TEARS IN THE SOCIAL FABRIC

Trust, Trauma, and the Challenges of Civil Society-Led Development and Democratization in Guatemala

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Para la gente de Santiago Atitlán quienes me enseñan más cada día. Siempre les agradeceré. Que Dios les bendiga y les dé esperanza.
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ABSTRACT

In recent years, scholars and practitioners of both democratic and economic development have moved toward a consensus position that promoting civil society in developing countries is vital to their successful development. This paper argues that the current literature promoting civil society as the crucial element in both the democracy and development arenas tends to romanticize its abilities. While working with local organizations still may be the best way to promote a democratic human development, it is crucial (especially for international donors and actors) to recognize the weaknesses and pitfalls of such an approach. These include: (1) local leaders’ desire to retain power, (2) potential for corrupt rent-seeking, (3) a lack of true representation, and (4) the tendency for leaders to come from economically and socially privileged backgrounds. These weaknesses are most pronounced in situations where a dearth of social capital limits the capacity for cooperation and leads to the dominance of self-interested behavior. I argue that in the case of Guatemala, civil wars and the subsequent long-term effects of continued traumatic stress destroyed social networks, thereby weakening collective social capital and precluding the cooperation necessary for the proper functioning of local civil society organizations as an important vehicle of democratic and economic development. Finally, I offer several suggestions as to how international actors can help mitigate the effects of these problems and maximize the gains from working with civil society organizations.
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CHAPTER ONE

Civil Society, Democracy, and Development: A Theoretical Review

Some one billion people suffer from hunger on a daily basis. Approximately two and a half billion live in poverty, with one billion of those living in extreme poverty.\(^1\) Clean water is inaccessible to millions, health care accessible to even fewer. Unsurprisingly, these statistics move people. Statistics like these, which reveal the realities in which much of the world lives, have done so for many years. Whether from altruistic or self-satisfying motives, many people who come from better circumstances have felt the urge to help in raising the quality of life for those who are less fortunate. From colonialism to neo-colonialism to service to the poor, the development of theories regarding how to relate to poor regions reveals a persistent interest on the part of the wealthy of the world in solving these problems. The debate, of course, has always been over the best way to go about it. Different approaches have suggested modernization, industrialization, democratization, export-led development, and locally-driven initiatives (or civil society) as the best vehicle for quality of life improvements. In the last few decades the promotion of civil society, which many believe to be the most direct and sustainable method of democratic development, has emerged as one of the most highly touted solutions to the problems of the world’s poor and developing countries.

Overview of Argument

This paper argues that the current literature promoting civil society as the crucial element in both the democracy and development arenas tends to romanticize its abilities. While working with local organizations still may be the best way to promote a democratic human development,

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it is crucial (especially for international donors and actors) to recognize the weaknesses and pitfalls of such an approach. These include: (1) local leaders’ desire to retain power, (2) potential for corrupt rent-seeking, (3) a lack of true representation, and (4) the tendency for leaders to come from economically and socially privileged backgrounds. These weaknesses are most pronounced in situations where a dearth of social capital limits the capacity for cooperation and leads to the dominance of self-interested behavior. I argue that in the case of Guatemala, civil wars and the subsequent long-term effects of continued traumatic stress destroyed social networks, thereby weakening collective social capital and precluding the cooperation necessary for the proper functioning of local civil society organizations as an important vehicle of democratic and economic development.

Chapter One reviews the literature on civil society in development and democracy. First, it defines key terms for the paper: civil society, development, social capital, trust, NGO, and participatory development. Then, it looks at democracy assistance, development aid, and civil society literature and suggests pitfalls and reasons why these pitfalls exist in civil society. Chapter Two lays out the historical context of the Guatemalan conflict and the structural violence of poverty, both of which contribute to a constant state of trauma in this disordered society. Trust between neighbors, families, and entire communities has been destroyed, thus depriving much of Guatemala of the basic foundation of social capital. Chapter Three then points to evidence of the four pitfalls in Guatemalan civil society organizations (CSOs), suggesting that their existence is not only detrimental to their effectiveness but a direct result of

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2 Authors who write on civil society mention some of these challenges. Hulme and Edwards and Goetz and Jenkins go into the most detail about representation and accountability while Carothers and Ottaway, Clark, and Van Rooy also do so, but only to some extent.

3 The term structural violence is used to refer to the structures which perpetuate “extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities ranging from racism to gender inequality to the more spectacular forms of violence that are uncontestedly human rights abuses” (Farmer, 8). The idea stems from liberation theologians and scholars, specifically those who convened in the meetings of Latin American Bishops in Medellin in 1968 and Puebla in 1978. See Paul Farmer, pages 8-10 for a more in-depth discussion of its origins.
violence and the resultant trauma experienced by the people who make up the CSOs and those whom they seek to serve. Finally, Chapter Four examines some of the practical implications of this paper for donors working with CSOs and suggests ways not only to recognize, but also mitigate the four pitfalls.

A Note About Fieldwork

In the past two years, I have traveled to Guatemala six times, spending a total of almost six months in Santiago Atitlán in the Spring and Summer of 2004, Spring and Summer 2005, and Winter 2005-6. I first went as a student of Anita Isaacs, Professor of Political Science at Haverford College. Then I traveled as a representative of the International Humanitarian Foundation (IHF), a small NGO dedicated to working in partnership with grassroots organizations in the developing world. Finally, in the aftermath of a devastating mudslide as the result of Hurricane Stan in October 2005, Haverford and IHF formed a partnership with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and my work contributed to the decisions made on where funding was to be directed for reconstruction. All stories and evidence in the following chapters which reference Santiago Atitlán, the Grupo Ixmucané, the youth group in Santiago, or ADECCAP (La Asociación de Desarrollo Comunitario del Cantón de Panabaj) are based on experience working in partnership with these organizations.

In addition, a series of interviews I conducted with women from the Grupo Ixmucané in July-August of 2005 also contributes to the argument presented below. Where appropriate, I cite the date and the place of the interview. When I interviewed the women, I told them I would record their information and would potentially write about them, but for the sake of confidentiality amidst a difficult group situation, I promised that, unless they wanted, I would not use their names. In some cases, the women insisted that I wrote their names and watched
carefully as I did so. In others, the women nodded, seemingly relieved to be able to speak freely about not only their experience in the internal armed conflict but also their experience in the challenges of the local CSO. In the case of the former, I have referenced the women by their first names, while in the case of the latter, I have substituted another commonly used name from Santiago as an alias.

Definition of Terms

A clear understanding of the terms put forth in this section is crucial to the argument presented in this paper. Each of these terms is used extensively throughout this paper, and they must be well defined because the existing literature contains various, at times competing, definitions for each. Some simply need clarification as to how I intend to use them in this paper. Civil society, for example, has been utilized as a broad term that can apply to a variety of groups. Trust, a commonly used term in everyday language, needs a scholarly definition. Other terms’ definitions are politically charged, and choosing one of the definitions suggests the acceptance of a particular stance. Development, for example, can mean one thing to neo-classical economists and another to political or social activists. Other terms have been excluded (and in some cases clarified elsewhere by footnotes) because of the relative consensus in the field of their definitions.

Civil Society

Civil society\(^4\) has become a common term in social science circles, but its meaning is not always clear. In its widest and most accepted sense, civil society can mean every social interaction that occurs in the space between the family unit and the state. A narrower view of civil society puts the condition that civil society organizations must take the form of voluntarily

\(^4\) The origins of the concept of civil society can be traced at least as far back as Hobbes and Hegel. For a brief history, see Hyden, 1995. For a review of its intellectual heritage, see Keane, 1988.
organized groups (i.e. they must be something that operates between the level of the state and that of the family, in which participation is not coerced). Still others believe that the operational definition of civil society should emphasize non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Yet another definition includes those organizations that enjoy autonomy from the state (voluntary organizations) but have as one of their primary goals to influence the state on behalf of their members. Some definitions include, and even emphasize, the business sector as a component of civil society alongside the traditionally included voluntary sector. However, because this paper views civil society as primarily a collection of organizations, including community groups, NGOs, indigenous groups, and faith-based/charitable organizations, it utilizes the World Bank definition:

Civil society refers to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations.

This definition, unlike the others presented, specifies the kinds of organizations that exist within the civil society sector (which will be those primarily examined in this paper) and moves beyond the broad and at times confusing definition of all social interaction between the state and the family. Those interactions between the state and the family that do not occur within the boundaries of an organization (such as friends and co-workers) are referred to in this paper as “social networks.”

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5 Rojas, 88.
6 Ottaway and Chung, 106.
7 Blair, 25.
8 Bernard et al, 12.
**Development**

Since the inception of the concept of under-development in 1949\(^\text{10}\) until approximately 1990, most would have defined development as an increase in national income as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP).\(^\text{11}\) To this day, many still believe economic development to be simply an increase in GDP,\(^\text{12}\) but development by this definition does little for the poor because economic growth, defined as an increase in average income per capita, does not necessarily entail that poorer citizens receive the benefits of this increase.\(^\text{13}\) In 1998, the Senior Vice President of the World Bank, Joseph E. Stiglitz, defined development as:

>a transformation of society, a movement from traditional relations, traditional ways of thinking, traditional ways of dealing with health and education, traditional methods of production, to more “modern” ways. For instance, a characteristic of traditional societies is the acceptance of the world as it is; the modern perspective recognizes change, it recognizes that we, as individuals and societies, can take actions that, for instance, reduce infant mortality, extend lifespans, and increase productivity.\(^\text{14}\)

The perspective put forth by Stiglitz shows a concern for moving away from the traditional towards modernity allowing for change along the way, which is presumably better for the development of the world.\(^\text{15}\) This definition moves away from solely GDP-focused development, allowing for a more inclusive idea of development that is more likely to be beneficial for the poor – one that considers health, education, and overall quality of life. But Stiglitz’s focus on “the modern” hints at a dangerous arrogance on the part of the developed

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\(^{10}\) President Truman’s Four Point Speech, Point Four. *Public Papers of the Presidents.* Esteva (1992, 6) sees January 20, 1949 as the birth date of the concept of “under-development.”


\(^{13}\) UN Human Development Report, 1990.


\(^{15}\) While there are a variety of anthropological discussions on the meaning of the “traditional” and the “modern” (Spivak 1995, Mitchell 2000, Kelly 2002, Pandolfo 2000), the traditional here can be taken to mean the practices of a pre-industrial society which have endured over time, and the modern means more post-industrial Western practices which are always changing.
world that assumes that modern is better. In some cases, change benefits everyone, but in some examples of “modern” development projects, the traditional way of doing things has proven to be more effective, especially for the country’s poor. For example, in Bali, a development-driven irrigation project which was meant to bring water more easily to local crops actually destroyed them. Unlike the traditional system, which consisted of a “complex network of irrigation structures, and coordinating planting and harvesting times to maximize water availability while minimizing the spread of pests,” this new system wasted water and did not take into consideration pest control.16 Also, in India, a project to build a dam to create a new water supply system which would give running water to many portions of the city did not take into account those who based their livelihoods on the river. The dam actually destroyed the way of living of hundreds of Indian peasants by altering their access to water for their crops and their consumption.17

Because this arrogance has at times proven ineffective and destructive, this paper adopts a view of development as what the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) calls “human development” – the process of enlarging people’s choices.18 This process signifies that average people in developing countries will be able to choose whether or not to engage in the “modern” or “traditional” models and decide what development means for them (or if “developing” even describes them). The essential factors involved in enlarging people’s choices are: “for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge, and to have access to resources needed to have a decent standard of living.”19 With these factors in place, people are able to engage in life and decision-making with more power and choices rather than only focusing exclusively on how

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16 Santikarma, 2-3.
18 UN Human Development Report 1990, 10. See also Ersson and Lane, 57.
19 Ibid.
to provide the daily meal. Finally, this paper embraces John Clark’s idea of a “just development,” meaning attacking the web of forces that causes poverty and demanding equity, democracy, and social justice as paramount objectives alongside the need for economic growth.\(^{20}\) This kind of development is focused on the idea of justice – not what is the most efficient alternative for the world economy, but what is the most morally correct.\(^{21}\) Economic growth and/or modernization \textit{at the expense of} abject poverty for a major portion of the world’s population are distinctly \textit{unjust}.

\textit{Social Capital}

The concept of social capital was made famous in Robert Putnam’s seminal work on American community: \textit{Bowling Alone}. He defines social capital as: “the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”\(^{22}\) Social capital can be held on an individual or collective basis, and it can be “bridging” (inclusive) or “bonding” (exclusive).\(^{23}\) Bridging social capital includes connections that cover “diverse social cleavages” (of race, religion, sex, etc), and bonding social capital refers to those connections that reinforce such cleavages.\(^{24}\) This paper adopts Putnam’s definition because it applies directly to the formation and effectiveness of civil society organizations.

Originally defined by Loury\(^ {25}\) as the set of resources inherent in family relations and community social organization useful for the social and cognitive development of children, the concept of social capital has evolved to be applied to human interactions as a whole and is based

\(^{20}\) Clark 1991, 23.
\(^{21}\) This is not meant to suggest that efficiency and morality are necessarily contradictory, but that the efficiency model as traditionally pursued, increasing profits and income at any cost, is not moral.
\(^{22}\) Putnam 2000, 19.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 20
\(^{24}\) Ibid.
\(^{25}\) Loury 1977.
on the concept of “the prevalence of trust in a society.” The resources that it draws upon differ for each person, but include “the relations of authority and of trust and norms [of etiquette]” learned through social interaction. The existence of social capital, according to some authors, also has great economic value, which contributes to the argument that its creation is necessary for development. Without social capital, a society’s overall well-being will be challenged even if economic policies recommended by economists are pursued. This is because economists, Fukuyama argues, in their analysis of physical and human capital, miss twenty percent of the economic equation: social relations. That twenty percent depends upon how well people are able to create social capital and utilize it for collective benefit. The argument is most simply explained by the idea of a network. Take, for example, an alumni network from a university. Simply because of one’s status as an alumnus of a particular university, the network makes it easier to find a job or support when needed. Social capital also contributes to democracy because it allows us to look beyond simply our own needs to the needs of the broader community, leading people to “take active roles in their community, to behave morally, and to compromise.” Social capital is also found to be positively correlated with collective action in a variety of studies. For example, Molinas’ analysis of 104 cooperative organizations in Paraguay and Isham and Kahkonen’s study of community-based water distribution in Sri Lanka and India both conclude that social capital increases participation and cooperation.

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26 Fukuyama, 26.
27 Coleman, 300.
28 See for instance Putnam, Fukuyama, Tonkiss et al, Coleman, and Warren
29 Fukuyama, 13.
30 Uslaner, 122.
Trust

Trust is the essential component of social capital, and therefore all which has been said about social capital is also true of the presence of trust in social relations. Trust promotes cooperation and therefore prosperity and democracy.\textsuperscript{32} It is a “rational gamble that cooperation with others will ultimately pay off,”\textsuperscript{33} and its acceptance makes for a vibrant community and promotes cooperation.\textsuperscript{34} In his volume on trust, Fukuyama describes it as “the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community.”\textsuperscript{35} This definition captures the idea that members of the community (and for the purposes of this paper, members of CSOs) are connected through the existence of basic trust and that this trust grows through their continual interaction.

