



# How to Overcome Communication and Cultural Barriers to Improve Service Provision to Indigenous Populations

## PROJECT DATA

### PARTNER ORGANIZATION:

World Bank

### ORGANIZATION TYPE:

Multilateral

### DELIVERY CHALLENGES:

Identity, culture, and norms; Social, environment, and geographical context; Citizen participation and community engagement

### DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE:

Inclusion of marginalized populations

### SECTOR:

Social protection

### COUNTRY:

Mexico

### REGION:

North America

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## Executive Summary

How could Mexico implement its flagship conditional cash transfer program—Oportunidades<sup>1</sup>—more effectively to help indigenous populations break the transmission of intergenerational poverty? Indigenous peoples make up to 10.5 percent of the total Mexican population and represent a particularly poor and marginalized group. To better serve indigenous populations, Oportunidades needed to overcome the cultural and communication barriers between the program implementers and its indigenous beneficiaries. Improving communication was key to combatting social exclusion while increasing the success of the program's own initiatives, especially since indigenous beneficiaries had higher dropout rates than their nonindigenous peers. These dropouts were costly for the program and endangered its long-term impact. The Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP) was created as part of a 2009 World Bank operation—Support to Oportunidades—which identified actions to be undertaken to ensure better services and support to indigenous populations. This case study focuses on three main issues: how to identify a communication problem, how a program can adapt its service delivery model

Many individuals contributed to this case study. Special thanks are due to Francesca Lamanna and María Concepción Steta, who contributed crucial feedback and insights throughout the research and case study writing process. The Mexican Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL), the National Coordination of PROSPERA, and the interviewees contributed to the case study by providing information about the context, implementation, and project details, as well as other useful insights. The Science of Delivery team provided helpful comments, and Jacob Bathanti revised and edited the case.

<sup>1</sup> The case study refers to the conditional cash transfer program primarily as Oportunidades, but important changes have occurred, and since 2014 the program has been known as Prospera. There have been substantial changes to the CCT over the years that are beyond the scope of this case study. However, among the key changes, Prospera intends to create sustainable poverty reduction by connecting the extreme poor to a range of other social programs, including income-generation activities and social inclusion, while still providing CCTs to eligible populations.

to a specific population and gain traction for implementation, and how that adaptation takes place. The experiences that came out of the IPP offer lessons for other conditional cash transfer programs around the world, especially those that include diverse populations.

**Oportunidades, now Prospera Program of Social Inclusion, is based on a number of co-responsibilities that require fluent interactions between beneficiaries and program staff.** However, external evaluations of Oportunidades suggested that for the indigenous population in particular this interaction was not fully effective. As part of the World Bank loan agreement, Oportunidades developed an IPP which included several interventions to increase Program benefits for the indigenous population among them the Bilingual Promoters Project, and suggested a seemingly straightforward proposal: catering to indigenous peoples in their native languages and disseminating information in their languages.

**The first step in the BPP implementation was to understand the needs of the indigenous populations and identify the mechanisms for providing them with better services.** Apart from finding a considerable gap between supply and demand for bilingual personnel, the analysis showed that the available resources were not being appropriately used; for example, out of the 110 bilingual personnel working for Oportunidades, they found that, in 2010, 79 percent of them were not assigned to areas where they could communicate in their mother tongue. After those results, the second step was clear: hiring bilingual promoters and relocating the existing ones. With the goal of expanding the hiring base with the needed cultural and language skills Oportunidades's operational rules were modified to allow children of program beneficiaries, who were previously ineligible (*ex-becarios*), to apply for jobs with Oportunidades.

**With the goal of attracting and retaining stronger candidates, an indigenous language certification process was proposed as a way to offer future and better job opportunities and as an incentive for young people to stay in their communities.** This process allowed bilingual personnel to obtain a diploma certifying their capacity to serve beneficiaries of any social program in the promoters' mother tongue. Along the way, it became clear that there was a shortage of bilingual people specialized in social programs. In response, Oportunidades developed a training program

for participants prior to certification, which covered the procedures that candidates needed to know. Finally, as a way to recognize the newly acquired skills, frontline and midline bilingual positions were created, and salaries of certified personnel were increased.

**The Bilingual Promoters Project had a number of positive outcomes for both beneficiaries and staff.** When program messages were offered in beneficiaries' mother tongues, they were more convincing, and beneficiaries tended to participate and express themselves more actively in group discussions. In addition, the BPP and the certification program increased the value placed on both bilingualism and the self-esteem of the certified personnel: they felt more confident in speaking their native language in public spaces. Furthermore, the interventions identified under the IPP supported the development of innovative instruments to communicate preventive health messages in a culturally appropriate way.

**Program flexibility, a focus on evaluation, and institutional support all contributed to the achievements of the BP pilot project.** Although providing a standardized attention model was initially thought to be the best strategy for Oportunidades, it ultimately became the program's Achilles' heel. Qualitative evaluations played a key role in making this evident and engaging high-ranking officials. Along this line, the Indigenous Peoples Plan helped implement specific interventions aimed at reinforcing the government's effort to better serve indigenous populations. The interventions developed due to a group of executives, who, having full support of high-rank officials, were able to adapt the project according to the findings and to the project needs. While inter institutional support was key for certain components of the project (certification, for example), making better use of inter-institutional knowledge from different sectors with years of experience developing attention models would have resulted in more effective interventions. Other issues are also important for ensuring sustainability: the involvement of different management levels in implementation, the establishment of sound indicators to assess the government's interventions especially as they affect indigenous populations, and addressing uncertainty about financing. The project shows how evidence-based learning and institutional adaptation can move forward innovations for greater linguistic and cultural accessibility for indigenous peoples in social programs. Finally, while the change of

national administration was accompanied by a change in personnel, it is promising, that as of February 2015, there were 562 registered bilingual promoters in Oportunidades, now Prospera, and discussions continue on how to ensure a future for the Bilingual Promoters Project.

## Introduction

Mexico is a diverse country, home to some 16 million indigenous people.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, indigenous peoples suffer from higher rates of social marginalization and poverty than Mexico's nonindigenous population. The causes and consequences of social marginalization and poverty are intertwined in this population and manifest themselves in a multitude of social arenas, including the fundamental question of language. When indigenous people do not speak Spanish, or speak it imperfectly, they may face additional barriers to development. And, while Mexico's Law of Indigenous Languages officially declares indigenous languages coequal in official status with Spanish, in practice, informal social exclusion is still very much a reality. The case of Silverio, from Chilapa, in Guerrero, one of Mexico's poorest states, provides an example. Silverio speaks Náhuatl with his mother and grandmother but Spanish with his father. As Silverio puts it, "Speaking in Náhuatl was related to women, to ignorance, to poverty. To be someone in life, I had to speak in Spanish, not just because of fear or shame, but to progress in life. I never felt ashamed of my mother or grandmother, but I had to see them only in the backyard of the house, in the kitchen. Out of the house, I was not one of them" (Martínez Casas 2011, 252).

This devaluation, unfortunately, is unintentionally confirmed when indigenous people are unable to access services in their mother tongues. This has historically been the case de facto, leaving indigenous populations unable to take full advantage of social benefits, including Mexico's flagship social assistance program Oportunidades (known as Prospera since 2014). Efforts are under way to change this picture of uneven inclusion and make Mexico's social programs more inclusive. Just as the negative effects of social marginalization and

poverty are bound together for Mexico's indigenous people, so may inclusive social programs and linguistic inclusion have positive effects. Take the example of bilingual state employees who provide information to beneficiaries of social programs. A Chol speaker from Chiapas may interact with Chol beneficiaries as part of his job and can speak with them in their native language. This fills an important need, reinforcing to beneficiaries and government employees alike that these communities and their cultural identities are valued.

This case study examines how Oportunidades introduced a new project, known as the Bilingual Promoters Project, to better serve indigenous beneficiaries as part of a broader strategy to reach these populations. As noted above, this cultural and linguistic intervention has thus taken on an important goal: better inclusion of these populations in programs intended to break cycles of generational poverty and close the gaps between indigenous and nonindigenous Mexicans.

