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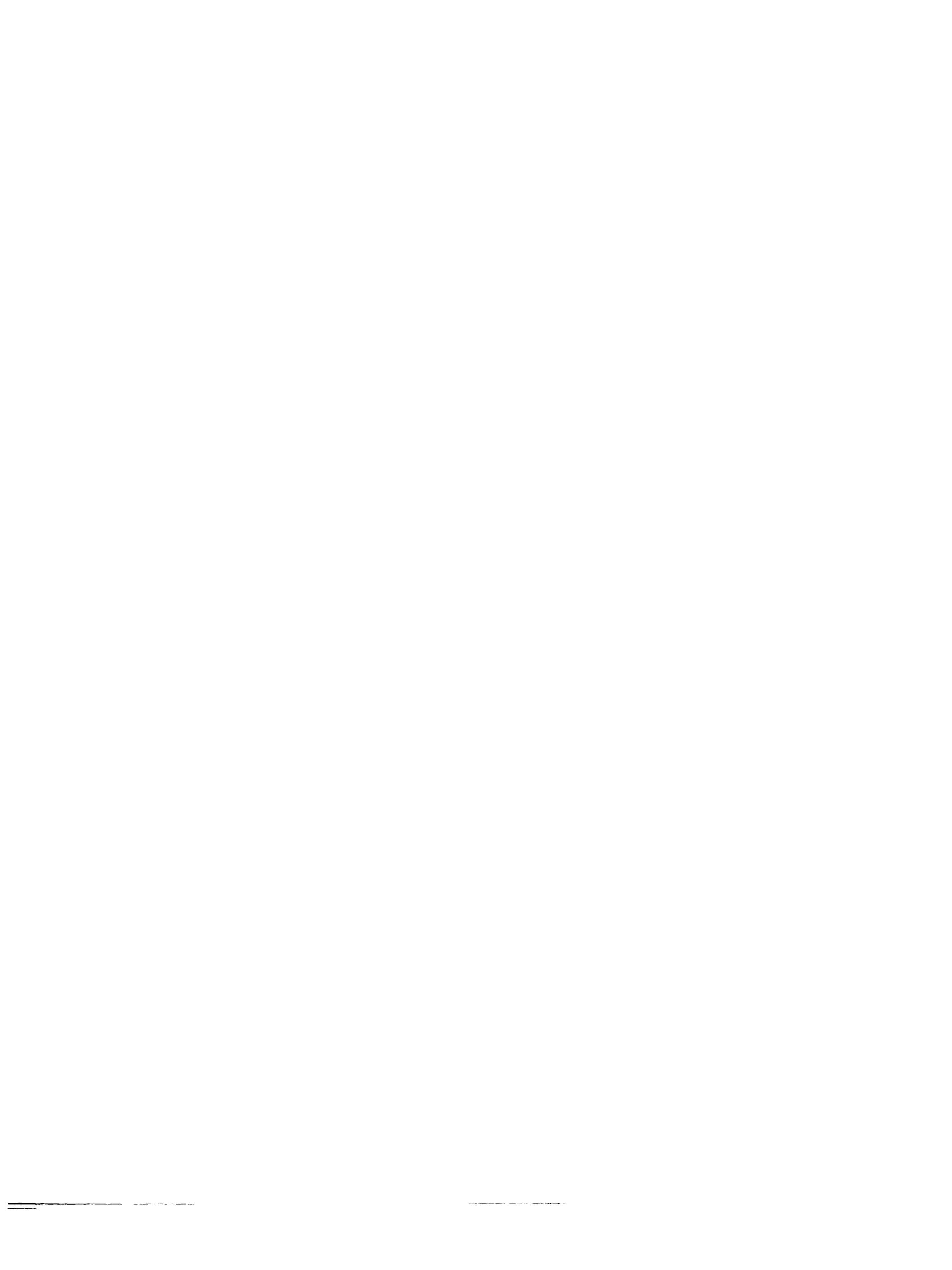
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**The Emerald of Guatemala:  
La Esmeralda and the Reality of Women and Men  
Organized and Participating Cooperatively for Community  
Development**

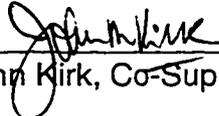
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in  
International Development Studies

Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
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February 17, 1997



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## **ABSTRACT**

Paula Shaw

### **THE EMERALD OF GUATEMALA: LA ESMERALDA AND THE REALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN ORGANIZED AND PARTICIPATING COOPERATIVELY FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

February 17, 1997

Collectively and organized, after having lived in refugee camps in Mexico for more than a decade, the Guatemalan refugees were returning home to build a 'New Guatemala'. A group of more than six hundred refugees, speaking nine different Mayan languages, returned to the Petén to be part of the reconstruction through building a new community, La Esmeralda. Using the insights gathered during my six months in La Esmeralda as an international accompanier and researcher, this thesis focuses on their community development efforts.

Through their collective participation in their cooperative (*La Nueva Esperanza*, or the New Hope) and women's organization (Ixmucafé), and their associated projects, in less than a year after their return, they had a thriving community. Their organized collective participation, however, was not without its problems.

In search for potential solutions to the participation problems in La Esmeralda, the development literature on participation is reviewed. Many of the interpretations of participation have neglected to include the importance of organization, a fundamental component of participation in La Esmeralda. The few reviewed that did, more adequately describe participation in La Esmeralda, but do not capture its spirit. Finding none of the interpretations of the various definitions given to participation were adequate, a specific definition is developed, *organized participation with empowerment*. In light of the experience of La Esmeralda, the barriers to *organized participation with empowerment* are discussed. There are no instant remedies to these obstacles, but taking them into consideration, a list of 'factors to be considered' are suggested for development projects, community or women's organizations which strive to have *organized participation with empowerment*.

## Acknowledgements

As I sit here looking out my window onto Fuller Terrace in the north-end of Halifax, thinking about who I would like to acknowledge in this space, my mind is racing around the globe. So if I forget to put your name, its been a long trip, please forgive me and know I appreciated your help.

In Guatemala there were many people who made this thesis possible. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank the people of La Esmeralda who by letting me into their lives gave me one of the greatest experiences of my life. Helen, grounded me, gave me great British expressions and stimulating conversation about dogs and tacos. Margie and Nathalie provided me a home away from home in Xela, and two great friends who I could call up anytime that I got near a phone. Chris, my friend and in-the-field thesis supervisor, kept trying to focus me against great resistance.

In Halifax, my co-supervisors, Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman and Dr. John Kirk, have both given me so much. Linda came to the rescue on countless occasions, and with great compassion and understanding she pushed me to make deeper analysis. In good humour, John stuck with me from the beginning and through many thesis topics, some how seeming to know when to give me positive feedback or a kick in the butt. As my reader, Dr. Andrea Doucet made me feel great that she enjoyed reading my thesis. Beth provided me with a link to Project Accompaniment, but more importantly a supportive friend and access to her children, Gavin and Ivy, to keep me from going into 'kid withdrawal'. In spite of being sick and tired of the T- word, Nadia was always willing and interested to talk about mine, and read a chapter or two. When the crunch was on, Jenny and Alan took Lina for walks and feed me. Hideki kept me on my toes, with his deep philosophical questions. Laura gave encouraging words through electronic means. Marie, wanting to make things easy, made sure that they were. Catherine for her map and Ken at K-PC Ltée for putting it on paper. Always wanting to be cuddled or walked, Lina always made sure I got breaks from my thesis. CIDA and CBIE made the field research possible and helped me avoid another year of tree planting. Canada's Project Accompaniment gave me a way to give something back to the community that gave me so much.

I would also like to thank my mother for having the gumption to visit me in Guatemala and being such a good sport and my sister Erin for being supportive and encouraging no matter what path I take in life. Thank you to my best friend, Liam. You started out on this journey with me and I was so glad you could be there to 'accompany' me at the end.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the horizon one could see them coming up the river in the shallow boats that can be rented from the local boatmen. When they reached the bank and stepped onto the shore, touching for the first time in over a decade the soil of their home country, one could see in their eyes their apprehension, excitement and hope. The mix of expressions likely came from memories of the past, their present reality, and the thought of the potential which their futures held.

The people disembarking were fifty Guatemalans who had been living in refugee camps in Mexico since they had fled their country more than a decade earlier<sup>1</sup> to escape from the violence of their government's counter-insurgency war.<sup>2</sup> Now they were returning home. They would add their numbers to the more than fourteen thousand Guatemalans who had returned as part of an agreement between their elected representatives and the Guatemalan government. They were returning collectively, organized, empowered and accompanied by international human rights observers, 'international accompaniers'. Acting as an international accompanier with Canada's Project Accompaniment, I was on the shore watching this historic event.

The following day, first in buses and then as the roads worsened in pick-up trucks, the newly returned refugees ('returnees') were accompanied to their

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the people on this return were children who, in fact, are officially Mexican citizens and not Guatemalan citizens, having been born in one of the refugee camps. According to the Mexican refugee authorities (COMAR) of the 32,272 refugees who still remained in the camps in 1995, 13,456 were born in Mexico (COMAR, 1995). Yet, as refugees, they were coming home to their country of Guatemala.

<sup>2</sup> The counter-insurgency war was an attempt by the military dictators of the time, Lucas García and Ríos Montt, to 'flush-out' the guerrillas of the URNG and bring an end to the armed uprising which started in 1960. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

new rural Guatemalan community, La Esmeralda (the Emerald).<sup>3</sup> As we approached the community the popular cheer "*el pueblo unido jamás será vencido*" ("the united people will never be defeated") rang out. And when the trucks pulled into the community it appeared that close to all of the 674 residents who had returned to Guatemala only five months previously were out to greet their new neighbours.

For six months I lived in La Esmeralda as an international accompanier/researcher. At first I had been apprehensive about having this dual role, and wondered whether there would be a conflict between the two. However, in the end I found they complemented each other in many ways. Being glad to have me in their community as an accompanier, the people of La Esmeralda were very willing to share with me, include me in their activities, and to be interviewed. Also, the life of an accompanier is often said to be very boring, with the distractions of the accompaniers' 'normal' lives having been left behind. Since I was always in a state of either actively or passively carrying out research,<sup>4</sup> I never found myself at a loss of things to do and never was inflicted by boredom.

In the beginning, not wanting to be invasive in my role as a researcher, I had made the decision to focus the research on International Accompaniment. After spending more than a month in the community I found that it was not the best place to carry out my investigations on my original thesis topic. Wanting to keep my original commitment to Project Accompaniment and the community,

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<sup>3</sup> For location of La Esmeralda, see Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> By active research I mean actively carrying out interviews, or attending meeting with the objective of carrying out research. Passive research, on the other hand, is what researchers most often refer to as 'participant observation', and I would say is not as directed and intentional. Living in La Esmeralda for six months I was always engaged in research as a participant observer, watching, learning, listening, and discussing. In fact, the day-to-day living in the community, taught me the most and is on what a large part of this thesis is based.

being very content living in La Esmeralda, and following the advice from fellow companioner/researcher Chris Tennant, I decided to change the focus of my research and to focus on the community in which I was living.

La Esmeralda is organized into a cooperative, *La Nueva Esperanza* (the New Hope) which helps organize and run the community. Equally important in their collective life is the women's organization, Ixmucané, which has its own separate organizational structure and development projects. My new focus would be on Ixmucané and its development projects.<sup>5</sup> Later, after I had returned to Canada, realizing that Ixmucané and the lives of the women in the community would be better understood by examining the cooperative as well, I expanded the focus of my thesis to include *La Nueva Esperanza*.

Through the relationships that I had already begun to build with people in the community, the transition to my new research topic was easy and natural. I began to: work regularly in the women's collective garden; carry out formal and informal interviews with community members, people from neighbouring communities, and workers from the NGOs and the UNHCR; attend numerous meetings and assemblies of both the cooperative and Ixmucané; and continue with my participant observations.

Every four to six weeks I would leave the community for a few days to give myself a bit of time to recover from one of the numerous intestinal problems which kept reoccurring, to expand my diet from beans and tortillas, and to take a step back from La Esmeralda, so that I could better understand it. I would often walk on these occasions, not wanting to wait for the possible arrival of one of the pick-up trucks to drive me to Dolores. I had not planned it as part of my

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<sup>5</sup> The women knew that I was researching about Ixmucané and its projects, and most appeared to be supportive and encouraging. Their support was shown in their availability to be interviewed and in their openness with me.

research methods, but the walk gave me the opportunity to have many chance encounters with people in the surrounding communities. The discussions we had taught me more about the reality of Guatemalan campesinos. It also gave me a comparative perspective on what was taking place in the Return community in relation to the surrounding communities. This distance, and the different view of life in the *campo* illuminated how extraordinary La Esmeralda and its collective community development efforts were.

By attending meetings and watching the day-to-day running of the community, it was apparent that the level of organization and participation in La Esmeralda was genuinely impressive, and vital to the community's development. As noted by one of the community leaders "If we had not been organized, we would not have had our achievements" (Eulalia). However, with more time in the community I also began to see the significance behind her other observation: "but always there are problems, always there are obstacles."

My knowledge and understanding of both the organizations and the people's participation in them matured greatly from my first naive impression. As a whole, the community of La Esmeralda has been able to make great advances because of their organizations and the high level of community members' participation in them. But, as Doña Eva (one of the leaders of Ixmucané at the time and later president of the cooperative)<sup>6</sup> said, "Working cooperatively is difficult," and "participation is not a panacea". I became fully aware of how difficult cooperation can be and the problems which exist around the issue of participation in both the cooperative and Ixmucané.

In this thesis I will look at participation in La Esmeralda in both Ixmucané

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<sup>6</sup> In the main text of the thesis there will be quotation by a Rodríguez (1993), this is Doña Eva. The quotations were taken from an article written by Doña Eva in a Guatemalan women's magazine, which, quite by coincidence, I had bought three years previously in Mexico, prior to the starting the Masters programme.

and the cooperative. The focus will be on: the way in which both are organized; the participation of the community in them and their various projects; and the problems and the barriers which exist, most of which are around the issue of participation. Finally, a list of recommendations will be suggested for development initiatives to consider when organized participation with empowerment potential is an instrumental component.

This thesis largely follows the grounded theory approach, which allows for “the discovery of theory from data” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1). By using this approach, the realities of La Esmeralda have determined the focus of this thesis. That is, this thesis is firmly grounded in the everyday realities of the community researched and has gone from those realities to the theory, allowing the experiences of the community to inform theory. For this reason, this thesis is important.

According to the literature, ‘participation’ is re-emerging in development discourse, along with an appreciation of its importance. The use of participation in development efforts, however, will not guarantee the initiative’s success. In part this may be due to the way in which participation has been conceptualized. There are numerous ways in which participation has been defined in the development literature and practice. This thesis is important because it will distinguish between the different interpretations.

Development initiatives with participation have also failed because of the barriers to participation. There are practical ways, however, in the the way in which some of these barriers can be defeated. This thesis is important for the list of recommendations suggested on how to overcome and/or avoid some of the obstacles faced by participation.

The study of international development can be very disheartening, as the ability to achieve just societies seems increasingly impossible. This thesis is important because by allowing the reader to become acquainted with a community which is actively working to make a more just society, it provides some hopeful, positive and realistic insights. In spite of the external and internal problems which it faces, my hope is that the example of La Esmeralda will give the reader hope for the future, as it has for me.

To understand fully La Esmeralda, the reader must have some awareness of the recent history of Guatemalan. In Chapter One, a brief sketch of recent Guatemalan history will be traced, dating back to 1944. Included in this chapter will be a discussion of the rise of the armed resistance and the events which led to the flight of millions of Guatemalans. As well, an outline of the Guatemalans who were forced to flee their homes, and sometimes country, will be given along with a description of their efforts to organize.

At the micro-level, the incredible advancements and potential of La Esmeralda, along with the barriers the community face can only be fully appreciated if one has an understanding of the area in which La Esmeralda is located. In Chapter Two, the Petén (the department where La Esmeralda is found) will be discussed, along with its local district, the municipality of Dolores, and the surrounding communities. The chapter will end with a description of La Esmeralda's immediate neighbouring community, Limones, and La Esmeralda itself.

As mentioned, there are two organizations in La Esmeralda which are of critical importance to its development, the cooperative, *La Nueva Esperanza*, and the women's organization, Ixmucané. In Chapter Four, the cooperative will

be examined with particular attention on how it is organized and the participation of the members in the various branches of its organization.

The women's organization, Ixmucané, I would argue, is equally important to La Esmeralda as the cooperative. It is very active in the community, having its own separate organization and associated projects. Chapter Four will discuss Ixmucané in general, and in more detail will discuss its projects, women's participation in them, and the problems associated with participation.

Participation is not new in development discourse and practice. In Chapter Five, the history of participation as a concept in development will be examined. Throughout its history and to the present day, participation has not had a single definition, and it has become a 'catch-all' term in development discourse. In the literature a number of ways of interpreting the numerous definitions of participation have been written. These interpretations will be discussed and then applied to participation in La Esmeralda. After seeing that these concepts fall short of adequately portraying participation in La Esmeralda, a definition particular to participation in La Esmeralda will be written, namely *organized participation with empowerment*. With reference to the preceding chapters and more observations of participation in La Esmeralda, this chapter will then look at an overview of the obstacles to *organized participation with empowerment*. It will end with suggesting a list of recommendations to be considered when *organized participation with empowerment* is used in development initiatives or organizations.

La Esmeralda is a community of 700 refugees who have returned collectively and organized to their home country of Guatemala. They have

returned to participate actively in the building of their new lives and community. It has been a difficult process, especially considering the obstacles to participation. The difficulties do not, however, take away from what the community has accomplished. Rather, considering the barriers which they have faced , the progress that they have made in establishing their new community is extraordinary. It is my hope that this thesis portrays to its readers the remarkable nature of their venture, and that they can appreciate the success the community has had thus far.

## CHAPTER ONE: AFTER FOUR DECADES OF WINTER, IS SPRING COMING AGAIN?: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GUATEMALA'S MODERN HISTORY

As stated in the Introduction, this thesis will focus on La Esmeralda, a community of returned refugees located in the Petén, and their attempts to participate actively at the community level through their organizations in the building of a *Nueva Guatemala*.<sup>1</sup> To fully appreciate what is happening in the community, it is important to have an understanding of recent Guatemalan history, which will be the focus of this chapter.

### **'Decade of Springs'**

Guatemala's history is full of examples of attempts by its excluded masses to participate in their country's economic, social and political development. In fact, its 'modern history' is said to have started with the 'October Revolution' of 1944. The 'revolution' was a successful attempt by students, workers, and young army officers to oust the president. The uprising managed to interrupt seventy years of Liberalism, a period that saw the further entrenchment of mono-export underdevelopment in the country and the rise to

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<sup>1</sup> *Una 'Nueva Guatemala'* is often what is spoken of as the goal of Guatemalans active in the popular movement. They want to build a 'New Guatemala'. There is also a new political party in the country which wants to build a new Guatemala, the *Frente Democrático Nueva Guatemala* (the Democratic Front for a New Guatemala or the New Democratic Guatemalan Front or FDNG). They were the only left-of-centre political party running in the country's 1995 presidential elections. The success of the FDNG in the elections surprised everyone. They won 7.71% of the votes and five FDNG candidates were elected to Congress. Two of the winning candidates had been very active leaders in the Guatemalan popular movement: Nineth Montenegro from the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo para los Familiares de los Desaparecidos (Mutual Support Group for the Families of the Disappeared or GAM) and Amilcar Méndez of Consejo Etnico Runujel Junam (Ethnic Council "we are equal" in the Quiche language or CERG) .

ascendancy of Spanish descendent (*ladino*)<sup>2</sup> landowners (*finqueros*) and foreign investors, particularly American investors (Jonas, 1991).<sup>3</sup>

The popular revolt was successful because Guatemala was ripe for it.<sup>4</sup> What had started as a student strike led to a general strike in Guatemala City and to the eventual forced resignation of President Jorge Ubico. After making a few token promises, but showing that he had no intentions to hold elections, provisional president Federico Ponce settled in to rule much like his predecessor Ubico. The political opposition made up of students, workers and dissident army officers ousted President Ponce in October 1944 and put in power an interim junta, which would rule for the next five months until the election of the first 'Revolutionary President', Juan José Arévalo (Smith-Ayala, 1991).

Arévalo made many changes to the status quo. He quickly adopted political democracy, passing a law of 'universal suffrage' (sic).<sup>5</sup> The other reforms during his presidency included: protecting the basic freedom of the press and speech and the freedom of political parties, a decentralization of political power, spending one-third of state expenditures on "an ambitious social welfare program", and progressive labour legislation (Jonas, 1991: 24).

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<sup>2</sup> There are many ways in which '*ladino*' has been defined. According to Menchú (1992), ladino "today [refers to] any Guatemalan - whatever his [or her] economic position - who rejects, either individually or through his [her] cultural heritage, Indian values of Mayan origin. It also implies mixed blood" (249). 'Mixed blood' is someone who comes from both Mayan and non-Mayan ancestry.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of Guatemalans are Mayan. However, the vast majority of the wealth and power in Guatemala is held by Guatemalan families of Spanish or European descendants, or by foreigners.

<sup>4</sup> See Jonas (1991) who also gives further detail of the internal and external factors which helped to set the stage for the October Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> Previously the right to vote was restricted to adult literate males. Arévalo's 'universal suffrage' widened the voting rights to all adult men and to all literate women. What this essentially represents is 'universal male suffrage' and very restricted voting rights for women, since as of 1950, 76.1 percent of Guatemalan women were illiterate and 95.2 percent of Guatemalan indigenous women were illiterate (Jonas, 1991).

In the 1951 elections, the reform government of Arévalo was replaced by the more reformist government of General Jacobo Arbenz.

President Arbenz's presidency proved to be much more radical than that of his predecessor. To reach his stated objective of turning the nation's economy from one based on dependent capitalism to one of national and independent capitalism, many changes were necessary (Jonas, 1991). The new economy called for the utilisation of national resources in import-substituting industries, a strategy which at that time was in vogue in development planning. To be more independent, changes to the pattern of landholdings were also necessary. This led to the passing of the 1952 Agrarian Reform Law.

The Agrarian Reform Law provided for the expropriation of idle lands from holdings of over 223 acres, with compensation for the land being provided by government bonds for the valuation given on the owners' tax forms. Due largely to the resistance of the *finqueros*<sup>6</sup>, the process of land expropriation was difficult. Ironically, the opposition was being led by a foreign company, the largest landowner in Guatemala at the time, the American-owned United Fruit Company (UFCo).<sup>7</sup> Only 15 percent of the UFCo's landholding were under cultivation at the time, which meant the government could possibly buy out 85 percent of their total landholdings. Since they had highly undervalued their land, they had a lot to lose with the new land reform law.<sup>8</sup>

There were others opposed to Arbenz's reforms as well, and the country had split into two camps, those for the reforms and those against. With the

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<sup>6</sup> *Finqueros* are large landowners and are part of the class of ruling elites.

<sup>7</sup> The reader will find that a number of acronyms are used in this thesis. A list of the acronyms used can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup> The United Fruit Company initially valued its land holdings to be worth \$1 million; later they claimed it to be worth \$16 million (Jonas, 1991).

potential negative impact on the United Fruit Company, there was much opposition to the law from the United States government. As well, this was during the heat of the Cold War and the American opponents saw Arbenz's reforms to be a form of communism.<sup>9</sup> These are some of the factors that led the CIA in 1954 to sponsor a coup to oust the elected Arbenz government and replace it with their own trained hand-picked president-in waiting, Carlos Castillo Armas.<sup>10</sup>

### **'Decades of Winter'**

The coup would bring to an end ten years of progressive reforms in Guatemala, an end to Guatemala's 'decade of springs'. The decade of springs was followed by four decades of 'winter' where there was no attempt to improve the conditions under which the average Guatemalan lived. Instead a period of "violence and death began comparable only to the Conquest" (Smith-Ayala, 1991: 24).

### **Armed Conflict**

In 1960, six years after the coup, a failed uprising by a group of junior army officers provided what would be the seeds to what has since become the longest armed-revolution in Latin America. After the failed coup, the junior officers formed an alliance with the Guatemalan Communist Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo, PGT) and in February 1962 formed the first guerrilla organization, MR-13. The history of MR-13 was be short-lived, but in December

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<sup>9</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of American involvement in Guatemala at the time, see Handy (1984).

<sup>10</sup> With the American Airforce planes provided to carry out the coup, and a number of other expenditures, the estimated cost to the American government for their coup 'sponsorship' was approximately \$7 million U.S. (Jonas, 1991).

of the same year a new guerrilla group rose out of the MR-13, which still exists today, the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR). The FAR were largely centred in the eastern and northern departments of Guatemala.

In the early 1970s a new revolutionary group was born in the western highlands of Guatemala, in the 'Ixil Triangle', the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP). Around the same time the Organización del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA) formed. The ORPA's operations were in the central highlands of Guatemala, concentrated around the resort area of Lago Atitlán, a few hours west of the capital. In 1982 the EGP, ORPA, FAR, and PGT joined together to form the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG).

Land ownership was, and continues to be, the largest issue of contention in Guatemala and was one of the central issues in the armed conflict. A 1964 government census illustrated the inequality; 2.1 percent of the population owned 62.5 percent of the land, and 87.6 percent of the farmers had access to only 18.6 percent of the land (Handy, 1984). A more independent study done in 1965 by the Inter-American Committee of Agricultural Development, found the inequality to be even more startling. It reports that 2.1 percent of the farm units<sup>11</sup> controlled 72.2 percent of the land and that 88.4 percent of the total farms existed on only 14.3 percent of the available land (Handy, 1984). The highly unequal pattern of land distribution would continue. By 1979 the official government figures stated that 89.7 percent of the farmers had access to only 16 percent of the land while large landholders, who represented only 2.2 percent of the farm units, owned 65 percent of the arable land.

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<sup>11</sup> A 'farm unit' could be the thousands of acres of land owned by a large multi-national corporation like the United Fruit Company, or it could refer to the one-acre plot of land owned by a poor Mayan campesino. Each one is a farm unit.

These landholding patterns, in part, were due to the expropriation of land by the large local landowners, the *finqueros*.<sup>12</sup> Being forced to exist on smaller and smaller plots, many of the campesinos had to work as farm labourers, under highly exploitive conditions, on one of the large export-crop growing *fincas*.<sup>13</sup> They were also persecuted by the government's armed forces. A combination of these three factors was what likely led many to campesinos to support the armed resistance groups. Those who joined the revolution saw it as "their only escape from economic strangulation and political suffocation". The guerrilla organizations provided a way for them to actively participate in events that would determine their future (Painter, 1989: xiii).

An overwhelming proportion of the guerrillas were not only campesinos, but were also Mayan (Smith, 1990).<sup>14</sup> Because of racism and poverty, those who suffered, and continue to suffer the most in Guatemala are its native people, the Mayan people. Depending upon how one defines the term Mayan, estimates of the percentage of the population which is Mayan range from fifty to seventy percent. In rural areas of Guatemala, eighty percent of the population is Mayan, and the majority are poor and often landless campesinos. 'No longer

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<sup>12</sup> *Finqueros* are large landowners and *fincas* is usually the noun used for their large plantation or estate.

<sup>13</sup> For a personal account of the horrific conditions under which the largely Mayan farm labourers lived and worked, see Menchú (1992).

<sup>14</sup> Handy (1984) suggests that another reason for the predominance of Mayan combatants is a consequence of the treatment the indigenous people received at the hands of the Guatemalan military commanders, who were largely *ladino*. Handy (1984) believed that in a country with almost five hundred years of systemic racism, the military commanders saw all indigenous campesinos as potential enemies and freely carried out their policy of genocide.

having a cheek to offer',<sup>15</sup> it is understandable why the armed movement found particular appeal amongst its native population.

Having been unable to eliminate the guerrilla movement, during the 1970s the attacks by the military increased and the army began what has been termed the first 'counter-insurgency war'. The first counter-insurgency war was largely selective, with the Guatemalan armed forces restricting their killings mostly to members of community organizations (Handy, 1984). Unable to suppress the armed movement, by the late 1970s and early 1980s the army tactics became increasingly brutal, "explod[ing] into a Dantesque nightmare of brutality" (Handy, 1984: 251).

The second counter-insurgency war was fought under the presidency of General Lucas García. The tactics used changed from selective repression to full genocidal war. Even with these new tactics, the government's armed forces still had little success at suppressing the armed rebellion. This led to the 1982 coup led by General Ríos Montt.

The coup, according to Handy (1984), appeared to be "a bid by garrison commanders to improve military efficiency in a bloody war that they might be losing" (180). Although at first the new regime offered amnesty to the guerrillas and their supporters, the olive branch was quickly dropped and Ríos Montt declared on television that "today we are going to begin a merciless struggle... to annihilate the subversives that have not understood the good intentions of the government" (Handy, 1984: 257).

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<sup>15</sup> This phrase comes from Rigoberta Menchú, a Guatemalan Mayan and a Christian, and also winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. She was taught that true Christians forgive their persecutors and pray for their souls. Her two younger brothers were murdered by pesticides while working in the cotton fields; her father and other brother were burned alive by the army; and soldiers murdered her mother, "very gradually, cutting her to pieces bit by bit after dressing her up in guerrilla's clothing". After these horrific events, Rigoberta, who had been taught to turn the other cheek, found "I no longer have a cheek to offer" (Galeano, 1988: 256).

The 'struggle' was merciless. The victims of the government forces were largely poor indigenous campesinos, who were often slaughtered without any evidence of having been guerrilla supporters. It was the army's tactic of what has been termed 'draining the water from the fish'. The reasoning was that, if the campesinos were eliminated, the guerrillas would have no support. In the words of dictator Ríos Montt, "the problem of war is not just a question of who is shooting. For everyone who is shooting there are ten working behind him" (Handy, 1984: 257). According to one Guatemalan bishop, "not even the lives of the old people, pregnant women or innocent children were respected. Never in our history has it come to such grave extremes" (Handy, 1984: 255).

By the end of Montt's rule, his army's 'scorched earth' tactics and 'free fire' zones had resulted in the entire elimination of a minimum of 440 indigenous highland villages, as well as the murder of more than 2,500 people in three months and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. The final death toll was as high as 50,000, with 200,000 children missing at least one parent (Dunkerley, 1988 and Handy, 1984). Although the killing included people from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, the vast majority of the attacks were directed against Guatemala's indigenous campesinos.

The war against 'subversives' was not only in the form of mass killings and destruction. Under the presidency of Ríos Montt, in the early 1980s a civic action project called *fusiles y frijoles* (guns and beans) was pursued. *Fusiles y frijoles* included: the forced relocation of peasants into 'strategic hamlets' and 'model villages', and civil patrols. The 'strategic hamlets' and 'model villages' were designed to "regroup the population in more concentrated and *easily*

*controlled* population centres" (Manz, 1988: 43),<sup>16</sup> ensuring that they would be located close to an army garrison. The military would also ensure that the people were unable to become self-sufficient, forcing them instead to rely on handouts from government agencies, or the generosity of a few religious workers who were permitted into the region.

Civil patrols were another tactic used by the military in order to control the people. Every male between the ages of 16 and 60 had to serve as local militia 'protecting' the community from potential guerrilla attack. Dunkerley (1988) believes that the "primary purpose of the patrols was less military than to ensure individual registration, control of movement, and dissemination of propaganda" (496-97). They were also "meant to insure military dominance by integrating all male residents into a military structure" (Handy, 1992: 33). Although the patrols were instantly condemned by residents in most communities, and by the United Nations General Assembly, many still joined because refusal to do so had led to many massacres in 1982 and 1983 (Handy 1992).<sup>17</sup>

In 1983 a coup ousted Ríos Montt, bringing an end to the "most painful chapter in the history of modern Guatemala" (Jonas, 1991: 146). "At the human level" the events between 1980-1983 were

a tale of wholesale slaughter and genocide by the new death squads, the counterinsurgent security forces, this time carrying out illegal violence themselves, with the facade of legal constraints. That this holocaust was almost unknown and unimagined in most Western countries, certainly in the United States, is a testament to the "great

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<sup>16</sup> To this day, model villages exist in Guatemala. According to Manz (1988) their goal is to "address the problems that fuelled the strong social movements of the last decade and to rechannel these energies into the army's model of development" (43).

<sup>17</sup> Civil patrols would become community death squads. They still exist today and are responsible for a number of human rights violations. Their continued to be a strong campaign by the popular movement in Guatemala to rid the country of the PACs and as a result, in the final peace accord an agreement to the dismantling of the PACs was agreed upon, although there is some uncertainty as to how this will be done, and if all of the arms will be confiscated.

silence” about Guatemala - an indifferent, at times complicitous silence, perhaps because the victims were overwhelmingly Indians. (Jonas 1991: 146)

In the two-and-a-half years after the overthrow of Ríos Montt, a process of returning to civilian government was started. During this time a Constituent Assembly was elected, work was done on the re-writing of the constitution, and finally in 1985 there were presidential and congressional elections. The 1985 presidential elections which brought to power civilian leader Vinicio Cerezo, were quickly touted by the U.S. Embassy as “the final step in the reestablishment of democracy in Guatemala” (Jonas, 1991: 156). To outsiders it appeared that Guatemalan government might be on track to improve its reputation as the worst human rights violator in the western hemisphere, and that the four decades of winter were over.

Even though the elections were not fraudulent, and it was the first time since 1970 that a civilian leader was elected to this office, “these factors do not constitute a basis for the sweeping claim that the election represented the culmination of a lasting transition to democracy” (Jonas, 1991). Only 55.8 percent of the electorate voted. Perhaps this was because potential voters did not see a party which represented their interests. Multiple parties competed in the elections, but there were no left-of-centre parties in the race and the parties that did run differed very little in their election platforms . As well, continuing with the coercive practices of the past, illegal executions and disappearances plagued the campaign, likely undermining the chance of any real ‘democratic process’. Overall, “the election was part of the war and it did not involve a real transfer of power from military to civilians.... [M]uch of the power remained in the hands of the army” (Jonas, 1991:157). The continued maintenance of the counterinsurgency apparatus “virtually assured the continuation of the old

patterns of violence and human rights abuses” (Jonas, 1991: 226).

Along with the continuation of state-sponsored violence between 1985 and 1990, living conditions deteriorated significantly for most Guatemalans as a consequence of inflation and the neoliberal austerity measures. A process of impoverishment was taking place, as many families who were not poor before, became poor (UNICEF, 1994). Not surprisingly, by the 1990 presidential elections the majority of Guatemalans had lost faith in the democratic process. As a result, there was a seventy percent abstention rate. Although the election of Jorge Serrano, former Council of State under the Ríos Montt military dictatorship, was ‘clean’, there was little reason to celebrate. According to one observer, the election were “so meaningless to the country’s real problems that it has been described as ‘electoral apartheid” (Jonas, 1991: 228).

In municipal elections after Serrano’s election, there were widespread accusations of electoral fraud and evidence of corruption involving Serrano himself. In March 1993 Serrano and his vice-president, Gustavo Espina, were publicly identified as having acquired property worth \$20 million since taking their elected seats (Dunkerley, 1994). Serrano’s greed, lack of popular support, and his limited political skill would soon bring about his own demise.

On the 25th of May 1993, Serrano suspended the constitution and the Supreme Court and dissolved Congress. His *autogolpe*, self-coup, was short-lived. By the summer time, his dictatorial experiment collapsed and human rights ombudsman Ramiro de León Carpio, was put in temporarily as president, until the 1995 elections of Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen.

Within the popular movement, there was likely a sigh of relief when Arzú won the elections. This was not because he would represent their interest, which was highly unlikely since he was from the right-wing PAN party and one

of the richest families in Guatemala, but because he defeated his nearest contender, the FRG, the party of ex-dictator Ríos Montt.

### **Peace Agreement: The Coming of Spring?**

Arzú did keep one of his electoral promises. On December 29th, 1996 his government and the URNG brought an end to the country's three and a half decade-long civil war with the signing of the peace accord. The peace process had started six years previously, in 1990, with the signing of an agreement between the URNG and the government's National Reconciliation Commission to start the peace process. That year the URNG had a number of meetings with various groups from Guatemala's civil society,<sup>18</sup> groups who would later have a more defined role in the peace negotiations.

