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# Women's leadership development and the empowerment process

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# **WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND THE EMPOWERMENT PROCESS**

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**PIM 63**

**A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Sustainable Development at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.**

**May, 2005**

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## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my daughter IxChel who shared my time and attention while I pursued my education. I would like to thank my family for their support throughout my education and for their appreciation of my work, and the Central American Solar Energy Project for providing me the opportunity to work with women in the area of leadership. Finally, I thank the three women participants in this study: Medarda Castro, Norma Maldonado and Maria Domingo for whom I hold deep respect and admiration.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Research Questions</i>	6
<i>Theoretical framework</i>	6
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Research Methodology</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>Research Approach</i>	16
<i>Research Context</i>	16
<i>Gaining Access to Research sites</i>	16
<i>Data Gathering Methods</i>	17
<i>Data Compilation methods</i>	17
<i>Data analysis methods</i>	18
<i>Presentation of Findings and Analysis</i>	18
<i>Dissemination</i>	18
<i>Challenges and Limitations of the Study</i>	18
<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	19
<i>Introduction to the Participants</i>	19
<i>Medarda Castro</i>	19
<i>Maria Domingo</i>	20
<i>Norma Maldonado</i>	21
<b>Analysis</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Women's Leadership Development in Theory and Practice</i>	21
<i>Perceptions of Leadership</i>	23

<i>Perceptions of Power</i>	26
<i>Uses of Power</i>	28
<i>Origin of Power</i>	29
<i>Power and Conflict</i>	30
<i>The Gender Factor</i>	33
<i>Process of Empowerment</i>	35
<i>Norma Maldonado</i>	36
<i>Maria Domingo</i>	39
<i>Medarda Castro</i>	42
<i>Motivation</i>	45
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>Letter of Consent</i>	56
<i>Memo to Institutional Review Board</i>	58
<i>Interview Questions for Women leaders</i>	60
<i>Interview Questions for CEDPA program coordinator</i>	62
<i>Photographs of Research Participants</i>	63

## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, Women's Leadership Development, (WLD) has become a focus area in the theory and practice of sustainable development. It attempts to develop and strengthen leadership skills in women, marginalized not only within development programs but also within the socioeconomic and political systems within their countries. Using mini-ethnographies to explore why and how three Guatemalan women leaders experience the process of becoming empowered, this paper gives voice to women leaders while providing insights into the development of women's leadership. The conceptual framework for this study is Critical Theory. It engages participants in a political agenda, inspiring action on the part of individual women, organizations and institutions.

An exploration into the methodologies of organizations working toward WLD in Guatemala indicates that while leadership skills can be strengthened, there are some fundamental aspects of leadership development that cannot easily be developed or replicated in a designed or controlled environment. Through the stories of these three women, it becomes evident that the empowerment process is historical, contextual, experiential and ultimately political.

## **Introduction**

Leadership, empowerment, and gender are quintessential discussion points in the field of sustainable development and within many organizations working in “developing” countries. While scores of women’s and mixed–gender organizations have traveled through approximately 25 years of feminist theories of development, most are still working out the intellectual and practical problem of how to empower, how to create gender equality, and how to develop leadership in women. This study looks at Women’s Leadership Development, (WLD) and the Empowerment Process, with the intention of understanding how women in Guatemala experience this process and what methodological implications can be applied to WLD programs in Guatemala.

The term “development”, co-opted from the social sciences and from its dictionary definition, descends in its historic sense from a 1949 speech by President Truman – development in terms of economic growth and the “process of recreating the industrial world” (W.M. Adams, 2001, p.7). Interestingly, development practitioners and academics have reacted to the failures of this conventional practice of development by redefining the term to include the concept of sustainability. The most commonly cited definition is from *Our Common Future*, otherwise known as the Brundtland Report, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p.43).

Likewise, feminist theories of development, originating primarily from Western academia and activists, reveal an evolution of thought that critiques development and analyzes the inequalities within gender (Peet & Hartwick, 1999, p.163). In 1994, the United Nations hosted an international conference on population and development in Cairo, followed by the



First World Forum on Social Development in Copenhagen and the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing. These conferences, which addressed the specific concerns of women, established gender equality and the participation of women as a central element in Sustainable Development (CEDPA, 1995, p.7). They also gave momentum to women's leadership and helped develop the language used in this study.

The term "leadership development", used in this study, refers to a process of becoming critically aware of one's situation, of developing a political posture and the skills needed to promote one's interests in the common good. This generally assumes a struggle to achieve equality between men and women, economic classes and ethnic groups within the political, economic and social systems that dictate these relationships.

The word "leadership" describes a process where skills, lived experiences, attitudes and knowledge combine together with a vision to move people toward a common goal or goals. Currently, women in Guatemala are becoming *empowered* and are *developing leadership* through trial and error, personal evolution and some level of participation in the development of their communities. Many organizations are in the difficult position of trying to create leadership by providing the necessary conditions and opportunities through women's leadership programs. The challenge for development practitioners, and leaders alike, is to develop methodologies that can effectively create or be a catalyst for those individual and collective changes. Leadership development, indisputably belonging to the areas of human or social development, requires change within individuals, groups, institutions and political and economic systems. In order for the women's movement in Guatemala to reach the goal of gender equity, control over and access to education, health care and natural resources, there must be changes at all levels. Development practitioners, interested in fostering more

equitable and sustainable development, benefit from understanding what meaning *leadership, empowerment, power, and conflict* hold for marginalized women.

The following ethnographic study took place in Guatemala eight years after the signing of the peace accords. The government's inability or disinterest in complying with the peace accords, several of which are specifically aimed at improving women's rights, has contributed to a state of increasing violence and impunity.

Currently, there is an apparent increase in violence toward women. In investigating the increase of violence toward women, Claudia Estrada, Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) Project Coordinator in Guatemala, suggests that currently, there is more capacity to monitor and report violence toward women. She adds that the amount of violence toward women reported during the armed conflict was grossly underestimated. Estrada points out that violence toward women is not a new phenomenon in Guatemala, it has a long history reaching back to the times of colonialism and the more recent 36-year armed conflict.

According to research participant, Norma Maldonado, the threats toward women come from the paramilitary and clandestine groups determined to discourage their participation in civil society (Maldonado, pers. comm.). In 2004, under ex-dictator Rios Montt, then elected president of congress, civil society groups were receiving more and more threats. The first groups negatively affected were the ones with strong women leadership (Maldonado, pers. comm.). This is considered by Maldonado as a plot to silence women within political spaces.

Another theory is that the violence has to do with the increased participation of women in non-traditional public spaces, including an increase in women breadwinners working in sweatshops. Within open market economics, small-scale farming has become less viable and more men are unemployed. Some of the violence is attributed to the intra-family conflicts

aggravated by rapid economic development, increased poverty and the consequential changes in the social order (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Another important issue, which influences WLD in Guatemala, is the ethnic diversity and the disparity between socioeconomic classes. These stark contrasts are the primary cause for discrimination in Guatemala. These differences have also been a point of conflict between individuals within the women's movement.

My personal experience in Guatemala began in 1996 at the time the peace accords were signed, ending the 36-year armed conflict and renewing hope for social and economic progress. I began my work in sustainable development as a volunteer with an indigenous community-based organization, (CBO). Before long, I was immersed in the practice of sustainable development, married to an indigenous leader, and a new mother. With this, I made a long-term commitment to live and work in Guatemala. Being a Euro-American woman, a wife and a mother in Guatemala made me question my identity and my amateur role in community organizing and sustainable development. I accommodated the novelty of my situation, by working with women. My interest in working with women originally stemmed from my desire to understand gender and development in the rural Guatemalan context. I later identified, as a woman, with the larger women's movement. In many ways, my own well-being and personal, as well as professional growth was dependant on the liberation, acknowledgement and celebration of women. In 2000, I began working with the Central American Solar Energy Project (CASEP), a women's organization that promotes the use of solar ovens in food preparation. As the organizations' participants grew in numbers so too did the need for more women leaders to assure the sustainability of the various projects. This is where my focus diverted from *development with women* to *women's leadership*

*development.* In 2004 I returned to CASEP to do my practicum for graduate school. The experience focused primarily on the formation of its WLD program in Central America. In the process of evaluating the program's progress and of developing a methodology I became aware of the complexity of the topic and therefore chose to dedicate my capstone to understanding the empowerment process: not just in theory but in the lives of women leaders.

My work is influenced by Paolo Freire's theories of experiential learning through popular education and the process of "*concientizacion*" referred to in English as the process of becoming critically aware of one's contextual situation with the goal of social change. Freire's theories and my colleagues, provide me with a politicized approach to sustainable development as a learning process with the primary purpose of liberation and social, economic and environmental justice.

This study departs from my experiences, and professional and personal interests in better understanding how leadership and the empowerment process develop in women's lives. I will begin by placing WLD within the context of the larger trajectory of feminist theories of development. Secondly, I will analyze the prevailing thoughts and approaches to WLD programs by Oxfam International and the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA). Through interventions with women leaders and ethnographic studies of women's experiences in leadership within Guatemala, I hope to capture perceptions of leadership, power and conflict. On the more constructive side, I hope to learn about the unique ways in which women develop as leaders and what implications this has in their personal lives, their families, and the organizations in which they participate. These "storytelling" sessions, where participants explore and share the critical incidents and other factors and motivators that have led them to their leadership experience, coupled with open-ended questions and

observations are the basis of my field research. Based on my findings, I will make methodological recommendations for the development of women's leadership within the context of Guatemala and perhaps Central America.

### **Research Questions**

My primary research question is:

1. What are Guatemalan women's perceptions and ways of experiencing leadership and how do they describe their process of empowerment?

Sub questions:

2. How are the development theories of women's empowerment and WLD translating in practice and on the ground?
3. What are participants' perceptions of power and conflict in relation to leadership?
4. What are participants' experiences, both inhibitive and constructive in the development of their own leadership?
5. How do women manage power?
6. What are some conclusions we can draw that support methodological approaches for empowering and creating women's leadership?

