



Paraguay Strengthens Institutions by Increasing Ethical Awareness among Public Servants

One and a half years of hard work are yielding concrete results for the institutions - and people - of Paraguay. Public servants in Paraguay's Ministry of Education and Culture have been energized by a comprehensive ethics campaign resulting in the creation of a Code of Ethics and Good Governance as well as an Ethics Office. Five other government ministries and institutions responsible for administering a considerable amount of Paraguay's public budget have also benefited from this program, conducted under the auspices of the Millennium Challenge Corporation's \$34.65 million Threshold Program.

Wide employee participation and consultation as well as leadership from the ministries themselves have been at the heart of the ethics program, which was launched in 2006 with a survey among public employees about perceptions on ethical and unethical behavior within their ministries. Results from one ministry were surprising: for the most part, employees described themselves as ethical individuals while cataloguing their colleagues as unethical, thus highlighting the perception that unethical behavior is always someone else's fault!

For those guiding this effort, it became clear that they had to create awareness among employees about what constitutes ethical and unethical behavior in the public sector and about the crucial role each individual plays in creating and sustaining an institution's ethical fabric. The task at hand was difficult for an organization that had never had a Code of Ethics, an internal system of checks and balances or any type of ethics training.

Rolando Chaparro, manager for this MCC Threshold Program activity, explains that "employees were organized in groups and invited to choose individuals they thought were 'champions of ethical behavior' and would be ideal candidates to elaborate the organization's Code of Ethics. Designated individuals were then invited to participate, on a volunteer basis, in an Ethics and Good Governance training featuring a series of workshops that guided them in developing the ministry's Code of Ethics and a Strategic Plan to incorporate ethics at an institutional level." According to Chaparro, ministries retained ownership of their Codes of Ethics but had to base all their work on a standard ethics model applicable to the Paraguayan government as a whole.



Posters designed for the Ministry of Education's ethics campaign.

A total of 131 individuals from five different ministries participated in the training, including 26 from the Ministry of Education and Culture. The program also included a train-the-trainer module, which trained 74 government employees to pass on their knowledge and continue raising awareness about ethics in public service.

The Ministry of Education's Code of Ethics, as defined by participating employees, consists of 11 principles: responsibility, service, participation, honesty, transparency, respect, impartiality, efficiency, collaboration, compromise, and competence. Employees also developed an internal communications plan to convey to their colleagues the importance of applying these principles in their everyday work.

"Posters describing the Ministry of Education's primary values are everywhere with a number that employees can call to report unethical behavior," says Norah Gutierrez, Communications Specialist for the Paraguay Threshold Program. "The Code of Ethics was approved by high level government officials and has been made available to all employees -- It has even been translated into Braille."



Employees from the Ministry of Education who participated in the ethics training.

The ethics program has taken a strong hold in the Ministry of Education that transcends political or party considerations. A second survey conducted recently showed a considerable improvement in employee's perceptions about ethical behavior in the ministry. In addition, the ministry now has a permanent Ethics Office, headed by Ethics Leader Carolina Arrúa. "We have defined our values and we abide by them. I am confident that our hard work would not be undone by a change of government – our employees have embraced this program and they will work hard to keep it going," says Arrúa.

Recently, a change ministering the leadership at the Ministry of Education gave employees an opportunity to show their commitment to the ethics program. "We did not want this change to take a toll on all our hard work so we met with the incoming minister and told her how important the new Code of Ethics and Good Governance was to us." According to Arrua, employees were successful at gaining buy in from the new minister, who began her mandate with an event in which she talked about the role ethics played in her life and exhorted employees to follow the Ministry's mission and vision.

For Arrúa, the greatest problem is managing the enormous expectation for immediate results. "This is a process that takes time but we are demonstrating that change has to come from each individual and that the possibilities are enormous when people start changing their own attitudes and behaviors!"