

"Best Practices in Afro-Latin Community Development: Lessons from a pilot Project on the Atlantic Coast of Honduras and Guatemala"

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INTRODUCTION

"Poverty isn't just the lack of material goods. It is also feeling distanced from decision-making and a sense of being devalued that manifests itself as apathy, anger and a weakening of civic culture -- from The IAF Grassroots Development Framework".¹

Central to the issues of social exclusion and poverty alleviation in Afro-Latin American (AFLA) communities is the need to develop community capacity to systematically address the factors that perpetuate their marginal conditions.

A major consequence of years of exclusion and neglect is that past attempts to change the social and economic conditions of Afro Latin American (AFLA) Communities have often been hampered by low self-esteem and significant degrees of internal apathy. This was often coupled with a deep sense of alienation from many of the regional and national institutions that are mandated to direct programs and resources to these populations. Disconnection and distrust were further aggravated by political processes in which AFLA leadership elements allied to the dominant national political parties, tended to mobilize people around development concerns primarily during election periods, making promises that were never kept.

This cynicism was then manifested in organizing for all other development efforts. People avoided participating when they did not believe the promised results could be achieved, or if no direct monetary benefits were evident, or if any conflict between leaders was manifested. The end result was not only a marked absence of socio-economic development activity, but also a lack of opportunity for community members to acquire much needed project planning and administration skills.

This chapter describes the experience of a pilot project in Honduras and Guatemala that developed a participatory community planning approach to start a process of local development in AFLA communities. It achieved high levels of community participation, and succeeded in training new grassroots leaders, predominantly women, in involving them in the design, fundraising and implementation of projects to meet their stated needs, and institutionalized community support mechanisms such as neighborhood promoters and neighborhood project committees, to address local development needs in a sustainable fashion.

BACKGROUND

Afroamerica XXI (AAXXI) is an AFLA regional process formed by leaders of existing AFLA-NGOs, elected politicians, and some grassroots organizations. They used the results of the IDB² studies to prepare a long-term plan of action to guide AFLA social, economic and cultural development for the next two decades³, and to promote among donors and governments the issue of the exclusion of AFLA from the mainstream development of the region. By the year 2000, AAXXI promotional efforts had achieved significant changes in the development environment with new funding becoming available for AFLA development. However AFLA communities and their NGOs were still unprepared organizationally, institutionally, or technically to ensure that new investments would lead to a sustainable and appropriate development.

¹ Ritchie-Vance, Marion: "Social Capital, Sustainability and Working Democracy: New Yardsticks for Grassroots Development." *Grassroots Development, Journal of the Inter-American Foundation*. 20,1 (1996): 3-9

² *Forum on Poverty Alleviation for Minority Communities in Latin America, Communities of African Ancestry*. Background Papers. November 13-14, 1996. Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 1997.

³ *Afroamerica XXI Plan of Action 1998-2021 "Vision of Afroamerican Peoples in the Third Millenium"*. Presentation to the Inter American Bank, Cartagena Seminar: Social Policies and Citizen Participation. Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. March 12, 1998

In Honduras, one of the few countries in the region that had legally recognized its black populations, the development resources made available over the years had not generated any sustained processes of local development. The approach that had been followed by Afrohonduran-NGOs (AFH-NGO) was the traditional project orientation. They designed projects in sectors with available funding, presented proposals, and then asked their communities to participate in those projects. This led to a non-coincidence of interests and low community participation levels. Another drawback of this approach was that community needs were not met unless they matched the specific menu being funded by government and international institutions. In addition, project allocations were seldom sufficient to cover the sectoral needs of the entire community (such as electricity) leaving service gaps and generating disadvantaged groups. This produced community sentiments of impotence and estrangement from development processes which were seen as being completely controlled by outsiders, further reinforcing disaffection.

Since 1998, AAXXI has promoted a process oriented development approach for AFLA communities. One in which NGOs would strengthen community organization and local development skills, so they had the capacity to identify their own needs, formulate projects, and seek funding from the municipalities, central government and donors to complement their local resources. In such a process, even if a project supplied a local need only partially, the community would have the skills to continue seeking funds until the entire community has met that need.

Thus, at the community level, the top AAXXI priority became to develop methodologies to overcome low self-esteem and the general apathy of the population towards organizing to achieve development goals. It was determined that any project initiatives needed to incorporate measures to address such issues. In the year 2000, as a result of the disaster caused by Hurricane Mitch in Central America, AFLA organizations were able to obtain funds to work on these priority objectives. It was intended that the lessons learned in that instance, would be spread by AAXXI delegates to other countries and communities.

The pilot project being examined arose from the experience gained by two Afro-Honduran NGOs (AFH-NGOs)⁴ in the aftermath of the Hurricane Mitch since January 1999. Using their own resources, these NGOs provided technical advice to two communities in the Department of Cortes on the Honduran Atlantic Coast, to enable them to make use of opportunities available for community reconstruction. Participatory community needs assessments were conducted to define priorities and to guide project decisions. Although participation was high at initial meetings (around 60 persons) by April 1999, as community life returned to normal, the levels dwindled to under 20 persons usually the same people.