The peace talks had not progressed very well for a number of years and to put the negotiations back on track the United Nations mediated talks in 1994. At these talks a Framework Accord was signed which established the *Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil* (the Assembly of Civil Sectors or ASC), formalized the role of a group of six nations, and called for the negotiation of eleven substantive and operational themes.

The inclusion of the ASC in the accords provided a way through which a broad spectrum of Guatemalan civil society could be an active participant in the peace process. Except for the URNG, the government, and the army, the Assembly was supposed to be open to all sectors in Guatemala. The eleven different sectors who were invited to take part in the forming of the ASC made a diverse group: political parties; religious institutions; unions and 'popular

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<sup>18</sup> 'Civil society' is a term used, as of late, in political science. It refers to "the collection of civilian groups, individuals and institutions in a nation who develop the capacity for political expression and action independent of the state structures" (Loeb, 1995: 2).

movement'; academics; cooperatives and small and medium business and professionals; Mayan organizations; women; journalists; non-governmental organizations; centres of study and investigation; human rights groups; and the Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations (CACIF).<sup>19</sup> With such a wide spectrum of grassroots groups participating in the ASC, it proved to be "an unprecedented forum for open discussion of crucial issues facing the nation [Guatemala]" (Loeb, 1995: 2). It acted as a "model of democratic dialogue across social and political dividing-lines", producing deliberations and far-reaching proposals on each one of the accords being negotiated. This "helped to stimulate public dialogue about the issues involved in the talks, in contrast to the secrecy surrounding the talks themselves" (Proctor, 1995: 3).

It was obvious that the ASC's power was limited. For one, it did not have a seat at the negotiating table, participating instead through recommendations which were nonbinding. In addition, although its signature was desired on the different accords which have been ratified, it was not necessary for their implementation. However, it still could have had influence in the process and the content of the accords which were ratified (Proctor, 1995). But, there was a sense that as the process continued, the voice of the ASC became muted.

In the end, although the country celebrated when the final agreement was signed at the end of 1996, there was also a sense of disappointment within the Guatemalan popular movement. Some of the agreements signed on the different substantial and operational themes were weaker than what had been hoped for. There was also concern that some of the accords had used very

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<sup>19</sup> CACIF represents Guatemala's most powerful private business sector. It refused to join, likely because it did not want to participate in any organizational structure which it could not dominate (Proctor, 1995). Unfortunately this hurt the credibility of the ASC, since it was set up to represent a broad range of Guatemalan society.

vague, nonspecific language which was going to make their implementation difficult. In the end, although Guatemalans were glad that three and a half decades of war were over, how the peace agreement would be implemented was still very unclear.

Overall, one can say that Guatemala is currently in a state of recovery. Three-quarters of Guatemalan families live below the poverty line, and for them a sign of great improvements in their lives does not appear to be close on the horizon (UNICEF, 1994). One group of Guatemalans who are collectively organized and working hard to improve their lives and their country are those who were displaced by the violence.

### **Guatemalans Displaced by the Violence**

During the violence of the early 1980s, it is estimated that 17 percent of the total Guatemalan population, or 1,300,000 Guatemalans, fled their homes (Hey, 1992). The majority of those were Mayan campesinos. Many fled to other parts of Guatemala, finding refuge, if only temporarily, in zones where there was less conflict. They are known as the *desplazados internos*, internally displaced.<sup>20</sup>

There are others who crossed one of the borders, entering into another country. They are the *desplazados externos*, externally displaced or

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<sup>20</sup> In 1989, at the International Conference for Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) it was recognized that there did not exist a generally accepted definition for 'displaced' persons. The conference proceeded to define displaced people as "people who have had to abandon their home, or normal economic activities, because their life, security and liberty has been threatened by the general violence or the prevailing conflict. However, they have remained within their country" (AVANCSO, 1992: 13).

refugees.<sup>21</sup> The only real difference between these two groups is who is primarily responsible for them. For the refugees, the first country which they enter is legally responsible for them, with assistance from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the UNHCR. For the internally displaced, the responsibility lies with the state, in this case, the Guatemalan state, whose forces the displaced were fleeing from in the first place. Not surprisingly, the internally displaced did not receive assistance from the government.

### **Desplazados Internos - Internally Displaced**

The vast majority of Guatemalans who fled their homes during the violence did not leave the country. Until recently, in fact, due to continuous army persecution, they have not been able to find a permanent place of residence (Hey, 1992). Needing to remain anonymous for their own protection, it has been very difficult to document them. As a result, the estimates of their numbers vary greatly. In 1989 a study by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) estimated that there were 100,000 to 250,000 internally displaced Guatemalans (Hey, 1992). Estimates by Americas Watch, church and United Nations sources put the number as high as one million (Jonas, 1991).

Within the internally displaced population a distinction is made between

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<sup>21</sup> The categories which are used to define whether a person is a internally or externally displaced are basically valid. However, many of the displaced have at one time or another fit in more than one of these categories. For example, initially many displaced persons who fled their homes lived in the mountains of Guatemala; perhaps after a number of years they fled to Mexico where they lived as unrecognized refugees, and then after a time they entered one of the refugee settlements and became recognized refugees.

As well, when the number of externally displaced refugees is discussed, there is no mention of those who did not make it to the border. In June 1983 the *Comité de Ayuda a Refugiados Guatemaltecos* and the Mexican Social Security Administration estimated that at least 8,000 Guatemalans died trying to reach the Mexican border (Ferris, 1987). This is not surprising considering that people of all ages fled, including infants, the elderly, sick people, and disabled people. As well, the Guatemalan military had militarized the border, making it very difficult to pass through to Mexico.

those who fled to the mountains and continued to live there, *desplazados internos en la montaña*, the internally displaced in the mountains, and those who fled to both urban and rural communities, the *internos dispersos*, the dispersed internally displaced (AVANCSO, 1992).

### *Desplazados Internos Dispersos - Dispersed Internally Displaced*

The Guatemalan government's counter-insurgency war was not waged with the same intensity throughout the country. The military's scorched earth tactics were largely concentrated in parts of the countryside where the armed rebels were more active. As previously mentioned, believing that the local campesinos were supporting the guerrillas, the army's tactic was to kill, capture, and torture the locals to ensure there was no one left to provide support to the guerrilla fighters.

Since the war was more concentrated in certain areas of the country, many Guatemalan Mayan campesinos who lived in these regions abandoned their homes to live in other areas of the country that were less affected by the war. Many fled to live in other rural areas on land which they did not legally own. Others fled to Guatemala City, or one of the country's other urban centres.<sup>22</sup> Also, a large numbers fled to the south coast where they would be the modern-day equivalent of indentured servants to the large plantation owners.

For a number of years this population of internal refugees did not want to

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<sup>22</sup> Prior to the 1980s, very few indigenous people lived in the nation's capital, Guatemala City. Due to the violence, and the increasing lack of land, many flocked to the city. From 1962 to 1992 there was over a three-fold increase in the capital city's population, from 600,000 to over 2 million inhabitants (Handy, 1992). According to Jonas (1991), between 1976 and 1987 the population of the shantytowns on the outskirts expanded four-fold. By 1991, 232 shantytowns surrounded the capital city, and their 801,600 residents lived in conditions of extreme poverty (UNICEF, 1994). Poverty was also becoming extreme within the metropolitan area, where an estimated thirty percent of the population lived in marginal residences (UNICEF, 1994).

be known for fear that they would be victims of the violence that has plagued their country. In 1989, however, they formally organized under the *Consejo Nacional de Desplazados de Guatemala* (the National Council of the Displaced of Guatemala, or CONDEG) which now represents more than 45 communities of displaced people (Project Accompaniment, 1997). Since they live on land which they do not legally own, the government considers them 'land invaders', and thus their existence on this land is very precarious. To try and improve this situation, CONDEG has been negotiating with the government for access to their own land.

*Desplazados Internos en la Montaña - Internally Displaced in the Mountains*

The other group of internally displaced, as previously stated, are the *desplazados internos en la montaña*. During the violence many Mayan campesinos fled to the mountains. Instead of continuing on to Mexico, some remained there to live. Because the army believed they were guerrillas, or at least supporters of the guerrillas, the internally displaced in the mountains had to establish a very mobile existence in order to avoid detection and capture by the army. To help themselves survive in these harsh conditions, they organized themselves collectively, something which members saw as being essential to their survival (Project Accompaniment, 1993a).

By 1983 they had already become highly organized and named themselves the *Comunidades de Población en Resistencia* (Communities of the Population in Resistance, or CPRs). Although by 1986 the majority of the members of the CPRs had left the mountains - returning to their communities, integrating themselves into other areas of Guatemala, or fleeing the country - the CPRs continue to exist to this day. In fact, "the CPRs are now seen as an

important model for community self-government and self-determination” (Loo, 1996: 2).

The CPRs are in three regions in Guatemala. The CPR-Sierra refers to the CPRs in a mountainous area in the middle of the Quiché province, a 22-hour truck ride from Guatemala City and then a five-to-six hour walk to the first community, and a another few days walk to the most remote communities. The CPR-Ixcán is located only 300 kilometres from the capital city in the tropical rainforest of northern Quiché, but due to horrendous road conditions, it takes twenty hours by road and then three to four hours on the river by boat. The CPR-Petén is located in the northwest tip of the Petén province on the border with Mexico. It is the most remote and is virtually impossible to be reached by land. Most often people get to the community by water, taking a boat up the river which passes through the community (Loo, 1996).

In 1989, the CPR-Sierra came out of hiding, in spite of the fact that the government forces continued to think of them as ‘subversives’, and continued to carry out bombing attacks against them, in violation of the Geneva Conventions which prohibit attacks on non-combatants. Not wanting to remain in hiding for another eight years, they decided to ‘go public’ and let people know who they were and what their situation was (Project Accompaniment, 1993a).

Following the CPR Sierra’s example, in January 1991 the CPR Ixcán also came out of hiding and the CPR Petén followed in November 1991 (Central American Monitoring Group, 1992). Subsequently, the CPRs have become very organized in their efforts to be recognized as a non-conflictive civilian population. According to the Canadian solidarity group, Central American Monitoring Group, the CPRs have made “very clear and moving declarations of their experience and right to exist” (Central American Monitoring

Group, 1992: 13).

Today, they are still viewed with suspicion by their neighbouring communities, who have been indoctrinated by the military. Moreover, the government continues to see them as outside of the law (Loo, 1996). However, they are no longer being bombed by the army, and as a result they have been able to set up more permanent settlements. Still, their existence remains precarious as they continue to live on land which they do not own, and no land to return to as the land from which they fled now has new occupants. As a result of their land crisis, they too have been negotiating with a number of government representatives to bring about their access to land and resettlement, which will help to make their existence more secure.

The number of Guatemalans who have been displaced internally is far greater than the number who have been externally displaced. Furthermore, generally speaking, the situation of the internally displaced is less favourable than that of the externally displaced. They have not received the same level of both national and international attention, protection and assistance. The majority of international attention and aid has gone to the more high profile *desplazados externos* or *refugiados*. This is likely to change in the future, however, as the internally displaced Guatemalans are becoming increasingly well organized at making their collective demands, and are gaining more international and national attention.

### **Desplazados Externos - Externally Displaced (Refugees)**

During the early 1980s, thousands of Guatemalans not only left their homes and communities to escape the violence, but also fled from their country. Because many are living in their new country illegally, it has been very difficult

to estimate how many Guatemalan refugees there are. In total, the estimates range from less than 100,000 to as many as 250,000 (Ferris 1987; Egan and Simmons, 1994).<sup>23</sup>

The vast majority of refugees were Mayan campesinos, who were the principal targets of the government's attacks. They fled over the border to the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Once crossing the border some entered refugee camps and became registered refugees, *refugiados reconocidos*, while others remained nonrecognized refugees, *refugiados no-reconocidos*.

#### *Refugiados No-Reconocidos - Unrecognized Refugees*

As was previously mentioned, the initial wave of refugees were victims of the Guatemalan government's 'selective repression' tactics. At first the Guatemalan armed forces were more discriminating in their campaign of terror; the 'disappeared', murdered, tortured and threatened tended to be community activists, leaders and organizers. Because of the selective nature of the terror, the initial exodus to Mexico was generally composed of individuals or small groups. Perhaps being a neighbour, friend or relative of someone who had been the victim of one of the government's selective attacks, the people who fled at this time did so fearing that they would be the next in one of the government's selective attacks (Project Accompaniment, 1993b).

To avoid detection by the Mexican government and possible deportation, on crossing the border many of the refugees discarded their traditional Mayan

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<sup>23</sup> As stated, estimates of the number of Guatemalan refugees in North and Central America vary greatly. In one estimate there are thought to be between 100,000 to 200,000 Guatemalan refugees in the United States, 45,000 to 150,000 in Mexico, 7,326 in Canada and 7,700 in other Central American countries, primarily Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica (Egan and Simmons, 1994). Other estimates calculated the numbers to be much smaller. For example, Ferris (1987) reports an estimated 2500 Guatemalan refugees in other Central America countries and only 35,000 in the United States.

dress (their *traje*)<sup>24</sup> and tried to assimilate into the Mexican population. Living as *refugiados no-reconocidos*, unrecognized refugees, they lived “life on the edge of a razor”, having no rights, no legal access to basic services, and with the constant fear of detection and deportation (Project Accompaniment, 1993b).<sup>25</sup> Although they had all the criteria to be identified as refugees, they were not formally recognized as such, and thus did not receive the support which was afforded to the ‘recognized’ refugees (AVANCSO, 1992).

In 1992 the unrecognized refugees in Mexico formed the *Asociación de los Refugiados Dispersados de Guatemala* (Association of Dispersed Refugees of Guatemala or ARDIGUA). Their mandate was to: resolve their problems and improve their situation in Mexico; gain official government recognition of their status; and return to Guatemala in dignity and security (Project Accompaniment, 1993b). The task of organizing the ‘unrecognized’ refugees has unfortunately proved to be very difficult. As with the internally displaced population in Guatemala, they have also spent more than ten years trying to live anonymously, in their case to avoid detection and deportation. However, the organization has grown, slowly, one contact at a time.

Recently, the refugees which ARDIGUA represents have been acknowledged by the government as being entitled to the rights granted to the

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<sup>24</sup> Traje is the traditional handwoven clothes that the Mayan people of Guatemala have worn since colonial times. Each ethnic group, as well as subgroups within each group according to geographical location, has had a distinctive traje. Although traje originally served to control the movement of the campesino population and the payment of tributes, today it is worn by many with a sense of pride, showing their ethnicity (Mamá Maquín, 1994).

Some Mayan men still wear their traje, like the men of Sololá and Todos Santos, but largely it is the Mayan women and girls who still wear their traditional dress. The females’ traje includes a hupil (a handwoven and/or embroidered blouse) and a corte (a hand or machine woven shirt).

<sup>25</sup> A young man in the community whose family had initially lived in Mexico as unrecognized refugees told me how while attending Mexican schools to avoid detection he would have to think of elaborate stories to explain his past and why he did not have any school records.

legal refugees. This includes rights to land; to returning collectively and organized; and to return with the accompaniment of international human rights observers. However, they are confronting a number of difficulties in their efforts to buy land.

### *Refugiados Reconocidos- Recognized Refugees*

At first the Mexican government deported the Guatemalans. Later, it reversed its policy and allowed the refugees to stay.<sup>26</sup> The Mexican government even provided them with some assistance through the newly established government agency *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* (Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees or COMAR).<sup>27</sup> By 1982 there were 30,000 to 36,000 *refugiados reconocidos*, recognized refugees who were registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and COMAR. The vast majority were Mayan Indians, and although some spoke Spanish, the majority spoke only a Mayan language.

Although the recognized refugees received some assistance from COMAR, initially their primary benefactor was the *Comité Cristiano de Solidaridad*, the relief arm of the Catholic Diocese of San Cristóbal. With the help of the local people, the Catholic diocese provided the recognized refugees with basic services. As well, several Mexican nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also gave assistance (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1993).

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<sup>26</sup> The largest deportation of Guatemalans from Mexico occurred between May 20 and July 19th, 1981, when approximately 3,000 Guatemalans were forced to leave the country and return to Guatemala (Ferris, 1987). The Mexican government's reversal of their policy could have been because of the international condemnation which they received, and/or because of the increasing number of Guatemalans who were fleeing to Mexico as the Guatemalan government changed its tactics from 'selective repression' to a basic form of genocide.

<sup>27</sup> COMAR was formed in 1981 to coordinate Mexican policy towards the refugees, administer the camps, and to serve as an advocate for the refugees within the Mexican bureaucracy (Ferris, 1987).

### *Life in the Refugee Camps*

The majority of the refugees ended up in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, it being the closest area from where they had fled in Guatemala. In 1984, the Mexican government forced, convinced and pressured a number of the refugees to move from Chiapas to new refugee settlements in Campeche and Quintana Roo. The reason for the move, as given by the Mexican government, was to protect them from the cross-border attacks by the Guatemalan military, which had been occurring.<sup>28</sup> However, although this may have been a contributing factor to the government's decision, many believe that there were other motives behind its actions.<sup>29</sup>

Enticed by offers of land, shelter and food aid, a number of the refugees went to the two Yucatán Peninsula states, but less than half moved, in spite of these 'incentives'. Not wanting to move from Chiapas, and fearing forced resettlement, some of the refugees spontaneously left their homes to form refugee settlements in the jungle (Ferris, 1987). In 1990, there were 12,500 refugees in four settlements in Campeche, 6,000 in the four settlements in Quintana Roo, and 23,000 still remained in Chiapas spread across 127 camps (AVANCSO, 1992).

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<sup>28</sup> On April 30, 1984, the day before the Mexican Secretary of the Interior announced that the refugees would be moved from the state of Chiapas for their own protection, the Guatemalan military forces attacked a refugee camp in Chiapas, killing six refugees and destroying several villages (Ferris, 1987).

<sup>29</sup> "The political and economic pressures on the [Mexican] government are particularly acute in the state of Chiapas" (Ferris, 1987: 52). Chiapas is densely populated and is one of the poorest states in Mexico, with living conditions well below the nation's average. According to Ferris (1987), Mexican officials were worried that something like the later Zapatista uprising would occur with the increased hardship posed by the national economic crisis and the presence of the refugees. The Mexican officials also feared that the refugees would contaminate the people of Chiapas with 'revolutionary ideas'. Believing that the refugees intensified those problems, they wanted to move the 'recognized' Guatemalan refugees out of the state of Chiapas.

Another contributing factor to the move of the refugees may have been that the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo were sparsely populated and the refugees could provide surplus labour for ongoing development projects (Aguayo et al., 1987: 23). For a more extensive discussion on reasons for the move of the refugees, see Aguayo et al. (1987).

In all the refugee settlements, but particularly in the new camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo, the refugee had access to many educational and training opportunities offered by UNHCR, NGOs and church groups. In "*la escuela de refugio*", the school of refuge - a term used by the refugees - there were several advantages for the refugees: training for community health promoters and mid-wives, literacy classes for adults, and schools for the children,<sup>30</sup> along with various projects.<sup>31</sup> One particularly important lesson learned in *la escuela de refugio* was of the existence of human rights.

The majority of the refugees had never heard of the concept of human rights, and likewise did not know that they were entitled to have their basic human rights respected.<sup>32</sup> As the following quote illustrated, becoming aware of their basic human rights was significant:

we arrived in Mexico as humble people, afraid of people richer and 'better' than ourselves, afraid to speak to them as we were poor. But now, we've taken courses and learned about human rights, and we've overcome these attitudes. Now we're 'awake'; people have encouraged us and Mexico allowed us to develop various skills. (Project Accompaniment, 1993a: 15)

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<sup>30</sup> As early as 1993, the school situation for children had become more difficult, with some of the primary schools in the camps being shut down. As well, later charges were introduced for exercise books and pencils which had a dramatic impact on who could afford to send their children to school (Project Accompaniment, 1993b).

<sup>31</sup> One of the international development workers who was with an NGOs that worked with the refugees in Mexico and also with the returnees in Guatemala, told me of the 'proyecto de conejos', the rabbit project. "They started out with a pair of rabbits and very quickly everyone in the camp had their own pair of rabbits" (Adelaide). They were other projects, to name a few: garden project, yogurt project, bakery projects, the raising of bees for honey, breeding of poultry for meat and eggs, and handicraft production projects.

<sup>32</sup> In many conversations with people in the returned community of La Esmeralda I heard stories of how when they had fled to Mexico they had never heard of the concept of 'human rights'. They did not know that their country had a constitution which, in theory, guaranteed and protected their rights, nor did they know of international agreements to which their government was a signatory and which guaranteed their human rights. The rights of children and women to be free from abuse were also unknown, and is a theme which is seen as very important as child and wife abuse is not uncommon.

Aside from the technical skills acquired and the knowledge gained about human rights, in the *escuela de refugio* the refugees developed political and organizational skills so that they could promote and protect their rights, and create an environment where they could utilize the new technical skills they had gained. This was a great advancement for all, but particularly so for the women.

A survey of the refugee women in the state of Chiapas found that many women learned to read, write and speak Spanish while in Mexico. The survey found that of the women who attended school, 59 percent did so for the first time in Mexico (Mamá Maquín, 1994).<sup>33</sup> While living in the refugee camps, 65 percent of the women in Chiapas who could speak Spanish learned the language while in Mexico (Mamá Maquín, 1994). Although learning Spanish can potentially be negative (leading to the loss of one's own language and further cultural disintegration), for women, learning Spanish provides them with a skill necessary to access information and to participate in certain projects and workshops. Moreover, and especially in ethnically mixed communities, it allows them to have greater community participation (Arbour, 1995).

In her interviews with various women, Arbour (1995) found that through their participation in workshops, seminars and community projects, the women developed leadership abilities. They also had increased self-confidence and greater awareness. Arbour believes that the small projects, seminars and workshops acted as “key catalysts of the beginning of gender consciousness” (5). Previously, women had been largely confined to their homes, but the new “opportunity to be together, to discuss together, to act together, and to enjoy the feeling of accomplishment together” (4) was identified by the women as the

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<sup>33</sup> Although the literacy rate of the women was still relatively low, with 91 percent of the women older than 35 being illiterate, 94 percent of the young women between the ages of 14 and 18 who came to Mexico as children learned to read and write (Mamá Maquín, 1994).

beginning of their gender consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

Women received courses on the individual rights of women, a process which led many to claim their voice in decision-making. They were also encouraged to organize in order to promote the observation of their rights. A member of one of the women's groups told of how

[i]n our country [Guatemala], as women, our work was that of the kitchen and having children. [Living] in Mexico has been an education, like school for us. Our eyes were opened and we learned to organize. (U.S. Committee for Human Rights, 1993: 8.)

### *The Decision to Return Home - Repatriate or Return<sup>35</sup>*

Although life in the refugee camps provided some unique opportunities to the refugees, it was not ideal for a number of reasons and many wanted to go back to Guatemala.<sup>36</sup> Some refugees had been repatriating voluntarily through a programme which was first established in 1984 by COMAR, with the

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<sup>34</sup> Although the women showed the beginning of gender consciousness, a survey done in the state of Chiapas of the refugee women found that old ideas still remained. The survey discovered that 85 percent of the women surveyed believed that they ought to obey their husbands, and an alarming thirty-two percent believed that husbands had a right to hit their wives (Mamá Maquín et al., 1991). It should be noted that this survey took place in 1990. One would expect that after six years of organizing, if the survey was done today, there would be some difference.

<sup>35</sup> As the following discussion will show, although to 'repatriate' and to 'return' both mean to go back to Guatemala, they are very different. In short, to repatriate is to go back to Guatemala as an individual, family or small group as part of the government repatriation programme. To 'return', on the other hand is to go back to Guatemala as part of one of the collective organized returns which have been organized and negotiated for by their elected representatives, the People's Permanent Commissions. Therefore, in this thesis organized collective returns, a noun, will be referred to as 'Returns'.

<sup>36</sup> The main reason given as to why they wanted to return to Guatemala was that they did not have access to land. The vast majority of the refugees were campesinos, and in Mexico they did not have their own land; instead they would have to work for Mexicans, and were often exploited. There are a number of other reasons given as to why they wanted to return: there were rumours that the aid to the refugees was going to end, and as there were already cut-backs this likely did not seem unrealistic; pressure from the UNHCR and COMAR for the refugees to return or integrate into Mexican society; fewer economic opportunities in Mexico; wanting to take part in the peace process and the rebuilding of Guatemala; and fear of losing their culture if they stayed in Mexico (Central American Monitoring Group, 1992; U.S. Committee for Human Rights, 1993).

assistance of the UNHCR, and which was later taken over by the newly formed *Comisión Nacional para la Atención de Repatriados* (the Guatemalan National Commission for Aid to Repatriates, Refugees, and the Displaced or CEAR)<sup>37</sup>. The repatriation programme would promote and assist refugees who wished to return. However, repatriation was not an option that was very popular amongst the majority of the refugees, as indicated by the relatively small number of refugees who returned through the voluntary repatriation programme.<sup>38</sup>

The refugees likely did not want to repatriate because they saw it had many disadvantages. Perhaps the largest disincentive was that because the repatriates did not return as large groups, but as individual, family units or in small groups, once they re-entered Guatemala, their fate was unknown. That is, they no longer had the same protection and assistance which they had while in refuge. Not having the resources, the UNHCR could not keep track of the refugees once they have repatriated, and thus the only information which the UN refugee agency had about them was where they initially settled (Project Counselling Service for Latin American Refugees, 1992) .

With no external or internal support or contact once they repatriated to Guatemala, and considering the “present human rights situation in Guatemala is still reason for concern...[and] a political system [still exists] in which gross human right violations are more rule than exception,” repatriating to Guatemala

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<sup>37</sup> In 1986 the *Comisión Nacional para la Atención de Repatriados, Refugiados y Desplazados* was formed. This Guatemalan government body would be responsible for returned refugees and Guatemala's displaced population (Project Accompaniment, 1993a).

<sup>38</sup> According to a UNHCR document (ACNUR, 1995), the number of Guatemalans who repatriated through the official programme from 1987 - 1992 was 8,252. The numbers during those years ranged from a low of 820 repatriates in 1990 to a high of 1,765 in 1992 (ACNUR, 1995).

without any support is not the best option (Hey, 1992: 468).<sup>39</sup>

### *Collective, Organized and Accompanied Return*

In spite of the fact that the war continued in Guatemala, many of the refugees still wanted to return home, but they did not want to repatriate under CEAR's repatriation programme. Instead, they decided to organize for their own voluntary collective organized return.<sup>40</sup> In 1987, a total of 72 representatives were elected by popular vote in each refugee camp to form the Comisiones Permanentes (the Permanent Commissions of the Refugees or CCPPs). The mandate of the elected CCPPs included: representing the refugee community, negotiating with the Guatemalan government for their return, and planning and coordinating the returns. Fortunately for the refugees, their desire to return home coincided with the Guatemala government's need to improve its international reputation.

Guatemala has been recognized as one of the western hemisphere's worst violators of human rights, and there has been pressure on the government to improve its record. It is commonly believed that since the Return of the refugees would make it appear to international eyes that Guatemala's human rights record had improved, the CCPPs were able to bargain with the government and set the conditions for their return. The reaching of a final agreement was also facilitated by what was happening on the international scene.

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<sup>39</sup> There have been reports that after returning, some repatriates have been forced into the 'civil patrols', and made to sign false 'amnesty' documents stating that they were guerrillas who have now repented. Others have had their lives threatened and some have sought refuge a second time in Mexico (Project Accompaniment, 1993c).

<sup>40</sup> For a full discussion of the right to return and repatriation in international law, with special reference to the refugees and displaced people in Mexico and Central America, see Quensel Meléndez (1990).

In 1987 the Central American Presidents signed the Esquipulas II accord which committed them to work towards peace in the region. The accord was the impetus for the UN-sponsored International Conference on Central American Refugees, Returnees and Displaced People (CIREFCA). The objective of CIREFCA was to “address solutions to the refugee crisis within the framework of a development policy” (Aguilar Zinser, 1991: v).<sup>41</sup> In an attempt to find durable solutions for the region’s refugees, returnees and displaced people, each country was to develop proposals for projects to assist these groups, within their national economic and social development plans. To this end, the Guatemalan government initiated a ‘National Dialogue’, in which the CCPPs participated. It was during one of these meetings that the CCPPs first publicly presented their “six points”, the six conditions that they insisted upon before they would agree to return.

Included in the CCPPs’ original six conditions were: the Return must be the result of a voluntary decision by the individual returning; the Return itself is to be collective and organized under secure conditions; and it is to be carried out with dignity. The refugees wanted to ensure that only those who wanted to return did so. However, in practice this was not always the case, since certain family members could be forced to return against their will due to the decision of other family members to return.<sup>42</sup> This condition also sought to ensure their right to return in an organized and collective fashion. Seeing what had happened to the repatriates, the refugees saw some validity in the old dictum

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<sup>41</sup> For a detailed report and analysis of CIREFCA, see Aguilar Zinser (1991).

<sup>42</sup> Some youth in La Esmeralda told me they did not want to return, but that their family had decided to return and that out of obligation they also did. A woman in the community told me that she did not want to return to Guatemala, but that her husband had threatened that he would return without her, taking their three young children with him. A number of families also went their separate ways, since some members of the family wanted to return and others did not. In La Esmeralda there were both cases where the wife had returned with the children and without her husband, and where the husband had returned without his wife or children.

about there being 'safety in numbers'.

Another condition for their Return was that their right to free association and organization be respected. Both the women and the men had become very organized in Mexico, and once they returned to Guatemala they planned on maintaining their high level of community organization. Some even planned to form new organizations, like cooperatives, and they wanted their right to do so to be protected.

Although the mass killings which led them to flee from Guatemala had ceased, the more selective killings had not. Being fully aware of this, as another condition, the refugees demanded that they had the right to international accompaniment for their return. When they had fled from Guatemala they had been 'refugees of a hidden war';<sup>43</sup> their plight was almost unknown and unimagined in most Western countries. To make sure this did not occur again, the refugees wanted to have international accompaniers who would accompany them back to their new communities and live with them, acting as international human rights observers.

A fourth condition for their Return was that the refugees must have freedom of movement within Guatemala, along with free entry into and departure from Guatemala. The final two conditions were that they had the right to life and community and personal integrity and that they had access to land.

In 1992, after many meetings,<sup>44</sup> the Guatemalan government finally agreed to all six of the CCPPs' conditions, along with an additional condition. The additional condition called for continued mediation during the Return process and the formation of an agency to verify that the conditions of the

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<sup>43</sup> Refugees of a Hidden War is the title of a book about the Guatemalan refugees by American anthropologist Beatriz Manz (1988).

<sup>44</sup> See Hey (1992) for a more detailed description of the negotiations between the CCPPs and the Guatemalan government.

agreement were honoured. The agreement was signed on October 8th,<sup>45</sup> and after more than a decade of being shut, the door was open for the refugees to return to Guatemala under conditions which they had set.

On January 20th, 1993, two thousand four hundred and sixty-six Guatemalans, making up 503 families, returned home as part of the first Return. The Return was not without its problems. Wanting to return with dignity, security, and in the full view of the Guatemalan public to demonstrate that they were a civilian population, the refugees refused to take the government's backroads route to their land. After days of delay, an agreement was reached and the returnees' caravan drove through the major centres in Guatemala being greeted at the roadside by thousands of well-wishing Guatemalans and foreigners. When they reached Guatemala City on the 24th of January several thousand supporters joined them for a rally in the capital city's main square. They had returned organized, collectively, and with dignity.

After the first return, in order to better facilitate organizing future returns, the People's Representatives of the Permanent Commission (CCPPs) divided into three Verientes (areas)<sup>46</sup>. The division was based roughly on the geographical area in Guatemala to which they would organize their returns. The Northwest Veriente of the CCPPs would organize returns to the northwestern part of Guatemala, including the highly populated areas from

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<sup>45</sup> The agreement is often referred to as the October 8th Accord, for obvious reasons. In this thesis, it will also be referred to as such.

<sup>46</sup> On February 20th, 1996 refugees wanting to return to Guatemala collectively and organized but not as part of one of the CCPPs returns formed the Coordinadora de Bloques de Retorno y Reasentamiento (the Coordination of Return and Resettlement Blocks or CBRR). Believing that "in the deepest spirit of the accord" benefits of the accord should be for "all of the refugees not only those groups represented by the CCPPs" the CBRR and ARDIGUA fought for their inclusion in the agreement (Coordination of Return and Resettlement Groups, 1996: 2). Recently, the Guatemalan government has acknowledged both groups' rights to the conditions stated under the accord.

where a large number of the refugees had fled: Huehuetenango, the Ixcán and El Quiché. The Returns to this area have tended to be more homogeneous in their language and ethnic identity, being largely composed of families who wished to relocate close to their communities of origin (Project Accompaniment, 1994.)

The North Veriente of the CCPPs would organize Returns to the far less populated northern departments of the Petén, Alta Verapaz and Baja Verapaz. For most of the refugees who returned to live in the Return communities of the North Veriente, it would be a move to a new area of Guatemala, far from where they had previously lived.<sup>47</sup> The communities in the North Veriente are ethnically diverse, with as many as nine different Mayan languages spoken by the returnees.<sup>48</sup>

The third Veriente is the South Veriente. This veriente includes land in the departments of San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Retalhuleu, Sololá, Suchitepequez, Chimaltengo, Escuintla, Sacatepequez, and Guatemala. The land in many of these departments is coastal land, which is the richest and most expensive land in Guatemala. It is land owned by the elite wealthy minority of Guatemala, or by multinational corporations who grow export crops like cotton. The CCPPs of the South Veriente have had many difficulties negotiating a fair

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<sup>47</sup> Due to the lower population density in Northern Guatemala, there was more land available for the CCPPs of the North Veriente to buy than in the other Verientes. The greater availability of land in the Petén is likely why the Northwest Veriente had a Return to this area in May 1996, in spite of the fact that it traditionally had been the area to which the North Veriente of the CCPPs organize Returns.

<sup>48</sup> Once a refugee has returned with one of the organized collective returns they are referred to as a 'returnee'. By contrast, someone who has returned as part of the repatriation programme is referred to as a 'repatriate'.

price and having straight legal dealings with the landowners in this area.<sup>49</sup>

### Women's Organizations

The CCPPs are not the only organizations that helped the refugees organize their return. The women had their own separate organizations. As previously mentioned, during their time in Mexico the women had new opportunities to participate in projects, seminars and workshops, and in exile their gender consciousness began to take root. This was a process which led them to organize. Originally the women were organized solely around domestic issues; trying to work together so that they could better carry out their domestic responsibilities. Later, the objective of their organizing came to be more political and focused on the desire to improve their situation not only as refugee, but as women refugees.

When the refugees started to think seriously about returning, and their elected representatives of the CCPPs began negotiations with the government to allow for their return, it became more apparent to the women that they needed to organize their own separate organizations around the return process. In the words of one of the women leaders:

we formed our organizations to have the participation of women in the return process. The land delegations were [made up of] only men, no women participated. Because of this, it is better that the women organize as well. The women go on the land delegations and see if it is suitable or not for us, *women*.... Because when the men return from land delegations they always tell about what they have seen. But, it is not equal to when one goes themselves. It is better to have women go, and see how the land is. For this, we organized. (Katarina)

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<sup>49</sup> In one particular case, the landowner had agreed to sell land for a price with the CCPPs. Later he demanded a much higher price but did not want to write a bill of sale for the higher amount to avoid paying the appropriate taxes. Wanting to follow the laws of Guatemala, the CCPPs refused, which made acquiring the land very difficult.