### **Theoretical framework**

This research follows Critical Theory as a theoretical framework for analyzing the theories and practice of women's leadership because of its collaborative approach to empowerment and social change (Creswell, 2003, p.10). Many Latin American writers of popular documents on sustainable development who have connected academic rhetoric with accessible and practical approaches to sustainable development have adopted this approach. This type of action research creates an experience and results that lend themselves to advocacy,

transcending the limitations of oppression in this case: colonialism, western hegemony, patriarchy and the neo-colonialism of development. Popular education and critical theory are based on the lived experiences of the writer and her research participants. The research process and findings are for the benefit of practitioners, the research participants and community leaders concerned with increasing women's leadership in Guatemala and Central America.

### **Literature Review**

Literature on WLD made its appearance in western academia in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rhode, 2003, p.4). By the 1990s, WLD Programs began to appear in Central America. In Guatemala, the first women's organizations or institutions to focus on the formation of women leaders came out of the peace process, which began in the early 1990's (Estrada, pers. comm.). Other than the popular, "how to" documents put out by development organizations, there is little information published on the subject and even less documented analysis of the impact these programs have had on the lives of women and the achievement of development goals. In Guatemala, establishing permanent processes for the formation of women have been dependant on international funding and therefore lack continuity (Estrada, pers. comm.).

My research indicates that the idea grew out of the Theory of Gender and Development (Rowlands, 1997), which stresses women's participation in civil society, local politics, and empowerment for which there is a plethora of information, analysis and critique. The sub-categories, drawn out in the analysis of empowerment, are power and conflict (Rowlands 1997; Shah & Guijt 1998; Kabeer, 2004).

The concept of empowering women was introduced in the 1970's within the Women in Development Theory, or WID (Peet, 1999, p.181). Originally, the concept related to the

empowerment of women through their increased visibility within development. The term has since evolved in its meanings and interpretations. Empowering the marginalized has been a driving force in participatory practices (Guijt & Shah, 1998, p.11). Jo Rowlands' book, *Questioning Empowerment* (1997), provides useful insights as she redefines and exemplifies the term through case studies of women's groups in Honduras. Rowlands notes that the "root-concept of empowerment is power". This leads us to the primordial question: what is power? Power is a force used in many ways, positively or negatively – inclusively or exclusively. Rowlands describes a variety of interpretations of the word power. A more conventional definition of power is, "the ability of one person or group to get another person or group to do something against their will" (p.9). This is referred to as "zero-sum: the more power one person has the less the other has " (p.9). Rowlands describes this type of power as overtly or covertly connected to decision-making and conflict. The following quote by Rowlands exemplifies how conflict can be prevented by making it impossible for people to imagine anything different from the status quo.

The most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent conflict arising in the first place by shaping peoples perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial (p.23-24).

Rowlands explains the issue of internalized oppression by stating, "When women are systematically denied power and influence in society they internalize society's messages about what they are supposed to be; this is referred to as *internalized oppression*" (Rowlands, 1997, p.11). She proceeds to outline and analyze different forms of power such as: power over, power to, power with and power from within (Rowlands, 1997, p.11). This analysis makes clear the importance of conflict, both internal and external, in the empowerment

process. In my experience working with women, mitigating conflict, as they and their families confront power differentials, was an essential criterion of their participation in community organizing. This gentle “pushing of boundaries,” tries to accommodate the richness of cultural traditions, which socially define gender roles. For practitioners, it is a challenge to avoid “interventions that legitimize existing sexual relations, alleviate government from its functions and create dependence” (Guijt & Shah, 1998, p.9).

To frame women’s leadership I will discuss two distinct movements within development; Women in Development (WID), and Gender and Development (GAD). WID, introduced in the mid 1970’s, showed that development policies favored men displacing the significant role of women in both reproductive and productive labor (Peet,1999, p.180). Programs were therefore necessary to “integrate” women into development projects. While WID may have increased women’s physical presence as implementers and benefactors of projects, women’s agendas were not addressed. Under WID, “gender mainstreaming” was a popular practice of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Commonly – felt problems with mainstreaming are that it doesn’t speak to the fundamental underlying relationships that perpetuate gender subordination, nor does it adequately address differences among women. Most leaders in WID were academic “liberal feminists” who emphasized “role models” or outstanding women who gained respect in the public sphere. (Peet, 1999) This “role modeling,” of female leaders both rejected women in traditional roles while isolating the poorest of poor.

GAD developed in response to WID in the mid 1970’s. It took a more critical look at access to and distribution of resources based on gender relations, the social construction of gender roles and critically examined gender divisions of labor. GAD was an attempt to



include men in the gender analysis. The concept of “gender awareness” was promoted at all levels, from program design to implementation and follow-up at the local, regional, national and international levels (Peet, 1999, p.187). GAD projects involved participants as agents for social change. Women’s perspectives were heard for the first time on social and political issues surrounding health, education, environment, human rights and economics. GAD is criticized, however, as having treated the symptoms of women’s oppression, without addressing the causes (Guijt & Shah, 1998, p.11).

Within the contexts of WID and GAD came an increased interest in women’s participation in development activities. Participation, especially in decision-making, throughout the 1980’s and early 1990’s, was considered key to women’s empowerment (Guijt & Shah, 1996, p.26). Numerous typologies of participation attempted to catalogue degrees of participation and the characteristics of each. They range from passive participation, in which women are co-opted to justify particular development propositions, to self-mobilization, described as women taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems.

In the 1980’s, Participatory Action Research (PAR), congruent with the GAD theory, stressed openness and the need to listen to others. It posed “an endogenous intellectual and practical research methodology for people of the third world” (Peet, 1999, p.139). Simultaneously, feminist participatory research emerged to link scholarship and activism with change (Guijt & Shah, 1998, p.6). In the book, *Myth of Community* (Guijt & Shah, 1996, p.26), participation and gender are presented as two separate movements that have difficulty connecting and transcending theory into practice. In Humble’s (1998) chapter on “Assessing PRA for implementing Gender and Development” she quips; “Gender and development is a concept in search of a methodology (p.6).” This is precisely the challenge posed by the

intention to develop women's leadership. The 1990's were an attempt to integrate theories of gender with practices of participatory development. This was done by sensitizing people to gender through training, improvements in the quality of research on gender analysis and through community development that supports empowerment of women through local level analysis and planning (p12).

In 1993, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was introduced as a way to include women in the analysis of community needs. They stated, "The core of PRA is the belief that it enables a group of people to analyze their condition, giving them confidence to state and exert their priorities, to present proposals, to make demands and to take action" (Guijt & Shah, 1998, p.24). In my own work with women in Guatemala, I used PRA techniques in a collaborative needs assessment for the formation of a women's group. The idea of creating a collective consciousness has supported women's connectedness as a distinct social group, producing a commonality, which motivates women to organize and empowers women in personal and collective action (Guijt & Shah, 1998, p.27). PRA has undeniably been a valuable catalyst in a process that creates awareness and self-confidence. Questions have arisen as to PRA's potential to empower women. Some of the critiques of PRA and participatory approaches are that they: underestimate the potential for conflict; rely on a commonly held perception of empowerment from which to judge its impact; have no clear ways of measuring empowerment; mask complex and varied levels of participation from social sub groups; and, create a sense of empowerment without effecting any shifts in power (Guijt & Shah, 1998, p.24-33).

Closely linked to the concept of PRA and empowerment are the Brazilian Paulo Freire's theories of "popular education" and "critical consciousness," which have highly influenced

grassroots development in Latin America. Freire's theory is that people who are critically aware of their society and have an understanding of oppression and power are more able to change it.

Feminist theories have provided a vocabulary and a large body of experiences and documentation to aid women leaders in the process of empowerment. The challenge for women has been to define their needs within the development agenda and from within a patriarchal hegemony.

In the continued process of gender equality, social justice and sustainable development, practitioners, feminists, Non Governmental Organization's (NGO's) and CBO's recognize the need to convert theory into practice. Increasing women's self-esteem, skills and ability to take an active role in the "development" of their personal lives, their families, their communities and nations is dependent on women's leadership and systemic changes in power relations within households and institutions. Women leaders alone have the potential to make these changes and it is "third-world women" who can best inspire and cultivate leadership in others. So what then is the role of the "other" in developing women's leadership programs?

Freeman and Murdock (2001) speak of "regional intellectual traditions" (p.427). The idea is that in the indefinable process of developing leadership, women will challenge prescribed and enforced ideas of power, revealing more regional, intellectual and feminine approaches to power.

Caroline Sweetman (2000) of Oxfam, has described three types of leadership development: personal development, professional development, and political formation. She defines a leader as a person vested with formal or informal authority that rules, inspires,

guides or mobilizes others. In her book, *Women and Leadership* (2000), she outlines three theories of social change and transformation:

1. Professional–Technical: The basic assumption is that the institutions, organizations and current society are sound but that women need to be ‘enabled’ to better cope with ongoing change. Social change occurs when people are trained to work more efficiently and effectively within the existing system.

2. Political: Recognizes groups with different interests and imbalances of power who encounter conflict in the competition over scarce resources. Social change occurs when people understand power differentials and those in power are willing to give up some of their privilege for the good of the commons.

3. Counter-Culture: Based on the importance of diverse cultural values, personal values, lifestyles and relationships – especially those of minority or marginalized groups. Individuals reach their full potential through personal change and community organizing outside of the status quo political and social structures.

There is a tendency within NGO’s to envision and practice Women’s Leadership Programs within the Professional – Technical approach. This is because the most obvious reason for the lack of women leaders has to do with the lack of access to education. Practitioners and participants make a direct analogy between increased education and increased leadership. However, we have seen in the case of the United States, that while women’s access to education has improved greatly, the number of women leaders has not grown proportionately (Rhode, Deborah L., 2003, p.66). As Freire suggests, we need to look at what we teach, why and how we teach it, if education is to be a tool for empowerment. In Guatemala, I have seen illiterate women speak at international conferences on policy issues.

While education is a right, it is not a precursor or a guarantee of women's leadership. Unless we look more critically at education systems and curricula, educational institutions and NGO's can work against the women's movement by reinforcing the status quo.

Sweetman, one of the intellectual authors of Oxfam's programs in WLD, writes in *Gender in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (2000):

Education and teaching leadership skills is a common approach to leadership development. While most gender experts agree that education is key to women's leadership in society, others argue that it has a neutralizing affect by providing a *professional/technical* response to a highly politicized problem of power differentials. Some gender experts see leadership training as an apolitical approach favored by development practitioners embedded in the "language of power and politics" and with little commitment to addressing the inequalities between men and women.