This activity was followed by a Microenterprise Development Project funded by the Inter-American Foundation⁵. It was based in six Garifuna communities in the Departments of Cortes and Tela, and began in April 1999 also as part of the post-Hurricane Mitch reconstruction effort. The project organized the self-employed and micro-businesses to improve their management capacity and to increase their business incomes through training and a credit program. This project also showed acceptable levels of participation in the initial training courses (20-25 participants, mainly adult women), but the levels subsequently decreased. It became increasingly difficult to achieve even minimum attendance levels (10 persons) after the fourth course, in spite of the fact that participation was a key requirement for accessing loans.

Different approaches were tried in this project for beneficiary mobilization: via patronato board members, through established leaders (which is the most common procedure), through individual visits to microentrepreneurs, and by way of general community announcements. None of these succeeded in

⁴ CEDECO (Centro para el Desarrollo Comunal) and CAMAFROH (Association of micro and small Afro-Honduran entrepreneurs).

⁵ CEDECO and CAMAFROH received a grant of \$307,300, for a three year project (1999-2002).

increasing participation levels.

The most common reason given for decreasing involvement was that the potential credit access was not enough of an incentive to compensate for the opportunity cost of their time. Participating in the training events meant that these self-employed residents had to stop their other activities, especially their daily income generation. In addition, the organizers realized that the population being reached represented less than 5% of all local residents and tended to be the same group of people who attended most events.

Given the result of their experiences, the NGOs in AAXXI-Honduras concluded that the only mobilization approach left untried was to reach people individually and directly in their homes in an attempt to get them to participate in community affairs.

The opportunity to test this approach came with the Grassroots Community Building Project for Honduras and Guatemala. Its original concept was based on community strengths and weaknesses identified in the IDB studies as well as successful experiences found in the studies conducted by the Inter-American Foundation (IAF)⁶. One of the most notable findings of the IAF was that Grassroots Community Organizations tended to build personal capacity as a means to encourage a more democratic culture and ultimately affect values and attitudes⁷. The other was that project timeframes were inadequately short because permanent results tend to become manifest after a grant has ended. This helped to confirm the understanding of AAXXI that the process of development for AFLA is a long term endeavor, that would have to be achieved in small stages, with solutions designed and tried as pilot phases locally, and then applied and adapted elsewhere.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Grassroots Community Building Project for Honduras and Guatemala, was a regional initiative funded with USAID Post Hurricane Mitch assistance and was the first of its kind among Afro-Honduran and Afro-Guatemalan communities.

The project grant⁸ was channeled through a "Grantee", and sub-contracted to a "Sub-Grantee" NGO that had initially proposed the project to the donor. This "Sub-Grantee" NGO was a first-time project implementer and was a US based member of AAXXI. The "Sub-Grantee" employed as the Project Training Coordinator a founding member of AAXXI based in Honduras, to manage the implementation in the field.

The project organization involved four AFH-NGOs and one Afro-Guatemalan NGO, as local implementing partners, plus the Patronatos of the nine communities (35 neighborhoods) proposed as beneficiaries by the AFH-NGOs. The budget involved four funding components: international/ bi-national training, community training, international and local advisor input, and a Small Projects Fund (SPF).

The project methodology for Grassroots Community Building was centered around the need for a process oriented approach that could more closely meet actual community needs and provide a greater involvement for AFLA population who needed to see their concerns being respected and addressed. The project activities made extensive use of participatory techniques.

The human resources for the Grassroots Community Building Project were hired for a two-month period and

⁶ Ritchie-Vance, *Social Capital*, p. 9.

⁷ Ibid, p.4

⁸ A grant of US\$500,000 was provided by USAID. Close to 50% was allocated for field activities. The project's time frame was 18 months, its completion date of December 31, 2001 applied to all USAID Hurricane relief projects in Honduras.

consisted of 33 Community Promoters employed through the Community Patronatos to mobilize in the communities and assist in neighbourhood project planning, and 7 Community Advisors (designated by the AFH-NGOs from their own membership) to train and support them. Volunteer Patronato members were designated to supervise the promoters' work in each community. The full time Project Training Co-ordinator was to develop and modify the methodology, supervise advisors and undertake quality control. Training consultants were used to conduct the community training activities.

TABLE 1: IDEAL MACHINERY FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The project design aimed to strengthen the machinery for local development, which in an ideal situation would include:

1. An elected community body to manage communal affairs, which in this case were the Patronatos;
2. A cadre of community people skilled in programming and administration for development (which the project would generate as promoters)
3. An office with equipment, administrative support, and funds for transport and communications (absent in most places)
4. A process of local planning, budgeting and control for development (to be initiated by the project)
5. The mobilization of local resources to finance local development (the project was to begin this through local initiatives)
6. A mechanism to share the development workload of the community and assist the Patronatos (to be generated by the project through the Neighborhood Project Committees).

PROJECT GOAL, PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED RESULTS⁹

The stated goal of the project was to develop the capacity of Black communities in Central America, -- particularly those affected by Hurricane Mitch,-- to become effective actors in their own development, thereby improving the quality of life of their citizens.

The purpose of the project was to generate a sustainable process of development in Central American Black communities by increasing leadership and institutional capacity, promoting citizen participation in the development process, and increasing social capital.