What Katarina says points out an interesting fact. Men do come back from the visits to the land and tell what they have seen, but it is not equal to a women going because men and women see things differently. As Doña Eva notes:

as women we have different interests, different ways of seeing things. Men look to see if the land is good, if it is fertile, they see many things. But sometimes they forget to see if water is close by. We're the ones affected since we have to wash the clothes and carry the water.  
(Rodríguez, 1993: 6)

The first organization of women refugees which made itself publicly known was Mamá Maquín, which was founded in 1990.<sup>50</sup> According to leaders of Mamá Maquín, it was born as a result of women being brought together and discussing their problems. This led them to organize to defend their rights and participate fully in the search for solutions to the problems in their community (Noticias de Guatemala, 1990). Mamá Maquín worked actively with the Permanent Commissions to organize the first return, and to ensure that women's voices were heard.

After the first Return and the division of the Permanent Commissions into three Verientes, it was apparent that there should be an autonomous women's organization associated with each Veriente. Having been an active member in organizing the Return to the Ixcán, which became part of the Northwest Veriente, Mamá Maquín continued to work with this Veriente, organizing the women who wished to return to this part of Guatemala.

In late 1992 Madre Tierra (Mother Earth) was formed. It became more widely known in August 1993 after the formation of the Verientes when it became the women's organization which was associated with the South

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<sup>50</sup> The women's organization Mamá Maquín was named in memory of a Mayan campesino women who was murdered by government forces in 1978 when she was part of a group of campesinos seeking land rights.

Veriente. In November 1993, members of earlier organizations La Nueva Unión (the New Union) and the Unión de Mujeres Guatemaltecas Para el Futuro (Union of Guatemalan Women for the Future), established the third organization of women Guatemalan refugees, named Ixmucané after a Mayan goddess. Ixmucané would be the women's organization for women who wished to return to the areas covered by the Veriente Norte, the Petén.

### *Involvement at the National Level*

The women's organizations and the CCPPs not only organize Returns to Guatemala, they also act as vehicles for the refugees/returnees' participation in the building of a *Nueva Guatemala* at the national level. For the women's organizations, in the words of one of the women leaders:

Our point of view, our proposal is to return to our country organized, and to push there too for the organization of women. In our visits we make ties with other organized women, and they want us to return and share our experiences with them. (Rodríguez, 1993: 7)

Therefore, through their involvement with other women's organizations in the country and in their efforts to 'push' more women to organize, they are a part of the larger Guatemalan popular movement working towards constructing a New Guatemala. As well, both the women's organizations and the CCPPs played a role in the formal peace process.

As mentioned previously, the peace process involved the negotiation and eventual signing of agreements on eleven substantive and operational themes. One accord focused on the population which was displaced by the violence and its reintegration back into Guatemalan society. On June 17th 1994 a 'vague' accord on this issue was signed.

As a result of the lack of clarity, a technical commission was created to develop ways in which the accord could be operationalized. On the technical commission there were two government representatives, two representatives from the international community, and two from the displaced populations - one from the CPRs and one from the CCPPs. To assist the technical commission and give it concrete ideas the *Asamblea de la Población Desarraigada* (Assembly of the Displaced Population or ACPD) was formed. The ACPD is composed of various groups of the displaced populations and human rights groups including: the Permanent Commissions of the three Verientes and the three women's organizations, Mamá Maquín, Madre Tierra and Ixmucané.<sup>51</sup>

With the signing of the peace accord, the agreement about the displaced populations can now come into affect. This is viewed with trepidation by many, as it is a weaker agreement than the October 8th Accord, signed years earlier between the government and the CCPPs. It is still unclear as to what will happen, but the CCPPs and the women's organizations will be the means through which the returnees interests will be represented at the national level.

### *The Return Communities*

To promote the building of a *Nueva Guatemala*, the returnees are involved both at the national level and at the community level. As far as the organizing of this collective effort, it is clear that the CCPPs are a key organization at the national level. At the community level, on the other hand, the transition from the Return process to life in the community has not been so easy. As the reader may recall, the CCPPs are the refugees' elected

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<sup>51</sup> The other groups who are part of the ACPD are: CONAVIGUA (National Widow's Organization), CERG (Council of Ethnic Communities), CONDEG (National Council of the Displaced), GAM (Mutual Support Group), ARDIGUA, the three CPRs, Atanacio Tzul (displaced Guatemalans living in the United States) and Yaalpemech (the community which had returned from Honduras, where they had sought refuge from the violence of the early 1980s).

representatives who were in charge of the actual Return to Guatemala. They negotiated the October 8th Accord, organized the land delegations, the buying of land, the signing up of the refugees to the various Return communities and the actual return.

Once back in Guatemala, the role which they should have in the Return communities was a contentious issue in many communities. Many returnees saw that the role of the CCPPs was over, and they wanted their communities to begin again, building new organizations and electing their own new representatives. One of the options taken by many communities was to form their own cooperative. Instead of the CCPPs' representatives guiding the running of the cooperative, the members elected an executive council.

The women's organizations, on the other hand, remained to work at the community level organizing women and trying to create space for women's voices to be heard. As well, the women's organizations would have a number of their own development projects in the communities, which would encourage the active participation of women.

As stated in the Introduction, the focus of this thesis is on the women's organization, the cooperative, and the people's participation in them in the Return community of La Esmeralda, where I was an international accompanier/researcher for six months.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> As previously stated, one of the conditions of the October 8th Accord was that the refugees/returnees could have international people live with them in the refugee camps in Mexico, journey with them back to Guatemala, and most importantly, live with them in their communities once they returned to Guatemala. There have been changes in Guatemala since the refugees/returnees fled the country in the early 1980s. However, as the massacre of eleven returnees by an army patrol in the Return community of Xamán in the fall of 1995 indicates, the rights of the returnees are not necessarily respected. As an international accompanier in La Esmeralda, with the support of the international solidarity network back in Canada, my role was to act as 'eyes of the international community'. The hope and belief was that the physical presence of international accompaniers would assist in preventing a repeat of the 1980s, when the western world was oblivious to the genocide occurring in Guatemala.

## **CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE SCENE FOR LIFE IN LA ESMERALDA**

After one week of training in Canada, almost three months of language school in Quetzaltenango, and a week-long orientation in Guatemala, I was ready to start accompanying in one of the return communities. At that time, there were twenty-four return communities, and which one I would go to depended largely on need. That is, based on which community did not have an accompanier. According to the records in the CCPPs office in Guatemala City, there were no accompaniers in La Esmeralda, in the municipality of Dolores in Guatemala's largest and most northern department, the Petén. The decision was made I was going to La Esmeralda.<sup>1</sup>

Having never been to this part of Guatemala, I was not to sure what to expect. According to the tourist guidebook, I was going to "the dense jungle cover of Guatemala's north-eastern department...[where] you may hear the squawk of parrots, the chatter of monkeys and the rustlings of strange animals moving through the bush" (Brosnahan, 1991). I would find that this description describes very little of what I did find.

### **The Petén**

The Petén the last frontier of Guatemala, shares a border to the north and west with Mexico and a disputed eastern frontier with Belize. It is known internationally for Tikal, the impressive ancient Mayan ruins. With the increase of environmental awareness in the North, it has become known for its jungles

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<sup>1</sup> When possible, Project Accompaniment tries to place accompaniers in pairs. I was originally paired with Danyka, but she left the community after a month to accompany in another community, and I remained in La Esmeralda. However, I spent very little time as the only accompanier, as numerous other accompaniers came to the community after Danyka's departure.

and the alarming rate at which they are being deforested. Vast tracks of the jungle are being cleared for a variety of commercial activities: the raising of cattle for export, the illegal logging of precious woods like mahogany, and oil exploration. There is also pressure on the land from the increasing number of landless campesinos.

The two regions in Guatemala where most of the migrants from other parts of the country flock to, are Guatemala City and the Petén (UNICEF, 1994). The landless campesinos who have not chosen to move to the nation's capital to live in one of the rapidly expanding shantytowns and then try and survive as part of the informal sector,<sup>2</sup> have chosen to migrate to the Petén, and search for land on one of the numerous unused tracts of land. The unused land is most often legally owned by an absentee landowner, usually one of Guatemala's wealthy elite, or an army General.

The common phenomenon of absentee landowners is an outcome of one of the country's largest problems, its highly unequal pattern of land distribution. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, in Guatemala the majority of the land is owned by a minute percentage of the population, or by foreign individuals or companies. In a country where 62 percent of the population lives in rural areas and depends on the land for existence, the land

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<sup>2</sup> The term informal sector entered development discourse in the early 1970s, and has since been widely used. It is used to distinguish between those who work in the 'formal economy' as opposed to those who work in the 'informal economy'. The workers in the informal economy would include the multitude of street-sellers who set up their stalls on the streets of Guatemala City every morning and pack them away again at night.

The term informal, and the formal/informal dichotomy are highly contentious. The worker in the informal sector is often seen as powerless, which is not necessarily the case. While in Guatemala City, I had the opportunity to talk with some people who worked in the so-called 'informal sector'. One woman who sold fresh squeezed orange juice from her cart explained to me that she liked her job and it had many advantages: she was her own boss, she was able to drop her daughter off at school and pick her up at the end of the day, and she made 40 quetzales for a half-day of work, which is a relatively good wage in Guatemala. On the other hand, she had no job security. For a discussion of women and the informal sector, see Suski (1995).

ownership patterns are particularly problematic (UNICEF, 1994). The land squeeze is also compounded by high birth rates, with a national average of 2.8% (UNICEF, 1994).<sup>3</sup> This rate is likely much higher in the countryside due largely to traditions, as well as lack of knowledge and access to birth-control. As a result, an increasing number of campesinos are being forced to leave their communities to search for land elsewhere, or seek refuge in one of the numerous slums in Guatemala City, or the other urban centres (UNICEF, 1994).

Moving to the Petén, and becoming a squatter on one of the many plots of land owned by an absentee landowner, is how some campesinos have been able to work a very unjust and unequal system to their advantage. One campesino told me how he and his family had been occupying a piece of land for sixteen years and had never had to pay rent to the missing landowner. However, he explained, it was not without its drawbacks. Since the family had no legal title to the land, the landowner could return at any time with his own private police force,<sup>4</sup> and forcibly remove the family from the land, land which had been essential to the family's survival for over a decade and a half. His apprehension was warranted, as there were reports of campesinos being displaced by the landowners when it served the owner's interests to occupy their land.

If one had spent time in other parts of Guatemala prior to going to the Petén, particularly in the country's western departments, upon entering the region one would be immediately struck by the height and skin colour of the majority of the local Peteneros. A large number of the campesinos who moved

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<sup>3</sup>According to government estimates, in 1992 the population of Guatemala was almost 10 million. With a birthrate of 2.8, the population will be 12 million by the year 2000 (UNICEF, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> At times the army is involved in 'removing' 'land occupiers' from such land. There have been many documented cases of these forced land evictions of *internos dispersos*, the internally displaced.

to the Petén were from the eastern departments of Guatemala where a high percentage of the population is *ladino*. Likely due to these migration patterns, the ethnic make-up of the Petén is more *ladino* and less indigenous than in most rural parts of Guatemala. The *ladinos'* taller stature and skin colour, ranging in various shades of whites and pinks, is in sharp visual contrast to the country's Mayan majority's shorter build and skin colour of varying shades of brown.

In the Petén one does not see many Mayan people wearing their typical dress. This is distinct from other rural areas in Guatemala, particularly the western highlands, where Mayan women have continued to wear their exquisite handwoven *hupils* (blouses) and *cortes* (skirts). In the Petén, instead, the majority of the people, both Mayan and *ladino*, wear *ropa americana*.<sup>5</sup>

In the rural areas, the women and girls wear dresses, and the men and boys wear the Levis, Wranglers, Calvin Klein and Gap clothes, which are the common wear in North America and Europe. This *ropa americana* can be bought in any number of second-hand clothing stores in the towns. In the countryside, vendors pedalling good second-hand clothing and last year's fashions sent down from the North often pass through the communities.

There is a distinct 'wild west' feel to the Petén, which is the result of a combination of factors. One of these is the influx of people from Guatemala's eastern departments, where the people are known for their distinct cowboy

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<sup>5</sup> There are a few reasons why the Mayan people would not be wearing their traditional clothing. One reason is that it is very expensive, and although much more durable than *ropa americana*, it is likely that it is too expensive for many. Another reason is because of racism.

Racism against the indigenous people is very pervasive in Guatemala, and, I would suspect, particularly in the Petén. Even in other parts of Guatemala where the percentage of Mayans is much higher than in the Petén, Guatemalans have told me that when they travel outside of their community they do not wear their traditional Mayan clothes. To avoid racist attacks, they change into their blue jeans and t-shirts or a dress, for women.

appearance, including the appropriate apparel: jeans, western shirt, cowboy hat and sometimes even a gun. Also contributing to the 'wild west' feel of the region is the lack of law enforcement.

The police presence in the Petén is minimal, and some Guatemalans like it that way; they argue that the police in Guatemala are often the perpetrators of numerous crimes,<sup>6</sup> and thus their absence may result in a decrease in crime rather than an increase. However, their relative absence made me wonder who, if anyone, enforces the law in this remote region. Lately, throughout the country, there has been an increase in citizens becoming self-appointed enforcers of the law. In the past year there were numerous accounts of angry mobs capturing crime suspects, then torturing or killing them.<sup>7</sup>

There is not a heavy civilian police presence in the Petén, but there is a strong army presence. Since the start of the armed conflict in the 1960s, the main reason likely given by the army for having such a large presence in the country would be to 'fight the guerrillas'. The justification of their numbers in this region could also be as a consequence of their ongoing territorial dispute with their eastern neighbour, Belize.

Guatemala has had a longstanding claim to Belize as a result of a 1850 treaty with which Britain, as the former colonial power in Belize, did not comply. Although Belize gained its independence from Britain in 1981, Guatemala still

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<sup>6</sup>Due to the prevalence of police involvement, or suspected involvement, in criminal activities, many communities have resisted the establishment of a police force in their communities. I lived in a small community in the Petén, San Andrés, for a week where this was the case. I was surprised by the relative calmness of the town. Granted I was only in the community for a week, and my observations of the community were somewhat superficial, since I was later informed by a local that drinking and domestic violence were a big problem in the community. Nonetheless, the calm which I felt, I was told by locals, did exist. There was no police presence in the community and the residents wanted their community to remain that way. As a result, to keep out the police and the corruption which often accompanies them, the people ensured that their community was tranquil.

<sup>7</sup> Some believe that these 'spontaneous' acts of law enforcement by Guatemalan citizens is not spontaneous, but planned and instigated by military or police personal, or people connected to the military or police establishment.

has claims on Belizean territory. The Guatemalan land claim has led to border skirmishes and is symbolically represented on Guatemalan made maps, which do not acknowledge Belize as a separate country.

The Petén is relatively isolated from other parts of Guatemala. Often the phones do not work, and if one does not fly to the area from the capital city, the trip overland can be a long adventure. Other companions who had been in the region had told me stories of washed out bridges, forcing them to abandon their bus in the middle of the night and walking until they encountered another ride. These were the lucky ones, as others were on buses which were held up by armed bandits.

Increasingly these same travel hazards can be had on any trip in Guatemala. Except for the highway from Guatemala City to the old capital city and major tourist destination, Antigua, the state of the roads in Guatemala is horrific. As well, buses and cars being held up by armed gunmen is not peculiar to the Petén. It is becoming increasingly common on the Pan American Highway and other major roads, as well. The state of the roads and the gunmen are vivid examples of the consequences of the underdevelopment and unequal distribution of wealth which prevails throughout the country.

In many areas of Guatemala the infrastructure is falling apart. In others, like the Petén, it has never been developed. This underdevelopment occurs in what is likely the richest area of Guatemala, due to the abundance of natural resources it contains. However, as throughout the country, the wealth offered by the resources of the land is not held in trust for the common good. Instead, it is largely being exploited by wealthy and powerful national and foreign interests.

## Dolores and the Surrounding Communities

After over eight hours on the bus from Guatemala to La Esmeralda, with a stopover to push another bus out of the mud, the bus turned off the main gravel highway to drop passengers off in Dolores, our next stop. Dolores looked like the end of the road, and appeared to offer nothing to an outsider, except perhaps a *licuado* (a tasty drink made with fruit, ice and milk or water). And that is possible only if the electricity to operate the blender was working. However, Dolores is the capital of the municipality by the same name and is the hub of activity for all the surrounding rural communities.

When I first got off the bus, I was struck by the walking skeletons of dogs scavenging for food in the filth of Dolores' main street. Although I always sensed a feeling of hopelessness there, Dolores remains one of those bustling communities which continues to wait for its day. Wanting to receive a higher price for the fruits of their labour, but not having the resources to incur the extra transportation costs to go to Poptún (a larger centre an hour south of Dolores), campesinos come to Dolores to sell their corn, beans and peanuts to the local buyer. Owners of small *tiendas* (stores) in the surrounding communities come to buy their supplies from the local merchants. And if people have savings, they can present their *cédula*, (an identification card which all Guatemalans must carry and present on request) at the local bank and open up a savings account.

The dust of the main street is often whipped up by the presence of any number of young Guatemalan army soldiers on patrol. The soldiers, dressed in full fatigue and adorned with machine guns and machetes, descend from their army barracks, ominously perched on the hill overlooking Dolores. When I asked one young soldier why the army maintained such a strong presence in the area, he seemed puzzled by the question. After a moment's silence he

responded, “the people are glad we are here because we protect them from the guerrillas.” His response, and the existence of the large army base, was for me a re-awakening that, there was still a strong army presence in the country and an indoctrinated anti-guerrilla mentality.

I never did confirm with the local residents that they were glad to have the army in their community. However, there might be some truth to it, but not for the reasons the soldier would suggest. For a relatively poor and underdeveloped area with very few prospects, some of the residents of Dolores would likely be pleased with the increase in business and the jobs produced by the soldiers’ presence. As well, the army had stepped up a campaign to improve their image and convince the people that they are needed. With the peace talks and the ceasefires, they had begun to search for a new purpose. With the lack of a local police force, it appears that they might become the ‘defenders of the people’ against the new enemy, delinquency.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from being the local area’s economic centre and home of the local army base, one of the Petén’s twenty-nine high schools is in Dolores (UNICEF, 1994). In many of the smaller communities there are primary schools with state-hired teachers, but if one wishes to continue studying past sixth grade, he or she must leave their community to attend school in Dolores, or one of the other larger centres. This is not an option for most students, since the cost of living away from home and the loss of potential revenue from their labour is not a luxury that most families in the area can afford.

The quality of education in the area’s state schools is suspect. Classes can often have more than sixty students and very few teaching materials. To

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<sup>8</sup> There is a lot of suspicion in Guatemala that a number of the gangs of delinquents were started by the army and the police. If this is fact, their rationale may have been that the gangs would create the need, or perceived need, for a strong army and/or police presence.

their credit, the schools do have certified teachers who receive a minimal salary from the government. However, in the primary schools in the smaller rural communities, the teachers often are there reluctantly, having come from larger urban centres. Not wanting to join the ranks of the thousands of unemployed teachers that exist in Guatemala, they have come to serve their time in one of the small rural schools far from their home and family. It is not just the young new teachers who are forced to leave their homes to work. Due to the cost and length of the trip to the school at which they taught, two middle-aged women teachers whom I met on the bus one Monday morning, told me they had to leave their teenage kids alone at home for the week while they taught in one of the rural schools.

When one considers the circumstances under which the teachers work and the very low pay they receive, it is not surprising that some are not very committed to the school and students. As a result, a school empty of students and teachers during the academic year is not uncommon. When children are asked why they are not in school today, the explanation often given is that “the teacher has gone home to their community and has not yet returned.” When pressed further as to when the teacher will be coming back and classes will resume, the students will shrug “We don’t know. Maybe next week.”

Dolores is also the centre from which local drivers of Toyota pick-ups offer their services to residents of the surrounding communities who wish to make their way home, *adentro*. If one is lucky enough to find a ride in the back of one of these trucks, the four-hour walk to La Esmeralda can be cut in half. One can then enjoy bouncing along in relative comfort and speed over the crevasse-ridden dirt roads. In spite of the incredible number of ‘pick-ups’ on the dusty main street of Dolores, if one misses Carlos’ early morning trip into La

Esmeralda, a whole day can be spent waiting for a ride. Unless, of course, one is willing to pay twenty times the going rate to hire out a truck specifically for their destination, a financial luxury only afforded by outsiders.

The rides *adentro* in the back of one of the local pick-ups is not for the faint of heart. As is likely a phenomenon in most, if not all, less developed nations, safety does not appear to be paramount in public transportation. Just when you thought there was no more room, another pile of people and all of their cargo are loaded on top. When some people see unsafe practices like this, they comment that "life is cheap in developing countries". I would argue that it is not that life is cheap, but rather that life is too expensive for the majority of the people in the less developed world. Overloading the trucks is perhaps the only way that the prices can be somewhat affordable for the local people, and that it can still be a viable business for the truck drivers.

On either side of the highway en route to Dolores from Guatemala City, where once stood virgin rainforest, cattle now graze in their place. This cattle is not being raised to feed Guatemalans, but for export. The profits from the sale will go back into the bank accounts of one of Guatemala's ruling elite or that of 'foreign interests'.

En route to La Esmeralda from Dolores, the jungle has largely been cut down as well. Standing in the place of the trees are not cows but tall stalks of corn. As previously mentioned, a number of landless campesinos have moved to the Petén in search of land. The area between Dolores and La Esmeralda is largely inhabited by these first generation Peteneros. They came to the Petén not to seek their fortune like the cattle ranchers, illegal loggers, and foreign oil companies, but rather to grow their food staples of corn and beans.

Corn and beans are the life blood of the subsistence campesinos who

dominate the area. The campesinos will use the corn and beans they grow to feed their families. What is left will be sold to the local buyers for the equivalent of approximately 25 dollars for one hundred kilograms. The small amount of money earned will then be used to buy sugar, oil, and soap, perhaps even a pound or two of meat. Most campesinos would be unlikely to have enough money left over to put in a bank account in Dolores.

The next major centre between Dolores and La Esmeralda is Shaan. I refer to it as a 'major' centre not because of its population (which the locals tell me is less than 70 families), but because it appears to be a meeting place for the surrounding communities. Likely, this is because it is located at a junction where two roads meet and it has one of the few *puestos de salud* (health posts) in the area, staffed by a local male nurse.

Health care is a state obligation, according to the Guatemalan constitution. However, according to a 1994 report by UNICEF and SEGEPLAN (Secretaría General del Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica), the funding allocated to the health sector is far from adequate (UNICEF, 1994). By their calculations, the government is spending 54 percent of what it should to provide basic health care to all. This means that 4.5 million Guatemalans (45.5 percent of the population) are not covered by the government's basic health care services.

In rural areas the health care which is provided is through *puestos de salud* (health posts).<sup>9</sup> In the Petén, according to the UNICEF and SEGEPLAN report, the lack of facilities does not appear to be as drastic as it is in other

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<sup>9</sup> According to a report by UNICEF and SEGEPLAN (Secretaría General del Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica) the majority of the assistance is not provided by the state, but by NGOs (UNICEF, 1994).

regions of Guatemala, but there is still a deficiency (UNICEF, 1994).<sup>10</sup>

According to these calculations, the Petén is lacking 20 percent of the adequate number of health posts to cover the basic needs of the department's population.

What this calculation does not take into account, however, is that the Petén is by far the largest of the regions and is relatively sparsely populated. Therefore, although the number of *puestos de salud* per population in the Petén may not be nearly as inadequate as in other regions of Guatemala, because of the low population density and the lack of good infrastructure, (quality and quantity of roads) the people often have to go great distances over difficult routes to receive medical attention.<sup>11</sup>

Since they are located on the road en route to La Esmeralda, the people of Shaan and the surrounding communities have had some contact with the people of La Esmeralda. By association, they have also had some contact with the international and national NGOs, GOs, United Nations agencies and church and solidarity groups which pass through their communities on their way to La Esmeralda. One positive, but largely superficial benefit which the local communities have received from La Esmeralda presence has been the improvement to the road. The municipality was obliged to do major road repairs

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<sup>10</sup> The study calculated the number of *puestos de salud* needed for each region based on the number of potential patients, and found that all regions lacked the adequate number of *puestos de salud*. The percentages ranged from lacking 15 percent of the adequate number in the area of metropolitan Guatemala, to 63 percent in the Alta Verapaz and Baja Verapaz departments (UNICEF, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> While I was in La Esmeralda, a pregnant woman had gone unconscious and two health promoters rushed her to the nearest hospital in a truck of an NGO that was in the community at the time. The drive was more than two hours and she gave birth to the child en route. In the end, both the mother and child were fine. Compared to women in the neighbouring communities, this woman was very fortunate, as she had the support of health promoters and access to a truck, things which the women in the neighbouring communities did not have. This example, is an illustration of how even though the Petén may not be as seriously lacking the medical facilities as some other regions in the country, the lack of adequate health care facilities and personal is critical.

to the road leading from Dolores to La Esmeralda for the arrival of the returnees to their new community. There are other ways in which the surrounding communities are and will be affected by the presence of La Esmeralda. Some of these will be hard to judge and measure, and likely will take a number of years to see any real effect. On the other hand, there was already evidence that the return community was already having an affect on their neighbours.

When I was walking back to La Esmeralda from Dolores I met up with a man who was going in the same direction as I was. He kindly dismounted from his horse, placed my backpack on the saddle and proceeded to walk with me. We began talking and naturally he asked me where I was going, although I suspect he knew since all foreigners in the area were going to La Esmeralda. Upon hearing me confirm his suspicion, he excitedly began to speak of the community and its cooperative. "They are organized into a cooperative, are they not?" he asked. I nodded in agreement. We discussed the cooperative, and then he informed me that he and many others in his community had a strong interest in forming a cooperative. Curious as to whether or not the existence of the cooperative in La Esmeralda had been the catalyst, I inquired as to when they had started to try and form the cooperative. He replied, "A professor came from Dolores and told us about cooperatives, but that was a few years ago. However, only a few weeks ago we had a meeting about forming a cooperative. There were over thirty-five people there."

It would appear that the existence of the cooperative in La Esmeralda was not the first exposure they had had to the idea of a cooperative, nor the first time they had been interested in becoming collectively organized. However, it seems to be the case that the existence of an active cooperative in the region did help to re-kindle the communities' interest in cooperatives. "But" as the man

insightfully pointed out “right now it is difficult to work cooperatively. Everyone is keeping to themselves, only wanting to do things for themselves.” I would later learn the truth behind these words. On the other hand, before we parted, we both agreed that it was difficult to get ahead on one’s own, and I wished him luck in his efforts to start working collectively with his neighbours.

Having been less directly effected by the violence than the people in La Esmeralda, the people in the surrounding communities would seem to many to be more fortunate. On the one hand they are more fortunate. In the words of one of the returnees “in one way, when we left we lost. Many lost family members, lost materially, professionally” (Emeldina). However, she also noted that “we did gain things by leaving, as well.”

As discussed in Chapter One, while in Mexico, the refugees had an opportunity to learn many things, most of which they never would have had exposure to in Guatemala. As a result, there is a noticeable difference between the surrounding communities and La Esmeralda, and in many respect, the people of La Esmeralda are the more fortunate. As Emeldina points out,

The people in the countryside in Guatemala, what do they about human rights? They do not know anything. What do they know about development? Nothing. They are trying to make a living on a little bit of land. That is not development. There is only one harvest a year.<sup>12</sup> They have no idea to search for alternatives, to start a project. (Emeldina)

The people of La Esmeralda realize that they have gained a lot from living in refuge in Mexico, and some of the people, particularly the leaders, have returned to Guatemala with the vision that they will act as ‘seeds of change’. They intend on helping their neighbours search for alternatives. One of the

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<sup>12</sup> In the region from which Emeldina and her family fled in the early 1980s, it is more mountainous, and there is only one harvest a year. The Petén, on the other hand, is more tropical and there are two harvests a year. However, the area was jungle, and it is questionable as to how long the soil will allow for two harvest a year.

community leaders in La Esmeralda told me,

We have learned a lot while being in refuge in Mexico. We have had the benefit of refuge. We hope to share what we have learned with our neighbours. We will be a seed for change in Guatemala. Starting with us, then we will have an affect on our neighbours, then they will have an influence on their neighbours and so on.

### **Limones**

One of their neighbours who are the most influenced by La Esmeralda are the residents of Limones, their immediate neighbouring community. When I made my first trip to La Esmeralda the truck driver dropped us off in the soccer field of Limones. I remember being immediately impressed by Limones' superficial beauty. It looked like a picture out of National Geographic, with its thatched roofs and lemon trees situated by a small river that winds through the community. While the small inviting river beckons the passerby to enjoy its waters, the bucolic charm of Limones begins to evaporate when one notes the raw sewage and garbage washed up on its banks. Because of a lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of proper sanitation, the people of Limones and the other established communities upstream have poisoned their water supply.

As one of the leaders in La Esmeralda pointed out to me, none of the houses in Limones have proper latrines. This, he thought, was likely due to a lack of understanding about personal hygiene and environmental contamination. He saw that this was one area that the people of La Esmeralda could assist their neighbours in. However, he pointed out, "That is not all we can help them with. There were many more ways in which we can assist our neighbours."

As in the surrounding communities, the people who live in Limones were landless campesinos who established themselves on the land of an absentee landowner. However, their lives would take a different course than their neighbours when the land delegations representing the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico decided to purchase the land on which they were living.

Through the CCPPs, a group of refugees returned to Guatemala on 'land delegations' looking for suitable land that they could collectively purchase through a loan system set-up by the government. Once they had found appropriate land, negotiations began with the landowner, as well as with the government to attain a loan through FONAPAZ.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, the land delegation returned to Mexico and visited the various camps to tell the refugees about the land they had found. Their mission was then to try and convince the refugees who had not yet returned, to sign up to return to the land they had found and become a part of the new community that they were going to build together.

In the case of La Esmeralda, the land which they purchased to build their new community was already partially occupied by the people of Limones. Because they fully understood the predicament of the landless campesinos of Limones, and indeed realizing the political sensitivity of it, the refugees had no intention of forcing the people of Limones from their homes. Instead, they made an offer to them that they were allowed to stay in their community and a section of land would be set aside for them so they could continue to farm. However,

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<sup>13</sup> FONAPAZ (*Fondo Nacional para la Paz* or National Foundation for Peace) was created to support programmes and projects for the population affected by the internal armed conflict. As part of this programme, the returnees received a loan to buy land. They would not have to start making payments on their loan for the first five years, then after they had to pay back the loan in the following 10 years. However, the money was from a revolving fund, and would go back into the community.

the conditions set by the new landowners were that the people of Limones who wished to stay must form a cooperative and pay back the proportion of the bank loan equivalent to the percentage of land that was set aside to be theirs.

Some of the residents of Limones did not like the arrangements and chose to leave. However the majority took advantage of the opportunity to own their own land, an option likely never formerly thought possible, and receive assistance and credit from the Guatemalan cooperative association FEDECOAG (*Federation de Cooperativas Agrícolas de Guatemala* or Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Guatemala) in establishing their cooperative. In the end eighty families remained.

The community of Limones now had the opportunity to own their own land, they had formed a cooperative, and with the assistance of FEDECOAG had access to credit and were going to start their own development projects. They also had access to the services available in their new neighbouring community. They had more than just access to the services of their new neighbours. The people in La Esmeralda had a wealth of knowledge, experience and connections to international agencies and organizations that the residents of Limones could never have imagined.<sup>14</sup>

On the surface, relations between the two communities appeared to be quite good. One sign of goodwill from the people of Limones towards their new neighbours was their generosity in the sharing of their lemons and oranges. On the other hand, there was very little social intermingling between the two communities. This may have been an indication of ill-feelings between the two

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<sup>14</sup> There were numerous NGOs, GOs, United Nations agencies, and church and solidarity groups that were in La Esmeralda when I was there. For a brief description of these organizations and groups, see Appendix C.

communities, or relations may be as they appeared, harmonious.

Although the rather sudden appearance of close to 700 new neighbours must have been difficult for the people of Limones, as discussed previously, they did receive a number of benefits from their new neighbours. And for the people of La Esmeralda, there was little doubt that they desired and needed to have good relations with their neighbours to counter the smear campaigns against them.

In the summer of 1995, when they returned to Guatemala accompanied by the UNHCR, CEAR, various NGOs, and international accompaniers, there were unfounded accusations by the local military that the returnees were smuggling in weapons to give to the guerrillas. The military was later forced to make an apology and retract their accusations. However, the attempt to slander the returnees was indicative of an attitude of suspicion, mistrust, and lack of understanding which still existed towards the refugees and returnees in the larger Guatemalan society.

There have been many campaigns against the refugees/returnees to try and link them to the guerrillas and discredit them as a civilian population. As previously discussed, this was how their initial slaughter had been justified. In their negotiations to return, the refugees made it clear they were a civilian population who were returning to live in, and help establish, peace in Guatemala. Realizing that there were campaigns to discredit them as a peaceful civilian population, the returnees were cautious and wanted to ensure that they maintained good associations with their neighbours.

The need to have good relations with one's neighbours must have created some degree of stress for the residents of La Esmeralda. A mother of three young boys and a newborn girl illustrated this stress by her comment, "I

fear that one of the children may say or do something to one of the children of Limones, which will upset the harmony which exists between the two communities.”

One factor which could have led to problems developing between the two communities was their sheer proximity. Previous to their return, the UNHCR had orchestrated the building of 13 *galeras* (non-permanent shelters) directly adjacent to Limones. *Galeras* are long warehouse-type buildings with roofs of sheet metal, walls of cut logs latched together, and dirt floors. The thirteen large unattractive buildings were side by side in two rows facing each other. Four metres separated each *galera* from its neighbour, and twenty metres separated one row from the other. The latrines were separate and set-back from the living areas.

### **La Esmeralda**

On July 13th, 1995 six hundred and seventy four returnees arrived in the community and were divided up and assigned to one of the latrines and basic shelters. The international accompaniers, development workers, and other visitors who accompanied them shared one *galera* with three other families. Initially the *galeras* had no internal walls to separate one family's space from another. With time, walls were erected and all the residents made separate buildings for their kitchen. Wanting more private space than afforded in the *galeras*, many built their own separate small makeshift homes. One of the consequences of the move from the *galeras* was the appearance of an 'urban sprawl', with houses spilling into Limones.

Most people did not put a lot of effort into making their temporary homes. Largely relying on the sheets of metal and plastic given to them by the UNHCR,

most of the houses had a rather impromptu appearance and lacked the physical beauty possessed by the homes of Limones. However, the apparent relative lack of concern for the appearance of their homes was due to their impermanence, as the community was going to move.

Likely because the road went no further than to the edge of the *finca*, the UNHCR had put the *galeras* on the parameter of the community's land. After arriving, the people had decided that they were not going to stay in their present location, but move to the centre of their *finca*. Depending on the conditions of the path and the fitness of the walker, the new community was going to be between a half hour to an hour by foot from their original location. Therefore, it was quite understandable why they were more concerned with clearing their land to plant their crops and working on the *lotes* (lots) where they were going to build their new homes.

Most were not planning to move to the new urbanization site until the road to the centre had been constructed and the water system was put in. Although they were working hard on building their new permanent homes. Some had planted the orange and lemon tree seedlings which had been given to them. And many women were planting any seeds they came across, and were pleased to receive the seeds from my cantaloupes or avocados. In fact, in many ways the community was a model for recycling. Very little went to waste in the community, and they quickly taught me what could be of use to them. Later, I found myself picking through the garbage in our kitchen trying to salvage empty coffee jars, plastic water bottles or even old newspapers which someone, unaware of their value, had thrown away. We had to make a strict rule for the children about taking our plastic bags. Plastic bags were a goldmine for the children. With a few sticks, some string and a plastic bag the

kids would make a kite which would fly so high that it became invisible in the afternoon sky.

