

Recommendations On Community Conservation and Gender for USAID/Guatemala

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by

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PREFACE

The WIDTECH project, funded by the Office of Women in Development (G/WID) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), provides technical assistance and training to USAID bureaus and missions. In March 1999, at the request of Claudia Pastor, an environment program manager with the Peten Program, I worked with the USAID/Guatemala. The Peten Program, a \$50 million effort, has limited USAID project staff. Therefore, the staff has needed to be creative in leveraging support for the program, including obtaining WIDTECH assistance.

The mission requested assistance in designing a strategy for the new bilateral environmental strategic objective and improving the work being done in Peten communities in community-based conservation and gender. The USAID/Guatemala's environment strategic objective is: "improved natural resource management and conservation of biodiversity in priority areas." The intermediate results are: (1) people adopt more sustainable, environmentally sound practices; (2) policies affecting the environment are improved and applied; (3) more responsive and effective institutions are achieved; and (4) local participation in decision making related to natural resource management is increased.

During my stay, I met with USAID staff and some of their partners and read pertinent documents in Guatemala City. On March 4, 1999, Claudia Pastor and I traveled to the Peten, where I interviewed personnel from three organizations working in the area with USAID: CARE, Conservation International, and Centro Maya.

This report—a series of recommendations to stimulate debate, discussion, and dialogue—is the result of my visit in Guatemala. I want to thank Claudia Pastor for planning my stay and for her support of the assignment. I also want to thank the USAID/Guatemala mission staff and their partners for their time and insightful comments.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

With the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, Guatemala's transition to peace and sustainable development has offered the country an enormous opportunity to improve the marginalized position of women—particularly indigenous women—who have historically had limited access to education, health services, factors of production, and democratic institutions.

Building on its history of systematic attention to gender issues, the USAID/Guatemala mission has responded to this opportunity by increasing girls' attendance at school, empowering women to make their own health-related decisions, increasing training for women in credit management and small business skills, and supporting legislative and policy reform to reduce domestic violence. In July 1998, the mission also sponsored two participants at the Women in Development Officers Workshop held in Washington, D.C. The mission hosted a WorldWID Fellow for a year to improve the mission's capacity to understand and integrate gender issues in development programs and participated in a PROWID grant on refugee women in Guatemala. PROWID's Women's Legal Status and Legal Education Project is promoting a gender focus in legal education and preparing advocates to address gender violence and discrimination in Guatemala. And the mission has used G/WID's WIDTECH and WIDSTRAT mechanisms for technical assistance on gender issues in the democracy and governance, environment, population, and health and nutrition sectors. The mission's 1998 Results Review and Resource Request (R4) for the strategic objective on the environment uses disaggregated data by sex, and it provides an analysis of men's and women's participation in mission activities.

CHAPTER TWO

GENDER AND ISSUES OF CONCERN TO WOMEN IN GUATEMALA

In her final report, Lisa Johnson Waugh, a WorldWID Fellow at the Guatemalan mission in 1998, writes that although awareness about women's issues and women's roles in development is growing, Guatemalan women continue to face age-old issues of inequality, isolation, dependency, and machismo. After talking with USAID partners and extension workers, she identified the following challenges in working with women in development programs.

IMPLICATIONS OF DEPENDENCY

- Men tend to control their families' income, property, and labor potential. Women usually need their husbands' permission to participate in groups or activities; permission is often contingent on proving that other responsibilities will not be neglected. When women work in wage labor—particularly in agricultural production—their wages are often paid to their husbands.
- Land traditionally passes from fathers to sons. Because land tenure issues have played a central role in Guatemala's history of conflict, trying to establish any equitable redistribution of land has been a challenge. To date, securing women's legal rights to land has been perceived as being of secondary importance in land titling programs.
- Many women do not have independent access to credit because their husbands or fathers are required to co-sign on loans. Often, women have no collateral in their own names. Since many women do not have access to formal credit, many village-banking initiatives seek to provide women with access to loans.
- Issues of dependency are twofold for many women. On the one hand, women are limited because of their economic and social dependence on fathers, sons, and husbands; on the other hand, many women are limited because of the number of people who are dependent on them for basic care. The dependency ratio for women in the Peten is approximately 7:1, which reflects the number of children and elderly parents who are dependent on one woman for food, clothing, and other basic needs.

