



REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROJECT

Case Study

Building Peace Through 3rd Party Impartial Facilitation: The Story of OAS-PROPAZ in Guatemala

This case study is one of 26 cases developed as part of the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP). The RPP cases were not written as evaluations; rather, they were written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across the range of cases. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people—the case writer, agencies, project participants, and observers—at the point it was written. RPP would like to acknowledge the generosity of the agencies involved in donating their time and experience for these case studies, as well as their willingness to share their experience with the worldwide community of peace practitioners.

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NOTE: (June 2003) At the time this case was written, OAS PROPAZ was an OAS Program. An updated version that documents the last part of the program when it became a national entity is being produced now.

Introduction

The following is a case study of a specialized program of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Guatemala known as “Culture of Dialogue: Development of Resources for Peacebuilding, OAS/PROPAZ”. The program is a joint effort of the OAS, the Government of Guatemala and various social sectors in Guatemala. This case study is presented in three sections. The first section contains a brief historical overview and a description of the general context in which the Program was first introduced. This section is intended to assist readers who may be unfamiliar with Guatemala and to illustrate the deep-rooted nature of the conflict in that country. The second and third sections describe the origins and evolution of the PROPAZ program. In presenting the Program we attempt to provide a conceptual framework that explains not only what PROPAZ did, but *why* and *how*, and to assess its contributions to the peacebuilding process underway in Guatemala. It offers a frank and transparent view of the questions and issues the Program faced in the hopes of assisting other practitioners working in the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

The OAS/PROPAZ Program initiated a transition period in November 2000 when its day-to-day operations were turned over to a Guatemalan director. By this time the PROPAZ program had facilitated and provided assistance to more than one hundred different initiatives and processes related to implementing the National Peace Accords, facilitating community-based approaches to conflict resolution, and/or building capacity in government and civil society sectors in third-party facilitation. Rather than present the breath of the OAS/PROPAZ activities and in order to illustrate concretely 'how' the OAS/PROPAZ program carried out its work, this presentation includes three different examples of a “*process*”. Each of these ‘mini-cases’ illustrates the types of activities carried out under each of the programmatic areas of the Program: Inter-sectoral, Zonal, and Training. The examples are presented separately in gray boxes to assist the reader.

I. General Overview of Guatemala

When the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived in the Guatemalan highlands in the 1520's they encountered a politically fragmented population prone to frequent wars between different Mayan kingdoms. They found hierarchically organized and very stratified societies with a significantly "urban" character.¹ The Spaniards were duly impressed by the Mayan's developed architecture and broad knowledge of astronomy, and fascinated by their practice of human sacrifice and their vast religious mythology. They paid much less attention to other equally original features of Mayan culture. Agriculture, though seemingly primitive, "obeyed a delicate and deep symbiosis between man and nature".² This wisdom and skill in handling nature allowed well-nourished populations to prosper in the area and, together with the indigenous peoples of El Salvador constituted the mostly densely populated regions of the entire Central American isthmus.

The Spanish colonial authorities exploited the internal differences between the various Mayan populations in a classic divide and rule strategy. Although different approaches were tried in Guatemala to subjugate the indigenous population through war, peaceful and forced evangelization, in general it was a violent process that resulted in frequent uprisings and fierce resistance that lasted for decades.³ Unlike their counterparts in North America that arrived a hundred years later bent on creating a 'New World', Spanish colonialism in Latin America sought to *re-create* in America a *pre-modern* feudal society. The result was an authoritarian political regime, a feudal landholding system, and a rigid two-class society based on religious absolutism and orthodoxy.⁴ Spanish was the only official language and Roman Catholicism the only religion. Not surprisingly, the indigenous peoples resisted this systematic destruction of their culture (language, religion and heritage). Today Mayan Indians comprise an estimated 55-65 percent of Guatemala's national population. They are divided into 21 different linguistic groups. In addition to the Mayan communities, there are some additional small ethnic groups.⁵ Today, more than half of the Guatemalan population identify themselves as Mayan, and many of those who speak Spanish do so as a second language.

¹ These villages were not urban in an economic sense, but rather self-sufficient and well-populated communities.

² See Hector Perez-Brignoli's *A Brief History of Central America*, (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1989) p. 34. Translated into English by Ricardo B. Sawrey A. and Susana Sterri de Sawrey.

³ Unlike the Aztecs and the Inca, the Mayan Kingdom had no large power centers for the Spanish conquerors to take over and establish rule. As a result, several decades of continuous struggle ensued not only between the Spanish and the indigenous populations, but also the inevitable rivalries that occurred between the different groups of conquerors. (Ibid, p.34-35).

⁴ See Howard J. Wiarda's *The Soul of Latin America* (New Haven:Yale University Press, 2001), p. 3.

⁵ Widely varying estimates exist concerning the indigenous proportion of Guatemala's national population. Most analysts concede, however, that in Guatemala, as in Bolivia, indigenous peoples constitute a majority. Cakchiquel, Mam, Kekchi and Quiché are the largest in numbers. In addition to the Mayan peoples, small ethnic groups include the Garifunas on the Caribbean coast and Xinca indigenous peoples near the Salvadorean border. For additional information, see Roger Plant, "Indigenous Identity and Rights" in Cynthia Arnson's, (ed.) *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America* (Washington, D.C./Woodrow Wilson Press, 1999). For its part, the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) indicated in a report in 1999 that Guatemala has the highest indigenous population of all of Latin America.

Land tenure and use have been and continue to be the primary source of conflict in Guatemala. The roots of the land problem stem from its pre-colonial and colonial past. Prior to the Spanish conquest, Mayan culture was based on subsistence agriculture. For centuries their populations lived on staples of corn, (grown under a system of *slash* cultivation interrupted by variable periods of fallowing), and a variety of chile peppers, squash and beans. Moreover, Mayan culture was based on a worldview that reveres land and nature based on collective, rather than individual, ownership. Spanish colonial administration introduced several practices that dramatically changed agriculture and indigenous life: they established large plantations using indigenous communities as *forced* labor⁶ and instituted the *tribute* system. The Kingdom of Guatemala survived throughout the 1600's on "tribute" from the Christianized Indians.⁷ The major part of the tribute was paid in kind. Indian tribute thus provided the goods (in particular corn, wheat, cotton, wool, cocoa, yarn, and thread) for local trade and for consumption in the cities. Public auctions handling these products generated cash for public salaries, expenses and remittances back to Spain. In Guatemala indigenous populations were exploited even further than their Central American counterparts through the "*regulated* distribution of products". Cotton was distributed to make thread, combined with the requirement to hand over all thread and yarn produced, and the forced sale of certain products. This system served two purposes: it assured the production of certain goods (such as thread, yarn and textiles) and forced the native trading to become money-based.⁸ These practices were to have far reaching consequences that even today impact modern day Guatemala.

In the end, Spanish colonial rule resulted in a restructuring of indigenous life, resulting in population settlements that blended pre-Conquest and indigenous traits with a typically Hispanic administration. The subjugation of native peoples took on complex forms and combinations. In Guatemala, indigenous peoples enjoyed autonomy in their daily life and in the internal structuring of their settlements and communities (under the watchful eye of missionary priests); indigenous leaders used traditional forms of maintaining internal order and administering justice, and developed procedures for collecting Indian tribute. Royal authorities regulated and collected the tribute, distributing it among the various beneficiaries. Occasionally authorities and justices visited the settlements, purportedly to watch over the enforcement of the system and to correct injustices and abuses against the Indians. Eventually these practices contributed to a new value system, (initially interwoven with pre-Conquest rituals and cults) that inculcated the belief that domination was a "gift from Heaven". Unlike other areas in the Caribbean and the isthmus, the Mayans survived the biological onslaught and war brought by the Spaniards and continued to have a visible presence despite their decline in number. As a result, a 'typical' colonial society with Spanish cities and towns, haciendas and plantations, and Mayan settlements that provided tribute and labor, endured through the end of the colonial period (and beyond).⁹

The practice of forced labor initiated during the colonial period continued long after Guatemala achieved its independence in 1821. During the 1840s and 1850s, lands that had been

⁶ Although in other countries of Latin America, indigenous populations were used as a cheap source of labor, in Guatemala, more often than not, labor was forced. This practice continued well beyond independence.

⁷ An estimated 70 percent of the fiscal resources of the Spanish authorities in Guatemala during the seventeenth century came from tribute from the Indians. (Perez-Brignoli), p.48)

⁸ Perez-Brignoli, p. 48-49.

⁹ Ibid. p. 40-44.

held in common by indigenous villages increasingly were confiscated, forcing the Indians to become sharecroppers or debt peons. Many children were taken from their parents and assigned to "Protectors", who treated them as indentured servants. As a result of these policies, the Mayans retreated higher into the mountains and the *altiplano* (the high plateau) where the land was not so desirable. Yet when the cultivation of coffee began in earnest in the 1870s, planters discovered that the steeply sloped hillsides of Guatemala's volcanoes (previously considered worthless) were excellent for growing coffee. The planters needed a government that would allow them to take this land and guarantee them a cheap, reliable supply of labor. They got it in 1871 when General Justo Rufino Barrios, a prosperous coffee grower, assumed power. The Barrios government tried to placate the Mayans by giving them other marginal lands. The Mayans who had little sense of private property, resented being displaced from their traditional lands. Most of them lived in self-sufficient villages and were loath to work, other than briefly, for money. The government remedied this situation by issuing a "*mandamiento*" and debt peonage. For Indians, their only alternative to being dragged off to work on a farm (or other forced labor) or going into debt was flight. Many did choose to flee into Mexico or into the mountains.

The forced migration down the *altiplano* of Mayan Indians to harvest coffee resulted in their contracting diseases such as influenza and cholera, and carrying these diseases back into their home communities. From the planters' perspective, Mayans were unreliable, often lazy and prone to run away from their farms. In some instances, they were stolen away by other planters. This uncertainty of supplied labor frustrated planters who complained to the government. At times the army was sent to round up Indians and bring them to work on the farms. This contributed to a mutual resentment between '*ladinos*' and Mayan Indians. While coffee profits boomed, the Mayans found themselves virtually enslaved. With this foundation, a future of inequity and violence was all but assured.¹⁰ This pattern continued into the late 1950's and the 1960's. By then Guatemala had developed a cash economy based on two principal exports: coffee and bananas. By the late 1990s Guatemala's wealthiest landowners made up two percent of the total population and owned more than two-thirds of Guatemala's arable land.

The period from 1960 to 1996 is known in Guatemala as the period of internal armed confrontation. It spans decades of fighting and the emergence of various guerilla movements that evolved in different phases throughout its 36-year history. Its roots lie in the CIA-backed military coup of 1954, toppling the government of Liberal president Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and undermining national attempts at key political reforms, including an agrarian reform.¹¹ The agrarian reform called for a redistribution of public lands and the expropriation of lands not actively under

¹⁰ See Mark Pendergrast's *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World* (New York: Basic Books 1999), pgs. 29-38.

¹¹ During the early 1950s land-hungry peasants began to illegally occupy coffee plantations. In an effort to resolve the land crisis, in June 1952 Arbenz put forth the Agrarian Reform Act. His government was, in fact, following the recommendations of the IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the precursor of the World Bank) which considered these lands vital for domestic food production. The law affected the vast holdings of the United Fruit Company which argued that its fallow lands – some 85 percent of its total holdings in Guatemala in 1953 – were a safeguard against plagues and diseases of banana trees. Although United Fruit was compensated for the expropriated lands at their "declared" value, the Company argued that real value was many times over. The US government sought to portray Guatemala as a "Soviet satellite", which became even easier after Arbenz purchased arms from Czechoslovakia. [For a succinct account of the overthrow of the Arbenz regime, see Perez-Brignoli (1989), pgs. 129-131.]

cultivation or property in excess of 90 hectares [224 acres]. One hundred former German coffee plantations were turned over to peasant cooperatives. Those forced to sell land were recompensed based on tax assessments. The hardest hit foreign corporation was the United Fruit Company that had large tracts of fallow lands as potential banana lands. The U.S., which perceived Arbenz as a threat to American influence in Latin America, approved a covert operation to overthrow his government, bringing to an abrupt end the first authentic period of social change and democratization in Guatemala that started in 1944. General Carlos Castillo Armas, who subsequently cancelled the agrarian reform legislation, disenfranchised illiterates, restored the secret police, and outlawed all political parties, labor groups, and peasant organizations, replaced him. Within a year and half, Castillo Armas had driven most of the peasants off the land they had gained under Arbenz.¹²

Although the Arbenz government was overthrown in 1954, the period of internal armed conflict is considered to have begun in November 1960 when reformist elements within the Armed Forces tried to launch a *coup*. The attempt failed and the frustrated *coup* supporters started their own guerilla movement¹³, which though largely ineffective, survived for many years in the mountainous regions of the Guatemala. It was in the 1970s, after efforts to bring about change through popular activism proved unsuccessful and met with increasing repression, that new leftist-oriented guerilla factions emerged. These new groups sought to change Guatemala's feudal economic and political system. As the guerrillas expanded their operations, they also expanded their cause, incorporating the rights and needs of indigenous peoples. The military responded to the strikes, marches, and public protests of this period with persecution, torture and the summary execution of many opposition leaders.

In 1982, the *Unidad Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca* (UNRG) was formed, uniting for the first time the various guerilla factions. As the guerillas began to gain control of territory and to win popular favor, they threatened to bring the war into Guatemala City. The military responded with a brutal counter-insurgency program aimed at cutting the link between guerillas and the nearby villages and communities that supported them. It was during the first half of the eighties that some of the worst massacres against the civilian (indigenous) population occurred. In 1982 when the born-again Christian General Efraín Rios Montt replaced General Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia through a military coup, many hoped it would lead to a respite in the killings. But Rios Montt continued the policy of his predecessor. The new policy dubbed "*beans or bullets*" also intended to win back the support of the civilian population through various incentives. Those communities that cooperated with the military and moved to newly created 'model villages' received government benefits that included development projects to build schools and roads, and provide electricity. Those communities that refused to participate were brutally persecuted as 'guerilla supporters'. According to the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) that was established by the Peace Accords, 440 villages were destroyed, over 200,000 Guatemalans were killed, and more than a million persons were forced to flee their places of origin as a result of government counter-

¹² Pendergrast, p.252-253.

¹³ In Guatemala, at the beginning of the 1960s, some dissident military officers took to guerrilla warfare, including Yon Sosa and Turcios Lima. [Perez-Brignoli, p. 146.]

insurgency operations during the period of armed confrontation.¹⁴ Successive U.S. administrations persistently cast the Guatemalan conflict in the geopolitics of the Cold War and maintained military aid throughout the 1980s.

The Guatemalan military also employed psychological tactics to counteract guerilla propaganda with propaganda of their own. They showered communities with flyers portraying the ‘communist guerillas’ as dangerous elements that had to be eliminated and accused them of being responsible for the suffering of the Guatemalan people. The army forced villagers into joining Civilian Defense Patrols (PACs) and to search the surrounding mountains for guerillas. As a result, many Mayan Indians went into exile, seeking refuge in Mexico or retreating further into the mountains. (The latter are referred to as the *internally displaced communities* since they usually took flight as a group or an entire village.) The army then resettled new communities on the abandoned lands, aggravating further the country’s already serious land tenure problems and setting the stage for future conflict.

Still, the army’s propaganda war proved effective. Many *campesinos* perceived Rios Montt as their “protector”. Support for the guerrillas began to wane as they launched offensives that they were unable to sustain, and left villages and supporters defenseless against reprisals by the military. The guerrillas themselves made their situation worse by killing civilians suspected of sympathizing with the army. By the late-1980’s, guerrilla military operations began to diminish. Instead, the guerrillas continued their resistance through sabotage and political kidnappings. At the same time, as the military slowly began to open up the political space inside Guatemala, government sponsored ‘death squads’ stepped up their activities resulting in numerous incidents of extra-judicial killings and the forced ‘*disappearance*’ of social activists. This climate of repression and sustained violence throughout the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a deeply-divided and fragmented society characterized by fear and mistrust.

The first significant opening for a negotiated end to the war came in November 1985, when the army allowed a civilian, Vinicio Cerezo, to be elected president.¹⁵ Negotiations received further impetus in August 1987 when the presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua signed the Esquipulas II Agreements. This regional accord spawned a series of complex peace negotiations throughout Central America. One important immediate result of this regional process was the establishment of the National Reconciliation Commission (CNR) in Guatemala to mediate talks between the Government and representatives of the *Unidad Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca* (UNRG). Designing a process and building a framework to establish a lasting peace in Guatemala was especially difficult and lasted a full decade. The progress achieved in some areas was offset by deadlocks in others. Overtime, the Government and the UNRG signed twelve separate agreements addressing the most critical issues and many of the underlying causes of conflict in Guatemala. These included, among others, agreements on clarification of acts of violence

¹⁴ The CEH was established as a result of an agreement between the Government and the UNRG in 1994. According to the findings of the Commission, the Guatemalan army committed ninety-seven percent of the atrocities committed during the period of confrontation. An estimated three-percent was attributed to the guerrilla.