NGO

Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, have become major players in democracy promotion and development in the past 15-20 years by channeling funds, initiating campaigns, and providing services to underserved populations. An NGO is traditionally defined as:

Any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information.\textsuperscript{36}

NGOs, as defined, therefore provide a range of services to the community at large – they represent local interests through advocacy work, provide information in order to promote participation in politics, and do service to the community. This paper utilizes this definition, as it

\textsuperscript{32} See, for instance, the works of Putnam, Fukuyama, Coleman, Grootaert, and Warren (1999).
\textsuperscript{33} Uslaner, 123.
\textsuperscript{34} Putnam 1993, 171.
\textsuperscript{35} Fukuyama, 26.
\textsuperscript{36} Definition derived from EXECOM - The Executive Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations Associated with The United Nations Department of Public Information and found at: http://www.ngo.org/ngoinfo/define.html.
is widely accepted and applicable to the argument in this paper. It also draws a distinction between NGOs and local organizations (LOs). NGOs are those organizations with official national or international recognition. They tend to be more professional and have paid staffs. LOs are such organizations without official recognition or paid staff that still complete tasks which are similar to those of NGOs, such as executing locally-designed projects, soliciting funds, and performing service and humanitarian functions. Both NGOs and LOs are parts of civil society but do not make up its entirety, as the definition still includes labor unions, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations which may not fit within the NGO or LO definition.

Participatory Development

Participation is essentially “the exercise of popular agency,” and participatory development is a concept and practice based on the belief that people have the capability to contribute to and have agency over projects designed to benefit them. USAID, in its 1993 “Statement of Principles on Participatory Development” closes by explaining that “development is a people process, and our efforts must aim to support the efforts of local people.” Working to address needs as project beneficiaries perceive and articulate them is shown by USAID to indicate more of their active participation than those projects brought in by outsiders. In theory, this participation creates ownership of the projects and contributes to their effectiveness and sustainability.

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37 LOs may also be described as grassroots organizations by some authors. I use LO in its place because of the leftist connotations attributed to the word “grassroots organization.”
38 For a discussion of the various definitions of NGOs, how they relate to civil society, and the various roles of NGOs, see Pearce 1993. Some authors (Otaway 106) do define civil society, however, as being made up exclusively of NGOs.
39 Hickey and Mohan, 3.
40 USAID, 4.
41 Dore, 1981.
42 Ibid.
Democracy Assistance

Foreign aid became a critical component of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War period. There may be debate about the authenticity of “democracy assistance” during the Cold War because of its objectives: foreign aid was primarily concerned with garnering anti-communist support from as many countries as possible. Supposedly, aid during this time promoted democracy as an international norm, but in many instances it did little to support democracy in developing countries because many of the governments of these “friendly regimes” were not democracies – they did not even have free and fair elections. Thus, instead of supporting democracy per se, this aid supported anti-communism. U.S. dollars were offered with the understanding that the recipients would associate themselves with and support the U.S. in the Cold War, and this support propped up many anti-communist tyrants all over the world. The policy was to support any regime, “no matter how repressive,” as long as it claimed to be anti-communist. Britain, France, Sweden, Denmark, and Japan (among others) also supported this kind of “democracy assistance” during the Cold War in order to maintain their own security: among the allies, along their borders, and for some, in their colonies and former colonies.

Aid for democracy promotion from all of these fronts increased dramatically towards the end of the Cold War and in the post-Cold War period. Like its predecessor, this new phase of assistance was not enacted simply to promote freedom and democracy around the world. While many politicians have expressed genuine idealism about the promotion of democracy (for example, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush), scholars also believe that “democratic

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43 Hook, 102.
44 Ibid., 104.
regimes are likely to make better political and economic partners over the long run.”

Democratic regimes are better partners because they are typically more stable, and thus less susceptible to political violence, which can lead to political and economic instability. Therefore, rather than simply promoting democracy as an ideal, in countries of economic or security interest at least, the U.S. actually placed its emphasis on promoting democratic governments, rather than simply anti-communist regimes. Beginning in the late 1980s, this assistance specifically concentrated on free and fair elections. Later, with unsatisfactory outcomes in many states whose elections were free and fair (for example the states that make up the former Soviet Bloc), donors saw the need to begin to focus on adding state institutions and judiciaries to the assistance package in order to address the necessity of having these state structures so that democracy can function.

By the mid-1990s, however, it was apparent that creating necessary state structures for all of the new democracies around the world was too costly, and aid began to focus on civil society as a cost-effective means of promoting democracy. Civil society promotion, it was argued, would create political awareness among constituents, and the voters would then demand the necessary structural changes. Encouragement of this cost-effective solution to democracy promotion has now become the mantra in both the aid and political arenas. During the Cold War, the U.S. was hesitant to support bottom-up movements because of a fear that grassroots organizing would ultimately be left-leaning as it was in Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. However, the force of civil society became apparent in the fall of the Berlin Wall when civil

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47 Ottaway and Carothers, 5.
49 Hook, 101-2.
50 Ottaway and Carothers, 6.
51 Ibid., 8.
society groups “heroically challenged communist rule” within the Communist Block. Civil society was no longer considered a potential communist threat, and its success in promoting democracy had been proven. Thereafter, international donors began to see civil society as a key component in democracy assistance. For example, during the Clinton administration, USAID included it in its strategy for building democracy, and support for advocacy NGOs, media, and human rights NGOs (among others) came to be the preferred avenues for democracy assistance. By the late 1990s, the assistance was becoming even more grassroots and decentralized in nature as an “emerging consensus stressed the connection between sustainability and the indigenous quality and character” of the assistance programs to the extent that the U.S. has begun to look past urban-based NGOs and towards programs that support “more local, rooted forms of civil society,” as the more extensive discussion below of USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) shows. As such, support for civil society has become a mainstay for any program with aims of deepening democracy.

**Development Aid**

Before the 1950s, the field of development economics did not exist. Rather it emerged in the aftermath of World War II in the economic reconstruction of Europe and extended on into the Cold War, shaping foreign policy and being shaped by it in return. The theories of this new field shaped the conditions the international financial institutions (primarily the IMF and World Bank) placed on international development aid disbursements. Up until the 1970s, modernization theory was the established framework for development aid conditionality. Modernization theory,
stemming from the supposed model of success of the developed nations, encouraged the growth of protected industry as a means to development.\(^5\) President Truman explained it best in his Point Four Message from his inaugural address:

“All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world’s human and natural resources. Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically.”\(^5\)

This parallel between developing countries and western countries’ development process made it seem logical that these countries could follow the same line of progress as those who developed before them, except this time, at a more rapid pace because there was a preset model to follow. It was clear that the west could aid the developing countries by “sharing its capital and know-how to bring these countries into the modern age of capitalism and liberal democracy.”\(^5\)

In practice, the conditions of the institutions took the form of import substitution industrialization (ISI), which meant a large state role in creating and protecting emerging industries through tariffs, a fixed exchange rate, and a plethora of export pessimism.\(^6\) Because in the 1950s, most countries were dependent on primary-product exports (usually as a legacy of colonialism),\(^6\) this plan was thought to bring developing countries along an analogous path to the developed nations who had all experienced an industrial revolution in their advancement into the modern and developed world. Therefore, loans for development during this time were given, with the understanding that the receiving government would pursue this macro-economic strategy to ensure returns on their loans.

\(^5\) See Rapley, especially pages 15-16 for an explanation of modernization.  
\(^5\) Rist, Appendix 1.  
\(^5\) Rapley, 15.  
\(^6\) Krueger, 1 provides a brief history.  
\(^6\) Ibid., 7.
By the 1970s, however, it became clear that ISI was not leading to rapid development in the developing world.\textsuperscript{62} A foreign exchange shortage as a result of exports not keeping pace with imports led to a foreign debt crisis.\textsuperscript{63} This crisis was combined with corrupt states and inefficient state enterprises which had failed to deal with the issue of incentives (Mexico’s failed state enterprises and subsequent collapse of the peso are a paradigmatic example). Because of this failure, protected industries did not produce all of the necessary goods for the internal market, and their products were ill-equipped to compete in the international market.

Additionally, at this time, with the rise to power of Margaret Thatcher and then Ronald Reagan, an increasingly conservative climate in the Western world promoted neo-classical economics. ISI failure provided the opportunity for its implementation. Trade liberalization, privatization, and fiscal austerity thus became the primary conditions for aid in this era.\textsuperscript{64} As a result, states in need of loans sold collapsed state enterprises to private international corporations.

Funding this neo-classical economic model also proved to be minimally growth enhancing and contributed to extreme economic inequality in the developing world. The disillusionment with the results of central state-led development and the inequality-enhancing implications of an increasingly open society led to the call for decentralized forms of development.\textsuperscript{65} This move was a result of a need for “strengthened governance, increased transparency and accountability, and more effective and efficient production and delivery of public goods and services.”\textsuperscript{66} This strategy thus intended to “accelerate economic growth and greater social equity, expanding participation in decision making, increasing the access of the poor to social services, [and] providing for the basic human needs of a majority of the

\textsuperscript{62} Rapley, 46.
\textsuperscript{63} Krueger, 9.
\textsuperscript{64} See Krueger, chapters 2-3.
\textsuperscript{65} Rondinelli and Cheema.
\textsuperscript{66} Cohen and Peterson, 1.
population."\textsuperscript{67} This new outlook paved the way for development assistance through more decentralized institutions such as municipal governments, NGOs, and CSOs.

**Civil Society – The Emergent Consensus**

*If, as Amartya Sen asserts, the pre-eminent development of the 20th century was the rise of democracy—then civil society has emerged in the new millennium as a global force essential to ensuring just and equitable development.*\textsuperscript{68}

As the histories of democracy assistance and development aid have shown, both groups of theorists and aid practitioners have come to a conclusion on the most effective way to promote successful democracy and development: civil society organizations working through a participatory development framework. Recent studies have also shown that democratic tendencies and higher levels of development go together,\textsuperscript{69} and while there is still discussion over the question of which comes first, democracy or development,\textsuperscript{70} there is emerging consensus that the two are complementary.\textsuperscript{71} The two fields thus come together to support civil society in order to promote democratic practices and enable participation of local people in the development process.

**Theorists and Authors**

There are a variety of authors who have written on this emerging consensus. Robert Putnam in his work on democracy in Italy, *Making Democracy Work*, shows that civil society organizations “instill in their members habits of cooperation, solidarity, and public-spiritedness” and these virtues “contribute to the effectiveness and stability of democratic government.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} Cheema, 203-4.
\textsuperscript{68} Taken from: http://www1.worldbank.org/devoutreach/winter02/article.asp?id=137.
\textsuperscript{69} See Putnam 2000, Chapter 19 and Sen, Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{70} For example, the debate between the pioneers of development (those who encouraged ISI and a strong central state thought development needed to come first) and the neo-classicalists (those who encouraged free trade thought that democracy came first).
\textsuperscript{72} Putnam 1993, 89.
Said another way, civil society organizations facilitate inter-personal trust and cooperation and as such provide accountability for democratic governance.

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam takes this analysis a step further and argues that a vibrant civic community is necessary for a flourishing economy, as well as a stable democracy. Putnam demonstrates that poorer neighborhoods in the United States have a better chance of succeeding if they build social capital. He even asserts that “social capital can help to mitigate the insidious effects of socioeconomic disadvantage.” This suggests that if people in poorer areas join together in civil society organizations, these organizations will build the norms of reciprocity and trust necessary for social capital, which can in turn mitigate their marginalized position in society.

John Clark is another contemporary theorist who has written two volumes on civil society and its role in democracy, development, and globalization. He, too, convincingly argues that participation in civil society organizations should “ensur[e] that people have influence over decisions affecting their lives,” and that development “projects will be better if they are based on the people’s own analysis of the problems they face and their solutions.” His argument suggests that a democratic and holistic development (a development that encompasses not only economic well-being, but includes health, education, and over-all contentment) will not be possible without the direct participation of local people through civil society organizations. He asserts that for development to reach the most vulnerable groups, active “participatory development is required.” However, he does recognize many of the weaknesses of this

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73 Putnam is not alone in this analysis. See for instance, Fukuyama, Coleman, and Warren (1999) also discussed above in the section on clarification of terms.
74 For a discussion of social capital, see “Clarification of Terms” above.
75 Putnam 2000, 319.
77 Clark 1997, 43.
approach. For instance, he admits that CSOs, and in particular, NGOs, have trouble with sustainable staffing and leadership regime change, designing projects that are both participatory and fundable, and deciding to whom they are accountable.\textsuperscript{78}

Milton Esman and Norman Uphoff\textsuperscript{79} were among the first to publish on local organizations as intermediaries between the state and the people in the realm of local development. In summarizing cases studies of developing countries, they conclude that local associations are the key to poverty-eradication and effective government:

> A vigorous network of membership organizations is essential to any serious effort to overcome mass poverty...we cannot visualize any strategy of rural development combining growth in productivity with broad distribution of benefits in which participatory local organizations are not prominent.\textsuperscript{80}

They argue that local organizations alone will not cure the development problem, but they are a crucial foundation and part of development.\textsuperscript{81} CSO participation should be the foundation of development because in that way local people will play the crucial role in decision-making, and it is an essential part of development because other efforts, such as in-country infrastructure (roads, etc), must be executed by the government (which, if development is founded on CSO participation, will look to CSOs for recommendations on where the infrastructure is needed). In their view, an effective institution of civil society is one in which there is a bottom up, democratic approach with social pressure as its sanction against local leaders. Thirteen years later, in a volume entitled \textit{Reasons for Hope}, Esman and Uphoff\textsuperscript{82} present successful experiences in rural development through local initiatives supported by outside donors (NGOs, universities, private people, etc). For example, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has

\textsuperscript{78} Clark 1990, 56-63.  
\textsuperscript{79} Esman and Uphoff, 1984.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 40.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 17.  
\textsuperscript{82} Krishna, Esman, and Uphoff, 1999.
grown to implement rural credit programs and open schools and clinics,\textsuperscript{83} and the Self-Help Rural Water Supply program in Malawi has organized gravity-fed rural water supply projects serving over 1 million people since the 1960s.\textsuperscript{84} To this day, Esman and Uphoff are still arguing that the most efficient, hopeful, and democratic way of doing development work is from the grassroots level.

Finally, those writing on assistance for civil society have also argued for funding local democratic processes and practices in order to promote a more just standard of living. For example, Alison Van Rooy argues for funding to be channeled to civil society organizations, showing through a variety of case studies that “if any project of social and political change is to be enduring, it must come from the voices of the local people.”\textsuperscript{85} In the absence of such practices, these projects could not endure because people would not feel ownership over them and they would not necessarily be relevant to the lives of local people. Additionally, Anita Isaacs shows in her work on “International Assistance for Democracy” that “enhanced popular participation provides a key to gaining political access and influence, to holding the political leadership accountable, and to fostering development.”\textsuperscript{86} Thus, a wide variety of theorists now agree that working with already-formed channels of participation is the most effective way to promote a blooming democracy and local economy.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 41-56.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 228-238.
\textsuperscript{85} Van Rooy, 217.
\textsuperscript{86} Isaacs 2000, 272.
Donor Organizations

This new wave of development theory – using local civil society organizations in order to facilitate participatory development – has expanded to the practices of progressive NGOs, and now even to the major international donor organizations and INGOs, which are integrating these practices into their projects. Both major and minor INGOs have been implementing the “local partner” strategy for development projects for many years.