IMPLICATIONS OF ISOLATION

- Women are often restricted to their homes and communities because of concerns for their safety. Men tend to travel with much less risk to their personal safety than women. In Corozal, for example, members of a women's cooperative reported that although men go to market approximately three or four times a month, women tend to go only three or four times a year.

- Those rural community leaders who are consulted about development activities often are members of a *comite de mejoramiento*. These committees usually have few women. To elicit the input of women takes extra time, effort, and resources, because women are often reluctant to participate. Moreover, many committee meetings are held in Spanish, which further hinders women since they are more likely than men to speak only their indigenous language.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE YEARS OF CONFLICT

- Because the war made it more difficult for women to travel safely, many women now feel an increased sense of isolation.
- The war aggravated an already pervasive sense of powerlessness and passivity.
- Because of their isolation, which has been only exacerbated by higher rates of illiteracy and limited access to television and radio, many women are unaware of the peace process. Thus, it will take them longer to recover from the trauma of the conflict. Many women continue to be extremely suspicious of development projects, because they believe there will be repercussions for participating in any kind of organized activity.
- After the loss of their husbands, many widows were forced to take on traditionally male roles. Eighteen years later, these women, if they have not remarried, often are intimately involved in economic activities and decision-making, which suggests that the war played a role in promoting and influencing changes in gender roles.
- *Retornadas* are women who are returning from Mexico after having been exposed to new ideas and after attending organized training in camps. They are often more willing to accept change and take advantage of opportunities than the women who stayed at home during the war. These women have been described as “*lista*,” “aggressive,” and “tough.” These characterizations suggest that that war served as a modernizing influence for some women and *decreased* their level of isolation.

CHAPTER THREE PRELIMINARY GENDER ASSESSMENT UNDER THE MAYA BIOSPHERE PROJECT

In 1998, Claudia Pastor, the USAID/Guatemala environment project manager in the Peten, wrote a report noting that the agreement with the Government of Guatemala on the Maya Biosphere Project calls for explicit strategies to include women. Under the same agreement, CONAP, the government agency for protected areas, is to separate “data by gender in reports and analyses whenever possible” and “to document to what extent women participate in/or are beneficiaries of field activities and training.”

Pastor’s report provided an assessment of the conditions in the Peten, where women face such constraints as the lack of education, restricted freedom to participate in activities, and limited access to and ownership of resources. Women also lack access to credit, training, and appropriate technology. It is recognized that incorporating women into productive activities not only has a direct impact on the personal, economic, and social development of women but also on the education, health, and welfare of the family. Women’s participation has been shown to contribute to community development. Women influence decisions that have an impact on natural resources and the environment because they play an important role in deciding the type of crops planted, consumption patterns, water and firewood use, and family planning. In her report, Pastor emphasized that a comprehensive gender approach in environmental and natural resources programs provides a great opportunity to have women as allies throughout Guatemala, but particularly in support of USAID programs in the Peten.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACTIVITIES ON COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AND GENDER

As a follow-up to Pastor’s report, USAID/Guatemala requested technical assistance from WIDTECH’s environment specialist. The assistance resulted in specific recommendations to improve the work being done in the Peten on community conservation and gender and to contribute to the design of the new USAID/Guatemala bilateral environmental strategic objective. The recommendations are based on three sources of information:

- Interviews in Guatemala City with USAID staff and their partners;
- Interviews with USAID partners in the Peten: CARE, Conservation International, and Centro Maya; and
- Review of USAID/Guatemala documents dealing with gender.