¹⁵ Although the military was ‘winning’ the war on the ground, the guerrillas appeared to be winning in the international arena. The Government came under fire by the international community for its human rights violations, generating calls for a suspension in military aide. This contributed to a growing sense of isolation among the military and eventually led to an opening of political space.

and human rights violations committed during the period of confrontation; the resettlement of uprooted populations; recognition of the identity and rights of indigenous peoples; strengthening of civilian control and the role of the military in a democracy, as well as an important agreement pertaining to socio-economic issues and the agrarian situation.

In 1991 the Guatemalan Government created its own National Fund for Peace (FONAPAZ) to coordinate the use of incoming foreign aid to finance development and reconstruction efforts throughout Guatemala. In 1993, following a failed *coup* attempt, the congress of Guatemala appointed former human rights Ombudsman, Ramiro De Leon Carpio as the interim president. In the mid-nineties the new government began implementing reconstruction projects aimed at promoting peace in rural communities. To their surprise, they found that the local population was skeptical and remained hostile towards the government, questioning their motives for introducing these programs. So despite the evident progress in the (formal) peace negotiations, officials found that establishing peace *on the ground* would not be easy. In various instances, FONAPAZ staff members were taken hostage. In addition, in the wake of the National Peace Accords, there appeared to be a security vacuum as crime and violence began to rise rapidly in many areas in Guatemala.

Another important and positive development as the peace negotiations continued, unique until then to Guatemala, was a growing demand by civil society to be incorporated formally into the process. In 1994 an Assembly of Civil Society (ASC) was established to enable various sectors of Guatemalan society to unify their views and submit proposals to the negotiating table on substantive items on the peace agenda. In addition, the ASC could, if it so chose, endorse the agreements between the Government and the UNRG. This expanded the legitimacy and representativity of the peace process and set an important precedent for the role of civil society in post-conflict peacebuilding in Guatemala.

These events together set and formed the backdrop for the United Nations to assume a role in directly facilitating the peace negotiations in Guatemala. This role of mediator and facilitator continued over a span of three years. After the signing in June 1994 of the Agreement on Clarification of Acts of Violence and Human Rights Violations Committed during the Period of Confrontation in 1994, the United Nations Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) was established to monitor and verify the human rights situation.¹⁶ Also signed in 1994 was the Agreement for the Resettlement of Populations Uprooted by the Armed Confrontation which unlike some of the other accords, included mechanisms for its implementation. In September 1996 the United Nation High Commission for Refugees/UNHCR began operations in Guatemala to assist in the resettlement of uprooted communities. This coincided with the establishment of the OAS/PROPAZ program. But it was not until the signing of the National Peace Accords on December 29, 1996 and the subsequent entry into force of all the previously concluded agreements, that the Guatemalan peace process entered fully into the implementation phase. Under the terms of the agreements, new mechanisms were to be created for parties to seek peaceful solutions to critical problems affecting their country. As the peace process gained momentum, USAID and the UNDP increased funding for development and reconstruction programs, and other countries including Spain, Canada,

¹⁶ Later, after the signing of the Final Agreement, their role was expanded to verify the implementation and compliance with the National Peace Accords.

Germany and the Scandinavian countries funded programs to assist Guatemala in its transition to peace and democracy.

Although the signing of the National Peace Accords constituted a momentous historical event, changing deep-seated attitudes of mistrust, resentment and a generalized disdain towards the government was and continues to be a complex task for Guatemalan society. It was evident that there was a need to redefine and establish a new relationship between the Government and civil society based on mutual respect, shared decision-making and greater citizen participation. The real question now was "*how to do it?*"

II. Defining the Role of the Organization of American States

A. A Request by the Guatemalan Government for OAS Assistance

Alvaro Colom¹⁷ was the director of FONAPAZ in 1994. He had been impressed with the work of the OAS International Commission for Support and Verification (known by its Spanish acronym CIAV) in Nicaragua. The CIAV was established in 1990 to assist in the demobilization and reintegration of the Nicaraguan Resistance. This civilian Mission played an important role in facilitating both formal and informal negotiations between the outgoing Sandinista Government, the incoming Chamorro Government and the Nicaraguan Resistance, as well as in the actual disarming of the Nicaraguan Resistance. Moreover, CIAV protection officers played a key role in mediating and resolving the various local conflicts generated as a result of the overall process, and mediated disputes between army and police officials, and the various groups that rearmed in the early 1990s. At Colom's initiative, the Guatemalan government made a formal request to the OAS for assistance. Through the recently established Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD),¹⁸ the OAS was invited to develop a program to strengthen local capacity to resolve and prevent community conflict. Towards this end, the UPD carried out extensive consultations with all the key sectors of Guatemalan society. They found widespread interest for and recognition of the need for 'external' assistance to build domestic capacities in the resolution and prevention of conflict.

In late 1995 the UPD and the Guatemalan government agreed to implement a three-month pilot project as part of a "Program for the Prevention and Resolution of Community Conflicts in Guatemala". The general goal of the Program was to contribute to the establishment of a '*culture of dialogue*'. The specific objectives of the new Program were to: establish a system for the prevention and resolution of community conflict; strengthen the institutional capacity of the State to respond adequately to community conflicts; promote greater civil society involvement and provide spaces where they could develop their own solutions to problems; at the community level, foster greater citizens participation and involvement in community affairs, and; through awareness and skills training promote the establishment of local and regional entities to resolve and prevent conflict. A key component of the pilot phase was to carryout a diagnostic survey of the sources of

¹⁷ Alvaro Colom was the presidential candidate in the latest election of the Alliance for a New Nation—the left-wing coalition that included the political power base of the former guerillas.

¹⁸ The UPD was set up after the end of the Cold War to provide advisory services and support to Member States to strengthen their democratic institutions and procedures. The UPD is one of four principal bodies within the General Secretariat of the OAS. (The others focus on trade, development, and education.)

community conflict. This included identifying the general patterns, the magnitude, the key parties or actors and the localization of these conflicts.

During this pilot phase, the project was expected to create several local and one national "Unit for conflict prevention and resolution" (known by their Spanish acronym *UPRECO*). These UPRECOs would incorporate government officials and well-respected representatives of civil society into local or national mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts. At the local level, once identified and selected, community leaders would be invited to receive training in mediation and other skills, and to serve as mediators in the resolution of community disputes. Through these local UPRECOs, the program hoped to foster a more propitious environment for implementing local development projects. If successful, the plan was to replicate this model in other zones or regions of Guatemala. The national UPRECO was meant to serve as an emergency mechanism to respond to highly contentious situations and prevent their escalation into violence.

Through a cost-sharing arrangement, the Guatemalan government contributed forty percent of the cost of the pilot phase, while the UPD (with help from special contributions by the governments of Canada and United States) covered the remaining sixty percent. The total cost of the pilot phase was US\$ 300,000, constituting the single largest expenditure of the UPD in such a short period of time.

B. Implementing the Pilot Phase

As part of pilot phase the OAS conducted a "diagnostic study" of the principal causes of social conflict in Guatemala. Through extensive interviews and existing documentary materials, the study identified the principal sources of community conflict as: 1) the ownership and use of land¹⁹; 2) labor disputes²⁰; 3) government impunity and the inefficiency of the justice system²¹; 4) a critical shortage of adequate housing; and 5) the lack of, deficiencies or discrimination in the provision of basic services and infrastructure. The study also revealed that discrimination against indigenous communities cut transversally across all of these sources of conflict. These preliminary findings were used as a basis for developing the OAS program.

During the pilot phase, and as a result of negotiations between the de Leon government and the OAS, the municipalities of Rabinal and Sayaxche were chosen for establishing the local UPRECOs. Both the government and the OAS felt that these municipalities would serve as useful focal points. While each had been significantly affected by violence during the period of armed confrontation, they had not been so totally engulfed by the conflict as to spell disaster for the pilot program. The UPD hired two international consultants, one from Argentina and another from Chile, to head up the OAS teams charged to establish the local UPRECOs. Based in Guatemala City, they traveled in pairs periodically to Rabinal and Sayaxche to identify community leaders who

¹⁹ Problems stemmed from numerous factors including the duplicity of land titles or claims, uncertainty regarding land borders or boundaries, competing claims by returning refugee and internally displaced communities with other communities that had resettled on their lands, etc.

²⁰ Problems stemmed from various factors including high unemployment rates, labor disputes between management and workers that often ended in the massive firing of personnel, and varying interpretations over the right to organize and form trade unions.

²¹ Problems stemmed from an outdated and discriminatory legal system, impunity and human rights violations.

were well respected and that they considered best filled the requirements to act as *impartial* mediators. These leaders were to receive training and be invited to form a ‘UPRECO’. Under the original plan, the UPRECOs were to become fully operational by the end of the three-month period. By drawing on existing human resources in the community, the UPRECOs were intended to function as local voluntary organizations and not expected to require any infrastructure or additional funding.

Regardless of its merits and high ambitions, the timing of the pilot phase was unfortunate. Implemented during the months of November 1995 through January 1996, the pilot phase included two national holidays, Christmas and New Year’s. It also overlapped with the general elections of 1996. Alvaro Arzu of the PAN, a party that had yet to define what role, if any, it wanted the OAS to play in Guatemala, replaced the government of Ramiro de Leon Carpio.

C. Results of Pilot Phase

The international consultants went into Rabinal and Sayaxche aware that they had only a limited understanding of the local history or how these communities had been affected by the internal armed conflict. They quickly discovered that even in the same municipality, not every village experienced the same degree of violence. This diversity made entry at the local level extremely complicated for outsiders. Take for example the municipality of Rabinal. In some communities, the period of armed confrontation destroyed the traditional mechanisms for dealing with conflicts by killing many of the members of the local ‘Council of Elders’, perhaps the most respected of all traditional or community leaders in many Mayan villages. In other communities these ‘old ways’ still existed in some form.

An important adjustment for international staff working at the municipal level was what they describe as “*getting used to the rhythm of the people*” or the slower pace of life outside the capital. Unpaved roads that turn into rivers of mud during heavy rains sometimes forced staff to cancel meetings. The lack of phones made rescheduling a process of delivering messages to those who could read, and visiting in person those who could not. Also, rural residents, depending on the time of year, face serious time constraints. Peasants or *campesinos* were unable to attend trainings during harvest time.

Another difficulty was discovering the right words in indigenous languages to articulate key concepts and words used in conflict resolution training. This process takes time.²² Trainers found out that even the invitation itself could be ambiguous. The word used in Spanish to describe a workshop, ‘*taller*’, in these rural communities usually refers to an outdoor garage. That is, a place where cars and bikes are repaired. Finding the right word in Q’eqchi’ to convey the meaning of the word “conflict”, for example, generated a heated debate, as did finding the equivalent for the word “resolution”. As a result, although participants understood that the purpose of the meetings was to

²² The task involves more than translating the ‘word’ or the term. It requires finding the equivalent expression, symbol or meaning since the same word may have different connotations in another language. Often, particularly in the beginning, interpreters were unfamiliar with the terminology used in conflict resolution programs. Later, as the Program expanded, several indigenous and community leaders joined the PROPAZ staff, greatly enhancing the specificity and character of its rural training courses.

form an organization, many of them were not clear *what* it was that the new organization was supposed to do.

Several meetings and training workshops were held during the pilot phase and many community members became very committed to the UPRECO process. Nonetheless, the local UPRECOs did not become operational. In subsequent interviews regarding the pilot phase, some OAS staff told RPP that in retrospect the proposed method for creating the UPRECOs was not suitable for Guatemala, particularly at the municipal level. Although such a model might work in another context, they argue that a three-month timeframe is far too short a period for organizing and establishing a new *type* of community structure. The new incoming director of the PROPAZ program saw an even greater problem. As she explained in an interview to RPP...

“In both Rabinal and Sayxche, UPRECOs were formed by the end of the three month period. In Rabinal it was named the Consejo Conciliador Rabinalense²³ and in Sayaxché it was referred as the ‘CAP’²⁴. While indeed three-months is too short a timeframe, the main problem was the ‘*idea*’ of going into a community with the ‘preconceived notion’ of creating a local structure. Local structures, if they are to be culturally relevant, functional and sustainable need to involve local actors in their design. It may well be that the creation of a new structure is not the best way to address the problem.”

The National UPRECO, while successfully constituted, did not become fully operational. The staff, in retrospect, considers that the plan for creating a National UPRECO had some inherent flaws. For example, its members were selected on the basis of their reputation (or integrity) and high profile at the national level.²⁵ But credibility at the national level did not necessarily confer or guarantee credibility at the local level. In theory, National UPRECO members were to be trained and ready to respond, when called upon, to diffuse and resolve particularly contentious situations. Yet, in practice, this could be problematic. A general tenet of the mediation process is that mediators need to have the trust of both (or all) parties to a conflict. The fact that these UPRECO members were generally speaking unknown to the local population, but familiar to municipal authorities, could in-and-of-itself convey a *bias* against local communities and reinforce local skepticism regarding the government's *real* intentions. Moreover, the members of the National UPRECO were already committed to many other high priority matters. It was unfeasible for them to drop out from their other duties and act as “emergency mediators”. These interventions could be time consuming and would take them away from important responsibilities.

²³ Conciliation Council of Rabinal.

²⁴ Council for On-going Support for the Resolution and Prevention of Rural and Urban Conflicts in Sayaxché.

²⁵ The National UPRECO was made up of two government representatives and three civil society representatives from the religious, indigenous and civic sector.

III. OAS/PROPAZ: Contributing to Peacebuilding in Guatemala

A. Taking Stock

As mentioned above, in mid-1996 there was a change in management and a new field coordinator took over the OAS program. A thorough internal review of the results of the pilot phase was conducted and new modalities and options for developing the Program were considered. The staff came to the conclusion that the UPRECO model or concept had several shortcomings, yet they also recognized that the communities in Sayaxché and Rabinal had become significantly involved in the UPRECO process. Staff at the time pointed out that in Rabinal, for example, the local committee that was formed as a UPRECO constituted the *first* attempt by civil society to organize in the municipality since the massacres of the early 1980s. They felt strongly that if the OAS walked away from what it had started, it would reinforce community mistrust towards outside agencies and make it harder for others to gain credibility within these localities. The new coordinator felt it was important to continue these local processes and to salvage the positive elements from the pilot phase, and to look for a natural exit point. Aside from these programmatic considerations, the larger question was also raised whether a large international organization such as the OAS is suited to working at the community level. After much internal discussion, the OAS decided to use their existing involvement in Rabinal and Sayaxché as an opportunity to develop methodologies appropriate to furthering peacebuilding efforts at the local level.

The internal review process demonstrated a need to revamp the structure, goals and strategy of the Program, and to develop a more strategic and coherent work methodology. It resulted in a significant shift in focus from the initial pilot phase. The new coordinator felt the OAS program could have a more *strategic* impact by concentrating on building ‘national’ capacity *within* Guatemala for dealing with the root causes of conflict and by transforming the relationships among national leaders in various spheres, polarized from years of confrontation and/or exclusion. This strategy also appeared to be more in keeping with the mandate of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy. The UPD and the field coordinator hoped that by transforming relationships at multiple levels, the likelihood of violent conflict in Guatemala would decrease.²⁶

The diagnostic survey from the pilot phase and OAS’ own field experience in Guatemala showed that the causes of conflict stemmed from both structural and social factors. The structural factors include, among others, the unequal distribution of land; the lack of a clear system for the registry of land ownership; an inadequate and outdated legal system and the lack of any genuine respect for or adherence to the rule of law; and a poorly functioning taxation system that fails to generate sufficient government revenues. The social factors stem from the impact of 36 years of authoritarian rule. They include, among others, the lack of tradition in consensus-building or

²⁶ In Spanish there is a distinction, hard to make in English, between the words ‘*conflicto*’ (referring to a specific conflict) and ‘*conflictividad*’ (which refers to the general dynamic of conflict, to certain *types* of conflict or conflicts within a specific sphere such as land related, labor, etc.). OAS/PROPAZ is dedicated to working at the level of ‘*conflictividad*’. That is, the program works towards the establish of permanent or ad hoc mechanisms for managing certain types of conflicts relating to, for example, the return of ‘uprooted communities’, the land rights of indigenous peoples, etc. It does not focus on how to resolve any specific conflict.

inclusive decision-making; the marginalization of the indigenous population; and a propensity towards or acceptance of “violence” as a means for resolving conflict. OAS staff found that in Guatemala, as occurs in many countries during transition from war to peace, the parties in conflict had markedly partisan and polarized views of the causes and effects of the conflict. Perhaps the most serious problem that they identified in this new political setting was the lack, both in the public sector and civil society, of qualified persons with experience in conflict transformation, dialogue and negotiation. More than three decades of armed conflict had produced deep divisions in Guatemalan society. Communication between certain sectors did not exist and appeared difficult to achieve. There was a generalized mistrust of the government and a critical need to develop a new relationship between the government and civil society.

