

A TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
EMPOWERMENT AND DISEMPOWERMENT IN A NICARAGUAN COMMUNITY

By

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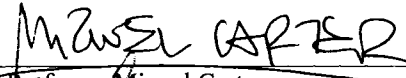
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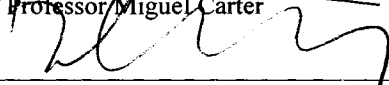
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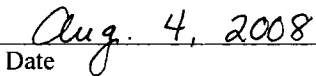
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Dedicado a la gente de
El Arenal,
mis amigos – los arenaleños

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ABSTRACT

At the turn of the century, it has become clear that humankind has gone many of the natural limits of the planet and that the way forward must tread a path towards sustainability. This thesis takes the case of the community of El Arenal, Nicaragua, in order to answer the basic question: how can an impoverished community in a developing nation make the transition to sustainable development?

The results of the research have shown that if development is to be sustainable, people must be empowered in order to participate in the making of decisions that affect the economic, social and environmental situation within their communities. Such empowerment is dependent not only on external factors, such as the satisfaction of basic needs and access to political spaces, but is a result of internal components as well – hope, determination and a sense of community identity and solidarity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADP	Area Development Project (of World Vision)
CAFTA	Central American Free Trade Agreement
CBO	Community-based organization
CPC	Citizen Power Council
<i>ENACAL</i>	<i>Empresa Nicaragüense de Acueductos y Alcantarillados</i>
<i>FSLN</i>	<i>Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional</i>
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
<i>Grudesa</i>	<i>Grupo de Solidaridad El Arenal</i>
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
<i>INAFOR</i>	<i>Instituto Nacional Forestal</i>
<i>MARENA</i>	<i>Ministerio del Ambiente y los Recursos Naturales</i>
<i>MINED</i>	<i>Minsteria de Educación</i>
<i>MINSAL</i>	<i>Ministerio de Salud</i>
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
SD	Sustainable Development
<i>UCA</i>	<i>Universidad Centroamericana</i>
UNO	National Opposition Union

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the latter decades of the 20th century, two global issues stood out that would determine the course of humankind at the turn of the millennium. Those two issues – the eradication of world poverty and the protection of the natural environment – have been combined into one sole global challenge, the advancement of the concept of ‘sustainable development’. After the publication of the Brundtland report in 1987, the term ‘sustainable development’ became understood as the balance between development and environmental protection that is needed for the continued existence and advancement of humanity. Although sustainable development is generally perceived as an environmental issue, it has as much to do with society and the economy as it does nature. Social and economic inequalities lead to imbalance, at both ends of which poverty and affluence build upon one another to perpetrate the unsustainable use of natural resources. Where the rich indulge, the poor scrounge; either way, the result is destruction.

Environmental stress has often been seen as the result of the growing demand on scarce resources and the pollution generated by the rising living standards of the relatively affluent. But poverty itself pollutes the environment, creating environmental stress in a different way. Those who are poor and hungry will often destroy their immediate environment in order to survive: they will cut down forests; their livestock will overgraze grasslands; they will overuse marginal land; and in growing numbers they will crowd into congested cities. The cumulative effect of these changes is so far-reaching as to make poverty itself a major global scourge (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 40).

Much scientific research has proven the link between the global and the local, where degradation at the community level both perpetrates and is perpetrated by degradation on an international scale. Local issues such as deforestation, erosion and polluted drinking water become global as they are replicated across the world. Global problems such as climate change and loss of biodiversity are worsened by local activities such as slash-and-burn farming, the unsustainable harvesting of fuelwood and the introduction of invasive species. In turn, these same issues can aggravate conditions at the community level by increasing the probability of drought and severe weather in vulnerable regions or by limiting the variety and quantity of available natural resources.

Already much research has been focused on answering questions referring to limits. How much pollution can a given environment absorb? How many trees can be cut down before the replacement rate falls below the removal rate? And most importantly, where can the line between the sustainable and the unsustainable be drawn? But while countless articles, books and reports clearly illustrate the unsustainable direction in which the vast majority of development is headed, relatively little has been effective in reversing the trend. Much of the problem lies in unanswered questions regarding the feasibility of such a transition. Does sustainable development have the potential to be a feasible alternative to current strategies in poor countries, or is it just an unrealistic ideal invented by those living far removed from issues of poverty and oppression? In a world of more than six billion individuals, how can the unsustainable become sustainable? And is such a transition practical?

This thesis addresses these questions by drawing both on theoretical research and on practical fieldwork conducted in the impoverished rural community of Arenal, Nicaragua. As the second poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, Nicaragua is host to some of the world's most pressing environmental problems, such as quality of and access to water, land use, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and vulnerability before natural disasters. It is estimated that 85 percent of the tropical dry forests and 65 percent of the rain forests have disappeared from Nicaragua in the last 300 years.

The thesis argues that although vital for all of the planet's people, sustainable development is the only option for people living in rural poverty in the world's poorest countries, such as Nicaragua, where survival depends directly upon the health of the surrounding environment. These are the communities that stand to lose the most from the degradation of their local and global environment, and paradoxically, these are the communities that are also often forced to degrade their environment because of their poverty. Thus, environmental organizations must be as concerned with economic equality and social justice as they are with protecting the planet's biodiversity and natural resources. As those with economic power tend to have social status and political power, decisions regarding development will often favor those who are in the least need of economic growth, and thus, lead humankind further along an unsustainable path.

The research shows that environmental degradation is correlated with imbalances of power between and within societies, which in turn makes sustainable development an inherently political issue. Thus, both the ends and the means of

sustainable development is a balance of power among all stakeholders – the empowerment of the ‘power-poor’ and the disempowerment of the ‘power-rich’ at all levels of society. The thesis specifically focuses on the importance of working to empower those who have historically been excluded or marginalized and uses Arenal as an example of a community with a history of exclusion, oppression and dependency. While attempting to rebalance unequal power distribution between and within societies is not easy, the thesis will further examine and illustrate the roles that development agents can play to aid such a transition.

In chapter two, a case is made for sustainable development. The meanings and implications of the concepts of development and sustainability are explored and analyzed, as well as the history of how the terms came to be merged. The connection between sustainability and equity is also established, leading into a discussion of why empowerment is necessary for sustainable development to be a feasible alternative.