The recommendations that follow are meant to stimulate discussion among stakeholders, especially the personnel in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), who are working closely with USAID/Guatemala on Strategic Objective #4 (SO4), “Improved natural resource

management and conservation of biodiversity in priority areas.” The recommendations focus on the institutionalization of gender and gender-sensitive strategies in MBR objectives.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GENDER

Capacity Building in CONAP

USAID/Guatemala has the opportunity to work on community-based conservation and gender issues under the supportive leadership of CONAP’s director. The director noted that through studies and workshops, CONAP has developed a good knowledge base on gender and community conservation. He emphasized that this knowledge must now be transferred to the field.

Recommendation

USAID/Guatemala should develop a strategy for putting gender issues on the CONAP agenda. The first step would be to develop a list of supportive CONAP staff. Other steps could include: targeted information dissemination on gender issues related to the conservation of biodiversity; technical assistance given in the design, implementation, and evaluation of activities; encouragement of women professionals in forestry, agroforestry extension, legal rights and land issues, and fields related to protected areas. USAID has begun to share information with CONAP on gender, and this process will continue. The recommendations in this report can be part of the strategy for working with CONAP.

Gender and Project Design

From an institutional point of view, working with women is often considered a time-consuming burden, particularly if gender issues were not considered adequately in the design phase of the project. If, for example, 80 percent of participants in a project are men and 20 percent are women, which is not uncommon in Peten activities, two things must happen to achieve equitable participation rates: (1) male participants must be decreased to 50 percent of the total, which means excluding some of the current male participants (an often unacceptable alternative) or (2) more women participants must be added, a heavy burden if additional resources and personnel are not added.

Recommendation

If the overwhelming number of project participants is men, the project document should recognize that this is a project that “targets” men and then should provide the rationale for doing so. In the Peten Program, for example, gender was considered at the design phase, and it was recognized that the vast majority of forest workers were men and that, therefore, more men than women would participate. Generally, however, the initial assumption is that 50 percent of men and 50 percent of women will participate. If the assumption is incorrect, then the efficiency of the bias toward men (or toward women) must be explained. In future program strategic objective agreements, gender should be fully considered at the project design phase.

Gender and Project Implementation

MBR’s principal strategy in working with women is to hire a female technician who then forms women’s groups and provides technical assistance to these groups. The reason given for the necessity of hiring a woman is that men, for cultural reasons, cannot work well with women. This strategy, it is said, often fails because: (1) it is difficult to find female technicians who have agroforestry and other needed credentials; (2) the job demands women be away from home for days, sleep in hammocks, and ride motorcycles through isolated regions; and (3) once a technician leaves her job, without her support, women’s groups tend to fail. These reasons have become the rationale for not working with women as much as would be desirable.

Many of the solutions to this cycle of failure are to be found already in the Peten. The following are some of the solutions mentioned by Maya Biosphere field personnel:

- There are many examples of men working with women, especially sharing technical skills. These examples need to be documented and disseminated.
- It is not necessary to hire more technicians, such as agronomists and professionals with forestry or agriculture backgrounds. Instead, technicians already in place need to train local men and women to disseminate technical lessons learned and best practices.
- Disseminators, already being used, are respected community leaders, both men and women.
- A solid foundation for working with women already exists. Women are community leaders, the *retornadas* have critical organizational skills, and women’s organizations are already in place.
- Those women’s and men’s groups that are successful generally meet a felt need, are led by community members, and are sustainable with or without outside help.

- A group can be strengthened with outside support—for example, with new information on conservation practices, small business skills, and organizational development skills. Such support is sustainable. Material support creates dependency; such subsidized groups are often not sustainable when the support leaves.
- The USAID partners in the Peten—Centro Maya, CARE, and Conservation International—should form an active coalition and learn from each other on how best to address gender and issues of concern to women.

Recommendation

A participatory planning session with project personnel from all the partner groups of the MBR should be held to determine a strategy for working with women. The session should begin with brainstorming how staff already successfully work with women and under what conditions. A strategy should be developed for expanding on these successes. In such a planning session, strategies will emerge out of the discussion of the successful work the technicians are doing with the communities. The meeting should be led by a facilitator skilled in participatory methods.