## Development Challenge of Inclusion of Marginalized Populations

Unfortunately, Silverio's story is far more common than that of the Chol speaker in Chiapas. These populations suffer higher rates of marginalization and poverty than Mexico's nonindigenous population. Approximately 72.3 percent of indigenous people live in poverty and 30.6 percent in extreme poverty (SEDESOL 2014, 321–33). In addition, their demographic dispersion and geographic marginalization make the delivery of public services extremely challenging.<sup>3</sup>

In an effort to improve the living conditions of the poor, Mexico's federal government launched a pioneering conditional cash transfer (CCT) program in 1997. The first of its kind, the program was launched under the name Progresá; in 2002, after a number of changes it was renamed Oportunidades, and later, in 2014 the new administration made additional modifications and changed its name to Prospera Program of Social Inclusion. The program's goal in the long term is to contribute to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty by

<sup>2</sup> An *indigenous people* is defined here as an ethnic group descended from populations that inhabited the present territory of the country at the time of colonization and that retain their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions or parts of them.

<sup>3</sup> 64.8 percent of the indigenous populations live in communities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and, according to CONAPO (2010) and IPP (2014, 31), from the 18.8 thousand rural localities with high indigenous population presence, only 14.9 percent were located near cities or semi-urban places, while 53.7 percent were isolated (far from roads and cities).

targeting the poorest citizens. The program offers monetary support to the female heads of the beneficiary households.<sup>4</sup> The monetary support is conditional on beneficiary families' keeping their children in school, making visits to health centers, and attending health workshops. In the short run, the monetary transfers aim to improve socioeconomic conditions of poor families; in the medium and long term, the program incentivizes the accumulation of human capital among young family members. Although the program does not have a particular focus on indigenous populations, by 2014, out of the 6.1 million families covered by the program, 24.9 percent were considered indigenous. Moreover, Oportunidades covers 66.4 percent of the 34,263 localities identified as indigenous in the entire country. The strong correlation between being poor and being indigenous explains the significant presence of indigenous families in the program (SEDESOL 2014, 44–46).

The results of Oportunidades have been very promising, and important gains have also reached indigenous populations: Oportunidades has contributed to closing the educational ethnic gap—that is, the difference in levels of education between indigenous and nonindigenous Mexicans, where indigenous people tend to be less educated—and the gender gap (the difference in educational levels, where men tend to be more educated than women). While those gaps still persist among the first generation of beneficiaries, the program has contributed to closing them among the next generation of beneficiaries. In fact, among the daughters of beneficiaries the ethnic gap for schooling has been inverted, with indigenous women achieving higher levels of education than their nonindigenous neighbors. Among the sons of beneficiaries, the ethnic gap has been mostly closed. However, despite this improvement, pressing issues of social exclusion and quality of service provision still remain to be solved for indigenous beneficiaries, who represent an important part of Oportunidades's pool of recipients. In education, indigenous students from elementary school still show the highest learning lags. In 2009, 43 percent of sixth-graders scored lower than a basic level in Spanish, and 34 percent scored below a basic level in math (SEDESOL 2014, 39).

## Delivery Challenge of Breaking through Communication and Cultural Barriers

Indigenous populations, aside from being among the poorest groups, do not necessarily speak Spanish as a first language.<sup>5</sup> This deficiency hinders the delivery of public services and deepens social exclusion. Evaluations of the impact of the conditional support program in rural areas have suggested that communication and cultural barriers prevent indigenous beneficiaries from taking full advantage of social services and, as a result, of program benefits (SEDESOL 2008b, 178–80). For instance, aspects related to intimacy protection (such as women's reluctance to be examined by male doctors) or the inability of indigenous beneficiaries to name their ailments were recurrent factors in discouraging visits to health centers by indigenous people, who had lower attendance rates than the nonindigenous (SEDESOL 2009, 25). With regard to program operations, the evaluations found that dropout rates tended to be higher among indigenous beneficiaries than among nonindigenous ones. These dropouts were related to the difficulties of indigenous beneficiaries in keeping up with the program paperwork, which is usually in Spanish. The operation of Oportunidades consists of several steps that involve a close interaction with beneficiary families, for which fluent communication between frontline staff and beneficiaries becomes vital (see annex 1). This is particularly relevant since Oportunidades has a significant presence among indigenous people, who represent about a quarter of its total beneficiaries. The key delivery challenge that faced Oportunidades's staff as they tried to improve services to the indigenous was communicating with them, for which it was necessary to break through linguistic and cultural barriers. In other words, if Oportunidades is not able to clearly transmit its core messages, there is a high risk that beneficiaries will be dropped from the cash transfer program and lose their access to health services and school enrollment.

While improving the quality of health and education services does not depend primarily on Oportunidades, which fall under the Ministries of Health and Education,

<sup>4</sup> There are a few cases in which the recipient of the monetary stipend is a man. That usually happens when there is no woman able to receive the stipend.

<sup>5</sup> According to the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, an indigenous household is one in which the head of household and/or his/her partner speaks an indigenous language, and/or those households that declare they are part of an indigenous group. Furthermore, indigenous populations are those in which 40 percent or more of the inhabitants are indigenous (Serrano Carreto et al. 2002).



the program can increase the inclusiveness and effectiveness of these services. It can improve the service offered to its beneficiaries and take other steps to increase access: for instance, in the case of indigenous populations, it can customize those services to better fit indigenous language, culture, and context. This is by no means an obvious or easy task, and the case study highlights some of the reasons why this is a recurrent issue. For example, by 2010, out of the 110 bilingual personnel working for Oportunidades, 79 percent were not assigned to areas where they could use their mother tongue with beneficiaries (Mir et al. 2011, 109).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, a literal translation may sometimes produce a different—or even opposite—effect from that intended because of cultural or semantic differences. The use of interpreters can also be problematic, since they might not be familiar with the technicalities of the program and thus cause distortions in the program's message. Using interpreters can also increase the costs of the program as well as the time spent in each consultation in a context with already high workloads. Likewise, a lack of trust on the part of the recipients, power dynamics, or negative stereotypes, among other issues, can also interfere with communication. Finally, the lack of proper communication also affects important policy tools such as surveys, which can have an impact on both the design and the implementation of a project as well as on the distribution of resources.

As the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (INALI) puts it, in spite of Mexico's cultural and linguistic diversity and efforts such as the Indigenous Peoples' Linguistic Rights (the law giving the right of beneficiaries to receive services and initiate public procedures in indigenous languages), too few public servants possess the necessary proficiency to communicate in indigenous languages (INALI 2009), leading to a situation in which Spanish is the only de facto official language. Consequently, incorporating an approach that respects indigenous languages and cultures, and allows indigenous people to express themselves and be informed in their native language, can improve the understanding of the program among beneficiaries and may also contribute to a sense of dignity and empowerment for indigenous people.

This case study describes the BPP, one among several interventions under the umbrella of the Indigenous Peoples

Plan (IPP),<sup>7</sup> and the Mexican government's efforts to improve service provision to indigenous populations. The Bilingual Promoters Project is an ongoing project that tries to address critical communication and cultural barriers to improve services to indigenous populations. The case study focuses on the BPP and particularly on a component that pertains to hiring and certifying bilingual personnel, as an attempt to better reach indigenous populations. The study tracks its implementation process, the contextual conditions in which this program was developed, and the prospects for its success. The case study covers three main questions:

- How were the communication and cultural barriers identified as a problem in reaching indigenous beneficiaries?
- How did the BPP emerge and gain traction for implementation?
- How was the BPP implemented, particularly the certification of bilingual personnel?

## Contextual Conditions of the Bilingual Promoters Project

### Coverage versus Service Quality

Oportunidades, then called Progresá, started with a focus on rural and indigenous populations, and in 2002, as the program grew and became Oportunidades, it expanded its services to urban areas. Until 2004, management emphasized increasing coverage (see table 1). After the program reached its goal of covering 5 million households, senior management realized that in order to maintain the target of 5 million and ensure that beneficiaries in need remain covered, the program had to combat dropout (see figure 1).

**Table 1 Program Coverage, 1999–2013**

Year	No. of municipalities	No. of localities	No. of households
1999	1,984	48,734	2,301,188
2002	2,354	70,520	4,240,000
2004	2,429	82,973	5,000,000
2007	2,444	92,961	5,000,000
2010	2,445	97,053	5,818,954
2013	2,451	109,852	5,922,246

Source: Indigenous Peoples Plan 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Given the relevance of interacting with beneficiaries in their mother tongue, by February 2015, there were 562 bilingual promoters working for Oportunidades (World Bank 2015).