The staff at PROPAZ stress that in mid-1996 when they began operations, the final peace accords had not yet been signed.²⁷ Guatemalan society was so polarized that it lacked individuals or NGOs (with the necessary profile) capable of facilitating dialogue. Essentially, what Guatemala needed were trained professionals who had the trust of different groups and who possessed the necessary technical and social skills to facilitate dialogue among various sectors in conflict. To assist Guatemalans in preparing for the new and emerging challenges represented by the forthcoming National Peace Accords, the OAS decided the most strategic role it could play in the immediate political context would be to: provide technical assistance and accompaniment to government and civil society institutions involved in promoting, developing or implementing dialogue or negotiation processes; when appropriate, to serve as a third-party facilitator, and; to build and strengthen the human resource capacity in Guatemala in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

In August 1996, the OAS signed an agreement with the government of Guatemala that broadened and transformed the pilot project into a specialized program called "Culture of Dialogue: Development of Resources for Peacebuilding, OAS/PROPAZ".²⁸ The expanded Program was mandated to increase government and civil society capacity to promote dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Funding for the expanded program was provided by the governments of Norway, Sweden and Denmark through contributions to the UPD.²⁹ Over its four years of operation, from 1996 to 2000, OAS-PROPAZ operated on an average annual budget of approximately 1 million dollars. During this period, the size of the staff fluctuated from 20 - 37 professionals and support staff. In addition, the UPD contributed staff, time and resources. International consultants were also contracted to provide specific expertise for various PROPAZ projects.

The expanded Program introduced a new component to promote multi-sectoral dialogue between State and civil society actors involved in issues of mutual interest. This new component aimed at strengthening the capacity of the various parties to work collaboratively.

²⁷ The Final Peace Accord was signed 26 December 1996.

²⁸ PROPAZ constitutes one of several OAS technical assistance programs undertaken as part of larger Program of Support of the Peace Process in Guatemala. Other components include programs for de-mining and destruction of explosive artifacts to increase the availability of agricultural lands, a training program in democratic values and political management for political party leaders, and electoral and parliamentary assistance programs.

²⁹ Funds for the OAS/PROPAZ Program were provided by the Norwegian government through its embassy in Guatemala, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the Danish Human Rights Program for Central America (through the Danish Embassy in Nicaragua) to the UPD.

The main objectives that have guided the work of the OAS/PROPAZ program since its inception are:

- 1) To encourage and strengthen mechanisms that involve, jointly or separately, the government sector and civil society in the search for solutions to critical problems that affect Guatemalan society;
- 2) To increase the human resource capacity within Guatemala in conflict analysis and transformation, and related peacebuilding skills.³⁰
- 3) To share the lessons learned, methodologies and learning materials of the PROPAZ experience with Guatemalans and international actors interested in peacebuilding.

The PROPAZ program constituted a new area for the OAS. It required a more direct and systematic engagement by an *intergovernmental* organization with civil society, at variance with its tradition of providing technical assistance directly to government counterparts. The OAS felt that by acting as an impartial third-party it would have an advantage that would enable it to help bridge the large gap between the government and civil society. Such a program could have wider implications for the work of the OAS throughout Latin America.

B. Defining a Conceptual Framework

The UPD and the OAS/PROPAZ had to deal with many critical issues, including several organizational ones. First they needed to consolidate a 'vision' of the newly expanded Program in Guatemala and work to establish more coherency in conveying its Mission to the public. This would require a better articulation to donors, staff and Program 'counterparts' of the underlying concepts that guide its efforts to support the process of peacebuilding in Guatemala. It also would require an upgrading of the overall quality of its training programs, as well as situate these in a larger process to promote social change. Previously, individual teams working in different municipalities were responsible for the design and delivery of their own training programs. The content and approaches they used often differed widely. PROPAZ wanted to be sure there was uniformity in content and quality, even if individuals had their own personal training styles, and to assure that training was used to support longer-term goals.

PROPAZ built upon the guiding principles of its predecessor and the UPD's vision of peacebuilding. These included the following principles:

- Conflict has been and is an integral part of the nature and history of human relations. While it can be the source of violence and destruction, it can also be the catalyst or motor for social change.
- The Program supports a transformative view conflict. As such, conflict can produce transformations in the individual/personal, interpersonal, group/association, structural or societal spheres. Appropriate approaches and treatment of conflict are required to produce these transformations.
- A minimum condition for initiating processes of rapprochement, dialogue, negotiation or *concertación* is a recognition by the various parties in conflict of their interdependence.

³⁰ Later this objective became more specific. During its final phase of operation and in preparation for the transition, the goal became to build capacity in third-party facilitation, the establishment of conflict resolution mechanisms, the design of multilateral dialogue and negotiation processes, and related peacebuilding skills.

- Peacebuilding is a dynamic and long-term process of socio-political, cultural and psycho-social transformation. It requires adequate attention to key aspects in the short and medium-term.
- Peacebuilding encompasses a variety of roles and functions, all of which are necessary to consolidate a durable peace.

Taking into consideration the internal political context of Guatemala, the mandate of the UPD, and the above concepts and principals, OAS/PROPAZ made the following strategic decisions:

- To serve as a impartial facilitator of processes of rapprochement and dialogue;
- To provide process assistance and specialized training;
- To use and promote dialogue as a value, objective and tool for consensus-building and negotiation;
- To maintain an intra and inter-sectoral vision, which consists in generating the necessary conditions within sectors, as well as encouraging, when appropriate, exchanges among sectors;
- To prioritize work at the general level of conflict in the agrarian and labor spheres, and to strengthen the mechanisms created by or relating to the National Peace Accords;
- To provide process/procedural rather than substantive assistance with the aim of helping parties reach agreements and build more constructive relationships;
- To enhance participation and contribute to social transformation by impacting in four key spheres: attitudes, skills/capacities, processes and structures;
- To work with government and civil society sectors; and
- To concentrate Program initiatives on integral *processes* that allow for a more strategic impact, rather than provide support for a particular activity or event.

Taken together these principles formed what PROPAZ calls its “operational framework”. In short, the Program was dedicated to initiating, supporting and strengthening processes of rapprochement, dialogue, concertation and negotiation at both the inter-sectoral and community level by providing process assistance, training and technical assistance. Through its support, the Program hoped to enhance the likelihood of reaching agreements on substantive issues, contribute to the development of constructive relationships and address critical national problems.

C. Setting Up Shop

The PROPAZ staff was aware of the unique difficulties of its institutional base. The OAS, as an intergovernmental organization responds to official requests made by the Member States. The PROPAZ program was, therefore, directly accountable to the government of Guatemala. Yet if the expanded program was to succeed, OAS/PROPAZ would need to work creatively and establish some distance from the Government in order to act as a credible, impartial third-party facilitator. This constituted a “double-edged” sword. As an OAS program, PROPAZ had access to high-level government officials, and therefore the potential to have a real influence on 'national' policy and practice—affording it a distinct advantage over most NGOs operating in the country. On the other hand, NGOs operate with more freedom to pursue their own independent agenda and often possess

a greater deal of program flexibility.³¹ Sensitive to the challenges of fulfilling its role as a third-party facilitator, PROPAZ based its work on five principles: inclusivity, impartiality, respect for all national actors (including respect for their cultural context and different forms of organizing), the non-imposition of *models*, and the non-substitution of national actors.

In December 1996 the ‘Firm and Lasting Peace Accord’ was signed, officially ending the internal armed confrontation in Guatemala and greatly furthering the transition to civilian and democratic rule. As a result of the formal end of the conflict, political activism began to move out into the open. This opening up of political space created a sense of real change and excitement in Guatemala. This new peace, however, was arriving in a country characterized by discriminatory and authoritarian state institutions, and a civil society accustomed to confrontational and adversarial politics. Both sides had little or no experience at offering proposals or working collaboratively to resolve common problems. Both government and civil society sectors lacked experience in collaborative and inclusive decision-making and were skeptical that serious and complex social and political problems could be resolved through dialogue or negotiations. Moreover, they harbored longstanding grievances against each other and a deep mistrust.

The National Peace Accords expressed a national consensus on the necessity of resolving the underlying causes that led to the armed conflict, but the specific manner for dealing with these issues was to be determined later. The Peace Accords called for the creation of more than a dozen different commissions to deal with a range of issues, such as the land rights of indigenous peoples, educational reform, modernization of the judicial system and the return of uprooted populations. These commissions were established to make policy recommendations, draft legislative reforms and allow for broad citizen participation in developing appropriate institutional procedures and mechanisms for dealing with critical issues. In general terms, the Accords allowed for the creation of two different *types* of commissions – “specific” and the so-called “parity” commissions. The specific commissions deal with a particular theme such as modernization of the judicial system. These commissions are multi-sectoral, that is they bring together a diverse and wide representation of various sectors to work on a specific issue. The “parity” or joint commissions are limited to government and indigenous representatives, with equal representation, to deal with issues relating to land reform, educational and linguistic reform, participation in governance, etc. These latter commissions were meant to specifically address the historical discrimination and exclusion of indigenous peoples in the political, economic and social life of the country.

The new commissions provided spaces for government and civil society to examine indepth the problems that have generated violent conflict in the past, and provide a forum for developing joint approaches and strategies to collaboratively address these problems. Under the terms of the Peace Accords, commission members are mandated to make decisions by consensus. A key component of the work of the commissions is to present proposals for legislative reform that address the underlying structural causes of conflict. To do so, the parties need to develop a shared view of the

³¹ In addition, due to the nature of the OAS’ internal financial system, PROPAZ’s attempts to respond to unexpected opportunities sometimes created friction with the OAS administration. Nonetheless, the staff in Guatemala are quick to point out that, “*We never were unable to respond to unexpected opportunities for this reason.*” This was due in large part to the efforts of a senior UPD staffmember in Washington that helped to carve out a special niche for the Program within the OAS bureaucracy.

causes of conflict and forge a common vision for working together in their resolution.³² PROPAZ recognized the historical opportunity being offered to Guatemalans and decided to broaden its initial objectives to support, when possible, the efforts of the various commissions created by the Peace Agreements.

In light of the above, the UPD decided that to increase the Program's impact, it would focus on two areas identified as the major sources of conflict in Guatemala during the diagnostic survey. These included agrarian and land issues relating to land tenure and use, and labor disputes (in particular in rural areas). A decision was also made to assist the various parties representing the Government, internally displaced communities and returning refugees involved in [bilateral] negotiations on the resettlement of uprooted populations.³³ Under the Accords, returning communities were to receive land and other benefits.³⁴ The OAS felt this was an immediate task for the Guatemalan government and success in this area would set a positive tone (and perhaps increase public confidence) that could be beneficial for the peace process as a whole. This work of the Program came to be known as the **Inter-sectoral Component**. Its goal was to support and accompany government and civil society actors involved in these various efforts and processes, and increase the capacity of their institutions and organizations through technical assistance, training, facilitation and accompaniment.

In addition, (for the reasons discussed above), the Program made a decision to continue the community work initiated in Sayaxché and Rabinal. This work took on the more general goal of strengthening local capacity to deal with, manage and resolve local conflicts. This included strengthening the skills of local authorities in participatory decision-making and promoting greater citizen involvement by helping community leaders develop attitudes and skills for constructive participation. If successful, PROPAZ staff hoped the methodologies developed in Sayaxché and Rabinal could be offered as examples, with possible applications, for other municipalities. The activities conducted in this area were referred to as the **Zonal Component**.

A key goal of the PROPAZ program is to install local or national capacity in Guatemala in dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflict. This principle had several practical implications for the PROPAZ program. It meant giving priority to hiring and training Guatemalan staff over internationals. It also meant assuring that all PROPAZ staff had the necessary training and skills to carry out the work in their respective sphere. On a separate plane, in order to successfully carry out its Inter-sectoral and Zonal work, the Program would need to provide customized training to national and local actors. These 'external' training programs would need to be developed in a way that would not create a dependency on PROPAZ. As a result, in the area of training, the PROPAZ program had to deal with several challenges simultaneously. It had to increase its in-house capacity to design and deliver training, it had to strengthen the technical skills in negotiation and mediation of its technical staff, it had to develop contextualized training for Program counterparts and it needed to develop and implement a strategy to build national capacity.

³² The proposed reforms were to go to a national referendum or '*Consulta Popular*'. The reforms presented in 1998 did not pass because they did not get sufficient public support.

³³ PROPAZ provided training in negotiation and communication skills for community representatives involved in negotiations with the government, and training in mediation to staff members of the UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees).

³⁴ The work with the returning refugees and displaced actually began in September 1996 as it was one of the few agreements at the time which included a functioning mechanism. The implementation of the other agreements started in 1997, after the signing of the National Peace Accords.

The staff discussed a variety of ways to meet these challenges. There was some internal debate over the best strategy for creating capacity. One idea was to target primary, secondary and higher education as part of a strategy to build national capacity and reduce dependency on the PROPAZ for training. While some work with educational institutions was incorporated into what became the Training Component of the Program, it never figured as the main focus of its work. It did, however, reemerge from time to time. In light of the pressing needs of the staff, and in order to gain more field experience in Guatemala, the key function of the **Training Component** was to provide in-house training for its professional staff, and support for training activities offered through the Inter-sectoral and Zonal components.

The PROPAZ program endorses the view that *building capacity* requires effecting permanent change at multiple levels. This includes in four principal spheres:

- ❑ **Attitudes:** This means helping parties to modify intransigent positions, to envision a common future, to support values and practices that foster tolerance, respect and inclusion.
- ❑ **Capacities/Skills:** This means improving the capacity of parties to carry out a variety of roles and functions, as well as developing specific skills in dialogue, decision-making, negotiation, mediation and/or third-party facilitation. This means building new skills in inclusive or collective decision-making and communication, and increased coordination among various agencies. It also includes the ability to train others.
- ❑ **Processes:** This means developing appropriate internal procedures for participation and decision-making, and the design and implementation of dialogue and negotiation processes.
- ❑ **Structures:** This means creating or strengthening institutional and *ad hoc* mechanisms for coordination, participation and consultation in managing and resolving conflict; or the establishment of new organizational structures, etc.

All the work of the Program, whether at the Inter-sectoral or Zonal level, was meant to impact in one or more of these spheres.

D. Inter-sectoral Component

Within its focus on agrarian policy, labor disputes and returning refugees, the Program's strategy involved working with various sectors, including government ministries and agencies, NGOs, labor unions, peasant and indigenous organizations, and to a more limited extent, with the private sector. By working inclusively with a wide array of sectors in Guatemalan society, OAS/PROPAZ hoped to provide informal spaces for dialogue; help parties develop new personal and institutional relationships; and contribute to reducing polarization and increasing cross-sector collaboration. The strategic objective of the inter-sectoral work was to facilitate dialogue among confronted sectors and build their individual and institutional capacity in dialogue and negotiation. Specifically, the Program strengthens the institutional (or internal) capacity of select ministries, agencies and key national and civic organizations through facilitated reflection on their mission, nature, organization and operational procedures; technical assistance, customized training and accompaniment. A key part of its work is to facilitate both *intra* and *inter*-sectoral dialogue.

By fostering changes in the four sphere mentioned above, the Program hopes to help catalyze a broader cultural appreciation for the value of dialogue as a viable tool for effecting peaceful social change, as well as a practical tool for dealing with or addressing conflicts within institutions and

between sectors. Work in these four spheres is carried out through a range of support activities tailored to meet the specific needs of its counterpart(s). PROPAZ might do one or more of the following: facilitate *intra* and *inter*-group dialogue; run workshops which provide a basis for internal restructuring or an internal process of strategic planning; facilitate inter-agency dialogue between various government entities or offices dealing with interrelated issues (agrarian reform, land disputes, indigenous rights, land transfers, land surveying, labor disputes, etc.); facilitate inter-sectoral dialogue between government authorities and civil society actors; or provide technical assistance to a key institution (i.e. in establishing data systems for monitoring and analyzing conflicts).

During the pilot phase all program activities were closely coordinated with the government. Under the expanded mandate the Program had greater autonomy and distanced itself somewhat from the government. (Nonetheless, OAS/PROPAZ has always kept the government informed of its activities). As a result of this greater freedom, the Program was able to work separately with the different sectors, in accordance to their specific needs. As a result, the Inter-sectoral component was able to offer separately, as needed, training in communication and conflict analysis, dialogue, decision-making (with a special emphasis on consensus-building), negotiation (including the preparation for, design and implementation of a negotiation process), mediation and the fundamentals of strategic planning.

This assistance is meant to enhance the likelihood of success in political negotiations. OAS/PROPAZ does not view itself as a protagonist in the ongoing peacebuilding process of Guatemala, but rather as an impartial third-party capable of providing *process assistance* and facilitating dialogue. This underscores a basic tenet of the program '*that those who have to live with the consequences of an action or decision, are the ones who must make the decision*'. In practice, OAS/PROPAZ has facilitated reflection on a variety of possible options, but always refrained from making proposals on any of the substantive issues. While PROPAZ has, at times, made *process* proposals, it has never advocated in favor of specific outcomes in any negotiation process. Moreover, PROPAZ encourages parties/counterparts to analyze their situation carefully and to consider all the legal options available to them.³⁵ Despite personal preferences and individual political leanings, as professionals the PROPAZ staff recognizes the need for the parties to come to their *own* solutions. This is important. Through training and other activities, staffmembers often develop relationships of trust with their counterparts. As a result, they often have the ability or potential to influence them. The staff is aware of this possibility and takes care not to voice their partial opinions.