In her conclusion, she recommends supporting a combination of women's education, political formation, and campaigning and advocacy efforts. For Oxfam, the key goals of their Women's Leadership Program are:

- ✓ acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and ways in which these relations may be changed;
- ✓ developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's own ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life;
- ✓ gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power; and,
- ✓ developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Acquiring these capabilities requires both a process of self-empowerment, in which women claim time and space to re-examine their own lives critically and collectively, and the creation of an enabling environment for women's empowerment by other social actors, including other civil society organizations, governments and international institutions. It entails both the development of women's own agency and the removal of barriers to the exercise of this agency (p.7).

CEDPA also has an extensive women's leadership program in Central America. It primarily promotes women's leadership through seminars, workshops and a graduated

training of trainers program. Through capacity building, the program recognizes the individual's ability to be a change agent and respects an organization's right and potential to determine its future. The program, as outlined in the CEDPA *Training of Trainers Guide to Advancing Women's Leadership*, has the following goals:

- ✓ Ensure that women have the leadership skills and tools to develop institutions, reach policy-makers and mobilize communities in order to expand program coverage in maternal health, family planning, reproductive health and women's economic development;
- ✓ Provide women with networking opportunities and innovative tools that enable them to disseminate strategic information and advocate for policy change; and,
- ✓ Document how institutional strengthening activities contribute to civil society, greater programmatic impact, improved health and women's economic development services.

CEDPA sees women as powerful agents of change whose active participation in decision-making leads to significant improvements in community development. They use phrases like, "assure that energetic, committed leaders have the practical skills to mobilize communities", "leverage organizational resources and increase civic participation in decision making", and "build equitable opportunities for leadership and development among all levels of society" (CEDPA, website accessed 10/02/04).

CEDPA, like Oxfam, proposes a "multi-level approach to leadership development". It begins with the individual, "transforming leadership skills", the community, "mobilizing to prioritize needs and participate in decision making," the organization, "building institutional stability and effectiveness" and society, "challenging gender inequality and strengthening civil society" (CEDPA, website accessed 10/02/04).

From this brief look at the strategies, concerns and goals of two INGO's, it is easy to see a similarity in their approaches. Both organizations have long-standing programs in

women's leadership and are considered leaders in the production of methodologies for the development of women leaders.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Approach**

The field work for my capstone research explores the perspectives, experiences and visions of women leaders in Guatemala. Comparing these lessons to the theory and practices of development organizations helps determine where methodological gaps may exist. The findings lend themselves to methodological applications for WLD in Guatemala. The strategy of inquiry is qualitative, using mini ethnographies to capture a narrative look at the lived experiences and perceptions of three women leaders in Guatemala. Ethnographies use extensive observation of patterns of behavior, language and expressed values to ascertain a rich description of the subject (Creswell, 2003, p.199-200). This approach helped reveal the individual women's perceptions and experiences as well as their important background information such as levels of education, social-economic class and ethnicity (p.14).

#### **Research Context**

The research took place in Guatemala with three women leaders; each interviewed in two, 3-hour meetings. The lengthy interviews allowed time and opportunity for verifying data, making clarifications and expanding the inquiry. Significant time was spent with each woman, observing her work in meetings, protests and workshops she conducted.

#### **Gaining Access to Research sites**

The organizations CEDPA and Oxfam were chosen for their experiences and well documented Women's Leadership Programs in Central América. Two other Women's Leadership programs in Guatemala, run by NGOs, Central American Solar Energy Project

(CASEP) and Mamá Maquín were referenced for their experience with women in Guatemala. I had the opportunity to visit the offices of these organizations. The three primary interviews were conducted separately in places chosen by the participant and ranged from my home, to their home, places where the women felt most comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives on the topic. The women had time to reflect and share their experiences without environmental pressures.

### **Data Gathering Methods**

The success of this ethnographic study is dependant on the design and careful implementation of the inquiry. Careful consideration was given as to where, when and how I would conduct interviews and observe the selected women. To collect data from observations and interviews, I used a journal, camera, portable computer and when approved, a tape recorder. Both the guided observations and the interview questions derived from the sub questions listed in the introduction. All materials presented in this study were translated into Spanish for the purpose of this inquiry.

### **Data Compilation methods**

The data collected in a journal and on audio tape, later transcribed into a computer, was classified, indexed, coded and translated. For the coding process, I used distinct colors to mark key comments or themes followed by a process of combining information in various ways to find meaning and draw conclusions. I specifically looked for information in the following categories:

- Perceptions of power
- Perceptions of conflict
- Pertinent life experiences
- Critical incidents
- Descriptions of leadership
- Descriptions of empowerment
- Gender related
- Approaches to leadership.
- The women's movement



### **Data analysis methods**

In analyzing data, I considered and even included my biases and preconceived ideas about the study in the documentation. I compared the comments of participants with the current trends in WLD programs and the more academic critique and analysis of the topic. I verified findings by checking with interviewees in follow-up meetings where we discussed their transcribed information and the analysis. I used multiple sources to study the history of WLD and empowerment by reviewing books, journal articles and the methodologies of several organizations. Colleagues in Guatemala did peer evaluations of the findings.

### **Presentation of Findings and Analysis**

The findings based on collected data, after analysis within the established framework, are presented in a descriptive narrative, with annexes that document the inquiry process. The finished document will be translated into Spanish to facilitate use by organizations and individuals within Guatemala and Central America.

### **Dissemination**

Capstone studies are available to the School for International Training (SIT) students and faculty through the SIT library. An abstract of this study may be published in a professional journal and a Spanish popular edition of this study may be bound and published for use by practitioners and women leaders in the field.

### **Challenges and Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study may be that the researcher is a Euro-American woman eliciting and interpreting subjective information from Guatemalan women. Another limitation may be that the majority of the women interviewed were known to the researcher both personally and professionally. This presented occasional difficulties in keeping the interviews

focused. However, the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees helped establish confidence. While anticipating a language barrier with Spanish, the “development” language and mentality was more of a hindrance. The women were either unfamiliar with certain concepts or rejected them as inappropriate. These limitations were dealt with by being open with readers about the learning and investigative process.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A copy of consent forms used to gain approval for research from the individuals participating in the interviews and observations is presented in the annex to this paper. Participants were contacted prior to the interviews to explain the purpose of the study and to gain their consent. There is no evidence of pretense in the study design and the experiences and views of those interviewed have been responsibly portrayed. Participants were given the transcribed information from interviews; to clear up any misinterpretations and to gain their approval.

### **Introduction to the Participants**

The participants in this investigation are three leaders, recognized locally, nationally and internationally for their contribution to social change within Guatemala. The following biographies are to help the reader identify with the participants as they read their perceptions and life stories recounted.

#### ***Medarda Castro***

Medarda Castro is Maya Kaqchikel from the department of Solola in the Western Highlands. She was raised Catholic and both the church and her strong family ties form an important part of her person. She was the first woman in the community of San Lucas Tolimán to get a scholarship for post secondary education through the church. At their request, she

studied to be a secretary. Upon completion of her studies, she was determined to continue her education in the area of social work. At the University Rafael Landívar in Guatemala City Medarda was exposed to the indigenous movement, of which she has become an important figure. She is a founding member of the organization Naleb, which supports indigenous leadership. She has worked with Oxfam in the preparation of programs grounded in the Mayan cosmovision. More recently, she has worked as a consultant for the Organization of the American States. During the conduct of this investigation, she was elected member of the indigenous counsel to the president of Guatemala. Medarda has consistently supported community organizations and working groups in her home town of San Lucas Tolimán.

### ***Maria Domingo***

Maria Domingo is Maya Mam originally from the department of Huehuetenango in the Western Highlands; a region hit hard by the violence during the repression in the 1980's. In 1993, Maria and her family were relocated to the department of Alta Verapaz. She is a return refugee who spent 11 years in Mexico while Guatemala was rife with civil war and, in many cases, genocide. In Mexico she became politicized as the camps received international attention and non formal education in community organization and resistance. She helped form the organization Mamá Maquín at age 16 while in Mexico and has been an active member since. Mamá Maquín represents women from return refugee communities now relocated in the Alta Verapaz region in political struggles such as land tenure for women, and human and environmental rights. In 2004 she was nominated coordinator of Mamá Maquín for her solid dedication to the organization and to the larger cause. She was also appointed coordinator of the Alliance for Rural Women for Rights, Land and Dignity, which coordinates activities among the three strongest return refugee women's organizations in the country. Maria was denied a formal

education. However, she has overcome this barrier through “popular education”, a combination of non-formal education and life experience. Maria has clear values and conviction. Her analytical skills and her keen perception of the larger situation propel her into the struggle for the basic rights and sovereignty of her people.

### ***Norma Maldonado***

Norma Maldonado was raised in a single parent home in Guatemala City. Her life, marked by the civil war, which tore apart communities and families, has been one of constant resistance and perseverance. Norma’s peers and colleagues involved in the insurgency were targeted by the military forces and the clandestine groups that terrorized people into silence. In 1979, during the start of violent period, Norma began receiving death threats. She fled to the United States where she studied and worked with a refugee community and several community organizations. In 1996 she returned to Guatemala to resume the struggle for human and environmental rights. Culturally, Norma is *Mestiza*<sup>1</sup>, of indigenous Mayan and Spanish ancestry. Her identity as a poor *Mestiza* in a country of extreme racism and classism has strengthened her commitment to fighting these destructive inequalities. She has fought for indigenous rights in almost every cultural/geographical region of her country. Currently, she works with the Mesa Global of Guatemala, a coalition that confronts the projects of neoliberalism, such as strip mines, hydroelectric dams and the privatization of natural resources and public services.

### **Analysis**

#### **Women’s Leadership Development in Theory and Practice**

WLD programs in Guatemala use training as their primary technique. In my research I found two different approaches, the Political and the Professional - Technical as outlined by

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Mestiza* or *Mestizo* refers to people of mixed European and Indigenous heritage.

Caroline Sweetman (Oxfam, 2000). Several approaches to WLD exist within Guatemala. One such example is a school for the formation of women that focuses on content such as political formation, land tenure, women's rights, history and understanding of macroeconomics, and projects like the Plan Puebla Panama, the push for biotechnology and the privatization of services under the Central American Free Trade Agreement. This knowledge and critical analysis is applied within the context of the organization's political agenda. Mental health has also been a strong component within the school because the women are on the front lines, confronting a violent and unjust past and present. These themes are tools for strengthening leadership skills.