One of the leaders in this new trend in the NGO world has been Oxfam International. Oxfam promotes “working with local partners to alleviate poverty” and ensuring that the organization facilitates local groups’ participation even in emergency relief. Some examples of Oxfam’s support of participatory projects include the “Self-Employed Women’s Association” in Ahmedabad, India and the program of Mali Assistance to Women and Children in the Sahel which is now running its own bank and organizing local literacy classes. Oxfam recognizes this need for decentralization even in its own operations, giving its local offices extensive independence in local organizing and initiatives. Each office is, however, expected to share in the participatory principle so that Oxfam promotes empowerment by involving local people in key decisions affecting their lives.

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87 This section aims to show that the concept of participatory development and the use of civil society to pursue it is accepted and touted by donors. However, it is important to note that while the rhetoric has been adopted, this does not necessarily mean that the essence of the concept is pursued in practice. For example, in searching for World Bank and USAID participatory initiatives, I found that most “participation” consisted of panels of civil society advisors for project implementation rather than actual participation and ownership of these plans. In addition, in correspondence with David Bronkema, Program Coordinator for Latin America of the American Friends’ Service Committee (AFSC) over this issue, he pointed out that in AFSC’s experience, processes, and spaces designed by the World Bank to include civil society input have serious limitations, many times because the governments themselves are opposed to such participation. However, it is not within the scope of this paper to give this issue the discussion it deserves. This paper wishes to criticize the idealism with which civil society is approached, but seeks to encourage, not discourage, the practical use of it in democracy and development initiatives. Many of these organizations should do more to put their rhetoric into practice.

88 Information found on the Oxfam International Website: www.oxfam.org.


91 Eade and Williams, 14.
Heifer International, another well-known development organization, says that its method is to help a community analyze its situation – what does it need, what are its resources? Heifer has worked all over the world, for example, in Mozambique with a goat reproduction project, in Rwanda with a cow project, and in Thailand with chickens.\textsuperscript{92} While the project is generally similar (caring for animals and sharing their offspring), locals are always involved in evaluating their own progress and, working together with Heifer, they create ambitious and visionary goals and then implement them in their community.\textsuperscript{93}

While it may be a bit more difficult to discern the criteria for accepting grant applications than it is to identify the method in which a particular NGO works, it appears that U.S.-based foundations are also encouraging their grantees to seek a local voice. For example, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was founded under the Reagan Administration and is funded by the U.S. Congress with the explicit purpose of promoting democracy abroad. The NED includes in its Statement of Principles and Objectives that, among a variety of other objectives, it seeks “to encourage the establishment and growth of democratic development” through its funding.\textsuperscript{94} Not only does the NED provide electoral assistance and monitoring for democracy promotion, but it works to train local groups in techniques in election monitoring (for example, in Haiti, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Poland)\textsuperscript{95} and sees itself as a catalyst in working directly with indigenous economic initiatives.\textsuperscript{96}

“Bottom-up” development theory has taken over development discourse to the point that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank – once

\textsuperscript{92} Found in the “Successful Projects” section of the website: www.heifer.org.
\textsuperscript{93} Information found on the Heifer International Website: http://www.heifer.org/site/c.edJRKQNFiG/b.201547/.
\textsuperscript{94} From the Statement of Principles and Objectives found at: www.ned.org/about/principlesobjectives.html.
\textsuperscript{95} Quigley, 565.
\textsuperscript{96} See the Hearing before the SubCommittee on International Operations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred First Congress, Second Session, July 19, 1990, page 13.
criticized by the academics and NGOs above for working only with governments – have been publishing papers on the benefits of participatory development. For over a decade, USAID has theoretically been practicing participatory development. Beginning with the 1993 “Statement of Principles on Participatory Development,” which closes with the assertion that “development is a people process, and our efforts must aim to support the efforts of local people…that way we will show real, lasting results,” USAID has been pursuing this strategy. Civil society assistance is considered a cross-cutting theme to promote all of the goals of USAID and is thus applied in a variety of projects. In Nepal, for example, USAID supports the Mahabirpur Community Forest User Group through advocacy training, and in Tajikistan, it has funded the implementation of the first indigenous-run “independence” radio station.

While the World Bank has a reputation for working on macroeconomic policy in developing countries, the organization has nonetheless become increasingly supportive of participatory development. Civil society organizations, the World Bank admits, have become “important channels for delivery of social services and implementation of other development programs.” A paper evaluating the success of recent World Bank projects states:

Participatory approaches that involve local communities in their own development have gained substantial support among international donors over the past quarter-century and have become increasingly important in the work of the World Bank. Community participation is an approach to development that can be used with any Bank lending instrument and across sectors. Projects can involve communities in different ways—by sharing information, consulting, collaborating, or empowering them. The process of involving communities in project activities is also expected to contribute in most cases to community capacity enhancement (emphasis added).

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97 USAID, 4.
98 Found under the “Civil Society Success Stories” section of the USAID democracy and governance page: http://www1.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/technical_areas/civil_society/.
100 World Bank Executive Summary, 1.
While it is apparent that not all – or even the majority – of the World Bank’s funds are channeled through local organizations or international NGOs, there are examples of this approach in action. Seventy-one percent of the World Bank’s 2000 portfolio of projects reported intended civil society involvement. In Mexico, the Bank is using participatory methods in the preparation of the Municipal Development Project, Bank staff members in Venezuela are providing technical assistance to over a dozen locally-led projects, and the Small Grants program is providing over $2.3 million dollars to small projects aimed at decentralizing the bank’s approach.

Finally, the Inter-American Development bank is included in this consensus. In a paper submitted by its strategic planning department, the IDB states that strengthening civil society cannot be separated from economic and social reform, but rather, it is an integral part in these reforms. The efficiency of the state, according to the IDB is also dependent upon the strength of civil society. Therefore, the IDB is pursuing projects to improve the capacity of CSOs in Argentina and Honduras and is funding Rural Productive Support Programs in Bolivia.

Thus, there is a broad agreement among development practitioners that using CSOs to promote democracy and build development is the most effective strategy. It is difficult, in fact, to find an organization that does not agree with this principle. While much of the support for this approach may indeed be warranted, the idealism with which theorists and practitioners treat it is (for reasons to be discussed below) cause for concern.

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101 When questioned on the Bank’s financial contributions to this new initiative, a bank representative said in a lecture for Susanna Wing’s Political Economies of Developing Countries class in March 2004, “About 10% of our budget is currently spent on directly supporting local initiatives.”

102 WB Progress Report, 4.

103 Ibid., 14 and 29.

104 BID, 2 and 4.

105 Found in the projects section at: www.idb.org.
Multi-Partisan Appeal

The consensus that has emerged on the necessity of civil society presence in democracy promotion and development has rarely been challenged. Those who critique some of its faults, as I will do below, are careful to point out that it is still a critical component to include in the pursuit of both the democracy and development goals set forth. It seems that many authors and organizations are hesitant to criticize this approach openly, especially within the United States, because of its bipartisan appeal.\textsuperscript{106} The use of civil society appeals to conservatives because it represents a lesser need for the state and promotes the kind of social work model that is akin to the small business model – innovative ideas working within the free market. More radical democrats are attracted to its implementation because it means that poor and marginalized people are empowered in the decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods.\textsuperscript{107}

Four Pitfalls of Civil Society

Working through civil society organizations, as described by the above theorists and practitioners, seems to be the critical component in the promotion of democracy and development. But CSOs do have their weaknesses, and it is crucial for academics and practitioners to recognize them in order to improve upon the work being done.

Proponents of civil society argue that it is a democratic mechanism for keeping government accountable, but such an argument begs the question: who keeps civil society accountable? After 10-20 years of pursuing civil society as a conduit for democratic development, one finds that while there have been many successful CSOs, this type of organization suffers from many of the same problems that government does. Below, I lay out

\textsuperscript{106} This conservative and leftist appeal of civil society extends as far back as Hegel and Gramsci. See Carothers (2004, 99) for a discussion.

\textsuperscript{107} Pearce 1993, 223.
four widely recognized weaknesses of the state in democracy and development and point out that despite the consensus in its favor, these same weaknesses exist in civil society organizations.

**Power Retention**

It has long been argued that people are self-interested actors, and that leaders are therefore prone to ensuring that they retain their power. This argument was one of the reasons for the emergence of democracy as the dominant model of government. Authoritarian rulers are likely to maintain power through all means necessary – military coups, corruption, cronyism, etc. – because a loss of position of influence means a loss of employment, power, and prestige. Because democracies institutionalize and regularize changes in power, leaders in democratic systems are more likely than their authoritarian counterparts to consider the losses associated with relinquishing power temporary, but a loss nonetheless. Civil society organizations, despite their democratic appeal, are not exempt from this same self-interested action on the part of leaders. Their leaders are just as likely as authoritarian leaders to want to preserve their power, for reasons of prestige, social status, and even economic well-being, and the lack of democratic institutions in place to keep them accountable makes this possible. In most cases, there are not even elections to decide who fills the leadership position, the most basic element of democracy.

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108 The recognition of self-interested behavior as the dominant mode of human action extends at least as far back as the biblical tradition, where it finds expression in the Genesis narrative of creation and fall and also figures prominently in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Later Christian thinkers, especially Protestant Reformers such as Luther and Calvin (see Luther’s “The Bondage of the Will” and Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*), maintained a radically negative outlook on the human capacity for selfless action. While some strains of enlightenment thought (e.g. Rousseau) emphasized a “higher” anthropology, which expressed more hope for virtuous action, Hobbes’ classic portrayal of the “state of nature” in *Leviathan* continued the influence of the more pessimistic perspective. This strain of thinking was particularly important in the development of the political philosophy of the framers of the American democracy, such as James Madison. “If men were angels,” he writes in the Federalist Number 51, “no government would be necessary.” The implication is, of course, that humans are not angels and therefore a government that includes internal controls is necessary.

109 John Clark 1991, pages 56-8 recognizes that founders of CSOs and NGOs tend to be in power over long periods of time. However, rather than seeing this as a problem for accountability, Clark sees it as a problem of replacement when the leaders move on.
Rather, leaders of CSOs tend to be self-selecting and self-appointed (founders, traditional leaders, etc.) or rise through the hierarchy of the organization in a business-like model.\textsuperscript{110}

The CSO consensus does not take this weakness into consideration. While CSOs are more local, they do not necessarily, “foster democracy and promote democratic consolidation” as their proponents might suggest.\textsuperscript{111} In addition, while the “object of development ‘from below’ is that the poor and powerless identify their own needs and interests,”\textsuperscript{112} this is not possible when leaders retain power which has not been given to them by the voices of the people they supposedly represent. Support for CSOs that have leaders in a position of power who have no sanction from local people for that power would not empower people with democratic affinities and ensure a strong voice of local needs for development projects.

\textit{Corrupt Rent-Seeking}

Corruption is “the illegal use of public power for private gain,”\textsuperscript{113} and it exists in all parts of the world. While there is debate over its effects on growth (some argue that corruption is growth enhancing while others it is growth retarding),\textsuperscript{114} it is clear that corrupt rent-seeking exists from the evidence presented in the IRIS dataset which shows that every country in the world has at least some degree of corruption.\textsuperscript{115} Among CSOs, there is also evidence of this kind of corruption, but it is a fact that is alluded to quite often in private although rarely discussed openly.\textsuperscript{116} The tendency of authoritarian power structures, as discussed above, lends itself to corrupt practices because of the lack of accountability inherent in CSO leadership. But the presence of corruption is glossed over in the literature on the benefits of CSOs as conduits for

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., Pearce 1997, 258.
\textsuperscript{111} Ottaway and Carothers, 11.
\textsuperscript{112} Pearce 1993, 226.
\textsuperscript{113} Goetz and Jenkins, 35.
\textsuperscript{114} See Rock and Bennett pages 999-1000 for a review of the existent literature on the subject.
\textsuperscript{116} Carothers 1999, 217.
democracy and development even though its presence undermines the reasons for using CSOs for development and democracy. Corruption not only diminishes faith in leadership among the constituency (and thus their faith in the practice of representation), but it takes directly from the beneficiaries which CSOs intend to support. When money is taken away from projects, those projects are unable to impact all of those intended, thus reducing the effect of participatory development measures.

Civil society as a whole is a tool to keep government accountable to the people, and, presumably, the people keep the CSOs accountable. However, there is nothing to ensure this accountability. There are, in most cases, no elections during which the CSO members might replace corrupt leaders. In many instances, CSO members may not even be aware of the corruption because there is often no public accounting, and CSO members may be ignorant of the amounts of money that come into the organization or what is put into the projects. If “a high level of corruption can make public policies ineffective and can also draw investment and economic activities away from productive pursuits toward the towering rewards of underhanded activities,” then this opening for corruption in CSOs casts doubt on civil society as the “global force essential to ensuring just and equitable development,” because it enables injustice and inequality.

Representation

This dilemma leads to the next pitfall: representation. Just as electoral results do not necessarily represent the petitions of local people, CSOs do not necessarily represent all or even most of the populations that they serve. These organizations can be controlled by a small segment of the population, aiming to speak for (rather than on behalf of) the larger

\[1^{17}\] Sen, 275.
\[18^{17}\] Taken from: http://www1.worldbank.org/devoutreach/winter02/article.asp?id=137.
\[19^{19}\] Isaacs 2000, 260.
community. The problem is two-fold. First, membership in CSOs is often infeasible for the poorest of the poor (precisely those who CSOs seek to serve). Many CSOs attempt to provide services for the poorest members of the community, but they most often do so without the participation of those individuals because participation violates the “survival constraints” of people living on the edge of subsistence. Second, because of the aforementioned lack of elections in many CSOs, even those community members who are able to participate may not have a voice within organizations. Many CSOs therefore “speak in the name of constituencies that have given them no mandate.” As a result, they need not be democratic in their distribution of benefits or resources. Thus, some CSOs have yet to gain legitimacy which “relates to the right to represent and the consent of the represented.” Many CSO members have not consented to their representation by CSO leaders. Yet donors, by promoting and funding CSOs for their democracy promotion campaigns assume that local organizations must be democratic and therefore representative of the local population. “Without meaningful accountability to their ‘beneficiaries,’ [CSOs] could seriously distance [themselves] from the poor and their own social structures.”