PROPAZ has worked with a variety of Guatemalan institutions, organizations and actors and refers to them as 'counterparts'. OAS/PROPAZ co-defines with counterparts the nature and scope of its support. While counterparts usually make an initial request for technical assistance on a specific project or for training in one of the Program's area of expertise, PROPAZ then works

³⁵ The technical staff was aware that in some instances, when adequate conditions do not exist, it might not only be legitimate but even important to withdraw from or refuse to join a negotiation process. It may well be necessary for one party to mobilize its constituency in order to demonstrate their '*power*' to the other party or parties. Peaceful protest or pressure tactics, such as strikes or demonstrations, can be useful to prove to the other party their '*interdependence*' and thereby induce them to come to the negotiation table. While the staff never advocated this course of action, it was careful to respect the legitimate right of its counterparts to opt for mobilization rather than dialogue. These principles are in keeping with Adam Curle's description of the various stages in peacebuilding.

closely with the counterpart, asking questions and learning about their work and concerns. This allows the staff to better assess the nature and scope of their institutional needs. As a result, the actual services PROPAZ provides may be significantly greater and different from the counterpart's or agency's initial request.³⁶

Early into the PROPAZ program SEPAZ, the Guatemalan government's official counterpart to OAS/PROPAZ, requested that the Program establish contact with the commissions created by the Peace Accords in order to offer its services. Following up on this request, PROPAZ established contact and was subsequently invited to work with the Parity Commission on Indigenous Rights to Land, the Parity Commission for Education Reform, and the Parity Commission for Reform and Participation, as well as other commissions established by the National Peace Accords. These commissions were of special interest to PROPAZ because they addressed the critical problem of indigenous rights and the double-discrimination that these peoples traditionally have faced. Most of PROPAZ's inter-sectoral work has been directed at "mid-level" officials and representatives—dealing less with grassroots and high-level politicians and more with professionals from government and non-governmental agencies.³⁷ Changing the skills, attitudes and institutional environment of these actors is one way to build capacity within their respective institutions and organizations.³⁸ Several of these entities (FONTIERRA, CONTIERRA, PROTIERRA, RIC) were newly created agencies established as a result of the National Peace Accords.

When a potential 'counterpart' decides to work with PROPAZ, and the staff feels that it presents an opportunity to work in a key area, then a relationship is established that often develops into ongoing collaboration. One good example of how a training session can lead to other forms of assistance is the *Mesa de Negociaciones para Conflictos de Tierra en Alta Verapaz* (the Negotiation Roundtable for Land Conflicts in Alta Verapaz), known as the *Mesa de Coban*. PROPAZ provided training to the members of the *Mesa* not just as an end in itself, but as a medium for establishing a relationship and building trust. This led to further assistance in other areas.

³⁶ By way of example, the Ministry of Education requested PROPAZ assistance to train a group of lawyers it had hired to serve as 'mediators' in conflicts involving the Ministry and teachers, students, parents or school directors. It was not clear, however, what was causing the recurrence of these disputes. PROPAZ suggested conducting a survey. Based on its findings, PROPAZ presented a proposal to the Ministry to provide technical assistance and facilitate dialogue to help the Ministry address internal problems of organization and communication, and improve the flow of information. Shortly thereafter, the Minister of Education decided to run as a candidate for the vice-presidency. As a result of internal changes, the person originally responsible for developing the program with PROPAZ was named Vice-Minister. Her replacement in turn was not interested in pursuing the matter further.

³⁷ One staffmember commented, "We did not make a strategic decision to do this. It was simply the level that we had access to at the time. Had we had access to top level leadership we would also have operated there."

³⁸ Three of OAS/PROPAZ's senior staff attended the Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University, and were greatly influenced by the work and ideas of John Paul Lederach. Nonetheless, the General Coordinator of PROPAZ said in an interview, "I have always found the concept of working at the mid-level interesting, but this has never been part of our strategic planning as such. Certainly the program was influenced by JPL's concept of peacebuilding, but not necessarily the idea of focusing at the mid-level."

MESA DE COBAN

The province of Alta Verapaz is one of the regions of the country with the highest incidence of land conflicts. The conflicts usually are between communities of indigenous people, or between these communities and private landowners (who have historically enjoyed the support of successive Guatemalan governments). Impoverished Mayan communities are frequently “invade” or occupy lands to plant crops to feed their families, or simply to harvest its fields. The costs for landlords to evict these ‘invaders’ can be considerable, and the process often results in violence and the loss of life. In addition, it is not uncommon for lands to be “reinvaded” shortly after one group has been removed, either by the same group or by another community. These confrontations can result in large losses for both sides, especially when the crops go unharvested.

The majority of the population in Alta Verapaz is Q’eqchi’. Most of them are poor peasant farmers who feel a strong connection to the land, which their ancestors lived on long before the Spanish conquest. For generations, indigenous communities have been used as a source of cheap labor and allowed to maintain villages on the privately owned plantations of large landowners. Since the end of the internal armed conflict, the efforts of indigenous groups to organize (asking for better pay, schools and health services) are no longer clandestine and occur in the plain light of day. Many of the wealthy landowners and their administrators argue that the peoples of the province lived in harmony “until human rights ‘agitators’ began to stir things up”.³⁹ Since the signing of the National Peace Accords, national organizations claiming to represent peasants have begun to operate in the open. As a rule, leaders from the private sector refuse to negotiate with these organizations, which they consider to be ‘fictitious’ (or fake) representatives without grassroots connections to these communities.

Making the resolution of the land conflicts even more complicated is the fact that Guatemala lacks a standard way of documenting ownership and delineating borders. As a result, different persons often have legal papers dating back to various regimes establishing ownership over the same parcel of land. Historically, the government has been notoriously inept at resolving these disputes. The National Institute to Transform Agriculture (INTA) is the government agency that was established in the 1960s to administer the agrarian reform. Many land conflicts naturally fell within its purview. By the 1990s INTA was widely perceived by the public as another corrupt state institution. Every step of the title process was said to include an official charging bribes. This fact alone made it hard for impoverished peasants to actually carry their case through the entire procedural process. Moreover, INTA was known on occasion to lose papers or move border markers in order to prolong conflicts (and generate more money for the private coffers of corrupt officials).

It was into this murky context that the United Nations Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA) waded in to monitor the implementation of the Peace Accords. The staff of the MINUGUA office in Coban soon recognized that many on-going human rights violations stemmed from unresolved land conflicts in the region. Two senior international staffmembers from MINUGUA in Coban

³⁹ In the past landowners would claim that ‘communists’ were messing with the heads of *campesinos*. Today it not uncommon to hear landowners, their administrators or lawyers say NGOs are instigating conflicts to justify their requests for financial support from donors and generate a need for their services.

undertook an initiative to explore with leaders in the region the possibility of meeting informally to see what might be done to address some of these land conflicts. One by one, they approached persons from the Catholic Church, the Ministry of Labor, INTA, the regional association of coffee growers, leaders of *campesino* organizations, directors of local NGOs, and others.

Then the two MINUGUA staffmembers convened a meeting of all those who expressed an interest in the idea of creating an informal group to discuss the land problem in Coban. Most of persons who came attended the meeting as concerned individuals, rather than in official representation of their respective institutions. Many of the persons who attended the first meeting did not know each other, but they were all willing to volunteer their time. Before they could reach an internal consensus on the purpose of these meetings, *campesinos* started lining up outside the door to bring them their cases. Helping these individuals became the focus of the group. The group came to be known as the *Mesa de Coban* (or the Roundtable of Coban). They began to meet regularly on Tuesday afternoons. There was no official connection between MINUGUA and the members of the Mesa beyond the support of the two senior staffmembers in Coban.⁴⁰ They provided logistical support, including a venue for the meetings, transportation, etc. throughout their assignment.

By focusing their work on individual land conflicts from the beginning, the members of the Mesa (and the MINUGUA staff) deftly kept divisive political and ideological issues off the agenda. Most of the persons who came before the Mesa were Q'eqchi' peasants. Although occasionally a landowner might request assistance, it was more common for them to appear in response to an invitation sent by the Mesa. Nor was it uncommon for landowners to decline an invitation. The types of problems brought before the Mesa included: land invasions by peasant communities; confusion over boundaries with two or more persons claiming ownership over the same piece of land; unresolved conflicts that had been brought before the INTA (some dating back more than 15 years); labor disputes⁴¹, and conflicts between indigenous communities over land and borders. The latter constitutes the largest portion of the conflicts brought before the Mesa.

The Mesa operates through an informal method to resolve the conflicts brought before it. It begins by listening to various accounts or stories told by members of the party appearing before them, and then reflects as a group on the best way to proceed.⁴² If only one of the parties to the conflict is present, the Mesa will invite the other party or parties to attend the following meeting to present their views. If these parties refuse to attend, the Mesa has no coercive power to force them to appear. After the parties have presented and explained their views and needs, the Mesa asks questions to clarify the various issues. It then either tries to help the parties reach an agreement, or refers them to the appropriate government institution. If the parties reach an agreement, the Mesa

⁴⁰ In fact, some in MINUGUA were wary of the Coban staff's involvement with the Mesa. In other parts of the country MINUGUA had come under heavy criticism by the Government for the efforts of some of its staff to '*intervene in the internal affairs of Guatemala*'.

⁴¹ This refers to labor conflicts that are closely tied to land issues. Usually they involve the competing rights of farm laborers known as "*mozos*" and landowners.

⁴² The Mesa respects the Q'eqchi culture and tradition where at least two persons, and perhaps a member of the Council of Elders, speak on behalf of the community or family. In Western culture this might be considered repetitive or inefficient. But for the Q'eqchi it is a way of ratifying what has been said and also demonstrating to the community their resolve to find a solution to the conflict. Since Q'eqchi is the native language of many of the persons presenting cases, much of business of the Mesa is conducted in that language.

will write it up. But the written agreement has no legal bearing and depends on the goodwill of the parties to implement and sustain them. In this sense, bringing issues before the Mesa provides an informal opportunity to explore the issues that make up the conflict and the *possibility* of arriving at a solution. In instances where the Mesa can not resolve the dispute, the Mesa makes sure that the appropriate government agency takes up the matter and follows through.

PROPAZ's involvement with the Mesa came through two related avenues. The staff members in Coban who had helped to form the Mesa decided to leave MINUGUA. They recognized that the Mesa was in its formative stages and needed some form of institutional support, so they contacted OAS/PROPAZ. [This turnover of MINUGUA staff in Coban coupled with subsequent personnel changes in the national office contributed to a shift in MINUGUA's policy toward the Mesa from one of support to one of discouragement.⁴³] The second point of contact came as a result of a training that PROPAZ was providing to the Ministry of Labor. One of the training participants was a labor inspector from Coban and a member of the Mesa. He introduced staff from PROPAZ to the members of the Mesa, which then extended an invitation to PROPAZ to come and listen to their concerns and suggest how they could work together.

OAS/PROPAZ began its assistance by facilitating “internal workshops” where its members reflected upon and articulated their immediate needs. Some of the concerns raised by members of the Mesa were that: 1) The Mesa only operates on Tuesdays without any support staff. They need additional logistical support; 2) They have no funds and disagree over whether or not to do fundraising; 3) Most members of the Mesa attend as individuals and do not officially represent their institutions. As a result, there is limited institutional support for the activities of the Mesa; 4) They have no procedure for following-up on conflicts; and 5) Some members feel they do not possess the appropriate skills to deal with these conflicts.

PROPAZ then designed a 50-hour training course for the members of the Mesa at the regional university. PROPAZ suggested that the training be open to a broad range of the Coban community. In addition to the tools and methods of conflict analysis, mediation and negotiation, the training sessions served to raise awareness among representatives from various government institutions of the value and benefits of the Mesa's work. Course participants say the training was professional, engaging and useful—all the more so because it was based on *real* cases and incidents from Coban itself.

OAS/PROPAZ also facilitated a process to establish and strengthen relations between the Mesa and government agencies dealing with land issues. CONTIERRA, the office designated by the Executive branch to resolve land disputes felt that the Mesa was encroaching on its jurisdiction. By bringing staff from CONTIERRA and members of the Mesa together in a joint workshop on addressing land conflicts in Coban, government officials came to appreciate the benefits that this local initiative could provide for their office. The workshop helped cement the relationship between CONTIERRA and the Mesa. Instead of perceiving themselves as 'rivals', they began to explore ways they could assist each other in their work. CONTIERRA has since joined the Mesa and

⁴³ The Peace Accords mandated that a national government agency, CONTIERRA, be established to deal with land conflicts. MINUGUA was concerned that the Mesa of Coban was operating without legal authority, clear accountability or mandate.

regularly sends representatives to the Tuesday meetings.⁴⁴ Other government agencies, such as the National Land Fund (FONTIERRA), have also since joined the Mesa.

This increased institutional acceptance and presence means that in addition to its role as a mediator, the Mesa serves as a unique space for coordination between different government agencies, and as a forum to exchange information between the government and other sectors of Guatemalan society. For example FONTIERRA, the government agency established to help distribute land to poor campesinos, learned through its participation in the Mesa that a particular ranch (or '*finca*') that they were about to purchase was located in the middle of a large tract of land in litigation over a boundary dispute. As a result, FONTIERRA decided not to buy the property. Some government officials say that before working with the Mesa they did not realize just how complex land conflicts could be. Their participation in the Mesa has increased the credibility of these new government agencies (that were often *perceived* as just one more corrupt government initiative) among all sectors, thereby enhancing their role and effectiveness. Also, through the participation of government agencies, the Mesa can better serve the individuals that appear before it by giving them advice about which agency to go to, and how to fill out and file the appropriate paperwork. When the Mesa recommends that certain papers be filed with a specific government agency, it arranges for a member of the Mesa from the relevant agency to meet the party when they arrive and accompany them throughout the various steps in the procedure. Through this simple gesture, government officials are able to improve their image before the indigenous communities as Q'eqchi' peasants no longer feel they are being bounced around from one office to another.

PROPAZ has played a role in assisting the Mesa work through certain organizational dilemmas. For example, since the Mesa has no phone number, mailing address or official office it is only able to receive requests in person. In addition, it continues to meet only once a week, on Tuesdays, in a room caked with mud around a large wooden table. The room has no electricity so meetings end as soon as it becomes dark. The Mesa has debated whether it should look for funds to hire some administrative staff, to follow-up on cases, and in order to rent office space where they could meet more often; and to systematize the experiences it has acquired through the different cases, in order to learn from them; and for strategic planning sessions to decide what to do when key members decide to leave—Should the Mesa end? How can it incorporate and train new members? The Mesa is still engaged in an ongoing process of reflection regarding its institutional structure and attributes. For its part, PROPAZ respects the decisions of the Mesa, as well as their right to advance at their own pace in making these important decisions.

Some examples of cases where the Mesa of Coban has been successful are:

- A land invasion by *campesinos* where they planted crops and built shacks. In order to have them removed, the landowner would have incurred large legal fees. The process could have destroyed the crops and led to the loss of life. Instead, the parties came before the Mesa, and by the end of the mediation, the landowner and the *campesinos* agreed that the peasants would leave peacefully and take their harvest with them. The landowner would also provide funds (a fraction of what he might have paid in legal fees if the matter had gone to litigation) to help the group to resettle elsewhere.

⁴⁴ This involvement of FONTIERRA in the Mesa provided MINUGA the reassurance it needed. They then resumed attending the meetings and providing whatever logistical support it could.

- The Mesa contacted FONTIERRA, which was preparing to purchase a ranch to resettle a peasant community. The ranch was located on a large tract of land that was in litigation. It involved a particularly contentious dispute over boundaries and several persons had already been killed as a result of the dispute. FONTIERRA decided that it would not purchase the ranch and the *campesinos* agreed to settle for other land. Even though they did not feel the land being offered was as good as land they were claiming, the peasants felt it offered them greater security.
- In one instance, a group of *campesinos* occupied a piece of the land that they did not own. The case was brought before the Mesa. After a careful review of all the documents presented, and clarifying the boundary situation, the peasants agreed to withdraw peacefully.
- According to the labor inspector in Coban, the Labor Code in Guatemala is very rigid and back wages owed to workers cannot be easily replaced with 'land'. But in one case where laborers ardently advocated land over money—they brought the matter before the Mesa. The Mesa invited the landowner to appear, and eventually the landowner, through direct dialogue, consented to give the workers some land instead of paying their back wages.

Looking over the results of its work, the members of the Mesa emphasize that they cannot correct or compensate for the asymmetry in power that exists between poor *campesinos* and wealthy landowners. The Mesa explains very clearly to the parties that come before it, that it operates under the existing laws of the country. Unfortunately, in many cases the law (as it currently stands) favors the rights of landowners over those of *campesinos*.⁴⁵

One member of the Mesa estimates that 3,000 people have had direct involvement with the Mesa, and perhaps an additional 25,000 in an indirect manner. The Mesa has gained national recognition. A different '*mesa*' in Quetzaltenango, which was created to influence public policy, has not been as successful in resolving conflicts and wanted to learn from the experience of the *Mesa de Coban*. Several national leaders have expressed their hope that the experiences of the *Mesa de Coban* can be used to assist the *mesa* in Quetzaltenango, as well as to set up other regional initiatives in other parts of the country.