### **The People of La Esmeralda**

On entering the community, a first glance would have given one the impression that the population was very homogeneous. Indeed, homogeneity was to be found in that more than ninety percent were Mayan, all came from farming backgrounds, and all fled to Mexico to escape the violence of the early 1980s. There also existed a great deal of variance. Most notably, there were nine different Mayan ethnic groups in La Esmeralda, all with their own language, culture and traditions.<sup>15</sup> There was some similarity between some of the languages, which allowed for them to more easily learn another Mayan language. There were also a few *ladino* families in La Esmeralda who spoke only Spanish, as was the case for an increasing number of Mayan children.<sup>16</sup>

The community had divided itself into four *barrios* (neighbourhoods), roughly based on where the family had lived in Mexico. Because people from the same ethnic group tended to live together in the refugee camps, the *barrios* also roughly corresponded to ethnic group. The *barrios* were going to form distinct neighbourhoods in their new community in the centre of the finca. As well, their ethnic division served a pragmatic need by organizing the community into smaller groups, facilitating more manageable ways to deal with local issues with greater ease and expedience. For the largest barrio, Campeche, their meetings could be much more inclusive as well, since they could be held in the

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<sup>15</sup> The Mayan ethnic groups in La Esmeralda were: Kekchi, Kanjobal, Kakchiquel, Q'iché, Mam, Ixil, Chuj, Jacalteco and Achi.

<sup>16</sup> There were Mayan adults, teenagers and children in La Esmeralda who no longer spoke their Mayan language. This was a process which started in Mexico, and with the marriages between different Mayan ethnic groups in the community, it is likely a process which will continue.

Mayan language which almost all the members spoke, Kekchi.

The majority of the general meetings and assemblies in the community were held in Spanish, and at times there would be some translating. This was difficult, however, since there were so many Mayan languages in the community. The fact that the language used most often was Spanish was not a problem for the majority of men, teenagers, and school age children, as they spoke Spanish in addition to their Mayan language. Spanish, however, was not the universal language of the community; a number of women, particularly the Kekchi and Kanjobal women, did not speak or understand it. As a result, without translation, these women likely understood very little of the public meetings which were carried out only in Spanish.

Initially, I thought the language and ethnic differences may have created a large problem in the community. There were some problems, as the above example illustrates. However, La Esmeralda was very young and it was still unclear as to how the language and ethnic differences would play their way out in the community.

One of the ways in which the community had decided to help lessen any potential for serious ethnic and language divisions was in the division of land. When they first arrived, land was quickly divided up through a lottery, and each family was given an adequate amount to plant their corn, beans and peanuts. However, as with their living arrangements, their land titles were temporary as well. Once they had moved to the urbanization site, they were going to hold another lottery to see who would get which parcel of land. This arrangement went against the desire of the Kekchi, who wanted to have plots of land close together. Since the *barrios* were already roughly divided according to ethnicity, it was decided that the type of arrangement the Kekchi wanted could further

segregate the community on ethnic lines, and thus was decided against.

A major structural division in the community, and one which was clearly visible, was based on life cycle and gender. What distinguishes a child from a teenager, a teenager from an adult, and an adult from an elder in La Esmeralda? Age is not what makes the separation, but the life cycle. The line between what distinguishes a teenager from an adult, in general, appeared to be whether or not they were living with a member of the opposite sex,<sup>17</sup> or had children. What made the defining difference between an adult and an elder was whether or not they had children who had not yet become adults.

### **The Children**

Immediately on entering the community, visitors would be greeted by up to a dozen or more of the community's friendliest ambassadors, the children. As in most developing countries, the largest age group in La Esmeralda was the children.<sup>18</sup> Over twenty-five percent of the residents of La Esmeralda were children under seven years of age. And of all the residents, they appeared to be the happiest and most well adjusted to their new home. In contrast to most Guatemalan communities, the children of La Esmeralda were very outgoing, outwardly confident and friendly. Part of the reason for this could have been because of the amount of contact which they had with outsiders while in Mexico.

When asked where they liked to live more, Guatemala or Mexico, all of the children would respond "GUATEMALA!" "Why?" I would ask. And they

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<sup>17</sup> I knew of no same sex couples in the community. Of course, that does not mean that they did not exist. Since this is very much a machista culture, I suspect that same sex couples would not have been very socially accepted in La Esmeralda. Thus, if there had been same sex couples, they likely led a very secret life, as far from public scrutiny as possible in a relatively small community.

<sup>18</sup> In Guatemala, 46 percent of the population is fifteen years old or younger (UNICEF, 1994).

would respond “for the trees, the land, the space.” For the children, La Esmeralda is a very large playground. Depending on the trend of the week, they might all be: out climbing trees to pick and eat the guava fruit, ripe or not; capturing an unsuspecting lizard or bug with eyes that glow in the dark; making tops; or flying kites.

Although the children in La Esmeralda were some of the happiest, most contented children I have seen both in Guatemala or Canada, their existence was not ideal. Six months after their arrival in the community, all of the children six years and under were weighed, and it was found that one-third of the children suffered from some degree of malnutrition.<sup>19</sup> These findings were an indication that conditions of poverty existed in the community. While I was there they were still receiving some food aid, so there appeared to always be an adequate quantity of food. However, often vegetables, milk products and meat products would be missing from their diet. As well, even if the children did eat an adequate amount of the appropriate food, there was an abundance of parasites in the community which made it difficult for the children to benefit fully from their diet.

Life for the children was not always carefree; from a very young age they acquired a great deal of responsibility, especially little girls. Both older sisters and brothers were expected to look after their younger sisters and brothers, and it was quite normal to see a five-year old taking care of her/his three-year old and one-year old sisters or brothers. Children also began at a very young age helping with other family chores, like collecting water and firewood. Often little boys, primarily, would be seen carrying a load of firewood on their backs that weighed as much as they did.

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<sup>19</sup> In the country as a whole, in 1985, 33.6 percent of the children between three months and three years suffered from malnutrition (UNICEF, 1994).

In the eyes of outsiders, and some people in the community as well, there was a problem in the community around the issue of child abuse. Some of the methods of child discipline that were used in the community were ones that many in Canada would find too severe. One day, while talking with one of the women in the community, our conversation was stopped by the wailing of a child. Because of the walls being made of logs thatched together, we could see in the neighbour's house as she whipped her eight year old son with a stick.

I had been told at the Project Accompaniment training that this occurred in the communities, and that as an international accompanier I was not to interfere, as it was a matter for the community to deal with. Knowing this, I asked my friend what she thought of it, and what she thought should be done about it. She explained that her neighbour often beat her children, and although she did not agree with it, they were not her children and she could not do anything about it. This was the prevailing attitude in the community. It appeared to be community consensus that children were the property of their parents, and that they could discipline their children as they saw fit.

Not all, nor a majority of the parents used such harsh measures of punishment. Perhaps then, the various workshops they had received, both in Mexico and Guatemala, about *derechos de los niños* (rights of children) may have changed some attitudes, but not all as child abuse still existed.

### **The Elderly People**

La Esmeralda was a new beginning, a new community. Most of the people in the community had great aspirations for their future and that of La Esmeralda. Prior to returning to Guatemala, however, the refugees were aware that initially the conditions were going to make life more difficult and challenging

than it had been for most of them in Mexico. Still, they returned for the future, for the potential of the better days which lay ahead.

Realizing that returning and starting over was going to be difficult, was likely one of the reason that very few elders decided to return. As a consequence, there were very few elders in La Esmeralda. The lack of elders could prove to be unfortunate for the community, as they will lose the wisdom and experience which the elders possess. Especially the link which they could have provided to the Maya traditions, some of which started to erode in Mexico. However, they may be able to gain some of this from the few elders who did return, all of whom were incredible people.

Doña Cecilia was Ixil from the area of Nebaj in Guatemala, one of the areas which was hardest hit during the violence in the early 1980s. She was always wearing the beautiful handwoven skirt and blouse of the Ixil. When there were meetings or special occasions in the community, she often wore her elaborately woven headdress. When she entered the meeting, she entered as a queen, with great dignity and eloquence. Her beauty was not just in her appearance, but in her character, a very strong confident character. An account of how she confronted a soldier when they invaded her village is a revealing example of this.

In the early 1980s, before she fled to Mexico, the army entered her village and began to carry out its 'scorched earth' policy. They burned the villagers' crops, slaughtered their animals and looted their homes. When a soldier proceeded to take away her cow, Doña Cecilia ordered him to stop. She demanded, "What are you doing with my cow?" Unfortunately, her protest did not sway the soldier to return the cow to its rightful owner. Fortunately, she was spared the fate of her cow, in spite of the threat by the soldier. When I met

her in La Esmeralda she was in her late sixties and continued to work in the garden, wash the family's clothes down at the river, and be the surrogate mother and father to her eight-year old granddaughter, Anna.

### **The Teenagers**

The teenagers were the people in the community who appeared to have the most difficulty adjusting to their new life and community.<sup>20</sup> Having fled Guatemala 13 years ago when they were infants or small children, most had no or very little memory of Guatemala. Many had worked in the Mexican tourist resorts in Cancún and had become quite 'Mexicanized'. A number of them said they did not want to give up the discos, nightlife, cinemas, sidewalks and paved roads of Mexico to return to Guatemala where "there is nothing to do." However, they did return because their family did.

On arriving in La Esmeralda, teenagers who were used to wearing fancy highheel shoes or cowboy boots had to put them in boxes and put on the shoes of their new found persona: the rubberboots or shoes of a campesino/a. For some the transition from cowboy boots and highheel shoes to rubber boots and low rubber shoes was too much, and they returned to Mexico. There were others who left the community temporarily to find work in Santa Elena, the capital of the Petén, or one of the other more urban centres in Guatemala. There were also those who appeared to have adjusted to the transition.

The youth had been through a lot and seen a lot from a very young age. One *joven* (teenager) told me that he remembered when his family fled into the mountains and later to Mexico when he was six years old. He recalled hiding in the mountains with his parents, and seeing the 'beautiful' lights of the bombs

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<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the youth in the Guatemala Return process, see Geggie (1994).

which were being dropped on the communities below. Upon arriving in Mexico, his family lived for many years as unrecognized refugees. As a result, when he was in Mexican schools he had to take on a Mexican identity and learn how to lie about who he was to avoid detection. Later, he would go and work in the tourist resorts, losing more of his Guatemalan identity. He is one of the juvenes whose 'Mexicanization' is more complete and is illustrated by a loss of his Mayan language. Although he and his siblings understand their parents' language, they could not speak it.

The youth had their own organization, Maya Tikal. One of the purposes of the organization was to try and help them collectively organize and search for solutions to their problems. However, when I was in the community it was quite inactive. One of the NGOs in the community, COMADEP, worked actively with the youth and their organization in Mexico and planned to continue to try and motivate the youth and present them with alternatives in their new home. One activity which involved four youth volunteers was a newspaper, *Porvenir* (Future). *Porvenir* was distributed in both the return communities and the refugee camps to keep Guatemalans on both sides of the border aware of what was happening in the camps and in the return communities in the North Veriente.

### **The Adults**

The distinction I suggest which marks the transition to adulthood occurs when two people begin to live together, or have children. Intentionally, the distinction was 'living together' and not 'get married'. From the conversations I had with various people in the community, it appeared that in most cases people did not get married. Instead, to begin their lives together people simply

began to live together. However, this should not be confused with the Canadian phenomenon of 'living together'.

In La Esmeralda, 'living together' did not appear to be a stage that one went through in a relationship before making the final commitment. It seemed to be approached with the same commitment and long-term expectations which marriage traditionally had been in Canada. Naturally, as with marriage, this did not mean that all couples who lived together remained together. There were at least eight single mothers in the community and I knew of five 'single' men who were no longer living with their wives and children.

Relative to Canada, women in rural Guatemala start to have children at a much younger age and have many more. The average amongst Mayan women is to have 7.6 children, and in the Petén the overall average is 7.1, compared to 4.4 in the capital city (UNICEF, 1994). In La Esmeralda, however, overall the women are starting to have children when they are older than when their parents started. They also wished to have fewer children than their parents did, though this is not always so easily accomplished.<sup>21</sup>

One often hears comments made by the ill or non-informed that if the poor people in the South just had less kids they would be better off. However, anyone who examines the issue of birth control to any depth, realizes that the topic is often very sensitive and complicated. This is particularly the case in a relatively poor Catholic country like Guatemala, where abortion is illegal and other forms of contraception are not readily available outside of the urban centres.

In La Esmeralda, birth control, and the lack of it, was a great concern

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<sup>21</sup> This appears to be a common phenomenon throughout the country. In 1950-55, the average number of children a woman would give birth to was seven. In 1990-95 it dropped to 5.6, and at current rates it is expected to be 4.9 for the period between 1995-2000 (UNICEF, 1994).

expressed to me by a number of 'married' women. Both younger and older women told me that they did not want to have any more children and that they feared getting pregnant. Many had had access to contraceptives in Mexico and some women had had hysterectomies. However, in their new community in Guatemala, no artificial birth control methods were available.

Two of the women who approached me with their concerns were a mother and daughter. The fifteen year old daughter had begun living with her partner shortly before coming to La Esmeralda, and they had not wanted to have children yet. Due to the lack of availability of contraceptives their first child was born in May, less than ten months after they had returned to Guatemala.

Her mother was at the other end of the reproductive life-cycle. At 38 years old, and with six living children, she and her husband had decided they did not want to have any more. As with her daughter, she feared she might become pregnant again without the aid of birth control devices. Although late to prevent some unplanned pregnancies, finally almost eleven months after the first return the community's health centre had acquired some birth control devices.

### **La Esmeralda's Development Goals and Objectives<sup>22</sup>**

Overall, it appeared that the adults in the community have the greatest vision for the future and development of their families, community and country. And in the words of the outstanding leader in the community, Doña Eva, "development is what we really want."

'Development' is a contentious concept. Many even argue that it cannot

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<sup>22</sup> 'La Esmeralda's Development Goals and Objectives' as defined by the numerous women who I interviewed, and the anniversary tape of Ixmucané given to me by one of the women in the community.

be defined. The definition that I give to 'development' is that which is given to it by the people in La Esmeralda. For them 'development' was many things. There was the material development which they desired, such as having a school close by so their children could study and "have the possibility to grow up to be teachers or doctors" a likely unheard of dream for the majority of campesinos of the area. Material development for the people was also to have a health clinic, a day care, potable water, roads, a comgrinder, parks for recreation, and a marimba (a Mayan musical instrument) to dance to (Emeldina, Doña Eva, Juliana, Katarina, and Ixmucané, 1994).

Development for them was also much more than that which is represented by material development. It was also the ability to become capable, to improve themselves, to develop personally. For women, this meant that their equality with men would be acknowledged and respected, and that they too would be given the opportunity to grow to their full potential. These were development goals which set the people of La Esmeralda apart from their neighbours. They had hope for their future and believed that they could achieve their dreams, and they actively worked together to try and attain them.

And finally, for the people of La Esmeralda who have returned to a country from which they were forced to flee 13 years previously, development was to have peace in Guatemala. They did not see peace simply as a signing of an agreement between two warring factions. They realized that if the conditions still existed as they did when the war started more than 36 years ago, there would not be peace, for "without development there can be no peace" (Ixmucané, 1994).

Their definition of development is rather large and has multiple objectives. For fellow poor Guatemalan campesinos, most of these objectives

would seem unattainable, far out of their reach, because they are most oppressed and disempowered segment of Guatemalan society. However, it was not the case for the people of La Esmeralda. They had already partially realized some of their development objectives and with confidence they were continuing to actively pursue the rest.

The partial success of the community thus far was largely a result of their active collective participation in the development of their own community. These largely self-propelled community development efforts were organized through two separate organizations in the community, the community's cooperative, *La Nueva Esperanza*, and the women's organization, Ixmucané. The following two chapters will focus on these two organizations and the people's participation in them.

### **CHAPTER THREE: LA ESMERALDA'S NEW HOPE: THE COOPERATIVE LA NUEVA ESPERANZA**

It would start with the familiar buzz, then what sounded like a rhino blowing out its noise in anger, then the familiar greeting, "Bueno, bueno. Hoy, hay una reunión a las cuatro en la iglesia para todas las mujeres y los hombres" (Today there is a meeting at four o'clock in the church for all the women and men). If there is one sound which I will always remember from La Esmeralda, it will be the sound of the crackle made when the community's announcement system was turned on, followed by three blows into the microphone (the announcers way of making sure it is working, I suppose), then the predictable greeting of "Bueno, bueno" (which always made me chuckle because of its predictability); the day's announcements followed.

The public announcement system was a vital communication link in La Esmeralda. There was always plenty for the announcer to inform the community about, covering many diverse matters: where they could buy the meat of a pig that had just been slaughtered; who they should get in contact with if a certain lost item should be found; the start time of a men's upcoming soccer match or a women's basketball game; the calling of one of the numerous meetings held almost daily in the community's church.<sup>1</sup>

The number and types of announcements heard throughout the day showed how active and involved the people were in the life of a very organized,

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<sup>1</sup> There was only one church in the community. The majority of the community was Catholic, although not exclusively and every Sunday one of the community's catechists would give a service. On special occasion, Christmas and Easter, the Catholic priest from Dolores would come and give mass. Also, to bless their new urbanization site, a sacred Mayan priest visited the community.

Some people in the community still practice their ancient Mayan religion. While spending the night in the home of one of the families in the community, I was fortunate enough to witness a crop blessing ceremony performed by one of the few elders in the community.

vibrant community. For the most part, the majority of activities occurred through the organizational efforts of the two main organizations in the community, the cooperative and Ixmucané. This chapter will focus on the cooperative, how it is organized what its function is, and what is the extent of the people's participation in it. The chapter will end with a discussion of some of the problems, or potential problems, for the cooperative in terms of people's participation.

### **The Organization of the Cooperative**

To aid them in their desire to reconstruct their lives, and through their experience in Mexico and the return process, I suspect the majority of people in La Esmeralda saw the benefit of being collectively organized. As a result, they did something fairly unique; they formed a cooperative, *la Cooperative Integral Agroindustrial La Nueva Esperanza*, the Integral Agroindustrial Cooperative the New Hope. The cooperative was more than a workers' or producers' cooperative. It was an integral part in most aspects of their lives; it was a full community cooperative. The name they gave their new cooperative, *La Nueva Esperanza* (the New Hope), was very symbolic of what it represented to them. In the words of a woman from the community, "*La Nueva Esperanza* (the New Hope) is to reconstruct our lives and establish our families; moreover it is to have community development" (La Nueva Esperanza: La Conquista de La Esmeralda, 1995).

To join the cooperative each family unit was obliged to pay a membership fee. Families were the membership unit in the cooperative, and generally just one fee was paid per family unit. The exception was that when there were older sons who wanted to have their own land, then they too would

buy a membership.

Members were entitled to a number of services and opportunities which had they not been organized they would never of had. The cooperative had a small 'emergency fund', from which the cooperative members could attain loans. It had its own Toyota pick-up, which provided access to the outside world.<sup>2</sup> There were plans of trying to get a much larger truck, so that they could take their crops to market, rather than selling them for the low rates offered by the buyers who frequented the community. And, in keeping with it being an agroindustrial cooperative, there were plans for a number of different agricultural and industrial projects, including a cattle-raising project. When it could, the cooperative also tried to provide assistance to those who needed it most. For example, there was a cooperative store which offered employment opportunities to single mothers.

Cooperative members had the right to the use of a piece of land to plant their crops, and the right to a lot in the new urbanization site to build their house. In the event that a couple's relationship should end, the land was to be split equally between the woman and the man. By Guatemalan standards, this allocation of land to women is quite progressive. This move, facilitated by a cooperative spirit, demonstrates a pledge to equality within La Esmeralda. However, in other ways, the cooperative was not as progressive.

Men and women did share some of the same obligations and rights: the obligation to vote, stand for elected office and volunteer for local committees. Attendance at all cooperative assemblies was expected and recorded, but it appeared to be mandatory for men more than for women. Other obligations

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the cooperatives truck was in an accident, as a result it was not working for a long period of time. Fortunately, although there were a few injuries in the accident, they were not too serious.

which were mandatory for men and not for women, with the exception of single women, were *manos de obra* (community labour). Every afternoon over the community announcement system, a list of men's names were read off. Those men were expected to meet the next morning to carry out their day of community labour. The tasks included such things as building a new warehouse for the community, putting in the new water system, building the new bridge, and cutting the boundaries of the *finca*.

Since membership entitled each member to a prescribed amount of land, the number of memberships for the cooperative was set. On the other hand, the actual membership itself was somewhat dynamic. On the first Return in July of 1995, there were 157 families (674 people) from the camps in Campeche and Chiapas. In December of the same year, there was a small return of 20 families (50 people). Since that time there has been another small return of only five refugees, most of whom returned without other family members. Because there was still more space in the cooperative, membership was opened up to Guatemalans who had never fled to Mexico. While I was in the community, two families from the surrounding area joined the cooperative. As well, family of cooperative members who had not fled to Mexico, left their homes in other parts of Guatemala to join their family in La Esmeralda. There was also movement between return communities, with a few people from other return communities deciding to leave their community and become part of La Esmeralda instead. Along with immigration of more people to La Esmeralda, there were some families and individuals who renounced their membership and emigrated from the community. Some went back to Mexico, others joined another return community, and there were also those who returned to land they owned in another part of Guatemala, where perhaps they still had family. In the end, the

community had grown, but not significantly.

### **The Junta Directiva**

The running of *La Cooperativa de La Nueva Esperanza* was left in the hands of an elected *junta directiva* (executive council), which served a one-year term. However, through cooperative assemblies and meetings which were held regularly, the membership was still actively involved in the decision-making process. In theory, and for the most part in practice, the *junta* acted according to decisions made at the membership level.

The positions on the *junta* were voluntary, as were most of the positions in the community. Naturally, the work of the *junta* was very time-consuming. Because of this and its voluntary nature, it is quite understandable why, when the time for the election of the community's second *junta directiva* approached, the elected officials with whom I spoke expressed their desire *not* to be re-elected. In fact, perhaps due to the stress of the responsibilities of his position as president of cooperative, Don Fabián appeared to be suffering from a very western stress illness, an ulcer.

Despite his ill health, his stated desire not to be re-elected, and the personal and family sacrifice that the non-compensated position as the head of the cooperative entailed, Don Fabián claimed that if the members chose him again to be president, he would continue. There were many people like Don Fabián in the community, and it is through their personal commitment to the community's advancement that it was already attaining some of its development goals.

To run a collective community with no support from government services, the people of the cooperative had volunteered for a number of other positions

and committees aside from the *junta directiva*. Wanting to remain as independent from potentially corrupt outside forces over which they had no control, the community elected its own mayor and police force, all of whom were men. In fact, there were no women nominees for the positions. When I was there, the mayor's duties included greeting new arrivals and acting as an ambassador to the community, although in fact the *junta directiva* largely took on that responsibility. The work of the 'police officers' did not appear to be very onerous. The one time I saw them 'in action' was when they were forced to deal with a drunk man at a community social function.

There were numerous other elected and non-elected positions and various committees. Some of these included: the running of the community public announcement apparatus, maintaining the community's temporary water system, organizing the eating arrangements for visitors, supervising the logging company's work, and organizing the community labour. As with the positions on the executive council, and the mayor and police officers, these positions were also unpaid and voluntary. Once again, all of these positions were held by men. It is unclear if this was because of a gender bias against giving women positions of leadership, or because women had much less time to volunteer than men, due to their excessive workload.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, both were the results of a system which discriminates against women

There were other positions in the community which required a great deal of commitment, training and time. These were the positions of the *promotores* (promoters), in particular the *promotores de educación* (education promoters) and the *promotores de salud* (health promoters). Although they

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<sup>3</sup> Likely, language also played a role, since the level of Spanish of most women was lower than that of men, and a good working knowledge of Spanish was needed since it was the working language of the cooperative.

entailed a lot of sacrifice on the part of the promoter, and his/her family, in the long-run they also offered opportunities which they never otherwise would have had.

## **Education**

In the preceding chapter, the condition of the state-run schools in the Petén was discussed, and it was also noted that one of the development objectives of La Esmeralda was to have a school in their community “so our kids do not have to go far” and so “they can learn and possibly grow up to be doctors or teachers” (Ixmucafé, 1994). The community has already attained this goal. Through their own labour, the people in La Esmeralda built their own elementary school. They also supplied the teachers needed to staff it. Unlike their neighbouring communities, the teachers in La Esmeralda were from the community. One of the likely reasons why the community has decided to have its own non-certified teachers, rather than the certified teachers that the government supplies, was because of the previously mentioned problem with teachers who come to teach in the rural communities. The possibility of having school cancelled for many days, because of an outside teacher’s lack of commitment was a problem the community wished to, and did avoid. As well, the community wanted to be as independent as possible, and having their own teachers is part of that independence. Lastly, relying upon members of their own community provided an opportunity for those involved to eventually become certified teachers.

Although the teachers were not yet certified, one of the women in the community (Emeldina) was working with UNESCO to negotiate with the Guatemalan government for a programme to enable the *promotores* to attain

their teaching certificates. Once they have their certification, the government will be obliged to pay them. The *promotores* were not paid by the government, nor by the community for their work. However, when I left the community, the parents were starting to clear land and plant crops for the teachers of their children.

Four mornings a week nine *promotores de educación* from the community essentially volunteered to teach the community's children. There were classes from kindergarten to grade six, and likely not by coincidence, but as a result of gender hierarchy, the two female teachers taught the two classes of preschool. The rest of the classes, two grade one classes and one each of the grades from two to grade six, were all taught by men from the community. If there were children in the community whose families could afford, and who wanted to go beyond grade six (which is very rare) they had to leave the community to continue their studies. One option was to go to school in Dolores, the other and preferred option was to go to the larger Return community in the Petén, La Quetzal.<sup>4</sup>

The *promotores* were also involved in a literacy programme for adults. A high percentage of the adult population of La Esmeralda, in particular the

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<sup>4</sup> Five students (two girls and three boys) had left La Esmeralda to go to school in La Quetzal. Since it was expensive to go between the two communities and took almost two full days of travel, the students lived away from home for the school year. Although they had extended family or family friends with whom they lived with in La Quetzal, their long faces showed that they found it very difficult to live away from their family for so long. Three of them told me that they would prefer to be back in La Esmeralda.

women, had little or no formal education.<sup>5</sup> A large number were illiterate.<sup>6</sup> Noting that a high number of women in the community were illiterate, one of the women in the community, Emeldina, organized a literacy programme. Initially she believed it would just be for women, but when it was beginning to be implemented many men expressed interest in joining the group, thus making it a coed venture. The programme eventually expanded to include adult classes up to the sixth grade.

## Health

Prior to their arrival, the closest *centro de salud* (health clinic) was in Shaan, a two-hour walk. As one of their development objectives, the people of La Esmeralda wished to have a health clinic in their own community, a goal which they were able to realize. As with the education situation, the community received no funding from the government for its *centro de salud*, even though the clinic provided services not only to the people of La Esmeralda, but it also offered healthcare to the residents of surrounding communities. In fact, the *centro do salud* served a rather wide area, and when it was first opened, more than half of its patients came from the neighbouring communities.

The clinic was staffed by seven volunteer *promotores de salud* from the community (six men and one woman) along with *promotores de salud* from the NGO ASECSA. ASECSA worked in health care in various communities in Guatemala and was funded largely by the European Economic Union.

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<sup>5</sup> From the census data of La Esmeralda the education level of the 188 females twelve years old and older is: 107 (57%) have no formal education; 14 (7 %) have completed grade one; 25 (13 %) grade two; 15 (7 %) grade three; 8 (4.%) grade four; 6 (3%) grade five; 11 (5.%) and 2 (1%) had completed grade nine (Tennant, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Almost half of the adult population in Guatemala is illiterate (UNICEF, 1994). The statistics in the rural areas is far worse, where 71.8 percent of the adults are illiterate. In the departments of Huehuetenango, Quiché, Baja Verapaz and Alta Verapaz the percentage of Mayan adults who can not read or write is as high as 77 percent.

However, like the ASECESA-funded promoters who worked in La Esmeralda, Luis and Fernando, the majority of the staff were Guatemalan, and many were indigenous. ASECESA maintained a permanent presence in the community, and almost every month another *promotor de salud* and a Guatemalan doctor from ASECESA visited the community to provide assistance to their *compañeros*, and give training sessions to the local *promotores de salud* and *comadronas* (midwives).

The community and the local *promotores de salud* realized that some time in the future, the assistance given by ASECESA would no longer be available. In order to ensure that high quality basic community health care continued to be provided to their families and neighbours' families, the health promoters of La Esmeralda continued to receive training courses both in the community and outside of it. The health promoter's work was also voluntary.

As well as having their own health promoters, a number of women in the community were *comadronas*. The women in La Esmeralda tended not to give birth at the health clinic with the assistance of the health promoters, but rather in their homes with the aid of a *comadrona*. More than six women in the community had received varying degrees of training both in Mexico and in Guatemala to be midwives. Their services were often called upon, especially with the previously discussed lack of access to birth control faced by the returnees during their first eleven months back in Guatemala. I can only speculate as to why getting contraceptives was not a priority on their arrival, but I suspect a combination of their *machista* and Catholic culture played a part in it.

## Human Rights

The memory of the violence in Guatemala which had forced them to flee, has left a deep scar on many, if not all, of the people of La Esmeralda. Numerous people told me of their own personal experiences with the violence during that time, or that of a family member. One teenager explained to me why he never knew his father. Just prior to his birth, his father was murdered coming home from the fields. Others spoke of their brothers, sisters and children being murdered or dying of hunger or illness when they fled to Mexico. Curious as to why one of my good friends in the community only had three children, and the oldest one having been born when she was relatively old (23), I asked her. She told me that she had had three other children, but all three of her first children had died when she fled to Mexico with them.<sup>7</sup>

The fear caused by the events of the early 1980s was still very evident in the people of La Esmeralda. However, they realized that the situation in Guatemala was different from when they fled. A very significant change is that they now have some international attention. One of the ways in which they maintain international attention is through the presence of international accompaniers. International accompaniers act as the eyes of the world, reporting any violations of human rights against the community. As previously discussed, the right to have international accompaniers was one of the conditions stipulated by the CCPPs in the October 8th Accord.

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<sup>7</sup> One night while visiting with one of my neighbours at his store, he spontaneously began to tell me of how it came about that he fled to Mexico. He told me of how he had been a community organizer, organizing his community to have better outhouses. One day, in the early 1980s, when he came home his aunt and his uncle were hanging dead outside their house; they too had been community organizers. Fearing that he would be next, he fled to the mountains near his home and went into hiding. Shortly after, while in the mountains he saw the army come into his village and take all the men from the village to the soccer field where their hands were tied behind their backs. They were then all taken to the village church and then shot. He then fled to a different area of Guatemala, and eventually he made his way to Mexico and one of the refugee camps.

The international accompanier programme, being voluntary, is unlikely to be sustained indefinitely. Some of the people in the community were aware of this, and thus of the need to possess the tools ensuring the respect of their human rights by the Guatemalan authorities. As was discussed in Chapter One, they made the first step towards this while in Mexico, when they learned about human rights. In La Esmeralda, the next step towards protecting their rights was being left in charge of the community's *promotores de derechos humanos* (human rights promoters). The *promotores de derechos humanos* received training from MINUGUA (the United Nations Verification Mission on Human Rights in Guatemala) and the *Guatemalan Procurador de los Derechos Humanos*, an independent Guatemalan government human rights agency. Once they received training the *promotores* gave workshops to the rest of the community. The steps in the training were three-fold: first, to learn their human rights; then to know how to demand them; and finally what steps to take when their human rights were not observed.

The *promotores de derechos humanos* and the residents of La Esmeralda were also having to keep themselves aware of a 'wolf' which may enter the community in 'sheep's clothing'. It was rumoured that the Guatemalan authorities were trying to enter one of the communities, namely La Quetzal, and ruin its potential for development advancement. This was to be done, so the rumour claimed, by government stooges posing as an NGO. Once in the community, this non NGO would attempt to divide the people by giving goods to certain individuals, and nothing to others. At a cooperative assembly in La Esmeralda, the *junta directiva* warned the people of the new 'face' being worn by their old enemy. When I left, there had not yet been any direct evidence of a 'wolf' in the community. However, even without any wolves in the community,

there were many other internal challenges which the cooperative faced.

### **Challenges for the Cooperative**

When I first arrived in La Esmeralda I was captivated by the idea of a community cooperative, and had great hope for its future. For the first while, I did not see any of the problems which existed in the cooperative, and I maintained my high sense of optimism. However, after spending more time in the community and gaining the confidence of the people, my 'rose-coloured' glasses started to lose their tint. I still remained impressed by the cooperative and some people's dedication to it, but I began to see that the cooperative was not without its own problems, and that there were signs of other problems waiting to surface.

I think it should be acknowledged that when I was in La Esmeralda, the cooperative *La Nueva Esperanza* was very young. The first large return to the community had taken place only five months prior to my arrival, and I left the community just prior to its first year anniversary. The cooperative was facing a number of challenges in, what has been termed, its 'stage of emergency'.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, as the cooperative matures and emerges from its crisis state, some of the problems or potential problem areas will be addressed. In the interim, and for future cooperatives, it is important to look at some of these problems, or potential problem areas.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Stage of emergency' or '*etapa de emergencia*' is a term used by Adelaide, one of the development workers with a local NGO. She refers to the first phase of the Return as such. The people are clearing their land, planting and harvesting their first crops, building their new homes and community, and establishing their cooperative. It was not clear as to when this 'stage of emergency' would end and the community would be in another phase. Likely, in part, because a number of events could occur delaying or advancing their advancement to the next 'time'. For example, the delay in the construction of the road and the water system delayed the community's development.

## Reliance on Voluntary Labour

One of the areas in which a problem could arise would be as a result of the cooperative's reliance on the volunteer work of its *socios* (members).

*Manos de obra* (community labour) was compulsory for all male heads of households, although some did not comply. On the other hand, the rest of the work and positions which were necessary to the running of the cooperative were voluntary. Examples of this are: members of the *junta directiva*, *promotores de educación, salud y derechos humanos* and volunteers on various committees.

As previously mentioned, the members of the *junta directiva*, the *promotores*, the women who worked for Ixmucané, and the people on the various committees were not remunerated for their work and their positions were 'voluntary'.<sup>9</sup> The people in these positions were highly committed to the cooperative, Ixmucané, and the community, with their jobs requiring a great deal of time and sacrifice. It was a sacrifice because, while they were fulfilling their role, they could not be doing work which would directly and immediately benefit their family. For example, if a member of the *junta directiva* or of *Ixmucané* needed to leave the community to go to a meeting, they would be unable to do the work which they would otherwise have been doing, such as cooking meals for their family or going out to the fields to harvest the crop. In the case of cooking the meals, someone else in the family would have to give up what they normally did to cook the family's dinner. In the case of the work that needed to be done in the fields, if no one else in the family could do it, it would have to wait. At times this waiting could mean risking damage or loss of

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<sup>9</sup> I write 'voluntary' because members of the cooperative are elected to different positions and although they can, and do, decline positions to which they are elected, there are those who feel an obligation to the community and serve in the position to which they are elected, regardless of whether they wish to or not.

the crop.

It should be obvious that all of these positions required a great deal of time and commitment, and took a toll on the volunteers and their families. Since these people, as with all people in the community, were engaged in a struggle for survival, their sacrifice was much more pronounced. The stress of that struggle was somewhat relieved with the assistance they were receiving from NGOs, the UNHCR, and solidarity groups. But once that help disappears, which is inevitable, will these committed people be able to volunteer their time as they had?

The situation was somewhat more intensified by the fact that not all the people in the cooperative were equally committed to it. It quickly became apparent that there were people who did a lot of work for the cooperative and many others who did very little, or nothing. When nominated to a position these people declined their nomination claiming "I don't have the time" or "I have obligations to my family."

To illustrate, there was a 'single' man who left his wife and children in Mexico and returned to Guatemala on his own. Being a single man, he would have had fewer familial obligations than the majority of the adults in the community, most of whom have one to seven children. Having more time one would expect that he would be willing to volunteer, but this was not the case. When nominated for any position of responsibility he declined, stating "I have no time." All the *socios* had limited time and most had families, but some felt less of an obligation and others more to their community. Those who felt less obligation often refused to volunteer any of their time.