Leaders with Social and Economic Superiority

One of the hindrances of democratic government in its ability to represent people of diverse backgrounds is that it is composed of people from the middle to upper classes of society. Even representatives of parties that are “for the people” generally come from an

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120 Ottaway and Carothers, 11.
121 Baland and Platteau 1999.
122 Ottaway and Carothers, 11.
123 Bebbington and Riddell, 112.
124 Pearce 1997, 258.
125 Pearce 1993, 226.
126 Verner finds that Latin American legislators in the 1960s and 1970s had high levels of education for the region. Fowler comments that congressional candidates in the United States come primarily “from the ranks of the highly educated professional and business classes (1996, 431).
upper-middle class background, or at least an upper-middle class education, because it is necessary to have financial and human resources readily available in order to run for office. This social and economic superiority of leaders is not unique to the political scene. It exists in CSOs as well. Many CSOs in developing countries have outside founders from educated classes or more developed countries. Others have local leaders, but these leaders typically emerge from the upper strata of already formed social hierarchies or from economic or educational privilege. Even though this phenomenon does not necessarily indicate a serious hindrance, it places major obstacles in the way of the understanding of local needs and demands because the leaders are not attuned to the realities of everyday life for those they represent. This occurrence is not adequately addressed in the current civil society literature, and it again poses a problem for the argument put forth by the consensus, that CSOs accurately represent “the voices of the local people” that are vital “if any project of social and political change is to be enduring.”

**The Overly Idealistic Model**

Amidst the emergent civil society consensus, it is not the intention of this paper to argue that civil society assistance should be abandoned, but rather that its weaknesses demand that implementation should be altered, especially in the sensitive social and political contexts that follow internal armed conflict and civil war.

In Putnam’s social capital argument, civil society organizations build social capital on the norms of reciprocity and trust that exist among the actors. The reverse, however, is also true: social capital is necessary for the functioning of civil society. In some cases, social capital already exists and thus involvement in CSOs increases this social capital. However, in other

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127 This dilemma is mentioned briefly in Esman and Uphoff, 187-193.
129 Pearce 1993, 226.
130 Van Rooy, 217.
cases, a dearth of social capital precludes the creation of more social capital through CSO participation. This may explain why there are mixed results in CSO success.

The civil society consensus is based on the analysis that civil society creates more social capital, and there are indeed some positive results in civil society organizations. But this is because when social capital, and thus trust, already exists among members of a community, many of the pitfalls of civil society presented can be mitigated because those involved in the CSO already adhere to an unregulated set of norms of honesty and reciprocal trust as a part of their set of social capital. When honesty and reciprocal trust are present, power retention is seen as a “benevolent dictator” who accurately represents and benefits their group; corruption is not tolerated as a norm; members’ opinions are taken into account and tolerated by others; and socially and economically superior leaders use their status to benefit those they support.

Civil society is not always, however, quite so “warm and fuzzy.”

It seems that this model breaks down when the norms that are necessary to create social capital do not exist. In order to create the kinds of conditions necessary for civil society to be democratic, representative, and accountable to the population, and thus create more trust and social capital, a critical mass of social capital must be already present among members of the group. Otherwise, civil society does not have a foundation on which to build even more social capital.

As we have seen, trust and social networks are the two vital components of social capital. If neither of these inputs exists, the critical mass of social capital cannot exist. Thus, when trust and reciprocal social networks do not exist among CSO members and these CSOs do not have institutions in place to ensure accurate representation and accountability, they face the kinds of challenges to their work evidenced in the four pitfalls: power is easily abused, groups are misrepresented, corrupt rent-seeking occurs, and there is no democratic accountability. These

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problems in turn reinforce the lack of trust amongst members and create a vicious cycle wherein lack of trust begets lack of trust and civil society does not create social capital, but rather precludes its growth.

In the case of Guatemala, studied in chapters two and three, we see civil society failures in promoting democratic accountability and development. While this is obviously not always the case, this paper proposes that war, specifically internal armed conflict and counter-insurgency warfare, breaks down social networks, destroying the trust that arose from them, and thus valuable social capital. In the aftermath of such wars, the trauma of conflict and the structures that enable violence make it difficult to rebuild trust and social capital enhancing networks of reciprocity. Thus, in such societies, CSOs face particularly acute challenges, which those who promote participatory development must bear in mind.
**CHAPTER TWO**

**Political and Structural Violence: The Guatemalan Context**

The thirty-six year internal armed conflict that raged in Guatemala from 1960-1996 affected all realms of life: the economy, the development of democracy, and social relations. The economy went into a downward spin because of the political instability. The democratic gains made during the “10 years of spring” from 1944-54 were reversed, and more than two decades of military-led authoritarianism followed. Social relations and networks were destroyed in the affected communities. The high intensity counter-insurgency strategy pursued during the 1980s left many communities completely devastated and others with newly imposed power structures that inflicted daily terror on the population. The after-effects of the counter-insurgency strategy, coupled with the structural violence of extreme poverty and marginalization, creates on-going trauma in every day life which has dissolved the fabric of trust among members of society. It is against the backdrop of this broken economic, political, and social framework that civil society organizations today find themselves attempting to create improvement in the daily lives of Guatemalans.

**Macro History of Development**

Between the years of 1960-2000, Guatemala performed as a lower-middle income country, according to the World Bank, and had slow, but relatively steady, overall growth over this period. The exception to this trend was at the height of the conflict in the 1980s, which witnessed a decline in GDP. The relatively positive picture painted by GDP figures fades,  

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1 See graph and explanation below.  
2 See Handy, Chapter 5.  
3 See Green, Manz, REMHI, CEH, and Sanford.
however, if one takes into consideration the income inequality of the country (as measured by the GINI coefficient): Guatemala is one of the most unequal countries in Latin America. In addition, as we look at Guatemala’s performance in human development (health and education), we find again that it performs poorly in comparison to other countries of its income level. This inequality is both a cause and its deepening a consequence of the internal armed conflict.

Looking at the above graph,\(^4\) GDP per capita over time, we find that Guatemala has not grown at quite the rate of the whole region. Beginning at $1000 per capita in 1960 (in constant 1995 dollars), Guatemala rose to about $1700 per capita by the late 1970s but plunged below $1500 during the early 1980s as a result of the intensity of the internal armed conflict during these years. The region as a whole, however, saw steady growth over the period, beginning at $2000 per capita in 1960 and ending at approximately $4000 per capita in 2000.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) Data from the World Development Indicators database online at www.wdi.org.

\(^5\) The graph also shows that the Latin American and Caribbean region as a whole saw a drop in the 1980s. It is widely accepted that this was as a result of the oil price shocks during these years. Guatemala, however, as an oil-producing country (although its production is small), should not have experienced these shocks at this time. The only other apparent explanation is physical destruction and capital flight as a result of the height of the conflict. In another paper for Michael Rock’s class on Development Economics in October 2005, I explore this issue further.
While some of the indicators of GDP growth portray Guatemala as on the track to development, Guatemala’s GINI coefficient—the measure of inequality in a country with 0 being perfect equality and 1 perfect inequality—of .599 shows that while some sectors of the country are doing well, the entire population does not share in this growth. Guatemala has one of the highest GINI coefficients in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), which is a region known for its lower-middle to middle income economies where the top 10% of the population has a majority of the wealth. This number is a reflection of Guatemala’s income distribution, in which the highest 20% of the income bracket earns 64.1% of the income while the bottom 20% earns 2.6% of national income.

Another new way to measure development beyond solely income per capita is the Human Development Index, or HDI, which ranks all countries on a scale from 0 (lowest human development) to 1 (highest human development) and uses real per capita income, life expectancy at birth, adult literacy, and mean years of schooling in order to rank countries. HDI data from 2000 shows that Guatemala’s score of .65 falls well below the regional average of .797. Because these are relatively new measurement tools, there are no measurements for the HDI and the GINI over time. However, before the war, the same complaints of inequality are shown in political literature, and the reversal of the only historical attempt to remedy the inequality, the “ten years of spring,” was one of the roots of the war. The effects of the war made this inequality even more drastic. The majority of those in the bottom 20% of the income bracket and those who are illiterate and experiencing the most health problems today (and throughout history) are Mayan indigenous. The HDI of indigenous people is .544, whereas non-indigenous people have an HDI.

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6 GINI Coefficient data in Country Paper Cross Section Data 2000 found on Blackboard and derived from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators Data Online for Guatemala.
7 Todaro and Smith, 59.
8 For structural inequalities, see Carmack pages 14-15, Handy chapters 3 and 4, and CONAVIGUA, page 4. On the ten years of spring, see Handy chapter 5. See further explanation of both in the section below.
of .684. Some 26.4% of indigenous people live in extreme poverty while only 7.7% of non-
indigenous face this kind of poverty. Only 69.8% of indigenous people are literate versus 89% 
of non-indigenous people. About 68.8% of indigenous people suffer from malnutrition in 
Guatemala compared to only 35.4% of non-indigenous people. Chronic malnutrition afflicts 
34% of indigenous people, but only 11.1% of non-indigenous people.

The majority of those affected by the violence were also Mayan indigenous who now 
mourn not only the loss of loved ones, but also for the loss of property and sources of income as 
a result of the war. It can be inferred, therefore, since there has been growth over time in the 
country as a whole, but those affected by the war have experienced loss, that the inequalities 
(which were a root cause of the war in the first place) have deepened as a result of the war.

These two measures (HDI and GINI) statistically show the realities of Guatemala’s poor, 
mostly Mayan indigenous people living in the highlands. In some areas, the peasants make on 
average below the $1 per person a day standard which the World Bank uses as the rule of thumb 
for extreme poverty – many do not have access to education, and fewer can find readily 
accessible clean water or health care. To illustrate this point, in my study of thirty-five 
indigenous families in Santiago Atitlán, a Mayan Tz’utuhil town, I found that only six families 
make above $1 dollar a day per person, and of those, two make between $1.50 and $2.00 a day 
per person, and the rest make below $1.50 a day per person. All those interviewed drink water 
from the nearby lake – a contaminated body of water known to be filled with hepatitis A,

9 Calculations in the UN Occasional Paper on the basis of ENS 89 and Encovi 2000. Juan Alberto Fuentes, Edgar 
Balsells, and Gustavo Arriola, from the Human Development Report Office of the UN Development Programme. 
An Occassional Paper for HDR 2003. “Guatemala: Human Development Progress Towards the MDGs at the Sub-
National Level” (2).
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo. Informe Nacional de Desarrollo. “Guatemala: Una Agenda 
para el Desarrollo Humano.” Anexo Estadico 1-4 y Informe Completo.
13 Study conducted by the author in Santiago Atitlán from July 4-August 6, 2005.
parasites, and amoebas, which residents also use for bathing and washing clothes. Over half of the families (20) have running water which in most cases they share with their neighbors, but this water comes untreated from the lake as well. Only three of these families have drainage or septic systems for human waste, and of these three, all live in the center of town, which is decidedly more developed than the surrounding aldeas, or villages. Four or five of the women interviewed can speak some Spanish, but only two can write simple sentences and mathematical sums. This snapshot of the difficulties, lack of education, and health risks of everyday life is only a small illustration of the kind of structural violence that existed before the violence of the war but that was made more extreme by the loss of property and many heads of household.

As a whole, it is obvious that Guatemala is by no means an example of successful development over the past 40 years. Income per capita has slightly increased and some health and education statistics have improved, but when compared with the Latin American and Caribbean region as a whole, Guatemala under-performs, especially in terms of income equality and human development. As such, Guatemala has a long road towards sustainable development in the country as a whole.

**The Macro-Political Historical Context**

During the internal armed conflict of Guatemala, some 200,000 people were killed and over a million displaced. Hundreds of massacres over the course of the war were reported in communities all over the country, and the number of torture and rape victims cannot be determined. According to reports of the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH),\(^\text{14}\) the U.N.-sanctioned Guatemalan truth commission, 83% of the 1.2 million direct victims were Mayan

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Many more were indirectly affected by the economic and social turmoil the war created in the majority Mayan communities in which it was waged. Based on the testimonies of 9,000 individuals in the aftermath of the war, the CEH concluded that the army or affiliated paramilitary forces committed 93 percent of the atrocities during the war, whereas the guerrilla forces only committed three percent, and the perpetrators of the remaining four percent were unknown.

**Structural Inequalities**

Since the Spanish conquest of Guatemala in the early 1500s, Guatemala has been wrought with structural inequality. The indigenous peoples of Guatemala “are the poorest, most exploited, and most discriminated against sector of the Guatemalan population,” even though they comprise more than the majority of the population. The current agrarian structure, the poverty associated with it, and racism are all legacies of this exploitation. Upon their arrival, the Spaniards conquered and titled most of the land in Guatemala creating a system of *fincas*, large amounts of land owned by Spaniards but typically worked by *indígenas*. In an agrarian economy, which Guatemala has been throughout its history, this type of land-holding structure is the root of poverty and inequality. By the 1950s this land structure meant that the majority of the population (which was indigenous) did not own enough land for subsistence farming. In the Mayan highlands, this problem was particularly severe as the average size of farm units in this area was only 1.3 hectares per person. The top 10% of the economic elite (typically individuals

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15 CEH, 85.
16 Carmack, 14.
17 The Spanish *indígena* means someone of indigenous ethnic identity. I use this term and its plural (*indígenas*) in this thesis in order avoid using the more confusing English translations, “indigenous person” and “indigenous people.”
18 For statistical data, see the section above on economic development
19 Carmack, 15.
of Spanish decent), however, owned the majority of the land. This economy was founded on race-polarization and discrimination that continues today. From the moment of their arrival, the Spaniards considered themselves “biologically and culturally superior” and this was passed on through the generations to the ladino population today. Though less overt in their racism in the aftermath of the Peace Accords, there is still a clear sense of inferiority projected onto the indigenous population by ladinos. “The structure of economic, cultural and social relations in Guatemala,” continues a publication by the Coordinator of Organizations for the Reparations of the Mayan People, “has been profoundly excluding [of the Mayan people], reflecting the colonial history.” Throughout post-Columbian Guatemalan history, indígenas have thus been excluded from positions of political and economic power and opportunities. They are not only marginalized economically like the 35 women from the interviews, but also politically and socially.

*The Ten Years of Spring*

On July 14, 1944, under pressure from a reformist alliance of students, academics, professionals, and business people, the dictatorial President of Guatemala since 1931, Jorge Ubico, relinquished power to a military junta composed of three generals. When elections, which were promised by the junta, were delayed, a coup quickly installed another junta which included one civilian member. This junta, under pressure from the student-led coalition, followed through on its commitment, and Juan José Arévalo emerged as the winner in the elections held in late 1944. His administration and the subsequent administration of Colonel

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20 CEH, 82-86.
21 Ibid., 86.
22 *Ladino* refers to those Guatemalans today of Spanish cultural and biological decent. Also, for a more detailed discussion on race relations in Guatemala, see the CEH especially pages 86-94.
23 *Coordinadora de Organizaciones para el Resarcimiento del Pueblo Maya*, page 4.
24 Handy, 105.
Jacobo Arbenz, are considered the “ten years of spring,” because they delivered a variety of social and economic reforms to benefit the country’s lower classes and address the unequal land structures. These policies included the promotion of small-scale industry and small-scale farmers, “both of which required large tracts of land and a new type of salaried agricultural labor,” and this threatened the upper strata of Guatemala’s traditional social structures. The controversial agrarian reform law, which jeopardized the interests of both the Guatemalan land-owning elite and the American United Fruit Company land-holdings, came into being in 1952, and by this time, the opposition was becoming desperate. Accusations of the existence of communism in Guatemala in the beginnings of the Cold War, and the threat of business interests moved the United States to support this opposition. In 1954, a CIA-sponsored coup headed by ex-Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas toppled the regime and reversed its policies, beginning the coalition of military and economic elites that was to rule for the next thirty years.