Encouraging Women in Leadership Roles in Partner Organizations

Those in the Peten spoke of the difficulties that female professionals and community leaders face working in primarily male environments. For example, cooperatives—organizations often used for development activities—are primarily male, thus excluding women from development activities. There is extensive literature in Spanish and English on making work environments safe and comfortable for women. Women worldwide provide much of the grassroots leadership for the environment movement; the MBR should cultivate this leadership potential.

Recommendation

It is recommended that there be: (a) professional development and mentoring for women as leaders in their communities and in the workplace; (b) a women's association of community leaders and professionals; (c) institutional policies on professional behavior of men and women working together and special training for men in working professionally with women in nontraditional jobs; and (d) an examination of institutional structures that encourage women professionals. For example, some technicians work 22 days away from home and then spend 8 days at home. This structure may be appropriate for men who have wives caring for their homes and children, but not for women without such support.

GENDER-SENSITIVE STRATEGIES IN PETEN PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Language as an Obstacle to Clear Communication

Language can be an obstacle to clear communication. In interviews, two terms were mentioned as confusing: gender and empowerment.

Gender refers to culturally and socially defined roles for men and women; for example, in the Peten, men plant corn and women make tortillas. Gender also includes the dynamics and interactions between men and women that often rest on a socially defined power base. For example, in the Peten, the man is considered the head of household. Sex refers to the biological differences between men and women. Gender is central to a community-based approach to conservation, affecting how communities and households are organized and how they relate to the environment around them. However, for the most part, among those interviewed for this review, the term “gender” seemed to confuse more than to clarify.

Empowerment, within the environment sector, frequently has been used to mean increasing the self-esteem, confidence, and skills of men and women so that they can participate in civil society on behalf of conservation and a sustainable environment. Some, however, find the term “empowerment” may imply conflict and political power struggles.

Recommendations

If the term “gender” is confusing, it should not be used. An explanation of what is meant by the term may be more helpful. For example, the following explanation includes gender within the context of community conservation without using the term: “A community-based approach to conservation builds on the vital roles women and men play in understanding and managing the environment that surrounds them in both rural and urban settings.”

If the term “empowerment” is inflammatory or inappropriate, other words and phrases can be used to mean the same thing. The Central American Regional Environmental Project, for example, uses the following phrase to define empowerment: “to develop effective participation of both men and women in problem identification, problem-solving, rule making, and right-to-know.”

Environmental Education: Highlighting Gender

According to a USAID-supported environmental survey in Peru, a significant difference exists between men and women regarding their knowledge of environmental issues, including the conservation of biodiversity and protected areas. Compared to men, women know less. The differences disappear, however, when education is taken into account. Therefore, the results of the survey give central importance to education, especially the education of women and girls, as a way to address environmental issues.

In general, the importance of reaching men, women, boys, and girls through environmental education is not disputed. It is recognized that all community members must be informed about the importance of conservation. Women are seen as playing a central role in environmental education because their intimate relationship with their communities and families provides an ideal conduit for environmental messages. Nevertheless, in the depiction of the management of natural resources, environmental education messages overwhelmingly use images of men and boys.

Environmental education activities can easily address gender issues. Classrooms where conservation materials are used are generally 50 percent girls and 50 percent boys. Those going on environment field trips and participants and leaders of special days dealing with the environment have been shown to be both boys and girls. By documenting these data, environmental education activities can showcase their attention to gender issues.

Recommendations

Sex-disaggregated participant data can easily be gathered to highlight successes and accomplishments in working with women and girls in environmental education. Education materials also should be reviewed to determine whether graphics show both boys and girls, men and women.

Clarify Gender Roles in Agroforestry Activities

Many agroforestry activities in the Peten seem primarily to involve men as technicians and participants. In the 1998 R4 for SO4, 85 percent of those adopting sustainable practices were men, while only 15 percent were women. The R4 concluded that one reason for the gap between men's and women's participation was "the strong focus on results in terms of management and integrity of the natural resource base. . . . [I]t appears that men's behavior has a more direct causal relationship." It may be that, given the priorities and objectives of the activities, men should be those primarily involved. If so, then the project title, objectives, design, and rationale need to indicate that the activity is targeted toward men.