The primary objectives were broadly defined as follows:

- A. To increase leadership and institutional capacity in the field of development among existing community elected leaders, community organizations and groups and of potential new leaders in the communities.

Some indicators of the expected results were:

- * community beneficiaries trained and with evident skills in local development techniques
- * New leaders identified and trained in each community, particularly women
- * Increased number of women leaders participate in Patronatos
- * Small projects developed and implemented using a participatory process
- * Training manuals produced

2. To strengthen democracy and civil society by promoting the active participation of Black citizens in defining local needs and proposing solutions to the problems, and promoting understanding of how decisions are reached at the local, regional and national government levels, and capacity to influence their municipal

⁹ The information on section has been taken from the Donor Agreement for the Grassroots Community Building Project.

governments.

Indicators of expected results:

- * Community development plans prepared
- * Increased participation rates in the process, specially women
- * Increased understanding of local leaders on how municipal government functions and how decisions are reached at the regional level

3. To strengthen the partnership among community elected leadership, Black NGOs and community groups to encourage reliance on local resources, enhance the sustainability of local development programs, build social capital, create a common vision, change attitudes and behaviour and create mechanisms for relating with outside entities.

Indicators of expected results:

- * Mechanisms created that allow patronatos, NGOs and community groups to work together
- * Partnerships gain the capacity to plan and administer projects jointly and build a common vision
- * Participating organizations develop a commitment to the concept of partnering
- * Increased organizational capacity of partner members to design and implement projects

The objectives of the project can therefore be summarized in a model for enhancing local development whose inputs are: (1) building new leadership skilled in the tools of development; (2) strengthening civil society's participation in advancing their local development; and (3) building social capital that can be applied to advancing local development.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the methodology designed during the pilot project was to identify means of achieving high levels of grassroots participation in local development activities, to train leadership to initiate and maintain a process of local development. The pilot project was seen as the first step in generating a sustainable local development process by engaging in participatory community planning.

Some of the key attributes of the model piloted were:

- (a) It is a process-oriented approach to community development;
- (b) New leadership development is achieved by training new community promoters to become effective agents of local development, and by establishing neighborhood project committees (NPCs) with residents that are trained in project planning and fundraising to meet their stated needs through self-help efforts.
- (c) Citizen participation is strengthened by increasing knowledge of the workings of government through local training and practical experience in achieving their own projects;
- (d) (Linking) social capital is strengthened by promoting partnership between communities and NGOs of the same ethnicity who act as technical advisors and as funding channels for multiple community projects;
- (e) (Bonding) social capital is built by (i) using participatory techniques as an incentive for grassroots involvement and consensus building; (ii) maintain participation by adopting the objectives identified by the organized grassroots (iii) training in communities to maximize the outreach of its capacity building; (iv) developing neighborhood promoters to advise residents; (v) mobilizing at the household level and organizing neighborhood committees.

Training inputs for promoters consisted of a week-long bi-national training workshop on leadership qualities and community mobilization techniques using household census; NGO advisors conducted personalized training with the promoters in their assigned communities for all activities subsequent to the census-taking; the Project Training Coordinator conducted personalized training and demonstrations with most of the NGO advisors to introduce each new tool that would be used by promoters. Community training consisted of workshops held in each community, opened to all residents and specially those in NPCs, using teaching

strategies suitable for semi-literate audiences.

The Grassroots Community Building model has four clearly defined community stakeholders:

- (1) AFLA-NGOs, who initially drive the development process;
- (2) Patronatod who ideally should lead and administer the local development process, but at this initial stage simply endorsed NPC initiatives and used their legal registration to act as a direct funding channel for neighborhood projects.
- (3) Community promoters, hired to mobilize residents and facilitate the meetings of the process.
- (4) Neighborhood Project Committees who engage in needs identification, planning, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation for neighborhood projects.
- (5) An external crucial stakeholder is the project executing agent whose funding decisions affect the ultimate results of the model.

The steps evolved in the community planning methodology were:

- 1) needs identification through a household census conducted by each neighborhood promoter, who also tabulated results and summarized the data;
- 2) age/gender needs assessments using focus groups in each neighborhood, to cross-check the data from the census;
- 3) generate consensus at the neighborhood level by feeding back the results using SWOT analysis as a tool;
- 4) strengthening collective action by establishing NPCs (as many as groups of people willing to form groups to meet shared needs)
- 5) conducting neighborhood planning workshops to define strategies for action;
- 6) community training workshops for the NPCs to learn-by-doing to design a project and raise external resources.
- 7) Consolidating Community Priorities by uniting NPCs with similar priorities into community project committees that seek funding jointly but implement projects by neighborhood.
- 8) Provide funds for a collective small project that could be used as a practical tool to apply the concepts learned in the community training.

Steps added subsequent to the pilot project were:

- 9) Conducting a Donor Forum to present all the projects designed by NPCs and to establish direct links between NPC/ Patronato leaders and donors.
- 10) NGOs provide coordination and logistical support to NPCs in following up the proposals submitted to different institutions.