ANALYSIS

A large number of cases have been brought before the Mesa. Its members lament that they have only been able to help parties reach an agreement in a small percentage of these cases. The Mesa has no legal standing or jurisdiction to impose a solution, or to verify the implementation of the agreements. The Mesa simply provides a 'space' for facilitating dialogue between parties in conflict. The inability to reach a solution in most cases can be attributed to the fact that one party often refuses to resolve the dispute through compromise and mediation. (Perhaps this is a reflection that under the present laws some parties feel they have a better alternative to reaching a negotiated agreement, or at least they *believe* they do). In addition, cases can require a lot of investigation and CONTIERRA⁴⁶ does not have enough time, staff and resources to investigate them all. Yet, when

⁴⁵ This does not mean the members of the Mesa support the *status quo* (or that they oppose it).

⁴⁶ CONTIERRA does this work because they are located in the Capital near the archives of land records, also this work falls within their legal mandate so it is easier for them to get access to the necessary files.

the Mesa does reach a settlement it can be a dramatic accomplishment. In at least one case the members of the Mesa were invited to attend a ceremony where titles of ownership were officially conferred upon a community, and to attend the large celebration that followed. As one PROPAZ staffmember points out, “*Who can say what is a little and what is a lot in a country like Guatemala?*”

Some members of the Mesa stress the value of the intangibles of its work: listening to the *campesinos* when there are so few organizations that do; helping them to understand how the law works; and providing a living example of another way to deal with conflict. The Mesa is a uniquely Guatemalan model for using dialogue as a tool for resolving conflict. This is evident from the recognition that the Mesa has gained nationally. The Mesa received a commendation from the National Commission for Accompaniment of the Peace Accords, and there now discussions at the national level on how to apply the Coban model in other regions of the country.

Aside from resolving a number of individual land conflicts, the Mesa contributes to regional peace and stability by helping government institutions to operate more effectively. Having a broad range of institutions represented on the Mesa enhances its moral standing and its ability to influence other institutions. When members of the Mesa speak with officials from a government institution, it often kicks things into gear and obliges the institution to finish a pending investigation, to locate a missing paper, or to arrest a known criminal. For example, in one instance a person was illegally cutting down trees on one community’s land. When members of the community appealed to the police they were ignored, but when the Mesa intervened the police agree to investigate and subsequently arrested the man.

Another essential feature of the Mesa is its transparent decision-making. *Campesinos* are witnesses to all that happens at the Mesa since everything takes place in the open. In this manner, the decision-making process resembles Q’eqchi’ culture and differs widely from that of any government agency. A majority of the members of the Mesa speak Q’eqchi’. The Mesa, therefore, regularly conducts all its business in the primary language of the *campesinos* appearing before it. (Translation into Spanish is available for those who not speak Q’eqchi’.) This helps to foster a sense of trust among *campesinos* in the actions of the Mesa. For indigenous peoples in Guatemala, Spanish has been the language of cultural domination. There is not a single state agency that regularly conducts business in an indigenous language. Another factor that makes the Mesa more accessible to peasants is that no formal papers are required in order to appear. Parties make oral presentations. The president of the Mesa believes that this contributes to the mental health of individuals and communities by enabling them to deal better with the stress in their lives. The way the Mesa listens to the people who bring them their problems and explains to them how the various institutions function, what their legal rights are, and which institution they need to approach to follow-up on their case, it significantly reduces the confusion and stress. Members of the Mesa also feel that even though many *campesinos* may not get to see their cases resolved, they benefit from the *cathartic* effect of finally being able to tell their side of the story (in their own language and in accordance to their customs) to a willing listener. Being able to fully tell their story and experiencing the power of being listened to are, in-and-of-themselves, of tremendous value.

Several members of the Mesa say that their experience with the Mesa has transformed them personally. It has changed their own skepticism about how much the Mesa can accomplish, even

with all its limitations. The personal transformation of individuals and officials, and their appreciation for the value of dialogue is part of what PROPAZ describes as creating attitudes and developing capacities for establishing a '*culture of dialogue*'. For PROPAZ this is what makes their work valuable. Wherever the Program operates, they hope some individuals will begin to change their attitudes, and that this will carry over into their relationships with others and into their work.

The Mesa of Coban is one concrete example of the OAS/PROPAZ's strategy to foster an appreciation for the value of third-party impartial facilitation. The Program's involvement started by listening to the needs expressed by the members of the Mesa. Responding to these needs through a process of facilitated reflection, training and accompaniment contributed to a sense of trust and support between the Mesa and the technical team of OAS-PROPAZ. Strategically, training was used as tool to improve the relations of the Mesa with the broader community and local agencies in Coban. In addition, OAS/PROPAZ worked behind the scenes to connect the fledgling Mesa with the appropriate government institutions. Nonetheless, PROPAZ is quick to point out that even though it believes its assistance was significant and timely for ensuring the continued existence of the Mesa, the *real* credit for the success of the Mesa belongs to the individual members who together make the Mesa work.

SOME INITIAL INDICATORS OF THE IMPACT OF THE INTER-SECTORAL WORK OF OAS/PROPAZ

At the time that this report was initially being prepared, OAS/PROPAZ was in the process of conducting its own internal evaluation and shared some of their staff reflections regarding the impact of their inter-sectoral work. The following is a brief synthesis of only a few examples, among many, of processes facilitated by OAS/PROPAZ as part of its Inter-sectoral work.

- Starting in 1997, OAS/PROPAZ organized and facilitated a process of dialogue over land issues between numerous peasant organizations, indigenous peoples, refugees and government institutions. After more than 15 years of tensions, on October 3, 1997 the first dialogue between peasants and indigenous organizations, and government institutions dealing with agrarian and land related issues took place. Forty-five government officials and leaders of peasant and indigenous organizations attended the meeting. Among the various results of the meeting was the recognition by *these* sectors that the agro-business sector should be brought into future dialogues on land issues.
- The experience described above generated conditions for PROPAZ to act as a catalyst in establishing an on-going dialogue between CNOC (the *National Coordination of Peasant Organizations* representing peasant-indigenous sectors), CONTIERRA (representing the government sector) and the Agrarian Business Council (representing the private sector). This constituted the first time in over 40 years that these various sectors came together to discuss common issues.
- From 1997-1999, PROPAZ provided assistance to CONTIERRA including facilitation of an internal review by its Board of Directors to assess and restructure the Office, and improve its internal operating procedures. PROPAZ facilitated intra-group discussions on how to order, analyze, classify and prioritize cases, and provided technical assistance in the

design and implementation of a database. PROPAZ also provided training and technical assistance to its professional and technical staff. In addition, PROPAZ provided technical assistance for developing roundtable discussions with representatives of peasant and business organizations; and in the design of a strategic plan for Péten, the first of CONTIERRA's new regional offices. Since PROPAZ began its collaboration, CONTIERRA has begun to decentralize its operations and has defined criteria for classifying and prioritizing cases, allowing it to be more effective in its efforts to resolve land conflicts. Moreover, the attitudes of many of the agency's staff have changed significantly. Today CONTIERRA has a broader outlook that addresses the general dynamic of land conflicts⁴⁷, as well as the specific cases brought before it. The agency values its participation in the inter-sectoral dialogue with the Agrarian Business Council and CNOC (catalyzed through the efforts of PROPAZ) and continues to establish partnerships with local initiatives like the 'Mesa de Coban'. Today CONTIERRA has a trained technical staff that continues to apply mediation and other skills in their daily work.

- OAS/PROPAZ has worked extensively with the Mayan People's Coordinating Council of Guatemala (COPMAGUA), an umbrella organization of indigenous organizations, and in particular with their National Land Commission (CNPT-COPMAGUA). CNPT is a commission of COPMAGUA, and forms the indigenous representation to the National Parity Commission on Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 1997 PROPAZ provided training in conflict analysis, collective decision-making and multilateral negotiations to members of the CNPT and provided technical support in organizational development. Between 1998 and 1999 PROPAZ helped facilitate a process to establish relations with over fifty social organizations in order to broaden citizen participation and provide input on draft legislation being prepared by the Parity Commission. The members of CNPT told RPP that through PROPAZ trainings they have become more confident in their dealings with government representatives (usually professionals with higher education) and improved their internal communication and decision-making. The CNPT also became aware of the need to coordinate and harmonize strategies with other national organizations representing displaced communities and peasants. As a result, CNPT re-established relations with other civil society groups with which it had had difficulties in the past. One indicator of the increase in communication and coordination with others is that direct lines of communication have been established between CNPT and CNOC, and other government agencies dealing with land issues such as CONTIERRA, FONTIERRA and UTJ/RIC (the Legal Unit of the National Surveying and Land Registry Program).

Most political analysts agree that the future of Guatemala remains uncertain. A national consensus on what path to follow is still lacking. Land conflicts are and will continue to be a critical issue for years to come. However, by fostering dialogue between representatives from different sectors of Guatemala society and building new relationships, PROPAZ has contributed towards setting a new foundation that should make it easier in the future to forge a national vision. PROPAZ has played an important role in helping parties develop better analytical and communication skills, enabling them to articulate their own views more clearly to others. Moreover, it has introduced and encouraged parties to consider *process* options that might not have been considered without their assistance. Ultimately, the full impact of the OAS/PROPAZ's inter-sectoral work can only be evaluated with the passage of time.

⁴⁷ Or '*conflictividad*'.

E. Zonal Component

The work at the local level in Sayaxché and Rabinal began during the pilot phase under a different conceptual framework. The international consultants hired during the pilot phase were mandated: 1) To identify local leaders; 2) Train them in mediation, and; 3) Ensure the creation of a local organization that would mediate community disputes. Despite these programmatic objectives, *how* these objectives were to be attained depended on the individual staffmembers themselves. Each team was responsible for designing and delivering its own training workshops. The approaches, training style and content of these workshops sometimes varied widely.

When OAS/PROPAZ began working in mid-1996 it had to bring the **Zonal** work in line with the new conceptual framework of the Program. In an interview, the general coordinator at the time told RPP that:

“During the first year our work proceeded at a very slow pace, in large part, because we were trying to reorient something that had begun under a different conceptual framework. One of the biggest challenges facing programs of this kind is recruiting the right people. Local work of this kind requires individuals who share the vision of the Program, who understand *how* to work at the community level (where a large percentage of the population has little formal education), and are willing to *live* in these rural communities. In many ways, recruiting staff to work at this level is an even bigger challenge than at the national level. The ideal profile for this work is someone who is local, has a firm grasp of the principles of community organizing and local development, is bilingual (who can speak the local indigenous language and Spanish), identifies with the principles of the PROPAZ program and the role of a third-party impartial. The person needs to thoroughly internalize both the program’s conceptual framework and its methodology. Needless to say, this is almost utopian. On the other hand, people in the field who lack these characteristics will have problems in designing and implementing peace-building programs. The consequences are even worse if they in turn supervise others.”

One issue that significantly affected the zonal work was the difficulty of identifying and recruiting staff. Between 1996-1999 the local coordinators in Sayaxché and Rabinal were changed twice. The first set of coordinators were international staff carried over from the pilot phase—affording the individuals who had begun the work in these communities an opportunity to build upon what they had started. Yet neither proved particularly effective at bringing clarity of purpose and coherence to the groups that had been trained during the pilot phase, or at initiating new processes with the local authorities such as mayors, justices of the peace, etc. Reflecting on this period, the coordinator suggested viewing the problem as a "dilemma". How can a Program help senior/existing personnel engaged in ongoing work to assimilate a new conceptual framework (one that represents a radical departure from their previous work) in a relatively short period of time, and at the same time continue the Program's fieldwork. During this period a coordinator-supervisor for the entire Zonal Component was hired to manage the Program’s work which was expanded to include a third municipality: Ixcán. The new supervisor was an international staffmember who had

worked with the OAS-CIAV⁴⁸ mission in Nicaragua and had a background in community education.

The overall goal of the Zonal component was to strengthen local capacity to resolve and prevent community conflicts that impede local development initiatives. A specific objective of the program was to function as a ‘catalyst’ (through the concept of working at the secondary level, OAS/PROPAZ hoped to adapt its methodology to fit with the work of approximately 10 NGOs operating in 3 or 4 municipalities) with a view towards developing an *infrastructure for peacebuilding* in ten percent of the municipalities in Guatemala. Between 1996 and 1999 the Zonal component worked in the municipalities of Rabinal, Sayaxché and Ixcán providing training in communication and conflict analysis to assistant mayors, and supported efforts to improve relations and communication among local authorities.

By early 1998, it became clear that the original objective was overly ambitious. Rather than expand its geographical coverage, the Program needed to go deeper in its work in the three municipalities where it was already operating. This would be necessary in order to achieve the more *strategic* objective of developing and validating through application, methodologies for peacebuilding at the local level. A decision was made to give priority to deepening the work, evaluating and systematizing the experiences, and developing publications to share the methodological learnings with Guatemalan and international actors interested in developing long-term work at the local level.

As part of a process to “*Guatemalanize*” its technical staff, OAS/PROPAZ hired two new coordinators, one for Sayaxché and one for Rabinal. The new coordinators were Guatemalan nationals with experience in aid or development work at the community level, though neither was familiar with the conceptual framework used by PROPAZ. A major responsibility of the new coordinators was to figure out what to do with the two community structures created during the pilot phase and somewhat transformed by OAS/PROPAZ, as well as to simultaneously initiate processes with municipal authorities, with a range of leaders in specific communities, and with a new legal entity the Municipality’s Technical Units (UTM).⁴⁹ The members of the UTMs were the individuals responsible for identifying, selecting and setting priorities for development programs throughout the municipality.

The UTMs were made up of technical staff from government agencies working in the municipality. Most of these agencies represented central government institutions. In many cases the municipal authorities resisted the establishment and role of the UTMs which they perceived to be an encroachment on their own decision-making powers. Yet because UTMs were to be the principle mechanism for providing technical assistance to the Municipal Council’s reconstruction and development projects, OAS/PROPAZ decided helping the newly formed UTMs to function better in Rabinal and Sayaxché would be a constructive way to begin working with local officials on *how* to promote and increase community participation in local decision-making. If successful, it might also contribute to greater stability in these areas. PROPAZ offered training to members of the UTMs, local authorities and community leaders.

⁴⁸ The OAS’ International Support and Verification Mission described briefly earlier in this report.

⁴⁹ UTM is the Spanish acronym. Under a recent law each municipal government is obligated to form a technical advisory unit known as a ‘UTM’ to assist in community development and municipal planning.

In Rabinal, the focus of the work was on creating conditions for more productive relationships between the UTM, the Municipal Council and community leaders. PROPAZ facilitators were successful in helping the UTM to coordinate policies that address the root causes of tension in the municipality.⁵⁰ For their part, auxiliary mayors received training to better understand their attributes, function and responsibilities under the law; and in facilitation of community meetings. They also explored ways to gain entry and assist in resolving community disputes. The mayors expressed great satisfaction at learning more about their legal status and attributes (something which had never been clearly explained to them), and appreciated the skills training that the OAS Program provided. In some cases, the trainings led to a new conceptualization within the community of the role of the auxiliary mayor, and more proactive efforts to address conflicts and increase community participation in municipal decision-making. However, aside from the increased efforts of certain individuals, it is unclear whether these trainings contributed to a meaningful or lasting reassessment of the roles auxiliary mayors could and should play in the community. PROPAZ efforts in Sayaxché were less successful. When the Program made a similar offer to the Mayor's Office in Sayaxché, it turned down the offer. And the national government institutions participating in the UTM were too dependent on central control for the Program to assume a significant role in assisting them to be more effective in their coordination work.

From the beginning the work of OAS/PROPAZ at the zonal level was meant to contribute to peacebuilding efforts in these municipalities and to the development of appropriate methodologies with possible applications for similar efforts elsewhere. Overtime PROPAZ came to conclusion that the necessary conditions for successfully employing an inter-sectoral methodology did not exist in any of these three municipalities. The external constraints were aggravated further by internal staffing and supervisory problems. As a result, the Program decided to scale down its objectives and place the emphasis on extracting the lessons learned, and their practical implications for peacebuilding at the community level. Through an internal process to systematize their learnings, PROPAZ staff found that despite all the problems they had encountered in carrying out their work, there was a "critical yeast" of well-trained people in both municipalities. The strategy then became to concentrate the last year and a half of the Program's zonal work in consolidating what had been accomplished in a way that would maximize its sustainability. In both Sayaxché and Rabinal, a network of community leaders trained by PROPAZ had been formed. In Sayaxché, with the help of OAS/PROPAZ staff, the network was able to acquire legal status as a municipal association. Since the new association was unable to secure funding, it functions as a voluntary organization.

What follows below is the story of the creation of the Community Conciliation Network in Rabinal.

COMMUNITY CONCILIATION NETWORKS IN RABINAL

Rabinal is a municipality located in the province of Baja Verapaz in the northern region of Guatemala. It is a valley, 504 square kilometers, which according to the 1994 census has a

⁵⁰ However, when the pre-electoral period began in Rabinal, the UTM was unable to continue working.

population of approximately 24,063 that survive on primarily on subsistence agriculture. A majority of the population is Achi and speak Achi as their first language. Sustained violence and repression throughout the period of internal armed confrontation left different psychological imprints of fear, division within families and communities, and low levels of community organization and participation in local issues. Several major massacres in Rabinal during the 1980s resulted in the temporary migration of some families to the capital.