The very individualistic attitudes of those members who would not give of themselves to the cooperative threatened its survival. For one, it must have

been very difficult and frustrating for those who gave a lot of time to the cooperative. It likely bothered them that the people who would not volunteer their time received the same benefits from the cooperative as they. Arguably, the committed members could claim they were penalized for working for the cooperative, as the time they spent working for the common good was time away from working for the advancement of their family. If the community-minded people started to view their advancement in very individualistic terms, like some of the others, the cooperative ideal would be lost and so would the cooperative.

Considering all of this, I believe that in the future, to ensure the continuation of the cooperative with its benefits to the individual and community, some method demonstrating its worth, particularly to those who shirk their collective responsibilities, must be devised. On the more practical side, a system of compensation for those who dedicate much time and energy to the cooperative and the community is likely well advised, to ensure that those who are still community-minded do not become cynical and lose their commitment. Since La Esmeralda is a 'cash-starved' economy and the economic resources do not exist to reimburse financially those who volunteer, another appropriate system of reimbursement must be discovered .

As the reader recalls, the teachers did receive some compensation from the parents of their students. Three months after the school year began, a system of compensation was started to reimburse the *promotores de educación*, who volunteered an average of twenty hours a week to their students. The system was such that parents of the students were obliged to spend a set number of hours working in the fields clearing land, and planting and harvesting crops for the teachers. Since the implementation of this assistance to the

teachers was just beginning as I left, I am unsure of its success. However, this is an example of one way in which volunteers in the community can be reimbursed.

### **Non-Appreciation by the Community**

Another problem which I saw in the community which could threaten to erode the volunteer nature of those who are more community-minded, was not the absence of positive reinforcement, but rather the presence of negative feedback. There were those in the cooperative who did not appreciate the time dedicated to the community by the various volunteers, and instead criticized them openly and gossiped about them. This often occurred with the more notable volunteer positions, like those of the education and health promoters.

While I was in the community there were a number of complaints about the *promotores*. Specifically, a number of accusations had been made by some parents against their children's teachers. The *promotores de educación* were at the school four mornings a week at 7:30, and taught the children until 12:30 in the afternoon, with a half-hour recess. The majority of the teachers had no higher than a grade six education and had very minimal training for their job. Still, most tried to do their job as best they could. Despite this, some parents complained about the teachers, making complaints such as "the teachers are always late to class." One of the grade one teachers told me that he was not going to continue as a teacher if these parents continued to complain and showed no appreciation for the work he did.

I have also been told similar stories by *promotores de salud* and women who dedicated much time to Ixmucané. There were cases where some of the criticism may have been well founded, but a more constructive mechanism for

discussing concerns, a cooperative meeting or special forum, is needed to aid the community towards lasting solutions.

### **Manos de Obra - Mandatory Community Labour**

The cooperative did not rely solely on volunteer labour, since it also had a system of mandatory community labour, *manos de obra*. All male heads of households whose families are *socios*, and all single women who were *socias*, were obliged to do a certain number of days of community labour. As mentioned previously, the work for the men included such tasks as: building the community school, warehouse or store, putting in the water system, clearing the bush around the community, and cutting the boundary for the *finca*. For the women their tasks included: cleaning the church and other community gathering places, including the accompaniers' living quarters.<sup>10</sup>

Although the idea of mandatory community labour appeared to be a good one, it also had problems. If one looks closely at the way in which the system of community labour is organized, one sees that it is not gender neutral. Single mothers, as heads of their families, were obliged to participate in community labour. This obligation did not take into account the unique predicament of single mothers, vis-à-vis the demands of their children, and being responsible for the work in the field as well as in the home. A second concern was that, in a family with both a husband and a wife, only the community labour done by the husband was acknowledged by the community.

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<sup>10</sup> I objected to the women who came every couple of weeks to clean our living quarters. For one, I believed that we should clean up after ourselves, and secondly, these women already had so much work to do that they should not had done what I saw as our work. When I objected to María, one of the single mothers who came to clean, she explained that if she did not clean our *galera* she would have to tell the person in charge of assigning the work and she would be given another job. She appeared to prefer to clean our living quarters instead of another task that she would be given, so we compromised. Jean Francois, another accompanier, and I, helped her clean.

Progressive as La Esmeralda was, progress in gender equality issues needs to continue.

### **Single Mothers and Manos de Obra**

Women in La Esmeralda were responsible for the multiple tasks around the day-to-day maintenance of the family.<sup>11</sup> That would include: all the steps involved (which are many) in making tortillas and beans after they have been harvested; washing the clothes in the river (a task which needed to be done two or three times a week and which took a whole morning or afternoon); taking care of any children or sick members of the family; cleaning the home; maintaining the family's garden, if they have one; and participating in any projects of Ixmucané or the cooperative, if they were related to their reproductive responsibilities. Many women were also active in the running of Ixmucané and the cooperative, which represented much time spent outside of their day-to-day family maintenance responsibilities. As well, a few women were also *promotores de educación, salud* and *derechos humanos*. With the absence of a husband, single mothers also had to do the work for which a man would usually be primarily responsible.

In the cooperative of *La Nueva Esperanza*, families were *socios* of the cooperative and were obliged to do community labour. In the case of families where there was both a male and a female who were old enough to do community work (around 15 years old), the male was expected to do the community labour. In families without a male, the women was expected to do the community labour.

There were approximately 13 single mothers and widows in La

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<sup>11</sup> In the feminist literature this type of work is referred to as 'reproductive work' because it is "required to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force"(Moser, 1993: 27).

Esmeralda. Most of the single mothers had 2 or more young children, and according to the way the system was, these women had to do community labour. For many this was likely too much to bear, considering their already overwhelming workload, and they might have felt great pressure to renounce their membership. Although it appeared that they retained the right to use land, and to have a lot for their house, in losing their membership they likely gave up their right to vote. Although they could still attend meetings and assemblies and bring up issues, they risked losing the right to have a say in an issue if it was voted upon, and could lose the right to be elected and to elect the cooperative's representatives.

There were also single and divorced men in the cooperative, some of whom had children. But, likely as a result of the culture, none of these men were the primary caregivers to their children. Therefore, they did not have the same responsibilities and workload as the single women with children. As a consequence, single or divorced men could maintain their membership in the cooperative and their voice could still be heard, unlike their female counterparts.

The problem with not having enough time to do their *manos de obra* is only one of the added challenges which were faced by single mothers in La Esmeralda. Through the friendships which I developed with two single mothers, in particular, I gained more insight into their lives and struggles; how they helped the cooperative and Ixmucané, and how these organizations helped them in some cases, and caused them grief in others. It is important to look at the lives of these two women to have a better understanding of how the cooperative may be structured to better suit special populations, like single mothers.

Clara Cecilia was a single mother of two intelligent daughters who were in primary school. Her two children were the result of relationships with two different men. One of the fathers had previously sent some money to buy school supplies and clothes for the children, but not with any regularity. The father of her other daughter had no contact with the family. Although the assistance from the fathers was essentially nonexistent, Clara Cecilia's own parents and siblings lived in La Esmeralda, helping her out when needed, and she them.

Her day often started at sunrise when she rose to collect water from one of the faucets just outside of her kitchen. She then would start a fire with wood that she had collected. Perhaps she collected it alone, or with the help of her 12 year old daughter Olga, or her youngest brother Fidel. Or maybe she went out to collect the wood with one of her neighbours, maybe with Marta or Ana. If she had enough money to pay for the corn to be ground at the community comgrinder, she waited for Olga, or her younger daughter Lity, to return from the community grinder with the nixtamal<sup>12</sup>. Lity had a hard time getting up in the morning, so it is likely Olga who would stand in line at the *motor*, waiting with the other children and women of La Esmeralda and Limones to have their corn ground. If there was not enough money to pay the 25 *centavos* (25 cents, approximately 6 cents Canadian), Clara Cecilia would use a stone to grind her corn, a method used for thousands of years by Mayan women and still used today. Or if a part was not missing from her more modern metal handgrinder, she might grind her corn with that, although many complained that it did not grind the corn fine enough.

Clara Cecilia might be making one of her 'gourmet breakfasts' just for her

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<sup>12</sup> Nixtamal is the name given to the corn after it has been cooked with lime and then ground to form dough to make tortillas.

daughters and herself. If there were workers in the community, like the men making the road, they might be treated to one of Clara Cecilia's culinary delights for a small fee. She had been able to utilize her exceptional cooking talents (talents which she developed in Mexico when she was employed as a cook) to supplement the family's income.<sup>13</sup>

She could use the money earned to buy food staples like salt, sugar and oil if the supplies from the UNHCR or the emergency funds provided by Oxfam Belgium had run out. If they had not, she might be able to buy a luxury item, like cheese, from one of the children from Limones who passed through the community, or bread from one of the women in the community who made bread every couple of days in a homemade dirt oven. Or perhaps she had been able to save up enough to buy her daughters a new t-shirt or dress from one of the *comerciantes* (merchants) who entered the community every few weeks selling *ropa americana*.

After breakfast, Clara Cecilia would send her daughters off to school, and if they did not have time to help her with the dishes, she would wash them with the remains of the water which she had collected that morning. Leaving the washing of the clothes for her daughters to do in the afternoon, the rest of the morning would be spent doing much of the work that would normally, primarily, be the responsibility of a man, except for watering the vegetables with the other women in her group in the *hortaliza* (vegetable garden). If she did not have to go to the *hortaliza* she might be saddling up one of her parents' horses and going out to the *campo* (fields) to attend to her crops, or to the *monte* (woods) to

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<sup>13</sup> Clara Cecilia was nominated by fellow companions and myself as the 'best chef in La Esmeralda' and possibly Guatemala. Her food is of the quality which one would expect in a high class Mexican restaurant. Considering the minimal ingredients which she has to work with, and that fact that she has grown practically all of them herself (the vegetables, corn, beans, spices, and the eggs from her chickens) her culinary dishes are indeed remarkable.

collect firewood.

The only visiting that Clara Cecilia would get to do with other women in the community is that which she could incorporate with her work.<sup>14</sup> For example, she and Marta have become good friends and they often would work together in the *hortaliza*. Not wanting to go to the *campo* by herself, she sometimes would be accompanied by her good friend and neighbour Magdalena.<sup>15</sup>

Clara Cecilia's day was long and full. Usually, when she had finally finished the dishes from their late dinner and was ready to go to bed it would be ten o'clock, long after most of her neighbours. She must work all day, every day, or as Olga said, "If we don't work hard, we don't eat." With the amount of work already involved in their day and all the responsibilities they had, it is easy to understand how single mothers like Clara Cecilia would be tempted to opt out of being *socios* of the cooperative, with its demand of mandatory community labour.

The lives of all single mothers in La Esmeralda are not the same,

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<sup>14</sup> Women and men in La Esmeralda, generally, do not socialize with one another unless they are related or *novios* (girlfriend and boyfriend, or fiancés). Therefore, for single mothers like Clara Cecilia, there is very little contact with men in the community outside of her brothers, father and the men she cooks for. However, since leaving the community, I have heard that a man in the community, who arrived on a later return, has moved in with her.

<sup>15</sup> The majority of the women, both single and married, go to the *campo* to work. The vast majority of them will not go alone out of fear. When asked what they are afraid of, I have been told a number of different responses. The things they are afraid of range from: wild animals, to strange men, to the army, to hurting themselves and no one being with them to help them. Perhaps another reason is a result of the *chismes* (gossip) in the community combined with *la enfermedad de celos* (the sickness of jealousy) which seems to be of epidemic proportions in Guatemala (both topics to be discussed later). This is only conjecture, but if a woman went out to the *campo* by herself, it could result in damaging rumours about her.

Likely another reason that the women do not want to go to the *campo* by themselves is that they were not use to being alone and thus were not very comfortable with it. When I was the only accompanier in the community, people often asked me if I was not afraid of being alone or was I not lonely. They found it strange that I would need and want to be alone at times, and would go out to the monte or walk to one of the neighbouring communities by myself, just so I could find a place to be by myself.

although all have common aspects. The main similarity is that single mothers have many responsibilities and very heavy loads to carry, being both mother and father to their children, along with trying to be active in the community. Emeldina was another single mother in La Esmeralda. In some ways her life was very similar to Clara Cecilia's. She too was a mother of daughters. She had three daughters ranging in age from 5 to 14. Her oldest daughter, Victoria, was one of the five students from La Esmeralda who had to leave the community and go to La Quetzal to continue her education. Her two younger daughters were in grade two and primary.

Emeldina came from a very close-knit family which provided her with a lot of support. Her aunt lived with her, and when Emeldina had to leave the community to attend a meeting, her aunt took care of the children. Also, her father and brothers helped her with her work in the *campo* and her mother, Doña Marta was the strong, soft, caring matriarch who could likely always have been counted on for emotional support. Emeldina's family was also one of the leading families in the community. Her father was the first president of the cooperative's *junta directiva*; one of her brothers was a *promotor de educación* and director of the school, another brother was a *promotor de salud* and his wife was one of the leaders of Ixmucané. Later, this woman, Emeldina's sister-in-law, Eulalia, was on the committee which oversaw the running of the cooperative, the vigilance committee. Emeldina, like her family, had a strong commitment to the community and the cooperative.

Her commitment to the community, like that of her younger brother, was in education. She was one of the key people at the community level in the negotiations with UNESCO and the Guatemalan government, so that the *promotores de educación* could eventually obtain their teaching certification.

As mentioned, she was also the main instigator for the adult literacy programme in the community. Having completed grade nine, she was also one of the women in the community with the highest level of formal education. She only attained this level with great personal sacrifice and with the help of her family.<sup>16</sup>

Emeldina's and Clara Cecilia's lives were, at the same time, different and similar. Emeldina has attained a relatively high degree of education and was often out of the community at meetings for her work with UNESCO. Clara Cecilia, on the other hand, like the majority of the mothers in the community, could not read or write and rarely had the opportunity to leave the community. Their lives were also different in the amount of time they could dedicate to the community and the cooperative. Because of the support that she received from her family, combined with her high level of community consciousness, Emeldina spent a lot of time working for the betterment of the community. On the other hand, although Clara Cecilia did receive some assistance from her family, it was much less than Emeldina. I would suspect, as a consequence, her life revolved more around the everyday survival of her family than Emeldina's. She too, however, worked for the community. When Ixmucané was looking for women to volunteer to administer the funds donated to build a *guardería* (daycare), Clara Cecilia was one of the two women to volunteer.

The women's lives were similar in that they both had been left with the responsibility to raise their daughters with virtually no support from the children's fathers. Every women in La Esmeralda had an incredible amount of work to do, but single mothers like Clara Cecilia and Emeldina had an added load. And they had specific needs and concerns. If they had to renounce their

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<sup>16</sup> When the first groups of people returned to La Esmeralda in July of 1995, Emeldina did not return with her two oldest daughters and the rest of her family. Wanting to finish off her academic year and finish *básica*, our equivalent of junior high, she put off returning to her new home in Guatemala until five months later.

membership (which they had not done), because they were unable to do the mandatory community labour, their needs and concerns might not be heard, and perhaps the contribution which they were making to the cooperative would cease. In the end, the cooperative, Ixmucané and the women would be worse off for it.

### **Another Gender Bias**

Another gender bias in the system of mandatory community labour was that community work undertaken by male heads of households was the community work which was credited, while their female partner's was not. What this symbolizes is apparent; women's contribution was not valued as highly as men, and in some cases not at all, and that men were considered the heads of households alone, and not jointly with their female partner.

As a specific example to illustrate will perhaps illustrate why this policy is problematic. Marcela was the only female *promotora de salud* in La Esmeralda. Like the male *promotores*, she too participated in training sessions. Some of these sessions required that she leave the community to attend, with her infant son whom she was still breastfeeding. Her husband, Nicolás, could not go out and harvest their crop, as he had to stay and take care of their other two children. However, since only the work of Nicolás was credited as community labour, the work that Marcela did as a *promotor de salud* went unacknowledged.

At the same time that the work of the only female health promoter in the community went unrecognized, there was a push to encourage more women to become health promoters. Realizing that women would be more likely to seek medical attention if there were more female health promoters, and that women

could benefit a lot from the opportunity, the cooperative and Ixmucané were trying to promote more women to become health promoters.<sup>17</sup> However, if women were not given credit for the work that they would do as *promotores*, there was little immediate incentive to become a health promoter. In the end, the community as a whole, and the women in particular were negatively affected.

### **Enforceability of Mandatory Community Labour**

A final problem that I saw with the system of mandatory community labour was a result of the inability to enforce it. As was previously noted, every afternoon a list of *socios* of the cooperative were read off and these people were supposed to meet the next morning to carry out a day of community labour. Many would and others would not. The only recourse which the cooperative had in ensuring everyone did their share of community labour was to try and shame those who would not participate.

There was a committee who was in charge of organizing the *manos de obra*, and keeping track of the number of days each person worked. At a General Assembly all the names of male *socios* were read off and the number of days that they had worked for the cooperative. The numbers ranged from 56 days by one of the health promoter to zero, one, two or three days by a number of others who appeared to be less community-minded. A source of discontent for those active members is that those less committed to the cooperative, and their families, receive benefits equal to the most dedicated. Obviously, left

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<sup>17</sup> An example of how women are hesitant to go the almost exclusively male-run health clinic was seen when one of the women leaders in the community, María, has a boil on her backside. María suffered in agony with this boil for close to a week, refusing to go to the clinic. As I understand it, she refused to go because she was embarrassed because of the location of her boil. Finally, after many days of pain, the boil burst and María found relief. Luckily her wound was well attended by her mother and did not become infected.

unaddressed, this situation could be detrimental to the sustainability of the cooperative. The risk of resentment by the very community-minded if left unchecked, poses a serious problem.

### **Participation of Women**

A final problem which I observed with the cooperative was the level of participation of women in the decision-making process. Women were physically present at all the meetings and assemblies of the cooperative, often outnumbering the men. However, the right side of the church, where the majority of the women sit, was relatively silent. Although the importance of the active presence and voting of the women was expressed, there was a gap between rhetoric and practice, and often women were forgotten. For example, during one of the community's first assemblies, by the time the first vote was called, many of the women had left to start making tortillas for the noon-day meal. It was as if their absence was unnoticed. However, María, one of the leaders in the community, demanded that the women's names should also be called out to vote.

The cooperative did recognize that some of the barriers to women's participation in the assemblies and meetings must be removed if their participation was to increase. One step which was taken, was to prohibit the operation of the community's corngrinder while meetings and assemblies were in session. But, there were still other hurdles to women being more vocal and actively participating.

One of the major obstacles has already been briefly mentioned in an earlier section, the problem of language. Although there was sometimes an attempt to translate what had been said in Spanish to one of the Mayan

language (usually Kekchi), the majority of the time the meetings of the cooperative were almost exclusively in Spanish. There were women and men in the cooperative who did not speak Spanish, but the vast majority of adults who did not understand or speak a language other than their own Mayan tongue were women. A large number of women, particularly Kekchi and Kanjobal women, did not speak or understand Spanish beyond a few basic phrases. Many of these women still attended the assemblies (perhaps because attendance was mandatory) but it was very unlikely that they understood a large part of what was being said. At times, some Kekchi women did voice their concerns at the assemblies in their own language, but it was rarely translated for the rest to understand, and thus their contribution was lost to non-Kekchi speaking people.

On the other hand, although the majority of women did not participate in the meetings, tending to be the silent majority, some did actively participate. In an interview with one of the leaders of Ixmucané, Juliana, she stated that one of the achievements of Ixmucané thus far is that “women are participating in the general assembly of the cooperative, which is new. Some give their opinion, but before the women did not give their opinion. They had fear. They were embarrassed.”

Nathalie, one of the Southern Coordinators for Project Accompaniment, came to visit the community while I was there, and attended one of the assemblies of the cooperative. She had spent time in various returned communities in her current position and when she had been an accompanier. She found that the level of member participation by both men and women and the *ánimo*, or sense of community spirit, at the assembly in La Esmeralda was impressive in comparison to those she had attended in other communities. This

is likely a very good sign of the advancement of women's participation. However, that does not mean that the level of participation, and of women in particular, in the cooperative could not be improved by trying to design a way to be more inclusive.

In this chapter, it has been shown that the cooperative provided the people of La Esmeralda with a number of opportunities and alternatives, which they would otherwise not have had. This gave them hope and possibilities for their future. On the other hand, it was also noted, there were a number of challenges which the cooperative faced, and its future success was not guaranteed. A number of the difficulties faced were around the issues of participation, gender and participation, and gender inequalities.

For Guatemala, the cooperative is relatively progressive in terms of gender equality. However, as indicated women were still not treated as equal with men. To work towards the attainment of equal status with men, the women of La Esmeralda maintained the organization which they formed in Mexico, Ixmucané. The following chapter will focus on Ixmucané and its projects, two vehicles for their emancipation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: IXMUCANÉ: A VEHICLE FOR WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

We weren't taken into account. That hurt us a lot. Then we realized that the community didn't think that women were important. There's where we started getting organized as women again.... We also realized that we needed to work to regain our rights and to promote the involvement of women. (Rodríguez, 1993: 5)<sup>1</sup>

As was discussed in chapter one, the realization of their right to be treated equal to men, pushed the women in the refugee camps to organize and create their own organizations. As a consequence, Ixmucané was founded in November 1993 to represent the interests and ensure the participation of women who intended to return to the Petén with the CCPPs of the veriente norte.

### **The Role Model of the Goddess Ixmucané**

Giving their organization the name Ixmucané was very symbolic. In the Popul Vuj, the sacred book of the Mayan ethnic group, the Q'ichés, Ixmucané is the grandmother of the Mayan people: one of their creators, a goddess, a women, and Mayan. One of the former coordinators of Ixmucané explained her story:

There were three gods - creators - and Ixmucané, a women. Then there were four gods. They formed a team who would meet to discuss problems, as we do now. Between all they would come to a conclusion. They got together to see how they could make the men of com, the human race.<sup>2</sup>.... The participation of Ixmucané was important because she

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Rodríguez (1993) is Doña Eva, she was one of the leaders of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda .

<sup>2</sup> The Mayan people call themselves the people of corn. Corn is the main staple of the diet of Mayan campesinos, and corn tortillas are eaten at every meal.

ground the corn, for example when they made the first man.... [After making men of rock and wood that did not work], they meet again to see what they were going to do. All of a sudden they saw the corn and Ixmucané, who is our grandmother, ground the corn and made nine drinks with the corn. Ixmucané said 'with my corn I can make distinct classes of drinks.' And they say she made nine classes of corn drinks to make the muscles, the blood and all that. Then she made the men of corn. And he worked and was very strong. And this is how the Pueblo Maya and the men of corn grew. (Eulalia)

Ixmucané worked with the other gods to create the Mayan people, just as the women's organization Ixmucané worked with the CCPPs of the North Veriente, actively organizing the collective returns to the northern Guatemalan department of the Petén. And as the organization of Ixmucané worked with the cooperative of La Esmeralda in building the community. The role of woman in the Mayan creation story corresponds, with some poetic licence, to two of the objectives of Ixmucané: "to organize ourselves, as women to actively participate in the preparation of our return to Guatemala, to plant our proposals in this stage of reinsertion... [and] to organize ourselves as women to have active participation in the community structures of our new communities" (Ixmucané, 1993: 2).

### **Objectives of Ixmucané**

The other four objectives of Ixmucané which were established at its first constituent assembly in November 1993 included:

to organize ourselves, as women to defend our rights and search for equality between men and women in our family, our community, in work and in all the structures where decisions are made in our country; besides being recognized as mothers and housewives, to be recognized as campesinas who are productive and actively contribute to the family economy and to be regarded as such in the model of human development

and community that we are looking for in our new community and the regions where we will return; we will organize as women to defend our Mayan culture and to recuperate that which we have lost after so many years in refuge; and to be recognized as an organization of women and have relations with other groups and organizations of women who also search for peace, democracy, justice and equality in our country. (Ixmucañé, 1993: 2)

To achieve these objectives the women of Ixmucañé had planned different activities to prepare themselves for the new stage of life once they had returned to the northern district of Guatemala, the Petén. The activities, *capacitación* for production, projects, and the training of their leaders all had the underlying goal of helping them meet their objectives.

As discussed previously, unlike the CCPPs, once the return was complete, Ixmucañé was not replaced by an elected community council like the cooperative's *junta directiva*. Rather, while maintaining its executive council, which would be largely responsible for issues outside of the community (other returns, the peace process, and involvement with other women's organizations) another level of the organization was developed. This level would work specifically at the community level.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will focus on the work of Ixmucañé at the level of the community in La Esmeralda.

### **Organizational Structure of Ixmucañé**

In La Esmeralda, Ixmucañé is a separate organization from the cooperative and from the CCPPs. There were two Ixmucañé executive council members in the community, Doña Eva and Juliana, who were most often in

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<sup>3</sup> In theory, the executive council is responsible for the more macro-level work of Ixmucañé and the local coordinators work mostly at the community level, putting the more micro-level plans into action. In reality, the structure of Ixmucañé is much more fluid, and both levels work at both the micro and macro-level.

charge of assemblies and general meetings. There were also coordinators for each *barrio* .

As with the cooperative, the organization into *barríos* was advantageous because it allowed for meetings in some *barríos* to be more easily held in one of the Mayan languages, along with translation in Spanish if needed. In this way the women who did not speak Spanish were not excluded, as they often were at the meetings involving the cooperative. As well, in the general assemblies and meetings of Ixmucané, there tended to be more translation into one or more of the Mayan language (particularly Kekchi, Kanjobal and Mam) than at the meetings and assemblies of the cooperative. Obviously, this made Ixmucané gatherings more inclusive, especially for women who tended to have much lower Spanish skills than men.

Ixmucané and the cooperative had one main goal in common: they both were working for the development of their community. Ixmucané also had another equally important goal, which many would argue is a precondition to their achieving their development goal. The women in La Esmeralda through Ixmucané, were working for the development of their community *and* for attaining equality between the sexes.

Prior to their flight to Mexico, the women of La Esmeralda explained that

we [the women] did not know our rights. We didn't know how to claim our rights. We did not participate and we thought we were less [valuable] than men. And that our work was only in the house. But now. NO. We know that we can do more. That we have the right to participate, speak, give our opinion, and work... And that we can train ourselves in new things. (Ixmucané, 1994)

As this quotation illustrates, a personal transformation occurred while in refuge. Realizing that they were equal to men and should have the same rights, through the organizations which they formed in Mexico, they began to work towards having those rights acknowledged and respected.

The achievement of equality between the sexes is an impressive goal to set, and many would think unattainable. But, through Ixmucané's efforts of "creating spaces for women so they can participate, learn, and struggle for development and become the leaders of tomorrow" (Juliana), the women of La Esmeralda were working towards its attainment.

The women of Ixmucané believed that their active participation in the life of the community and the development process would be the means to achieving its two goals, gender equality and community development.

According to Doña Eva,

the principal objective of Ixmucané is to increase the participation of women to prepare them so that tomorrow they have the right to assume responsibilities. Not only men can be president or treasurer of the cooperative, women can as well. (Doña Eva)

Four months after this interview, in the second annual elections of the cooperative's *junta directiva*, Doña Eva was elected the next president.

Through Ixmucané, the women in La Esmeralda are active both outside and inside the community. As was discussed briefly in Chapter One and mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Ixmucané participated in the Guatemalan peace process through the Assembly of the Displaced Population. As well, because of their exemplary organization, the women of Ixmucané had been asked for assistance by other women and women's groups in non-returnee communities. Since they had a wider vision and believed that they

could act as seeds for change in Guatemala, the women were pleased to heed the requests from their neighbours. In the community itself, one of the ways in which Ixmucané was working to achieve their two main goals was through the women's participation in its projects.

### **Projects of Ixmucané**

While I was in the community a number of projects were actively running and others were at various stages of implementation and planning. The active projects included: the *hortaliza* (the vegetable garden), the *molino* (corngrinder), and the *programa de alimentación* (the nutrition programme). Projects that were at various stages of implementation and planning were: the *tejido* project, *guardería* (daycare), the *panadería* (bakery), and two *proyectos de pollo* (chicken projects). As well, Ixmucané initiated the creation of four women's basketball teams and two women's volleyball teams. The women's sports teams provided an opportunity for the women to *disfrutarlo* (enjoy themselves). According to Juliana, the creation of the teams is because "*las compañeras* also have the right to play. They have the right also to not spend their whole life in the house".

### **Hortaliza - Vegetable Garden**

To prepare themselves for their return to Guatemala, while in Mexico collective vegetable gardens for women were started in some of the refugee camps. This was to give women the opportunity to learn the basics and grow their own vegetables (Santo). When they returned to Guatemala they wanted to "recuperate this idea [*of hortalizas*] that had began in Mexico" (Santo), especially since the conditions were ripe. In Guatemala, they were no longer

limited by the amount of available land, nor did they have access to earning money in the wage economy as they had in Mexico, making the conditions for growing vegetables both favourable and necessary.

The immediate objective of the project was to provide vegetables to the families of the women who participated in it, and to bring them together to work and share experiences. The long-term financial objective of the *hortaliza* was for the women to sell their produce both inside and outside the community. This would provide women with the opportunity to earn an income, which many believed would be one of the steps towards helping to improve women's position in the community.

Assistance with the project was needed and an agreement was reached with ADEPAC, a Guatemalan NGO, that they would supply the project with seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and the services of a Guatemalan agronomist (Don Elmer). Ixmucané also petitioned the cooperative to set aside a piece of land, close to their temporary settlement, where the women could set up a common vegetable garden. A large plot close to a water source was fenced off and given to the 45 women who were going to participate.

The women were divided into 4 groups, based roughly on ethnic lines with a Kekchi group, a Mam group, a Q'iché group and a 'mixed' group. The 'mixed group' was composed of women who were from one of the other ethnic groups (Ixil, Kanjobal and Jacelteco), all of whom could also speak Spanish, or were *ladinos*, who only spoke Spanish. After strong disagreements between members in the largest group (the Kekchi group), the group split into two, making a total of five groups. Each group was autonomous and all five groups had: its own section of land, in the fenced off area which had been designated as the *hortaliza*; its own supplies from ADEPAC; its own coordinator; and

eventually its own water tap.<sup>4</sup>

The coordinators were each to organize their own group and were responsible for the supplies from ADEPAC. They were also supposed to participate in the training sessions given by Don Elmer, with the expectation that they would pass on their new knowledge to the people in their group. If any serious problems arose in the *hortaliza*, the coordinators and the leaders of Ixmucané were supposed meet to discuss them and search for a solution together.

The way in which each group organized how they worked was quite distinct. Once the creek had dried up making watering of the vegetables more time-consuming, the Mam group decided to divide up its plot so that each woman could have her own *tabla* (bed) to plant *rábano* (radish). Because the community was soon to move to their permanent settlements, *rábano* was the preferred crop since it reaches maturity in six to eight weeks. Since the family could only eat a limited amount of radish, the majority of the crop was sold to their neighbours in La Esmeralda or Limones. The Mam group also shared other crops, which every woman was responsible to water.

The Q'iché group had a large fluctuation in how many women participated. The group started with seven members, then shrank down to

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<sup>4</sup> When the dry season began, the creek which ran by the *hortaliza* began to dry up and the women petitioned ADEPAC for the resources to put in a water system. After receiving permission from the *junta directiva* to tap in to the community's water system, the women installed the water system to the *hortaliza*. The system ran hoses underground from the community's water reservoir to the *hortaliza* and each group had their own *chorro* (tap). The organization, participation and effectiveness of the women in the installation of the water system was truly impressive.

Unfortunately, the water system had its own problems. For one, the hose was not wide enough, and the result was that the water came out very slowly from the taps. Also, the hose was cut a number of times. It was never determined whether this happened by accident or whether the hose was cut intentionally. Another point related to the new water system concerned the different groups' attitudes towards sharing their tap. Some groups did not mind if other groups used their tap if they were not in the *hortaliza*. Other groups did, and would remove the knob to their tap when they were not there to prevent others from using it.

three, after four women left La Esmeralda to return to their former home communities in Guatemala. Shortly after, two other women left the group telling me they no longer wanted to participate because: “they did not have time” or “it was too much work”, and the coordinator of the Q’iché group, Francisca was *brava* (difficult to get along with).<sup>5</sup> Their departure left Francisca as the only member of the Q’iché group. She then recruited a family friend, her brother-in-law’s wife, and another woman in the community, so the group was back up to four members. After a short period of time the number dropped down to three. One of the new members left, her stated reason being that she and *her husband* did not think it was safe for her to be out watering at night, the only time that one of the hortalizas had access to the community water supply. <sup>6</sup>

The Q’iché group revolved around Francisca. It is likely her leadership style and energy that led this group to have a lot of success in terms of productivity. They had taken over land in other areas and had four separate vegetable gardens. But, it was also largely her leadership style that had led at least three members to quit the group.

The groups which appeared to have the most overall success in terms of

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<sup>5</sup> Francisca can be described as demanding and very industrious. While in her first trimester she continued to work hard in the 3 different hortalizas that she had started and even started a fourth, despite ill health. She did have a miscarriage and was forced to take a number of weeks off from working in the hortaliza.

It cannot be assumed that her working hard in the hortaliza led to her miscarriage, but it could have been a contributing factor. Another contributing factor could have been her age; she was 38 years old which is relatively old in a rural Guatemalan society to be having one’s third child. As well, miscarriages and spontaneous abortions are very common in La Esmeralda. In the community, the women’s lives are very labour intensive and often they do not receive an adequate diet. Both of these factors and the overall living conditions which exist in most less developed rural communities likely contribute to the early unintended terminations of pregnancies.

<sup>6</sup> There are snakes in La Esmeralda and thus, not wanting to work in the garden at night for safety concerns is well founded. However, I suspect that there are a number of other reasons why she no longer wished to work in the *hortaliza*. In part I believe there could be other unstated reasons because she seemed to far prefer working in the *campo* to working in the kitchen, and appeared to take every opportunity to go out to the *monte* (bush) with her sons, husband or female neighbours. Therefore, the work in the *hortaliza* would have likely appealed to her.

production and group cohesiveness was the 'mixed' group. There were five active members in this group and they always worked together. Their coordinator was a Mexican women, who had married one of the returnees when they were in Mexico,<sup>7</sup> Cleotilde. She did not have an autocratic leadership style like Francisca; instead the majority of the decisions were made through informal consensus. Although, this group had its problems, largely due to some personality clashes, overall it was very successful.

I would suspect that two of the main reasons why this group seemed to work better than the others was the members' consensus decision-making process and their conscientiousness. All women arrived at the hortaliza on time (relatively for Guatemalans) and if they could not come, they sent one of their children, or their mother in their place. They also all worked hard for the entire time they were there. However, two of the women (one a single mother and the other who for many weeks had to attend to her dying mother in-law) expressed to me that the high standard which had been established, of mandatory attendance, was a bit hard for them to maintain.

Prior to splitting into two groups, the Kekchi group had been the largest with over 22 members. Originally, to better utilize their time, they divided into two, with half the group responsible for watering in the morning and the other half for the afternoon. One of the factors which led to their eventual split, and the formation of two distinct groups, was that the afternoon group was accused by the morning group of not doing an adequate job of watering, or not bothering to water at all. It is unclear, but from various conversations, another

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<sup>7</sup> There were four Mexicans in the community - two Mexican men who had married two Guatemalan refugee women, and two Guatemalan refugee men who had married Mexican women. Each family had children and the families decided to return to Guatemala, rather than stay in Mexico. Although Guatemala is much poorer than Mexico, the future of the returnees offered a lot more prospects than staying in Mexico did for a landless campesino/a.

factor which may have contributed to the dissolution of the original Kekchi group was the suspected dishonesty of the original coordinator of this group. She was suspected of selling produce from the garden and keeping the profit for herself. She was also alleged to have treated a common waterpump as her own and rented it out, once again keeping the profits for herself.<sup>8</sup> In the end, the group split into two separate groups with the majority of the morning watering group forming one group and the afternoon group forming another.