The First Guerrilla Movement

After the destruction of the democratic regime and the subsequent closing of political spaces by the military, some of those loyal to the equality-enhancing ideals of Arbenz and Arévalo, including many young military officers who had been involved in a failed 1960 junior officers’ revolt, took to the mountains to form a guerilla movement. In the new government, the Comité Nacional de Defensa contra El Comunismo (The National Defense Committee Against Communism) was founded and made responsible for making a list of all those who had participated in the “communist” activity of the former governments. While the guerrilla forces during this time were never strong, the military used the existence of a guerilla movement to justify the repressive tactics it pursued against those people named on the list, some of whom

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25 REMHI, 185.
26 Handy, 124.
were part of the guerrilla movement and others who were simply democratic community leaders. The guerrilla organizations of the early 1960s had two primary centers of operations: Guatemala City and the eastern departments of Zacapa and Izabal. The leaders of the forces in the city were targeted and “disappeared” by paramilitary death squads operating there. In the eastern departments, however, because the difficult terrain provided more cover to the guerrillas, the military identified its victims by geographical proximity to the guerrilla strong-holds. In October 1966, a military assault on the guerilla’s operational areas in the eastern departments killed some 5,000 to 10,000 civilians and succeeded in virtually eliminating the guerilla forces there. By the early 1970s, the guerrilla movement was inactive. Having silenced the guerrillas, the military and its paramilitary forces confronted “social and political movements, including peasant leagues, church-based groups, student and labor unions,” and this repression served to create more sympathy among the population for the return of the guerrilla forces.

*The Second Movement*

After a period of exile in Mexico, the founders of the guerrilla movement returned to Guatemala to form the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (The Guerrilla Army of the Poor, EGP), designed to fight a prolonged people’s war. This time, the movement based itself in the primarily Mayan highlands where inequality and poverty were most drastic, entering Guatemala in the Quiché and continuing to expand to the south and east. The guerrillas, however, were never really well-equipped for warfare, and their impact was still minimal. As such, the violence still remained at relatively low levels since the guerrilla movement had not yet presented a viable

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27 REMHI, 199.
28 Ibid., 200.
29 Schirmer, 36.
30 REMHI, 203.
31 Isaacs 2003, 2.
threat to the state. But as the threat (or the perception of a threat) grew, so did the indiscriminate violence of the military.

*Lucas García and the Scorched Earth Policy*

Lucas García was elected President in 1978. His time in office saw a drastic increase in the reach and intensity of government repression. The low-level and targeted repression of the 1970s gave way to a scorched earth campaign that terrorized the Mayan highland population leaving an estimated 35,000 dead.\(^{32}\) Seeing the growth of support for popular movements and the guerillas in the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake, the regime perceived an increasing guerrilla threat. Since the guerrillas had targeted primarily Mayan areas for their campaigns, the military began to see the two groups in a strong alliance with one another. Broad and indiscriminate violence followed.\(^{33}\) In response, the population began to join the guerrillas in order to take revenge or protect their communities from further harm.\(^{34}\) The guerrillas’ language of a “people’s war” against the repression began to take root in some communities, and thus, rather than destroying the guerrilla support, the Lucas García regime may have actually increased it.\(^{35}\)

*Ríos Montt’s Government*

On March 23, 1982, yet another coup installed General Efrain Ríos Montt as President of Guatemala. His regime pursued a new strategy aimed at destroying the emerging support for the guerrillas. General Héctor Alejandro Gramajo Morales described the impetus for the shift in strategy in March 1982 as follows:

“It was clear to us in the Army General Staff that a paradox existed in the use of force (repression) to bring peace to the country. There was a clear need to produce peace by other

\(^{32}\) Shirmer, 44.
\(^{33}\) REMHI, 219.
\(^{34}\) See, for example, Morales Interviews, Part 1, page 39.
\(^{35}\) REMHI, 221 and Stoll, 78.
means, perhaps more complicated, more sophisticated, more elaborated, and more time-consuming, but at the same time, more humanitarian, directed toward solving, alleviating or eliminating the causes affecting peace.”

His report shows that the new leaders of the Guatemalan military recognized the “paradox” of the success of the García tactics in creating even more support for the guerrillas through their indiscriminate repression. This recognition gave way to the new strategy which included, most importantly, an increase in the number of active troops and the creation of Civil Defense Patrols (PAC) and “model villages.” The increase in the number of troops was possible because “young indigenous men were literally grabbed off the streets to be drafted as conscripts” in order to fulfill the vast needs of the military and the newly created civil defense patrols (PACs), which were a crucial part of the counter-insurgency strategy. Once one was “voluntarily” taken to be a part of these institutions, dissent or desertion meant death.

Involvement in the PAC was a way for local indigenous people to distance themselves from the guerilla/Mayan coalition by allying themselves with the army. It was not optional, however, as those who refused to patrol would be identified as guerillas and targeted for repression; this new strategy forced the population to take sides thereby dividing communities.

By forcing people into military service in their own communities the unimaginable happened – neighbors began to kill neighbors. The purpose of this organization was to involve the communities in the counter-insurgency offensive, “fulfilling the long-held military dream of virtually complete control of rural Guatemala by replacing existing village government with a military instrument,” and thereby dividing communities and reducing support for the insurgents.

The military was successful in this endeavor. The effects of the PAC were tremendous – despite

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36 Quoted in Schirmer, 22.
37 Schirmer, 35.
38 Isaacs 2003, 2.
39 Davis, 28.
40 Schirmer, 93.
their late implementation in the course of the war, one out of every five atrocities committed during the war was attributed to the civil defense patrols.\footnote{REMHI, 12.} It was during this period of counter-insurgency, specifically through the vehicle of the PAC, that community solidarity and remnants of social organization were destroyed.

The model villages were used as a way for the army to address the other reason that the population joined the guerrillas – poverty. They developed these villages with houses and provided the inhabitants with work in exchange for food. It was however, simply the easiest way to exert the most control and surveillance over inhabitants, and many of the “programs” were not what they seemed. Some described the villages as “virtual concentration camps where the peasants were kept against their will with little provision for their well-being.”\footnote{Handy, 261.} The villagers did not always have the tools for the work they were supposed to do, and many had to sell their food in order to rent the necessary tools.\footnote{Sanford, 113.} Their creation was also a way for the army to coerce many who had fled to the mountains to return under an “amnesty” for the “wrongs” they had committed with guerrillas in the mountains.\footnote{Ibid., 110-12.} Once they “turned themselves in,” the army would proceed to interrogate them. Then, the local PAC would continue with the interrogations by observing their every action through twenty-four hour patrols.\footnote{Ibid., 113-15.} Military training and reeducation were also required of each member of the model village:

“They had to raise and salute the flag every morning, learn military hymns, and master disciplined military formations and slogans…the military sought to construct a new past, one that portrayed the army as the savior from the monstrous guerrillas rather than as the perpetrator of the destruction.”\footnote{Manz, 159.}
The model villages were thus not a tool of development but rather a tool of control and a vehicle for fear which brought together people from fragmented and diverse communities who at times were not even from the same language background. The camps were clearly “part of the government campaign to destroy the foundation of village life and to reform it with substantial military control.” This was another way in which the army destroyed the social fabric of highland communities.

*The Transitional Governments*

By 1985, Guatemala’s inability to receive military and economic aid, the withdrawal of many business interests because of the violence, and their “pariah” reputation in the international climate led to the army’s endorsement of a return to civilian rule. This move gave way to a renewal of international (primarily U.S.) aid, and, as one guerrilla commander admitted, it weakened the guerrillas: “when the civilian governments take over, this [the population’s support of the guerrillas] then disappears.” But under a strong government-military alliance, the disappearances, murders, and massacres continued, albeit less frequently than in the early 1980s, despite the continued vigilance of communities by the PAC. This gradual decline continued until peace talks began in 1994.

*The Peace Accords*

The Peace Accords were finally signed on December 29, 1996 by both the Guatemalan Government and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity), the guerrilla coalition. While there was agreement on the importance of addressing human rights, the rights of indigenous people, and a timetable for implementing the peace agreements, almost ten years later, Guatemala remains a torn society.

47 Handy, 261.
48 Isaacs 2003, 4.
49 Quoted in Isaacs 2003, 4.
because the peace accords did not adequately address “the indissoluble link between structural and political violence” thus perpetuating “exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness.”

Gangs, social cleansing groups, and others maintain their own rule of law. Communities have not been rebuilt, and those who seek reconciliation and reparations for rebuilding are threatened, attacked, and on occasion murdered by “those most responsible for the worst atrocities [who] have resorted instead to renewed violations of international human rights, overseeing or condoning the reemergence of clandestine death squads.” Those living in affected communities still live the daily fear that was pervasive during the conflict.

The Micro-Perspective

The country-wide statistics and history show evidence of a brutal internal armed conflict. The scorched earth policy destroyed countless lives and the physical infrastructure of many communities, and the Ríos Montt regime’s implementation of the PAC and model villages bitterly divided communities. However, it is much easier to dismiss this macro picture of history because it dehumanizes the effects of the violence and sufficiently demonstrates neither its devastating effects on individual lives and communities nor the intricate ways in which it destroyed the social fabric of Guatemalan communities. Recounted below are only a few of the many stories of the conflict which have been collected, but they include personal examples of the country-wide history presented above: stories of victims, conflicted perpetrators (who in a way are victims in their own right), the terror, destruction of social fabric and customs, and the legacy it has left behind. It is the collection of thousands of similar stories that together explain why Guatemalan society is so fragmented today.

50 Green, 49.
51 Isaacs 2003, 11.
Stories of the Conflict

Linda Green was one of the anthropologists who worked in Guatemala during the heat of the conflict. She spent most of her time in Xe’caj, a Kachikel village in the department of Sololá. In her work, *Fear as Way of Life*, she documents the lives of women in this village which experienced the intensity of the internal armed conflict. The women told her their personal stories in their own way:

Doña Maria, age fifty-four, had had a constant headache since the day they disappeared her husband several years ago. “It never leaves me,” she said.

Doña Juana, age sixty said, “I have pain in my heart.” She could not forget witnessing the brutal killings of her husband and son.

Doña Elena was thirty-eight. Her husband was disappeared and killed in another village seven years before. She had constant headaches, gastritis, and heart pain.52

These stories are not uncommon in Guatemala.53 Many more women can tell of the brutal killings and disappearances of their husbands, sons, or fathers. Most of them mention the physical pain experienced ever since their loved one was taken from them – heart ache, headache, nervios, and susto54 – and also the anguish of being unable to provide for their families.

Like Linda Green, I spent most of my time in one town, Santiago Atitlán, with a group of women, many of them widows. Of thirty-five women interviewed during July-August 2005, twenty-four had a total of thirty-nine family members who were killed as a result of the conflict. Only eleven of the thirty-five reported that none of their close relatives had been killed during the war. Others reported up to three of four family members dead. One woman, Concepción,

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52 Green, 116.
53 Many more similar stories have been collected by the REMHI, Anita Isaacs, Beatrice Manz, and Victoria Sanford.
54 Nervios, or nerves, is a term described by many Guatemalans as a symptom of traumatic events. It is similar to being nervous that something could happen again. Susto, or fright, is another explanation of someone’s state of being during trauma. One of Linda Green’s interviewees describes it: “The spirit of the person is nothing more than life itself. All living things have a spirit, although sometimes the spirit of a person will abandon that person physically, socially, psychologically, and morally, when that person is preoccupied, when their energy is low and they are thinking of other things: the violence, how to survive. Something may suddenly frighten them, and their spirit will abandon them and go into the spirit of another living thing” (Green 122).
recounted that two of her sons and her husband were kidnapped by the army. Through tears, she explained that she is a part of the group of women with which I was collaborating because, while some of her daughters are still alive, her sons and husband are not around to help and support her, and as a result of their deaths, she is in too much pain to work. Candelaria, a normally exuberant woman, explained with immense pain in her face that after her husband disappeared, her son became bed-ridden because of his susto. “Only my daughter and I can work now,” she says. Andrea, another group member, recounted that her son, age 13, was murdered in the December 2, 1990 massacre in Santiago Atitlán. Since that time, she says, her husband has been sick from depression and unable to work. In the aftermath of the massacre in Santiago, the community organized and petitioned the government to have the military base removed from their community. Since their success, the army has not returned to Santiago. Many of the women, however, express the most anguish about the inability to adequately support themselves and their families because of the loss of husband or son. The destruction of families was thus not simply an emotional loss, but also a distinctly physical loss – through the embodiment of violence (seen in the headaches, heart pain, nervios, and susto) and the increased poverty the families experienced in their loss.

Repression was not, however, as random as these stories might seem to imply. Selective repression against community leaders was commonplace, and was aimed at crushing organizational efforts. The REMHI provides this example:

“They left my dead father bound and riddled with bullets; and his face totally destroyed so that we family members wouldn’t be able to identify him…This was because the deceased was extremely religious, very active, and he liked to be part of improvement committees, and he was highly regarded by the community.”

55 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, July 4, 2005.
56 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, July 11, 2005.
57 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, August 6, 2005.
58 REMHI, 5.
This kind of repression was effective, as it discouraged collective organization and action and made those “highly regarded by the community” wary of taking on too much of a leadership position. Only the army would exert control, and one accepted this reality passively or faced the consequences. This legacy lives on today as leaders are not easily trusted, but yet their orders are passively accepted.

In Xe’caj and Santiago, the repression was typically selective, but in other places, especially in the Quiché, entire communities were destroyed. “We were always persecuted” explains a villager from the Quiché, “When the army came in, it chopped everything down and burned the houses…we were always fleeing into the mountains.”\(^{59}\) The village of Santa María Tzejá where Beatrice Manz worked was also forced to flee complete desolation of their community: “the day after the massacre…the clearing at the center of the village was a blackened scar…Santa María Tzejá lay smoldering and its inhabitants either had been murdered or had fled into the rainforest.”\(^{60}\) Many then spent months or years in the jungle or managed to flee to the Mexican border. In these cases, those who fled the violence together were able to support and depend upon each other,\(^{61}\) but those who were captured in route or hiding in the jungle were forced to return and be incorporated into a new military-controlled village comprised of about 40% former inhabitants and 60% new inhabitants (who were given “vacated” land by the military) in a collection of 7 different ethno-linguistic groups and 5 different religious denominations.\(^{62}\) This new “community” was actually fragmented in every way possible, and this fragmentation gave rise to conflicts over land tenancy between new and old inhabitants.\(^{63}\)

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 127.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., 124.
\(^{62}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
Witnessing the destruction of one’s family and community led many to sympathize with
the guerrillas’ cause, and as the macro-history showed, many took up arms in response to the
government’s repression of the “guerrilla territories.” According to a man from Cobán, this was
because “we believed they [the guerrillas] were our arms to resist, because the truth was that we
had no one to stand up for us. The situation, as we saw it, was the same one in which the
guerrillas walked, talked, and fought.” Beatrice Manz also notes an increase in guerrilla
recruitment after an increase in violence. For example, in the aftermath of a highly political
murder and funeral where the military created havoc by patrolling with helicopters and machine
guns, the children of the victim and many of his followers joined the guerrilla movement. “The
repression was growing,” said one witness, “but so was the resistance.”