Other approaches, employ professional technical training in self-esteem, public speaking and other technical skills. The primary motivation behind this approach is to support women who can lead organizations or hold public offices, thereby increasing the presence and participation of women within civil society and public spaces. This approach to leadership development provides women with *what* to do and *how* to do it but avoids the question of *why*. As Sweetman explains, it assumes that women must adapt to the structures and systems of development organizations and institutions. Such programs can produce confident women ready to assume positions of power within organizations and institutions. However, they tend to lack the fundamental political clarity or analysis of the situation in which the women are living and working to create change. Without such analysis, or consciousness building it is difficult for these organizations to become more than program managing NGO's or for the women involved to become more than public functionaries or employees, dependent on external motivation and with a lack of direction and conviction.

Politically oriented organizations assume that technical skills will be acquired outside the framework of the organization. There is no focus on “projects” or their management because development is seen as part of the dependency problem, which stagnates true social change. Programs referred to as “political formation for women” are geared toward the most marginalized women within Guatemala. Their trainings, for example, prepare women to confront the very real threats of neo-liberalism from an historical and cultural perspective with themes on human rights, local and national politics, global macroeconomics and environmental topics such as extractive industries and bio-technology. Such politically oriented organizations prepare women to apply their knowledge and skills in direct actions, manifesting strategies for opposing the destructive projects of Plan Puebla Panama or the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Both approaches help develop or strengthen women’s leadership through training. What differs is the political framework from which they operate. The political approach operates on the periphery, opposing not only the political system of their government but also the politics of development and globalization. The professional – technical approach is situated squarely within the existing system, trying to make incremental changes from within.

### **Perceptions of Leadership**

In the rural Kaqchikel communities, a leader is referred to as *Kamal Bey* (Castro, pers. comm.) and in Mam, *Nej nēn* (Domingo, pers. comm.). Traditionally, these men guide people in decision-making. Now there is a different type of leadership that involves women, men, institutions and organizations (Domingo, pers. comm.).

According to the interviewees, a natural leader is one who shows a demonstrated interest and conviction in community organizing, in learning, and in social change. As such,

they are driven toward a determined objective for the common good and their honesty, transparency, and responsibility set them apart (Castro, pers. comm.).

Most women have leadership skills but have not yet discovered how to apply them. This is where structured organizations and leadership training or formation can help develop latent skills and interests. A critical understanding of community, social and political systems and an analysis of the local context, especially that of women, is essential in developing leadership.

Medarda identifies various examples of leadership; some of which are constructive while others destructive. One type of leadership contributes to a culture, open to collaboration with others in the development of new leaders. Some leaders are more democratic while others manifest their leadership in individual interests, using their power to manipulate the decisions of others for their own benefit. The latter is an example of the “zero-sum” (Rowlands, 1997, p.9) concept of power where it is perceived as a limited resource.

Medarda makes an interesting analogy between two political leaders: the ex-dictator Efraín Rios Montt and Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo, the first democratically elected president during the 36-year civil war. “While the controversial Rios Montt successfully raised his daughter Zuri Rios into a strong and powerful politician, the esteemed Cerezo’s wife and daughter don’t show any sign of political formation (Castro, pers. comm.).” Although Medarda is vehemently opposed to the politics of Rios Montt she recognizes his ability as a leader to move others in his cause. The point here is that part of what makes a leader strong is his or her ability to create or inspire leadership in others.

Medarda describes her own leadership style as fundamentally Mayan. “It is a combination of leadership for community development and democracy” (Castro, pers. comm.). When asked to describe an example of successful leadership she recalls her work with Naleb, a Mayan

organization that promotes intercultural leadership at an academic and political level. With its understanding of the state and of the indigenous pueblos, Naleb has achieved the development and the promotion of individual indigenous leaders as well as collective models of leadership (Castro, pers. comm.).

While it is possible to strengthen leadership skills through education, becoming a leader comes through life experiences and the practical application of skills. Many NGO's and CBO's lack mechanisms or the flexibility to support women in the application of such skills.

According to Medarda, women's leadership programs provide a necessary social space where women can learn and reflect. She adds, "What women need to develop leadership are values and principals that are collective, a constant critical awareness of their reality and political formation to orient the actions they will implement. When a woman is operating within a structured organization or institution some technical and organizational skills are needed to successfully manage resources" (Castro, pers. comm.).

The approach to leadership development varies according to the focus of the organization. Some organizations are purely political, identifying themselves as movements, coalitions, alliances or CBO's. Their relationship with the community has to do with taking direct actions toward changing an unjust system. Other organizations, often referred to as NGO's, manage programs and projects that usually have more to do with "sustainable development", meeting basic needs or advancing economic or social development.

In politically-oriented organizations, women tend to feel more connected and clear about their participation because they have joined a group or a movement out of political conviction and a desire to change an oppressive system. However, they often feel that the organization does



not help them meet their basic and immediate needs because the nature of political work is less direct and more gradual.

In project-oriented organizations, when women's material needs are met, there is a feeling of more immediate satisfaction. However, there is often less of a commitment or personal connection to the organization, which is reflected in weak leadership. Organizations, especially those associated with the state and with strong ties to international NGO's through outside funding, often lack critical analysis. According to Norma, this is one of the greatest debilities experienced by women's groups in Guatemala. She believes the debate should concentrate on a critical analysis of the development process. The type of leadership generally projected by women from such organizations is that based on possession of technical skills in, for example, NGO management. A critical approach to development and fulfilling community needs inspires clarity, active participation, avoiding project dependency or, "the band aid" approach to development (Maldonado, pers. comm.). Ideally, as Maria explained, an organization looks critically for ways to resolve basic needs without confusing people into thinking that "projects" will solve their problems. What strikes me as most interesting is the type of leadership that these two different approaches inspire.

### **Perceptions of Power**

According to the interviewees, power is a force or an energy that can manifest itself in tangible ways. There are different ways to acquire this force or energy. Each one of us has power, but some have more than others. Some people obtain power through an appointed position while others seem to inherit power from a family or a culture of leaders. Power may be acquired through hard work and recognition within society. It can also be generated from within, through the process of empowerment.

The three interview participants had trouble acknowledging themselves as leaders with power. It was as though seeing themselves as leaders might corrupt their ethics or compromise their convictions and core values that guide and motivate their work. This immediate reaction to the word power reflects the legacy of corrupt leadership that has abused power in Guatemala. In the process of unfolding the various meanings and examples of power, each woman gave her perspective.

For Norma, the power of the state, a power from the outside inflicted inward, is what first comes to mind. Reflecting on her own power, she thinks it is more an issue of self-esteem or the ability to perceive things. This she credits to her mother who has power that comes from necessity, from suffering and from life experiences. “My mother is a person who broke through barriers. She was a single mother in the city with three children, but, she valued herself. You can see this in her world view. She always believed that we can do anything with persistence and desire (Maldonado, pers. comm.)”

For Medarda, power is a force attained by having certain knowledge or control over information or resources. She adds, that this power permits one to make decisions and realize certain actions. We see here, and reflected in the perceptions of the other research participants, the relationship between power, self esteem, decision-making and autonomy.

Maria’s perception of power is similar to Medarda in that they both see power as a force that allows one to achieve a determined action. “It can come from having certain knowledge, control of information or resources – It has to do with other factors as well. For example, having power to make decisions but also one must know when is the most appropriate moment to use this force to make change” (Domingo, pers. comm.). While power can be assigned

through appointed positions, Maria does not believe that power has much to do with position; that many people have power regardless.

I feel that everything that I am doing I have always done before having a position of power within Mamá Maquín or the Alliance. I am still not clear about what type of power I should exercise. I know that power is not for imposing it is for sharing but this is very difficult. There is an accumulation of power. For example, right now, I am doing double work, I am doing a job by coordinating an organization and I am completing my political commitment according to my principles (Domingo, pers. comm.).

At some level Maria believes that everything has to do with power but some power has to do with political or organizational decisions. For her what is most interesting is the desire to learn more and feel satisfied with the results of one's work within her community. "One can be a leader with out being in a position of power what really interests me is helping with the little that I can." She adds, "being in a position of power is difficult to manage; the power to make decisions or to conduct an organization or oneself for that matter" (Domingo, pers. comm.). She continues, adding that power can be anywhere but it is also within us. We all have the power to speak or to lead.

### **Uses of Power**

According to Medarda there are different ways to use power. In the case of women, it is to generate a common good or an individual goal to better one's own situation. One use of power is to maintain a determined situation convenient to the interests of some, for example, in the exploitation or domination of certain populations as within the process of colonialism or development or in any situation where one group appropriates power or resources from others. "To generate a common good it is necessary to transform certain realities of individuals who maintain their power and wealth from a situation of inequity" (Castro, pers. comm.).

“Unfortunately,” she adds, “some people want more power and it is as though they take power away from others instead of helping them” (Castro, pers. comm.).

The participants recounted examples of power struggles within women’s organizations and between women leaders. Participants’ reflections on their own uses of power include the concepts of a collective leadership, a shared leadership, one that empowers others and one that generates more power. The following quotes on collective leadership are from Maria and Medarda respectively.

This is the goal, to construct a collective power of shared decisions but not only in one’s work but as a personal commitment. There are times when we use power in ways that do not produce results we expect. There are always things to think about afterward. We need to change the way we manage power so that it is less destructive and more constructive. That is how I understand the management of power (Domingo, pers. comm.).

One of the ways that I manage power is collectively so that decisions are made by many and the responsibility for this use of power be shared by others. Currently there is an environment of insecurity around the use of power. That is why women use power collectively, in a way that produces a common good (Castro, pers. comm.).

### **Origin of Power**

Power is an energy attained through critical incidents, lived experiences, inheritance, position, acquired knowledge or control over resources.

Maria Domingo’s formation as a leader comes from her contextual reality and a “historical memory.” She explains, “Now that I am an adult, I understand the reality and the necessity to be organized or to lead a group.” She continues, “Everything that has happened to me – all of my history to be discovering new things within the struggle – this is a vocation that I bring with me – and I have only strengthened this energy.” For Maria it is her critical vision of the contextual situation that justifies organizing for the larger struggle. It is a political commitment that she has

made for herself, her family and for her community but not necessarily as a “leader”. She says, “We are obligated. I am not satisfied with what is happening [in my country] and we are not the whole struggle. We are very few; each one makes his or her contribution” (Domingo, pers. comm.).

