

Guatemala: Empowerment as Ongoing Process

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Case Studies - Empowerment

Four case studies examine the effects of donor interventions on the capacities and opportunities of the poor as part of the project on promoting empowerment in post-conflict contexts.

About FRIDE

FRIDE is an independent think-tank based in Madrid, focused on issues related to democracy and human rights; peace and security; and humanitarian action and development. FRIDE attempts to influence policy-making and inform public opinion, through its research in these areas.

Understanding the process of empowerment in a post-conflict context implies finding the roots of the conflict, which have given rise to the crisis itself, and evaluating its consequences. In addition, it is a logical means to understanding a country's current situation, since it identifies the impact the conflict has had on society. Furthermore, it involves analysing situations that have evolved over time, and whose effects have had an accumulative impact on human conduct and social praxis, within that particular society.

Thirty-six Years of Conflict: Causes and Consequences

The origins of the Guatemalan civil war can be traced to various interrelated problems, which have gone unresolved over time. This might explain thirty-six years of hostilities. However, the roots of this war had been developing for centuries. After

the country's independence in 1821, the structure of its economic, cultural, and social relationships remained fundamentally hierarchical, and was sustained by a deep-rooted colonial heritage. This led to the creation of an exclusionary state, manifestly racist: one which would be responsible for one of the cruellest acts of violence in history, against the poor, excluded and indigenous populations.

After years of deep-set inequality, a brief period of liberalisation and reform was instituted by *Arbenz* and his democratically elected government in the mid-twentieth century (1944-1954).¹ Undoubtedly, it was a turning point for a poor, marginalised society, which finally began to see opportunities for change. But this reform was interrupted in 1954, by a military coup with support from the United States, who feared the country was succumbing to communist influence. The coup was to be but a prelude to civil war. A string of right-leaning military and civilian governments followed, with the objective of destroying the post-1944 advances in the fields of freedom and social change, in order to recreate the prior hierarchical and elitist system. As part of this restrictive policy, the Communist Party was outlawed and leftist and even centrist parties and labour unions were violently suppressed. This exclusion of the left would lead to the birth of a guerrilla movement,² which would gain strength within the poor rural areas. In 1982, three rebel groups united to create the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The government's

campaign against this insurgency group intensified, destroying entire towns, especially in rural areas inhabited by indigenous groups.

The fact that this conflict developed during the Cold War affected its evolution and the country's internal politics. Specifically, it implied a very influential and controlling role for the United States in the country's affairs and in the transformation of the Guatemalan Army. The latter underwent an important change due to the inclusion of doctrinarian elements based on Cold War concepts, aimed at counteracting any communist threat as well as neutralising any type of opposition, be it social, political or military.³

It is evident that the aforementioned causes of a historical nature, in and of themselves do not explain the development of the insurgency and violence that escalated into armed conflict. Other social and economic questions, specific to the sixties, also motivated it. Poverty deriving from the unequal distribution of wealth (land, especially) and the limited access to education⁴ had worsened. Alongside this, the concentration of resources in the hands of a small fraction of the population was perpetuating itself, producing a profoundly asymmetrical wealth pattern, resulting in the reduction of economic and social opportunities for vast sectors of the population, especially indigenous groups. Such deprivation as experienced by the majority became a source of collective discontent.

This economic and social marginalisation was complemented by the political exclusion represented by

¹ Some of these changes include the preparation and approval of the Constitution in 1945, the greater number of political parties able to participate, and the approval of a new electoral law. Additionally, public education was strongly promoted, a Work Code was published, and agrarian reform was stimulated. However, the restructuring of the Army's role as defined within the Constitution increased its direct participation in the country's politics, transforming it from a subordinate body to a locus of power.

² Guerilla organisation programmes always included the defence of the excluded. The revolutionary discourse was presented on behalf of the poor and succeeded in convincing and mobilising many in that condition.

³ State powers and paramilitary groups were responsible for ninety-three percent of documented rapes, according to the Commission for Historical Classification (CEH). See the 1999 CEH report.