In chapter three, the concept of empowerment is dissected and examined. The chapter discusses the different definitions, levels and components of empowerment, as well as confronting the problematic misuse of the term as a popular ‘buzzword’ in contemporary development practice. Theory connects with practice in chapter four, where both the historical and the alternative roles played by development agents are examined through the lens of empowerment

The practical research methodology enacted in the community of Arenal is explained in chapter five. In this chapter, the author’s lens as an ‘impartial’ researcher

is questioned through a discussion of objectivity, local knowledge and gossip and the various research methods are listed. An overview of the historical and political context of the research community is detailed in chapter six in order to set the stage for the results of the research.

In chapter seven, the 'state of sustainability' in Arenal is identified through the results obtained by the research analysis. A brief examination of Arenal in the 21st century points to its contradictory existence as a place between two conflicting moments in time: a traditional past and a globalized future. This chapter also asks questions dealing with past and future development in Arenal and how these experiences of development have led to an unsustainable present. Finally, local and national experiences with equality, sustainability and power are examined in order to find linkages between disempowerment and environmental destruction.

The main results obtained from the research are also laid out in chapter eight, which examines the experiences of two 'development schemes' in the community: World Vision and Grudesa. Despite using very different strategies, the main objective of both was to bring a 'sustainable' and 'community-owned' development to Arenal. This chapter will analyze the work of both in order to show how strategies that focused on the internal empowerment of the community led to sustainable results, while strategies that did not led to further disempowerment and a lack of sustainability.

Chapter nine is the final and concluding chapter and engages in a brief discussion that connects theory to the findings of the participatory research. The

differences between different levels of empowerment are once again addressed and put into a set of guidelines for development practitioners and environmental organizations interested in promoting sustainable development through community empowerment.

CHAPTER 2

A CASE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Defining development

Throughout history, philosophers and scholars alike have debated the role of development in human society. The meaning of ‘development’ as ‘a process of growing, maturing, or advancing’ is as old as human civilization itself, but as a theory and as a practice, ‘development’ has been around for less than a century. Although in modern society, the study of development has branched off into dozens of fields, including education, psychology, economy and urban planning, at the heart of the concept is a question of purpose. For many Westerners, development is not only an idea or an activity, but is rather viewed as a ‘duty’ that must be fulfilled (Mair, 1984). “What has altered over time has been the issue of to whom that duty was owed. From Christian tradition initially duty was owed to God, based upon the Protestant and biblical notion that man’s task on earth was to make the world more productive, acting as a steward for the deity” (Gabriel, 1991, pp. 8-9).

In this perspective, it was the mission of humankind to advance and develop through the exploitation of the resources over which he was given dominion. Progress was to be measured through the introduction of ‘civilized ways’ into ‘backward’ societies. This belief in productivity being “man’s task on earth” has shaped the Western concept of development for hundreds of years, resulting in the modern day

connection between development and economic growth. “Western thought has consistently placed man in the centre of the universe. The natural environment was there for man to conquer, exploit and demand for his sole benefit... For the (colonizing) Europeans, the land, its resources and all the living creatures were his to purchase or take and, thereafter, to exploit” (Burkey, 1993, p. 32).

However, when most people think of development, they do not think of the “divine right” of the colonizers, but the academic and professional field that emerged in Western schools of thought after WWII. Modern development theory has its roots in the U.S. Marshall Plan that provided economic assistance to Europe for postwar recovery. Since then, notions of development often go hand in hand with international involvement and democratic and communistic ideologies alike. Still, the main driver in all development is advancement, and in practical terms, this advancement is often gauged in material terms, rather than in the more abstract fields of emotional or spiritual growth.

Like any other popular concept, modern development theory has been discussed, picked apart, transformed in rhetoric and practice, and even thrown out. It has gone from ‘modernization’ to ‘participation’, from ‘dependency’ to ‘empowerment’, and from ‘top-down’ to ‘bottom-up’. Yet through all this, ‘development’ as we understand it today has remained much the same. The dictionary definition of development: “the process of making something more mature, elaborate, or advanced,” has not changed –

though there would be many a debate with regards to what the end product of such 'development' would look like.

'Development' cannot be easily defined or measured, since it involves a powerful political and culturally specific term. Instead, it may be useful to understand the rational meaning of the social situations for the actors or participants involved in them. From this perspective development is likely to mean very different things for different individuals and groups (Gabriel, 1991, p. 13).

Defining sustainability

While the concept of development evokes a spirit of advancement or 'moving forward', 'sustainability' can be defined as 'maintaining what already is.' Thus, in a purely literal sense, sustainability could be perceived as the antithesis of development. Indeed, some of the first sustainability advocates, known as 'preservationists' in the 19th and 20th centuries, were often accused of being 'anti-progress' – a criticism that is still directed at certain environmental and cultural preservation movements. Modern notions of sustainability continue to be connected with conservation, and environmental sustainability has its roots in the struggles of North American conservationists of the 19th and 20th century to set aside large swaths of wilderness for the intrinsic value of nature itself ("Chronology of Selected Events in the Development of the American Conservation Movement, C.1850-1920 ", 2002). One of the most famous conservationists was United States President Theodore Roosevelt, whose administration is credited with giving life to America's fledgling national park system through the established protection of wildlife refuges, national forests, and bird reservations (Roosevelt, 1913). John Muir, a famous preservationist and the founder of one of

America's first environmental organizations, the Sierra Club, wrote "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." (Muir, 1997, p. 814).

Aside from environmental discussions, the use of the concept is equally pertinent to debates surrounding social, economic, and institutional issues. Among historians, traditionalists, and cultural preservationists, sustainability is vital for the continuity of languages, cultural practices, stories, and ways of being. The United Nations World Heritage Program is one of several global efforts to protect and preserve important sites around the world of great cultural importance.

Each time a language or culture is lost, we lose an irreplaceable and exquisite way of being. Each time a well-loved building is torn down without a trace, or a gathering place paved over, a strand of culture is frayed. Culture is the highest expression of what it means to be human. It is a measure of our species' contribution to planetary Biodiversity. Cultural Preservation emphasizes the need to protect, restore, and honor all forms of Cultural Diversity. It is a cornerstone of Community (Ecotrust, 2002).

Economic self-sufficiency is another important dimension of sustainability. At the most basic level, this refers to the capacity of an individual to provide for her principle survival needs: food, shelter, and clothing. However, economic self-sufficiency is also often perceived as a state of personal 'autonomy', through which an individual has the basic right not only to life, but also to freedom and the pursuit of one's own happiness. Indeed, the concept of 'autonomy' was of utmost value to the Founding Fathers, who upheld personal freedom as a virtue that government must take care to respect and preserve. Such freedom could not be separated from a need for economic self-sufficiency. As declared William Pitt in the House of Commons

November 18, 1783, “Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is argument of tyrants. It is the creed of slaves.”