All three women mentioned having inherited their power from a close relative, past generations and or cultural roots. Medarda traces the origin of her power to her ethnic identity. Her self-esteem comes from the relationship she has with her family, within society and from being an indigenous woman. Norma too sees her power as a force coming from many previous generations especially from her mother. Maria feels that she inherited her power from her father and that she has strengthened it. “In the beginning, I was afraid to use my power and I still have doubts. But, I have learned so much” (Domingo, pers. comm.).

### **Power and Conflict**

Within the framework of power, conflict is always present. It is the capacity to manage conflict – because it is not always negative – that can help consolidate and increase power. It is an opportunity but, at the same time, a conflict can weaken one’s power (Castro, pers. comm.). The major sources of conflict discussed in the interviews were competition for control over resources, discrimination and insecurity.

Traditionally, men or patriarchal systems exert power over women. When women gain access to positions of power, they often abuse this power, causing conflict and division between women. Disrespect for one’s own principles and values as a leader is associated with low self-esteem and a lack of respect for women in general. This inferiority complex leads to situations where women doubt their own capacity and that of other women. Norma recalls working with mixed gender organizations where there were women who clearly did not want

to work with other women. She adds, “We haven’t been able to get out from under the same destructive patterns of the state; we replicate them within our organizations and within our families” (Maldonado, pers. comm.). It is difficult to develop and then implement a new model of leadership that does not abuse power.

Guatemala’s problems of discrimination have permeated women’s organizations, causing conflict between women leaders and within organizations. In Guatemala, the majority of women academics involved in leading the women’s movement and the feminist movement are socially and economically privileged. The majority of poor, underprivileged people are Indigenous and poor *Mestizo* women. This sets up a situation of inequality, where those who lead the women’s movement are often less in touch with the reality of those they represent. In the case of feminists there is an aggressive approach to women’s rights, detached from the cultural, social and economic reality of the majority population. Although the research participants may identify themselves to me as feminists, they do not identify publicly, much less in their communities as such, for fear of alienating both men and women. According to the participants, feminism has taken women’s rights to an extreme in Guatemala, causing more division between men and women.

Maria was denied a formal education because she grew up in a poor, rural, indigenous community targeted by violence during the war. She often refers to those who have more schooling but she questions where this education has led them. “Some of the most ‘educated’ women are those that cause division and provide less support for others” (Domingo, pers. comm.).

Another source of conflict, presented by Norma, is the reluctance to accept individuals who do not represent a base population and who work outside of an organizational context

within the women's movement. In one conversation, Maria remembers hearing a woman say, "...if you are not part of an organization you do not have a right to speak or contribute – you are nothing without an organization." According to Maria, this exclusion of individuals indicates a lack of clarity amongst organizations, a sense of insecurity and the fear of competition. With the amount of work that needs to be done, the movement needs as much support as possible (Domingo, pers. comm.).

There seems to be a problem with disqualifying the work of others within the women's movement. In some cases, an organization tries to co-opt the work of others. Organizations and people seem to lack confidence in one another.

Medarda shares that in her professional work, there is a lot of competition between women who try to influence or co-opt her work. These people limit new women from becoming leaders. Learning to work with different leadership styles is key to Medarda's success. The following story about a job Medarda coordinated helps exemplify this problem.

I worked with women from the different political parties and women from various groups within civil society. The idea was to encourage women from within the political parties to take on a stronger leadership role and to open lines of communication between women from civil society and the various political parties. Some confrontations between them arose. The civil society groups all had very different agendas and they were very skeptical and critical of the politicians in a way that made the work prohibitive. There were some problems between the different leaders that had to do with prioritizing the needs of women. In the end they were able to share their agendas but the civil society groups decided not to work with the politicians. They were concerned primarily about the political parties co-opting or politicizing the women's agendas to use as political propaganda in the upcoming elections (Castro, pers. comm.).

Maria worked with women's groups in refugee camps but when her community returned to Guatemala they began to disperse and form small groups specializing in specific subjects, dividing the women's movement into sectors. Norma describes this process as taking the lid off the pot of the past. When she saw the degree of distrust and competition

between leaders, and the fragmenting of groups it reminded her of the state and the political history of Guatemala replicated within women's organizations.

Norma recounts one of the most painful experiences for her was when the more academic or technical women in her organization began to question her participation. "Everyone began to lose confidence in one another" (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Norma explains that there is a sense of paternalism or maternalism, which tries to protect the "vulnerable" indigenous organizations. "Many people, especially women, have assumed the responsibility of protecting indigenous leadership. There are many arguments between the academics about the indigenous groups. It is as though they are fighting for control over access to these groups, the panacea, the maximum and they have the 'responsibility' to protect the secrets of the indigenous groups, to always remain popular within these groups" (Maldonado, pers comm.).

### **The Gender Factor**

Many women who consider themselves to be active in the women's movement are critical of "gender" as a concept managed by the development rhetoric or industry. The problems that exist between the sexes are considered only by women – primarily because of the misunderstanding that gender refers to women and that gender inequity is a women's issue. There are organizations that still tout "gender" programs as a cover term for anything that has to do with women. Sometimes it is necessary to have spaces designated only for women. However, if the group is to address gender then women must work in coordination with men in practical applications.

The women's organization Mamá Maquín has four areas of work: organization, health, land and political participation. They do not apply gender as a program area. However, they



cover important topics that have to do with women's rights. They are defined as a women's group because historically most community organizations lack the active participation of women. Maria Domingo explains that within the Mamá Maquín office staff and the coordination, they use the term "gender," but not in the communities. She explains, "In Mamá Maquín we understand the term gender but for us it means working for women's rights from within the communities and from within the families, in direct negotiation." It is something Mamá Maquín is always conscious of but that they make little reference to. Meanwhile there are women and men who have studied and are experts in gender, but when it is time to help one another, this knowledge does not necessarily produce results (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Norma shares her experience with the term "gender" as having been manipulated by the international aid community. It is seen as an obligatory space for women within any organization. The demand by the international aid community to focus on gender has manipulated the topic into a product or a service. That is why it is convenient for organizations to produce and sell "gender" as a solution to society's ills. This has become a way of theorizing about the topic but, as Norma explains, the topic needs to be lived. She admits that even though she understands the concept of triple discrimination of women, for being female, poor and in some cases indigenous, she feels that women are getting burned out on "gender" courses without actually having been listened to. According to Norma, the gender theme has become merchandise that has little practical application.

The study of gender presents another problem because there are many different definitions that distract people. In Norma's experience, gender is a term that has focused almost exclusively on reproductive and labor rights. Here she makes the point that, "you can't begin to talk about reproductive rights in Guatemala when we do not yet have basic human

rights.” In a country with ethnic diversity, it seems that the debates around gender have impeded progress within the women’s movement and succeeded in dividing groups; limiting their capacity to address more complex and urgent issues. She says “...the patriarchal system and the development industry want us to pay more attention to our differences and less to our similarities, so as to put us in boxes, distracting us from reaching our potential as humans – which is too bad because there is so much work to do”(Maldonado, pers. comm.). Norma believes that the international aid community has created this “gender” model from within the framework of neocolonialism as a way to fragment civil society, creating more dependency, to the point where organizations can only survive if they can sell their expertise or services. “Unfortunately, many of us have fallen into this trap” (Maldonado, pers. comm.). She adds, “This is why the concept of gender, and the way it has been manipulated, scares me” (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Claudia Estrada, of CEDPA admits that the theme “gender” within development and the women’s movement in Guatemala has provoked controversy. However, it is her feeling that little by little, the theme has given room to women within civil society and has created more consciousness around the issue of gender equity (Estrada, pers. comm.).

### **Process of Empowerment**

The process of empowerment is one in which power is born from within or acquired through a combination of life experiences and education. The contexts in which women grow help form this sense of insight or conviction, not only that one has value but also that their cause is a common one. The following stories offer us a window into the participant’s process of empowerment.

## *Norma Maldonado*

The following excerpts are rich descriptions of critical incidents and specific personality traits that have influenced, shaped and inspired Norma's formation as a leader.

I was thinking about my childhood and I realized that it [process of empowerment] all began a long time ago. Once I was in a competition at the stadium, I was running with my school, there were some kids running without shoes on against children from the American School two times as tall ..., and we won. Not because we were in good physical condition or that, we were well trained but simply because we had the desire to win, we had the conviction to do it. Anyone could see the differences in class, in height, everything you could see there in that stadium. I remember this image and I was very young. There, we competed under unequal conditions and we won. That is why for me it has always been a question of valuing oneself, respecting others and having desire and conviction. I recall this power, if that is what we should call it...from my first memories.

When I was in primary school, I remember the relationship I had with the teachers and the students. The school was an incredible scene, and I remember attending as a spectator. My observations were about the composition of the social classes of my classmates, of the indigenous, the orphans, the *Mestizos*, everything that united me to them was a thing of analysis almost completely from the outside inward. When the teacher said that she was going to do evaluations, I thought that she was going to evaluate herself not me. She could not possibly evaluate me because the world inside my head was much bigger and much richer than the one she spoke of in the classroom.

These are my earliest memories of school – of how I felt different and isolated from the groups. For example, I did not feel bad during the evaluations, if I passed my classes or not. The state and the society had to evaluate me and give me a grade to see if I was good enough but this never affected my decision to continue with my education – not at all. I would not permit that a system from the outside that doesn't recognize my abilities, put me in a box – to determine if I am valid or not – at that age, I didn't have the capacity to analyze all this but yes I felt that the education and the evaluation was not attending my needs.

I was always observing everything. I was deeply affected by the suffering in the streets. My poems reflected this. I wrote mothers day cards for the absent mothers of orphans, or for the indigenous mothers affected by the poverty. We all lived with poverty, but we were conscious of the life we had (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

From a very young age, Norma demonstrated specific character traits, key to leadership development. For example, her ability to perceive and analyze complicated social situations, to question inequality and present alternatives within her own lifestyle and choices. Her

nonconformity with what little information was presented to her only increased her desire to learn more. What she sees on the surface is not sufficient for her to make informed decisions. Her level of consciousness and ability to critically analyze situations, especially those problems within society, helped Norma form a solid “*medulla*” which literally means spinal cord. Her understanding of racism, classism and systems of oppression come from her every day life experiences.