⁴ For further information, see O. López Rivera et al., *Nociones elementales para entender la pobreza*, Programa de estudios multidisciplinares sobre pobreza, Serie Textos básicos N° 1, FLACSO/ASDI, Editorial Magna Terra, 2004.

the continuous authoritarian and dictatorial regimes.⁵ The state, under the control of the military, abandoned its mediator role between diverse social and economic interests, creating a vacuum, which led to the direct conflict between those receiving the benefits, the defenders of the established order and those who demanded their needs be met. This system of power also led to the prohibition of all channels of communication and participation, and the persistence of racist values. Added to this, was a weak and biased judicial system, which did not guarantee the prevalence of law nor the respect for civil rights. In recent years, the standard of human rights has deteriorated significantly, especially as many victims of rape have yet to be compensated.

The sum of all these interrelated historical, political, economic, and social factors led to the civil war which, according to official data, caused two hundred thousand deaths and disappearances, and one million displaced refugees. The civil war was especially intense in the rural areas in the north and west of the country.

The civil war has left a deep imprint in all spheres of society and will be difficult to overcome. Its effects, far-reaching and persistent today, continue to worsen the country's structural problems (poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, insecurity, exclusion, and racism). Politically, Guatemala is currently immersed in a transition process, which, for a series of reasons, is proving unable to culminate in the consolidation of democracy. The state continues to be an apparatus to protect the elite, far-removed from the general population's demands and social interest. The lack of political will translates into the lack of a true impulse to the Guatemalan

Peace Accords⁶ and the recommendations made by the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH)⁷.

Over time, the causes outlined above have led to different violent manifestations.⁸ Today, this violence is still clearly reflected in the country's political life, and its social and labour relationships; and its origins are economic, political, ideological, religious and ethnic in nature. A clear example of this is the strong imprint that the dictatorial tradition has left on national political culture, implying the repeated closure of spaces for political expression and civil participation, becoming an indiscriminate and uncontrolled exercise of violence by the apparatus of power. Repression has been the most common response to the demands of marginalised society. Moreover, a culture of terror has been installed as a result of the atrocities carried out by the state, military groups and other related mechanisms, such as impunity for its perpetrators, the extensive campaigns to criminalise the victims and the forced involvement of the civilian population in carrying out acts of barbarism.⁹ All this has led to the creation of the so-called 'parallel powers' and the strong influence wielded by drug traffickers in the country's social, political, and economic life. As a result, many communities, especially poor ones, are completely controlled by mafia and corrupt police forces. The sum of these precedents has led to a violent, frustrated, traumatised, fearful and apathetic society, in which the capacity of association is weak and the population has little interest in social and political participation.

⁶ See the official Guatemalan Government document, 1996, <http://www.congreso.gob.gt/Docs/PAZ/Acuerdo%20de%20paz%20firme%20y%20duradera.pdf>

⁷ See <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/>

⁸ From 1996 to 2004, five hundred cases of lynching or attempted lynching have been documented, although it is believed that this figure is even higher, given that, in many cases, they were carried out in isolated places or without the presence of eyewitnesses. See María Cristina Fernández García, *Lynching in Guatemala*, Harvard University, 2004.

⁵ Guatemala is one of the Latin American countries with the greatest number of military governments and dictatorships since the country's independence. *Inter American Development Bank*, 2003.

More than ten years after signing the Guatemalan Peace Accords, some significant advances have been made.¹⁰ Nevertheless, inequality is still a fundamental national characteristic. The concentration of public funds on military expenses during the years of conflict has weakened social development even more. It seems that this trend will continue as the latest data indicate that military spending will once more increase above the amount agreed in the Accords.¹¹ This can be clearly seen by examining education, health, malnutrition and wealth distribution indicators which are among the least favourable in Latin America. According to the data included in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2005 Report, Guatemala has a literacy rate of approximately forty percent and half of all children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition. Additionally, more than half of the country's households live below the threshold of poverty, while nearly twenty-two percent are considered extremely poor.¹² Furthermore, a privileged ten percent of the population earns forty-five percent of all national income. The armed conflict has also weakened the state's already traditional deficient tax collection and has intensified the private sector's opposition to the necessary fiscal reform. At present, Guatemala is one of the countries in Latin America that least collects in terms of taxes.¹³ The effects of this have been decisive, since it has widened the gap between income and expenses, unchaining a series of macroeconomic imbalances and weakening the state's

⁹ The so-called Civilian Self-Defence Patrols were made up of civilians, both young and old, who should also necessarily be included. They became schools of violence and atrocity.