Many times, however, women's relationships to natural resources are invisible. As the 1998 R4 recognizes, "With more attention to division of labor by gender, the program will be able to focus more effectively on including women as participants and decision makers."

Women who live near protected areas often are defined by themselves, their families, reserve staff, and others as "housewives." Men have more descriptive titles—"fisherman," "farmer," and "cheese maker"—that more clearly delineate their relationship to natural resources. It is important to deconstruct the term "housewife" to make visible how women interact with the natural world. For example, in El Ocote, a reserve in Mexico, one extension agent wrote down the tasks of a "housewife" that brought her in contact with natural resources. They included cooking, cleaning, marketing, and preserving fish; growing herbs for food,

medicine, and adornment; harvesting, grinding, and storing corn, coffee, and chilies; tending the garden for food and market; raising chickens and turkeys for home use and barter; and gathering water and firewood.

Although many agroforestry activities in the Maya Biosphere Reserve involved only men, other agroforestry activities included both men and women, recognizing the roles of women in the management of natural resources. Among those activities mentioned were growing medicinal plants, reinforcing the Mayan agricultural system, planting fruit trees, introducing fuel efficient stoves, and using integrated farming systems—for example, goats, manure, and worms for composting and gardens.

Recommendation

Agroforestry activities are numerous and diverse. Choosing one activity over another is based on many variables. It is recommended that when men are chosen over women as the majority of participants, or vice versa, project designers should explain the rationale for this decision in the appropriate project documents.

Land Titling: A Woman's Rights Issue

WorldWID Fellow Lisa Waugh writes, “Access to land and control over land are of particular significance in the history of conflict in Guatemala. For generations, land disputes have been sources of contention, and agrarian reform is considered by many to be one of the most important parts of the peace process. The focus of current efforts has been on the institutional development of land titling systems, coordinating with the Land Fund to provide land titles to families in conflict areas, and coordinating the efforts of CONAP and CARE with other international donor initiatives.”

Waugh also comments, “There appears to be lack of consensus about how to best address the needs of women in the titling process. Discussions to date have centered on the fact that in spite of the apparent lack of legal bias against women's ownership of land, there continues to be a cultural bias which excludes women from formal ownership.”

Recommendations

Efforts should be focused on informing women about their legal rights. The land titling process should be carefully documented to indicate at what points women are brought into the process. This documentation will help identify entry points for informing women of their property rights.

The mission should contract a land tenure specialist with a background in gender issues to research women's rights under Guatemalan law as it is written, to track the quantitative indicators that reflect increasing levels of ownership for women, and to develop case

histories from the Peten that would capture qualitative aspects of land tenure issues. Part of this contract would require dissemination of the research through a variety of mechanisms such as workshops, pamphlets, and radio spots.

Women, as well as advocates of women's issues, often do not know the vocabulary or the terminology appropriate to a discussion of land tenure issues. For this reason, they are easily dismissed. These women need allies within the donor establishment who will identify spokespeople for them who have credibility and expertise.

Productive Activities: Making Them Sustainable

Many of MBR's activities in the Peten are linked to generating income for those who live in and around the reserve. As a rule, all income-generating activities for communities, partners, or sites should be treated as businesses and managed accordingly. Small businesses are generally high-risk ventures, with traditionally high failure rates. Not surprisingly, many local economic activities are developed with a built-in reliance on continuing support from nongovernmental organizations. Without appropriate training and sound credit, production, and marketing advice, such efforts are prone to failure. Small businesses should respond to legitimate market forces. Productive activities created for women, however, often fall outside project objectives and tend to be developed without regard to market forces.

Recommendation

Economic activities in the Peten should be based on sound business principles and should not be confused with activities that solicit the good will of the communities in support of the reserve. A determination should be made that these economic activities: (1) are clearly related to biodiversity conservation; (2) are demand-driven and have a competitive advantage; (3) produce a value-added product; (4) are market based; and (e) have managers with business skills. Particular attention should be paid to those enterprises advocated for women since women face more obstacles—such as a lack of credit, mobility, language skills, and education—than men do in running small businesses.