<sup>7</sup> An IPP is plan that ensures that the World Bank loan will benefit indigenous populations.

**Figure 1 Total Annual Deregistration, 2003–07**

Source: SEDESOL 2008a, 113.

Some beneficiaries leave the program as a result of improvement in their socioeconomic situation. However, there are other, more negative reasons for deregistration; for example, beneficiaries can fail to comply with the program's coresponsibilities, their addresses can change, and sometimes the possibility that civil servants appropriate access to the program for political or clientelistic purposes (for example, falsely telling beneficiaries that benefits are contingent on support for a particular politician). Breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty through the development of human capital requires a sustained intervention, and these dropouts—deregistration without improvement in socioeconomic situation—endanger the long-term goal of the program. The ability of beneficiaries to comply with program requirements depends on having the right communications mechanisms in place to inform the population, offering the corresponding service, and solving the problems that emerge in the field (SEDESOL 2008a, 114).

## Toward Better Quality

As part of Oportunidades's efforts to provide better service to its beneficiaries, it decentralized its operations in 2004. The decentralization created a model of operation by zones that, based on a geographic criteria (that is, the distance of the beneficiary household from the program's Center for Attention and Registration, an office with a representative of the program), tried to improve the quality of services provided to beneficiaries and to strengthen community participation. In 2011, the General Directorate of Attention and Operations (GDAO), presented the microzone scheme as a refinement of the previous model. That scheme

subdivided Oportunidades's territory into smaller zones to bring program personnel even closer to beneficiaries, with the aim of increasing personalized attention and improving operational control over program procedures. Frontline personnel are key figures in this endeavor; under the microzone scheme, the two major frontline positions were the responsible of attention (RA) and the social promoter (SP) (see annex A). The responsible of attention is in charge of orienting beneficiaries, informing families about their status in the program's registry; assisting with paperwork; responding to queries or complaints; and collaborating on updating the register of beneficiaries. The responsibilities of the social promoter include specific tasks related to the execution of complex procedures such as recertification, identification, and delivery of support.

## Special Focus on Indigenous People

In the early 1990s, there was increased awareness of indigenous peoples' rights, partly as a consequence of a series of protests and demands triggered by the Zapatista uprising of 1994. Some of these concerns led to the promulgation of the Law of Indigenous Peoples' Linguistic Rights in 2003. The law recognizes indigenous languages as national languages, with the same validity as Spanish for any public procedure, and acknowledges the rights of indigenous people to access any service or public information in their own languages. That same year—2003—the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples was created with the goal of guaranteeing the proper development of indigenous people. Since then, the federal government has undertaken a series of efforts in collaboration with the commission to address indigenous peoples' rights, such as the Program for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (2009–12). In line with the National Development Plan (2007–12), the program proposed a series of goals and actions to support indigenous identity by recognizing and respecting the different cultures, languages, and rights of indigenous communities.<sup>8</sup> The increased emphasis on indigenous peoples in the Oportunidades program can also be understood as part of this national trend.

<sup>8</sup> See Plan Nacional de Desarrollo / Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas. 2010, 2009–12, 11.

## Tracing the Implementation Process

### Problem Identification and a Window of Opportunity

With the inception of Progresa, Oportunidades's successor, evaluations were built into the program to demonstrate impact and learn from experience. This program set a precedent for a culture of evaluating public policies in Mexico.<sup>9</sup> When the first independent impact evaluations were taking place in 1999, José Gomez de León, then national coordinator of Progresa-Oportunidades<sup>10</sup> (PNC), realized that such evaluations needed to be complemented with qualitative research to show what was happening within the communities affected by the program. In addition to wanting to know the impact of the program, he was interested in knowing more about the processes related to program implementation. With these questions in mind, he brought on board Mercedes González de la Rocha and Agustín Escobar, anthropologists from the Center of Investigation and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), to conduct qualitative evaluations, with the first one taking place in 1999.

The rigorous impact evaluations were fundamental for understanding the effects of the program and consolidating it (Levy 2006). In addition, between 1999 and 2001, qualitative evaluations were used primarily for analyzing program operations and beneficiary enrollment processes. Since 2002, quantitative and qualitative researchers have been evaluating the program, for semi-urban, urban, and rural populations. During these evaluations, researchers realized that the program's impact was different across different types of households. Some of the factors influencing the differential impact were the time of exposure to the program and the socioeconomic characteristics of each household. Indeed, beneficiaries with longer exposure tended to obtain better results than newer beneficiaries. This realization sparked researchers' interest in studying

how Oportunidades operated in different contexts. This led in turn to studies of the differential impact of the program on indigenous and nonindigenous beneficiaries, which yielded three insights: (1) indigenous populations tended to be poorer and more marginalized than their nonindigenous counterparts; (2) researchers observed misunderstandings between indigenous beneficiaries and frontline workers of Oportunidades, as well as in the interaction of indigenous beneficiaries with the health and education providers; and (3) researchers noted that indigenous people were facing discrimination in access to services (González de la Rocha 2011, 10). From these observations, researchers hypothesized that indigenous populations may have been getting fewer benefits out of the program than their nonindigenous counterparts (González de la Rocha 2008, 32).

In 2007, the director of the General Directorate of Geo-Statistical Information, Analysis, and Evaluation (GDGIAE), María Concepción Steta, was aware of these findings and was concerned about indigenous people because of her previous experience with the program in the state of Veracruz. She contacted Ms. González de la Rocha, who had been leading the evaluations of Oportunidades for over six years, and proposed three topics to be covered in the round of evaluations for 2007. Apart from proposing to focus on the long-term impact of the program and its coverage, Ms. González de la Rocha suggested studying the differential impact of the program on indigenous and nonindigenous households. The director gave Ms. González de la Rocha her full support. This was an important turning point because, although there were hints that the program impact could be different on indigenous groups, this was the first time the evaluations would focus on this population and examine the possible differences.

To ensure a reliable comparison between indigenous and nonindigenous groups (and between beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries), households were carefully selected for the evaluations. To have a reliable counterfactual, beneficiary households had to be as similar as possible to the nonbeneficiary households by the time they joined the program. Also, to ensure that the differences between indigenous and nonindigenous beneficiaries were due to differences in indigenous conditions and not to differences in service access, researchers selected ethnically diverse groups that had the same potential access to education and health services of similar quality.

<sup>9</sup> This "culture of evaluation" has been later supported with the law of Social Development (2004), which establishes the obligation of evaluating every social program in Mexico; and with the creation in 2005, of the National Council of Evaluation of the Social Development Policy (in Spanish, CONEVAL), in charge of regulating and coordinating the evaluation of the social policy, and of establishing the guidelines for the definition and measurement of poverty.

<sup>10</sup> The PNC is the highest authority of the program and appointed by the president of Mexico.

The 2007 evaluations showed that, contrary to what was expected, the program contributed to closing ethnic gaps (SEDESOL 2008b). However, it also found problems due to communication and cultural barriers. These findings suggested that, although indigenous peoples were receiving a lower quality of attention than their peers, indigenous beneficiaries were putting more effort than their nonindigenous counterparts into complying with the program's coresponsibilities. In spite of these efforts, dropout rates were found to be higher among indigenous populations.<sup>11</sup> While women showed a general understanding of the rules and responsibilities of the program,<sup>12</sup> the evaluation found that frequently women did not fully understand specific mandatory paperwork (for example, forms for reporting deaths of family members or address changes), which often caused their suspension from the program. Researchers identified the main problem as a lack of appropriate guidance and information sharing from the program frontliners, mostly caused by communication and cultural barriers.

Providing a homogeneous service for all beneficiaries was thought of as a positive characteristic of Oportunidades's attention model. This homogeneity in service provision was conceived as a strategy to avoid corruption and operational inefficiencies. However, while this arrangement might have had positive results, the one-size-fits-all approach of the attention model was now becoming the program's Achilles' heel. More attention to providing quality services was needed, particularly for the indigenous populations, whose communication barriers put their development of human capital at risk.