I noticed that in Spanish everyone refers to their children as “*vos*” and to strangers and adults as “*usted*” but when we were in the market I heard people refer to the indigenous people as “*vos*”. This had a devastating effect on me. It was a sign of great disrespect. I refer to all adults as “*usted*”. That is why, for many years, I dealt with this conflict by referring to everyone, my friends, family, adults, strangers, everyone as “*usted*” until I was about 20 years old. This example of racism and classism left a huge impression on me. From then on, I always noticed the differences. I did not learn about racism and classism in the University or in a book, I learned about it in the streets, in the school from a very young age our innocence was damaged. It is difficult to have an identity because this country has always presented these characteristics – a society marked by the differences within the social classes. This is where a new type of leadership begins; perhaps it is power, the power to see a situation. It is a new stage of awareness and a very tense one (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

In the following story, Norma recalls a time when she realized where her power comes from. Her strong convictions have caused her to put her own safety in jeopardy on many occasions as seen in this example.

Once I was planting a banana in a very steep ravine. My mother was above me and I had the plant in my hand. She was yelling to me “lower, keep going lower, you can do it!” That is when I realized that my mother believed in me, she saw me as a person who could do anything. In that situation, a bit dangerous and difficult, she did not have any doubt that I could do it. She is the one who has empowered me the most because of this confidence she has in me and she tells this to the whole world (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Norma is an activist who grew up in the capitol city during the most violent years of the civil war. Her history, combined with the personal characteristics described above, is an important part of her development as a leader.

Later, in her participation within organizations she noticed that leaders tended to gloss over important global issues, giving the members of their organization only a small piece of the picture. She, who always wanted more information, saw this as a lack of respect, and control over information. “My agenda,” she explained, “if I have one, should be one that is omnipresent in everything I say and do. It is to inform people, so that they can make their own decisions” (Maldonado, pers. comm.). That is why Norma has taken on the role of educating people around her country about global themes, like free trade and biotechnology.

Norma has an ability to connect and communicate with people despite the racism, classism, not to mention language and cultural barriers in Guatemala. She is able to pass through all of these barriers and this is her strength as a leader.

Norma envisions her participation as a leader within civil society as support for the processes and efforts of different organizations and individuals. “I am not leading within an organization because I have difficulties with hierarchies” (Maldonado, pers. comm.). Her strength is in forming community wherever she goes. She feels that community is an attitude, and a mental state. This is why it is easy for her to form relationships with individuals and to form networks around concrete issues.

Norma is conscious of her limitations and tries not to assume responsibilities that she will not be able to complete. She does this in part for her own health and to simplify her life so that she can live in accordance with her own values. She says, “It has never been my idea to discover milk or hot water,” more than anything she hopes to support processes that concern Guatemalans. In her work with the Mesa Global of Guatemala, in the struggle against neoliberalism, she has helped initiate a new stream of thought with more influence that involves a wide sector of the population. Although Norma prefers to support and not lead

processes, within the Mesa Global she has helped develop strategies and has designed curricula for educating people with various levels of education about the destructive projects of globalization. She sees her function in civil society as a person who distributes information and helps people critically analyze the global situation. “There are people who want to feel part of the global solidarity movement but they don’t know how to get involved. This is easy for me and I enjoy doing it because I don’t come from an individualistic culture but one of support systems of strong community with people who have a lot to share. This is natural for me; it isn’t something I had to learn” (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

For Norma, to be a leader is not a hobby or a job. She says, “I have the ability to perceive things and I have the obligation to use this ability outside of any structures related to money or power. This is why I use my leadership politically and in solidarity but not to make a living or to gain a position of power.

### ***Maria Domingo***

Even though Maria Domingo has never had the opportunity to study formally, she has strong analytic skills and has always been active, from a very young age in a struggle for basic human rights. Through participation in various organizations and in the refugee camp, Maria learned about the history and the cultures of many people, including her own. She understands how the world is managed and manipulated by the powerful few, and she has helped developed strategies to protect her people’s sovereignty.

When considering her past, Maria most regrets not learning how to read and write in her native language, Mam. She feels that having a formal education has little to do with her ability to occupy a space of leadership. She also feels that whether she is considered a “leader” is irrelevant to the work she does. She focuses on her goals: to improve her knowledge and her

participation within civil society; and, to understand the reality of the communities and their needs. Working from the capital city has given her access to more information, which has helped her analyze local, regional and global situations. Maria extends the definition of leadership to women and men from the communities who promote the indigenous struggle. She says that if she returns to her community now, she has a position within an organization; but even those who do not have positions contribute with their ideas. There are always men and women in the communities, who are not considered leaders, but who make great contributions. “Now I am leading an organization – but really I don’t know who invented that word leader because I can do the same work without having this position” (Domingo, pers. comm.). She hopes that society will some day understand that the people, especially the youth, will create the revolution for access to education and other resources but she adds, “first, we must resolve the problem of power” (Domingo, pers. comm.). She hopes that through her work and that of many others, some day the people of Guatemala will be able to participate in decision-making with reference to access and control over resources. She explained that currently there is no land reform but hopes to some day recuperate her people’s lands and their culture. This is what motivates Maria.

Maria describes one of the problems with society as the lack of a constructive community sentiment. “There are committees for development but we lack a sentiment of community constructed from the people” (Domingo, pers. comm.).

The largest struggle in Guatemala is for the recuperation of land – and an equal distribution of land. She makes the example, “If I do not cultivate the land it does me no good to occupy it” (Domingo, pers. comm.). This is a historical problem and Guatemala has one of the worst land distribution in all of Latin America. Maria adds, “We are not struggling to reach positions of

power but to achieve a *real* development. We ourselves need to be capable of analyzing a proposal for community development. We could live better with mechanisms to help make better decisions because the education system only teaches us to look inward, not to look outward or to be critical. It is about memorizing not about understanding or being critical” (Domingo, pers. comm.).

Maria confesses that five years ago she was passive. She could not defend herself and when she was upset she would say nothing. She felt frustrated with decision-making and the inter-relational politics within her organization. She took on the operative work, washing the dishes and running errands for the organization because she feared conflict.

A few years ago, I did not have the strength to make decisions. I did not know when to make decisions and when not to. There were times when my *compañeras*<sup>2</sup> did not support me in my decision-making and that is why I was afraid to make decisions. They would say to me, “Maria, you’re not making decisions nor do you have initiative.” However, when it was time for me to make a decision one *compañera* would say that my decision was bad. I think that when you make decisions you have to consult with the group. You cannot make important decisions that have to do with the organization with out collecting ideas first. When one is trying to learn, the decisions we make, whether they are good or bad, provide us with an experience. If I make a mistake, I am going to learn from it. Likewise, when one makes a decision, they have to take responsibility. This is how it all began five years ago when I began working with Mamá Maquín. It has always been difficult to work with the different leaders within an organization (Domingo, pers. Comm.).

Maria is now the coordinator of Mamá Maquín. When she first became a member of the organization co-workers who discriminated against her because of her lack of education and passivity discouraged her. She quickly assumed tasks like cooking or washing the clothes of others within the organization. Eventually she realized that this was an abuse of power and she made the decision to take a more proactive role with in the organization. She attributes this poor

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<sup>2</sup> The term *Compañeras* refers to people in a variety of relationships. It is used to describe one’s partner or partners in a personal or professional setting. In this context, it also refers to a relationship of solidarity.



distribution and abuse of power within the organization to the lack of clearly defined functions and discrimination that exists within even the most progressive organizations.

Currently she participates in a coalition that has given her the space to grow and recognize her value as a leader. Maria's process of empowerment, and her achievements as a leader and an activist have not come easily. She carefully protects her image as an indigenous leader. She says, "One must control their image not only nationally but also in her community. This image is very delicate. It would be too easy to lose everything we have constructed so far" (Domingo, pers. comm.).

### ***Medarda Castro***

Medarda, like Maria comes from a traditional indigenous family. She grew up in a small community in the highlands of Guatemala within a large extended family that had strong roots and a history of leadership. Although she has been working in the capital city for years, she has maintained a connection with her community, a relationship very conscious of her ethnic and cultural rights and obligations. She works in her community on weekends supporting activities with women and their participation in local politics.

Medarda's formal education and experience acquired through her work has given her access to information to make informed decisions about her life. She embraces her identity as an indigenous Kaqchikel woman and this too has had an enormous effect on her formation as a leader. Her access to information and the capacity of analysis has helped her communicate her ideas with women from within her community, nationally and internationally. She recognizes that the majority of people do not have this information from which to exercise their power. She explains, "I can question the traditional ways for example, the culture of "*machismo*" and racism and this helps me live differently" (Castro, pers. comm.).

I share a particular culture, clothing, language, interpretation or way of life with the indigenous women in my community. The way we socialize, our values and beliefs have helped me develop honesty and transparency. From within my culture, I have developed an attitude of struggle that has helped me reach my goals. I feel connected to the women in my community because we share the same history of discrimination and subordination; we have been denied certain services and spaces (Castro, pers. comm.).

Medarda's experiences outside of her community and internationally, have inspired her to maintain and build upon her relationship with her community. Medarda's development as a leader is tied to her relationship with her family, her community, especially with women.

When Medarda was younger, she faced discrimination in school for being indigenous. This affected her development, causing her to have a crisis of identity and self-esteem. She remembers feeling ostracized by *Ladino*<sup>3</sup> schoolmates because of her clothing and other cultural traits. Later in life, she recalls how much this discrimination in the school affected her.

After many years in the university, I received information about some scholarships for students from rural communities. There was a high probability that the majority of these scholarships would go to students from my community. Here I was presented with a difficult situation. One of the young women who applied for a scholarship was a previous classmate of mine, the one who discriminated against me years before in secondary school. I could very well have excluded her from the pool of applicants but I decided to include her. This reminded me of that painful experience years ago – it really touched me (Castro, pers. comm.).

In this experience, Medarda recalls having an internal struggle, which led her to further define her values and her position against discrimination of any kind.