The connection between personal freedom and economic autonomy is as relevant in the 21st century as it was in the 18th century, as the gap between the rich and the poor has only grown wider in the past 300 years (Bourguignon & Morrisson, 2002; Wallerstein, 1975). While slavery has been outlawed and feudalism is a system of the past, economic oppression continues to exist, if in more subtle forms, through the lack of opportunities that poorer classes have to escape from the bounds of poverty.

Historically, both before and after the colonization of the Americas, the indigenous inhabitants primarily survived on what they could produce from the land. While class-based inequalities and slavery were by no means unknown to these societies, a close connection to the land enabled families to have much control over the decisions related to their livelihoods. However, once this freedom of self-sufficiency is taken away, there is no replacing it. As the naturalist Thomas Belt observed on a visit to Nicaragua in the 19th century, “The Indian is industrious by nature, and works steadily and well for himself; but if compelled to work for another, loses all heart, and pines away and dies” (Belt, 1888, p. 85).

Finally, sustainability can be defined as a process or activity able to maintain itself without additional inputs over an indefinite period of time. This definition is often invoked by businesses and institutions that perceive the intrinsic value of a system, whether natural or manmade, that is inherently capable of self-maintenance. The

central idea is that of a ‘closed loop’ energy system, in which energy created by a process is captured and reinvested into maintaining that process. Some examples of such ‘closed loop systems’ are found in sustainable technologies and organizational models, such as permaculture farms, where organic waste is recycled into fertilizer and methane gas, and microcredit schemes, in which returns on investments are used to support the further creation of small businesses.

Defining sustainability is more than a discussion of preservation over progress but rather one of specifics. What does one want to maintain? And how does the concept of ‘maintenance’ fit into the context of a constantly changing and evolving society? The key to understanding sustainability, then, is not about accepting stagnancy, but learning to place value on those things that must be upheld.

Merging the Terms: Sustainable Development

Until very recently, such notions of sustainability were overlooked in favor of the virtues that development had to offer. In the centuries after colonization, ‘civilized’ societies were of greater worth to the Europeans than those that were egalitarian. As wrote Darwin of his observations of the native inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego: “Perfect equality among the individuals composing the Fuegian tribes must for a long time retard their civilization. As we see those animals whose instinct compels them to live in society, and obey a chief, are most capable of improvement, so is it with the races of humankind” (Darwin, 1909, p. 237). Indigenous peoples who took into account the limits of the natural resources available to the region were often portrayed as

‘backward’, ‘indolent’ or ‘unproductive’ by the more environmentally destructive colonizers (Mendoza, 1990). Nor was economic sustainability or self-sufficiency considered to be virtuous as compared to the benefits of surplus production. Though Karl Marx may be best known for his ideologies on the history and implications of class differences, he also believed in the necessity of surplus labor and production for a modern society.

It is only after men have raised themselves above the rank of animals, when therefore their labour has been to some extent socialised, that a state of things arises in which the surplus-labour of the one becomes a condition of existence for the other... The productiveness of labour that serves as its foundation and starting-point, is a gift, not of nature, but of a history embracing thousands of centuries” (Marx, Moore, Aveling, Engels, & ebrary Inc., 1890, p. 561).

However, the last few decades have brought the concept of ‘development’ under trial, as the unintended consequences stemming from the advancement of human civilization have been proven to threaten the needs of both present and future generations (Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 2004; Mesarovic, Pestel, & Club of Rome., 1974). The failure of humankind to respect the limits of the planet has led the way into a 21st century literally littered with a host of environmental problems. From the loss of biodiversity to the threat of global warming, environmental sustainability is recognized as essential to the survival of all species, including humankind, on the planet. No longer is development alone considered to be a panacea for the world’s problems of poverty, sickness, and war. Rather, in its stead has surfaced a new concept, a ‘sustainable’ addition that would fix what development alone could not.

The concept of ‘sustainable development’ emerged from a report entitled *Our Common Future* created by the United Nations World Commission of Environment and Development in 1987. Although the term does not question the nature of development itself – indeed, it states that for the majority of the world’s population, economic development is necessary for the fulfillment of basic needs – it raises issues of how much, for whom, and what kind of development is desirable. The original definition of sustainable development, as stated in the Brundtland report, was remarkably simplistic yet complete: “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In this one sentence, the writers of *Our Common Future* were able to address the importance of equity for all members of society – not just those who are alive today, but also those who will be born tomorrow.

The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of development. The essential needs of vast members of people in developing countries for food, clothing, shelter, jobs - are not being met, and beyond their basic needs these people have legitimate aspirations for an improved quality of life. A world in which poverty and inequality are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life... Growth by itself is not enough. High levels of productive activity and widespread poverty can coexist, and can endanger the environment. Hence sustainable development requires that societies meet human needs both by increasing productive potential and by ensuring equitable opportunities for all (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 54-55).

Making Development Sustainable (and Equitable)

While the authors of the Brundtland report were clear about the definition of sustainable development, they were less specific about how the concept should work in

practice, only making broad recommendations for countries and institutions along the lines of responsible growth, good governance, and support for civil society. As a result, over the past two decades there has been much dispute with regards to what ‘true’ sustainable development entails and which institutions and projects have the right to label themselves as promoters of the concept. Some of the largest and most influential development institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have taken great strides to dress themselves up in the new sustainable development rhetoric in their attempts to address the economic and environmental problems of ‘underdeveloped countries’. However, critics argue that because these institutions continue to use the traditional development approach in the implementation of many of their ‘sustainable development’ projects and programs, the results have been less than sustainable.

This dominant model of sustainability is reformist rather than transformational and is compatible with and indeed may advance ideological and economic projects of globalization from above and economic liberalization. An examination of the reports and directives of these institutions suggest that many of the values and assumptions of the traditional development model – especially economic growth, free markets, efficiency, rationality, and individualism – remain at its core, even as development is now redefined as sustainable” (Horton, 2007, p. 6).

Scholars and development practitioners also cite the reluctance of the same institutions to address the underlying issues of economic and social inequalities that are at the roots of many environmental problems. The writers of the Brundtland report continually emphasized the importance of equity for the fulfillment of sustainable development. “Our inability to promote the common interest in sustainable development is often a product of the relative neglect of economic and social justice

within and amongst nations” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 59). As those with economic power tend to have social status and political power, decisions regarding development will often favor those who are in the least need of economic growth. Indeed, development strategies directed towards growth have been shown to intensify existing inequalities, rather than lessening them. One example points to the growth-focused development policies that were adopted by Brazil in the late 1960s and continued into the 1990s, which only served to increase the gap in income distribution, even as the GDP increased during the same period.