The recommendations of the 2007 evaluations included addressing the problems arising from the cultural interface (that is, language barriers). One recommendation was hiring and training young people from indigenous beneficiary families as "cultural hinges" between the program and the indigenous beneficiaries. According to Ms. González de la Rocha, before the evaluation of 2007, senior management was skeptical

about offering differential treatment to indigenous populations. The 2007 evaluation was critical to changing perceptions among management, as it showed that indigenous beneficiaries were making an effort to make use of the program but that communication and cultural barriers were preventing them from maximizing its impact. The evaluation of 2007 represents an important turning point: it helped create awareness of the need to better reach indigenous populations and catalyzed senior management support for measures to do so.

After the evaluation of 2007 was published, the program made efforts to improve its interface with indigenous populations. For instance, in 2008 Oportunidades took an important step in approving the use of translators and interpreters in frontline operations.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, this was not enough to solve the communication problems. Some of the translators were improvised interpreters, whose level of fluency was difficult to determine. Also, cases of distorted messages or of interpreters' exerting influence on beneficiaries were found, and the efficiency of the process was questioned.<sup>14</sup> A new opportunity to improve attention to indigenous populations opened in 2009, when the Mexican government signed a loan with the World Bank to support Oportunidades.

Given that Oportunidades works with indigenous populations, the World Bank's safeguard policy on indigenous peoples (OP/BP 4.10) was triggered as part of the new loan agreement, requiring the preparation of an Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP), a document specifying how the World Bank funds would be used to ensure that indigenous populations benefit from the operation.<sup>15</sup> Both the Mexican officials and World Bank staff believed that the need to implement an IPP could improve the attention given to indigenous populations. The IPP was elaborated by the General Direction Directorate of Geo-Statistical Information, Analysis, and Evaluation, in consultation with institutions specialized in indigenous matters, such as the National Commission for the Development

11 This was stated by different researchers and current and former senior management.

12 The coresponsibilities were generally the same for everyone. According to GDGIAE staff, people from rural communities tend to learn from their peers. When a change in the program is introduced, dropout rates go up, but then dropout rates subsequently diminish as the community learning process takes place.

13 In 2008, the operational rules were changed to allow the use of translators, and INALI developed a standard of competencies to inform interpreters and translators in indigenous languages.

14 For instance, personnel from Chiapas emphasized the risk that improvised interpreters would acquire a disproportionate influence over beneficiaries (Mir et al. 2011, 102).

15 The World Bank policy on indigenous peoples, OP/BP 4.10, "underscores the need for Borrowers and Bank staff to identify indigenous peoples, consult with them, ensure that they participate in, and benefit from Bank-funded operations in a culturally appropriate way—and that adverse impacts on them are avoided, or where not feasible, minimized or mitigated" (<http://go.worldbank.org/IBZABS9UU0>).



of Indigenous Peoples. The main policies set out in the IPP were directed at adapting program communication and rules to improve results for indigenous beneficiaries. Among the projects of the IPP, two stand out: the Indigenous Peoples' Communication Plan (IPCP) and the BPP pilot. On the one hand, the IPCP was intended to encourage health education through information dissemination in indigenous languages. The BPP pilot, on the other hand, was intended to develop a strategy for supporting operational personnel in their interaction with beneficiaries in regions with a high percentage of indigenous populations. Moreover, Ms. Steta shared that an objective of the BPP was also to help diminish the high rates of personnel turnover and migration by providing a widely recognized skills' certificate to young people that could be used to improve salaries within Oportunidades or to find better job opportunities in the same community.

State-level health officials implemented the IPCP. Its goal was to provide the staff in charge of the self-care health workshops (part of the health component of Oportunidades) with the necessary methodological tools to adapt the educational materials on health-related topics to indigenous languages, following an intercultural approach.<sup>16</sup> The IPCP involved the development of a variety of educational materials (posters, family cards, and audio-visual materials) with the participation of the local populations as a strategy to maximize the social approval of the messages. The evaluations of the IPCP showed that the use of indigenous languages represented a big improvement, given that it dignified indigenous beneficiaries who were now able to receive information in their native tongue and that it guaranteed that the message would be understood. Audio-visual materials were considered to be the most effective tools. The IPCP has been implemented in more than 30 municipalities across 12 states and in 11 indigenous languages. Given the positive results of the IPCP (Mir et al. 2011, 104–05), the strategy for 2014–18 is to increase the number of languages in which educational materials are developed. However, the evaluators also considered the need to improve effective access to indigenous beneficiaries and, in particular, the

need to offer direct attention in their native language (Mir et al. 2011, 104–05).

Furthermore, Oportunidades needed to show progress on the IPP as part of its loan appraisal. In response to this need, senior management asked Rebeca Barranco, who was director of Citizen's Attention<sup>17</sup> at that time, to design a project following IPP's mandates. Without much previous knowledge about the IPP and little time, she had to present a project in the upcoming meeting of Oportunidades's directors in Guanajuato. After doing some research on indigenous peoples and reviewing some of the external evaluations, Ms. Barranco came up with what seems a very simple idea: communicating with indigenous peoples directly in their native languages, which led to the development of the BPP pilot. The national coordinator of the program, Salvador Escobedo, who had responded favorably to the 2007 evaluation, liked the project and offered Ms. Barranco his full support.

Under Mr. Escobedo's administration, every general direction, on top of their day-to-day obligations, was directed to propose and to lead "macro-projects" that meant to be cross-cutting to all the directorates. The macroproject focusing on indigenous populations emerged at the same time as the one focusing on the urban populations, both under the GDAO. However, in the end the efforts were concentrated on developing and implementing the urban model. Given the shortage of resources, the indigenous macroproject was demoted to a pilot project (not applying across all general directorates).

Catering to indigenous people in their native languages goes beyond the responsibility of the subdirectorate of Citizen's Attention, whose main role is to gather citizens' complaints and suggestions. According to senior management, the fact that the project was led by this subdirectorate rather than by the GDAO, which is in charge of operations and customer service throughout the program, may have been due to lack of strategic planning. It seems that since 2002, when the planning directorate was split into two subdirectorates—the GDAO and the GDGIAE, with the latter being in charge of Oportunidades's evaluations—neither of the two new subdirectorates had assumed responsibility for strategic planning. Also, this lack of planning may have impeded

<sup>16</sup> An intercultural approach implies a relation between different cultural communities based on respect and equality. That is, it does not accept asymmetries between cultures based on power that benefits one cultural community over the other.

<sup>17</sup> Among other responsibilities, the Directorate for Citizen Attention collects citizen's suggestions, and complaints of the beneficiary population, as well as the general public with the objective of improving the program's operations.

project coordination with other directorates, such as the one responsible for communications, which was also trying to improve its outreach to indigenous populations.

## Diagnostic on Personnel and Communication with Indigenous Populations

The first step in the pilot project was to undertake a diagnostic on Oportunidades's situation with regard to its initial conditions and current needs for bilingual personnel. In 2010, with the collaboration of the GDGIAE, and using information from INALI and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI),<sup>18</sup> researchers found that the program was serving 3 million indigenous people, speaking 261 linguistic variants and distributed across 14 states. Given the high dispersion and diversity of the languages across the territory, it was decided that the program should prioritize the languages with higher numbers of speakers.

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The most common linguistic groups in Mexico are Náhuatl (with 1,586,884 speakers); Maya (with 796,405 speakers); and Mixtec, Tzeltal, Zapotec, and Tzotzil (with more than 400,000 each). Altogether, these groups make up 61.5 percent of the total indigenous population. There are also 21 linguistic groups with fewer than 1,000 speakers each.

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Up to that point, Oportunidades had not kept track of the languages spoken by its own personnel; however, some promoters happened to be bilingual. When the BPP was first proposed, Ms. Barranco administered a survey to personnel who had already been hired, asking three basic questions to identify individuals who were interacting with indigenous language speakers: Do you speak another language? Which one? In which language are you interacting with indigenous populations? The results of the survey showed that, while there were already bilingual promoters, many indigenous people were trying to hide their bilingualism and, by extension,

their indigenous condition. The analysis revealed some interesting data:

- In the zones with 100,000 or more inhabitants speaking indigenous languages, around 60 percent were already interacting with a bilingual frontline staff member.
- In the zones with between 10,000 and 99,999 inhabitants speaking indigenous languages, only 13 percent were interacting with bilingual frontline personnel (Mir et al. 2011, 109).
- Out of the 110 bilingual personnel working for Oportunidades in 2010, 79 percent were not assigned to areas where they could use their mother tongue in interactions with beneficiaries (Mir et al. 2011, 109).