¹⁰ See United Nations General Assembly on the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), March, 2005. (A/59/746) <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/277/50/PDF/N0527750.pdf?OpenElement>

¹¹ See the UNDP's *Human Development Report* (2005).

¹² According to the *World Bank Guatemalan Poverty Assistance Report* (GUAPA), 2003, the northern and western areas of the country have the greatest incidence of poverty. Coincidentally, this is where the conflict was most acute.

¹³ World Bank, 2004.

ability to foment development even more. The state has been unable to carry out its obligations as is reflected by more than seventy-five percent of the population having to work in the black market due to the lack of new jobs and that the Agrarian Reform carried out has been unable to resolve the problem of access to land.

Victims of the Conflict¹⁴

While it is true that in other conflicts it is difficult to clearly identify the groups of victims, in Guatemala, its history since colonisation has implied the marginalisation and exclusion of one specific community. With the arrival of the Spanish, the Mayans were exploited and repressed. This deeply marked Guatemalan history because, while Spaniards originally felt superior biologically and culturally, this tendency was later propagated by the *criollos* (born of European parents) and later by the *ladinos* (mixed race). This may explain why the number of Mayan victims during various periods throughout the armed conflict was greater and why the acts of extreme cruelty and inhumanity were carried out among these communities. With the massacres, razed land campaigns, kidnappings, and execution of authorities (Mayan leaders and spiritual guides), the aim was not only to break the guerrilla movement's social base but also, and above all else, destructure the cultural values that guaranteed the communities' collective cohesion and action. As such, the racism, which was originally an expression of colonisation and subordination, has been

¹⁴ Carrying out a detailed study of who the victims of the Guatemalan conflict are is far beyond the scope of this study. For this reason, it was decided that the level of analysis would be a broad grouping. This does not enter into the discussion whether there are other collective victims of the conflict.

passed on throughout subsequent generations to this very day.

Brutality reached its peak when the indigenous were defined as a strange, threatening, and non-human collective: *el Otro* (the *Other*). The army launched massive attacks on the Mayan community, completely disregarding their condition of non-combatant civilians. The figures speak for themselves: according to the CEH, the magnitude of the state's repressive response led to forty-two thousand victims, of which eighty-three percent were Mayan, in contrast with seventeen percent of *ladinos*. The CEH has condemned this extermination of indigenous peoples as genocide. After ten years of peace, the indigenous population's lives continue to be characterised by exclusion, discrimination and racism. Forty percent of the indigenous population in Guatemala lives in extreme poverty and seventy-four percent of the whole live in poverty. While it is true that there are non-indigenous poor, seventy-five percent of the population living in extreme poverty are indigenous; the worst incidence of extreme poverty and lack of social services is found within areas of the country where the indigenous populations are the majority: seventy-five percent of indigenous households do not have running or drinking water; half of the indigenous are illiterate; indigenous children in rural areas receive two years of schooling on average; indigenous girls, little more than one year. The Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, signed in 1995, whose aim was to amend some of these deficiencies, was deemed by the United Nations Mission to be the least developed aspect of the Guatemalan Peace Accords.¹⁵

¹⁵ See the official document from the UN General Assembly on the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), March, 2005. (A/59/746)

<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/277/50/PDF/N0527750.pdf?OpenElement>

To date, the number of internally displaced persons and refugees during the cruellest period of the conflict (1981-1983) is still unknown. This is a clear reflection of the aforementioned marginalisation phenomenon, which has served to further isolate the indigenous community. Factors such as the non-existence of a single registry, the lack of a uniform definition of what is understood as an Internally Displaced Person (IDP), the fact that many of these were forced to maintain their anonymity due to fear of being persecuted during the conflict, and the government's denial that there were any displaced between 1986 and 1996, explain why there are no exact figures. Estimates signal that there were between five hundred thousand and one and a half million refugees and IDPs – almost all indigenous – during the most violent period, although the figure currently used is that of two hundred and fifty thousand. With respect only to refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) believes that the figure is upwards of forty-six thousand, though human rights groups estimate that the figure ascends to one hundred thousand. The majority of IDPs returned to their places of origin soon after having been displaced, though many of these did not receive any type of aid upon return, and found their homes and lands destroyed and occupied. Given the precarious nature of their conditions, they are a very vulnerable group.