The World Bank’s statistics indicate that in the 1980s, the percentage of Brazilians living on less than \$2 per day increased from 34 to 41. In the 1990s, the poorest 10 per cent of the country’s population held less than 1 per cent of its wealth. In comparison, the richest 10 per cent commanded 49 per cent of the nation’s wealth. These data are drawn from Brazil’s most recent census, and it seems fair to ask: who was included, and who was excluded? (Mittelman & Pasha, 1997, p. 128).

Economic disparities also exist between societies or countries, as is illustrated by the blatant divide between rich and poor nations. The concept of ‘free trade’ is based on the belief that if the market is left unregulated and open, people will produce in accordance with their best interest. If such trade is possible, competition between countries will drive down prices and production will only occur in places where it is profitable to do so. Thus, while high wages and strict environmental regulations in the United States would drive up the prices of manufactured items, low wages and lax regulations make such manufacturing a very profitable enterprise in countries such as Nicaragua. Unfortunately, not much of ‘free’ trade is ‘fair’ trade. Basic staple crops, such as corn and wheat, as grown under large-scale, government-subsidized production

in the United States and Europe has been shown to undercut small-scale local production in much of Latin America. Where these imported grains are sold in local markets for less than the cost of the production of the locally grown grains, farmers are either forced to switch crops or to sell their land and seek employment in urban zones.

The relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between these and world trade, assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and can be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion, which can have either a positive or a negative effect on their immediate development (Dos Santos, 1968, p. 61).

Whether inequalities exist within or between societies, it is the 'political identity' of an individual or society that both perpetrates and maintains them. A person's political identity is the "consequence of how power is organized" (Mamdani, 2001, p. 22), which is based on the legal standing of the combination of factors that make a person a social being: ethnicity, race, gender, status, class, culture, and religion. Within a tribe, community, region or nation, power relations dictate the cultural, economic and political rules of a society. Even among cultures where there is a strong tradition of equality, certain members are given less of a voice than others in the making of decisions. In much of the world, women's social status is lower than that of men, which limits their access to decision-making activities and, consequently, their political power. In other countries, subtle prejudices based on race, religion, sexual preference, gender, age, or class, serve to legitimize their lack of political, economic or social power.

Inequalities can also be found at the heart of the environmental movement. Deep ecology is a branch of ecological philosophy that leads the claim that all life, in

whatever form, has an equal right to live and flourish. This belief highlights the imbalance of power that humans seek to maintain over the rest of the environment and attributes a decline of environmental sustainability to humankind's inability to understand that "the right of all forms to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified. No single species of living being has more of this particular right to live and unfold than any other species".¹ Aldo Leopold writes, "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." These authors agree on one central point – that humankind has tipped the natural balance of power on the planet in his favor – to the demise of all.

Not only has humankind failed to limit our abuses of power upon the natural environment, but we have also wielded such unwarranted authority upon our own kind: the future generations that will inherit the destruction that we have inflicted upon the earth. Friedmann refers to this abuse of power as 'intergenerational inequality', and writes, "of all the disempowered groups within a population, those with the least power lack an effective voice in public affairs, above all infants and children, who are virtual citizens of their respective countries, and the generations of the unborn" (Friedmann, 1992, p. 124). Friedmann, among other authors, argues that we have a responsibility to these future generations, and that responsibility lies in a promise to allow future generations the ability to fulfill their basic needs as much as, or better than, previous generations have been able to.

¹ As stated by Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher who coined the phrase 'deep ecology' in 1972.

Where people do not have the power to make the decisions that will influence their lives, they are at the mercy of those who do have such power. Will those in power make political decisions that support the basic needs of those without? Will they make decisions that reflect the local peoples' ideas on what should be sustained versus what should be developed? Will they make those decisions in the name of solidarity? Or will they continue to perpetrate the inequalities existing within the current system of imperialism, ethnocentrism and globalization? (Kates, 2005)

All discourses of sustainability are inherently political in the sense that they are built on underlying assumptions and values (e.g. material, emotional, spiritual, aesthetic) that cannot be predetermined through scientific methods or technical analysis. Rather, these intrinsic normative elements of sustainability discourses are the product of collective political processes that range from imposition by a small group of elites to democratic forms of decision making and that can take place at levels from the local to the transnational. In addition, development discourses and associated policies have inherent material and distributional consequences, benefits, and costs. They impact distinct groups in society differently, producing winners and losers. Development discourses are a product of power relations and in turn influence relations and distribution of social, political, and discursive power." (Horton, 2007, p. xiii).

Focusing on Power

Power is at the heart of development. Development of any kind is an outcome of decisions made by those with the power to do so. In development theory, sustainable development as practiced by the major institutions has become known as 'dominant SD theory' (Horton, 2007; Wagle, 1996). The main critique of this 'dominant' style is in its top-down, product-oriented and separatist approach, in which local problems are analyzed and given solutions by outsiders rather than by those who are directly impacted by them. Critics have taken issue not only with the specific solutions themselves, but also with the reluctance of these institutions to allow local people and

governments determine for themselves the solutions to the problems they face. Such top-down decision-making is a violation of the autonomy of those who are to be ‘developed’, which greatly limits the potential for sustainability by undercutting peoples’ own initiative to help themselves (Ellermen, 2005, p. 4).

Horton addresses this problem as the central dilemma of the helper-doer relationship: “Autonomy cannot be externally supplied. And if the doers are to become autonomous, then how can external helpers have any direct influence?”

In every parent-child, teacher-student, manager-worker, or, generally, helper-doer relationship, there is the frustration of the helper wanting the doers to do something - and wanting them to do it for the doers' own reasons. Whatever cajoling, enticements, rewards, or bribes might be offered by the helpers will only supply external reasons. Yes, the doers might be induced to go through the motions in this way, but that is not the desired internally motivated performance (Ellermen, 2005, p. 4).

This paradox of supplying help to self-help, “assisted self-reliance”, or assisted autonomy is the fundamental conundrum of development assistance. David Korten terms it the “central paradox of social development: the need to exert influence over people for the purpose of building their capacity to control their own lives” (Korten, 1983, p. 220) in (Ellermen, 2005, p. 4). Korten was one of the founders of a development approach that originated in the late 1980s called ‘people-centered development’. This method sought to place the local people at the heart of development strategies – not just as passive recipients, but rather, as active participants in the process.