## Design and Implementation

In response to the findings showing the gaps between the availability of bilingual people and their areas of intervention, the 110 bilingual personnel identified were reassigned according to the languages they spoke. In addition, Oportunidades worked with INALI to develop a linguistic verification form to test the candidates' language mastery. The idea was to introduce the form into Oportunidades's application process to verify whether candidates spoke an indigenous language. With this information in hand, the next step suggested by Ms. Barranco was to prioritize hiring bilingual personnel over nonbilingual personnel.

Despite the need to hire more bilingual personnel, it was not possible to establish mechanisms for making the hiring of bilingual personnel sustainable, according to current and former senior management of Oportunidades. The heads of the Regional Attention Units (RAUs), the basic geographic building blocks of Oportunidades's structure, believed that a potential reason for this problem was how the hiring process was taking place. Oportunidades's State Coordination centralizes the hiring process, and job openings are communicated mostly through the official webpage, but not appropriately disseminated into indigenous communities (where the chances of recruiting bilingual personnel would be much higher). For example, in interviews for this case study (see annex B), heads of the Regional Attention Units mentioned that they knew local people who spoke language variants that were in demand and who qualified for local job positions but that they were unable to hire them under the centralized hiring process.

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<sup>18</sup> INALI was the main partner of Oportunidades for the BPP and its objective is to promote the strengthening, preservation, and development of indigenous languages spoken in the national territory. INALI is legally competent to establish normativity and formulate programs to certify technicians, translators, and bilingual professionals and is enabled to design standards of competencies with respect to indigenous languages.

During the diagnostic phase, the project team realized that it was difficult to find bilingual people who both fulfilled the hiring requirements and were not children of Oportunidades's beneficiaries. The latter presented an obstacle, because according to Oportunidades's rules, relatives of program beneficiaries could not be hired as public servants. In response, the rules of operation for 2010 were modified to allow the hiring of bilingual relatives of program beneficiaries as frontline personnel.<sup>19</sup> These people, generally children of beneficiaries, were expected to be the best links between the program and its indigenous beneficiaries for several reasons: first, because they had previous exposure to the program through their families; second, because they were bilingual; and third, because they came from indigenous communities, they were already familiar with the cultural background of the beneficiaries. Ms. Barranco noted that the support of senior management was crucial to changing the operational rules, which the endorsement made easy to do. This measure moved implementation forward: for instance, in Yucatán, according to RAs, approximately 50 percent of the pool of selected candidates for certification came from beneficiary families (these jobs would allow them to master their skills in bilingual interactions in social programs).

Apart from prioritizing the hiring of bilingual promoters, the Oportunidades team realized something else was needed. The contracts offered by Oportunidades to the frontline personnel were unstable (with some contracts averaging only six months and in other cases only one or two months), and the salaries were not competitive. To increase the attractiveness of the program to prospective employees, Ms. Barranco proposed another benefit that the program could offer. Building on an idea that she had put forward initially several years before, she suggested certifying bilingual personnel.<sup>20</sup> Certification would allow bilingual personnel to obtain a diploma recognizing their competence to serve beneficiaries of any social program (not just Oportunidades) in an indigenous language. This credential would make working for the program more attractive, as it would strengthen their résumés for

future job opportunities and could also offer an incentive for certified personnel to remain in Oportunidades and in their communities.

For the certification process, management had to develop a standard of competencies, later approved by the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Occupational Competencies (CONOCER).<sup>21</sup> The standards would reveal the competencies of the candidates in three main areas: data collection, orientation to beneficiaries, and knowledge of procedures and services. Ms. Barranco characterized this standard as enabling social promoters to be “specialized in the whole machinery, instead of just in the screws.” Certification would increase the efficiency of attention in hard-to-access areas, where, if the frontline personnel do not know how to resolve an issue, beneficiaries would normally have to wait up to two months to get an answer (Oportunidades personnel visit program beneficiaries, on average, every two months). As part of the final evaluation process for certification, candidates would have to develop a portfolio of materials to demonstrate their proficiency in an indigenous language, cultural understanding, and teaching competency (for example, using videotapes of classes or teaching materials the candidates had created) and would need to translate and adapt a set of materials—originally in Spanish—to the beneficiary's context, culture, and language.<sup>22</sup>

The high number of linguistic variants made it difficult to find enough bilingual people specialized in social programs to assess the candidates. In response, the project team and its collaborators (mainly INALI and CONOCER) decided to create “seed groups” to nurture the first generation of bilingual evaluators. This plan necessitated the creation of another standard of competency (SoC) to certify the candidates as evaluators, so that they could then evaluate and be evaluated by their peers. For this process, the candidates would be organized into groups of three formed by members speaking the same linguistic variant, where they would assume the role

19 Every year, Oportunidades personnel propose changes to the operational rules, to be enacted the following year.

20 Ms. Barranco tried to offer certification in attention to its Citizen's Attention personnel, but the idea was frustrated due to a lack of support from the previous administration (2000–06).

21 CONOCER is an office within the Ministry of Public Education. Its role is to approve and publish the standards of competencies for jobs requiring certification (which have to be previously developed by experts who define the abilities, behaviors, and skills that a person should have in a determined function).

22 It is worth noting that, since promoting high-quality personnel was something needed for the whole personnel (independently of whether they were bilingual), Ms. Barranco wanted to create another SoC to certify the personnel in the general attention of social programs (in Spanish). This would build on the previously created SoC for bilinguals; however, she didn't have time to develop it since she left Oportunidades in 2012.

of evaluators and evaluated, consecutively. Once certified as evaluators, they would be able to evaluate subsequent groups in their own regions, lowering costs and expanding the certification scope. This way, the personnel could come to own the certification process, being themselves the ones in charge of evaluating the future candidates (see figures 2 and 3).

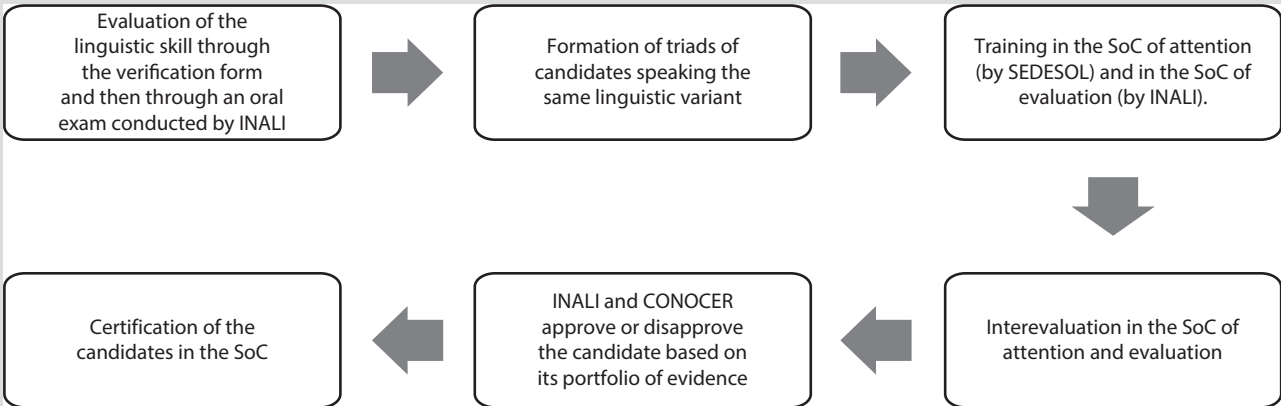
While recruiting the first batch of candidates to be certified, project leaders realized that most of the selected frontline personnel did not have the right expertise.<sup>23</sup> According to senior management, this may have been due to the way the training process takes place: the PNC trains midlevel managers, who then train the frontline

personnel under their authority, in a cascading training process. However, this was not ensuring a high-quality training process for frontline personnel. Moreover, the personnel were not generally familiar with more than one of the three components (data collection, orientation to beneficiaries, and knowledge of procedures and services) at the time. In response to this deficiency, the project team developed a two-week refresher program (in Spanish) prior to the certification process (which took an additional week), covering the procedures the candidates needed to know before certification. The candidate would have to receive a training in the SoC of attention (conducted by SEDESOL), and a training in the SoC of evaluation (conducted by INALI).