Under these circumstances, being included in the registry is vital for the displaced because it is the only way for their rights to restitution to not be undermined. Another obstacle for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees is mistrust among local communities. This feeling was encouraged by the state by means of the stigmatisation of the displaced, characterising them as guerrilla supporters or as instigators of the civil war.

A long-term solution and the sustainable reintegration of the displaced continue to be blocked by a lack of advancement on the application of the terms of peace, and a lack of an integral rural development policy. If no advance is made on either of these fronts, the internally displaced will continue to be landless, discriminated against and destitute. Many of the displaced currently live in illegally-occupied premises, without access to basic services, such as housing, medical services and education.

As occurs in the majority of current conflicts, women are the objects of acts of cruelty and humiliation. Guatemala is no exception. In a study carried out in 1998, the Archbishop of Guatemala's Office on Human Rights concluded that the rape of women and girls was generalised during the conflict and occurred in one out of six killings. However, the government has not recognised the seriousness of this matter, nor has it apologised for the conflict's exacerbated impact on the lives of women. According to the CEH's 1999 report, rape was an actual part of the counter-insurgency strategy, used to terrorise putative enemies. The majority of rape victims were girls and women from the Mayan indigenous collective. This group represented a quarter of all victims of human rights abuses according to the CEH report and, in some massacres, they were the only victims.

The armed conflict has had terrible results for women. Violence and discrimination against women are still latent in the country. The then special commissioner for the rights of women of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, Susana Villarán, who visited Guatemala in 2004, observed an increase in the number of women murdered, as well a rise in the cruelty with which they were killed. Moreover, the girls and women who survived the massacres and rapes

remain severely traumatised: in addition to bearing the stigma associated to rape, many of these women were widows and had to fight for the very survival of their families.

A Process of Empowerment or Disempowerment?

The previous analysis allows us to see what the current situation is like for Guatemalan society, especially for the victims of the conflict in terms of their empowerment. Despite the civil war having ended ten years ago, the content within the Guatemalan Peace Accords related to processes of empowerment has not advanced as much as it should. If empowerment is understood as the ability to make decisions, in Guatemala this ability has been weakened by various factors and some specific, marginalised groups,¹⁶ are currently in a state of disempowerment.

In the Guatemalan context, the disparities have had a severe impact on the process of empowerment among the victims of the conflict.¹⁷ This situation hampers their development and implies their inability to have access to land, education, wealth, and employment.

¹⁶ Such as the indigenous population, women, youth, and the displaced which also represent half of the total population.

¹⁷ Guatemala is ranked third in terms of income inequality among countries with low to medium income around the world, behind only Brazil and Pakistan. The poorest within the population receive only 3.8 percent of total income, while the richest receive 60 percent. The indigenous population is twice as likely to live in extreme poverty as the non-indigenous, while those living in rural areas are more than three times as likely to live in extreme poverty as those living in urban areas. Disparity in terms of development can also be seen between men and women. Fewer women than men can read and fewer women than men go to school (58.9 vs. 74.2 and 43 vs. 51, percentages, respectively) and women earn, on average, a third less than men (US\$ 1691 vs. US\$ 5622). Various sources: World Bank, 2003; CIDA, 2001: official MINUGUA documents.

Additionally, it perpetuates their marginalisation and reduces their ability to make decisions, since they do not have the necessary resources to do so. As revealed by official data,¹⁸ public spending is not adequately focused if the aim is to eliminate these imbalances, since the proportion of fiscal resources that actually reaches the poor is truly limited.