People must have sufficient access to resources, knowledge, and appropriate technology if they are to avoid overexploiting local resources out of desperation. The assumption and experience of people-centered development are that given the opportunity people come up with diverse and innovative ways of solving local, specific problems and

thereby complement the diversity that is inherent in nature and necessary for preserving its health (Veltmeyer, 2001, p. 18).

Into the 1990s, authors and practitioners began calling for an ‘alternative development,’ emphasizing not only the participation of local people in their own development, but also the power dynamics between members of a society. Although alternative development is primarily focused on empowering those individuals or groups who lack the power to change their economic or social situation, the concept of sustainability is integrated through an emphasis on ‘intergenerational equality’. This focus on empowerment is also central to a new field within the rhetoric of sustainable development theory known as ‘grassroots sustainable development’. Here the belief is that the main problem is that the misplaced focus in dominant strategies “makes the human being disappear from development thinking and practice” (Wagle, 1996, p. 75).

Beyond the world of those who have been thinking about and implementing development and environment projects and policies, there is a different world - the world inhabited by people living mostly in rural villages and urban shantytowns in developing countries at whom the development is often targeted. In the current worldwide debate on development and environment, these communities are often treated as passive recipients of development, and hapless destroyers of local environments. However, from the perspective of grassroots communities, the history of development is largely a history of displacement and destruction (Wagle, 1996, p. 5).

As with proponents of ‘alternative development’, defenders of the ‘grassroots perspective’ are primarily concerned with equity of power as the main objective of sustainable development. Grassroots proponents argue that knowledge and power are intrinsically connected, and because of this people will often resist attempts to manage the environment by outsiders, as they would interpret those attempts as threats to their livelihoods, knowledge systems, and cultural identities (Vivian, 1992; Wagle, 1996).

Therefore, it is essential for development practitioners to recognize that “environmental degradation in rural areas of the 3rd world is not due to the poverty of rural communities; rather, poverty is a symptom of one of the primary underlying causes of local-level environmental decline in the third world today: *the disempowerment of these communities*” (Vivian, 1992, p. 72) (emphasis added).

Thus, power is also at the heart of sustainability. If development is to be sustainable, those making the decisions should be the same people who will live with the consequences of such decisions. Without the empowerment of the local population, any efforts to promote a ‘sustainable development’ are at best irrelevant, and at worst, detrimental to the lives of those who must live with the effects of such development.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING EMPOWERMENT

Primary stakeholders/affected persons should be empowered to sustain development impacts of the project, i.e. their entitlements would be converted into capacities – this will ensure that project interventions and their benefits are sustainable over a longer time and motivate future development and further popular initiatives at the grassroots level where communities can make critical decisions affecting the quality of their everyday life (Maiti, 2006, p. 294).

The concept of empowerment in development or political processes dates back to the American civil rights movement, which sought to put political power into the hands of its followers. Though the term ‘empowerment’ is almost as exploited as ‘development’ in its diversity of usage across the psychology, healthcare, education, technology, and management fields, its basic meaning refers to the investing of power or enabling of an individual or group of individuals.² In development practice, a generic view of empowerment is increasing the control of individuals or communities over their own lives and ways of being (Lyons, Smuts, & Stephens, 2001). Craig (2002), defines empowerment in the development context as “the creation of sustainable structures, processes, and mechanism, over which local communities have an increased degree of control, and from which they have a measurable impact on public and social policies affecting these communities” (125-126, in: (Hardina, 2006, p. 4). Other scholars have referred to empowerment not only in concrete material terms (the

² empowerment. (n.d.). The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Retrieved March 05, 2008, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/empowerment>

reallocation of power for political and economic gains), but also, more abstractly, to explain a state of mind (Javan, 1998).

The idea of enabling or investing power in a person or a community for their own benefit can have many different interpretations. For some, empowerment can be as basic as satisfying the basic needs of an individual so that they are freed to pursue other needs. One approach that found much support in community development practice emerged in the 1980s for the advancement of 'sustainable livelihood security'. This approach places its focus on reducing the vulnerability of the poor through increases in assets (time, security, cultural identity and social ties), rather than incomes (Arce, 2003).

In the context of development practice, before becoming a modern buzzword the concept of empowerment was previously referred to as 'citizen participation' (Hardina, 2006). In 1969, Arnstein developed a 'ladder of participation', with each rung depicting the level of citizens' power to make decisions and bring about desired outcomes. On the bottom end of the ladder is 'manipulation', where peoples' participation gives an illusion of power but does not actually provide power itself. However, on the top end of the ladder is 'citizen control', or in modern language, the empowerment of the people.

Since the 1970s, empowerment has been a reoccurring theme in rural development (often going hand in hand with 'participation') (Ellis & Biggs, 2001). The main call for empowerment in development has been based on a belief that if people are to benefit from development projects, they must be enabled to make choices with

regards to such development. Here lies the principal argument for the transition from a top-down to a bottom-up development approach. Not working “on the people”, but rather, working “with the people” (Wilson, 1996). Not product-based, but process-based (Sadan & Churchman, 1997). Not ‘direct’ assistance, but ‘indirect’ intervention (Ellermen, 2005; Sadan & Churchman, 1997).

Levels of Empowerment

Empowerment can be internal or external, objective or subjective, individual or community-based. Just as the different dimensions of sustainability complement one another (in the sense that economic equality and social harmony will lead to environmental sustainability, and vice-versa), so can the different levels of empowerment be self-reinforcing. The following chart illustrates how levels of empowerment can be merged with different results, further explained below.

Table 1: Levels of Empowerment

Levels of empowerment	External	Internal
Individual	Civic participation Knowledge and skill development Time and energy Resources Status	Hope Self-esteem Critical awareness Intrinsic motivation Determination Commitment to action
Community	Community mobilization Resources to make change Allies Access to political spaces	Social/Cultural identity Strong sense of community worth (belief in the power of the community) Solidarity

Internal and External

Internal empowerment refers to an increase in an individual or society's perceived sense of control and power, regardless of whether or not it is accompanied by external empowerment, which is the increase in that individual or society's actual ability to change things in a physical manner. For example, a prisoner may have few means gaining power in external ways, but through self-introspection and inner strength, he can maintain his sense of power and self-worth in intangible, intrinsic ways. A common theme in resistance struggles is "They can break my body" (take away my external power) "but they can't break my spirit" (take away my internal power). Thus, even a slave can be a holder of power, if she has the inner strength and self-esteem to recognize and nourish that power so that it grows. Indeed, physical manifestations of power are not always as significant as the underlying psychological power that motivates the action. For example, children who have been abused sexually often carry more emotional scars than physical wounds. Internal and external powers are not necessarily complementary, and in some situations may have inverse relationships. A person can amass a great deal of external power (wealth, prestige) in order to compensate for a lack of internal power (feelings of worth). This is commonly the case in societies where both economic and social inequalities prevail. Heads of household who are forced to work in situations with unequal power dynamics, such as day laborers on a large coffee plantation, often attempt to regain what power that they lose in their daily employment by wielding physical or emotional power over their wives and

children. “In a patriarchal society even the most miserable of men in the poorest of classes can be an owner of property - in his relationship to his wife, his animals, over whom he can feel he is absolute master’ (Fromm, 1976, p. 58).