The certification process has had two rounds of piloting. The first one took place in February 2011 in

<sup>23</sup> The current administration wants to develop trainings that directly target RAs and frontline officers in addressing the limitations of cascading training.

**Figure 2 Steps for Certifying a Seed Group**



**Note:** There are three different roles to be assumed by each member of the triad: i. an evaluator of evaluators, ii. an evaluator of promoters (evaluated in the SoC of evaluation), and iii. a promoter (evaluated in the SoC of attention). CONOCER = National Council for Standardization and Certification of Occupational Competencies; INALI = National Institute of Indigenous Languages; SoC = standard of competency.

**Figure 3 Steps for Certifying Subsequent Generations**



**Note:** CONOCER = National Council for Standardization and Certification of Occupational Competencies; INALI = National Institute of Indigenous Languages; SoC = standard of competency.



**Table 2 Bilingual Promoters Pilot Project Timeline**

<i>Time period</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Relevance</i>
2008	2007 evaluation of Oportunidades was published.	The evaluation revealed a problem and changed perceptions of indigenous beneficiaries' behavior, leading to a change in the attitude of senior management.
Early 2009	World Bank loan agreement and development of IPP.	IPP had to be implemented by Oportunidades as part of the loan agreement with the World Bank.
End of 2009	Progress on the IPP presented to the World Bank.	IPP drives behavioral change in senior management.
End of 2009	BPP was proposed to the PNC and the rest of directors in the Guanajuato meeting. The PNC offered full support.	Beginning of the BPP.
Early 2010	A diagnostic of supply of and demand for bilingual staff was developed.	Feedback loop.
2010	Relocation of bilingual personnel to interact with beneficiaries in their own languages.	Evidence-based adaptation and refinement.
2010	Hiring process incorporates language examination.	Evidence-based adaptation and refinement.
2010	For hiring eligibility, sons and daughters could not receive Oportunidades scholarships. Oportunidades's operational rules are changed to allow the hiring of sons and daughters of beneficiary families who previously received support from the program ( <i>ex-becarios</i> ).	Organizational change.
Early 2010–November 2010	Certification process was proposed. Collaboration between Oportunidades and INALI begins (July). SoC are published (November).	Adaptation and refinement.
November 2010–February 2011	Team leaders realize deficiencies of cascading training process and develop a two-week training for candidates prior to certification process.	Evidence-based adaptation and refinement.
February 2011	First cohort of certification candidates from Chiapas, Yucatán, and Oaxaca is trained and evaluated.	Implementation of a BPP component.
2011	Salary increase for promoters and midline positions is offered to certified personnel.	Intuition-based adaptation and refinement.
August 2012	Second cohort of certification candidates from Yucatán is trained and evaluated (17 out of 23 approved the certification; one linguistic variant was covered).	Implementation of a BPP component.
September 2012	Third cohort of certification candidates from Yucatán is trained and evaluated (11 were certified; three linguistic variants were covered).	Implementation of a BPP component.

*Note:* IPP = Indigenous Peoples Plan; PNC = Oportunidades's National Coordinator; INALI = National Institute of Indigenous Languages; BPP = Bilingual Promoters Project.

Chiapas, with participants from that state as well as from the states of Yucatán and Oaxaca. Twenty-three people were certified, and 10 linguistic variants were covered. The second round of piloting took place in Yucatán in August and September 2012. At this time, 17 out of the 23 candidates were approved in one linguistic variant. In the certification that took place in September, 11 people were certified covering three linguistic variants.

Once bilingual personnel are certified, they have to be recognized for their acquired credentials. Senior management increased salaries for certified staff by 10 percent and created frontline and midline bilingual positions to be filled with certified personnel (for example, bilingual regional attention unit (RAU) chief, bilingual social promoter, and bilingual responsible of attention). Thus, certified bilingual personnel have the opportunity to develop a career track with room for advancement

within the program. However, this measure did not translate into high retention rates of certified personnel. Together with a change in administration came a change in personnel, and many certified personnel left the program. For example, by September 2014, only 4 out of the 23 who were trained and evaluated in Yucatán in 2011 and 2012 were still working for Oportunidades. In addition, recruiting certified personnel has been difficult: three out of the seven midline bilingual positions that were created in Yucatán have been closed, and some of the remaining ones are currently filled with noncertified bilingual personnel.

Another important issue that came up was financing the certification process. Up until September 2014, the funding was one of INALI's main constraints on continuing with the certification. The certification process for the first seed group of 16 candidates was covered by INALI, while their pretraining was offered

and financed by Oportunidades.<sup>24</sup> According to INALI, the certification costs will decrease for subsequent generations because the evaluation process will be simplified. Nevertheless, while Oportunidades can cover the pretraining (from its personnel training budget), it cannot cover certification because its frontline personnel are not permanent staff. Among the issues currently being discussed are the potential financing as well as different modalities for undertaking the certification process and involving other relevant stakeholders.

While initial reports (for example, Mir et al. 2011) show positive results, the BPP pilot could have been strengthened by putting in place indicators to systematically demonstrate the results of the program on indigenous people. It is therefore critical to develop such indicators, not only to ensure continuity of the BPP but, more important, to continually assess the extent to which the Mexican government's efforts to improve the livelihoods of indigenous populations are successful.

As the following sections will show, there have been important benefits from the BPP. Both the training and certification of bilingual frontline staff and the development of tailored communication plans and health materials stand out as important landmarks in institutionalizing improved quality of service to indigenous populations. It is encouraging that the new administration is again committed and exploring the issue of providing services in indigenous languages and knowing that, as of February 2015, there are 562 registered bilingual promoters in Oportunidades. This development represents an opportunity for certification and significant progress since only a few years earlier, in 2012, there were around 300 bilingual promoters and only around 100 in 2010. As a result of the efforts of the Mexican government, and specially of the National Coordinator, Paula Hernandez Olmos, and Julio Valera, General Director for Attention and Operations, it is expected that by the end of 2015 there will be 110 certified bilingual personnel. Finally, discussions are under way to incorporate more mechanisms for identifying issues that particularly affect indigenous populations into the Punto Centinela—a monitoring strategy for identifying problems during implementation of Prospera and encouraging course correction. This strategy can trigger important changes in the overall design and implementation of Prospera.

<sup>24</sup> During the evaluation week, the seed group candidates have to evaluate and be evaluated as evaluators. The certification process had an average cost of US\$2,000 per candidate.

## Outcomes

### Effective Communication and Beneficiaries' Empowerment

Overall, initiatives to provide better services to indigenous populations can be improved by the cultural relevance of the interaction with these populations through better verbal and nonverbal communication. According to Mir et al. (2011), the program messages are more convincing when transmitted in the beneficiaries' mother tongue. For instance, some women said that they were convinced by their RA to undergo a Pap smear or breast cancer test because he or she spoke their language. According to beneficiaries, paperwork-related mistakes diminished, not only because of better understanding but also because they had greater trust in the bilingual personnel. When the attention is offered in the mother tongue, beneficiaries tend to participate and express themselves more actively in group discussions; they are more likely to mention their concerns and state their preferences.

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"Beneficiaries feel grateful for receiving the benefits of the program. That's why they usually don't complain. However, now that they receive attention in their mother tongue, they speak up and complain much more."

*Source:* RA from Yucatán.

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Moreover, monolingual women beneficiaries do not need to rely on their husbands, who are more likely to be bilingual, as translators. Local authorities are also more willing to accept the program in their communities when the representatives are indigenous and speak their language. According to Mir et al. (2011), the BPP constitutes a qualitative improvement over previous program efforts to reach indigenous populations (for example, using translators), because it eliminates the intermediaries (translators and interpreters) in the communication process. Oportunidades improved its capacity to reach out to indigenous beneficiaries by supporting the implementation of a new attention model with bilingual program staff, as well as the certification process. A significant achievement was that in 2009 Oportunidades began increasing the number of frontline program staff able to serve the indigenous beneficiary population in their own languages. This effort required reassigning some staff to different regions and training

and hiring new staff. It is indeed promising that by February 2015, there were 562 registered bilingual promoters in the program.