Later, after the Ríos Montt regime began its new strategy, many were forced into
choosing sides for fear of being labeled a guerrilla because of remaining inactive. One man
describes that “some of us, out of fear that they would kill us, you know, forced ourselves to
attend the meetings that they [the military] would hold because whoever did not attend was a spy
to them.” This necessity for secrecy and the pervasive fear led to many social changes. The
REMHI describes evidence of restricted communication, withdrawal from organizational
processes, social isolation, and community distrust as among the major social effects of the
violence. As one man put it: “There were constant calls for silence, to keep from discussing
anything. That’s what I heard; every single person’s daily life was filled with danger.”

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64 REMHI 8.
65 Manz, 109.
66 Ibid.
67 REMHI, 9.
68 Ibid., 10.
Another echoes his words: “The army began to change people’s ideas. It became difficult to trust in them.”69

This man from the Quiché was right to not trust people, even his neighbors – many were using the violence as an excuse to escalate other conflicts, for example, over land: “there are many people who I know in other villages,” says a man from Huehuetenango, “who, because of problems over land [such as] ‘this brother of mine wants to take my land, [said] let’s take his life,’ and then the killing started.”70 Many personal squabbles were settled during this period, and envidia, or envy, has been seen as a major cause of conflict on the local level. In one example, a young man, René, was only a baby when his father was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by the army. His mother was shot in the back three months later.71 René was raised by his grandparents and his uncles; the eldest, Bárbaro, recently passed away. On his death bed, he was constantly asking to speak with René, and when René came, he received the testimony of his uncle:

“jealous of the better land René’s grandfather had left to René’s father, the uncles betrayed their half brother. When the military came to town to round up the guerrillas, the real guerrillas in town – René’s uncles – instead denounced René’s father and several others who had no connection to the insurgency.”72

Disputes and infusions of jealousy such as these became easy to resolve by simply denouncing one’s foe to a soldier or guerrilla fighter thereby adding to the daily existence of violence in communities, neighborhoods, and even families.

The combatants too have stories of the traumatic events they experienced. Even though many committed atrocities, their guilt is also covered in victimization. One PAC member describes his unfortunate situation: “And that officer told us that if we didn’t kill them, they

69 Ibid., 11.
70 Ibid., 17.
71 Isaacs 2006, 17.
72 Ibid.
were going to kill all of us. And that’s how it came about that we had to do it.”

Those trying to understand why it was that neighbors killed neighbors should look to these examples where the Ríos Montt regime’s strategy was extremely effective in forcibly dividing communities by threat of death. Some who joined the guerrillas also felt that there was no other way. Responding to the question of why he joined the insurgents, Jorge Morales said that when he weighed the options they were clear: “I am going to die here, either from hunger, or because the army will kill me one way or another. I prefer to die there.”

For Jorge, the eventual kidnapping of his uncle solidified the reality that the same thing could happen to him, so he joined the guerrillas in order to not passively accept the victimization of his family and community.

The Destruction of Costumbre

One of the ways in which the military destroyed the social fabric of villages was to target the things that held communities together: their traditional dress, language, and religious practices. In some cases, people were forced to abandon their dress and language because it could identify and thus condemn them. For example, Jorge Morales, a Maya-K’iche from near Santa Cruz del Quiché, recounts that when his family left El Quiché to flee repression, his mother was unable to leave their safe house in Quetzaltenango because her distinctive dress would reveal her community of origin and thus make her a target for the military. When his family settled in Guatemala City, Morales remembers: “We first had to change our dress again, stop speaking our language, and again say that we were from Totonicapán [an area which, unlike the Quiché, was not identified with the insurgency].” These restraints forced the Morales

73 REMHI, 8.
75 Ibid., 28.
76 Ibid., 36.
family to weaken the few ties they had left to their community of origin after fleeing the violence – their language and traditional dress.

Traditional Mayan religious and social organization was also threatened with the presence of the military in the countryside. As Carlsen points out, traditional Mayan social organization was challenged with the arrival of the Spaniards in the fifteenth century, but the dissolution was intensified during this internal armed conflict because of its explicit attack on Mayan beliefs as another way to exert control and instill fear. In Santiago, various Atiteco rituals required presence in the mountains, and these practices were abandoned during the conflict because venturing into the mountains was prohibited by the army.77 Belief in these practices thus began to dwindle as Atitecos were unable to perform them as ritual demanded.

This destruction of ritual was also evident in the inability of survivors to go through the grieving process. Bodies, in many cases, could not be found or buried properly. Of the 5,500 interviewed by the REMHI project, only 49.5% knew where the bodies of their loved ones were and only 34% were able to perform the proper burial rituals.78 Those who cannot find their relatives suffer from guilt of not being able to light the proper candles, bring flowers, or honor their dead. One woman pleads:

“where is my son, is he somewhere thrown in the mud, tossed in a ditch, lying up in the mountain? Maybe he got eaten by animals, maybe they burned him, maybe that’s why I can’t reach him in my dreams? Or maybe they put him so his mouth faces down and I can’t speak to him in my dreams? I can’t bear this, he was my only son, all I ask is to find some remains.”79

This woman’s anguish stems from not only her son’s death but his inability to communicate with her through dreams because he was not properly buried. “Funeral rituals are a way of strengthening the social bond” explains Linda Green. “The Mayas believe that without proper

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77 Carlsen, 147.
78 REMHI, 18.
burial souls linger in the liminal space between earth and the afterlife, condemned in time between death and the final obsequies.”

This kind of unknowing is not only one of the ways the perpetrators were able to keep from being held responsible, but it also “enhanc[es] memories through the imagery of their violent history” requiring survivors to relive the memories.

Because there is no way to emotionally or spiritually resolve the atrocities, the perpetrators are able to retain the power of fear over those affected by the violence.

**The Legacy**

This fear is one of the most salient legacies of the conflict. Many people have testified, but with 200,000 dead and over 1 million displaced, the testimonies seem minimal. Many did not testify because the budgets and scope of both the CEH and the REMHI did not permit it, but many more did not come forward because of the continual blanket of fear that exists. “Some [women] are still afraid,” says one witness, “and have not wanted to give their testimony” because in many cases, those who perpetrated the crimes are still alive. “I am a little anxious because if the ones who have caused harm in our communities find out, well, they could harm me too, because we have reported what they have done,” another survivor said during her testimony. Others are afraid because at times they see the perpetrators or intellectual leaders of the atrocities on a regular basis. One widow describes her fear of the former mayor; while she does not say whether or not he was responsible for the death of her husband, she knows that he had collaborated with the army by denouncing people and pointing out “subversive” houses, and she shudders as she sees him every Sunday on the way to church. In other cases, widows knew who had denounced their husbands because some continued to live nearby as neighbors and to

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80 Green, 77.
81 Ibid.
82 REMHI, 13.
83 Ibid.
84 Isaacs 2006, 15.
this day instill fear in everyday activities.\textsuperscript{85} These testimonies, concludes the REMHI, “provide details that reveal the extent to which forced collaboration in atrocities was intended to destroy the social fabric.”\textsuperscript{86}

**Civil Society in Guatemala**

Guatemala has a long history of local organizing and participation. In the pre-Columbian era, there is evidence that the Mayan highlands were organized on “constituted landholding units of political organization and social identification” rather than along purely clan lines.\textsuperscript{87} While it is true that Mayan culture has traditionally included “special tolerance of multiple points of view,” which contributes to their views and acceptance of “collective leadership, consensus making, and the tolerance of different rationales for actions,”\textsuperscript{88} what was once a Mayan empire was, by the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, divided into groups, the most powerful of which was the Quiché empire.\textsuperscript{89} “Cakchiquel, Rabinal, Mam, Tzutuhal, and other sub-groups successfully revolted and became rivals to the Quiché,” but in order to defeat an Aztec army in the late 15\textsuperscript{th} century, they were able to join together.\textsuperscript{90} After the conquest, the indigenous people continued to organize, and “by the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, many Indian villages had developed a reinvigorated hierarchy and a strong sense of community,” demonstrating a determined hold on their communal lands.\textsuperscript{91} In one revolt, the indigenous people “rose up under the inspiration of a young woman who claimed she had been told by the Virgin to eliminate the Spanish” who were attempting to banish the “pagan” Mayan traditions of Catholic and Mayan syncretism.\textsuperscript{92} By “creating their own religion and a political and social system that helped reinforce group

\textsuperscript{85} Green, 100.
\textsuperscript{86} REMHI, 23.
\textsuperscript{87} Carlsen, 74.
\textsuperscript{88} Warren 1995, 69.
\textsuperscript{89} Handy, 18.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 31.
solidarity in defense of encroachment from the outside,” Mayans demonstrated their persistence in cohesive organization. Their organization also manifested itself in forms of protest. For example, in 1786, a crowd of over 1,500 gathered in Quetzaltenango to demand the expulsion from the city of three recently arrived Spaniards, and in 1815 the same town erupted over the implementation of a colonial tax system.

In the last 50 years, the presence of civil society organizations was also prevalent. But, as the political history shows, the CIA-sponsored coup of 1954 and the subsequent military governments and counter-insurgency war made social organizing difficult because it was seen as subversive. Some organizations continued to exist, especially after the 1976 earthquake which shook Guatemala, destroying many homes and lives. The government’s slow response to this disaster led to increased cooperation and social consciousness of the population. Out of this cooperation emerged the Comité para la Unidad de los Campesinos (CUC, Committee for Peasant Unity), the first indigenous-led labor organization in Guatemala’s history, which played a significant role in the organization of local people, most prominently from the Quiché, during the conflict. Because of their commitment to social change, the CUC also became a support base in the guerrilla struggle, thus reinforcing the government’s image of organizations. In an interview, Jorge Morales, a Mayan K’iche whose family was heavily involved in both the CUC and the guerrillas, said he was teased by children for being a “communist indio.” When asked if this was because they knew about the CUC, Jorge replied, that yes, “somehow they knew we were participating in these kinds of activities.”

93 Ibid., 33.
94 See Grandin, especially 54-81, for examples of social organizing from 1786-1850s.
95 Carmack, 20.
96 Morales interviews, Part 1, Internal Displacement.
97 Morales interviews, Part 1, page 18.
dispersed under threat of terror or even death during the implementation of the Ríos Montt strategy. After his uncle, a leader in the CUC, was kidnapped, Jorge’s family was forced to flee.

“We stayed for two, three days, waiting to see whether someone from the CUC would come to find us. Finally someone did come. They told us that we needed to leave Quetzaltenango, to leave Zalcaja, and to go the capital. Surely they were torturing my uncle and surely they were also looking for us.”

From the time of the kidnapping until relative peace began in Guatemala, Jorge and his family were constantly traveling from one place to another as internal refuges. During this time, the CUC and other organizations were forced to continue to function in secrecy or not function at all.

By the 1990s, however, under civilian government, civil society began to reemerge as a dominant social force, and the Mayan activism movement grew with many young and educated Mayans becoming involved in what became known as the “Pan-Maya movement.” This movement saw the “cultural stakes” in the emergence of the peace accords and as such played a key role in ensuring that “Maya communities would have decision making power over their own destiny.” Working through the Coordinator of Organizations of the Maya People of Guatemala, (COPMAGUA), Mayan activists “commissioned position papers from different groups and worked toward a consensus on key issues” surrounding the peace accords so that they could influence the assembly. They were successful in garnering support for the “Agreement on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples” section of the peace accords, and the accords also guaranteed the strengthening of social participation, specifically at the level of communities, providing “an ample, organized and concerted participation by the citizens in the

98 Ibid., page 36.
99 Carmack, 20.
100 Warren 1998, 53.
101 Ibid., 55.
decision-making process." This success and a lifting of the most repressive tendencies against
civil society spurred the growth of other organizations including the indigenous rights
organizations, economic initiatives, political activities, and cooperatives.

Today, civil society is active all over the country, from national organizations which have
gained strength through the Pan-Maya movement, such as CONAVIGUA (*Coordinadora
Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala*), which was formed in the late 1970s amidst escalating
repression, but is now one of the most prominent indigenous organizations in Guatemala, to local
groups of women simply holding monthly meetings to talk about their situations. Donors and
other international actors are supporting the participatory methodologies implemented by these
civil society organizations. Local consultation has been utilized in the implementation of the
Local Reconstruction and Development Project (PDL) funded by the World Bank.

In Peace

Brigades International’s program in Guatemala, voluntary groups of civilian peacekeepers have
been formed. The Catholic Church, a major player in civil society in Guatemala, also played a
crucial role in post-conflict civil society through the creation of the REMHI and has supported
community-driven projects such as building houses for those affected by the war and the creation
of community centers. Women’s organizations began to be involved in the UN Fund for
Women (UNIFEM). Weavers’ associations in Chorti and a farmers’ export alliance have been

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103 Colletta and Cullen, 73.
105 van Tongeren et al, 365.
106 The existence of these Catholic Church Projects is evidenced in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala.
107 van Tongeren et al, 535.
funded by USAID.\textsuperscript{108} And the funding of many small women’s organizations has been documented in Xe’caj, Santa Maria Tz’eja, and Santiago Atitlán.\textsuperscript{109}

The existence of such active civil society participation and its encouragement by donor support would therefore suggest, according to the civil society theories reviewed in Chapter 1, that we should see the growth of social capital and the existence of democratic development in Guatemala. The reality, however, is more complicated. While there have been some authors who show successes in civil society promotion of participatory development such as women’s banking cooperatives\textsuperscript{110} and a farming cooperative in the San Martin municipality,\textsuperscript{111} the broader idea of national Mayan solidarity masks the more complicated post-conflict reality on-the-ground with local groups. The following chapter explores how the four pitfalls of civil society outlined in Chapter One affect the outcomes of civil society work in Guatemala.


\textsuperscript{109} Linda Green documents women’s organizations in Xe’caj and Beatrice Manz in Santa Maria Tz’eja. My fieldwork in Santiago Atitlán reveals the presence of women’s organizations there.

\textsuperscript{110} Colletta and Cullen, 75.