Some institutions working in Rabinal claim more than 5,000 people lost their lives as a result of the armed conflict during the 1980's. Yet not all of these deaths were related to fighting between guerilla forces and the army, or reprisals by these forces, but rather the result of opportunistic individuals or groups that took advantage of the situation of violence to settle longstanding animosities and disputes involving individuals, groups and entire communities. Simply denouncing your neighbor as an informant or a member of the guerilla to the authorities could be enough to make them '*disappear*' forever. It was during this period that the army organized the Civil Defense Patrols (PAC). Many of the atrocities committed in the zone have been attributed to the PACs. These patrols were usually made up of persons from the urban center of Rabinal⁵¹ sent to patrol the mountainous perimeter where the guerillas were known to operate. To this day a strong mistrust and fear persists between many of the residents in the mountain villages and those of the urban center. This deep, longstanding distrust makes it hard for the government institutions based in the 'center' of Rabinal to provide services in these rural villages.

It is not surprising then, as a result of years of violence and with the reduced military presence in the area, the signing of the peace accords resulted in a rise in the number of gangs, theft of livestock, alcoholism, break-ins and rape. Many of these problems derive from or are accentuated by the extreme poverty that exists in the area. In some of these communities the violence, intolerance, incomprehension and lack of mutual cooperation is such that development and aid agencies simply refuse to work there.

Many of the individuals who used to function as community conciliators—usually members of the 'Council of Elders' or traditional Mayan priests—were killed or discredited, and now play a more passive role.⁵² Since part of the strategy of the army in this area was to replace these traditional leaders, the signing of the National Peace Accords and the withdrawal of the army left a vacuum. Many of these villages suffer from a lack of strong leadership and community organization. The inability to deal with matters at the local level means that even the smallest of infractions are brought before the justice of the peace. In the past, these types of conflicts would have been resolved at the village level, and not before a judge. Many of these infractions could be resolved through frank dialogue between the parties.

⁵¹ The situation on the ground was quite complicated. It should be understood that patrols were also made up of men from the villages, and not only the urban center.

⁵² The army targeted traditional leaders as part of its counterinsurgency strategy and in order to exercise control in local communities. Often the moral authority of these traditional authorities had less to do with their official role as an "elder" and more to do with an individual's personality style and personal wisdom. Many of the traditional forms of organizing were substituted by highly authoritarian *Comisionados Militares*. In the absence of good role models, it becomes difficult to maintain and pass down these traditional forms and wisdom.

OAS/PROPAZ was one of the few programs operating in Rabinal with a permanent office in the municipality, run by local staff who grew up in Rabinal and speak Achi. The creation of community networks of conciliators was initiated as part of the Program's "exit strategy" in Rabinal. As mentioned earlier, since the pilot phase in late 1995, the OAS has been present in Rabinal working with various sectors of the municipality, helping to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for conflict transformation, greater community participation and dialogue. During trainings, community leaders acknowledged that many of the conflicts that arise in their villages could be resolved with resources from within the community. Perhaps another indicator of success is that many community leaders who received training report that by adopting more inclusive forms of decision-making that increase the transparency of their work, and by exerting more energy to maintain a constant flow of communication and feedback, they have regained credibility and the trust of their neighbors. Mayoral authorities also expressed strong support for the continued efforts of OAS/PROPAZ. They recognize the value of improving the dialogue between the government institutions in the urban center and the surrounding villages. It was at this point that OAS/PROPAZ decided to consolidate the gains from its efforts and considerable investment (particularly in terms of human resources) in training these community leaders. They hoped that by empowering further these local networks of conciliators, the networks would begin to play a more proactive role in resolving local conflicts.

One of the main suppositions of the Program was that a well-respected and recognized community leader would have more moral authority, and hence more potential to function as a conciliator within the geographical area of his or her existing social relations. Since OAS/PROPAZ was working with networks of community leaders that already existed and operated in these communities⁵³, they felt the likelihood participants in the trainings would actually put these new skills into practice was greater. Working with pre-existing leaders in the social territory they naturally occupied, and by focusing on their own culture as a starting point, PROPAZ hoped the new networks would not become dependent on the OAS to sustain them. In this manner, the work with these community networks would vary significantly from the manner in which the CCR (the Conciliation Council of Rabinal) had been formed.⁵⁴ Working under this new, more direct modality was in keeping with two to the stated principles of the OAS/PROPAZ program: 1) The non-substitution of Guatemalan actors, and; 2) Creating and reinforcing an installed capacity to deal with conflict that builds on the existing skills of Guatemalans.

These pre-existing community networks were made up of individuals who already had relevant leadership roles. They were the directors of various local committees dealing with water issues, schools, religious ceremonies and included midwives, health promoters, Mayan priests and other leaders. These persons were in constant communication with the communities and prepared to organize communities around certain development projects (including the construction of roads, schoolhouses, health posts, etc.). They constituted a link between their community and the various

⁵³ It is important to point out that although these community leaders operated as an informal network—they did not necessarily view themselves this way. It was from this informal network of local leaders, that OAS/PROPAZ was able to identify and assist a smaller group of individuals explicitly interested in resolving disputes in their communities.

⁵⁴ The CCR constituted an entirely new type of municipal structure created as part of the process to establish local UPRECOs and community leaders were required to come into the urban center to receive training in conflict transformation.

municipal authorities, NGOs and other communities. Although they did not call themselves a network, they immediately identified with the use of word "network" in Achi.⁵⁵ Every community has individuals with a reputation for dealing well with problems and who enjoy the confidence and trust of their neighbors. These were the individuals that PROPAZ tried to identify and invite to explicitly form the Community Conciliation Networks in Rabinal.

OAS/PROPAZ trained 68 rural community leaders and a group of 15 young people in the urban center who call themselves the "Association of Friends in Solidarity with Rabinal."⁵⁶ These leaders are integrated members of their own communities and who are now identified as members of a network of community conciliators ready to help resolve problems that arise in their communities. The average training program included 10 sessions in each community, in addition to other meetings to help plan and evaluate the workshops. The training workshops included the theme of conflict *transformation* and provided space for a joint reflection on problems in the community, and what conciliation at the local level actually means. In addition, participants learned *how* to intervene in the conflicts of others and *how* to facilitate meetings.

OAS/PROPAZ believes strongly that the legitimacy of these local networks must come from the communities themselves if the networks are to be sustainable. Towards this end, each local network organized its own public presentation/introduction to the community. This was meant to raise public awareness of the newly trained conciliators and the services that they could provide. The OAS/PROPAZ staff in Rabinal point out that the manner in which the networks presented themselves in each village was an essential way to gain respect in the community for the newly trained conciliator. PROPAZ helped conciliators to demonstrate through socio-dramas how they could help their communities. One important feature of these introductions to the community was a Mayan ceremony, led by a Mayan priest. Another important feature was the presence of different municipal authorities such as the mayor, justices of the peace, NGO directors, persons who rarely visited these remote villages. The culmination of these efforts came when a final ceremony was held in the urban center of Rabinal organized jointly by the Mayor and PROPAZ. The local networks of conciliators were presented to the approximately 1000 persons in attendance. A diploma was given to the members of each network. More than twenty representatives from different organizations, including local and national representatives, attended the ceremony. Some actually traveled all the way from Guatemala City to witness the event! This recognition, both local and external, helped reinforce the legitimacy of each network within its own community.

Some concrete examples of disputes that community conciliators helped resolve include:

- In the community of 'Las Ventanas', a group of teenagers broke into a schoolhouse to steal some toys. Some neighbors caught them. Instead of bringing the youths before a judge, they brought them to the conciliators. The conciliators helped the kids' parents and the school director work out a solution to the problem. The kids were asked to acknowledge what they had done and the parents agreed to pay the school for a new window to replace the broken one.
- In the village of Chuateguá, two separate incidents occurred: 1) a group of teenagers broke into a woman's home, and; 2) another group robbed a store. Neighbors caught both groups of

⁵⁵ "Kar" in Achi refers in a broad sense to the relationship of the individual to the community and the community to the individual. The conciliators were individuals who already operated on the basis of their relationships within a certain 'social territory' (one that often corresponded to a specific physical territory as well).

⁵⁶ *Asociacion de amigos solidarios de Rabinal*

teenagers. The woman/storeowner sought out the community conciliators and both were satisfied when the youths consented and acknowledged that what they did was wrong.

- In one village, CARE⁵⁷ helped a group of mothers build a schoolhouse. Because CARE only works with children within a certain age group, some mothers were excluded from participating in the project. Later when SHARE proposed a project to work with the whole community, the mothers who had built the schoolhouse didn't want the other mothers to receive any benefits. The community conciliators facilitated a dialogue between the two groups so that the issues could be brought out into the open. The conciliators pointed out that the school building would require maintenance. So the mothers agreed that those who had already contributed by building the schoolhouse would not have to help with its cleaning and maintenance. The mothers who did not participate in the initial construction would be responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of the schoolhouse. This was acceptable to all sides, and SHARE was then able to develop a project with the whole community.
- Another village encountered a similar problem and conciliators decided to visit the other community to see how they had resolved the problem. Later the same solution was accepted in the second community.
- In one community the head of the local water committee quit when he realized that the community wouldn't allow him any perks in exchange for his work. Instead of dissolving the committee in his absence, a conciliator from the local network helped to facilitate a search for a new person to head the committee. This is the type of action any good community leader would have done before. But as a result of the OAS training, the local conciliator explicitly saw the situation an opportunity to help resolve, and prevent the escalation, of a conflict.
- An example of one instance where the conciliators were unable to reconcile but still managed to resolve was a case in which a woman was raped. The husband refused to deal with the rapist. The rapist was subsequently exiled from the community. This particular case highlights an ongoing debate in Guatemala over the supremacy of '*derecho consuetudinario maya*' (Mayan customary law) and the national judicial system.⁵⁸

Were it not for the presence and intervention of local conciliators, some of these cases probably would have been brought before a local judge. As communities begin to demonstrate a capacity to manage and resolve problems without involving local authorities, the justices of the peace are freer to focus more attention on the violent crimes destabilizing the region. Today many justices of the peace have come to appreciate the contribution these community networks can provide by reducing their heavy caseload. In some instances, the judges themselves have actually referred cases to local conciliators.

The former justice of the peace in Rabinal, an enthusiastic supporter of community conciliators, believes that their functions should be clearly defined legally. He suggests that the networks be

⁵⁷ An NGO that works in development and relief projects.

⁵⁸ As outsiders, we might ask if being forced into 'exile' is sufficient punishment for a rapist. The issue raises many questions. When should the 'penal system' take preference over traditional Mayan customs? What about the woman's say in the matter and her own self-esteem as a result of the rape? As members of the community, conciliators are likely to endorse the values that are supported by their community, and to have strong opinions on these matters. One should also keep in mind the context. Given the current state of the Guatemalan criminal justice system it is unlikely that authorities would investigate the crime, much less prosecute the suspected offender. Rabinal has approximately 5 police officer, with maybe one car between them. All too often 'known' criminals are neither arrested or brought to trial. In other municipalities this situation has led to lynchings.

registered in the Municipality, and function in a more regulated and formal manner. He argues further that if they register as a conciliation committee, this will give them greater legitimacy. He also feels conciliators should write up the cases they handle and file them at the municipal office. This formality and providing this type of information would make it easier for mayors in other towns to: 1) Understand how the community networks operate and to assist in their establishment, and; 2) Avoid confusion regarding the legal status of these networks and the validity of their work. However, his recommendation has pros and cons. He himself recognized that it would be difficult for community conciliators to prepare a written report of every case. Many conciliators are illiterate, and many of the cases they help resolve are not, *stricto sensu*, 'cases'. Sometimes one party or more may simply ask a conciliator for advice.

OAS/PROPAZ disagrees with the judge's implicit message, that to function legitimately these networks need to be registered as legal entities. They emphasize that the legitimacy bestowed at the local level is far more 'profound' than 'formal legality'. This legitimacy is based on trust and credibility, and stems from an ability to possess and demonstrate moral values. Drawing on its experience with the overly formalized UPRECO structures (the CCR and CAP), PROPAZ made a strategic decision to avoid any kind of institutionalization of these networks. They wanted to avoid linking them to the justices of the peace in any formal manner, (thus avoiding the problem that a turnover in conciliators derail the process). Another problem linking the networks' legitimacy to the local justice of the peace is that if a new justice is appointed to the area who does not support this kind of work, then the initiative is likely to die out.

According to members of the community, appearing before a judge to resolve a conflict is a source of great shame. It has economic costs (transport into and from town, the costs of the paperwork, and other administrative costs). And although the offending party might be forced to pay a fine, the victim does not receive compensation. Rather than restore relationships, litigation often leaves both sides with a feeling of resentment. Today there are not that many people left in the community who have experienced or remember examples of *how* the 'Council of Elders' dealt with conflicts in the past. Before these community networks were formed, many local conflicts simply went without resolution. As a result disputes would fester and tensions would grow, until the matter reached a point requiring intervention by a judge. One indicator of the impact of these Community Networks is that other villages are now approaching OAS/PROPAZ and asking to be trained. In one instance, the 'Group of Elders' themselves expressed an interest in participating in OAS trainings.

OAS/PROPAZ made a proposal to continue assisting the communities around Rabinal and those in the neighboring municipality of San Miguel develop community networks of conciliators. Former PROPAZ staff in Rabinal, through the auspices of a local NGO, will carry on the work of accompanying these networks. However, this aid will eventually be phased out as the networks become self-sustaining.

OAS/PROPAZ recognizes that much of its initial work in Rabinal did not bear the fruit they hoped for. But through the establishment of the Network of Community Conciliators, the Program did create an installed capacity for resolving conflicts at the community level. Today PROPAZ views the establishment of these networks as one of its most important successes. It has been able to systematize the experience and much of the lessons learned from its work in Rabinal. The learnings have been compiled and presented as a set of two books on promoting reconciliation at

the community level. The first book shares the lessons learned from its zonal component, and second is a training manual for community organizers and trainers based on the workshops run in the community. Each is illustrated with figures depicting indigenous and ladinos, and written in simple, everyday language. The materials have been shared with other actors in Guatemala and elsewhere. Additionally, between July-December 1999, the Program was informed of 82 cases where local conciliators intervened. Sixty-two of the cases were resolved to the satisfaction of those involved. The cases covered incidents ranging from petty robbery and marital problems to kidnappings and death threats, and other types of aggression stemming from longstanding feuds and land conflicts. The Network appears to have broad community support and to have contributed to reducing civil unrest in the area. Nonetheless, a history of sustained conflict cannot be erased overnight. The staff emphasizes that creating the networks is simply ‘a *process* with a good beginning’. The fact remains that although the rule of law should apply uniformly throughout Guatemala, municipal authorities are understaffed and lack the necessary resources. Therefore, it is with even more reason, that empowering local village leaders to take the initiative constitutes an important step towards building a civic culture that fosters peace and stability.

REFLECTIONS ON THE OVERALL IMPACT OF THE ZONAL COMPONENT

The case of the Network of Community Conciliators in Rabinal illustrates how some of the Zonal work has been consolidated into new community structures, structure which are beginning to have, at minimum, an anecdotal impact in the villages where they operate. Their impact is expected to increase. Similarly, in Sayaxché, OAS/PROPAZ was able to consolidate its work by helping trainees form a voluntary association for the entire municipality.

A key observation from among several by the staff is that too much time was spent ‘reinventing the wheel’ of community organizing. Much of what was learned by the Guatemalans working at the local level has been a basic part of community organizing principles as practiced by experienced community organizers in other parts of the world for many years. Another important observation is that much of the experience in grass-roots organizing in Guatemala has traditionally been conditioned by a politically partisan agenda. This poses a serious dilemma for practitioners in this field of conflict resolution and transformation. In highly polarized post-conflict situations, and in countries where the educational system does not encourage the development of critical thinking, *how* do you create or generate the conditions so local newcomers to this field can begin to internalize the necessary principles, values and methodologies? OAS/PROPAZ points out that, “the problem is not fundamentally one of communicating information, but rather it has to do with *how* people learn a new way of looking at the world.” Developing strategies to deal with these formidable challenges is difficult. One factor that made the work for Program staff in countryside even more difficult, though certainly not unique to PROPAZ, was the inevitable tension that arises between the Central Office and the regional offices.

Another factor that impacts work at the local level is that the most immediate *perceived* needs of residents are improved health facilities, schools and roads. OAS/PROPAZ found it difficult to introduce the Program to locals and help them understand the link between good negotiation skills and improved municipal decision-making, and how this could help them to satisfy their immediate and pressing needs. Even after months of operation, many locals were certain that PROPAZ would eventually begin to fund a development project of one sort or another. Dispelling

these expectations can be difficult, no matter how many times you explain otherwise. In view of this problem, it is worth considering if linking local peacebuilding work to specific aid or development initiatives is feasible.

One unintended consequence of the PROPAZ trainings is that they provided space for a type of psychological and emotional catharsis. On more than one occasion, the training agenda was changed mid-course, out of respect, to allow participants who had started to relate their story an opportunity to continue. In many instances these stories were powerful and provoked strong emotions within the person telling the story and among the group. Venting, clearing the air, telling your story and releasing pent up emotions are all part of the process of trauma recovery and reconciliation. Although this was not stipulated as one of the programmatic goals of the Zonal component, it appears, nonetheless to have helped serve this function.