The specific tools developed for the community planning methodology were:

- (a) a household census questionnaire, instruction sheets and tabulation manual, to gather data on population, organizational practices, and local needs;
- (b) manual for promoters to conduct Age/Gender needs assessments using focus groups;
- (c) manual to prepare a SWOT analysis per neighborhood, and to conduct a planning meeting in the neighborhood;
- (d) forms to develop action strategies for newly formed NPCs;
- (e) manual for Project Design and Planning to train NPC members;
- (f) Project Proposal Format, to be used by NPCs to prepare their proposals for fundraising.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

While the Grassroots Community Building Project aimed to be a totally integrated sequential pilot process, unforeseen events occurred during the community planning phase that significantly affected the intended outcome. Although these events hampered specific elements of the implementation process, in the end they actually served to test the overall hypothesis and highlight the strengths and weakness of mobilization methodologies, thereby providing further opportunities to learn important lessons.

The community planning phase began in March 2001. The community planning phase and the testing of the first community course were completed by mid June 2001 in eight of the nine communities. Community participants were promised initially that between March and December 2001 they would learn to identify needs, set priorities, plan their own projects, and learn how to find funding. Partner NGOs made a commitment to provide follow-up support in fundraising and project implementation and project agreements were signed with Patronatos stating benefits and mutual obligations.

In June 2001, the Sub-Grantee's Project Director (PD) dismissed the PTC and excluded the AFH-NGOs and the newly established community NPCs from any further participation in the project. He chose instead to formulate a new plan midway in the project cycle which reoriented the training from full community involvement to a more traditional hierarchical top down approach in the communities. Instead of community training for all interested residents in all participating locales, it was reduced to holding five bi-national workshops limited to just 5 representatives per community; it also provided grants to a project selected by each Patronato without involving the NPCs in the selection. The precipitous actions of the PD prompted a three-month project management crisis that in effect ended the project's investment in piloting a methodology for participatory community planning.

Ironically, the causes of the abrupt change in project management and implementation were not related to the project itself but to peripheral regional leadership changes taking place in AAXXI. The impact was large because the individuals involved were also key players in the Honduras project. This therefore had a domino effect that eventually reached the community beneficiaries.

In December 2000, (while participating in the Americas Preparatory Conference for the UN Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Discrimination), AAXXI, for internal reasons, held elections in Chile for a new Secretary General. They elected a delegate from Honduras who happened to be an active participant in the Grassroots Community Building Project. The former Secretary General who was the PD of the Sub-Grantee NGO did not accept the leadership change and succeeded in forming a minority faction that agreed to his reinstatement and split from the overall process causing controversy and disagreement in the region and rendering AAXXI temporarily inactive.

In the meantime, from January to June 2001, because of the administrative linkages, the PD began using the Honduras project as a device apparently to challenge and weaken the new Secretary General's credibility. The PD gave instructions to dismiss this individual as a community advisor and to remove two of the AFH-NGOs from the project because the new Secretary General was a key member of both. In April 2001 project fund transfers to the field were withheld to pressure the decision. Other AFH-NGOs in Afroamerica XXI involved in the project were also contacted by the PD to encourage the expulsion of the new Secretary General as coordinator of AAXXI in Honduras. The AFH-NGOs responded by encouraging both leaders to meet and resolve their differences. To ensure that the communities involved in the project were not affected by this external conflict the AFH-NGOs discouraged visits by the PD to Honduras until the Community Planning Phase was completed. The PD subsequently traveled to the country in mid-June and immediately proceeded to conduct the dismissals and to make an alliance with the AFH-NGO that had initially dropped out of the project for the purpose of eliminating the presence of the other AFH-NGO leaders in some of the communities involved.

The Patronato leaders and the promoters by this time had acquired a strong proprietary interest in the project and were not pleased with the changes. They worked with the AFH-NGOs to forward their protests to the Donor, the Grantee and the Board of Directors of the Sub-Grantee, but received no immediate responses. There were a number of possible reasons for the lack of responses from the administrative oversight bodies. On one hand, midway into a project with a short and absolutely inflexible time line¹⁰, the Donor and the Grantee were driven by expedient management and administrative concerns that took

¹⁰ Any extension of the time line would require contract amendments approved by the US Congress.

precedence over the agreed upon purpose and objectives of the project. In addition there was no clause in any of the agreements that provided a mechanism to respond to the beneficiaries' complaints that the project was not fulfilling its contractual obligations.

Also, a lack of shared understanding regarding the philosophical framework of the project as a tool to initiate sustained local development (as opposed to being merely a means to deliver some training and small project funds to communities) possibly led to differing perceptions between the project's AFLA and the Grantee. Coupled with that, there was also a lack of clarification within the sub-grantee organization as to the actual oversight power held by its Board of Directors and their authority to undertake the steps needed to respond effectively to protests from the field regarding the PDs actions.

Consequently, it soon became evident to the AFLA stakeholders that the project was not likely to deliver on its promises to the NPCs, and that alternative funding would have to be sought to complete the Community Training Phase and to send the NPC projects to donors. Thus, in the aftermath of the crisis, outside the scope of the project, the AFH-NGO advisors and the promoters continued working in the communities, while the former PTC (also a member of one of the AFH-NGOs) traveled to North America to seek additional funding. In August 2001 funds were obtained from Match International of Canada to conduct a community-donor Forum in Honduras. The former PTC now functioning as an AFH-NGO advisor, conducted workshops in the eight Honduran communities to prepare the NPC proposals and select individual representatives to the Forum.