Part of what makes Medarda a successful leader is that she has her priorities in order. Personally, she maintains her energy by taking care of her health. “My parents do not understand the concept of relaxing – they actually didn't know what the word means. This is

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<sup>3</sup> The term *Ladina* or *Ladino* is a social construct in Latin America referring to people of mixed heritage, European and Indigenous, who culturally identify with a Western culture and who no longer exemplify or identify with an Indigenous culture. Although the word is used commonly in Guatemala, many consider the term pejorative.

because the people in my country work from sun up to sun down, especially the women” (Castro, pers. comm.). Professionally, Medarda participates in less traditional spaces, within politics and within groups that orient and promote political participation. Her primary goal has been to create lines of communication between civil society and the different political parties. One of the ways she has done this is by helping promote a women’s agenda within the indigenous council at the national level, creating a bilateral relationship with the state.

In her relationship with the community, Medarda has participated from a very young age in committees within the church, women’s cooperatives, coalitions and associations for local development. Medarda has gained the respect of her community because she is an educated woman who has not forgotten her identity and the traditional values of her people. Regardless, she feels that there are a lot of limitations and barriers for women to reach positions of power and decision. The following experience was a test of her convictions and self respect.

Four years ago, during the mayoral elections, I was nominated candidate for the civic committee, a political party with a more local agenda. In the end, the committee offered me the second seat with the excuse that I needed more experience. Medarda questioned, “Who in this town doesn’t need more experience?” There are women with skills that go unrecognized and women who have to compete up to three times that of a man. I was running for the first seat because I was prepared for the position and had the support of the community. I did not accept the second seat. The criteria of those men who made this decision was very closed. It was a political decision; they wanted to use me in the second seat to gain the votes of women but without actually allowing a woman in a position of power and decision. My plan was to work for everyone not just the women. That is why I did not accept, I was not willing to take the second seat (Castro, pers. comm.).

Medarda’s strength as a leader comes from her confidence in her identity as a Mayan woman. She plays an important role within the spaces she is working. She has an ability to interrelate with people from all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. She has no problem

creating relationships with distinct groups; women, youth, indigenous, political parties, the business sector, and the media.

Medarda's family has encouraged her leadership. She does not recall differences in the treatment of men and women. Her parents communicate. They consult with one another in decisions within the home and publicly, whereas in most indigenous families there is a lot of submission of women. Medarda recalls,

.... When I was younger, I was offered an opportunity to study in the United States through a connection in the church. The priest told my parents that it would be too much of a cultural shock for me to have studied in the States. This is what he said to my parents. He gave me a scholarship to study to be a secretary here in Guatemala and when I graduated, he wanted me to work for the parroquia but I had a different vision. I decided on my own to continue my studies in the capital city completely independent from the church (Castro, pers. comm.).

As a social worker, her goal is to contribute to a more just life for the marginalized groups in Guatemala. "Each generation has been able to improve the situation – I must continue this struggle" (Castro, pers. comm.).

Medarda sees strength in the experience and the knowledge of women. Even though they are poor, their lives are filled with creativity and enthusiasm. Medarda's role within her community is as a promoter of opportunities, of inquiry, and of implementing actions that create change. She has a solid sense of her values, principles, and sees herself as a student, always learning. She has developed technical skills and political skills that help orient her actions.

### **Motivation**

All three women reported that they are less motivated by being women, and more motivated by the larger more global problems and the "historical memory" of struggle within their country. Maria clearly reflected this when she said; "I am a woman but I'm not so

motivated by the fact that I am a woman than by the much larger struggle, an historical memory that I can not ignore...” and she gives the overarching example of the massacres which occurred in her community during the war.

Maria feels strongly that some day things will change, that they will be able to “construct a new country” (Domingo, pers. comm.). She is motivated by the urgent need for change from within a political and social system that historically excludes participation in decision-making. She says so eloquently, “I have a memory – our history – that generates courage and interest in the struggle” (Domingo, pers. comm.). It is her history more than anything – what the grandparents have told her – that generates this interest in recuperating the real history that has affected the participation of women. She is motivated by the history that is told, not written. “Some say that women only exist to attend the home as though it is an obligation instead of thing of value, like the preparation of food and the tradition of weaving one’s own clothing” (Domingo, pers. comm.). She repeats, “it is the history that has converted people into tools for the struggle, and if one loses this vision, if we forget what happened in the past, it is difficult to understand where we are right now. If I did not understand the history I would still be running around in circles within community organizing” (Domingo, pers. comm.). Her point is a revealing critique of development through community organizing without a critical understanding of the history and current context to guide it. In a country with such a violent history, it is common for both Guatemalans and NGO’s to fear and avoid this type of critical analysis. A common approach to development is through projects aimed at solving basic needs, which do not address the root cause of the problem.

Norma shares an empowering experience and an example of self – or group-oriented motivation:

When I was living in Livingston, [Guatemala] taking care of a friend's hotel, the owner contacted me and told me she would send me Q500.00 Quetzales (approximately \$75.00 U.S.) to pay for the annual staff party. Instead, we formed two teams of women to look for turkeys, to be raffled off in order to generate the funds for the party. It wasn't about the goal, it was about the process. The women began to travel into the surrounding communities, looking for turkeys and selling raffle tickets. In the end, two women accidentally bought the same ticket, number 68. When the day came to raffle off the turkeys the number 68 was chosen and two women who had never met before had to find a way to split the turkey. This experience of first traveling to all the rural communities, talking with other women, looking for the turkeys and selling the raffle tickets was a process of relational empowerment where they made their party their own. It was an exercise in liberty and creativity that helped these women realize their abilities to negotiate, to socialize and to organize. The process, these innocent trips into the communities, was more productive and more motivating than attending a meeting or having a party thrown for them in their honor. This is what we do not value when we plant solutions in the form of projects. We miss the opportunity to self-motivate (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

In these passages on motivation, we see that women's leadership is motivated by lived experiences and a critical awareness of one's history and current situation. Motivation is a key question for development practitioners as it explains why certain women develop as leaders and what inspires change.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

From this study on the development of women's leadership and the empowerment process, we can make two assumptions. 1) Power is the tool of the leader, with which she can do almost anything, and 2) conflict results from the management of power, providing potential opportunities for growth.

WLD can benefit from group support and skills taught in workshops, however, it is in the practice that women build self-confidence, define their convictions and truly begin to lead.

WLD cannot exist outside of a critical analysis of the past, present and future. It is not recommended that development organizations attempt to develop women's leadership from a program/project management position. WLD is political and will therefore have more long-

standing effects if it is supported through solidarity with social movements. In practice, leadership programs can support and compliment women, but only when there are clear objectives in accord with the needs of a community.

The three research participants clearly stated that their leadership is neither a job nor a hobby. It is a personal commitment, which they have made outside of any binding structures or rewards. This is why it is important for women leaders like Maria, Medarda and Norma to take care of their needs because organizations and civil society rarely attend to the needs of their leaders. Despite the difficulties, they need to maintain their energy levels by leading full lives, having healthy homes, relationships and opportunities for regenerating their strength.

Although development organizations can hope to inspire leadership they cannot take credit for the formation of a leader. It is, as research participants explained, an historical memory, a attitude of struggle and lived experience that inspires leadership.

Currently we see in Guatemala conflicts not only between civil society and the state but between different sectors within civil society. Norma hopes that in the future women and men will help nurture leadership in one another.

...The major challenge is the lack of clarity and confidence Guatemalans have in the work of one another, which limits the potential of individuals and of the larger movement. This is a result of war, of poverty and the legacy of colonization that have divided our people and stolen their sense of autonomy. Our objective is to learn how to trust and to open ourselves up to other people in the various processes. Coming out of an armed conflict, the tragedy is that it has invaded us and it is our goal to maintain our energy and not feel so hurt by this system that has taught us to fear. We are too enclosed and I feel that the work we have to do together, within civil society is infinite (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Norma's role as a leader within civil society brings up the interesting question of whether women can lead outside of a group or organizational context. In this study, the definition of leadership is inclusive, it embraces individuals who inspire others but who have chosen not to

lead a particular process from within a structured setting. With the amount of work civil society has taken on in Guatemala, there is no room for discrimination. It is also important to respect one's decision to separate their role as "leaders" from structures which may at some level contradict their core values, like in the example of state institutions or NGO's.

Another problem within the current trends in women's development is the tendency to promote specialties such as "gender experts" who have difficulties addressing complex issues. Such specializing and theorizing of problems, as Norma explained so well, fits into the current global economic system of capitalizing on resources and concepts as though they are merchandise to be bought or sold (Maldonado, pers. comm.). It does not lend itself to a social movement.

An important lesson is that we cannot make generalizations about women. There is diversity amongst women and their priorities. We must also be wary of radicalism and specializations within the women's movement. In Guatemala, women prefer to identify themselves with a women's movement, rather than a feminist movement, because feminism has become synonymous with radicalism and isolated approaches to solving "women's" issues. As Norma illustrates, "They [feminists] talk about reproductive rights as though these parts of the body are separate from the rest of us." (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Perhaps the most difficult challenge for women in Guatemala is to come out from under the oppressive and repressive models of leadership that they have experienced historically at all levels within their society. Through a process of healing, women need to redefine and put into practice new models of leadership, or restore traditional models of leadership that reflect their cultural values and priorities as women.



*¿Un líder se nace o se hace?* In English this translates as: A leader is born or is formed? For many people this is a controversial question. Those who are in the practice of developing leadership will often respond emphatically that leadership is a set of developed skills. Although this question was not posed directly to research participants, I was able to determine specific characteristics developed through life experience in a non-controlled environment while others can clearly be “developed” through formal or non formal education.

The most important characteristics, which tend to develop outside of any intentional structured experience, are an attitude of struggle and a strong sense of conviction. In my research, I noted that these attributes are essential to my participants’ success as leaders. They accredited the development of these characteristics to an “historical memory”, a sense of personal identity with a struggle, an “inheritance” of leadership skills and their life experiences. Another important characteristic which can be enhanced but which the research participants showed evidence of having possessed from a very early point in their lives is the capacity of critical analysis and the birds eye view of socioeconomic and environmental situations. Each participant has the capacity to situate her own self and that of her community within a larger global context. These characteristics are what set them apart from the majority.

Politically oriented organizations may provide a more empowering context from which to develop women’s leadership. Project oriented organizations constantly confront power differentials, dependence on external funding, the agendas of international aid organizations and trends in Sustainable Development. It may be more empowering for women to belong to political advocacy oriented organizations, coalitions or working groups as they are generally focused on sovereignty and solidarity.