Beyond these questions, the government, *in its role as guarantor of rights*, has made timid progress towards implementing the necessary mechanisms to consolidate the democratic system. The relationship between society and the state is characterised by lack of trust. Within this vacuum, we find concerns such as the lack of tools for accountability and governability. As indicated in a comparative study on the indices of governability around the world, which evaluates empowerment-related issues (such as having voice and participation, efficient government and corruption), Guatemala is one of the worst ranked countries.¹⁹ Such high incidence of corruption reinforces the malfunction of government and extenuates inequality, thereby accentuating the disempowerment of the most vulnerable within society.²⁰ According to this same study, the rule of law is very fragile, especially with respect to the judicial system, which, according to Guatemalan society itself, is slow, scarcely transparent, inefficient, bureaucratic and centralised.²¹ According to a national survey²² on society's perception about the post-conflict period, more than fifty percent of the population feels that the level of democracy remains

unchanged, while a third feels that their country is now less democratic than before.

Such a protracted conflict scars society profoundly and its victims especially, leaving wounds not easily overcome. The culture of fear, the high degree of vulnerability and low self-esteem, continue to reign due to levels of violence that have reached alarming figures. Years of repression have led to fear of participating in the public sphere, while marginalisation and racism continue to be very present in the social realm. In practical terms, this implies: a diminished participation in public elections, an elitist society and a weakened ability for social organisation. Traditionally, participation in political decision-making has been restricted to a few groups, which have tended to be dominated by non-indigenous males. This, in turn, has engendered governmental institutions captive of elitist interests, therefore exclusionary of the interest of the great majority, with an especially detrimental effect upon women and indigenous groups.

However, it is also true that, in some cases, the war fomented solidarity and cohesion amongst society, since it reinforced the villagers' determination to work together and protect themselves from external threats. Also, since 1996, a process of democratic opening is emerging. Decision-making at the national level has been broadened to include previously excluded collectives. This has been achieved through national elections and other specific fora. Middle-class groups have participated and there are even signals that their demands are being legitimised by other means, such as peaceful protests. Nevertheless, these new organisational and participatory models are limited by a lack of economic resources, education, and access to information. At the local level, participation is limited to town halls, whose actual role is of low profile, acting

¹⁸ Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2000. Government of Guatemala.

¹⁹ Carried out by Kaufmann et al. for the World Bank, 2006.

²⁰ According to a report prepared by the World Bank, Guatemala is among the twenty-eight percent worst-rated countries in the world.

²¹ A survey carried out by Aragón y Asociados, *User Perceptions of Justice Administration in Guatemala*, 1998.

²² Carried out as part of Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP).

essentially as beneficiaries of favours from central government, thereby creating a situation of institutional clientelism. With respect to smaller rural communities, their power in political decision-making is even more insignificant, depending, to a large extent, on the pressure they can exert on larger town halls or other external contacts

It is unfortunate that the Guatemalan government has not strengthened this social capital to its fullest potential. It is hoped that the approval of three laws²³ related to citizen participation and decentralisation will represent an important step towards the empowerment of local communities. This legislation represents an important step in the creation of a reference framework and legal structures, that aim to bring the government closer to the community, transfer certain responsibilities to the local level and give power to the communities and local councils for their better participation in the decision-making process.

A process of empowerment requires the most marginalised communities to have direct access to the political powers for there to be a decentralised system. However, Guatemala is an excessively centralised country (sixty-eight percent of all spending is in the hands of central government), especially given the heterogeneous character of a society where fifty-four percent of the population lives in rural areas.²⁴ This institutional framework only accentuates social inequality, since rates of rural poverty are at seventy-four percent,²⁵ while Guatemalans depend on agriculture for seventy percent of their income. Bearing in mind the special vulnerability of this sector

in Guatemala,²⁶ it is evident that centralisation plays an important role in the process of empowerment of society's underprivileged.

Reconciliation, an ignored and generally omitted term, has thus been absent from the country's reconstruction process and the Guatemalan Peace Accords. There is not a single agreement or commitment that deals specifically with this concrete issue. This omission seems to have been deliberate because the concept of 'reconciliation' demands change to occur at every level and sphere, a transformation that the status quo is not ready to undertake.