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“Recently after I finished school, I was offered a job in Oportunidades, as a promoter. I remember that when beneficiaries showed up at the office speaking Tzeltal, my mother tongue, I always talked to them in Spanish until one day, a coworker saw me speaking in Spanish to a beneficiary who didn’t speak it. “Why don’t you speak to her in Tzeltal? Help her. Don’t you see that she does not speak Spanish?” My reaction was to say that I didn’t speak it well; I felt ashamed of speaking Tzeltal, I tried to hide my bilingualism. After the certification, I realized I was a fool.”

*Source:* Testimony from a bilingual-certified promoter provided by Rebeca Barranco.

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## Personnel Empowerment

According to interviews conducted by Mir et al. (2011) in their evaluation of the first cohort of certified personnel, the certification has contributed to raising the value of bilingualism and to increasing the self-esteem of certified staff; they feel more confident in speaking their native language in public spaces. The certification has also placed a value on the experiential knowledge of the staff. This has been particularly important for promoters without the appropriate academic profile to be hired as RAs (that is, a high-school diploma or higher).

## Lessons Learned

### How Were Communication and Cultural Barriers Identified as a Problem in Interactions with Indigenous Beneficiaries?

The ethnographic research from the 2007 evaluation brought to light the communication and cultural barriers between Oportunidades staff and the beneficiaries. These barriers led to higher dropout rates among indigenous populations. Researchers recommended hiring and training bilingual indigenous youth from beneficiary families as promoters and frontline operators. The motivation to act on these results came from the costs imposed on the program from the high dropout rates of the indigenous population, which undermined the program’s desired impact of building human capital in poor and marginalized populations.

The highly developed culture of evaluation has allowed Oportunidades to become a dynamic program, able to correct its course based on evidence collection and feedback loops. According to former senior management, external qualitative evaluations were particularly helpful in providing evidence to enable adaptation and course correction. Indeed, such research not only focused on process outcomes but also on in-depth follow-up with the beneficiary families, which allowed for greater understanding of how the program was affecting cultural and ethnic dynamics. Qualitative research complemented the results of quantitative approaches.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, Oportunidades has not drawn much on the experience of existing models in developing its own model for reaching indigenous populations. According to interviewed researchers, a lack of inter-institutional collaboration and the culture of compartmentalization among the government institutions may have prevented knowledge exchange between Oportunidades and, for example, the IMSS-OPORTUNIDADES (Mexican Social Security Institute). Back in 1982, IMSS-OPORTUNIDADES developed a model to meet the needs of rural and indigenous populations by forming and mobilizing an extensive community network of local midwives, traditional doctors, health committees, and volunteers. This model remains in place today.

### How Did the Bilingual Promoters Project Emerge and Gain Traction for Implementation?

The World Bank safeguards were triggered as a result of a loan to Oportunidades, which then had to show progress on the Indigenous Peoples Plan. This led to the design of a project that could respond to the IPP mandates. The idea of certifying and hiring bilingual promoters to interact with indigenous beneficiaries in their mother tongue was the result, as well as strengthening of the communication strategy of the health component.

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<sup>25</sup> Agustín Escobar, an anthropologist who worked on a number of evaluations for OPORTUNIDADES, shared an example of how qualitative evaluations complement and contest quantitative evaluations: results of the quantitative evaluations’ panel data showed no impact of the program on the newer generations. The qualitative team, after living in the beneficiaries’ villages for about three months, realized that this might have happened because approximately 45 percent of the original sample had migrated by the time the end line was conducted. The qualitative team was able to track almost 100 percent of the initial sample, finding positive effects. The cases of success were not happening in the original localities, but rather were manifested outside the communities in more urbanized areas.

Senior management offered support to the BPP, having been previously sensitized by the 2007 evaluation. In addition, the need to present progress on the IPP increased the urgency of the senior management to focus on indigenous peoples. According to interviews with senior management, the support of the PNC was particularly important for the development of the project. People at the PNC were also extremely collaborative, responsive to requests, and able to adapt the program to the findings and to the project needs. However, there was a lack of coordinated effort with other directorates that were also trying to reach indigenous populations more effectively.

While the BPP gained traction among senior management, the project was barely discussed with midline and frontline personnel, who were not involved in the design or the implementation of the project. For instance, the heads of an RAU in Yucatán said in an interview that they could have participated in proposing bilingual candidates for local openings or helped disseminate those openings among their indigenous jurisdictions. However, this was not possible partly because the National Coordination centralized the hiring process. Furthermore, after the administration changed in 2012, some of the bilingual and certified personnel left. However, taking into account the new Indigenous Peoples Plan (2014) as part of the new operation of the World Bank with the Government of Mexico in the sector, and the fact that the new administration is focused on improving the quality of attention and on avoiding needless dropouts from the program, lessons presented in this case study could be helpful.

### **How Was the Bilingual Promoters Project Implemented, Particularly the Certification of Bilingual Personnel?**

First, the project team found out that existing bilingual personnel needed to be relocated to serve non-Spanish-speaking beneficiaries. This action was based on the initial diagnostic, which studied the nature of the supply of bilingual personnel (how many? which languages did they speak? how were they distributed?) and the nature of the current demand (how many bilingual beneficiaries? which languages did they speak? how were they distributed?). Afterward, to prioritize the hiring of bilingual personnel and to allocate them according to their languages, they decided to incorporate a linguistic verification in the recruiting process. Next, after realizing

that it was difficult to find bilingual personnel who could fulfill the job requirements, they suggested a modification of the operational rules to allow for sons and daughters of beneficiaries to apply. At the time, Oportunidades did not offer prospective employees competitive job opportunities or job stability. Program leaders refined the project by designing a certification process as a way to incentivize participation and provide steps toward future opportunities.

For the certification, the shortage of bilingual evaluators was met by an innovative solution: the development of seed groups, from which the first generation of evaluators would emerge to evaluate the subsequent generations. This necessitated developing an SoC, not only for operators but also for evaluators. During recruitment, the deficiencies of the cascading training approach revealed a need for additional training before the certification process. Once the bilingual personnel were certified, their acquired skills needed to be recognized, and the project team managed to increase their salaries and create frontline and midline bilingual positions to be filled with certified personnel. The initial idea was refined several times to meet the challenges that emerged during project implementation. Throughout the implementation process, the team showed a high degree of adaptability in correcting the course in line with the project context.

The BPP pilot, as well as the Indigenous Peoples Communication Plan, provides useful insights on how to improve a program's attention model to better reach culturally and linguistically diverse populations. It provides important lessons on institutional flexibility and adaptation, as well as on citizens' empowerment. While this case is specific to the Mexican experience, it also offers important lessons for other social programs, especially the more than 30 conditional cash transfer programs around the world that face similar challenges in delivering services to indigenous populations. Serving any population in its mother tongue can contribute not only to reducing communication barriers but also to counteracting social exclusion by claiming the right of the socially and ethnically excluded to express themselves in their native languages.

## **How the Case Study Informs the Science of Delivery**

### **Relentless Focus on Citizen Outcomes**

Attending beneficiaries in their mother tongue and taking into account their culture are particularly important in



light of programs such as Oportunidades and their efforts to influence behavior. Introducing new practices requires building trust in the program, and trust requires strong communication that allows beneficiaries to understand, to express themselves, and to be understood in both language and culture. The BPP and IPCP have had a direct impact on reducing communication and cultural barriers, enabling trust, and ultimately bringing about behavioral change. Moreover, these projects counteract social exclusion, helping beneficiaries express themselves in their mother tongue and better understand the program and ultimately rendering them better able to claim their rights. Finally, apart from improving outcomes for beneficiaries, the Bilingual Promoters Project was also deemed empowering for frontline personnel, as it offered them chances to master their skills and strengthen their *résumés*.

## Multidimensional Response

The BPP and certification would not have been possible without the collaboration of key institutions like INALI and CONOCER, which have a deep understanding of indigenous communities. CONOCER played an important role in the approval of the SoC and in evaluating the evaluators. INALI played a crucial role at different stages of the project. During the diagnostic, it provided key information about the distribution of indigenous languages. During the hiring process, it evaluated the proficiency and variants of each language. During the certification process, it actively collaborated in designing the standard of competencies and evaluating the candidates. However, Oportunidades could further strengthen the inter-institutional knowledge sharing with sectors that had previously developed models for better reaching indigenous populations, such as IMSS-OPORTUNIDADES.