This does not mean that women participating or leading NGO's or organizations who manage projects and are engaged in either social, economic or environmental development are not developing leadership skills. These conditions are also conducive to the development of leadership skills. The skills developed in these types of organizations, through experience and formal and non formal education are primarily professional technical such as public speech, women's rights and NGO management. Some have to do more with social development in case with, self-esteem and conflict resolution. All of these skills are useful to women leaders; however, they do not guarantee autonomous and enduring leadership.

While I am convinced that supporting the development of leadership skills in women is an approach to gender equity, sustainable development and environmental, economic and social justice, leadership programs need mechanisms for the direct application of these skills.

In the development of leadership, development practitioners need to focus not only on education but on a critical education that supports women in their every day challenges, connecting their actions to a larger movement toward social – economic or environmental justice. If an organization's motivation for developing leadership is solely to increase the quota of women in positions of power or to sustain the same organizations, it is missing the point. Developing women's leadership within the context of a development program or project is like trying to grow a tropical forest in an atrium or a coral reef in an aquarium. The most important conditions, which contribute to the development of women's leadership, cannot be simulated in development programs.

Currently, there are many deficiencies within the Guatemalan civil society. "We have a legacy of pain and suffering, resentment, and distrust that makes it difficult to put in practice or to share power. There is a concentration of power and control over information. If the

objective of globalization and neoliberalism is to control information then it is a question of how to share and integrate power in a new system that breaks this scheme of control over production” (Maldonado, pers. comm.).

Throughout this investigation, I attended meetings, protests, and workshops where it was obvious that the women’s movement in Guatemala is about much more than women’s rights. The women’s movement is a struggle for basic human and environmental rights from within which women have organized to protect what is essential to their survival in Guatemala. The correlation between an increase in violence, and the destructive structures and projects of neoliberalism is a main concern of the research participants and the larger women’s movement.

This process of inquiry has helped me understand my work with women in Guatemala; specifically, efforts to increase women’s leadership. It was also a productive process for the participants. Maria shared, “I was thinking about writing this myself because it is important to me but I have not had time – but also, we are afraid to say these things because we want to appear to be o.k. both to ourselves and to others and that is why we don’t do it” (Domingo, pers. comm.).

While conducting interviews I discovered that the “development” language that I was using was often inappropriate and even offensive. As a cultural outsider, some of my questions assumed that “third world women” were in need of further “development”. This made me question the practice of sustainable development and to what degree there is an innate contradiction between women’s leadership development and most approaches to sustainable development. It seems that an important part of WLD is the creation of autonomous or “endogenous” solutions to problems. This is primarily because most of the problems women are

addressing can be connected to colonialism, paternalism, the process of development and the more recent globalization of cultures and economies.

For this reason, the process of inquiry and the resulting conclusions and recommendations are equally valuable. It is my hope that these perceptions of leadership, power and conflict will shed light on the current state of WLD in Guatemala. It is also my intention to share these insights with those organizations interested in “developing” women’s leadership in the region because it is a complex endeavor worth careful contemplation.

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## **Appendices**

### *Letter of Consent*

#### **Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study**

**Title of Study:**           **WLD and the Empowerment Process**

**Investigator:**           **Rebecca Day Cutter**

#### **Introduction**

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, please ask the investigator, Rebecca Cutter. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in the study.

#### **Background/Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of women leaders and women involved in WLD Programs of power. Having been involved in Women's Leadership Programs in Central America for several years now, I am interested in engaging women in a critical analysis and reflection of their perceptions of power. I am also interested in finding insights into the process of empowerment. The motive of this study is to contribute an awareness to this process and understanding the development of leadership within women. The study is a requirement for my graduate Capstone. The interviews will be conducted with a total of 3 women in the months of January and February of 2005.

#### **Information**

Participation in this study will involve a commitment of at least three hours of your time, one on one with the investigator. Some interviewees will be asked to commit to more than one interview. Between interviews, I will transcribe the information and the following interviews will serve to fill in gaps and go into more depth.

For the women attending the CASEP Women's Leadership Conference I will ask that they allow me to observe them throughout the sessions and document their comments for use in the research.

#### **Alternatives to Participation**

Participation is voluntary. Any participant can decide during or after the interviews and /or observations that any portion of the interviews be excluded from the research.

#### **Risks**

While the investigator does not expect that the interviewees will experience any level of risk she will be sensitive in suggesting safe public spaces to conduct the interviews and observations. The subject of Women's Leadership often means discussing sensitive topics that can cause women to feel emotions including – happiness, relief, sadness, confusion, frustration and possibly anger. The investigator will propose sufficient time for women to discuss and work through these emotions before returning to their daily lives where they may not find sufficient support or understanding of their emotions. Participants will be asked

before and after the interview if they wish for their information to remain confidential. In such case, the investigator will ask for permission to use the information under a pseudonym.

**Benefits**

Those who participate will be given the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences as leaders and share their experiences and insights with other women and those interested in the topic. The completed study, translated in English and Spanish will share the common and distinct perceptions of women about power, conflict and leadership with professional communities both in Central America and in the USA and other countries. The document, in its findings, will also make recommendations for WLD methodologies.

**Confidentiality**

Part of the purpose of this study is to allow women the opportunity to speak out about their lived experiences. If all participants agree to be identified with the information they disclose the study will reflect the names and photographs of the women involved. Any participant requests to remain anonymous will be honored. Participant requests that certain information be held in confidence will be honored. In other words, the investigator assures that private information remain confident.

Information in study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in a restricted-access computer and will be made available only to the investigator unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise.

**Contact**

If you have questions about the study or procedures, you may contact the researcher, Rebecca Cutter, in San Lucas Tolimán, Dept. Solola, 07301, or at 772-0035, e-mail: rebecca.cutter@mail.sit.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may visit the World Learning website and check its policies on Human Subjects Research. ([www.worldlearning.com](http://www.worldlearning.com)).

**Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be removed from the data set and destroyed.

**Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.**

**Participant signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_



*Memo to Institutional Review Board*

November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004

Dear Institutional Review Board:

I would like to request that the following consent procedure be approved for my study that involves observation and interviews with women in Guatemala from the following nationalities: Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, Costa Rican, and Honduran:

- I will obtain permission from the *organization; Central American Solar Energy Project CASEP* to visit the project office in Guatemala and observe the women during a Women's Leadership Conference, while interacting with them as a colleague. If the General Coordinator of the organization, William Lankford, and the other participating women agree, I will observe the women, through out the week long conference especially during a dialogue on the women's perceptions of power. I will be designing the dialogues to facilitate a discussion on the theme of power within leadership. I have submitted with the attached protocol the questions for the interviews I will be conducting with three Guatemalan women leaders – not directly related to CASEP. My experience with this culture and the organization leads me to believe that The General Coordinator and the women will communicate their agreement when I initially contact them, at least a week prior to conducting the interviews/observations. I will not attempt any interviews until I am fairly certain that the women understand why I am there, and that they and CASEP are supportive.

- The 8 women I will be observing are familiar with me as we have been working together for the past 4 years. The three Guatemalan Leaders I will contact at least one week prior to interviews to discuss the purpose and the details of the inquiry. All interviews will take place in a public place. I expect the interviews will take a few hours to conduct, as I hope the women to reflect on their life experiences and provide me detailed information. The If they are nervous, upset, or otherwise seem disturbed by my interaction with them, I will thank them and end the interaction.

- Oral script for three women leaders I will be interviewing in Guatemala:

As part of my graduate studies at the School for International Training in Vermont, USA, I am doing research for my thesis (capstone) on Women's Leadership Development. The purpose is to learn more about women's perceptions of power as well as their lived experiences as women leaders. If you agree that I can interview you about your life experiences and perceptions around power and leadership I will ask you a series of open ended questions. If there are any that you don't want to answer, then you can just ask me to go on to the next question. You can leave at any time if you don't want to speak with me anymore. The questions that I will ask you should not embarrass you. Do you have any questions? If not, then do you agree to let me ask you questions?

- Verbal consent will be documented in my notes, and I will assign a pseudonym to each individual if they indicate that they don't want me to use their real name. I am requesting written consent in the form of a signature. As noted in my protocol, I have spent a considerable amount of time in the region working with women. If my actions are considered inappropriate by participants, I will be asked to leave. Therefore, it is in my best interest to treat all participants with respect, and be certain to obtain consent from them.

- If the participant declines to be interviewed, I will thank him/her and end the interaction.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rebecca Cutter  
Primary Investigator

## **Interview Guide**

**Title of Research: WLD and the Empowerment Process**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location of interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Biographical Questions

1. How is your life different from that of most women in your community?
  - a. How is it similar to your own life?
2. What are some of the everyday problems (barriers – impediments) you face as a woman?
  - a. How have you and do you address these problems?
3. When do you feel most satisfied with yourself? Why?
4. When do you feel most satisfied in your work? Why?
5. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

### Gender Questions

6. How would you describe the gender dynamic within your family, community and professional setting?
7. What do you see as the biggest gender issues in your community?

### Motivation Questions

8. What motivates you to do the work you have done and continue to do?
9. In your experience what motivates women to organize?

- a. Describe how women organize?

### Power Questions

10. How would you define power?
11. How do you perceive the role(s) of power within your family, community, and society?

### Conflict Questions

12. Do you see a relationship between conflict and power?
  - a. If so, what is the relationship?
13. What kinds of conflicts have you experienced in your personal life, your family, your professional life and within your community?
  - a. What are some ways that you approach these conflicts?

### Leadership Questions

14. How do you perceive your role in your community?
15. What qualities make a good leader?
16. What is your definition of leadership?
17. Describe the different types of leadership have you experienced (observed)?
18. What is your preferred approach to leadership?
19. In the organizations you have been involved in, which ones are most successful and why? (in terms of leadership)
20. Which are the least successful and why? (in terms of leadership)
21. What are some of the key events, people, or institutions that have influenced your development? (both positively and negatively)

*Interview Questions for CEDPA program coordinator*

The following questions were used in an interview with the Program coordinator of CEDPA, Claudia Estrada, held in Guatemala City, Guatemala.

1. When did programs for WLD appear in Guatemala?
2. Where did the interest in developing women's leadership come from?
3. What methodological changes have you witnessed in the history of WLD in Guatemala?
4. In your experience, what is the most essential or the most important aspect of the CEDPA methodology for WLD?
5. What is your theory on the reported increase in violence toward women in Guatemala?

*Photographs of Research Participants*



**Medarda Castro**



**Norma Maldonado**



**Maria Domingo**