A donor-community Forum was held in October 2001 which brought together selected representatives from the eight Honduran communities and key donors that could invest in the types of projects that emerged. These included the Social Investment Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and USAID. A one-day post-Forum meeting was also held to plan a second phase with same stakeholders.

PROJECT RESULTS

The project design included an internal evaluation of the methodology which was cancelled after the administrative crisis. The donor did not include a project evaluation in the agreement. Thus, in the absence of any evaluation, the following conclusions are based on direct observations, interviews and comments gathered from the beneficiaries and other stakeholders, and a review of documentation generated by the project.

The community planning approach used in this pilot project was successful in achieving: (a) high rates of grassroots participation, particularly of women and young persons (1094 persons), (b) the absorption of knowledge and acquisition of skills in planning and fundrasing as evidenced by the 23 proposals generated, (c) organizing the grassroots and achieving consensus to act on their priority needs (53 strategies for action), and (d) in establishing permanent mechanisms to address local development (53 NPCs). All of these results have increased the social capital that can be applied to satisfy basic needs and improve quality of life in each community.

To analyse the pilot project results, a framework was used that is based on the IAF's Grassroots Development Framework (GDF). The IAF's "cone" (see Figure 1) represents the widening impact of grassroots development from the individual through the organization to the community or society at large and takes intangible as well as tangible results into account. The experience of the pilot project fits well into this model.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE: FILE ATTACHED SEPARATELY]

Specific achievements at the grassroots are analysed in terms of (1) building new leadership skilled in local development; (2) strengthening civil society participation in local development, and (3) building social capital in communities to advance local development. The results achieved, the constraints experienced, and notable success factors are presented in the sections below.

(1) Building new leadership for local development.

The new leaders trained in the 9 communities over an eight month period were:

- > 30 trained neighborhood promoters
- > 7 NGO advisors trained in the methodology
- > 505 participants of focus groups familiar with needs assessment tools
- > 1094 participants familiar with developing consensus using participatory planning, SWOT analysis, and action strategies of NPCs.
- > 319 NPC leaders trained and designed neighborhood projects that are currently being assessed by different donors.
- > New demographics: Participant age-gender composition demonstrated that new population segments had begun to enter the process. Adults mothers with no secondary education brought their daughters and argued that they learned more attending the course than in normal school classes. Young adults since then have increasingly participated.

Constraints were experienced that could arise when replicating the model. These are:

In Human Resources:

(a) Scarcity of experienced AFLA development practitioners to act as promoters and community advisors. The majority of the promoters were young and female, new to development, with no formal skills and little technical experience. The community advisors were drawn from the participating AFH-NGOs and varied in experience. In one organization all of its seasoned directors were already committed, another left the project before the community planning phase began citing insufficient financial incentives. The project implementation experience of the other AFH-NGO advisors ranged from none to minimal so they were assigned one small community each.

(b) To formally indicate the presence of the project in the community, the promoters requested uniform Project T-shirts and identification badges in order to be readily received in the homes of their own neighbors.

Time Constraints

A deadline set externally for the project plus the months needed to enlist and negotiate communities' participation resulted in only 10 months available to conduct the overall process. This was shortened to five months by the administrative crisis. Nevertheless, the experience showed that:

(a) A minimum of 7 months are needed to conduct the community planning phase, so that team-training is done in a formal and systematic fashion before each step of the process.

(b) The need for haste had the most adverse impact on the quality of data collected. It affected the ability to thoroughly check the accuracy of the data gathered, to make immediate corrections, and to conduct census recounts as soon as errors were found. This in turn affected the reliability of the outputs produced, resulting in SWOT analysis that reflected trends only. Also there was no time to develop a framework of indicators for monitoring the results.

(c) Overall supervision and coordination were also affected by the time constraint since it was difficult to adequately support seven advisors in nine communities in three months with only one supervisor (the PTC).

In Training

Community training requires adaptation to the literacy level of the beneficiaries. The first community to receive training in planning was used as a pilot to test the teaching approach, especially since the majority of the participants averaged partial elementary school education. To better aid absorption of new planning concepts, the instructors wrote on overhead projector transparencies, while participants verbally repeated the content and copied it into their notebooks. These combined oral and practical actions reinforced the learning process. Participants were then given time to work in groups applying one concept at a time to

formulate their chosen project. Adolescent students were brought in by their parents for writing and reading assistance, and to learn the subject. This minimized any learning frustrations and resulted in a zero drop out rate over the two days of the courses.

(2) Strengthening civil society's participation in local development.