Individual and Collective

Power relations can be similarly observed at the individual and collective levels. While the empowerment of an individual refers to the increased ability of a person to make decisions and have control over his or her life (whether through internal or external means), the empowerment of a community refers to the ability of a group of people to do the same for the collective good (Javan, 1998; Nielsen, 2006). As with internal and external empowerment, individual and collective empowerment can be either mutually reinforcing (as the individual gains power, so does the community) or can compete with one another (the individual gains power by taking it from the community). Both relationships are important in the study of development.

Wilson (1996) writes that the inner transformation that goes along with individual empowerment is both essential for and dependent upon a sense of solidarity with others: “Just as the externals of community economic development are empty without the underlying individual and community empowerment, community mobilization without the underlying individual transformation is empty” (Wilson, 1996, p. 618). However, some community leaders may use their positions to take power out of the collective hands of the community and to put it into their own. The expression ‘power corrupts’ refers to this occurrence, and further touches upon the addictive nature

of power. The more power someone has, the more power they seek to have, especially when that power is external rather than internal.

Subjective and Objective

However, not all power is objective. Though everyone has power, it is most often perceived subjectively, as something that people can have more or less of in comparison to one another. As an objective force, humans have the equal power to simply exist, as well as the power to ponder the nature of their existence. For some, this objective power is enough. For the vast majority, however, there is a need for 'relative' power, or the power to 'have'. Fromm distinguishes between these two modes of existence as the 'being' mode and the 'having' mode:

The having mode of existence, the attitude centered on property and profit, necessarily produces the desire - indeed the need - for power. To control other living human beings we need to use power to break their resistance. To maintain control over private property we need to use power to protect it from those who would take it from us because they, like us, can never have enough; the desire to have private property produces the desire to use violence in order to rob others in overt or covert ways. In the having mode, one's happiness lies in one's superiority over others, in one's power, and in the last analysis, in one's capacity to conquer, rob, kill. In the being mode it lies in loving, sharing, giving (Fromm, 1976, p. 66).

In a socially and economically unequal world, those who have too much power must be made to relinquish the 'excess' in order to enable others. The simple argument is that of morals; is it right that where one man makes less than \$1 a day, another makes \$1 million? But there is also a practical argument, one that does not involve value judgments. In a world of finite resources, it stands to reason that there is only so much wealth and power in the world to be divided among the human population. If it has already been determined that the survival of humanity on planet depends on a transition

to ‘sustainability’, and such sustainability is directly dependent on social, economic, and political equity, then it must be clear that while some must be given more power, others must have less. Thus, empowering some implies the necessity of taking power away from others. More than a matter of ethics, a balance of power is a prerequisite to sustainable development.

Empowerment in Development: Old Wine?

Radical empowerment discourse is associated with both individual and class action, with the transformation of structures of subordination through radical changes in law, property rights, the institutions of society... As ‘empowerment’ has become a buzzword in development, an essential objective of projects, its radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost. The concept of action has become individualized, empowerment depoliticized (Cleaver, 2001, p. 37).

Empowerment has become almost as much of a buzzword in development practice as has sustainability. While writing this thesis I lived in a hotel in Nicaragua, where interested strangers often inquired about my work. Usually I took the time to explain the research in depth, but occasionally, after a long day at the computer, I found myself falling back on the buzzwords and hoping that they would speak for themselves. On one such instance, after explaining to a young woman from Holland that I was writing about how “empowerment and sustainable development are related”, she raised her eyebrows at me and said, “To me, you just said nothing.”

Indeed, buzzwords have the ability to take all meaning out of a word or a concept. Buzzwords also hold their own sort of power. Cornwall and Brock (2005), who have done much research on the occurrence of buzzwords in development practice, write that as words become buzzwords, they take on different meaning in different

contexts. Not only do buzzwords give the appearance to the rest of the world that development organizations are on the right track, but they also frame the rhetoric in such a way as to legitimize their interventions.

Barely any development actor could take serious issue with the way the objectives of development are currently framed. This new consensus is captured in a seductive mix of buzzwords. 'Participation' and 'empowerment', words that are 'warmly persuasive' and fulsomely positive, promise an entirely different way of doing business. Harnessed in the service of 'poverty reduction' and decorated with the clamours of 'civil society' and 'the voices of the poor', they speak of an agenda for transformation that combines no-nonsense pragmatism with almost unimpeachable moral authority. It is easy enough to get caught up in the emotive calls for action, to feel that, in the midst of all the uncertainties of the day, international institutions are working together for the good, and that they have now got the story right and are really going to make a difference (Cornwall & Brock, 2005, p. 1043).

For example, some authors have taken note of how serious the World Bank has gotten on the subject of empowerment, having even published a sourcebook on the subject. But just because institutions give lip service to important notions such as empowerment or participation does not mean that they are effective in adhering to such ideas in their daily work practices. In actuality, top-down, bureaucratic structures, such as those found at the World Bank, make the insertion of empowerment in development projects more of an afterthought than a priority. At the Bank, "goals of project approval, fund disbursement and the management of relationships with host governments took precedent over empowerment goals in the day to day practices of staff" (Bebbington, Lewis, Batterbury, Olson, & Siddiqi, 2007, p. 615).

Empowerment has been largely stripped of its original meanings about the realities and distribution of power to refer instead to 'responsibility delegated from above, or from the centre, to monitor others below or beyond one, for whose activities one has to be responsible' (James, 1999, p. 14) in (Bebbington et al., 2007, p. 601).

The Empowerment-Participation Link

Empowerment and participation are two terms in development practice that are commonly linked and occasionally confused for one another. To many development practitioners, participation equals empowerment. However, just because local people are participating in the creation and implementation of development strategies affecting their communities does not guarantee that they or their communities are empowered by the experience. The first issue is one of simple definition. To attend to this issue it is necessary to identify participation as a means to empowerment, rather than an end in itself. Thus, participation is only one of several components that can serve to empower a person or community.