\textsuperscript{111} Krishna.
CHAPTER THREE

Guatemalan Civil Society and the Four Pitfalls

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This chapter presents Guatemalan examples of the four pitfalls of CSOs laid out in Chapter One: (1) power retention, (2) corrupt rent-seeking, (3) representation, and (4) leaders from socially and economically privileged backgrounds. It then explains that these pitfalls exist because of the absence of a “critical mass” of social capital that is required for CSOs to produce the benefits associated with them. Some form of social capital, or the presence of trust and norms of reciprocity between people, must already exist between members for civil society to build more of it. Thus, if there is no social capital from which to begin, civil society does not contribute to the creation of more social capital (and therefore CSOs do not contribute to democratic development). As the stories of the widows and victims like René show, during the internal armed conflict of Guatemala, the pervasive violence destroyed social relations, trust, and networks in many communities. Because these social relations and trust are what fuel the creation of social capital, the violence also destroyed social capital. Today, many communities of people still suffer from the devastation left behind and the continuing structural violence of extreme poverty and marginalization. The trauma experienced by the community as a result of both kinds of violence leads to a dearth of trust and norms of reciprocal social relations. The absence of social networks and the trust that they create then leads to conditions that allow for lack of accountability, corruption, and issues of representation.

Power Retention

Most founders of CSOs are charismatic people with strong leadership qualities, such as the ability to deal with crisis and speak convincingly. These traits (and leaders’ passion for their
organizations) make it difficult and indeed rare for “regime change” in CSOs. Whether their intent is malicious or not, original leaders tend to retain their power because of a variety of factors. For most, the organization is a main source for their livelihood, and for others it is a source of status within the community.

In one case in Guatemala, *El Grupo Ixmucané* in Santiago Atitlán, the founder of a group of widows continued to be the president of this same group for over 25 years, affording her social and economic status that apparently she could not access before. Over this period, many women left the group because the President was always “angry” and gave special treatment as a reward to some submissive members at the expense of others who spoke out about what they wanted.¹ When questioned jokingly why she was so quiet all the time in meetings, but when we met in her house she was chatty and exuberant, Maria replied in complete seriousness, “There are certain people who scare me, so I don’t speak out that much.”² Like the woman who feared the mayor she saw each week and other victims who live near those who perpetrated crimes against them, Maria is scared of this authority figure, and thus avoids speaking out. As will be shown through more stories below, she is not alone in this fear. People fear the president because she not only played a role in the conflict as a guerrilla fighter, but she is also widely believed to practice witchery against those she dislikes. Even in the case where elections were attempted in this group, the president used her power of fear over the women to intimidate them. Secret voting was undertaken in one meeting of the women, and when the results were in, of thirty-four votes, the president had only five. However, because the women wanted to create a *junta directiva* of five women, the voting was pushed to a second round as winners were not clear from the first round. By the next day, the rumor of voting had spread, and “campaigning”

¹ Interview, Santiago Atitlán, Elena, August 6, 2005.
² Interview, Santiago Atitlán, Maria, July 27, 2005.
lead to over 20 votes for the president in round two. When asked later why the women had not taken advantage of this situation to elect a new president, some replied frankly, “She [the president] made me vote for her.” Others said that they couldn’t say why, and many more that they were afraid to say why.

In another case, in a weaving cooperative in Xe’caj, Linda Green describes that “a presidenta was selected [rather than elected] by the project to represent the other participants.” This practice “did not allow each woman, as a member of the project, the opportunity to voice her ideas, her needs, or her desires publicly to the other members,” giving the presidentas uninhibited power for the duration of the project. These women, if they wanted to receive the benefits of being a part of the group, were also subjected to the whims of their nominated representative. This kind of unchallenged power, whether used maliciously or not, does not contribute to the “democratic norms” which CSOs are said to create because in some cases, people’s voices are not seriously taken into account, and more often, fear stifles the voice from speaking out.

The existence of this pitfall challenges the role civil society plays in democratizing and improving development. Participatory development, as we saw in the theories laid out in Chapter One, fosters democratic improvements in the daily lives of local people. Guatemalan CSO leaders’ desire and ability to retain power, however, hinders progress towards this end goal by silencing or ignoring the voices of much of the community. The absence of democratic participation is so complete that, in many cases, not even the simplest form of democracy – free and fair elections – exists in these CSOs.3

3 Green, 139.
4 Ibid.
5 It is true that most CSOs, such as those described by Putnam, are also not necessarily democratic in the sense of having elections for leadership positions. I agree with Putnam, however, that these CSOs contribute to democratic
Corrupt Rent-Seeking

One of the greatest hindrances to CSOs in promoting human development in Guatemala is corrupt rent seeking. In a study of two communities, one which experienced high intensity conflict and another which experienced low intensity conflict, the World Bank found exploitation in both of the local communities.\(^6\) The Catholic Church-sponsored truth commission, the REMHI, also found corruption in post-conflict Guatemala and sees its existence as a legacy of the conflict where deceit, lies, and reckless self-interested behavior played major roles in everyday life.\(^7\)

Linda Green also witnessed corruption in a development project called *La Ayuda*, a cooperative of women tending chickens. One of the project coordinators who was supposed to deposit the money that the group earned into the bank, “quit his employment…and absconded with the money” leaving the entire group without their earnings.\(^8\) In Xe’cajar, Green also found that it was common knowledge that the presidentas of a variety of women’s cooperative groups were utilizing their positions to earn money by charging women and withholding funds.\(^9\) This corruption was possible because the presidentas were nominated by outsiders (rather than elected), and the other participants did not have a voice in the process, thus disabling them from speaking out against the corruption.

In Santiago, a long-standing corruption scandal was uncovered in the *Grupo Ixmucané*. Through the interviews with the thirty five women and a variety of other personal conversations and paperwork presented to me by other donors, it became apparent that the president of the

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\(^6\) Colletta and Cullen, 96.  
\(^7\) REMHI, 320.  
\(^8\) Green, 102.  
\(^9\) Ibid., 139.
women’s organization had been stealing money for at least 20 years, and over the years, tens of thousands of dollars were unaccounted for. Dolores, who had worked with the president from the founding of the organization, listed all the times she knew money was unaccounted for. The total sum was approximately $25,000 (Q186,000). While this exact large amount was never confirmed by other women, they consistently corroborated the charges of corruption on the part of the president, often without prompting. For example, Concepción reported that during a Swedish housing project, she was asked to pay Q5,000 in addition to turning over the legal documents to her land in order to receive her house. The representative of the Swedish organization said that there was ample money for the construction of each of the houses and no documents were necessary, so this money remained unaccounted for. A local anthropologist, Elba Villatoro, confirmed this woman’s testimony with the written testimony of at least two more women who paid the same amount and gave her their legal documents. Other women complained that when foreign groups came to buy handicraft from the women’s organization, only the president (and occasionally some people who she was rewarding) would be allowed to put out handicraft to sell, “But not ours,” said Cristina. Additionally, I have record of giving $200 (Q1500) to the president at her request for transportation costs of the women to a Spanish course my organization sponsored. The 25 women received transportation reimbursement once: Q2 each. The remaining Q1450 was accounted for on paper, which the president brought to me, but all of the women I talked with said they knew nothing of this money.

The sense of corruption amongst the leadership is pervasive, even amongst those women who are afraid of leveling charges against those who abuse their power. When asked about how she felt about the work that the leaders were doing, an older woman blurted out to my translator,

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10 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, July 18, 2005.
11 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, July 4, 2005.
12 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, August 4, 2005.
“I don’t trust them! You know, just like me, that they’re all corrupt!” By the few words I understand in Tz’utuhil and simply reading body language, I was able to understand that the woman had said something important about the leaders who had upset her. When I questioned her, my translator gave me a silencing look, mouthing, “I’ll tell you later.” She later explained what the woman had said and that immediately after, she begged the translator not to tell me or anyone else that she had said it. She had accidentally divulged this feeling, and she was afraid that it might reach the president’s ears. Another woman, Dolores, who is a family member of the president said to me in confidence, “They [the leaders] are all corrupt…but don’t tell her…I’m scared, she’s so angry all the time.”

In ADECCAP, *La Asociación de Desarrollo del Cantón de Panabaj*, corruption is perhaps not as blatant, but it persists nevertheless, albeit in more subtle forms. For example, one of the women from Panabaj, Micaela, who had been a part of the *Grupo Ixmucané* signed up to be a part of ADECCAP. One of the ADECCAP’s leaders, who is a good friend of Micaela’s, noticed that her name was not on the list and came to ask her one day why she had not become a part of ADECCAP. Micaela explained that she had gone and added her name to the list weeks ago, but when she showed up to be a part of one of the projects, they had told her she could not participate because her name was not on the list. She knew, she elaborated, that her neighbor (who is one of the female leaders on the *junta directiva* of ADECCAP), had taken her off the list because she is jealous of Micaela’s family since they have the nicest house on the block.

Corruption in these cases lessens faith in leaders and thus faith in the practice of representation. Where fear is prevalent, speaking out against corruption is unlikely, and where corruption exists, it both reveals and contributes to a lack of trust and therefore social capital

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13 Interview with Susana, Santiago Atitlán, July 13, 2005.
14 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, July 20, 2005.
among members. CSOs are thought to contribute to democratic practices, but the corruption apparent in these Guatemalan CSOs does not lead to practices of openness, accountability, and transparency, but rather secrecy and deceit. Where corruption exists in CSOs, democratic development is unlikely.

**Representation**

The *Grupo Ixmucané* was originally described to me as the widow’s organization of Santiago Atitlán. I found, however, upon closer examination, that the group does not include all the widows in Santiago Atitlán, and of those included, there are only two or three voices represented in the group. During my time working with this president and her group, I observed that the voices of the women were not represented in the way she directed the group. In meetings, the women were silent when I asked questions about what they wanted to do or how to do it. It seemed that there was a cultural divide, and the women were timid or scared to speak out in front of me, but interaction outside of meetings through friendship or interviews showed that in fact, it was the president who stifled opinions and participation. “They never listen to the women,” said Rosalina, “they don’t take me into account, so why should I speak?"15 “They just talk, they don’t listen” said Angela of her leaders, concluding that her opinions did not matter.

Linda Green found that this was also true in Xe’caju where CSO projects also represented widows and those women affected by the conflict, the majority of those “represented” were left disgruntled without their opinions taken into consideration.16 *La Ayuda* treated the women as if they were “a coherent group” and “overlooked both the economic and political context of their lives and what set them apart from their villages and among themselves.”17 The unabated power of the *presidentas* of the project contributed to the lack of representation of the complex opinions...
of the entire group and in many cases fueled conflict between the members and the leaders so that some left the project.

Since ADECCAP is a newer organization created in the aftermath of a devastating mudslide in October 2005, it remains to be seen if it can accurately represent those its mission claims to stand for – the victims of the mudslide in Panabaj. In the current political scene, however, it seems unlikely that ADECCAP will succeed. The community is now physically and politically divided into two different camps – those who live in the displaced persons’ camp are allied with the local government, and those who live in houses of their friends and families (what are being called casas particulares) are allied with ADECCAP. The people of the casas particulares make up the majority of the weekly assembly which ADECCAP holds; therefore the opinions which are voiced are only those of one “side” of the reconstruction debate. In this case, ADECCAP has been forced to discount the opinions of half of the population for which it works in order to pursue what its leaders believe to be right and representative of their allies.

CSOs are seen as the most representative of local people in the process of participatory development, but in the CSOs surveyed in Guatemala, a core group of people makes the majority of decisions. Those who are given a voice are given one on “a discretionary basis” such as with ADECCAP’s group and the few Ixmucané women who are allowed to speak in the group setting. The fear and conflict that pervade the local communities leads many citizens to submit to this situation, rather than demanding the agency of representation. The end result is troubling for a theory of CSO-led democratic development.

Leaders with Social and Economic Superiority

Finally, the last pitfall of CSOs, the economic and social superiority of leaders, is highly prevalent in Guatemalan communities. In each of the three groups: Ixmucané and ADECCAP in

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Santiago and *La Ayuda* in Xe’cay, the primary leaders come from a higher level of income and access to opportunities. The president of the *Grupo Ixmucané* lived in a significantly larger house in a better neighborhood than the rest of the group, owned her own car, and could afford to go to private hospitals in the capital city. She also had social superiority to the women because she could speak more Spanish. Some of the women, when asked if the leaders represented their voice simply responded with, “I can’t speak Spanish or read and write, so they translate for me.”

This response indicates the degree to which many women are dependent upon their more educated or more socially connected leaders for a voice. In another example, *Grupo Ixmucané’s* liaison, the other primary group leader, was always the only one to complete financial reports, and because he was the only literate person among the group, I did not think anything of this practice of reporting until I realized that many of the women were not benefiting from the financial support we sent and that most did not know that it existed. In one interview, I asked Lucia about the one “group-wide” event of the year (there are a variety of “participatory” projects for smaller groups, but all of the members come together only for this one event), the Christmas party, which my group had amply funded that year and for which the liaison had given me an accounting, reporting that all members and their families had attended and received food and toys for the kids. Looking at me blankly, she said, “There was a party this year?”

Another commented, “Who knows what they’re doing? There is no transparency!”

The women had no idea how much money was spent or received because their leaders had a social and economic advantage over them due to education, literacy, and language skills. The social advantages of these leaders made the corruption, lack of representational accountability to the group, and their ability to retain power which is described above, easier to accomplish. However, the women

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19 Interviews, Santiago Atitlán, July 4, 5, 13, and 27 2005.
20 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, Lucia, July 19, 2005.
21 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, Angela, July 5, 2005.
may have demanded explanations and accountability from their leaders, as they do from their husbands and children, if fear of them was not a factor. The fear of the president in this organization, again stems from her “anger” and her ability to act out on this anger – through withholding goods, pursuing witchcraft, or resorting to violence (as she did as a guerrilla during the conflict).

Linda Green also noticed that leaders of *La Ayuda* in Xe’caj were the best Spanish speakers and generally the more educated and elite members of the group. This advantage of the leaders, as in the case of Santiago, also likely led to the ability to practice corruption, lack of representation and power retention evident above. The three core leaders of ADECCAP are also more financially stable than most of the other residents of Santiago. These three local leaders have all been educated at least through vocational school and come from more middle class families. It remains to be seen how these leaders will use their power.

This drawback, while less obvious in its impact on the effectiveness of CSO work can lead to the conditions necessary for the other pitfalls – power retention, corruption, and lack of representation – because more educated and socially advantaged leaders have the skills to deceive and manipulate other group members. This pitfall inhibits the effectiveness of CSOs, as it makes them one step further from “the local,” which is one of the main reasons to use CSOs for democratic development. While it is a decentralized approach compared to the national scale, civil society is still not an equalizer and does not rid communities of traditional, and at times, exploitative hierarchies.

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22 Green, 139.
23 For those familiar with the organization, I refer here to the President, Francisco Coché, their secretary, Dolores Reanda Vasquez, and Don Rafael (whose official title is unknown to me) as the three local leaders. I did not here tackle the even more contested issue of the foreigners who currently play a large role in their organization.
24 Again, this occurrence is not inherently a pitfall – some superior leaders genuinely work honestly and for the people they represent. However, it becomes a pitfall when fear of leaders exists, and leaders exploit that fear.
Why the Challenges Exist: Trauma and Its Legacy

The problems these CSOs face are a result of the pervasive fear and lack of trust in communities affected by the internal armed conflict, specifically those targeted by the counter-insurgency tactics used and implemented in order to destroy the social fabric of the Mayan communities. The tactics employed by the counter-insurgency strategy of forcing divisions and betrayal among communities still show their effects today. This legacy cripples the successful creation of social capital by CSOs, thereby hindering democratic development.