This involves not only attendance levels at activities, as provided in section (1) above, but also the absorption of the knowledge imparted and its use to produce outputs. The results that evidence the achievement of this objective are:

- * Attendance levels in the planning workshops in most communities ranged from 53% to 89% of neighborhood households (one member per household). In smaller Bay Island communities attendance ranged from 85% to 100% of the households. Even the most recalcitrant Cortes community, had rates ranging from 24% to 37% in Garifuna neighborhoods, and 89% in a mixed ladino-Garifuna neighborhood. Rates in previous projects never exceeded 5-10% of the households.
- * Women, adult and young, tend to be over 80% of the participants. Male attendance is still far less than actual representation in the overall population. Elderly men tended to be the most responsive.
- * 53 Action Strategies to solve a priority need were produced by the NPCs
- * 23 project proposals were prepared by the NPCs
- * Household census raw data for 33 neighborhoods in 9 communities, and 33 SWOT analysis for 9 communities prepared by the advisors and promoters.
- * 9 community patronatos are efficiently administrating small project funds and implemeting the project of choice for the community.
- * 23 NPCs are following up project proposal submissions with the AFLA-NGOs and donors.

(3) Building social capital to advance local development.

The results that evidence the achievement of this objective are:

- * Promoting partnership: 5 AFLA-NGOs with 9 communities in four different geographical zones. Increased contact and the opportunity to build trust between Bay Islander and Garifuna organizations, and between Guatemalans and Hondurans.
- * Use of participatory techniques to raise participation and to build consensus: Six methodological tools were developed, and it tested the content for a seminar to increase self-esteem and demonstrate the viability of Afro-Latin-American potential;
- * Network of neighborhood promoters created to advise residents: 30 promoters trained.
- * Network of NPCs established: 33 neighborhoods engaged in planning with 53 NPCs formed.
- * Sense of partneship developed: A second phase of this project and a project for youth were agreed upon by all communities and organizations. No bilateral projects between community - organization were developed. NPCs seek NGO partnership only when they do not trust the Patronato as the channel for funding.
- * Developing planning skills in partners: this was achieved at the NPC level; neither Patronato nor NGO leaders other than the advisors attended the training.

Success Factors

I. Activation of individual participation

a) Strengthening personal capacity

Using the GDF as a reference (see Figure 1), the pilot process begun at the tip of the Cone, focusing on individuals, within a household, within a neighborhood, within a community. The pilot project strengthened the intangible factors defined under the Cone's category of "Personal Capacity", such as self-esteem, cultural identity, creativity and critical reflection, through training and practical experience. This produced a change in attitude and a more positive frame of mind among participants, and it became an incentive for individual participation. Many of the NPC leaders stated at the conclusion of the Donor Forum that the knowledge acquired during the Community Planning Phase had equipped them with the language needed to engage in

discussions directly with donors and the ability to understand what donors meant.

This also led to a *tangible* result (through people's own efforts to meet a "Basic Need")¹¹ as exemplified by the 23 project proposals from 8 Honduran communities which led directly to continued engagement in solving common problems. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the projects identified were to meet a Basic Need, 9% were for Knowledge/Skills enhancement, and another 9% would result in Employment/ Income enhancement. Seventy per cent (70%) of the projects were in sectors within the mandate of municipalities, and mostly involved completing service networks for electricity, water, telephones, roads, seawalls, and health services. To solve these needs, communities require their inclusion in the municipal budgets and plans.

b) Overcoming personal mental barriers through quality training

(i) A key factor of the promoter training seminar, and a key tool for helping to eliminate normally submerged feelings of racial and social inadequacy of individuals was providing knowledge of the achievements of ancient ancestral Africa and Afro Latin American history. These tools specifically developed to suit AFLAs were particularly aimed at minimizing the effects of low self-esteem, and racial prejudice. This information was fundamental in generating optimism and opening minds to personal potential and the available opportunities. It was also key to enhancing the performance and effectiveness of ladino training consultants sensitizing them to become more knowledgeable, and respectful in their dealing with AFLA communities.

(ii) The workshop format overcame fears that hamper leadership development by encouraging participation through discussions. Practice lessened fears of public speaking and increased people's confidence in their own judgement thereby decreasing the onus on established leaders to always be solution providers and spokespersons.

(iii) Training in Project Planning resulted in a demystification of the development process. It built new capacities and reinforced community self-confidence by bringing the language of development within semi-literate community reach and especially by achieving results previously considered to be the sole preserve of NGO "experts".

(iv) Training conducted in the community encouraged high participation levels, built local leadership capacity and avoided prior deficiencies whereby only a few people were trained outside their locales, and never shared the knowledge with others. It also helped to distribute project financial benefits among communities as local residents provided the goods and services for the training. This increased local acceptance of the process because it brought tangible indirect benefits.

II. Activation of collective participation

c) Successful Tools to build consensus

Developing neighborhood profiles enabled all residents to see themselves as part of a larger group that shared similar economic, educational and organizational constraints. It helped to minimize rivalry and open the way for discussions on how to overcome constraints by grouping with others with similar needs. Consensus was not required from all residents, only those who were willing to work on the same issue. Apathy was not rewarded with inclusion.

d) Awareness of their place in international development

Throughout the process participants were repeatedly informed there were no guarantees of immediate project funding but that the new international donor policies of funding support for AFLA and the current shortage of strong projects had increased their chances. This hope of benefitting from the new inclusion

¹¹ Ritchie-Vance, *Social Capital*, pp. 9

acted as an incentive to develop "bankable" projects and became a strong motivating factor for continued grassroots level involvement.