## Evidence to Achieve Results

Evaluating the program has been important, not only to demonstrate its impact but also to enable the program to learn from experience and to correct course when

necessary to increase its final impact. This becomes particularly important in Mexico, where a homogeneous service model is likely to fail if it cannot adapt to the complexity of such a culturally and linguistically diverse society. While in its beginnings the homogeneity was initially thought of as the best strategy for Oportunidades (that is, to increase efficiency and avoid corruption), it ended up becoming the program's weak point. The evaluations played a key role in making this problem evident and in engaging key stakeholders. Inspired by this experience, Bolsa Familia—the Brazilian conditional cash transfer program—has developed qualitative studies of the impact of the program on Quilombolas and indigenous populations. In addition, to diminish exclusion errors due to communication and cultural barriers, Bolsa Familia has adopted a particular strategy in its recruitment process, incorporating social workers who speak indigenous languages.

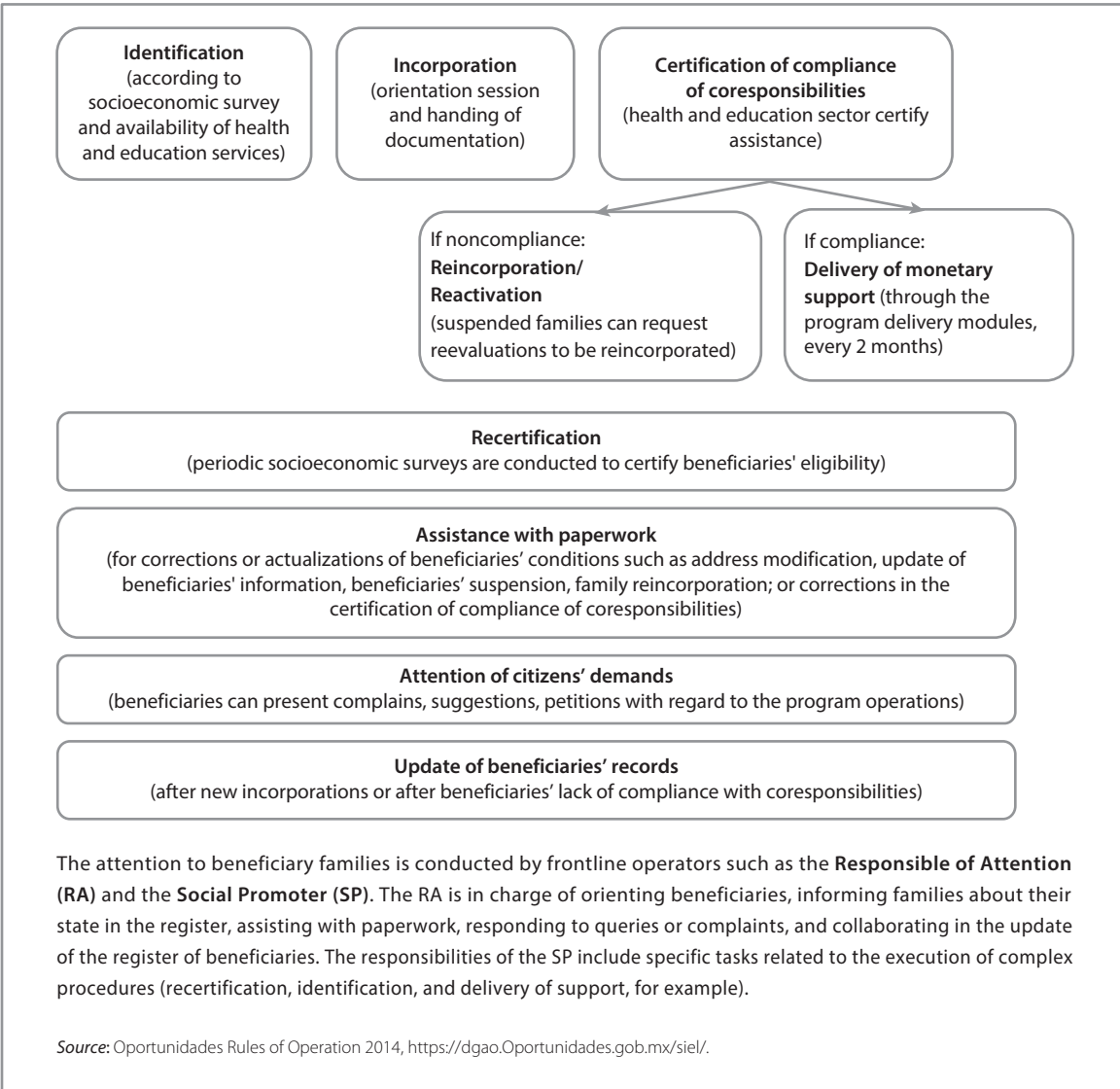
## Leadership for Change

Support from senior management was extremely important for the implementation of the BPP. However, the change in administrations undermined the continuity of the BPP. Furthermore, in spite of some initial results (for example, Mir et al. 2011), indicators were not in place to systematically capture program results. Project personnel said in interviews that there was not enough time to create indicators. While political support is critical to the development of projects, it is important that it reach all levels of management and that the different actors involved in the implementation process be appropriately engaged.

## Adaptive Implementation

Adaptability was key for the BPP. Oportunidades remained flexible and open to course corrections, such as the modification of the operational rules on hiring personnel and the salary increases for certified bilingual personnel. The organization also embraced further modifications to the project design, such as the introduction of seed groups and training courses for staff.

# Annex A Oportunidades Attention Model



# Annex B Interviewees and Role at Time of Interview

Interviewees	Title or Role
Mercedes González de la Rocha	Researcher from CIESAS Occidente
Augustin Escobar Latapí	Researcher from CIESAS D.F.
Guillermo de la Peña	Researcher from CIESAS Occidente
Lucía Bazan Levy	Researcher from CIESAS D.F.
Regina Martínez Casas	Researcher from CIESAS D.F.
Claudia Mir Cervantes	Consultant at COCOA Services, S.C.
Francesca Lamanna	World Bank Senior Economist and Task Team Leader for the new operation in support to Oportunidades
María Concepción Steta	World Bank Senior Social Protection Specialist and former Director of GDGIAE Oportunidades
Juan Rivera	Director, Center of Investigation for Health and Nutrition
Carlos Mancera	Director, Valora Consultores
Juan Pablo Gutierrez	Researcher, Center of Investigation for Health and Nutrition

table continues next page

## Annex B Interviewees (continued)

<i>Interviewees</i>	<i>Title or Role</i>
Genaro Cerna María Guadalupe Ortiz	INALI
National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples representatives	National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples
Julio Manuel Valera	General Director of Attention and Operations, National Coordination, Oportunidades
David Martínez Soto	Director of Citizen's Attention, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Hugo Zertuche	General Director of Evaluation, Analysis and GIS information, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Rogelio Omar Grados Zamudio	Director of Liaison with External Evaluations, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Raul Perez	Direction of Liaison with External Evaluations, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Carla Vazquez	Direction of Liaison with External Evaluations, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Marco Ortiz	Director of Community Promotion, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Aurora Peralta	Director of Communications and Diffusion, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Laura Duran	Director of Program Operations, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Delegate of Oportunidades in Yucatan	Coordination Agency of the State, Oportunidades
Representatives of the Health and Education Secretaries of the State, IMSS-Oportunidades state-level coordinator	State Level Technical Committee, Oportunidades
UAR Chief and Coordinators	Representatives from Yucatán UARs Oportunidades
RAs (Monolingual, bilingual, certified, and noncertified)	Social promoters and RAs from Yucatán, Chiapas, and Oaxaca.
Vocals of the Community Promotion Committees	A group of 30 Oportunidades beneficiaries (acting as focal points with Program families in their areas) from Popolá village (Yucatán)
Oportunidades beneficiaries	Approximately 100 Oportunidades beneficiaries who participated in focus groups in Yucatán
Gerónimo Camargo	Former Director of Program Operations, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Rebeca Barranco	Former Director of Citizen's Attention, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Daniel Aceves Villagrán	Director General de Oportunidades en el Sistema de Protección Social en la Secretaría Salud, National Coordination, Oportunidades
Roberto Rafael Garduño Alarcón (and team)	Coordinator of Community Action of IMSS-Oportunidades

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