A variety of psychologists who have studied Guatemala and other post-conflict zones show that many of the people suffer from the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Indeed, there is evidence of survivors who witnessed “death, injury or a threat to the physical integrity of a person” or learned about these occurrences to close friends or family members. Doña Juana witnessed the brutal killings of her husband and sons. Andrea witnessed the massacre of her son at age 13. The responses of these women and others like them include the symptoms of PTSD of “intense fear and/ or helplessness.” Fear is expressed in the silence of those unwilling to come forward and testify for fear that the perpetrators might find out that they told. Others, like the woman who fears the mayor she sees each week, are simply afraid at the sight of one of the collaborators or perpetrators still living in the community or even in their household, like René’s uncles. Still others have a general fear of speaking out against authority figures. The remarks of one widow, Maria, betray the sense of helplessness that overpowers many who suffered during the conflict. “There is no one to help us,” she says. “No

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26 See for instance, Lykes, Melville and Lykes, and Herman.
28 Green, 116.
29 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, August 6, 2005.
30 Green, 116.
one comes.”31 Others, when asked why their situation is how it is (either rhetorically or by someone else) respond with the interjection of “a saber,” or “who knows” while shrugging their shoulders in defeat.32 Still others recall, “I am too sick to work, and my husband and sons are gone.”33

While some may relive the event through the retelling of their story or when faced with personal interaction with those who committed atrocities, others may persistently avoid such recollection, as many survivors’ silence or refusal to testify reveals.34 Others, mostly men, resort to alcoholism and narcotic abuse, another symptom of PTSD.35 Doctors in the communities also describe being unable to treat many of the recurring physical symptoms described to them by survivors (headaches, stomach aches, and heart aches – all symptoms of PTSD) because they are psychological problems.36

The presence of PTSD is not something that has disappeared over time but rather is something that is “potentially self-perpetuating.”37 Those who are unable to complete the normal process of grieving (for example, the many survivors who still are unable to recover the remains of their loved ones to bury them) are the most likely to be stuck in the traumatic reaction.38 When people’s cries for help during traumatic events are not answered, they feel abandoned and “cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life.”39

31 Isaacs 2006, 10.
32 Ibid.
33 Interview, Santiago Atitlán, July 4, 2005.
34 For the retelling of stories see the REMHI, Green, Manz, Sanford, or Isaacs 2006, and for evidence of silence see Isaacs 9.
35 Interview, Tomás Botán, Santiago Atitlán, July 2005. This tendency is also commonly apparent by walking through the streets of the communities and smelling marijuana or seeing drunk men wander past or sprawled out on the street or sidewalk passed out in broad daylight.
37 Herman, 47.
38 Ibid., 69.
39 Ibid., 52.
Traumatized people “lose trust in themselves, in other people, and in God,” and those who are already disempowered are the most likely to suffer from this affliction.40

It is important to note however, that while relevant, this diagnosis is problematic because it adopts the Western ideal of individualism, perpetuating the idea that there is something wrong with the victims in their current state because of something that happened in the past. Likewise, “the understanding of trauma cannot be restricted to the intra-psychic process of the individual sufferer because it involves highly relevant social and cultural processes” and the consequences of massive trauma “afflict not only individuals but also social groups and cultural formations.”41 Because the trauma experienced by people in these societies is not an abnormal reaction to a normal occurrence but rather a normal reaction to an abnormal occurrence,42 it can be suggested that it is not the individual which is disordered, but the society or community.43 Thus in a post-conflict society, the trauma is neither the result nor the cause of an individual’s disorder but rather signals and contributes to the existence of a disordered community in which betrayal, secrecy, and fear are commonplace.

The trauma is not “post” or in the past, but a daily reality. Daily life is traumatic. Although the high-profile trauma of disappearances, assassinations, and massacres may be a thing of the past in Guatemala, more subtle forms (many with their roots in the history of conflict) persist today. The experience of trauma in the Guatemalan context is not confined to the remembrance of traumas past, but also includes the lived experience of present trauma. Not only have perpetrators not been brought to justice, but the sight of them living their lives next to the victims only adds to the traumatic sense of injustice. Poverty, economic inequality, poor

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40 Ibid., 60.
41 Suárez-Orozco and Robben, 1.
42 Martín-Baró, 111.
43 Isaacs 2006, 6.
health, and social marginalization, especially in those households which have lost their traditional head, add trauma to trauma each passing day. One author was struck by how important economic loss was: “the loss of kin seems less disturbing to the Quiché than the loss of livestock and other property,” she observes. She suggests that the loss of a “provider” for the family, for example, is perhaps more difficult than the loss of a “husband” or “father” because a family is never able to recoup “a household’s life savings” following the death of its primary income generator. Robben describes the daily trauma of poverty as the “impotence at being unable to give enduring care to the suffering child.” The trauma of this kind of loss is experienced each time a child must work instead of going to school, each time a mother cannot afford enough food, and each time someone is sick and cannot receive adequate care. This trauma and its effects are thus somewhat of a vicious cycle – structural violence in a poor and marginalized society makes that society more susceptible to divisive and violent conflict; violent conflict compounds the trauma already experienced on a daily basis, and more structural violence occurs in the aftermath of violent conflict adding more trauma to trauma. Since the existence of trauma contributes to fear and the lack of trust in one’s community (and therefore social capital), it is easy to understand why the critical mass of social capital necessary to build successful civil society does not exist in these communities.

CSOs are said to build social capital because they facilitate the growth of norms of trust and reciprocity between community members. However, this paper presents evidence that this trust is not necessarily only a product of CSO work, but that a certain measure of trust is also a prerequisite for the success of such work. In the Guatemalan cases studied, trust between community members is absent because the “fragile intricate bonds that held communities 

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44 Zur, 308.
45 Robben, 74.
46 For a discussion on this, see Chapter 1.
together have been severed by the effects of the violence that resonate throughout daily life.\textsuperscript{47}

When social networks are destroyed, the trustworthiness that arose from them is also destroyed, as the analysis of trauma shows. Instead of hopeful visions for the future and trusting bonds with others in the community, a post-conflict society is left with a disheartening refrain of “

\textit{no los confío}” (I do not trust them), such as that repeated time and again by women in Santiago. Without this trust, social capital cannot be created. So it seems that without a critical mass of social capital from which to begin, it is difficult to begin to build more of it. The legacy of violence and the trauma left behind cripples CSO effectiveness in democratic development. This is the core reason why the CSOs above have seen the four pitfalls evidenced in their work.

\textsuperscript{47} Green, 32.
CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions: Practical Implications for Funding CSOs in Low Social Capital Environments

This paper has shown that there are weaknesses with the CSO model for democratic development in post-conflict Guatemala: power retention, corruption, representation, and economic and social superiority of leaders. However, the argument presented in this paper is not meant to suggest that civil society should be abandoned as a vehicle for development. There is a valid reason for the emergent consensus in favor of civil society-driven development demonstrated in Chapter One. Civil society is a far more representative and democratic tool for promoting development than the state is, and it does offer some advantages, which have been demonstrated in a variety of success stories. Even in Guatemala, there are some communities which have shown the potential for such an approach. For example, the members of the return refugee community of Santa Maria Tz’aja has begun to rebuild their lives upon their return to Guatemala, and the community where Jorge Morales Toj now lives has organized a variety of successful community initiatives including women’s and youth programs. So, there is reason for some hope. However, in the communities of Santiago and Xe’caj, which this study considered most closely, the war was waged differently – in Santa Maria Tz’aja and Jorge’s community, residents fled the violence together and had to support each other along the way, thus creating a base of social capital. But in Santiago and Xe’caj, the nature of the conflict was more secretive and filled with mutual betrayal rather than support, thus destroying all types of social capital. It is imperative, therefore, that structures for accountability and democracy be implemented where trust and social capital are absent.
Civil society, therefore, may still be the most effective way to work towards a just and participatory development, but the idealism with which academics and development practitioners treat it is dangerous. This paper suggests that international actors and donors should not romanticize civil society, but recognize its debilities and take steps towards counteracting them. This chapter draws on already existing literature that gives a blue print to international actors in development, puts it in the post-conflict CSO context, and lays out cautionary recommendations for these international actors.

Cautious Action

Before laying out a plan of how one should work across borders, it must be determined that it is acceptable to do so. Some scholars, such as James Ferguson,\(^1\) suggest that those from developed areas should stay in their own countries and work to change the structures there, allowing activists in developing countries to take on the task of local development. This critique stems from the disasters that some international actors have created around the globe, and the implications are valid. For example, in Guatemala, US intervention in 1954 eventually led to the internal armed conflict which has proven to destroy community social fabric, among other things. There is certainly a need for some, or even a majority, of concerned internationals to remain in their countries promoting larger development issues such as responsible consumption, fair trade, and debt cancellation. Taking these concerns into consideration, if CSOs are to function (and even international intervention critics would agree that CSOs are the best hope for participatory development) in what is unquestionably an increasingly globalized and capitalist world, they need funding. Funding from all sources typically has strings attached. Governments fund CSOs and projects in return for support. The goal of international donors should be to

\(^1\) Ferguson 2002.
minimize the strings attached (per the discussion below) while being constantly self-critical and as such mitigating the effects of the pitfall.

In addition, it is crucial for international actors with good intentions to recognize their capacity for doing harm, just as many who came before them have done. Being a conscientious actor, constantly evaluating and criticizing one’s own actions is the most effective way to act across borders. Also, in following with the emergent consensus of participatory development, actors must allow local partners to set the agenda, rather than imposing it from outside.² The actors’ final goal should be to work themselves out a job.

**Strengthening Debilities**

The debilities, or pitfalls, laid out in the previous chapters must be overcome for CSOs to contribute effectively to human development in a low social capital environment. In order for this to happen, a variety of changes must be made in the way funding organizations work with CSOs. The issue of trauma as the root of these pitfalls must be addressed and reconciliation pursued, while at the same time donors must place restrictions on the CSOs they fund in order to compensate for the pitfalls of their work.³

**Reconciliation**

In Guatemala, national reconciliation is undoubtedly needed. Some of the steps for reconciliation on this level put forth by reconciliation scholars include truth-telling through truth commissions and exhumations, acceptance of the truth by those in power, prosecution of those responsible, and reparations to the victims.⁴ Reparations to individual victims have begun in Guatemala, but the process of deciding to whom the money should go has caused even more

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² Hulmes 1997b, 242.
³ In this sense, reconciliation means not reconciliation between two people *per se* but rather a reconciliation of trust between an individual and his or her community.
⁴ See for instance, Nigel Biggar or Anita Isaacs 2006.
divisions and corruption. It seems that a more productive form of reparations would be community reparations through CSO-led reconstruction projects, but as we have seen, these kinds of projects are limited because there is not local reconciliation.

Therefore, the most crucial step in strengthening the weaknesses of local CSO work is to work towards reconciliation within communities by treating the hurt and trauma of the disordered community. The difficulty, of course, is how to treat this reconciliation. The broader steps of truth, acceptance, prosecution, and reparations put forth by reconciliation scholars are also relevant in this context, and these steps do aim at working with individuals to overcome trauma. But an effort should be made at finding the best kind of conflict resolution method in the local communities. Working strictly from a Western perspective on psychological issues in the context of the developing world is clearly a mistake. We have also seen, however, that more traditional Mayan ways of dealing with trauma and healing have been altered or altogether destroyed by the war and increasing globalization. This is obviously an issue for the psychological and anthropological scholars to address, but it seems that working from a Mayan and Western perspective (for example, training local people who have knowledge of the traditional methods in Western psychology, the ways of the cofradias, and taking into consideration the religious beliefs of all) is in keeping with the current culture of the communities.

Conditions of Funding

Creating a reconciled community is not, however, the sole responsibility of the donors. Funding the training of the locals mentioned above is one way to facilitate this process, but reconciliation cannot be forced. Rather, donors must recognize the weaknesses of the

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5 From discussions with Jorge Morales Toj, a former member of the National Reparations Commission.
6 See Carlsen and Chapter 2, Section: Destruction of Costumbre.
organizations they fund and create conditions that mitigate these weaknesses. The only acceptable way to do so is by placing conditions on funding. This is not to suggest that donors should impose agendas or projects for the CSO, but rather that they should demand representation and accountability to the represented population. While this practice would run the risk of exacerbating power structures (donors are, after all, very socially and economically advantaged), the well-intentioned donor would release this power back to the majority of locals, rather than just the leaders.

One way to mitigate the pitfalls of power retention, corruption, and representation is to require democratic processes within the CSO and open financial accounting not only to the donors but to the community at large.\(^7\) These processes may include a system of elections for leadership every few years, a monthly assembly of the members to vote on decisions made by the leadership, or some combination of the two. CSOs should also be required to print sheets of expenditures and provide receipts in books open to the public at large.\(^8\) These kinds of conditions for funding help local development processes move from what John Clark calls “supply-side development” to “demand-side development” in order to ensure that CSOs are articulating the concerns and preferences of locals.\(^9\)

Donors can promote inclusive CSOs simply by giving preference to those organizations that demonstrate inclusiveness in communities, thus creating incentives for organizing and building social capital (just as the war created disincentives) even where social capital might not naturally be built, and finally, where networks of trust and cooperation do not exist, donors

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\(^7\) In *Democratizing Development*, especially page 26, John Clark suggests that donors withhold funding from governments that fail to meet standards of participation and suggests diverting funds to NGOs where governments fail. Here, I use his idea but apply it to CSOs, suggesting not that funds should be diverted back to the government, but to another CSO.

\(^8\) Esman and Uphoff, 234.

\(^9\) Clark 1997, 45.
should encourage the creation of new and inclusive organizations, especially among the younger
generations, in an effort to build social capital for the future.¹⁰

Donors’ To Do List

There is also a place for donor representatives on the ground in communities where the CSOs are working. Since there is no replacement in understanding of community dynamics and organizational weaknesses for time spent on the ground, representatives should live and work among communities members for as much time as possible.¹¹ During this time, the donors should survey locals’ reactions to the work being done by the funded CSOs and act as observers as the democratic processes play out (along a similar vein to United Nations elections observers). Donors must also refrain from stepping in on projects that they see as potential failures, and if they do indeed fail, donors should encourage the reevaluation process without threatening a loss of funds, as there is always the danger of placing too much emphasis on delivery rather than strengthening the institution.¹² Project failures are not a waste of donor money, but rather an investment in the long-term capacity of the CSO to function without donor support. By working through the failures, the organization will grow in its institutional capacity and will have a long list of lessons learned from which to draw in the future.

Finally, the project for all those concerned with participatory development is to have patience. Participation takes time, and creating effective development projects on the basis of participation takes even more time.¹³ The long term benefits, however, are potentially community-altering.

¹⁰ Esman and Uphoff, 41.
¹¹ Bebbington and Riddell, 119.
¹² Pearce 1997, 274.
¹³ Bebbington and Riddel, 122.


Santikarma, Degung. “Subak.” Draft – Cited with author’s permission.