An important result of the Donor Forum held was the emergence of a direct dialogue between funding institutions, the AFH-NGOs, and the NPC leaders which can ensure a continuation of the local development process. Another result was an emerging sense of respect for each other's institutional limitations. Donors indicated they would incorporate the community concerns into their policies, programs and projects, while communities were more mindful of what donors could not provide and their drawbacks in direct funding. The impact on NPCs was an increased awareness of the inter-dependence between communities, municipalities and donors, and that gaining access to resources involved understanding criteria, governing regulations and the processes to be followed.

III. Giving Respect and Developing Trust

Achieving repeated participation is directly related to developing community trust in the agents of development. A common experience of mainstream NGOs that work in AFLA communities is the drop in participation rates after the initial activities. The ladino training consultants used in the community training have worked with other ethnic and mainstream women's groups. They observed that the issue of trusting NGO leaders and staff was felt strongly in this project and that they had similar experiences with other ethnic minorities, but not with mainstream groups.

In the project trust was accumulated by: (1) validating local opinion when feeding back the information from the households, the neighborhoods, and the community; (2) engaging in total transparency regarding the financial information on the project; (3) adopting the local objectives as the main task of the process; (4) delivering results for every promise made; (4) not abandoning the community when problems arose and funding disappeared; (5) following up community concerns that arose in the process.

III. Sustainable development

One of the most important results, endorsing the process oriented approach, was that despite disruptions in the pilot project, resources were found by local stakeholders to independently carry on the process to realize the project's aims; especially those related to the preparation and presentation of community project proposals. At the community level, the NPC's found other institutional sources of counterpart funding for their projects.

Constraints experienced

AFLA Gender issues in participation in local development

(i) Adult males were consistently under represented in the activities throughout the project. The census results indicated that the main reasons for the failure of both genders to attend meetings were work, ignorance about the meeting, or lack of interest. The latter was a reason given by a much larger percentage of men than women. Other reasons given by male participants for low attendance of other males were that men were intimidated by women's aggressiveness at meetings and it was easier to just let women be; and young males do not like the manner in which adults conduct community affairs because they waste time in non-important issues and do not value the opinion of the young.

(ii) Women in most communities agreed that the participation of men in local development was important to build consensus and to encourage changes in male attitudes. Male participation was also deemed necessary to be positive role models for youth and to encourage boys to become responsible adults with a greater role in community affairs.

(iii) Female participation in activities away from the community increased because infants were allowed to accompany their mothers during the training, and in exceptional cases cash advances were provided for food for the children that remained, and for health emergencies.

Leadership development among Patronato Directors

The project design incorporated the patronato as an institution, but did not make the participation and capacity building of all directors a specific objective. One of the results was that only one or two of the patronato directors in any community were trained and participated fully. Nevertheless, the Patronatos used other outputs of the project. Although the project crisis prevented the preparation of the final Community Plans which encompassed all strategies and projects, Patronatos welcomed the 33 census and needs assessments for use in their on-going work.

Opposition of established AFH-NGO:

The project unintentionally changed the status quo of local decision-making power by using participatory decision-making and consensus. This had the effect of stimulating change in the perceptions of the grassroots actively involved so that they questioned the benefits of a decision made by a long standing AFH-NGO to resign from the project, encouraging the communities to follow its example without success.

This incident begun a steady a resistance to the project in two communities with loyal sympathizers of the departed AFH-NGO. Resistance was expressed as unsupported charges against key personnel in the project, controversial community arguments generated around non-substantial issues, raising negative criticism and fear during decision-making meetings, inciting changes in patronato directorship, etc. All these measures created delays, distractions, encouraged participant drop out from the overall process and ultimately (by becoming an ally of the PD) succeeded in derailing the project purpose.

Although a change in the status quo tends to result in local resistance to any new initiative, regardless of the ethnic group, in this particular case it was aggravated by the personal history and fundamental beliefs about development of the key players. This rendered useless all the institutional tools used for conflict resolution.

When fundamental beliefs about development approaches and ethical principles are at stake, the differences between AFLA-NGOs become polarized, and seeking common ground is much more difficult. This has been seen at a regional level and at country level, and has resulted in the segmentation of the AFLA NGO sector.

It is simpler to seek a solution to this problem at the community level, where the grassroots can make decisions based on their own welfare and not the concerns of outsiders, and AFLA-NGOs must comply with community wishes. By comparison, the mainstream NGO sector is much larger in number and sectors of work, so that these differences are submerged by other factors.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The model tested in this pilot project is based on a framework for local development outlined in Table 1. The pilot project was designed to strengthen components 2, 3, 5 and 6 of this framework. It was expected that #3 (administrative infrastructure) could be strengthened through subsequent community projects, and that #1 (Patronatos directors) could be achieved through activities aimed at the grassroots.

1. The main lesson learned is that the tools developed to engage in participatory community planning were very successful in generating grassroots participation, achieving consensus on development decisions, in acquisition of knowledge by new leaders, and undertaking collective action to solve local needs. They succeeded in strengthening the components of the local development machinery that were explicitly stated as objectives of the methodology.