C. Training Component

Several challenges faced the new training director when he joined the PROPAZ program. Initially PROPAZ envisioned a training component that would work broadly with members of civil society and train them in the skills relevant to peacebuilding. As senior staff began to explore a variety of options, it debated whether to focus on educational institutions in order to help integrate peacebuilding themes into the education curricula or to establish a permanent training program that would accept applications from interested parties and function three days a month. However, for several reasons OAS/PROPAZ decided not to follow through with either of these plans during its first year of its activities in Guatemala. Senior staff felt it was important to gain experience by actually doing peacebuilding work in Guatemala (in this new political juncture) before setting out to teach or train others. They also recognized that much of the current staff at the end of 1996 had little experience with the technical skills and practice of mediation, facilitation or negotiation. They felt the priority during this initial phase should be developing and reinforcing the Programs *internal* capacity. As a result, there was little time to develop an in-depth external training program. Another decision was to assist the Inter-sectoral and Zonal components to strengthen their own training capacity. The Training Component of the PROPAZ program focused inward, then, to increase the technical skills of its professional staff, and to assist staff from other Components in the design and delivery of training programs.

To assist them in their efforts, OAS/PROPAZ hired CDR Associates, a consulting firm that specializes in organizational development, systems design and mediation located in Boulder, Colorado. (CDR later helped in the design and coaching of external training programs offered by the Inter-sectoral Component.) According to the director of the Training Component from 1996-1998, many of the models and methods used by CDR have, to a large extent, been incorporated with some changes into the training programs that PROPAZ offers to its Guatemalan ‘counterparts’.⁵⁹ PROPAZ was careful, however, to avoid creating a dependency on outside consultants for its programmatic initiatives. There were several reasons why the OAS/PROPAZ decided to concentrate on building its own in-house training capacity. These included...

⁵⁹ Another senior staffmember sees it differently. “While the CDR trainings had an important impact in some of the areas in which PROPAZ trains, we did not basically incorporate their models and methods, but rather took them as *inputs* for building our own designs.”

- ❑ **Contextualized Training:** Many of the Program’s counterparts from government and civil society sectors have specific training needs. To make the simulations and training relevant requires a familiarity with concrete problems their institutions are facing and an ability to root the training in the specific context counterparts are operating in. This is difficult to do for an international consultant whom does not live in the country or province. Moreover, given their broad range of clients, international consultants have a tendency to use a standard format. This is a reasonable strategy when working with heterogenous groups for whom you can not judge specific needs ahead of time. While this may work well in some settings, the more ‘*local*’ the work gets, the greater the need to contextualize the content to trainees’ local reality.⁶⁰ The inability of many consultants to speak the local and/or national language, as well as their infamiliarity of local culture can be additional barriers. Taken together, these factors makes it hard for external consultants to prepare context specific (and more useful) simulations. But even more importantly, training is not the end goal. PROPAZ trainings are intended to form part of a larger strategy to build relationships and develop a process of strategic support.
- ❑ **Timing:** International consultants often work under severe time constraints. If a training program has to be cancelled or postponed due to local factors, it can be hard for them to juggle commitments and reschedule. PROPAZ wanted to make sure that their training programs took place on the dates and at the intervals that were most convenient to their counterparts, and not the available timeslots in a consultant's schedule.
- ❑ **Cost effectiveness:** In the long run, investing in the training of their own staff and creating an in-house capacity would be a more economical use of resources.
- ❑ **Capacity-building:** Since many of the technical staff of the PROPAZ Program are Guatemalans, training them would contribute to the Program's goal of building human resources in Guatemala in conflict resolution and related peacebuilding skills.
- ❑ **Building relationships:** Training is not an end goal. PROPAZ views training as a tool and a medium for introducing themselves and building trust with potential program counterparts, and for building a medium to long-term relationship. Therefore the presence and protagonism of PROPAZ staff in training activities is vital. Trainings often set the stage for further collaboration in other areas, thereby increasing the strategic impact of the Program.

Eventually, OAS/PROPAZ developed customized training programs in the following areas:

- Communication and dialogue;
- Conflict analysis;
- Decision-making (with a special emphasis on consensus-building);
- Negotiations (which includes preparation, design and implementation of a negotiation process);
- Reconciliation and mediation;
- An introductory seminar on strategic planning;
- Design of multi-party or multilateral dialogue processes.

⁶⁰ In some situations, persons can readily make the necessary associations and grasp the applications of a standardized format to their own work. Yet at the grass-roots level, persons often have difficulty understanding new concepts. Rooting these concepts in clear and concrete situations derived from their own experience is vital to help them make the connections and to involve them in a process of discovery and learning.

- An intensive training course in third party facilitation.

Training, however, was not intended or offered as an end in itself. It constituted one tool, among many, to support a *process* or strategy to foster dialogue and cross-sector collaboration. It was meant to strengthen the capacity of PROPAZ counterparts in a given area. More importantly, training was viewed as *tool* for social change or *transformation*. In many instances, training provided a medium for developing a relationship with a counterpart and usually led to assistance in other areas. This afforded the Program an opportunity to concentrate on the spheres describe earlier (attitudes, capacities/skills, processes and structures).

OAS/PROPAZ works especially hard to avoid simply ‘unloading’ its content on to counterparts. Training is viewed as a type of ‘formative facilitation,’ a space to share information that is relevant to addressing the specific issues which counterparts are grappling with, and using their situation to illustrate more general lessons related to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Gradually, through its new experiences on the ground, OAS/PROPAZ expanded the focus of its training from communication, conflict analysis and transformation to include participation and democracy, and various forms of decision-making, the design of processes and third-party facilitation.

By way of example, in a training program on participation, participants will examine five different methods of decision-making. These include: 1) An authority makes the decision; 2) The authority first consults and then makes a decision; 3) Everyone decides by voting (the majority rules); 4) Decision is made by consensus, and; 5) The *lack of decision* is a decision. Rather than stop there, trainees explore as group the circumstances in which one method might be more appropriate than another, as well as the pros and cons of each method. The training attempts to illustrate that being “democratic” does not mean using only one preferred method of decision-making, but rather an ability to use an array of methods that satisfy the procedural, psychological or attitudinal, and substantive needs of the persons or populations affected by the decisions.

By refraining from advocating a specific course of action, the staff feels their training programs are neither imposing nor “culturally imperialist”. It seeks to present a variety of options, some of which may be new or challenge the cultural norms and assumptions that many Guatemalans operate under. PROPAZ does, however, give particular attention to consensus decision-making. This is done in part to support and foster the values of the Program itself, and in part because for many Guatemalans consensus building constitutes a relatively new or *foreign* concept. Many individuals and groups lack the skills and attitudes to foster a process of consensus building. By increasing not only their (technical) *skills*, but also their appreciation for the value and benefits that consensus building can offer, PROPAZ hopes to contribute to increased citizen participation at multiple levels, and promote more inclusive decision-making processes by government and civil society sectors alike. The trainings also emphasize that the promotion of a "culture of dialogue" does not mean pacifying groups or peoples. There may be times when confrontation, argument and social protest are necessary and legitimate courses of action. What the program does advocate is peaceful, rather than violent, methods for promoting social change.

In addition to increasing PROPAZ’s internal capacity, the Training Component worked to strengthen the capacity of Guatemalan institutions and organizations by supporting the work of the Inter-sectoral and Zonal components at the national, regional and municipal levels. It also

contributed to reinforcing the capacity of one Guatemalan institution involved in establishing an in-house capacity to provide training. The Rafael Landivar University requested PROPAZ assistance to support the University's efforts to create an institute that would focus on conflict resolution training and research. OAS/PROPAZ felt that helping the new institute train potential staff persons and providing logistical support would be congruent with its goal of creating an installed capacity in Guatemala, as well as an opportunity to support the efforts of an educational institution to incorporate conflict resolution into its academic curricula.

The parties agreed the University would be responsible for identifying and selecting professors, staff and students committed to setting-up the institute and most likely to benefit from the training. PROPAZ would be responsible for developing an intensive training program. Unfortunately, the selection process was less than rigorous. An announcement was posted around campus and all persons that applied were admitted to the course. Despite some reservations, PROPAZ decided to go ahead with the training.⁶¹ The course took place as planned but the trainers were not always satisfied with the level of personal commitment and work habits of some participants. The new institute was founded but was bogged down in organizational and other problems during its first year. Since then, the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Transformation (INTRAPAZ) has been able to overcome many of its initial difficulties and today enjoys a good reputation in Guatemala. Informed by this experience, PROPAZ later offered a "training of trainers" series for members from twenty Guatemalan NGOs involved in peacebuilding activities.

It was in 1998, after two years of operation, that the training component began to focus more specifically on the medium-term goal of creating a form of installed capacity, and to reconsider the idea of establishing a training school. The following case study reviews the pioneering experience of the OAS/PROPAZ School of Higher Learning.

OAS/PROPAZ TRAINING SCHOOL OF HIGHER LEARNING

When the senior staff of OAS/PROPAZ began to consider in earnest the idea of establishing a training school, they discussed two different approaches for developing local capacity, and therefore two different approaches for creating and offering courses. One idea was to identify important and emerging actors dealing with land related issues, train them and support their reinsertion into the processes and agencies they came from. In this manner, these trained political and social actors would become an internal resource for their respective institutions or organizations, with expertise in third-party facilitation and negotiations that could be called upon as needed. This approach would also complement and feed back into the Program's inter-sectoral work.

Another, equally valid, idea was to train *generalists* in process facilitation. Some of the individual participants would become potential candidates to work with the new Guatemalan entity that would eventually takeover the role and functions of PROPAZ. Unable to identify a viable academic institution or NGO with whom to partner and in a position to assume the role and

⁶¹ The staff was concerned that the failure to screen candidates adequately meant they had little assurance that trainees would actually apply their learning for the benefit of the new institute.

responsibilities of OAS/PROPAZ, the Program began to examine other options. A suggestion to establish a government foundation provoked strong objections among PROPAZ staff. They questioned whether a government institution, given the strained political climate in Guatemala, would be able to operate successfully as an impartial third-party facilitator. The Program came to the conclusion that the best option would be to establish a new Guatemalan entity that they referred to internally as ‘the NEGUA’.⁶² In considering *how* the transition from an international to a national program would likely occur, the senior staff hoped that, at minimum, the core of its inter-sectoral staff—four Guatemalan nationals—would naturally become part of the new entity. But they also recognized that additional staff would be required.

The new Training School was conceived of as a medium to train a spectrum of political operators who would be introduced to the Program’s vision of peacebuilding and possess the skills and ‘political acumen’⁶³ to become effective third-party impartial facilitators. The staff hoped that some of the trainees would be recruited to work for PROPAZ or the future NEGUA. To allow ample space for dialogue and individual attention, PROPAZ decided to limit the ‘first class’ of the School to fifteen. Trainees would receive intensive training over a period of three months, followed by a seven-month practicum. Initially, the Program estimated that two-thirds of the trainees would do their practicum with OAS/PROPAZ. This would provide PROPAZ an opportunity to observe them in action and to identify those individuals who might be good candidates for the future NEGUA.

In this context of transition, the new School would have a dual function. One would be to strengthen the capacity of select government officials and civil society actors, and reinsert them into their respective institutions and organizations, thereby reinforcing its in-house capacity. Another function would be to strengthen the internal capacity of PROPAZ itself (or the future NEGUA) by identifying and supporting good national candidates to join the Program. PROPAZ came to realize that it would be unrealistic to work with two-thirds, or approximately 10 interns, simultaneously. The staff would be unable to provide the individual coaching or mentoring, and adequate supervision that trainees would need and deserve. It decided that only one-third of the training group would do their practicum with PROPAZ, and the remaining two-thirds were expected to return to their respective institutions or organizations.

Once these preliminary decisions were made, there was a heated internal debate within OAS/PROPAZ over which of the proposed approaches for setting up the School would be the ‘most’ strategic. One approach argued for limiting the training course to government officials and civil society representatives working on land related issues. Another approach was to work with persons working on various *critical* issues. Another matter that provoked discussion was whether or not students should be paid to attend the School. Some saw this as the best way to ensure their commitment to the School. They pointed-out that most applicants need to work in order to support their families. Those who opposed paying students argued it would make the program too expensive and might attract persons to the School for the *wrong* reasons. Others simply felt that paying students to attend might be the only way to attract qualified candidates *away* from their current positions, and guarantee that once accepted, candidates would not take on projects that

⁶² NEGUA is the Spanish acronym for “New Guatemalan Entity”.

⁶³ The word ‘acumen’ is used as a rough translation of the expression used in Spanish ‘*olfato politico*’. It refers to the political savvy and intuition needed to operate well in the political realm.

would interfere with their obligations to the School. A final consideration was whether it might be harmful to pull talented people 'out' of the institutions where they are working. If these individuals were already playing effective roles, would it be best to simply let them continue? Moreover, there was always a risk that after completing the OAS/PROPAZ training course, some might seek higher paying jobs as 'international consultants' or leave Guatemala altogether.

PROPAZ grappled with these concerns and decided to proceed with the idea of creating a specialized Training School in third-party facilitation. One goal of the program would be to prepare and train at least four qualified individuals to join the future NEGUA. The others, they hoped, would find their own way back to useful roles in the overall peace process. PROPAZ was looking for individuals with the necessary demeanor and skill to serve as impartial facilitators. As described in the announcement and course brochure, applicants were required to have a minimum of ten years of professional experience in areas related to social, economic or political development; a University degree; political savvy (demonstrated through written essays and interviews with PROPAZ staff); good analytical skills and an ability for critical thinking; good writing skills and an ability to be self-critical.

The former head of the Training Component was invited back to develop the curriculum and training modules for the new School. The training program was designed to be a three-month intensive course of study and discussion, the equivalent of more than 400 hours of academic credit. To participate, trainees had to obtain a leave of absence from their current jobs and agree not to take on other projects while attending the School. To make this feasible for the incoming students, OAS/PROPAZ would pay them a stipend. All trainees would receive the same stipend, calculated on the basis of the net average salary of the group. This constituted a significant expenditure, raising the costs of the Training School, but PROPAZ felt it was worth doing.

Two renowned specialists were asked to serve as 'international consultants' to the School and lead seminars on specific topics that PROPAZ wanted to include in this intensive training program. One consultant, John Paul Lederach came from the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University. Lederach specializes in cross-cultural training and international peacebuilding. Another consultant, Christopher Moore came from CDR Associates, a firm that specializes in organizational development and systems design. Moore is an anthropologist and expert in cross-cultural mediation.

In addition, PROPAZ decided to remodel and build an addition to its Main Office, instead of renting space and facilities for the new Training School. This afforded PROPAZ two advantages. It now has a training area within its facilities to host future training events, thereby reducing its costs in the long-term by eliminating rental fees for conference space from nearby hotels or centers. Perhaps even more important, having trainees present in their facilities made contact between trainees and the PROPAZ staff much easier. The Program also assigned two staff members to provide full-time support to the Training School.

In selecting the students into the training program, PROPAZ tried to ensure diversity. Eight women and seven men were accepted representing a range of ages and life experiences, and different political views of individuals operating at various levels. The training group included persons of Mayan as well as *ladino* origin. The training group included a former mayor and government official from FONAPAZ, as well as other government officials from CONTIERRA and

SEPAZ. There was also a labor inspector from the Department of Alta Verapaz, and the executive secretary of the National Parity Land Commission. In addition, the first female president of Congress and an adviser to one of the commissions of the Guatemalan Congress were also accepted. From civil society several directors and leading members from among the most prominent Guatemalan NGOs, two professors from the Raphael Landivar University, one leftist lawyer who served as a consultant to the negotiations between the URNG and the government, and a recent university graduate working with various indigenous political organizations were selected.

