



Grant Term' nated: Global Development and Women's Empowerment

Denise Lor Baer, George Washington University

On Monday, Jan. 27, I received an email from local project staff in Guatemala canceling that day's key informant interview due to the "review of cooperation projects by the United States government" and the request to "suspend activities" until further notice. This was the first notice that the evaluation of the Legal Reform Fund (LRF) project that I was conducting had been paused—and, in effect, permanently canceled. After checking in with the project implementer, the American Bar Association's Rule of Law Initiative (ABA-ROLI), I received formal notification of the pause later that same day.

LRF provided contextualized expert legal technical assistance and training to partnering government agencies, parliamentarians, judges, court staff and women entrepreneurs to improve women's access to land, property rights and credit in Guatemala, Indonesia, Mexico and Timor-Leste. I had been working on the evaluation for about two months, with the intent to complete all initial staff interviews before the end of January and then move on to field data collection. The evaluation had been approved last December by the Department of State, with approval of the inception report coming from the department's Office of Global Women's Issues just a week earlier. While I'd been tracking the flurry of executive orders, I doubted that this project would violate the new "two-gender" policy—after all, it was funded through the **Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative** created by President Trump himself during his first administration in 2019 and championed by his daughter Ivanka with great fanfare. The initiative aimed to help 50 million women in developing countries realize their economic potential by 2025; the LRF project was only one of many funded by W-GDP initially and later continued by the Biden administration.