Given their historical marginalisation, the victims of the Guatemalan conflict need specific policies to ensure their support and to guarantee their social inclusion. In this sense, the necessary platforms for public dialogue and debate have yet to be created, in order to launch and/or reinforce the process of empowerment and become a point of inflexion in their state of disempowerment.

²³ Specifically, the Law on Urban and Rural Development Councils (Decree 11-2002), the Municipal Code (Decree 12-2002), and the General Law on Decentralisation (Decree 14-2002).

²⁴ Data from the Government of Guatemala, 2003 estimates.

²⁵ GUAPA (2003).

²⁶ The consequences of restructuring the coffee industry are worth highlighting. This traditional product represented significant income for the State despite the crisis having reduced this income by 50 percent. In addition, the restructuring had important social repercussions due to the income the industry represented for rural homes. The crisis meant the loss of 40000 jobs in 2002 according to official data.

Donors as Empowerment Process Catalysts

Although some donors (such as Canada, the United States, and Sweden) already had programmes in place prior to the end of the conflict, development cooperation did not intensify until the end of the war in 1996, in response to the then government's decision to launch the Guatemalan Peace Accords. In the years following the war, there was a clear commitment among the donors, despite the majority having adopted a cautious approach given the volatile scenario. With time, political and social stability allowed for aid to acquire a more constant nature, albeit ostensibly diminished in volume in recent years.

The historical trends of Official Development Assistance (ODA) reveal these variations with greater clarity. While Guatemala received two hundred million US dollars between 1990 and 1995, the average rose to six hundred million during the post-conflict period (1996-2002).²⁷ However, this commitment was not made real, since little over fifty percent of the above was actually delivered.²⁸ There are several reasons for this considerable gap, but for the purposes of this study, donors' administrations' red tape will suffice as mention of one of the main obstacles. Moreover, this aid presented other unique factors, which strengthened the country's dependency and limited the process of

empowerment. For example, only twenty-five percent of all aid consists of subsidies and grants; the remaining seventy-five percent are loans. This explains why Guatemala's primary donors are financial institutions, led by the Inter American Development Bank (IADB). Further yet, it also explains the manner in which the aid is allocated: fifty percent having the growth, stability and competitiveness as its destination (this includes infrastructure, the financial sector and technology, among others). Despite the abundant nature of the country's needs, resources are much to the contrary, and, in the case of Guatemala, priority has not been given to fundamental matters linked directly to the vulnerability and marginalisation of the communities most affected by the conflict. As a whole, women, children and indigenous populations have been the focus of less than 0.5 percent of the country's budget during the post-conflict years.²⁹

The Integration Game

Led by the North, supported by the Guatemalan government and rejected by society: thus are the various processes of regional integration that the central American government is immersed in. Processes such as the Free Trade Agreement with the United States and the Association Agreement with the EU.

While some see potential economic benefits, others criticise the potential social costs, in addition to the unequal position at the negotiating table. To this can be added the scant or non-existent citizen participation in the decision-making or debates that orient various aspects of this integration.

In terms of empowerment, these negotiations and their implementation have a duplicated impact: on the one hand, there is the misery that they leave behind and, on the other, the incoherence of the donors' doubled-edged sword, which offers aid to promote freedom among beneficiaries, while, at the same time, limiting it by imposing conditions (such as trade agreements) that society does not desire.

²⁷ J. A. Fuentes y T. Carothers (1998), 'Luces y sombras en la cooperación internacional', in *Democracia en Guatemala: La Misión de un Pueblo Entero*, Santa Fe de Bogotá: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (Internacional IDEA), 1998.

²⁸ See D. Holiday and W. Stanley, 'Broad Participation, Diffuse Responsibility: Peace Implementation in Guatemala', in S. J. Stedman et al. (eds.), *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.

²⁹ See Morales (2004), 'La Cooperación Internacional en Guatemala'.