In many ways, the first week of the School felt more like a 'retreat'. The students were taken to the mountains. It was here, away from their respective settings, that students were given an opportunity to know each other, to form a bond and constitute themselves into a 'training group'. Creating this sense of belonging to a 'group' was important because trainees would be dealing with difficult issues and need to feel there was 'safety' in their new setting. The strategy worked exceedingly well, creating a 'honeymoon' effect that lasted for at least half, if not the entire duration, of the School. The pace of the training program was intense. Students had eight-hours of course work a day, plus reading and writing assignments. At times guest speakers, individuals who had played a role in the Guatemalan peace process, were invited to speak with the group. The training seminars were designed to challenge the trainees and push them to examine their own assumptions. At times these sessions were emotionally draining. Simulations and dynamic exercises were used to explore complex concepts. Most trainees say the PROPAZ School was atypical. According to participants, Guatemalans are accustomed to sit in their seats and take notes while some important individual gives a lecture. One trainee summed it up by saying "*What the School demonstrated is the philosophy of conflict transformation. It presented ideas but it didn't try to give us a toolkit or manual, but rather to help us figure out how to make the connections back to other parts of our lives. This made the course feel quite relevant and valid to everyone—not imposing, but definitely challenging.*"

After 15 weeks of intensive class work, students were expected to complete a seven month practicum where they would apply, validate and continue their learning by putting them into practice. Initially PROPAZ hoped trainees would find some way of applying the ideas from the School in their respective institutions or organizations. Although three students did so, many trainees lost the desire to return to their previous workplace. In essence, the Training School had a powerful impact in their lives. In fact, the impact was so *transforming* that it produced a heartfelt reevaluation of many of the fundamental assumptions that trainees had operated under for years, and even decades. Many trainees felt it was necessary to move on to the next stage of their lives.⁶⁴ Moreover, the institutions and organizations they worked for lacked a genuine understanding and appreciation for the type of work that the Training School was encouraging them to do. Trainees felt there was little room for innovation and creative projects in their institutions, and that it would be difficult to integrate work of this nature into the already established priorities (even more so because it was an election year). In order to prevent the trainees/students from floundering,

⁶⁴ This pervasive sense of mid-life crisis was unexpected. Perhaps part of it can be attributed to the fact that many of these students themselves held strongly partisan views throughout the period of internal armed conflict. They had, in effect, learned the necessary skills for 'waging' war. Now with the peace process underway, they were being called upon to reevaluate all the assumptions that they had taken for granted and to learn a new approaches for dealing with conflict and to develop a new set of problem-solving skills. Moreover, rather than defend a strictly partisan view, they were being asked to consider the value and benefits that third-party impartial facilitators could provide to Guatemala.

OAS/PROPAZ was able to get funding from the Soros Foundation in Guatemala for two projects involving six students for a period of seven months. The Program then worked closely with the students to them design the practicum. In addition, four trainees, as planned, did realize their practicums with OAS/PROPAZ.

The head of the Training School worked hard to make sure the practicums were not geared towards 'training others', but actually *putting into practice* the ideas and concepts that had been developed in the School. Out of a total of fifteen students: 3 returned to direct their NGOs and put into practice their learnings, 1 was hired by USAID, 1 became a presidential candidate in the elections that took place shortly thereafter, 1 focused his practicum on assisting the members of the 'Mesa de Coban' (See the mini-case on the *Mesa de Coban* in this report), 3 did their practicum with OAS/PROPAZ⁶⁵, 3 worked on a participatory research project to develop a methodology for promoting reconciliation at the national level between ten different sectors (*campesinos*, military, women, youth, political parties, etc.), 2 worked to create a school program on democratic values that could be integrated into the current curriculum, and 1 student was chosen by PROPAZ to help systematize the experience of the OAS/PROPAZ Training School so it could be shared with others. The four trainees that did their practicum with OAS/PROPAZ eventually were hired as part of its permanent staff.

In retrospect, OAS/PROPAZ acknowledges that the school was a large expenditure that could not be repeated in the same manner. Nonetheless, they feel the expense was justified because the Training School broke new ground in the Program's capacity-building strategy and training methods. Like all research and development projects, the up-front costs were considerable. The lessons learned from this experience will be published and available to a wide range of practitioners. The PROPAZ goal of sharing (and fostering) a strategic vision for peacebuilding was extremely successful and, according to accounts from trainees, had a powerful impact on their lives. It remains to be seen if the *programmatic* goal of creating a pool of human resources capable of assuming the role of third-party facilitators that will make themselves available to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between government and civil society actually happens, as a result of the PROPAZ initiative to establish a Training School. However, given the track record of these high-powered trainees, the staff at PROPAZ is optimistic. The director of the Training School thinks that the immediate goal of identifying four qualified persons to operate as third-party impartial facilitators may have been unrealistic. Even though the three new members of the Inter-sectoral Component show immense promise, it is clear that three months of intensive class work does not translate into practical *know-how* and hands on skills. These need to be developed over time through practice and application. The School's training director also expressed reservations about the practicum. He sees it as an interesting concept, but not necessarily the ideal way to consolidate new learnings and help the trainees to build their skills. To be successful, much more pre-planning and care in the design of the practicums is needed.

Once again, the impact of this experience will only become apparent with the passage of time. The draft report of this case study was prepared in the immediate aftermath of the completion of

⁶⁵ These three students worked with the Ministry of Education to determine the institutional needs of the Ministry. (See the reference contained in the Inter-sectoral section, above.) When a new Minister assumed office, he decided not to go forward with the recommendations in the proposal by OAS/PROPAZ. As a result, these students devoted the remaining time to doing field research for future OAS/PROPAZ publications.

the practicums. Were PROPAZ to repeat the Training School, they would dedicate more time to developing a detailed plan for the practicum and a process of reinsertion to assure coherency with the goals of the Program. There are many open questions at the end of the first promotion. Instead of pursuing the dual goal of reinsertion and building capacity for a NEGUA, might it be better in the future to focus on only one of these goals at a time? Might it be better in the future to have a more homogeneous group? For example, to work only with persons/institutions working on land related issues. This way the program can help individuals to develop and consolidate both personal and institutional relationships between different sectors working on land issues in Guatemala. The School would then serve the function of training individuals and laying the groundwork for better dialogue and cooperation between these sectors in the future. The School's training director feels that all of these courses of action are valid, as is the argument for a more heterogeneous training group that prepares and sends persons with a new vision to work in different spheres. The most important thing is to decide on 'a strategy' and build it into the format and design of the training program.

REFLECTIONS ON THE OVERALL IMPACT OF THE TRAINING COMPONENT

Training was a vital support for and feature of nearly all OAS/PROPAZ initiatives or strategies. Many of the Program's successes and achievements in the Inter-Sectoral and Zonal Components are linked to the support in training design, in-house training activities and technical assistance provided by the Training Component. It contributed in a significant manner to raising the quality and consistency of all PROPAZ training activities. According to its training director, there were several phases in area of training. Before establishing a training component, individual teams were responsible for the design and delivery of training. This resulted in varying levels of quality and of uniformity in content.

When the new area was established it was intended to build installed capacity in Guatemala. Cognizant of the gaps in staff's technical skills and knowledge in conflict resolution, it was decided that the new area would assist the other components in the area of training design in order to enhance the Program's potential impact. The area worked on developing designs in conflict analysis and transformation, decision-making, design of dialogue processes and other peacebuilding skills. But rather than *assist*, the area was actually taking the lead in the design and delivery of the trainings themselves. While this assistance proved invaluable, the director and senior staff eventually became concerned that others inside the program were developing a dependency upon the new area and sidestepping their own responsibility to articulate and develop strategies for social change. As stated repeatedly throughout this report, training was never intended to be to an end, but rather one tool in a larger process to build capacity and effect change. For this reason the Training Component changed its operating procedures. Rather than go to the places or areas where the training was needed, staff came to the training office for advice and assistance. Through a series of probing questions, staff identified needs and the respective areas developed their own strategies, designs and training programs. Staff from the other components also delivered their own trainings (drawing heavily on the previous materials and designs developed by or under the guidance of the training director). This afforded the Training Component greater freedom and permitted OAS/PROPAZ to develop other methodologies for building capacity in Guatemala.

The Program appears to have developed a training method that not only is highly participatory, but eminently didactic and purposeful. The Program strives to be culturally sensitive and is careful to refrain from imposing culturally dominant frameworks or models (taken from other settings) onto participants. Many participants in PROPAZ training programs comment that they are very different and qualitatively superior to many of the training programs offered in Guatemala. If one accepts the notion that satisfaction is linked to learning (and learning is linked to action), then PROPAZ training programs have served as an effective tool for promoting social change in Guatemala.

The Training School was successful in galvanizing a group of persons committed to ideals and peacebuilding to assume new responsibilities and functions in the Guatemalan peace process. Nonetheless, the cost of training these 15 individuals was considerable, and more than donors are likely to allow in the future.⁶⁶ It remains to be seen if the lessons learned from the Training School, when shared with a wider community of practitioners, will justify its cost. Only the future will show if these 15 individuals will come to play important roles in Guatemala either through the NEGUA or in another capacity. Given the record of achievement of the persons selected, it is quite likely that they will.

In terms of creating some form of installed capacity in Guatemala the Program has had significant and varying levels of impact. In helping parties prepare for and by bringing polarized sectors of society together in training programs, seeds were planted and new modalities for peaceful political interaction and collaboration were introduced to many prominent individuals working in various sectors. Many individuals are already putting these new ideas and skills into practice, and other seeds may yet blossom in the future. PROPAZ, by hiring Guatemalan nationals as technical and field staff, and training fifteen exceptionally talented Guatemalans in third-party impartial facilitation, has helped Guatemalans acquire the cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral skills needed work with and train others in various conflict resolution skills. It has encouraged these individuals to assume a proactive role in facilitating dialogue between sectors in conflict. These individuals can continue to have an impact either as part of a NEGUA or elsewhere in Guatemala. Two are already dedicated to strengthening the initiative of the Rafael Landivar University to train a new generation of young professionals in conflict resolution and transformation. Others may decide to assist *public* universities to do the same.

The proposed NEGUA, once established, could have a significant impact on the negotiation and dialogue processes that will shape Guatemala's future. As the peace process moves into the more complex and difficult tasks of implementing the socio-economic reforms mandated by the peace accords, the need for these skills increases. The NEGUA may be the best way to institutionalize and consolidate the learnings acquired in Guatemala through the OAS/PROPAZ program and the OAS pilot program.

G. Evaluation and Systematization

⁶⁶ In interviews with the Program's donors, several told RPP that they would not consent to funding another intensive training program in the same manner.

A primary objective of the UPD has been to evaluate and systematize the PROPAZ experience in order to share the lessons learned in peacebuilding with Guatemalans and practitioners involved in international peacebuilding in the Central American region. From the beginning the Program from the beginning set aside time for internal reflection and evaluation, and even hired John Paul Lederach to lead them in a workshop to assist their efforts. But the director still felt the need to have an 'outside' person come in and evaluate the Program. Senior staff invested a lot of time and energy, including both human and financial resources, in identifying and hiring an outside consultant to develop an evaluation methodology that would demonstrate the impact of the PROPAZ program on the peace process. Because many of the changes that PROPAZ seeks to foster are *intangible*, this proved to be quite a daunting task. Changing the attitudes of government officials or indigenous activists is not as easy to identify and quantify as building houses. The field of conflict resolution remains relatively new. There were few evaluation methodologies to go from and most of these had not been adequately field tested or proven useful to PROPAZ.

The decision was made to work closely with a senior consultant from a highly respected firm that specializes in the development of evaluation methodologies. This consultant was asked to serve as an external evaluator of the Program's impact. She proposed a process to establish a 'baseline' through a series of interviews and questionnaires of staffpersons, individuals from government institutions and civil society that had worked with the Program, and other persons who had not worked with Program, but were knowledgeable about Guatemala. The baseline would be used to determine the degree of and types of changes that occurred as a result of the Program. However, for numerous reasons, the process failed to yield a baseline of any real comparative value.⁶⁷ PROPAZ felt the report essentially confirmed what they already knew and was not sufficiently critical of the Program.

For its part, although the UPD concurred with PROPAZ that the external evaluation failed to establish a baseline, they found it useful for other purposes. The external consultant interviewed 161 persons. These interviews yielded two main results. First, the OAS/UPD was able to reconfirm the value of the PROPAZ program by Guatemalans outside of the Program. And the information was collected from someone outside of PROPAZ and independently of any other specific initiative. Secondly, the report also provided insights of the internal workings and perceptions by the staff of the Program. It was evident that the three senior staffpersons had a common, strategic vision of the Program and could readily articulate their strategy for effecting change. Much of the rest of the staff, however, did not have a common view of what the PROPAZ program was about, and did not see a clear linkage between the work conducted at the zonal level and its inter-sectoral work. Moreover, several staff saw a need for organizational development skills within the program to improve communication and forge a common vision among the entire staff. They attributed this problem more to a lack of time, than to a lack of will. They also recommended targeting new groups, such as political parties.

⁶⁷ It is difficult to attribute changes in attitudes and other types of changes directly (and exclusively) to OAS/PROPAZ. There are many contributing factors (some stimulating and others inhibiting) to change in Guatemalan society. So it is hard to make a direct correlation between the PROPAZ program and these changes. Together they form part of complex process of social change in Guatemala. OAS/PROPAZ staff feels that the external evaluator was *not sufficiently critical* of the Program. In preparing this report, I wonder if the part of the problem stems from the fact that PROPAZ was the agency that hired the consultant. For their part, the PROPAZ staff attributes the problem, at least in part, to the consultant's inability to fully understand the nature of their work.

Despite its merits, the initial report did not provide OAS/PROPAZ with the type of assistance that they felt was needed and they decided not to continue further with the agency and the consultant. Instead, they would concentrate on developing their own internal evaluation and systematization procedures. PROPAZ proposed to the donors that they take the results of their internal process as a series of hypotheses, and that the donors select an external consultant to verify their veracity.

PROPAZ's efforts to develop a series of measurable indicators, that could be used to indicate the results and impact of its work, produced data that largely confirmed what the Program *already* knew. Given the difficulty of establishing objective indicators to prove *qualitative* changes, the search for indicators might be inherently flawed. OAS/UPD and PROPAZ suggest that perhaps it is better to talk about '*illustrators*'. These could be used to make an implicit sense of success or failure clear through a few key examples. The Program carried out a process of structured reflection with its staff to identify the lessons learned. These reflections are being synthesized into a series of publications that will be shared with a wide range of practitioners both within Guatemala and internationally.

The books and publications produced by the Program will be an additional contribution to the literature (case studies, articles and writings) that already exists on peacebuilding. The UPD has expressed a desire to do more than just publish literature. They want to develop ways to institutionalize the lessons learned from its experience in Guatemala. This may have applications on *how* the OAS operates or works in other countries. This, however, was never a stated goal of the OAS/PROPAZ program and there has not been a coordinated effort on the part of the OAS to ensure that this happens.

H. CURRENT SITUATION OF GUATEMALA AND OAS/PROPAZ

OAS/PROPAZ, under its current mandate, has funding through April 2002. There has been a clear decision by the OAS and the Guatemalan government to proceed with the creation of a new Guatemalan entity (NEGUA). The transition began in November 2000 when an interim Guatemalan Coordinator/Director took over the day-to-day management of PROPAZ. The new acting director has a profound respect for and appreciates the value of the work of OAS/PROPAZ in Guatemala. He also brings new ideas to the Program. He hopes to be less 'cautious' than his predecessors. He would like the Program to be 'bolder', without being irresponsible. According to the new director, this means a readiness to take certain risks even when 'ideal conditions' may not exist but the staff considers that the situation merits the risk. Moreover, he hopes to get the staff more involved in the internal decision-making process, and have them assume more responsibility for their successes or shortcomings. For both the OAS and the outgoing international coordinators, these ideas are welcome. They recognize and support the right of Guatemalans to develop their own approaches and strategies, and see it as part of the process of assuming *ownership* and stewardship of the Program.

At present, the interim director works under the general coordination of the UPD's senior specialist who oversees the OAS/PROPAZ program. In April 2002, the program will become fully independent. Nonetheless, the interim coordinator values the support and expertise provided by the

UPD and says collaboration of some form is likely to continue between the NEGUA and the OAS in the next few years.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This case study of the OAS/PROPAZ program in Guatemala clearly shows that the Program has earned the respect of many of the individuals, institutions and communities it has come into contact with. The Program is widely recognized for the high quality of the training programs it has provided to government and civil society counterparts, which have contributed to a greater appreciation for the *value of dialogue*. If the Program failed to reach fully all of its specific objectives, it has served to sow many new seeds and to help prepare a foundation for assisting Guatemalans in their efforts to move from confrontation towards "a culture of dialogue". What fruits these initial seeds will bear, and the final impact of the PROPAZ program on the peace process is still difficult to determine at this juncture. Guatemala remains immersed in a complex process of radical change. The electoral changes and the emerging strains resulting from the failure to implement the socio-economic and other reforms needed to secure the necessary resources and provide tangibles, has resulted in sporadic outbreaks of violence. At the same time there are signs of a renewed energy and commitment to the peace process.

Whether the work of the OAS/PROPAZ was carried out in a cost-effective and strategic manner is still hard to determine. Yet, at minimum, the OAS/PROPAZ program appears to have played a positive role. It has striven to avoid creating a dependency of its counterparts on the Program. The turnover of international staff and their replacement by Guatemalan nationals occurred smoothly. A decrease in activities in the year 2001 stemmed, in large part, from the country's internal political situation. While the OAS continues to support PROPAZ, today the entire staff is Guatemalan. The international staff was able to withdraw from the Program without causing any harm to the situation in Guatemala.

At most, the OAS/PROPAZ program has been a strong catalyst for change at multiple levels, including at the highest levels of Guatemalan society. It has created an installed capacity within the Program, that through the establishment of the NEGUA, will be able to continue to play a critical role in supporting dialogue processes and building a durable peace in Guatemala. And Program has prepared and fielded a pool of well-trained and committed individuals to work in various sectors in the promotion of dialogue, the establishment of mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration and third-party facilitation. These skills remain scarce in Guatemala and are vital for transforming the structures and processes mandated by the peace accords into viable mechanisms for dialogue, reform and conflict management. Peacebuilding is a long-term process, of which OAS/PROPAZ constitutes simply "a *good* beginning" and not the end.