attention of municipal-level authorities in the hopes that they would take the perspective and problems of financially insecure citizens into account when evaluating the system. This advocacy contributed to the establishment of a Citizen's Roundtable for Health (Mesas Ciudadanas de Salud) in several municipalities within Sonsonate.

The roundtables were attended by community leaders, healthcare professionals, midwives, government officials, and, most important, citizens. They provided a forum for citizens to discuss and denounce discriminatory

practices in SIBASI and offer feedback to the relevant authorities on how the system could be improved. The roundtables represented a significant first step in the struggle of civil society groups like FUMA to open up channels of communication with the government and contributed to the complete elimination of user fees in eight municipalities of Sonsonate.

FUMA is using its experience in Sonsonate as a model to advocate for comprehensive nationwide healthcare reform. Political changes under the recently elected Funes Administration have created an unprecedented opportunity to address the growing costs of SIBASI and reverse recent trends of centralizing policymaking and privatizing services. The government has responded to consistent pressure from FUMA by institutionalizing the National Health Forums, a set of formal spaces for municipal-level citizen participation, and has pledged to eliminate healthcare user fees nationwide.

## FUMA's Participation in the Partnership Initiative

Recent reforms to El Salvador's public healthcare system promise that poor citizens will no longer be forced to forgo healthcare for lack of funds, and that communities will have a greater voice in crafting local-level solutions to local-level problems. FUMA will continue to monitor the healthcare system aggressively through policy analysis and social audits so as to ensure that these reforms become a reality not only on paper but in practice. With the support of the Partnership Initiative, FUMA will incorporate new budget analysis and expenditure-tracking techniques into their existing community-level health policy monitoring programs and will advocate for reforms that will regulate prescription drug prices in the public sector. Such reforms would help control high out-of-pocket healthcare expenses and would ensure that all Salvadorans have continued access to healthcare, regardless of income.

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*The IBP's Partnership Initiative is a collaborative effort that seeks to enhance the impact of civil society budget work in selected countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The initiative strives to contribute to the development of sustainable institutions; to increase public access to timely, reliable, and useful information; to enhance the effective participation of civil society in policy and budget processes; and to establish a platform of good practices on which future generations of civil society can build.*