It is interesting to note how and when the split of the group into two occurred. The group that was being accused of not doing an adequate job of watering decided to form their own group. They did so when all the leaders of Ixmucané were out of the community at a meeting. The *hortaliza* was a project of Ixmucané, and therefore Ixmucané was supposed to supervise and help the project when necessary. Officially, Ixmucané should have held regular meetings with the coordinators of the *hortaliza* and helped resolve any problems or disputes. However, in the six months that I was in the community, I only ever knew of two such meetings taking place, and I was told by the coordinators that they did not happen very frequently. In the end, when the leaders of Ixmucané returned, the Kekchi group had already formed into two separate groups, and although Doña Eva did hold a meeting with them, it was after the fact and there was very little she could do.<sup>9</sup>

The two Kekchi groups organized themselves differently. The group

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<sup>8</sup> I never learned the 'truth' as to what happened, learning instead the consequences of various versions of it.

<sup>9</sup> The make-up of the two groups is interesting. In the one group all but one of the members was young, and this member was the mother of the coordinator of this group. Except for this woman, all of the members in this group spoke Spanish and Kekchi. As well, everyone in this group wore *ropa americana*. In the other group, the age range varied, with some younger women and some older. But, the average age was older. The number of women in this group who spoke only Kekchi was much higher, and it was not only due to the higher average age of the women, as some of the younger women did not speak Spanish as well. Also, almost all of the women in this group wore the Kekchi *traje*, or traditional clothes of the Kekchi.

whose members tended to be younger did not work as collectively as the older group. In fact, after a while, the number of women who regularly came to the hortaliza from the younger group dropped substantially. This was not the case with the older group. The older group had organized so that half of the women would come in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. In this group, there always appeared to be a large gathering of people working, as the women would be accompanied by their children and even a husband or other adult male member of the family. It was a unique group in that it was the only one in which the husbands would come and work in place of their wives, and sometimes even with their wives.<sup>10</sup>

Each group had had a number of harvests, all of varying success, but none of them was overwhelmingly successful. Some groups had concentrated on growing crops to sell, and others were more concerned with growing vegetables to feed their families. The women understood that this was the beginning of their *hortaliza* project and that they could expect to produce more once they had moved to their permanent site. Despite the problems which existed within groups and between groups, most of the women interviewed wanted to continue working in the new hortaliza once the community had moved to the urbanization site. Nevertheless, some women did stipulate that whether or not they were going to work in the collective hortaliza depended on how far it was from their house.

The urbanization site was very large. Where the hortaliza was going to be located, and if there was going to be only one large hortaliza or smaller ones

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<sup>10</sup> In the younger Kekchi group some husbands also came to help their wives, but only just after the larger group had split and they were dividing the land and reworking the land to plant their first crop. After that was completed, the only husbands that I saw working in the hortaliza were those from the older Kekchi group. It appeared that in this case more visible gender egalitarianism existed amongst the more 'traditional' Kekchi group. This runs counter to the common belief that 'traditional' societies and groups are less egalitarian than more 'modern' societies or groups.

in each neighbourhood, had not yet been decided. If there was only one large *hortaliza* it would have the advantage of bringing the women all together in one spot, and might save on very limited material resources. However, it would have the drawback that it would be located further from the homes of the majority of the women. Some women said they would discontinue their participation if this was the case. Not wanting to have the added work and time commitment of walking a great distance to the *hortaliza*, they would plant their own garden by their house instead.

The majority of the women in the community choose not to participate in the collective garden. I asked one of the leaders of Ixmucané why she thought this was, and if she thought it was a problem; she responded that she did not think it was a problem. She suggested that the reason most of the women did not participate in the *hortaliza* was because it was not their *gusto* (their liking):

Ixmucané has various projects because not all like the same work. One likes one kind of work and another likes another kind of work. One women weaves and another works in the *hortaliza*, or in the bakery. But, the thing is to look where everyone can work. Not everyone is going to want to work in the *hortaliza*. In La Esmeralda there are going to be other alternatives. (Doña Eva)

It is true that not every woman was going to like the same work, and that some may not like to work in the *hortaliza* and thus would not participate. However, I spoke with a number of women about why they did not participate in the *hortaliza*, and none of them said they did not work there because they did not like the work. Instead, many other reasons were given.

The most common reasons stated for not participating were: "I don't have any time", "I can't because of my children", and "there are too many problems

between the women in the hortaliza". That is to say, there were many obstacles to women's participation.

One of the major obstacles was that women were already overburdened. On average, the working day for women in La Esmeralda started around four or five o'clock in the morning when they began to prepare their families' breakfasts. Their day was filled with the domestic work of maintaining the family; cooking, washing dishes, taking care of the children and any sick member of the family, washing clothes, collecting water and participating in the projects of Ixmucané. As well, all of the women were involved in the work of the *campo*.

As shown in the previous chapter through the description of the lives of Clara Cecilia and Emeldina, the lives of single mothers was particularly challenging. All single mothers, and some married women, would frequently work in the fields to clear the land, plant, fertilize and harvest the crops. Once the crops had been harvested all women were involved in preparing the crops to be sold, or consumed by the family. In fact, the work of taking the corn off the cob, removing the beans from the pod or the peanuts from their shell was largely the responsibility of the women. Another task which demanded women's already limited time was their community-related work: their attendance at assemblies and meetings of Ixmucané and the cooperative; their voluntary commitments to projects of the community, and their nonvoluntary commitments to community work.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is quite understandable why some women felt they did not have the time to participate in the collective garden.

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<sup>11</sup> Some examples of the mandatory community labour are: the *manos de obra* and the providing of meals for the international companions and other visitors to the community. The community has a rotation system whereby every so often the female head of household was given the responsibility to provide the day's meals to one of the companions or visitors to the community.

The average mother in La Esmeralda had at least three children. Some women, particularly the Kekchi women, brought their children to the hortaliza with them. The smaller ones were strapped to their mother's, sister's or brother's backs and the toddlers who were not attended by an older sister, brother or neighbour would sit in the shade waiting for their mother to finish. However, the women who brought their children to the hortaliza would have preferred not to, realizing the heat and sun is hard on their children, not to mention the affect of the pesticides.

A few women told me that they did not participate in the hortaliza because of their children. These women had no other family in the community and each had an infant and a toddler. Since their youngest children were not yet in school, and they did not have any other family in the community, there was no time during the day when the women could go to the hortaliza to work, unless they brought their children with them. Not wanting to expose their children to the hazards in the hortaliza, they chose not to participate.

The reason most often given as to why they do not participate in the hortaliza was not because of their children, nor because of lack of time, but rather because they believed there were too many problems in the hortaliza working collectively with other women. Some women had worked in a collective garden or other collective all women project in Mexico and had had bad experiences, and therefore did not want to participate. Others had not worked with other women in a collective project, but had heard of bad experiences so did not want to participate.

The 'problems' that these women believed to exist all revolved around issues of the quantity of work that each person did and the relative amount of produce given according to the amount of work. "One wants to work and the

other one doesn't", "they don't understand when one can't work", "we have a big family, but received the same as families with no children", "all the women work the same, but the ones with more kids get more" and "some work more than others and when the time comes to divide up the harvest everyone wants the same." These are all common and mutually contradictory reasons given by the women as to why they choose not to participate in the hortaliza.

The above concerns raise important, fundamental questions around the notions of participation, working cooperatively, and sharing the outcome of that work. What does it mean to participate? Why should one participate? What does one have to gain from participating? Does it mean participating only as a labourer? Or does it include making the decisions? What is working cooperatively? Does working cooperatively mean that you work on the same project at the same time, and then divide the fruits of the collective labour according to each person's contribution? Or, do you divide according to need, allowing each individual to work to the degree they are able, then parcelling a share to all the members dependent on their need? But is that an equal share? Is an equal share related to need or contribution? What are the benefits of working cooperatively? These would seem to be important questions to look at before, during and after any project. By the concerns raised and the various ways that the different hortaliza groups organized themselves, it does not appear that there is one clear and definitive answer. In the case of the *hortaliza*, each group appeared to have found different but workable answers to these questions. It is interesting to note that once the groups had time to establish their own way of working and resolving these issues, they did not appear to have many problems around these issues.

## ***Molino* - Corngrinder**

Through funds solicited through ADEPAC, Ixmucané purchased a motorized *molino* (corngrinder). For a small fee, corn from the homes in La Esmeralda and neighbouring Limones could be ground. This would spare the mother of the house the time-consuming and physically demanding job of grinding her corn by hand. As well, in some cases the workload of the women was even further reduced because other members of the family took the corn to the *molino* to be ground.<sup>12</sup> On average, 90 to 100 people used the *molino* every morning and afternoon.

Initially, the operating of the *molino* was the responsibility of a group of seven people (4 married women, one widow, one single mother and one man)<sup>13</sup>. Every day, two women and the man were responsible for having it in operation by 5 am and then the women came once again at 11 am. Part of their job included collecting and keeping track of the money which was proffered from the customers (on average 25 centavos, 6 Canadian cents per customer). The seven workers each received 30 Quetzales a month (less than eight dollars Canadian).

At first, it was believed that the money being made at the *molino* was not being well accounted for, resulting in allegations of mishandling of funds and theft. To rectify this problem, in an Ixmucané assembly two women volunteered for the unpaid task of coming twice a day to collect and record the amount of money earned. At the end of each month, they would give the money to the

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<sup>12</sup> Six different times María Rafael (a young woman in the community) and I surveyed the people who were using the *molino*. We found that on average half of the people who brought the corn to the *molino* were the mother of the family and the other half were a child, five times out of six it the daughter and only one time out of six was it the son. Only one time did a husband bring the corn to the *molino*, and that was because his wife had just had a miscarriage.

<sup>13</sup> The individuals in this group were a diverse lot. They were from a cross section of the ethnic groups, some were very involved with the organizational hierarchy of Ixmucané and others were not, and some had young children and the others had only adult children.

treasurer of Ixmucané along with their records.

However, other problems arose. The women who actually operated the *molino* were paid. Being one of the few paid employment opportunities for women in the community, there was some disagreement amongst the women as to who should have the jobs. Recognizing the difficulties faced by single mothers, widows and orphans, it was suggested that the jobs should be open to them. Eventually, two young women without fathers and one young single mother took the positions.

The process involved in getting the young women to work at the *molino* was not an easy one. At an Ixmucané assembly the proposition was put before the single mothers; most of them flatly rejected the offer, explaining they did not have the extra time to do this work. It was then suggested that the older daughters of single mothers or widows should have the option for this work. Standing in front of the assembly, one of the young women who had been offered the job began to cry. She told the others that she wanted to accept the job, but that she was hesitant to do so because she did not want the women to be talking about her behind her back, as they had done to the other women who had worked at the *molino*. Her impassioned speech raised an issue which I would argue is a real hindrance to the advancement of women in the

community: *chismes* (gossip).<sup>14</sup> In the end, this women and two other women took the jobs, on the conditions that people would respect them and not gossip about them.

The transition to these three women being largely responsible for the running of the *molino* was smooth, as they were not left without assistance. They were helped by María, one of the former workers who lived very close to the *molino* and one of Ixmucané's *barrio* coordinators. On a positive note, once these young women took the job, and the new collecting and recording of earnings from the *molino* was taking place, I did not hear of gossip about them, nor was there any contempt for these new workers. Many women still did not use the *molino*, however, with some complaining that it was too expensive and that it had been much cheaper in Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> As the existence of gossip in La Esmeralda attests, gossip is not restricted to teenage North American girls, as some might suspect. Goldsmith's (1989) cross cultural study, found that gossip appears to be widely distributed across different cultural systems. It is also not restricted to only one gender. Johnson's (1994) study discovered that men also participate in gossip. Gossip has been found to serve many functions in a group, organization, or society. Kinney (1994) found that gossip served to help establish 'meaningful identities'. Noon (1993) uncovered that in organizations gossip offered individual escapism and social mobility. It can also serve to strengthen social relations (Eder and Enke, 1988). There have been many studies which have investigated gossip as a form of social control or reinforcer of social boundaries (Eder and Enke, 1988; Black, 1984; and Fine, 1986). I do not wish to go into a discussion of gossip in La Esmeralda, but simply raise the point that it was very prevalent amongst women and men. It likely did serve many positive functions in the community, like those noted in the above studies. On the other hand, from my observations I would say that gossip can also be a very negative force, which can greatly hinder BOTH individual and community advancement.

<sup>15</sup> An often heard complaint in the community was that things were cheaper in Mexico. Even though Mexico is a relatively richer country than Guatemala, at least before the 1996 drastic reduction in the value of the Mexican peso, the goods and services in Mexico were much cheaper than in Guatemala. As well, in the Petén goods and services tend to be more expensive than in other parts of Guatemala, because of high transportation costs.

## **Programa de Alimentación - Nutrition Programme**

Six months after their return to Guatemala, all children in La Esmeralda under six years of age were weighed. At roughly the same time, money for a nutrition programme arrived in the community, perceived to be provided by the Catholic Bishop of Guatemala City. Before the programme started, all the children were weighed and each was given anti-parasite medication. Of the 216 children, the parents of 162 of them decided they would participate in the programme. Of these 162 children, over 34% suffered from some degree of malnutrition, as can be seen from the following table:<sup>16</sup>

**Table One: First results from weighing the children 6 years and under who participated in the nutrition programme - January 23, 1996**

Total number of children weighted	162	= 100.0%
'Above weight'	1	1.4%
'Normal weight'	105	64.8%
'At risk'	16	9.4%
'First degree malnutrition'	16	9.4%
'Second degree malnutrition'	20	12.4%
'Third degree malnutrition'	5	3.0%

(Source: ASECSA, 1996)

As part of the nutrition programme, a glass of *atol*<sup>17</sup> was given six days a week to each participating child and to every participating women who was breastfeeding a baby six months and younger. To try and extend the duration of the programme it was decided that 50 centavos (approximately six Canadian

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<sup>16</sup> The measure of malnutrition is by a 'health curve' put out by the World Health Organization. According to the chart, a child at a certain age should weigh in a certain range. If they fall below that range they are said to be suffering from malnutrition. There are three degrees of malnutrition, depending on how far below the 'normal' average weight the child falls.

<sup>17</sup> Traditionally *atol* was a drink made out of corn dough cooked in water, salt, sugar and milk (if available). The *atol* which was made for this programme was more diverse. Sometimes it was made of soya milk, or with oatmeal instead of corn, and other times peanuts were added.

cents) would be charged per month for each child.

It is not clear whether or not the programme was initiated by Ixmucané, but the organizing, administering and implementation of it was left in their hands. At an assembly of Ixmucané, one woman from each of the four *barrios* whose children were going to be receiving *atol*, volunteered to be the coordinator of the programme for their *barrio*. One of these women, Cristina, also agreed to be the main organizer, keeping track of the programme's funds and supplies. To participate in the programme, in addition to the fee of 50 centavos per child, when it was her turn the mother was obliged to work in the community kitchen making the *atol*. In addition, once a week the mothers of participating children were required to supply a load of firewood.

The efforts of the women quickly showed results. Less than three weeks after the programme had started, the percentage of children who weighed 'normal' or 'above normal' had increased from 66 percent to 77 percent (see Table Two).

**Table Two: Second results from weighing the children 6 years and under who participated in the nutrition programme - February 23, 1996**

Total number of children weighted	190	= 100.0%
'Above weight'	2	0.4%
'Normal weight'	145	76.4%
'At risk'	1	1.0%
'First degree malnutrition'	22	11.6%
'Second degree malnutrition'	18	9.5%
'Third degree malnutrition'	2	1.2%

(Source: ASECSA, 1996)

Luis, a health promoter in the community with the NGO ASECSA, warned that the improvement in the children's weight was likely not only the result of

their receiving a glass of *atol* six days a week. Its benefit could not be denied, but this must also be put alongside the effect of the anti-parasite medicine, which rid the children of their parasites (at least in the short term), allowing them to better utilize their food. As well, he pointed out, there had been a harvest, so families had more food, were eating better, and their diet was being supplemented by the recently started 'emergency food programme'.<sup>18</sup>

After the nutrition programme had been running for almost seven weeks, its positive impact was still apparent in the increased weight of the participant children. It was found that from the start of the programme, the number of children in the programme who suffered from malnutrition or were 'at risk' had almost halved, from 34.8 percent to 18.8 percent.

**Table Three: Third results from weighing the children 6 years and under who participated in the nutrition programme - March 22, 1996**

Total number of children weighted	192	= 100.0%
'Above weight'	11	5.7%
'Normal weight'	145	75.5%
'At risk'	5	2.6%
'First degree malnutrition'	23	12.0%
'Second degree malnutrition'	7	3.6%
'Third degree malnutrition'	1	0.6%

(Source: ASECSA, 1996)

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<sup>18</sup> Oxfam Belgium had donated money to the two communities in the Veriente Norte, La Quetzal and La Esmeralda, for an emergency food programme. In each community volunteers were elected to administer these funds. In La Esmeralda one woman and two men were in charge of the programme. Their work included selecting what food to buy, going to the market in the largest town in the Petén, Santa Elena, to price out the food, buy it, organize its shipping to the community and its storing and distribution once it had arrived in the community.

This is a very different type of 'food aid' compared to the food aid provided in the community by Canada and the United States. In the community the evidence of the tied aid practice by the Canadian and American governments is evident in every house with their jugs of canola oil with large Canadian flags on the side and the bags of corn and peanuts with 'product of the U.S.A.' stamped on them.

The sample size is small and there was incomplete data on the children who did not participate in the nutrition programme (see Table Four), but it does indicate that they suffered from a higher degree of malnutrition. Although it is inconclusive, this may be more evidence that the nutrition programme run by Ixmucané had a beneficial impact on the children who participated. In addition, according to ASECSA, they saw a reduction in gastrointestinal problems amongst the children, which they attributed to the programme (Luis).

**Table Four: First results from weighing the children 6 years and under who did not participate in the nutrition programme - March 22, 1996**

Total number of children weighted	15	= 100.0%
'Above weight'	0	0.0%
'Normal weight'	7	46.6%
'At risk'	1	6.6%
'First degree malnutrition'	4	26.4%
'Second degree malnutrition'	3	19.8%
'Third degree malnutrition'	0	0.0%

(Source: ASECSA, 1996)

One of the problems I observed in the running of the nutrition programme was around the issue of the fifty centavos monthly fee for participation. The concerns over the cost ranged from: those who simply could not afford this amount, to those who could afford the fee, but were against it on principle since money for the programme had already been donated. There were also those who could not afford the fee, and if they could, simply would not, because of the principal mentioned above. There was also a problem with a mother who refused to take her turn in the kitchen making the *atol*. There were also other children who did not participate, because their mothers did not have the time to

take their turns working in the community kitchen.

While it is true that many of the families in La Esmeralda have very little or no money, in some cases I had my doubts whether their decision not to participate was because they could not afford it. For example, one mother told me that her sons were not receiving *atol* because of the fifty cents a month charge per child. Instead of taking part in the highly subsidized nutrition programme, she then went on to say that she would make *atol* for her children. Considering that a small bag of milk or soya milk costs at least twelve quetzales (twenty-four times the cost of the child being in the programme for one month) this fact undermines the argument that the reason her family did not participate was due to the cost.

On the other hand, some people stated that even if they could afford to participate in the programme they would not, given that the money for it was already donated. This attitude, of expecting not to have to pay, I believe, was the result of living in refugee camps in Mexico for over a decade. While in the camps, generally, the people received a great deal of assistance from aid and development agencies. Many likely became accustomed to not having to pay a small fee for services or goods. In La Esmeralda, from watching some of the interactions with the various NGOs, GOs, United Nations agencies, and solidarity groups, it was evident that a degree of dependence on outside assistance still existed.

There were other marked examples of this 'dependence on outside assistance' in the community. One involved the cooperative and the buying of a cooperative truck, and the other, the women and a chicken project. In both cases, there was great hesitancy by many of the participants to move forward with the project, unless they would receive full financial aid from an outside

source. They had the option of receiving a loan, but did not want to go this route. Some members grew quite frustrated at their colleagues, and commented that “we can not depend on others our whole lives.”

In the case of the nutrition programme, the objection to the monthly fee for participation may also have been the result of a misunderstanding or poor communication as to why the charge was being applied. With the language differences and perhaps lack of effective communication, sometimes the reasons for certain policies were not understood.

Another reason given for not participating in the nutrition programme was that the mothers did not have time to take her turn in the kitchen. As already indicated, the mothers in La Esmeralda worked almost continuously from when they rose early in the morning until they went to bed. For some women, the added pressure of taking their turn in the community kitchen to make *atol*, along with having to supply firewood, was too much.

One woman, Olga, had four children, three of whom were under 6 years of age, and potential were beneficiaries of programme. However, since her husband was teaching at the school four mornings a week, and she did not have any other family in the community, there was no one but herself to run their store and take care of their kids. As a result, she did not have the time to take her turn making the *atol*. Although this may not be the only reason why her children did not participate,<sup>19</sup> it does raise an interesting point. Her husband works more than twenty hours a week teaching the children of the community, but their children do not receive a glass of *atol*. Perhaps then, this is why some families do not participate: as a form of protest against their lack of

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<sup>19</sup> I say that this may not be the only reason, because usually there are many complex reasons. Often as we continued to talk, people would later give another version or aspect of the story. In this case, our conversations never got to those other reasons.

compensation for work which the father, and sometimes mother, perform freely for the community.

As with the cooperative, the nutrition programme also had problems with some participants not doing their share of the work. At an assembly of Ixmucané, the problem was raised that one coordinator was having problems with one mother in her group. This particular mother did not want to take her turn working in the kitchen, telling the coordinator that she did not have the time.<sup>20</sup> The question was put before the assembly of women "what can we do with this woman who will not do her share of the work?" It was decided that the only thing they could do was what the cooperative had done with the men who would not do their *manos de obra*, try and shame her into doing her share of the work. As the other women saw it, "if she does not want to work, she does not want to work. What can we do?"

### **Tejido - Weaving**

Our ancestors handed many things down to us that in exile we have been losing... But through sharing the experiences we've all had, we've been able to rescue many good things that our ancestors used to practice. (Rodríguez, 1993: 6)

One of the objectives of Ixmucané, as previously noted, was to "organize as women to defend our Mayan culture and to recuperate that which we have lost after so many years in refuge" (Ixmucané, 1993). One particular project of Ixmucané which focused on the 'recuperation' of what had been lost while in exile was the *proyecto de tejido*, or weaving project.

The art of weaving is a Mayan tradition which has been passed from mother to daughter for a millennium. To this day, in the Guatemalan

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<sup>20</sup> This same woman was also at the centre of the conflict in the Kekchi group in the *hortaliza*.

countryside Mayan women and girls can be seen working with their backstrap looms. The final product may be a *hupil* for a woman or girl in the family, or it may be a wall hanging which will go to a local or foreign market to be sold, perhaps eventually adorning a wall in a country that its creator will likely never visit.

When they fled to Mexico, the weaving tradition which was normally being passed down from mother to daughter was broken in many families, and many of the females in the younger generation did not learn how to weave. In La Esmeralda, a weaving project was initiated to bring back this tradition and to provide a potential income source for the participants. Doña Fabiana, a Mam woman in the community, taught the techniques of backstrap weaving to eight young women who desired to learn, with Ixmucané supplying the thread.

When the project started the women appeared to have much energy and enthusiasm to learn how to recapture the lost art of their ancestors. Because *hupils* are very expensive to buy, many of the young women did not have their own and were excited about making one for themselves. They also had visions of making products which they would be able to sell, providing them with their own source of income.

The initial burst of energy began to fade, and the women were no longer seen grouped together weaving. Doña Fabiana agreed that her students seemed to have lost some of their enthusiasm in the weaving project. She suggested this might be because the women did not have a market for their goods, and without a market they were unable to purchase needed thread.

To try and rectify this 'market' problem of where they could sell their products, the women approached the UNHCR for help. When I talked to Isabel from the UNHCR, she explained that they had not been able to find a market for

the women's weaving. She said they had asked the women for samples that the UNHCR could show when looking for a potential market. But, the women still had not given them any samples, and the process seemed to have stalled there. However, as Isabel pointed out, the market for Guatemalan woven goods was already quite saturated. The saturated market in all likelihood would have meant a poor return for the women's efforts, unless they created a yet-to-be-found niche. Four months after its initiation, this project seemed at an impasse, and when I left no further progress had been made.

From the above description of the *tejido* project it is apparent that there were a number of reasons why it had reached an impasse (lack of a market, need of a market to purchase more thread, loss of interest, not carrying through with providing samples to the UNHCR). These reasons and the fact that they contributed to the cessation of the project, even if only temporary, are indicators of a number of things. First, the women do not have the mobility, as of yet, to find their own markets for their woven goods, and were dependent on the UNHCR. Second, if a project is started there should be investigation prior to its commencement that there is a market for its goods. On the other hand, if one of the main objectives of the project was for women to recapture part of their heritage which they lost while in refuge (the art of weaving), then perhaps finding a market was not as imperative. However, if this is the case, this must be a decision made and clearly understood by the participants, thus preventing false expectations and eventual loss of interest in a project.

### ***Guardería - Daycare***

The noise of crying children had reached unbearable levels, drowning out the megaphone aided voice of the speaker. "MOTHERS, take your children

out!”<sup>21</sup> demanded one of the men in the crowd. Realizing that the meeting could not continue with the current unrest of young children, many women got up to escort their young ones out. The scene was a general assembly of the cooperative *La Nueva Esperanza* in La Esmeralda. Unfortunately, this spectacle was often more the norm than not.

The call was not ‘PARENTS, take your children out!’ or ‘MOTHERS or FATHERS, take your children out!’ but was ‘*MOTHERS*, take your children out!’. This is an illustration of how women were not only primarily responsible for the family’s children, but were often the only one responsible. Men in the community took very little responsibility for childcare. As a consequence, it is obvious why women in the community noted that “one of the obstacles to our participation are our children” and “our biggest problem is our husbands” (Ixmucañé, 1994 and Juliana, 1996). To try and remove the lighter of these two ‘obstacles’, Ixmucañé suggested that “the best solution is to have a house where young women and old women who are trained can take care of the them [the children]”, a *guardería* (daycare) (Ixmucañé, 1994).

A number of young women and one older woman had shown interest in being daycare workers and went to a few workshops and training sessions organized by the NGO ADEPAC. Ixmucañé solicited for financial assistance to build the daycare facility. Their request was answered again by ADEPAC, who surprisingly sent 45,000 Quetzales to the *junta directiva* of the cooperative to help finance the project, and not to Ixmucañé.<sup>22</sup> Once the funds were received, two women in the community then volunteered to be on the *comité de la guardería*, to help administer the funds and oversee the construction of the

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<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note, this comment directed only to mothers and not to fathers did not seem to raise any eyebrows except for my own.

<sup>22</sup> I never asked ADEPAC nor the cooperative or Ixmucañé why the funds were sent to the cooperative and not to Ixmucañé, believing that it may be too sensitive a topic to bring up.

daycare.

When I left the community, all but two of the families were still living in the temporary community. Since the daycare was going to be built in their permanent settlement area, construction of it had not yet begun. However, the women who were going to work in the *guardería*, as previously mentioned, had already received some training and were still waiting for supplies, such as crayons, paper and toys. It was hoped that once the daycare was running, and the women felt comfortable administering it, it would prove to be a great assistance in increasing women's participation, and aiding Ixmucané and the women's struggle for equality and community development.<sup>23</sup>

### **What Has Ixmucané Done for You?**

From the above discussion, it is apparent that Ixmucané has provided the women of La Esmeralda with a lot of alternatives to increase their participation and correspondingly to become more empowered. These are options which none of the women in the neighbouring communities have, and the women of La Esmeralda would likely not have if they were not organized. Therefore, the importance of Ixmucané to the women in the community, and to the community as a whole, is apparent. It had been instrumental in the community development efforts of La Esmeralda, and in increasing the participation of women and aiding them in gaining their voice. Unfortunately, it did not appear that many of the women consciously realized how they had benefited by being collectively organized.

In an assembly of Ixmucané, when the women were asked "what has

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<sup>23</sup> Ixmucané also had a number of other projects, including two chicken projects and a bakery project. These will not be discussed, as not much had been done and they were still in the planning stages when I left.

Ixmucané done for you?”, there was a long silence. Then one woman who was very active in the *hortaliza* responded, “for my part, I do not think Ixmucané has done anything to benefit me”. Doña Eva proceeded to explain to this woman, and the other women how projects like the *hortaliza* came to La Esmeralda because of proposals made to NGOs by Ixmucané.<sup>24</sup> She then went on to explain in greater detail how Ixmucané worked and what work it did. This assembly illustrated that there was a dangerous gap of knowledge and understanding between the leadership of Ixmucané and the base, the majority of the women, of how Ixmucané operates and what it does. Since the continued success of Ixmucané depends on the continued participation and support of not only its leadership, but of all women, it must ensure that it is inclusive as possible. That is, women at all levels should be involved and informed, or have the opportunity to be. If this is the case, women will understand what Ixmucané is, and how it is helping them, and as a result, they will be more inclined to support it and benefit from it. For although the situation may improve in Guatemala as a result of the peace agreement, there are still many obstacles which the people of La Esmeralda face. And from their experience thus far, they have shown that through being organized and actively participating in their own development they achieve a lot.

With the recent end of more than three decades of war, there is reason to celebrate in Guatemala. However, as discussed in Chapter One, although the war is over, it is clear that the thirty-six years of war have woven violence into the nation’s fabric. According to the peace agreement, the state-sanctioned

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<sup>24</sup> In the past three chapters, the reader has seen how ‘outside agents’ (NGOs, GOs, United Nations agencies, and solidarity groups) have played an important role in the advancement of the community. Since it is not the focus of this chapter, but it is important, I would like to refer the reader to Appendix D, for a more detailed discussion of the ‘outside agents’ that were present in La Esmeralda.

community death squads, the PACs, will be disbanded, but it is unclear as to how and if all their weapons will be removed from their respective communities. As part of the peace accord, there is also supposed to be a reduced army. However, the Guatemalan Army is still the most powerful institution in the country and it would be naive to think it would be prepared to easily give-up any of its power. As well, delinquency in the country is sky-rocketing.

Not only is direct violence part of the national fabric, but increasingly the violence of poverty is consuming it. From 1980 to 1989, the percentage of the Guatemalan population which was considered 'extremely poor' almost doubled (UNICEF, 1994). One of the outcomes of this process of impoverishment has been the number of landless campesinos who have fled to the Petén. On land which they do not own, these campesinos are living a life of subsistence with very few options and little hope for an improved future.

Amongst all of this, La Esmeralda is a little oasis. The people of La Esmeralda have returned to Guatemala empowered and capable, and through their organizations, ready to build their new life, community, and country. As was discussed in Chapter Three and in this chapter, through their cooperative and women's organization in less than one year they made remarkable progress in establishing their new community, and in attaining some of their development objectives.

Although they have made great advances, as was also shown, it has not been easy. They have faced many problems, most of which involved participation. Although it is clear that the people's active participation is both necessary for advancing both the community and the people, it is also problematic. There are a number of barriers and obstacles to collective participation. Some of these are a result of the greater Guatemalan context.

Even though La Esmeralda may be an example of new hope in Guatemala, it is still affected by what might occur in the country as a whole. Others problems around participation appear to be more related to the cooperative and Ixmucané, or to individuals. The following chapter will look at the literature on participation and development in order to gain more insight into participation in La Esmeralda its barriers and obstacles.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE LESSONS OF LA ESMERALDA.**

In the preceding chapters, we have seen that through the projects of Ixmucané and their cooperative, *La Nueva Esperanza*, the people of La Esmeralda were building for themselves new lives and a new community. Their efforts, coupled with outside assistance, had enabled the community's endeavours to be largely successful. In less than a year after their return to Guatemala from Mexico, they attained many of their development objectives, and with renewed confidence they continued to pursue new ones.

Although their collective efforts have been the principal reason for the rapid development of their community, this process has not been without its drawbacks. As noted by Doña Eva, "there are always problems when working cooperatively" . In Chapter Three and Four, the "problems" faced by Ixmucané and the cooperative were discussed, and it became apparent that they largely revolved around the issue of participation, or the lack thereof. The participation of the people of La Esmeralda is critical to the advancement of the community, but participation is not a panacea. There are a number of difficulties and potential difficulties associated with relying on the actions and efforts of individuals for the advancement of a group. If these difficulties associated with participation are not addressed with care and much consideration for the future, they could become systemically and socially entrenched, thus hindering genuine efforts to achieve a lasting success.

In this chapter, reflecting on the experiences of participation in La Esmeralda, some of the problems and barriers will be discussed. From this, a list of factors to be considered when participation is the cornerstone of a

development strategy will be suggested. Prior to this, however, a definition of participation must be established.

### **History of Participation in Development**

The development plan which La Esmeralda followed, with the active participation of community members in the cooperative and Ixmucané as its foundation, is linked to a change in development practices and theories which began more than thirty years ago. In the late 1960s, the concept of participation made its first entry into development dialogue (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994), resulting in it becoming a popular facet of development policy by the early 1970's (Galjart, 1981). By the early 1980s, 'the lost decade of development', participation began to lose ground in international development discourse. The dogma dictated by the neoliberal policies during that time, "legitimized only certain forms of participation: basically, those of the individual pursuing his or her own interests within certain legally codified rules of the game" (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 182). As such, there was "no room for organized efforts" (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 18).

Although the impact of this period is still being felt to this day,<sup>1</sup> in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the pendulum has swung back. Participation has re-emerged to a point where "it is now almost reactionary... to propose a development strategy which is not participatory" (Oakley et al., 1991). According to Stiefel and Wolfe, (1994) "participation has never enjoyed as much official legitimacy as today" (220). However, as in the 1960s and 1970s, there still does not exist one single all-embracing definition for the term

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<sup>1</sup> One of the impacts has been on the promotion of market approach micro-enterprise development. For a discussion of market approach to gender and micro-enterprise development and the opposing empowerment approach, see Mayoux (1995c).

'participation'. In fact, Ghai (1988) suggested that the "growing consensus owes much to certain ambiguities in the concept of participation" (1). Tri (1986) did not only see that there were 'certain ambiguities' in the term, but that participation in development discourse "can mean whatever one wants it to mean" (11).

The flexibility of the term may have its benefits, such as allowing it to be adaptable. On the other hand, it can also be very negative. As Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) noted, this flexibility has allowed the term to be used to legitimize "manipulative paternalistic policies" (18). They also pointed out the danger of its ambiguities because "like Sustainable Development, [it] has become one of those catchwords, that everybody advocates, each has their own definition of, and few put into practice" (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: backcover).

### **Participation = Pluralist Democracy**

One of the standard uses of the term, and the one with "the longest and widest acceptance", equates participation with pluralist representative democracy (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 23). In other words, participation by some is defined as the act of marking an 'X' on a ballot and dropping it in the ballot box. Many believe that the participation of the electorate in a western-style democracy is the first and necessary precondition in bringing about 'development'.

Goulet (1989) argues that the re-democratization wave which was sweeping through parts of Latin America and Asia in the late 1980s provided the opportunity for popular participation, an essential founding and fundamental component for development. According to him, the change in these countries from dictatorships to popularly elected officials

radically challenges the development strategies pursued during [the previous] periods of dictatorial rule. The cry for greater political freedom is paralleled by demands for more equitable development policies. (Goulet, 1989: 165)

However, even though democracy can allow for the demands of the populace to be heard, their demands may fall on deaf ears. Thus democracy, I would argue, will not necessarily result in a radical reorientation of development strategies, or inclusion of the majority. As Goulet (1989) admits, “without development participation of the non-elites, even political democracy will be largely a sham” (176). In many ways, this can be said to be the case in Guatemala.

As pointed out in Chapter One, in 1985 the first democratic elections were held in Guatemala, since the people of La Esmeralda and over a million other Guatemalans had been forced to flee their homes earlier in that decade. The election of Cerezo, the first civilian head of state for a number of years, was seen as “the first ‘political opening’ of any kind in Guatemala’s recent history” (Jonas, 1991: 162).