According to Cooke and Kothari, co-editors of the groundbreaking book, *Participation: The New Tyranny*, on the incidence of participation in development practice as a 'tyrannical' force, "the proponents of participatory development have generally been naive about the complexities of power and power relations. This is the case not only 'on the ground' between 'facilitators' and 'participants', between 'participants' and more widely between 'donors' and 'beneficiaries', but also historically and discursively in the construction of what constitutes knowledge and social norms. While analyses of power in participation are not new, what is evident is that there are multiple and diverse ways in which this power is expressed; furthermore, articulations of power are very often less visible, being as they are embedded in social and cultural practices" (Cooke & Kothari, 2001, p. 14).

Indeed, there is much to question about the use of ‘participatory’ strategies in development practice. Cooke and Kothari cite three types of tyrannies in participatory development practice: the tyranny of decision-making and control, the tyranny of the group, and the tyranny of the method. Within these tyrannies exist several problems and myths that question the connection between empowerment and participation in development. One cited problem is that of institutionalism, in which NGOs and institutions promote participatory techniques that support the *raison d’être* of the development institution or project in question. Rather than recognizing the diverse organizational and decision-making structures that already exist within a given community or society, the institution will use participatory approaches of their own making to achieve donor-supported project ends. Frances Cleaver (2001) gives an excellent example of this in his study of a Tanzanian project for local management of water resources. Despite the fact that the target village already had an effective, equitable, and culturally appropriate system for the management of the local well, an outside organization insisted on the necessity of setting up ‘participatory’ Water User Groups to oversee the process.

This is a clear example of the undercutting of local strategies. The main problem is that such institutional participation is structured to fit within the confines of the organization or system. There is no ‘out of the box’ participating allowed. A set of strategies is supplied and the choice is given to choose one of the above. A World Bank community development project, for example, would never include ‘political

revolution' as one of its options. "Associations, committees and contracts channel participation in predictable and recognizable ways, the aim of many development interventions apparently being to establish community structures that most clearly mirror bureaucratic structures" (Cleaver, 2001, p. 40).

A second problem with participatory strategies is one of identification and representation. Who is to participate? The community? Who then makes up the community? The assumption, far too often, is that the community is a homogenous entity with fixed boundaries, and thus can be motivated and mobilized as an organized force. "An implicit assumption in much of the ideological invocations of participation for community development is the notion that participation itself makes economic inequality, educational differences, and ideological divergences disappear" (Schafft & Greenwood, 2003). Rather than accepting that such differences within communities will not disappear, development organizations often tend to find it more convenient to act as though they do not exist in the first place.

A third critique deals with levels of engagement: where should participation occur? Some critics argue that community development projects favor overly localist participatory approaches over engagement with broader structures of injustice. Hickey and Mohan (2004) attribute this 'obsession with the local' to the tendency of development organizations to focus on solving imminent (external) problems, rather than immanent (internal) problems (Cowen, Shenton, & ebrary Inc., 1996).

To privilege the practices of imminent development risks a further type of 'irrelevance' by distracting from an engagement with the underlying forces of socioeconomic and political charges that shape people's livelihoods. The related assertion that

development can be willfully 'managed' through 'the right mixture' of institutional responses has further 'depoliticized' the practice of development in poor countries (Ferguson, 1994), rendering it a technocratic process to be administered and planned for by agents of development rather than negotiated with and contested by its subjects (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 10).

However, despite the implications of the above critiques regarding the effectiveness of participatory approaches in development practice, participation continues to be an essential component in changing existing power structures. There are several spaces in which participation of local people can help to realign imbalanced power structures, at community, regional, and global levels. One such space is that of 'participatory citizenship', or the involvement of individuals and communities in political and structural arenas where decisions affecting their lives and livelihoods are made. Within this space, proponents argue that citizens can become 'makers and shapers' of political and structural policies and interventions, rather than simply 'users and choosers' (Gaventa, 2002). However, it is essential to recognize that unless citizens are aware of their 'right to have rights', they will not seek to claim them.

Concepts of citizenship, which abstract rights from the political and historical contexts in which citizens find themselves, and which ignore differences in both awareness of rights and the capacities to claim them, will inevitably lead to differential outcomes. Those with the resources, power and knowledge to shape definitions of rights and how they are put into practice are able to turn rights discourses and entitlements to their advantage. On the other hand, the very structure of exclusions means that the most marginalised are often unable to do so" (Young, 1989, p. 258).

Other Components of Empowerment

Although participation is essential to making empowerment a reality in local strategies for sustainable development, it is only one of many. If people are to be able to lay claim to their right to make the decisions that will directly and indirectly impact

their lives, they must have both the external and the internal means to do so. External components, such as access to political spaces and the satisfaction of basic needs, are just as important as internal components, such as community identity and feelings of hope and confidence.

Satisfaction of Basic Needs

The first priority is not the environment or production but livelihoods, stressing both short-term satisfaction of basic needs and long term security (R. Chambers, 1989).

Much of development theory and practice is focused on the satisfaction of needs as a prerequisite to a better society. Abraham Maslow was a pioneer in studying the connection between human needs and motivation and developed a theory that ranked different types of needs into a hierarchical pyramid consisting of five levels. The basic premise of his theory was that ‘lower’ needs, such as physiological necessities and feelings of security, must be satisfied before so-called ‘higher’ needs, such as self-esteem, respect for others and self-actualization, can be sought after (Maslow, 1943). Though it can be argued whether needs can be labeled as ‘lower’ and ‘higher’, or even ranked at all, the importance of Maslow’s work lies his central argument that “it is quite true that man lives by bread alone — when there is no bread.”

This is an important lesson for the development practitioner, for whom a clear understanding of the motivations that shape the actions of individuals and communities is vital for the creation of effective and beneficial projects. If a person’s basic needs for survival and security are not met, then it is unlikely that he will be able to invest much

effort in working towards the betterment of his person or community. Hunger, thirst, sickness, pain, and fear are incapacities that cannot be put off or dealt with on the long-term. For those who lack the basic means for survival, conserving natural resources for the sake of environmental sustainability is low on the list of priorities. Accounts by people who have suffered extreme or chronic hunger tend to have in common an obsession with obtaining food, to the point of pushing any other needs aside. This obsession will lead them to dig through trash, putting their health at risk and forgoing any sense of dignity; it will lead them to steal from others, sometimes even from neighbors or family members; it may even force them to use physical aggression against others who would compete for their source of nourishment. In these situations – in times of war, drought, or famine – development agents must recognize that power can come in the form of survival. Regardless of the degree of the actual threat to one's life, “anyone who attempts to make an emergency picture into a typical one, and who will measure all of man's goals and desires by his behavior during extreme physiological deprivation, is certainly blind to many things” (Maslow, 1943, p. 375).