The creation of the Consulting Group³⁰ in 1997 was novel in international development cooperation and it is the only instrument to facilitate coordination between donor and receptor governments. It is also a unique forum in which civil society can participate, permitting all players to express their opinion, thereby acting as a purveyor of dialogue. It is seen as an important factor for appropriation, but it has to be adapted to the process of decentralisation, promoted by the Guatemalan government, in order to guarantee its relevance in the medium-term, and include the indigenous population in its agenda. Another problem, pointed out by various critics, is that the Group's decisions are not translated into effective reality, which may turn into a source of frustration. A solution to this matter has yet to be offered.

Despite the existence of this Group, the more general critique of development cooperation in Guatemala is centred on the poor management of funds and a lack of coordination. The funds from many agencies are linked to complex administrative processes and are not adapted to the scarce local capacity or an overload of work. On the other hand – despite all donors linking their projects to the Guatemalan Peace Accords –, because it is such a broad, complex, and ambitious programme, it does not facilitate coordination. This situation is made even more complex if we take into account the scarce ability of governmental agencies to overcome these obstacles, which is reflected in their deficient strategic capabilities, high employee turnover rates, clientelism and high rates of corruption.

Perhaps, the donor that stands out the most – above all others –, due to its leading role and greater presence, is

³⁰ See all the documentation gathered by the Inter American Development Bank: http://www.iadb.org/regions/re2/consultative_group/guatemala/

the United Nations, through its Human Rights Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA). Installed in 1994, its permanence and functions were later broadened given its positive results and the need for its continued presence. MINUGUA was present in the country for ten years, becoming one of the longest missions in United Nations history. It became a central player in promoting the peace process and in the fulfilment of the Guatemalan Peace Accords; zealously dedicated in providing technical assistance and divulgence, even though it had already become indispensable, during the peace negotiations. It set up regional offices throughout the entire country, which permitted citizens to see that an external and impartial arbiter could intervene on their behalf if necessary, especially in the protection of human rights. This does not mean, however, that the Mission was exempt from trouble, and some sectors of society did reject the foreign intervention in domestic affairs.

In general terms, broad sectors of opinion agree in giving this international assistance a positive evaluation, especially with respect to its mediation between the two parties (Government and URNG) during the negotiations. More concretely, it is felt that development cooperation has served as an active observer and financier of the Guatemalan Peace Accords. Perhaps, the latter aspect is the Mission's most valuable contribution, given Guatemala's fiscal insolvency and the fact that the peace agenda was largely financed by international aid.

To be able to analyse the extent to which donors served as catalysts for the empowerment process, requires itemising this concept into more easily identifiable, tangible components. As such, the crucial creation of communication mechanisms between society and government (such as participation and accountability)

has not been fully supported by the international community, despite being one of the central items within the Guatemalan Peace Accords.³¹ In the same vein, donors have not considered democratic assistance as a strategic priority, despite the need to consolidate the country's democratic system. This vacuum is even more noteworthy if we compare the aid received by other countries.³² The majority of donors have been reluctant to support and finance political parties, even though this is fundamental to create a strong and representative opposition, something that is especially important given its volatile and scarcely institutionalised character. What is more, donors have paid little attention to fostering basic civil and democratic values within society, in order to be able to construct the ever necessary social consensus. In contrast, donors have prioritised the advocacy of human rights through their support for the CEH and through their own activities. However, some national organisations have manifested³³ that the practices of some donors have been inappropriate as they have tried to impose their own models and practices. This attitude is contrary to the ideas of appropriation and empowerment.

Good donor practice must be based on a solid knowledge of the context in which the work is going to be carried out, knowing the players and carrying out an analysis of the causes and consequences of the conflict.³⁴ Without this *a priori* step, intervention may have adverse consequences, not to mention the

possibility of society incurring a process of disempowerment.³⁵ In the case of Guatemala, undertaking such an analysis does not seem to have been the norm among donors. This absence can be seen in the fact that the perception among Guatemalan society does not seem to coincide with the international community's. While Guatemalans feel that the main problem in the country is crime, the international community focuses primarily on political rights and political freedoms.