2. The process oriented approach to local development has been more successful in ensuring community participation and overcoming negative occurrences that previously resulted in drop outs and apathy. Features of the process-oriented approach that favoured these results are:

* The process provided tangible benefits in the form of knowledge and skills that improved personal

capacity, and this made it worthwhile to continue participating.

- * The process supported local objectives and thus produced local project benefits.
- * Technical support of the NGOs to the NPCs did not end when the project was finished, it continued while new funding was sought. There is follow up of a community's fate.
- * Local projects were developed and taken to donors by participants who also sought counterpart funding. Thus they felt in control of the process and were willing to live with its results.
- * The needs identification was thorough, training in project design, planning and proposal writing was also very realistic and participants were made aware of the strict donor criteria for support. In this manner, the outputs were realistic "bankable" projects that reflected felt needs justified in terms of their impact on future development, and presented as an investment in which the community also had a stake.

3. An AFLA Gender lesson was that gender issues in AFLA communities are not the same as those in the mainstream. Male participation is a constraint. Female participation can be strengthened by providing knowledge, raising self-esteem, and being mindful of childcare concerns. Future projects need to include specific pro-active measures to involve males in decision-making and project implementation. Some of these measures could include gender segregated meetings to identify issues and needs, integrated meetings to decide on actions and to divide responsibilities, and better scheduling and announcement of meetings.

4. Strengthening Patronato leaders and NGO directors, other than those specifically assigned to the project, was not achieved with project activities. A special approach is required because the individuals involved have time and money constraints that prevent their ad hoc participation. It could be tailored to their knowledge gaps and to their time constraints, and financial rewards need to be included.

5. Ideal Profiles of key stakeholders began to emerge as a result of the pilot project. Personal characteristics related to formal and informal education, comprehension ability, track record of community work, and commitment to local objectives emerged as important factors in predicting the performance of promoters, advisors, Patronato and NPC Leaders, as well as of communities.

CONCLUSIONS: POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

A. The pilot model to initiate a process of local development by engaging in participatory planning at the grassroots is a valuable contribution to overcoming self-generated barriers to social exclusion in AFLA populations.

The pilot implementation, however, suffered serious setbacks which left the original design incomplete, and also affected the quality of data collected. Adjustments to its elements are needed to strengthen the model and replicate its use. These adjustments are:

1. Inclusion of Operational Review Mechanisms in AFLA project agreements, that will respond to beneficiary complaints regarding changes that could affect negatively the expected results and/or impact of the project.
2. Incorporate explicitly into the objectives: (a) training of Patronato and NGO directors, (b) increase in male participation in the process; (c) strengthening municipal relations with communities; and design and test suitable strategies to achieve them.
3. Data Management: develop a system for quality control in collection and processing, and train promoters and advisors to use it. Also develop a monitoring system with impact/ result indicators that can be tracked.
4. Extend the timeframe of community planning to seven months to increase the time for advisor and promoter training, and another five months to complete the community training phase. Neighborhood promoters and community advisors should be hired for the entire community planning phase, and at least one community promoter should remain for the community training phase.
5. Review the specific tools used in the pilot and refine all the manuals and teaching aids for the replication of the overall process.

B. To advance AFLA development among the grassroots, it is necessary to invest in the institutional strengthening of AFLA-NGOs. Their inexperience and scarce administrative resources and capacity are a bottleneck to the achievement of AFLA social inclusion.

In order to take advantage of new funding availability for AFLA populations, and generate sustainable development processes in AFLA communities, it is necessary that AFLA-NGOs set as their goal to become more effective intermediaries for macro-project funding.

The objectives of strengthening AFLA-NGOs are: to achieve the certification standards of the larger donor institutions; to achieve financial sustainability by holding a diverse project portfolio that generates sufficient contributions towards their administrative overhead; and to become effective technical resources to guide and train communities.

To achieve the above objectives, an institutional strengthening package for AFLA-NGOs should include:

1. Technical support and training targeted to their leaders, volunteers and personnel to make them capable of generating, administrating and managing a successful development project portfolio.
2. Capital investment donations to ensure sufficient office equipment to administer the project portfolio. Essential components are word processing, accounting, communications and publication equipment, furniture and a means of transportation to communities. Operational funds should be generated from the administrative portion of the projects in their portfolios.
3. The training content should include: the methodology and tools of the Participatory Community Planning Process; administrative skills (financial, information and personnel management), programming skills (project design & development, budgeting, donor relations), and analytical skills (government and donor policies, development trends, sectoral policies that affect AFLA development).
4. Technical assistance to implement management and administrative systems, especially for financial management and accounting, personnel management, project development and proposal follow-up.
5. Funds for umbrella-projects to reach a group of client communities and generate local development processes. These should include small project funds to support the diverse needs of the communities, including infrastructure.
6. Funds to participate in seminars and exchange visits, to exchange results, lessons learned, and identify best practices in the AFLA sector.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAXXI	Afroamerica XXI
AFLA	Afro-Latin American
AFLA-NGO	Afro-Latin American Non-Government Organization
AFH-NGO	Afro-Honduran NGO
GDF	Grassroots Development Framework
IAF	Inter-American Foundation
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
NPC	Neighborhood Project Committees
PD	Project Director
PTC	Project Training Coordinator
SPF	Small Projects Fund
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis

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