The space that opened eventually did allow for the cries of the public to be heard, as the daily protest marches in front of the National Palace in the capital attest. The return to a democratic system was also an essential prerequisite for the return of the refugees, both in their desire to return, their ability to negotiate the conditions for their return, and the agreement of the government to their return. However, change to more ‘equitable development policies’ has not followed on the heels of the changes from a dictatorship to pluralist democracy. Rather, since the time when the country has embraced pluralist democracy, the situation for the average Guatemalan has not

improved, but has become worse.

The level of poverty in the country increased drastically between 1980 and 1989..... in reality, it has been a process of impoverishment, in that many families that before were not poor, now are. (UNICEF, 1994: 52)

During this time the percentage of homes that were 'not poor' decreased from thirty-seven percent of the population to twenty-four. At the other end of the spectrum, in 1980 some 32 percent of the population was considered 'extremely poor', whereas by the end of the decade over half of the families (54%) in Guatemala fitted in this category.

As well, pluralist democracy has not meant that citizen participation has been welcomed in the country. To this day impunity for political crimes committed by the country's security forces prevails. The photos or headlines on the covers of the country's national newspapers, of the tortured remains of another political or social activist found on the side of the highway or telling the details of the kidnapping of another activist's child, is testimony to the State's continued resistance to true popular participation. And the dramatic increase in the percentage of the population who are considered 'extremely poor' is an indicator that there has not been a radical change in their development priorities. The non-elites have been excluded. As a result, some would argue that in many ways 'democracy' in the country appears to be somewhat of "a sham".

On the other hand, if participation is to be defined purely in electoral terms - voting and multi-party politics - although the 1995 elections saw less than a fifty percent voter turnout, the emergence in those elections of the only 'left-wing' political party in Guatemala, the *Frente Democrático Nuevo Guatemala* (FDNG), is a good sign for the potential of participation in

Guatemala. However, most would agree with Iman and Ibrahim (1992), that if participation is to be equated with democracy “democracy cannot be relegated to the modus operandi of voting (or not) for politicians every few years” (17).

### **Participation and Its Different Forms at the Community Level**

At the community level, participation is most often defined as more than the act of voting for locally elected officials. Its definition encompasses a range of interpretations. Overall, there is agreement by development agencies and practitioners that the participation of the intended beneficiaries is essential for the success of community development efforts. However, a uniform conceptualization of participation beyond that does not exist, and ‘in the field’ it is defined and operationalized in a number of ways.

In the literature, various methods have been used to interpret and categorize the plethora of definitions given to participation. The categories created help to untangle the mess of translations of participation. However, as noted by Oakley et al. (1991), these categories are not mutually exclusive; and all development initiatives which promote participation are not necessarily located within one or the other. However, although the lines between the different categories are permeable, “the general thrust of most development projects could be located in one” or the other (Oakley et al., 1991: 7).

In the section which follows, instead of listing countless definitions given to participation by scholars, policy-makers and development practitioners, the ways in which these definitions have been interpreted and subsequently categorized in the literature will be reviewed, in brief. They will then be interpreted in light of my research in La Esmeralda, and from this interaction an appropriate definition for participation in the community will be developed.

## **Participation and Dichotomies**

In the literature, many of the interpretations of the way in which participation has been used and defined employ the use of dichotomies. Participation in development initiatives is either top-down or bottom-up; the intended beneficiaries are either passive or active agents; and their participation either works to support the status quo or works for change. Yet, binary thinking can be very limiting and often, when applied to the 'real world', it is found to be inadequate, with reality being more of a mix of the two than one or the other. In spite of their limitations, these interpretations of participation still can provide some tools for explaining what has been experienced and differentiate alternative ways of understanding the concept.

### *Participation as 'modernizing' the participants vs. utilizing better the participants as they are*

"At the risk of grotesquely oversimplifying", Oakley and Marsden (1984) have divided the various conceptualizations of participation into two camps (13). One form of participation is implemented on the premise that little is wrong with the direction of development practice. The relative lack of success of development initiatives thus far is not the result of the the prevailing development practices, but rather the consequence of neglecting the 'human factor'. What is needed is the injection of external information into the participant, thereby increasing their knowledge base. The involvement of the participant is necessary, but only once he/she has been transformed, or 'modernized'. Once they have become modernized, they are ready for active participation in projects which have been conceived of by others for their benefit.

The opposing interpretation of participation believes that it is not the participant who needs to be transformed but the direction of the development, as development is fundamentally flawed. This interpretation claims that there need to be new directions and new modes of organization in development initiatives. The participation of the intended beneficiaries is necessary, but they do not need to be 'modernized'. Instead, their preexisting knowledge needs to be better incorporated and utilized.

It is not the failure to take into account the "human factor" which is at fault, but rather the unreflexive way in which the developers were left out of the equation and the rather unilateral way in which they dealt with what were regarded as passive recipients - consumers rather than producers. (Oakley and Marsden, 1984: 13)

#### Participation for efficiency versus participation for empowerment

White (1982) noted that in projects with a high level of participation, the benefits were numerous.<sup>2</sup> Two of the overarching potential benefits of participation are: it will make the project more efficient, and it will empower the participants. Another way in which the various uses and definitions given to participation have been interpreted is according to the primary reason for its use, because of its efficiency potential or its empowerment potential (Bamberger, 1986).

For some development initiatives, the primary reason why participation of the intended beneficiaries is integrated in project proposals is because it makes the project more efficient. For example, from an efficiency perspective, the use of indigenous knowledge and expertise is advantageous because: "they use

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<sup>2</sup> According to White (1982), the sum of the potential benefits of participation include: more will be accomplished; services can be provided at a lower cost; felt needs will be guaranteed to be involved; things will be done the 'right way'; there will be freedom from dependence on professionals and their high cost; and they allow for the use of indigenous knowledge and expertise.

local labour and raw materials rather than imports; maintenance and repair will be easier for local craftsmen, and there will be less demand for scarce skilled manpower or spare parts” (White, 1982: 30). Projects which advocate the use of participation because of its efficiency potential tend to be: top-down, project-centred, and the participants tend to be passive agents.

For other projects “empowerment is essential to participatory development” (OECD, 1995: 8). These development initiatives value participation more for the qualitative benefits that it can bring to a project, and the accompanying empowerment potential. Through participation, people may become more aware of the nature of their oppression, thereby gaining skills, knowledge, self-confidence, and a sense of power that they can begin to challenge the oppressive structures which they have identified. Projects whose primary objective is empowerment will look quite different than projects whose primary objective is efficiency. They will tend to be more bottom-up, people-centred, with the participants as active agents.

#### *Participation as means versus participation as ends*

Another interpretation of the various forms of participation classifies them according to whether participation is seen primarily as a means to an end, or as an end in itself. The use of participation as a *means*, is to use it to achieve some goal or objective. “In other words, participation is a way of harnessing the existing physical, economic and social resources of rural people in order to achieve the objectives of development programmes and projects” (Oakley et al., 1991: 7). As with projects whose primary reason for using participation is because it will help them be more efficient, those who see participation as a means see the results as more important than the act of participation.

Some argue that participation “is one of the principal needs of man (sic)” (Trí, 1987: 11). It follows that there are those who advocate the use of participation because of its intrinsic value. That is, they see participation as an *end* in itself. When participation is used in projects because it is seen as an end, the act of participating is as valuable (or more valuable) to the project as the accomplished goal. The purpose of participation is not to achieve a goal or objective but “to develop and strengthen the capabilities of rural people to intervene more directly in development initiatives” (Oakley et al., 1991: 8). Thus, time spent in long assemblies and meetings is not seen as time ‘wasted’, because of the value it holds to the people who are participating in the activity.

However, as Goulet (1989) points out, with the “dual nature of participation [which is] evident in most development settings”, the value of it as both a means and an end becomes evident (166). That is to say, those who at first advocated participation because they saw it as a means to meet development objectives, begin to see its intrinsic value, and *visa versa*. In fact, “at the international level, most multilateral and bilateral agencies have recognized the importance of participation both as a means and as an objective of development” (Ghai, 1988: 1).

*Participation as participation in the extractionist approach versus participation in democratization of development process*

In his discussion of the African experience of participation in development, Wanyande (1987) makes a distinction between participation which is advocated as part of the ‘democratization of the development process’, and that which is part of an ‘extractionist’ approach’ to development. The interpretation of participation within the ‘democratization of the development

process' is based on the belief that the participation of the potential beneficiaries is essential and prudent. Since they know best their needs and priorities, and are better able to identify them and offer solutions, they should be an active part at all stages of development efforts.

The 'extractionist approach', on the other hand, is more paternalistic and as such, does not see the role of participants as very important. Conversely, it believes that people do not know their own development needs and priorities, nor how to solve them. As a result, the role of the people in this approach is confined to the provision of the labour necessary for a particular project, whereas the government is a key participant. The 'extractionist' approach "emphasizes the inevitability of central government intervention in identification, planning and implementation of development activities and projects" (Wanyande, 1987: 94).

Similarities between the dichotomies presented are obvious. There is one class which sees participation as important primarily for pragmatic reasons. Therefore, this group I will refer to as *pragmatic participation* and includes: participation as means; participation in the extractionist approach; participation for efficiency; and participation as 'modernizing' the participant. At the other end of the spectrum, the other group sees the importance of participation primarily for the benefits gained from the act of participation. Since one of the major benefits from the process is empowerment, this group I will refer to as *empowerment participation*. Included in this group are: participation as end; participation in the democratization of development process; participation as empowerment; and participation as better utilizing the participant.

## Participation and Level of Entry

There are also interpretations of participation which are not based on the binary thinking exhibited above. A 1975 United Nations study and a 1969 M.I.T. report categorized participation according to at what level participation entered in a development initiative. Participation was defined as: participation in the mass sharing of the benefits of growth, participation in implementation, and/or participation in decision making.

Years later, Cohen and Uphoff (1980) devised a “state of the art review” for looking at participation in rural development which has been particularly influential in the way it has related participation to development projects and suggested the key stages in this process (Oakley et al.: 1991). The key stages which they noted were the same as the M.I.T. report’s and United Nations study’s entry level of participation, but they had added one to the list - “participation in evaluation”.<sup>3</sup>

The first level of entry of participation is in the ‘mass sharing of the benefits of development’. The introduction of participation at this stage came about as a result of the realization that the fruits of development efforts were not reaching the poor. Subsequently, a cry for ‘distributive justice’ was sounded. Demands were made to change economic policies to ensure that the poor and poorest sections of a society could ‘participate’ in the economic benefits of development initiatives. In this instance, the poor people’s participation can be equated with the passive receiving of goods, services and programmes. In

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<sup>3</sup> Goulet (1989) notes that the sooner the entry of participation in the development process the higher the quality of participation. Therefore, according to Goulet, the highest quality of participation involves participants in decision-making, with lower quality of participation if it is only at the implementation phase. Participation is of even lower quality if it occurs only at the benefit stage.

these more difficult economic times, with resources of all forms being taken away from the poor, this level of participation is rightly seen as very important. However, although 'distributive justice' is critical, in itself, it is not enough to bring about true and sustainable development.

There are other ways in which participation has been conceived which called for more active involvement of the intended beneficiaries; the next level of increased involvement is entry of participation at the implementation of development efforts. The M.I.T. report defined this form of participation as "participation in the work of development, though acquiring and putting to use the skills that characterize modern man (sic)" (Hapgood, 1969: 4). This conceptualization of participation is very similar to the interpretations of *pragmatic participation*, in particular: participation as a means, participation as 'modernizing' the participant, and participation for efficiency, as discussed above. The participant would become 'westernized' and then put his/her new knowledge and skills to use in a development project which they did not participate in the designing of.

Participating at this level, 'putting to use' newly learned skills, is not necessarily to the benefit of the participants. As the United Nations study (1975) pointed out

a programme to build rural feeder roads by means of community self-help may, in effect, benefit the large landowners and middlemen who are in a position to take great advantage of the roads more than the people who built them and who may have needed other types of facilities. (6)

There are a number of other examples in development practice of how participating in a project at the implementation stage has not been of benefit to the participant. An extreme example are mega-projects, such as dams.

The poor peasants 'participate' in the project of a mega-dam by moving off their land, because it will then be used as the dam's reservoir. They may receive a small stipend for their land, or be moved to other, more marginal land, or if they are the most unfortunate, holding no legal title to the land they receive no compensation. As well, the countryside does not become lit up, by the building of this dam, as the power does not go to the surrounding countryside, but rather to the city. Even if the peasants move to the city, having lost their land, they will likely still not benefit from the dam. Being forced to live in one of the shantytowns on the outskirts of the city, they will still be left in the dark.

In the case of La Esmeralda, because collectively the people are much more in control of their development, there are no extreme examples of participants not benefiting, either directly or indirectly, from their participation. There are times when participation is simply at the implementation stage, for example the *manos de obra* system, as described in Chapter Three. However, this is connected to the running of their cooperative, from which they receive great benefit.

To make sure that the participants benefit from their labour, it was seen by many that participation should be extended to the next level of entry of participation, namely participation in decision-making. The level at which the participants enter in the decision-making process varies from taking part in making: the initial decisions; the ongoing decisions; and/or operational decisions (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980).

Participation at this level does not guarantee that the benefits will go towards the participants, either. The U.N. report (1975) noted that participation in decision-making, in fact, can be meaningless if the participants have no choice in defining the situation which requires a decision. That is, if the act of

participating in decision-making is to be meaningful, participation must include choosing the options, as well as participating in the final decision of picking one option over another. In other words, if the participant can be part of the initial decision-making process, the likelihood of them benefiting from the project is greater than if their participation only occurred later, in the making of ongoing and operational decisions. That is not to say that participation at these stages is not as important, but for a project to address the needs of the participants, their participation from the beginning is important.

Once a project is under way, and often not until it has been completed, there is an evaluation of it. The final level of entry of participation is participation in evaluation. According to Cohen and Uphoff (1980), this is a stage of participation which had often been neglected in development projects with "little written - or actually accomplished " on it (221). Even though the process of evaluation is very important for further learning, rarely are the participants part of the evaluation of a development initiative. This would lead one to question how future endeavours will not repeat mistakes of the past, if those who are supposed to benefit from a project do not partake in its evaluation.

There is a correlation between the level of entry and the dichotomies presented. The group of interpretations of participation referred to as *pragmatic participation*, being more focused on the efficiency and the cost-effective value of participation would likely involve the participants only at the benefits and implementation stages.

On the other hand, *empowerment participation* would build its development strategy on participation of the beneficiaries participating at all levels, especially right from the beginning at the initial decision-making phase. Believing that the intended beneficiaries know their situation the best,

*empowerment participation* would be certain to give great importance to participation at the evaluation level.

From having read the preceding chapters on the community of La Esmeralda, its cooperative and Ixmucané, the reader will note that the later interpretation of participation, *empowerment participation*, more closely characterizes the type of participation which prevailed in La Esmeralda. In theory, in the larger scheme all participation in La Esmeralda was connected to the long-term goals of the cooperative and Ixmucané; community development, empowerment and gender equality, which all would benefit from.

The importance of the process of participating for its empowerment potential was seen as very important, as demonstrated by the countless assemblies and meetings. Through their participation in these meetings all adult members of the community were supposed to have an opportunity to partake in the decision-making process. As well, at times during assemblies of the cooperative and Ixmucané there would be an evaluation of these organizations, with additional meetings for evaluating a particular project. On the other hand, there were projects, as mentioned, in which 'pragmatic participation' prevailed and there was little chance of empowerment potential as the people's participation was only at the implementation and benefit stage. However, they were connected to the larger community development process and its potential for power-gaining.

A good example of the people's participating almost exclusively at the implementation and benefit stage was in the project to install the community's water system. The project was contracted out to CECI by the UNHCR, as part of its 'rapid impact projects'. Two Guatemalan engineers who were working for

CECI came to the community to draw up plans for the system. The men in the community were 'involved' in the project, in that they went out to the urbanization site with the engineers and carried their equipment. Once the plans were drafted, the 'passive' participation of the men continued as they dug the ditches and laid down the piping for the system. Their participation was the 'means' through which the goal of getting water to each house was to be achieved. Also, their 'volunteer' labour reduced the costs and made the project more 'efficient' and likely allowed it to be possible. Although the men's participation fits into the pragmatic participation category, because the decision to have potable water to each house was likely made at the level of the cooperative, of which they are a part, they did play a part in the initial decisions.

On the other hand, it appeared that the cooperative may not have participated a lot in the ongoing and operational decision of the water project, as these were left in the hands of CECI. It is important to remind the reader that one of the main reasons why the majority of the people had not moved to the permanent urbanization site a year after their return, was because the water system had not yet been put in. From talking with some members from the *junta directiva* it was apparent that they were frustrated with the slowness of the implementation and completion of CECI's 'rapid' impact project. I suspect that this, in part, is a result of the cooperative not participating significantly in the ongoing and operational decisions. It is not clear what recourse they had to speed-up the process, but one of the members from the *junta directiva* remarked that they were going to write a letter to show their disapproval of the situation.

As stated, generally speaking, people in the community participated at all levels, right from the start with the making of the initial decisions. The

description of La Esmeralda, moreover, also indicates great variance between, and within projects, as to the quality of participation and who participated. An example of this is the women's collective garden project.

The original women's collective garden projects were started in Mexico, and were likely not at the request of the women, but rather as an initiative of an NGO. Knowing that they were returning to Guatemala, the women later made the decision to request ADEPAC to assist them in La Esmeralda in order to establish another collective garden.

In the project itself, and within the five groups, the level of participation of the women was varied. In some groups the women participated at all levels and the decision-making process was very decentralized with decisions being made through consensus. In another group, the decisions were largely made by the coordinator, and the other women in the group were largely participating only at the implementation and benefits stages. Thus, according to the 'level of entry' typology the type of participation which occurred in the collective garden project can also be said to be variable.

One might assume that the group in which decisions were made collectively was 'better' than the group where one woman made most of the decisions. There is some evidence that this might be the case; the former group was most productive and maintained all of its members, while the later group, although very productive, had constant membership turnover with the only permanent participant in the second group being the coordinator. However, there may be other cases when, due to the restraints of time and resources, participants may decide that they want a strong leader who will take the responsibility for operational and ongoing decision. Although this may take away some of the empowerment potential which comes from participating, if the

members maintain some ability to have control over the decisions made, it is not necessarily a less valuable option. An example of this is in the cooperative.

In the assemblies of the cooperative, in theory, all the members make the initial decisions concerning it.<sup>4</sup> The day-to-day running of the cooperative, on the other hand, is left in the hands of the elected *junta directiva*. That is, the operational decisions are made by the *junta*, as well as many of the ongoing decisions. However, the members can re-call their elected representatives at any time, and thus indirectly participate at all levels of decision-making.

As can be seen by the above examples, the type of participation which generally occurs in La Esmeralda can be said to be *empowerment participation*. However, the reader will likely agree, *empowerment participation* does not fully describe participation in the community. A major component is missing.

### **The Missing Component - Participation and Organization**

The people of La Esmeralda have not returned to Guatemala to exist as their neighbours, who, according to Emeldina, "try to make a living on a little bit of land... [and having] no idea to search for alternatives." Instead they had returned empowered, and ready to build a new community, the development of which they controlled. In addition, they were creating a number of alternatives for the collective. They had control of their development and could create a number of development options because they were organized through the cooperative and Ixmucané. This follows with Galjar's (1981) proclamation that "an increase in self-governing capacity of a collectivity implies, first of all, that it must organize" (145). In the case of La Esmeralda, therefore, it is apparent that

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed, in theory, men and women in the cooperative have equal rights and access to making decisions about the cooperative. In reality, due to a number of factors a number of which are the result of the machista culture and society, overall men participate much more than women in making the decisions which affect the cooperative.

“organization is a fundamental instrument of participation” (Oakley et al. 1991: 9). As Katarina pointed out, “we would have not been able to accomplish what we have, had we not been organized.”

Since the categories of participation reviewed thus far, including *empowerment participation*, do not discuss the role of organization, and it is critically important to participation in La Esmeralda, it is obvious that they are not completely applicable. Bamberger (1986) and Oakley et al. (1991), on the other hand, both consider the role of organizations in their interpretations of the various definitions given to participation.

*Participation as community participation, local organizational development or indigenous local participation*

Bamberger’s (1986) first category of participation is ‘community participation’ in which the beneficiaries participate in the planning and implementation of projects which are externally initiated. This category is very broad and within it there is a lot of variance in the form that community participation can take place. In fact, the last three interpretations of participation, and *empowerment participation*, are forms of participation which fit under the rubric of ‘community participation’.

Bamberger’s (1986) second category of participation is participation in the development of local organizations, with external assistance. This form of participation is to be distinguished from community participation in that it does not centre around a project. Instead, participation is directed towards the building and strengthening of local organizations, which then can act as channels through which community participation can take place.

Bamberger’s third form of participation is also participation in

organizations, but it is participation without external assistance. *Indigenous local participation* is participation which does not come about as a result of outside initiatives and assistance, but rather a consequence of “spontaneous activities of local organizations” (Bamberger, 1986: 5).

*Participation as contribution, organization or empowering*

Oakley et al.'s (1991) three 'broad interpretations of participation' also take into consideration the role of organizations. Their first class of participation is 'participation as contribution', in which potential beneficiaries of projects 'donate' resources at the implementation stage.<sup>5</sup> This class of participation is very similar to some of the dichotomies noted earlier, in particular, participation for efficiency, and participation as a means.

Unlike Bamberger's 'community participation' category, 'participation as contribution' does not include involvement of the participants at the decision-making stage. Instead, participant involvement is restricted to the implementation phase of the project. Even though one would think that this form of participation, which in many ways is non-participation, would fit more with development initiatives of the past, as we saw in La Esmeralda with the water project, it still exists. In fact, according to Oakley et al. (1991),

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<sup>5</sup> Because the populations involved in development projects most often have very limited financial resources, the contribution asked of them as part of their 'participating' most often is not in the form of money. Dichter (1989) argues that this is erroneous. He believes that enthusiasm for grassroots participation has “sometimes overshadowed what we know about how people, any people behave” (Dichter, 1989:131).

He proposes an 'enterprise approach to development' which is based on two principles: “people appreciate something when they pay for it” and “people have a stake in what they own” (Dichter, 1989:134). To those who would argue that for some the contribution of money would be impossible, he would respond “it is very often the poorest who are able to come up with the small percentage of equity” (Dichter, 1989:134). He claims that they may claim that they do not have the resources, which means a “somewhat cagey waiting game may therefore be required to ensure that the project beneficiaries realize that the assisting organization ‘means business’” (Dichter, 1989). His views and his 'enterprise approach' are one of the extreme views in the literature of what participation means.

*participation as contribution* is the most prevalent interpretation of participation in development projects.

Oakley et al.'s (1991) second interpretation of participation is 'participation as organization.' The importance of organizations is generally recognized, but there is disagreement as to where it should originate from: "either such organizations are externally conceived and introduced... or else they emerge and take structure themselves as a result of the process of participation" (Oakley et al., 1991: 9).

Perhaps as a result of the imperialist tendencies of development efforts, there is a strong movement within development practice and thought that development initiatives and their accompanying organizations should come from the people. Only in this way will they truly be the people's organizations, have the most empowerment potential, and have the greatest chance of meeting real needs, as determined by the people, not by outsiders. As a result there are two camps:

The urge within development workers to *suggest* and *structure* appropriate organizations for rural people is at times uncontrollable; the alternative equally recognizes the importance of organization but seeks to *encourage* rural people to determine its nature and structure. (Oakley et al., 1991: 9) (italic added)

From my experience in La Esmeralda, I would say that it may be somewhat naive to think an organization can develop free from outside influence. Even the latter's view allows for development workers to 'encourage', which can be interpreted in any number of ways. In the case of Ixmucané, for example, the distinction made by Oakley et al.'s (1991) between organizations which form naturally as a result of a participatory process<sup>6</sup> and

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<sup>6</sup> See Verhagen's (1987) work which shows how formal organizations can come to be as a consequence of a participatory process.

those which came to be as a result of external efforts, is difficult to determine.

According to a COMADEP development worker, Ixmucané was formed as a consequence of “the whole process of participation of women in the communities, which was promoted by themselves” (Adelaide). In this interchange, it appears that the formation of Ixmucané was independent from outside influence. However, it was noted that the NGOs played an active role in programmes which promoted the participation of women, “because it was very low. The women were absent in the community. They were in their houses. They didn’t participate in hardly anything” (Adelaide). This being the case, the origin of Ixmucané may have come about as a natural occurrence through the women’s participation process. However, their participation was ‘promoted’ or ‘encouraged’ quite strongly by NGOs, and thus was quite heavily influenced by the NGOs.

On the other hand, in Doña Eva’s account of the formation of *La Nueva Union*, the women’s organization which later would become Ixmucané, the part played by NGOs is much greater than simply “promoting” the participation of women. According to Doña Eva, the refugees had been living in Mexico for five years and their housing was in very bad conditions: “it was almost two years that we had lived in the water and all our clothes were wet.” To try and rectify the situation they organized a mixed cooperative of men and women and solicited development agencies for assistance to build or repair their housing:

The [development] agencies said that if we organize the women and make a request specifically from and for the women it is more likely that we were going to get the houses. So we saw the necessity to organize ourselves [the women]. (Doña Eva)

The above quotation shows how the development agencies’ policies and priorities were an important motivator for the formation of Ixmucané’s

predecessor, *La Nueva Unión*. However, if NGOs and the larger development apparatus played a role in the eventual formation of Ixmucané, I do not believe that it takes away from the organization. Although NGOs still had influence on it, subsequently Ixmucané was controlled, organized and run by the women and they ultimately determined what the organization would be.

Oakley et al.'s third broad interpretation is 'participation as empowering'. "The relationship between participation and power is now widely accepted" (Oakley et al., 1991: 10). It is not only widely agreed that participating can potentially empower the participant, according to Oakley et al. (1991) in the past decade, but also this idea of participation as a way of empowering rural people has increasingly gained support. Although empowerment has become widely accepted in development discourse and practice, it too does not have one universally accepted definition:

Some see empowering as the development of skills and abilities to enable rural people to manage better, have a say in or negotiate with existing development delivery systems; others see it as more fundamental and essentially concerned with enabling rural people to decide upon and to take the actions which they believe are essential to their development. (Oakley et al., 1991: 9)

Whatever the disagreement in perspectives, the empowerment potential of participation has made participation a cornerstone for development initiatives which see the need for great change.

The empowerment potential should not be viewed only at the individual level. The differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes, has both contributed to, and been a consequence of, the loss of power of those less empowered social groups and classes. Therefore, "participation for empowerment necessitates the creation of organizations of the

poor which are democratic, independent, and self-reliant” (Ghai, 1988: 4). In other words, “one facet of empowerment is...pooling of resources to achieve collective strength and countervailing power” (Ghai, 1988:4). Thus, empowerment can be seen as a transformation which occurs at the individual level or at the group level, both leading to a building of strength and a gaining of power. This power can then be used to try and attain group and individual development goals.

### **The Importance of Organization in La Esmeralda**

In large part, because of their inclusion of organization, Bamberger’s and Oakley et al.’s categories which recognize that “organization is a fundamental instrument of participation” (Oakley et al., 1991: 9) are the most applicable to participation in La Esmeralda. As was shown in the previous chapters, the two organizations in the community (the cooperative and Ixmucané) were the mechanism through which the people of La Esmeralda were trying to form a new community. Without these organizations they would not have had their own school, with their own teachers, nor would they have had their own health promoters, access to an emergency fund, or a collectively owned truck. They would also not have created a daycare, a collectively owned *molino*, or a large *hortaliza* and the potential it offered for the women as a source of income. Also, if the women did not have their organization, they might not have received equal access to the land, nor been able to struggle in united fashion, as stated in the objectives of Ixmucané “as women to defend our rights and search for equality between men and women in our community” (Ixmucané, 1993). There also would not have been women on the land delegations, and as a result, the women’s interests would not have been represented. A further example of the

importance of their being collectively organized came out in a particular incident, which potentially threatened the survival of Ixmucané.

In La Esmeralda's sister return community, La Quetzal, an agronomist who worked for ADEPAC arrived with the seeds for the *hortaliza* when the local leader of Ixmucané, Gregoria, was not there. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the *hortaliza* was a project of Ixmucané, and had only come to be because of the efforts of Ixmucané. However, rather than leave the seeds with another representative of Ixmucané for them to distribute as they saw fit, he began to give out the seeds to the women in the community. For good reasons, this was found to be very objectionable by Ixmucané:

They were very angry about it, that ADEPAC didn't recognize their way of working. They thought "it is undermining our organization when you do something like that. Because you make your own structure, you make your own thing. And you are denying our existence and the way we have struggled 5-6 years to come to this point".  
(Adelaide)

By giving the seeds to the women directly and not going through their organization, the agronomist, likely quite unknowingly, was not recognizing the way in which the women had organized themselves collectively. In fact, it was said that his actions represented

one of the things we were worried about in Mexico. The NGOs would come and would not recognize the way we are working. The structures we have, the way we work with the women.... So they [the women from Ixmucané] were very astonished when ADEPAC was doing things with women without Ixmucané, without the organization.  
(Adelaide)

Although the seeds were being distributed to more women, which may have increased the amount of vegetables grown in the community, as Doña

Eva pointed out,

The objective of ours is not simply that the people eat radish. NO. The objective is that the compañeras also have the time to get together to share experiences... But, if each has their own seeds, they will plant their seeds where they feel like, and if they come to a meeting [of Ixmucané] yes. And if no one comes, Ixmucané will not advance.

And the advancement of Ixmucané is critical. As one of the development workers pointed out

A strong organization is the basis. It is the motor of it all. When they have a strong organization they can confront the problems they will have in the community, and in the national context as well....[As a result] you have to be very careful with it [the organization]. Because undermining it is undermining much more than who can eat vegetables, or who won't.... Because they know the main thing to surviving and to develop their community here in Guatemala isn't money, isn't the seeds of the hortaliza, it is the unity. The unity of the people working on it. (Adelaide)

When one looks at what the community had achieved collectively the importance of their unity through their organizations becomes very apparent. Therefore, any definition of participation for La Esmeralda must include the importance of organizing.

Although not in every project and in all instances did participation in La Esmeralda have empowerment potential, the reader will likely agree that participation in La Esmeralda also fits with Oakley et al.'s 'participation as empowering'. As the following quotation illustrates, the women of Ixmucané were very aware of the empowerment potential of participation:

The principal objective of Ixmucané is to promote the participation of women so that women can participate, prepare themselves remove the blinders from their eyes and start to think that they too have rights as women. (Doña Eva)

As this quotation also illustrates, the empowerment which the community is striving for is more than simply the power gained from the acquisition of new skills and abilities, which allow people to manage their development process better. It is also more than people making decisions and taking actions on those decisions. Empowerment in La Esmeralda is a combination of both of these forms of empowerment. At the group and individual level it is

a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control and to transformative action. (Karl, 1995: 14)

That participation in La Esmeralda closely corresponds with Oakley et al.'s 'participation as empowering'; and their 'participation as organization', does not pose as a contradiction. In fact, since "organization is a fundamental ingredient of a process of empowering" (Oakley et al., 1991: 10), they are a natural fit. Thus, a definition of participation for La Esmeralda must include both the elements of empowerment and organization.

### **Spheres of Participation**

A very different way of looking at participation is presented by the UNDP Human Development Report (Karl, 1995). It identifies four forms of participation, related to the sphere in which they take place: household participation, economic participation, social and cultural participation, and political participation. These are similar distinctions made by Ghai (1988). He noted that "participation may be examined from different levels and perspectives. One distinction relates to participation in the public domain, work place and at home" (1). By viewing participation in this way, the lack of participation of women in some areas and their over-participation in others (household participation in

particular) is more exposed and thus potentially better taken into account in development initiatives.

The first form of participation is one which is “largely neglected in most discussions on participation” (Ghai, 1988: 1), household participation, or participation at the home. This dimension of participation refers to family relations and work at home. It is an area of participation which is particularly important to consider for women, since it is “often the main - and sometimes the only - place where women participate” (Karl, 1995: 3). For women’s over-participation in the home often can prevent them from being able to participate in other areas.

Within household participation a difference in participation can be observed by the level of entry of participation. For example, the mother may be the only participant involved at the implementation stage. She also may participate at the decision-making stage, but only for minor day-to-day decisions. On the other hand, the husband’s participation may be purely at the decision-making stage. In this case, the work which results from decisions made about the running of the household are not being made by the one who has to do the work. As well, the women’s participation may be seen as ‘participation as contribution’, and having little, if any, empowerment potential.

‘Home democracy’ does not exist in the majority of the cases. The literature is full of examples of unsuccessful development initiatives which did not take this into account. Relying only on the decisions of the husbands, many projects have had very negative consequences for women. It is all very ironic that development projects have largely overlooked participation in the home, since “in relation to the time spent in different places, ‘home democracy’ is at least as important as ‘work democracy’ and is a crucial determinant of the

welfare of some members of the family, especially the women and children.” (1). Therefore, it follows that development initiatives need to give more attention to it.

Economic participation is the form of participation which is usually considered in isolation when looking at development initiatives. This is erroneous, as the “forms of participation are interrelated and cannot [should not] be viewed in isolation” (Karl, 1995: 2). By considering that economic participation is only one area of participation, and that it affects and is effected by the other four areas of participation, more insight can be drawn on how it affects and is affected by other forms of participation. Once again, this is particularly useful when one wishes to understand more fully gender dynamics and their influence on participation. For example, if a project is initiated to give women a potential to earn money, but the demands on their time of their household participation are not considered, the project will likely fail.

A third form of participation is social and cultural participation. Social and cultural participation is what makes each community distinctive and special. It is what gives it a feeling of vitality. Social and cultural participation occur through a wide variety of groups and organizations, from religious groups to community associations, to teams. Social participation is often an area of participation where women are given limited access to participate. This could be for a number of reasons: conservative attitudes of the society or husband; economic status; and/or excessive burden in the other areas of participation.

The final form of participation is political participation. Although political participation includes voting or the holding of elected office, it is not the same as participation as pluralist democracy. It includes the involvement in associations and organizations which try and influence the political arena.

By using together the UNDP's four forms of participation, the impact of one form of participation on another can be seen. Discovering the limitations which are created by one form of participation on another can allow for the development of a strategy which can take this into consideration, and work around it or attempt to confront it.

In the case of La Esmeralda, political participation occurs within Ixmucané and in the cooperative. The cooperative *La Nueva Esperanza* is a means through which the population can truly participate in decision-making around issues which affect them. In fact,

cooperatives have been widely advocated as a preferred means of development for women by national governments, international agencies, NGOs and feminists. (Mayoux, 1988: 3)

However, as discussed in the preceding chapter and has been shown in the literature, women are often not on equal terms with men in mixed cooperatives.<sup>7</sup> In fact, there are many cases where mixed-cooperatives reinforce preexisting patriarchy (Mayoux, 1988).

In *La Nueva Esperanza* both men and women have the right to vote, the right to stand for election, and have a voice in the running of their cooperative. However, as noted, because of a variety of factors (the culture and the society, the difficulty which many of the women have with Spanish, their over-participation in household, and the corresponding under-participation of men in the home) this has made full and equal participation of women in the

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<sup>7</sup> For a more indepth look at mixed-cooperatives, see Mayoux 's edited volume All Are Not Equal (1988). Included in this work are 17 case studies from cooperatives in Africa, many of which discuss the gender power imbalance which exists in mixed cooperatives.

cooperative not as 'full and equal' as aimed for.<sup>8</sup>

### **Participation in La Esmeralda**

The various categories of participation do distinguish features of participation in La Esmeralda. For example, at times participation was more of a means to achieving the development objectives, but at other times it was an end in itself. Most often participation involved decision-making at some level, while in others participation only took the form of providing labour at the implementation stage. However, alone, none of them capture the essence of participation in the community, as all miss important features of its character.