Sharing information, a fundamental element in stimulating knowledge and, as a result, promoting empowerment, has not been a strategic or financial priority among donors. On the other hand, access to basic education, especially among indigenous girls, has gained precedence in the agenda of all players and has brought Guatemala closer to fulfilling Millennium Goal number two.³⁶

³¹ See the official Guatemalan Peace Accords document.

³² See D. Azpuru et al., 'Democracy Assistance to Post-Conflict Guatemala, Finding a Balance between Details and Determinants', Working Paper 30, The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael, 2004.

³³ Interviews carried out among local NGOs by the Clingendael Institute in 2004

³⁴ See Paula San Pedro (2007), '¿Por qué promover el empoderamiento en situaciones de posconflicto?', *Development in Perspective*, Madrid: FRIDE.

³⁵ Since, for example, the indirect causes of a conflict may be heightened or the wrong needs and vulnerable groups may be identified.

³⁶ See the last report on the Millennium Goals, United Nations, 2002 http://www.undg.org/documents/2368-Guatemala_MDG_Report_-_Primer_Informe_Espanol.doc

Conclusions: Lessons Learned and Some Recommendations

More than ten years after the end of the conflict, many questions remain unanswered, which need to be resolved in order to consolidate peace and avoid new potential conflicts. Among these is the empowerment of Guatemalan society, especially in terms of the victims of war. International development cooperation may play a fundamental role as a catalyst in this process of empowerment.

To this end, the international community has to maintain its level of aid during the post-conflict period. In order to promote empowerment, the level of inequality has to be reduced, while improved access to resources is needed, the bases for sustainable development have to be created, the participatory democratic system has to be strengthened, and citizen safety has to be improved. The government still lacks the financial resources to overcome these obstacles, which is why donors need to continue to support the peace-building process and the initiatives proposed by society.

In addition, aid must focus on the victims of the conflict. This implies a greater effort, since aid will have to be aimed especially at the rural areas where, thus far, international presence has been limited. In so doing, the centralist trend will be broken. Donors must support the process of decentralisation the government is trying to stimulate.

Peace will not be consolidated until the government carries out the needed structural changes and thereby

resolves the causes that led to the conflict. One of its priorities, as such, must be land reform. In so doing, the government would solve the problem of the displaced that have not been able to return to their places of origin and the large number of poor farmers without land to toil. International development cooperation must support the government in this process, not only financially but also by applying greater pressure on the elite.

The high crime rates are the greatest concern for Guatemalan society. Despite there being no indication that the conflict might be revived, these levels of insecurity make it impossible to overcome the long-lasting fear once and for all, and, accentuate the culture of fear instead. In addition, it does not allow for the establishment of a minimum of human safety, a necessary condition to develop any social process, including empowerment. To this end, donor response must be multi-dimensional: on the one hand, strengthening the judicial and police systems and, on the other, fomenting civic education.

The implementation of the Guatemalan Peace Accords has been stagnant for the last few years due to a lack of political will and consensus. Despite this, it is necessary to move forward on this matter as it is one of the ways to continue society's process of empowerment. Donors can play an important role in two ways: applying diplomatic pressure and stimulating its implementation via their own projects. This lobbying power must act so that reconciliation is not only a part of the Accords, but rather a central focus of it, especially since it is a necessary phase in the individual's process of empowerment.

National and international NGOs have done notable work, especially in terms of bolstering development

within the poorest rural communities, promoting associations and defending the fulfilment of human rights. Thanks to their work with grass-roots organisations and their close collaboration with vulnerable communities, NGOs have been catalysts of the process of empowerment among the victims of the conflict and others. Donors, for their part, must systematically support these organisations with an eye to the future, eliminating the bureaucratic obstacles, which they must overcome. They must also work to reduce persistent relations of dependency.

In conclusion, consolidating peace implies responding to the causes of conflict. Among other things, this includes empowering the victims of the conflict so that they may exercise full citizenship. Only Guatemalan society can decide on its future and it alone must choose its development model. In this sense, international development cooperation may play an important role in facilitating the necessary instruments for society to make its decisions. But this will only be possible if donor intervention is contextual, respondent to the needs of the recipients, and not based on pre-established models.

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