In spite of the many faces of participation in La Esmeralda, from the above discussion it should be apparent that empowerment and organization are two of its defining qualities. Therefore the participation which is strived for in La Esmeralda I will call '**organized participation with empowerment**' and is defined as: **both women and men being actively involved at all stages in their organizations and their corresponding projects. Through this organized participation they are becoming more aware and skilled, which leads them to have greater involvement and control in bringing about development, social justice and**

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<sup>8</sup> In her study of cooperatives in Nicaragua, Mayoux (1993) found similar difficulties and there were serious shortcomings in the attempts to integrate the women into the production cooperatives.

One way of dealing with the lack of gender equality in cooperatives is to have women-only cooperatives. However, as was seen in the case of Ixmucané, having a women-only organization does not necessarily lead to equal and full representation of all women. Some women will have the ability to participate more than others and they will likely benefit most and be able to form the organization according to fit their needs, goals and desires.

Mayoux's study (1995c) noted a similar but more exaggerated situation, likely due to the greater degree of heterogeneity in her groups of women. Not surprisingly, she found that the "women with the most time, skills and resources to contribute to participatory projects are generally those better-off women who are also less subject to norms of gender subordination and family responsibilities... Poorer women generally have very little time, resources or skills for participatory projects unless they yield a quick and tangible income". (Mayoux, 1995c: 53)

**equality in their own lives, their community, and the greater Guatemalan society.**

### **Obstacles to Participation**

*Organized participation with empowerment* is the ideal form of participation aspired to in La Esmeralda. However, at times the participation which does occur falls short of this ideal. This is because “the practice of participation does not occur in a vacuum; on the contrary it is susceptible, in both a negative and a positive way, to a whole range of influences” (Oakley et al., 1991: 10). As was discussed in the past three chapters, participation is not a panacea, since a ‘whole range of influences’ created many different problems and potential problems for attaining *organized participation with emancipation* in La Esmeralda. These problems are the result of particular key factors, or obstacles.

#### **Structural Obstacles**

Participation in any development initiative, be it a project or an organization, is limited or supported by the larger environment in which it exists. In the case of La Esmeralda, it is obvious that the situation outside of the community, in the larger Guatemalan society, had a great impact on the development and establishment of the community.

Indeed, as was discussed in Chapter One, the ability of the refugees to participate (through their elected representatives) in negotiations with the Guatemalan government to return under conditions set by them, was a result of the government’s interest to improve its international reputation. Prior to that point, the political environment in Guatemala would not have allowed the

refugees to participate as they later did. As well, the conditions under the October 8th Accord would not have been agreed upon by the government if they had not viewed the return of the refugees as advantageous to it at that time. In these cases, the political environment in Guatemala was favourable to their participation. This favourable atmosphere for their participation is illustrated in the "Accord for the Resettlement of the Populations Uprooted Due to the Armed Conflict". In the preamble to the accord, the

indispensable role that the affected populations must play in the making of decisions regarding the design and implementation of an effective strategy for resettlement" is recognized (Cdp, 1994: 1).

On the other hand, there are a number of structural obstacles which have influenced their participation in a very negative, and often violent, way. This is sometimes termed 'structural violence'. "To get beyond a concept of violence as merely sporadic and personal" in the late sixties Galtung wanted to "formulate a concept that would picture the durable, impersonal and massive violation of human beings created through social structures" (MacQueen, 1992: viii). Thus, he used the term 'structural violence'.

In Guatemala, see that there are two forms of structural violence which have proven to be obstacles to the participation of the returnees/refugees. One is what I will term 'direct structural violence', and is the result of the preeminence of the Guatemalan military in the society. The other I term 'indirect structural violence', and is a result of the structures which make and keep the majority of Guatemalans impoverished.

### Direct Structural Violence - The Military

One of the ways in which the refugee and returnee populations' participation was limited, was as a consequence of the strong role the military played, and continues to play, in Guatemalan society.<sup>9</sup> The myriad forms of violence used by the military are well documented. The existence of the army creates justifiable fear in the people, quite intentionally I would suggest, and as a result limits their participation. Less than half of the refugees in Mexico have returned to Guatemala to participate as citizens in the efforts to form a *Nueva Guatemala*, and for some of these refugees the main reason is due to this fear.

There are a few ways in which the refugees/returnees were attempting to confront this direct structural violence. One was to insist on their right to have international accompaniers, which would keep international attention on them. By maintaining an international profile, they could reduce the threat possessed by the Military, thereby minimizing one of their obstacles.

As noted, many of the people did realize that at some time in the future there would no longer be international accompaniers in the community. To ensure that the obstacle of direct structural violence from impeding their development could be removed, they had their own human rights promoters and were learning how they could protect their own rights. In addition, they were also partaking in the peace talks, whose various accords may reduce state

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<sup>9</sup> 'The Military' in Guatemala is not a homogeneous unit. Strong divisions in the Guatemalan army do exist, but "it is a very difficult animal to classify, both because of the powerful institution's secrecy and because of the tradition of conspiracy that exists in the country" (Martínez and Loeb, 1994: 6). One of the most common ways it has been classified is according to the two strategic tendencies which exist: the "institutionalists" or "developmentalists"; and the "hardliners". The former supports the Constitution and the civilian institutions it outlines. Whereas, the later "still yearns to put tanks in the streets and has only reluctantly reconciled itself to the notion of a civilian government" (Martínez and Loeb, 1994: 6). However, for the purpose of this thesis, the military is treated as a single unit, because although they have different strategies their end goal is the same. "They are all committed to the same goal of preserving existing political and economic power relationships, and believe that army must play a major role in that" (Martínez and Loeb, 1994: 6).

violence.

### Indirect Structural Violence - Poverty

The structure of Guatemalan society has also created a small wealthy elite and a poor campesino majority, who Uruguayan-born writer and political activist Eduardo Galeano noted were forced to survive off of plots of land the size of graves. This is one of the main reasons why a level of extreme poverty exists in the country, and “there is nothing more violent than poverty” (Murillo, 1992: 62).

The violence of this poverty is represented by the country’s statistics. It has one of the highest rate of mortality in Latin America, the life expectancy of the average Guatemalan is five years less than their Latin American neighbours, and 54 out of 1000 children born in the country die at birth (UNICEF, 1994). Poverty, therefore, is another form of structural violence, but a more indirect form, and it too is a barrier to participation.

Participation requires time, energy, often resources, and at some level a degree of skill and ability. This has led Mayoux (1995c) to state, “participation has its own costs” (53). In theory, since most of the people to whom the benefits of development initiatives are directed are poor, the costs of participation may be too high for them. This is particularly the case for *organized participation with empowerment*.

In La Esmeralda, there was a segment of the population which did not participate, and many of these were the least well-off in the community. Some of them gave the reasons for their lack of participation as a lack of time. Or, in the case of using the *molino* and taking part in the nutrition programme, a lack of money was the reason for not participating. By not participating they were

unable to gain the same degree of benefits, which result from being involved.

On the other hand, due to the costs of participation, the people in the community who were relatively better off had a greater possibility to participate than those who were the poorest, and often the least empowered. As a consequence, it can be seen that there was bias in favour of the better-off, as Mayoux (1995c) found in her examination of women's cooperatives. In the end, this may result in the emergence of class divisions. In fact, in La Esmeralda there was already evidence of a few more powerful families emerging. These were families who were very active in the community in leadership positions; in the longrun they will likely benefit greatly from their participation.

It is debatable whether or not class divisions are good or bad, and that is not an argument that I wish to enter here. However, the point which I do wish to make is that poverty prevented some from participating. Overall, there was some evidence that those who would have benefited the most from participating, could not afford 'the cost' of participating. As a consequence, they, and in turn the community, did not benefit from all that can be gained from their participation.

### **Social and Social Structural Obstacles**

According to Oakley et al. (1991),

The most frequent and powerful social obstacle to the participation of rural people in development projects is a mentality of dependence which is deeply and historically ingrained in their lives. (12-13)

As mentioned in previous chapters, the example of the nutrition programme, the proposed chicken projects, and the possibility of buying a larger community truck, provided evidence of the mentality of dependence possessed by some,

which may have limited their participation. However, overall this is not a powerful social obstacle in La Esmeralda, as the majority of the people tend to be quite motivated and independent - actively participating in their organizations to develop their community.

The largest social obstacle to the participation of women in La Esmeralda is a result of the machista culture and society. As has been already discussed extensively in this thesis, this has resulted in specific barriers to women's participation which include: their excessive workload, their level of education,<sup>10</sup> their level of Spanish, and their husbands.

There are no instant remedies to resolve all of the structural and social obstacles faced by 'organized participation with empowerment' in La Esmeralda. However, in light of the discussion above and that in the preceding chapters, this thesis will make some recommendations for development projects, community or women's organizations who wish to have 'organized participation with empowerment'.

### **Factors to be Considered**

As previously discussed, some of the limitations to participation were the result of structural obstacles in the greater Guatemalan society. One of these obstacles is the result of the continued forceful role played by the Guatemalan military in the society, or direct structural violence. It is apparent, therefore, that for *organized participation with empowerment* to exist and be sustainable in a society with a political culture like Guatemala's, **the project or**

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<sup>10</sup> In countries which rank low on the human development index (of which Guatemala is one), less than two-thirds as many females were literate compared to men and only received 39% as many years of schooling as men (Karl, 1995). In Guatemala the figures are not as bad: three-quarters as many females were literate, and they received 86 percent as many years of schooling as males (Karl, 1995). Nevertheless, they were still significantly disadvantaged compared to men.

**organization, in some manner, must support a movement for change in the greater society.**

The other structural obstacle which existed in La Esmeralda was as a result of the material poverty in the community, or indirect structural violence. Due to the limitations that were created by this poverty, **the immediacy of needs must be considered and not forgotten about for long-term goals.** This, however, does not mean that long-term goals should be forgotten, or be given secondary importance. A balance between the two must be established, and this 'balancing act' of different goals will not be easy.

Often in development projects and organizations, development agencies play a large role. They can be important and at times essential allies of the development initiatives. But, if the initiative is going to be successful, and have empowerment potential, **the objectives and goals of a project or an organization should ideally be developed and ultimately defined by the participants themselves.** As well, the participants must also understand and agree upon the way in which they intend to achieve **these goals and objectives.** Of course not all the participants will be as involved as others, and so channels of communication to these less involved members should be made available.

As discussed in Chapter Four, at an assembly of Ixmucané when the women were asked "what has Ixmucané done for you?", the initial response given was 'nothing'. If an organization or project is going to receive and sustain the support of its members or the community, **there must be evaluations of it and recognition of what it has done that is important.**

As discussed extensively, one of the major problems faced by their collective efforts, is due to the fact that the people in the community do not

participate equally in the cooperative and Ixmucané. In reference to the fact that some women did not do their share of the work, Doña Eva observed “not all of us are equal. For some compañeras it is difficult for them to be conscientious”. Like Doña Eva, I too “have no medicine to fix this”. However, for organizations and projects to be successful, in spite of the problems which arise out of the fact that some participate very little, it would be wise to ensure that **all must have the opportunity to participate and be actively and positively encouraged to do so.** ‘Actively and positively encouraged’ means that there should be some sort of incentive to participate. That does not mean financial incentive, which is not possible in La Esmeralda with its minimal financial resources. There are a number of other forms that encouragement could take; it could be in the form of praise, fields cleared and planted (as was done for the teachers), childcare or any other form which fits the context.

On the other hand, **discouragement of participation should be avoided.** For example, in the community the negative comments and gossip which were said about and to active participants acted as a disincentive to their participation. It is important to understand these complaints and see that they dealt with in a more positive and constructive way. Therefore, **there should be a mechanism to deal with grievances in a positive, constructive and perhaps more open and direct manner.** There is some hesitancy to recommend a more open and direct approach because in some cultures, like the Mayan and Guatemalan culture, openness and directness are not culturally appropriate.

There will always be those who participate more than others. These people are very important to an organization or project. However, over time there could be a tendency for there to be too much dependence on a small core

group of very active, committed people. To avoid the previously discussed pitfalls associated with this, **an overdependence on a few strong leaders should be avoided and time should be devoted to bringing in and giving experience to new leaders.**

In the *hortaliza*, each of the groups formed their own way of working which best suited them. Being pleased with the way their groups were organized, most of the women intended to continue their involvement in the project. This points to the **need for projects and organizations to be flexible, so they can adapt to the needs of the participants, as well as to the complications that arise every day.**

One of the major obstacles to participation in La Esmeralda was that faced by the women. Many of the above suggestions address these gender-related problems, but indirectly. Due to the significance of the barriers which confront women, it is important that **gender differences and the obstacles to women's participation be carefully examined and explicit aims and appropriate strategies be built into the project or organization to address them.** On a practical level, it can be argued that the barriers faced by women inhibit the advancement of the community as a whole. Therefore, it is essential this recommendation should be followed not only by Ixmucané and its projects, but by the cooperative and its projects as well.

In this chapter, it has been shown that participation has been interpreted in a number of ways. La Esmeralda contains elements of the various interpretations, but the importance of participation for La Esmeralda was not captured by any of them. This led to the defining a definition particular to the participation in La Esmeralda, it has been called *organized participation with*

*empowerment.*

The *organized participation with empowerment* which exists in the community has allowed the community and people of La Esmeralda to make many advances towards attaining their development goals and objectives. At the same time, from my experience in the community, it was also evident that there were a number of obstacles to achieving *organized participation with empowerment*. These obstacles were both structural and social, and although some might appear to have created too formidable a barrier to cross, there are ways in which they can be confronted and overcome. The list of recommendations are practical ways in which these obstacles can be hurdled, and *organized participation with empowerment* can be achieved along with community's development goals and objectives.

## CONCLUSION

My time in La Esmeralda proved to be a journey of discovery. When I arrived, I was captivated by the community and the people, and how they were working collectively to bring about their own development. I unquestionably believed the popular cheer shouted out by the returnees, 'el pueblo unido jamás será vencido' ( 'the united people will never be defeated' ). As I was in the community longer, I began to see that there were many problems faced by the people's collective participation efforts, and that they were not as 'united' as I had first thought. Consequently, my infatuation began to wane. Soon I was engulfed by the problems and I grew cynical and pessimistic about the possibilities of working united towards a common goal. "A united community may not be defeated by outside forces", I thought "but it may be defeated by the community itself". This cynical and pessimistic perspective would also transform itself.

With time, I began to better understand the people, the community, the obstacles they faced as individuals, as groups, and as a community as a whole. I also started to see how they were working at creating methods to overcome their collective problems. The external and internal barriers to *organized participation with empowerment* were still very apparent and would never let me return to my naive optimism. But, because of the evidence around me, I began to believe again that although it would not be easy, through collective empowered participation they could advance both personally and collectively.

I did not realize it at the time of the interview, but the following quotation from one of the women leaders in La Esmeralda contained great insight. In fact, it would also prove to contain the seeds of the knowledge which I gained from

my time in the community, and the main points which I hope the reader will acquire from this thesis:

We, ourselves, formed our own community, developed our own people. Yes, it is difficult when faced with people who speak different languages, think differently. But what is important is to have confidence in oneself and in the other people. Because, with one set of arms one can not take a hold of a great amount; on the other hand, with three or four, yes, one can do quite well. Little by little it is the work that we must do, [for] there remains no alternative. (Emeldina)

As the quotation states, and as the thesis has sought to elaborate, the people of La Esmeralda returned from Mexico 'confident' to 'form' their own community and to continue to 'develop' their own people. Having learned that "with one set of arms one can not take a hold of a great amount,.... [whereas] with three or four, yes, one can do very well" (Emeldina), they decided to maintain and strengthen the women's organization Ixmucané, and form a cooperative.

As described in Chapters Three and Four, through these organizations the people of La Esmeralda participated in the collective efforts to develop their community and further empower themselves. Their success at both these endeavours is illustrated in some of their achievements thus far: the fifty percent reduction of the number of children in the community suffering from malnutrition; a school full of children with the community's own teachers; adults being taught how to read by their neighbour's child; a group of women selling the fruits of their labour to buy a pig together; learning the Mayan art of weaving, a cultural tradition which many had lost; and women collectively organizing to demand their voice be heard and their right to land be recognized, to name a few.

In Chapter Five, the type of participation for which they strived in order to

reach these collective and individual achievements was discussed, defined, and named *organized participation with empowerment*. Considering what they have been able to achieve in less than one year, the strengths of this form of participation show themselves clearly. On the other hand, as seen in La Esmeralda, there are a number of barriers to be overcome in the creation of *organized participation with empowerment*.

Some of the difficulties faced in trying to attain *organized participation with empowerment*, as noted in Chapter Three, Four and Five, are a consequence of the nature of a group. A group is made up of individuals who are all different. These differences may be the result of “people who speak different languages, [or] think differently” (Emeldina) or they may be due to the fact that there are “those who work with great care and others who do not” (Doña Eva). Regardless of these many variables, these individual differences can make working cooperatively difficult.

The obstacles to *organized participation with empowerment* are not only a result of individual differences, however. In the discussion in Chapter Five, we saw there were also a number of structural and social barriers which inhibited organized empowered participation. The cooperative and Ixmucané had their own methods to try and surmount these barriers, and this thesis has also made some suggestions. In spite of these barriers faced, the example of La Esmeralda shows that *organized participation with empowerment* is likely the best option for the people, and perhaps, as Emeldina claims, “there remains no alternative”.

With the signing of the peace accord, which brings an end to more than three decades of war in Guatemala, there is a sense of optimism in the country,

but cautious optimism. The peace agreement does not necessarily translate into more options for the country's poor majority, especially not immediately. The military will likely continue indefinitely to be a powerful force in the country, and the majority of Guatemalans will continue to be 'extremely poor'. Therefore, it is apparent that the people's participation in their organizations is not only essential to their development, but is very likely their only option to create any improvement in their lives.

This thesis suggests a number of areas of further research. La Esmeralda was not yet a year old when the research for this thesis was carried out. What the future holds for the community, and whether it will continue to attain its development goals and objectives is unknown. Further study of its advancement will give greater insight into the sustainability of *organized participation with empowerment*.

Whether or not the community continues to be successful may depend not only on its own efforts, but on the support which it receives from others. This thesis discussed briefly the role of NGOs, GOs and international solidarity in La Esmeralda. As an international accompanier, it was clear to me that people outside of the community also had an important role in its future. Further research into the part played by these outside actors is also an important area of investigation. Another related question is, 'is this form of participatory development possible without the support of NGOs, GOs, United Nations Agencies, and solidarity groups?'. Now that the peace accord is signed, international attention will begin to shift its focus away from Guatemala. Is a

community such as La Esmeralda sustainable on its own?<sup>1</sup>

The title of Stiefel and Wolfe's (1994) 'important' book, *A Voice for the Excluded: Popular Participation in Development, Utopia or Necessity?*, poses an important question. The experience of La Esmeralda, as described in this thesis, shows that participation is a necessity. However, as discussed in Chapter Five, in development discourse there are a number of interpretations of what popular participation means. As a result of this, a more accurate reply would be, 'it depends on how popular participation is defined'.

Although the chameleon nature of participation has allowed it to become widely accepted, its flexible nature can also result in its becoming a superfluous term. On the other hand, it would be of little value, and likely impossible, to give one definition to participation. In this thesis, another approach has been taken. To ensure that the term is not a 'catchword' of little value and meaning, the participation which is strived for in La Esmeralda is defined and named.

There are a number of interpretations of participation in the literature, many of which were cited in Chapter Five, but the general term 'participation' continues to be used. The defining and naming of a specific form of participation, as done in this thesis, points to the need in the academic literature, and in development practice, for there to be more clarity and

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<sup>1</sup> In November 1989 8,000 Salvadorean refugees returned to Morazán, El Salvador and established a new community, Ciudad Segundo Montes. They tried to maintain their egalitarian values and participatory community development model, which they had cultivated, with outside assistance, while in refuge in Honduras. In 1992, after twelve years of civil war, the Salvadorean government and the rebels (united under the banner of the FMLN) signed a peace accord. According to Macdonald and Gatehouse (1995) "many of the most difficult challenges and dramatic changes [to Ciudad Segundo Montes] have come as a result of the peace accord" (3).

Part of reason is likely due to the reduction in aid, as international attention lost interest in a 'peaceful' El Salvador. The same month that the peace agreement was signed, food aid to the community ended. This had the effect of "contributing to a growing sense of uncertainty and crisis and forcing the community to reconsider the appropriateness of their organizational model for the demands of economic development" (Cagan, 1994: 41). Other challenges faced by the community's ideals were the subsequent introduction of market forces (Cagan, 1994).

specificity when the concept of participation is used. Only in this way will the term have meaning and will there be a clear understanding of its use, ending the "dialogue of the deaf" (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 238).<sup>2</sup>

It has not been without its trials, but *organized participation with empowerment* has allowed La Esmeralda to make great advances in reaching its community development objectives, thus far. For me, it is the emerald of Guatemala. It is my hope and belief that if it remains united and participatory, it will continue to make strides forward, in spite of the obstacles which it faces.

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<sup>2</sup> Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) found that 'because 'development' and 'participation' have been given so many different interpretations, which have been internalized by the 'social actors', that everyone is using the term in their own way and no one is hearing what the other is saying. As a result, a 'dialogue of the deaf' continues to be perpetuated.

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### Formal Tape Recorded Interviews

- Adelaide. Development Worker with COMADEP. March 25, 1996.
- Christina. Member of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. One of the coordinators of the Nutrition program for children. April 11, 1996.
- Cristina. Y. Member of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. Coordinator of one of the Kekchi groups in the garden project.
- Cleotilde. Member of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. Coordinator of the 'mixed' group in the garden project. April 10, 1996.
- Elmer. Development worker with ADEPAC, worked with the women in the garden project. March 18, 1996.
- Emeldina. Member of Ixmucané and organizer and teacher of the adult literacy classes. She was also working with UNESCO in the negotiations with the government for a certification programme for the education promoters.
- Esperanza. General treasurer for Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. April 17, 1996.
- Eulalia. Member of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. Former member of the executive of Ixmucané in Mexico. April 13, 1996.
- Doña Eva. Member of the Executive Council of Ixmucané, second President of the cooperative *La Nueva Esperanza* in La Esmeralda. April 3, 1996.
- Francisca. Member of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. Coordinator of the Q'iché group in the garden project.
- Juliana. Interviewed by Alma (development worker with COMADEP) Member of the executive council of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. March 3, 1996.
- Juliana. Interviewed by Paula. April 16, 1996.
- Katarina. Member of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. Former member of the executive of Ixmucané in Mexico. March 28, 1996.
- Luis. Health Promoter with ASECSA in La Esmeralda. April 15, 1996.

- María C. Member of: Ixmucané, La Esmeralda and the garden project. Also on the cooperative's Vigilance Committee. April 5, 1996.
- Marí S. Member of Ixmucané, former member of Ixmucané delegation to Canada. March 25, 1996.
- Doña Marta. Member of Ixmucané in La Esmeralda. April 6, 1996.
- Santo. Development worker with COMADEP, worked with the women in the garden projects in Mexico. March 19, 1996.

Other taped interviews include general short interviews with various women in the garden. March 25, 27 and 29, 1996.

# APPENDIX A

## Departments of Guatemala



Source: Adapted from Catherine L. Nolin Harlan (1995)

## APPENDIX B<sup>1</sup>

### ACRONYMS

- ACNUR/UNHCR:** Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (United Nations High Commission for Refugees).
- ACPD:** Asamblea Consultiva de la Población Desarraigada (Consultative Assembly of the Uprooted Population) - The agreement signed between the URNG and the government in 1994 about the displaced populations was vague, and to make it operational a technical commission was established. The ACPD is made up of various organizations from the displaced populations which gives advice to this commission.
- ADEPAC:** Asociación del Desarrollo para América Central (Development Association for Central America). An NGO, whose focus is community development, that works in the return communities of the Petén, including La Esmeralda.
- ARDIGUA:** Asociación de los Refugiados Dispersados de Guatemala (Association of Dispersed Refugees of Guatemala) - Association of the Guatemalan refugees who are dispersed throughout the Mexican population.
- ASC:** Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil (Assembly of Civil Society) - The member groups represent different sectors of Guatemalan civil society. It works to develop consensus on the themes which were under discussion in the peace negotiations.
- ASECSA:** Asociación de Servicios Comunitarios de Salud (Association of Community Health Services). A health NGO which works with the return populations in the Petén and with non-return populations in many rural areas.
- AVANCSO:** Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala (Association for the Advancement of the Social Sciences in Guatemala) - Carries out and publishes social science research in Guatemala.

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<sup>1</sup> This list of acronyms is adopted from a collaborative list, see Project Accompaniment (1996).

- CACIF:** Comité Coordinador de las Asociaciones Agrícola, Comercial, Industrial y Financiera (Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations) - A very powerful right-wing association of businesses in Guatemala.
- CBRR:** Coordinadora de Bloques de Retorno y Reasentamiento (Coordination of Return and Resettlement Blocks) - Formed in February 1996, to organize collective returns outside of the CCPPs.
- CCPPs:** Las Comisiones Permanentes (The Permanent Commissions) - Formed in December 1987 to represent the refugees in negotiations with the Guatemalan government, and to prepare for the return. The Commissions are divided into three regions ( 'verientes' ): CCPPs Veriente Noroccidental (Northwest), CCPPs Veriente Sur (South); and CCPPs Verientes Norte (North).
- CEAR:** Comisión Nacional para la Atención de Repatriados, Refugiados y Desplazados (National Commission for Aid to Repatriates, Refugees, and the Displaced) - A Guatemalan government agency which was formed in 1986 to work with the displaced population in Guatemala and the Guatemalan refugee population in Mexico.
- CECI:** Centro Canadiense de Estudios y de Cooperación Internacional (Canadian Centre for International Study and Cooperation) - A large Canadian NGO which has received many contracts through the UNHCR in the return communities.
- COMADEP:** Cooperación Mesoamericana para el Desarrollo y la Paz (Mesoamerican Cooperation for Development and Peace) - An NGO which works in the area of community development in the return communities of the Petén and in Mexico in the refugee camps, primarily in Campeche.
- COMAR:** Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a los Refugiados (Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees). A Mexican government agency responsible for the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico.

- CONDEG:** Conferencia Nacional de los Desplazados de Guatemala (National Conference of the Displaced of Guatemala) - The association of the Guatemalans who were internally displaced by the violence and the repression in the 1980s.
- CONAVIGUA:** Coordinación Nacional de las Viudas de Guatemala (National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows).
- CPRs:** Comunidades de Población en Resistencia (Communities of Populations in Resistance) - There are three CPR groups organized geographically: CPR-Sierra, CPR-Ixcan, and CPR-Petén.
- EGP:** Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) - One of three revolutionary forces which make up the URNG.
- FAR:** Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (Rebel Armed Forces) - One of three revolutionary forces which make up the URNG.
- FDNG:** Frente Democrático Nuevo Guatemala (New Democratic Guatemalan Front) - The only 'left-wing' political party in Guatemala. It entered the political ring in the 1995 presidential elections.
- FEDECOAG:** Federación de Cooperativas Agrícolas de Guatemala (Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Guatemala) - Provides technical assistance to cooperatives, promotes cooperativism, and helps to organize, develop, and strengthen cooperatives throughout Guatemala.
- FONAPAZ:** Fondo National para la Paz (National Fund for Peace) - A Guatemalan government agency which gives credit for the purchase of lands to the refugees who are returning from Mexico.
- FRG:** Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (Guatemalan Republican Front) - The political party of ex-dictator Ríos Montt. The constitution did not allow him to run in the election, but most believed that he has still in charge of the party. The FRG lost in the 1995 presidential elections to the PAN party, and current President Arzú.
- GAM:** Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo para los Familiares de los Desaparecidos (Mutual Support Group for Families of the Disappeared).

Ixmucané:	Organization of Guatemalan refugee women who return to Guatemala as part of the CCPPs of the Veriente Norte.
Madre Tierra:	Organization of Guatemalan refugee women who return to Guatemala with the CCPPs of the Veriente Sur.
Mamá Maquín:	Organization of Guatemalan refugee women who return to Guatemala as part of the CCPPs of the Veriente Noroccidental.
MINUGUA:	Misión de las Naciones Unidas para la Verificación de los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala).
ORPA:	Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms) - One of three revolutionary forces which make up the URNG.
PACs:	Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (Civil Self-Defense Patrol).
PAN:	Partido del Avance Nacional (National Advancement Party) - The party of the current Guatemalan president, Arzú.
PGT:	Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (Guatemalan Labour Party). The Communist Party and one of the groups that makes up the URNG.
UFCo:	United Fruit Company - An American fruit exporting company who at the time of the 1954 coup, was one of the largest landowners in Guatemala.
URNG:	Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (National Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity) - Coalition of the three revolutionary forces (EGP, FAR, and ORPA) and the PGT.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **'Outside Agents': NGOs, Solidarity and Church Groups, the United Nations Agencies and Guatemalan Government Agencies in La Esmeralda.**

Through their cooperative and *Ixmucané*, the people of La Esmeralda were actively participating in the development of their community. In less than a year, their efforts had already allowed them to meet many of their development objectives. However, it would be incorrect to assume that they had done so in isolation. Their efforts were not purely self-initiated, motivated, propelled, or shaped, as they had received assistance from a number of outside organizations, groups and individuals, which had some influence on the development of the community and the type of participation which took place. In this appendix, I will discuss briefly the 'outside agents' which visited or worked in the community in the six months that I was there. I will categorize them into four groups: NGOs, solidarity and church groups, United Nations organizations, and Guatemalan government affiliated organizations.

#### **NGOs - Nongovernmental Organizations**

With the split of the CCPPs into three different groups, after the first Return in January 1993, the NGOs were divided amongst the CCPPs. As a result, most of the NGOs listed here, only worked with the Return communities in the North Veriente. Most of the NGOs listed here, I would argue, were the most active 'outside agents' that worked in the community while I was there. They include: ASECSA, COMADEP, FEDECOAG, ADEPAC and CECI. From my perspective, all of these NGOs were very different and had their own particular

approach to the community and community participation.

The reader has already been introduced to ASECSA (*Asociación de Servicios Comunitarios de Salud*, or Association of Community Health Services) and their work in the health clinic. ASECSA was largely a Guatemalan staffed NGO, which received the majority of its funding from the European Union. They gave direct health services to the community, in the form of two health promoters and an almost monthly visit by another Guatemalan health promoter and a Guatemalan doctor. ASECSA was also involved in the training of La Esmeralda's health promoters and midwives.

COMADEP (*Cooperación Mesoamericana para el Desarrollo y la Paz*, or Mesoamerican Cooperation for Development and Peace) was another NGO which received much of its funding from the European Union. Its workers were a mix of Mexicans, Guatemalans, Europeans and a Canadian. It started to work with the refugees in Mexico many years before the first return, and was instrumental in promoting the participation of women and helping women to become more organized. Since the first return to the Petén in April of 1995, it has been working in the Return communities of the Petén, and continuing its work in the refugee camps.

The emphasis of its work in La Esmeralda appeared to be twofold. One was on helping the community build and reinforce its organizations, like the youth organization Maya Tikal, the cooperative, and Ixmucané. Its other focus in La Esmeralda was around land use and agricultural issues. It had two highly educated agronomists who worked for it (one European and one Guatemalan), who were working closely with the population on how best to use its land and introduce new crops, like soya, which it could potentially market.

Another NGO which was largely funded by the European Union and

locally staffed by Guatemalans and Mexicans was ADEPAC (*Asociación del Desarrollo para America Central*, or Development Association for Central America). Before the first return to the Petén, an agreement was reached between ADEPAC and COMADEP as to their areas of work in the Return communities of the Veriente Norte. As a consequence of this agreement, ADEPAC took over certain areas which formally had been COMADEP's areas of work in Mexico, for example the women's garden. Although they worked very closely with COMADEP, their focus and approach were very different. ADEPAC appeared to be more project-focused than COMADEP, and aside from the garden, worked with Ixmucané on the daycare and corngrinder projects.

The NGO which had the most constant presence in the community was FEDECOAG (*Federación de Cooperativas Agrícolas de Guatemala*, or Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Guatemala). FEDECOAG was the Guatemalan organization of cooperatives, and was staffed by all Guatemalans. As previously mentioned, they worked in Limones, and in La Esmeralda, to help the community develop their cooperatives. They also gave technical assistance ranging from workshops on cooperativism, to starting up a business, to accounting. They also give credit and support for projects, along with technical agricultural assistance.

As discussed in the thesis, one of the largest NGOs in Canada, Quebec's CECI (*Centro Canadiense de Estudios y de Cooperación Internacional* or Canadian Centre for International Study and Cooperation) was involved in a 'rapid impact project' in La Esmeralda. The project was to put in the water system for the community. As discussed, two Guatemalan engineers were in the community drawing up the plans for the water system, and because of some unknown delay, it was not until many months later that the men of the

community, as part of their community labour, were beginning to do the manual labour part of putting in the system.<sup>1</sup>

### **Solidarity and Church Groups**

There were also a number of solidarity groups who were involved with the community. The group which kept a constant presence was the international accompaniers. Since the initial Return, there had always been at least one, and sometimes up to a dozen, international accompanier, from one of the fifteen countries which had an accompaniment organization,<sup>2</sup> in the community. There were also accompaniers who were not affiliated with an organization, 'suelto' who accompanied in the community. While I was in La Esmeralda, nine other accompaniers spent time 'accompanying' there; the majority were Canadians from Project Accompaniment. From my experience, accompaniers were an appreciated and respected part of the community, but besides from the assurance their physical presence gave, they were inconsequential to its development process.

Other solidarity groups included: the Mennonites from Belize, who came to provide the 'expertise' in the building of a new bridge; the Catholic Church, which provided funding for the nutrition programme; Pastors for Peace, who came to ask the community what materials it needed so on its upcoming donation drive it could make requests for them; and a group from Holland, who provided Christmas *piñatas* for the children and ran a second-hand store in the Netherlands whose profits they shared amongst various groups, including the

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfam Belgium was not physically present in the community, but it had sent money for the previously mentioned 'emergency food aid programme'.

<sup>2</sup> There are accompaniment groups in: Canada, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, France, Italy, the United States, Spain, País Vasco, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Britain, and Norway.

return communities. These groups were not involved in development, per se, but provided material aid and in some cases their 'expertise' to the community. Perhaps, most importantly what these various groups gave to the community was their solidarity, which was very significant to people who had been victims of a war the outside world had not paid notice to.

### **United Nations Agencies**

In the thesis two United Nations agencies, the UNHCR (or ACNUR) and MINUGUA, were mentioned in regards to their involvement in La Esmeralda. As previously discussed the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees or *Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados*) was active in supporting the refugees in Mexico and continued to support the returnees in Guatemala. Because of the nature of the United Nations, the UNHCR was not as active as the NGOs, but it did provide material support and acted as a liaison in support of the refugees/returnees between the Mexican and Guatemalan government.

MINUGUA (*Misión de las Naciones Unidas para la Verificación de los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala* or United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala) was the United Nations team which has been established in Guatemala to verify human rights abuses. As with the UNHCR, its staff was hired from around the world. The MINUGUA staff came to the community and gave a workshop on human rights to the human right promoters, who then gave a workshop to the rest of the community. MINUGUA was one of the first agencies that was to be contacted should the army enter the community.

## **Guatemalan Government Agencies**

Two Guatemalan government agencies, CEAR and the *Procurador de los Derechos Humanos* (Human Rights Attorney) were also involved in some manner in the community. In the case of the *Procurador de los Derechos Humanos*, two human rights promoters from the independent government agency of the Procurador de los Derechos Humanos visited the community and gave a number of workshops on human rights. Their focus was more on the rights of the individual. The rights of children and women were key areas of discussion.

The other Guatemalan government agency that came to the community was CEAR (*Comisión Nacional para la Atención de Repatriados, Refugiados y Desplazados* or National Commission for Aid to Repatriates, Refugees, and the Displaced). It was the national agency for aiding the refugees and displaced people. They organized the logistics of the Returns with the UNHCR and came to the community to distribute food aid and building supplies.

As the above description illustrates, La Esmeralda was not alone its development efforts. However, over all, even though the community received an abundance of outside assistance, I would argue, its own efforts were still the main engine which led to its initial success and attainment of its various development goals and objectives.