Access to Political Spaces

Development practitioners excel in perpetuating the myth that communities are capable of anything, that all that is required is sufficient mobilization (through institutions) and the latent capabilities of the community will be unleashed in the interests of development. The evidence does little to support such claims. Even where a community appears well motivated, dynamic and well organized, severe limitations are presented by an inadequacy of material resources, by the very real structural constraints that impede the functioning of community-based institutions (Cleaver, 2001, p. 46).

The notion of a 'space' for participation, protest and action in political spheres is a vital issue for discussions of empowerment and development. It has been shown that collective action is more dependent on the incentives and opportunities that political spaces provide than on any underlying economic or social structure of deprivation (Tarrow, 1998). People act on opportunities and the opening of a previously closed political space can have the same effect on a group of oppressed people as a rope would have on a person trapped in a well. While the intention to climb out of the well was always there, it is only with the opportunity that the rope provides that there exists a chance to act on that intention. Political spaces can exist formally as well as informally, and can be further distinguished as either 'popular spaces', arenas that tend to attract likeminded people that come together out of a simple desire to do so, and 'invited spaces', in which a more diverse group of people, with different interests, are brought together for the purpose of staking their claims in a given issue (Cornwall, 2004). Both types of spaces are important for development purposes. While 'popular spaces' can give further strength to an already unified group of people, 'invited spaces' provide an arena in which a more heterogeneous group of actors can debate differing perspectives amidst an 'equality of voice' in order to come to general consensus (Habermas, 1984). However, it is vital to recognize that like any form of participation, political spaces can (and are likely to) be manipulated by those who create and run them (Kohn, 2000).

Spaces come to be defined by those who are invited into them, as well as by those doing the inviting. For no matter how equitable the intentions that inform the creation of an arena for participation might be, existing relationships cannot be simply left at its boundary; rather, the traces of these relationships, and of previous experiences in other

spaces, continue to exert an influence on what is said, what is sayable, within any given space (Cornwall, 2004, p. 80).

Spaces can be formal or informal; they can be as regimented as a structured meeting in which the representatives of various factions are present (i.e. peace talks between warring parties) or as informal as an impromptu social gathering in which people commiserate on a shared problematic situation. Indeed, many social movements and revolutions have their origins in the everyday complaints of the oppressed members of a population about an injustice in their lives, if in hushed tones. Informal spaces can lead to formal spaces, and people practice voicing their complaints among allies and garner support, forcing institutions and governments to open up more official arenas in which they can make their demands heard. The creation of new and effective spaces depends on many conditions and is reliant both on ‘those below’ to insist upon them, as well as ‘those above’ to grant them, or at least not to stand in their way. A totalitarian regime in which freedom of speech is censored, for example, would be the least conducive political environment for such spaces to arise, where as a freer, more democratic system would provide a friendly environment for spaces to grow and flourish.

Local capacities and capabilities

It is useful to think of empowerment in terms of increasing the political capabilities of the poor: personal political capabilities, self-confidence, capacity for community organization, recognition of dignity, and the collective ideas available to support effective political action (Whitehead & Gray-Molina, 1999). It is the political capabilities of the poor that will determine whether they can employ social capital (the shared networks, norms and values created through social interaction) constructively or create social capital where it is lacking (Moore & Putzel, 1999, p. 13).

Regardless of the level of participation of community members in development discourses, imbalances of power are unlikely to fall into equilibrium if there is little capability or capacity for change at the local level. Capabilities and capacities can exist on many different levels and can manifest themselves in both tangible and intangible ways. Innate individual skills such as the power of persuasion, a good sense of the political climate and the capacity to build networks can greatly further a community's cause, as can accurate knowledge of local and national laws and experience in the workings of a country's judicial system. Empowerment in this sense basically refers to the changing ability of poor people to engage with the state (Williams, 2004).

Amartya Sen (1999) argues that such capabilities are actually freedoms that become the ends and the means, the processes and the opportunities of development. According to Sen, the deprivation of capabilities, whether in absolute or relative form, is the main driver of poverty, underdevelopment and inequality. If we look at capabilities and capacities in their absence, rather than in their presence, we can see the truth in this argument. Where people are deprived of the capacities and capabilities that will allow them to make relevant changes in the political sphere, then they are deprived of the freedom to make decisions regarding the development of their communities. But this issue is a two-way street. As we have already shown how top-down decision-making has little potential for sustainability, political and development policies will be short lived unless local people are given the capacity for participation and action within these spheres. "Capabilities can be enhanced by public policy, but also, on the other

side, the direction of public policy can be influenced by the effective use of participatory capabilities by the public” (Sen, 1999, p. 18).

Local capacities and capabilities can be strengthened ‘from above’, by improving channels of access towards and the accountability of governments, as well as ‘from below’ by assisting communities to make use of the power of organization: “the weapon of the weak in their struggle with the strong” (Michels, 1984, p. 48). In practical terms, this means increasing citizens’ access to information, enabling inclusion in political structures, supporting local organizational structure and good leadership and building the integration of local networks and alliances (Bebbington et al., 2007). In particular, local capacity can be greatly enhanced through unification with allies, either of higher or equal social and political status (‘friends in high places’), who can help them to garner more support for their cause. Indigenous social movements, for example, often make use of global networks of other indigenous groups and friends when allies are harder to come by at regional or national levels.

Keck and Sikkink (1998) have suggested that such shifts in discourse at the transnational level provide a positive boomerang effect in which indigenous groups are able to bypass unresponsive states and instead seek the support of transnational institutions, which then pressure the states. In this sense, the transnational forum is additive, not displacing more localized forms of indigenous discourse and mobilization but rather serving as an additional space for mobilization and a source of resources (Stiles, 2000). Globalization from above, therefore, can be appropriated and strategically utilized in a type of globalization from below that seeks to defend more localized ways of life (Horton, 2007, p. 101).

Inner Strengths

Perhaps the most complex and misunderstood component of empowerment theory is the idea of ‘internal’ empowerment. As noted earlier, internal empowerment

can exist both at the individual and the community level, and can act between both levels as either a reinforcing or converse relationship. Psychologists and behaviorists have long studied the link between an individual's level of self-esteem and their potential for success. Obiakor and Beachum's study (2005) on self-empowerment among African American students showed how if a student's idea of 'self' is threatened in a negative manner, such misconceptions and perceptions can lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy. For example, if a student is constantly threatened with the possibility that she will not graduate or end up in jail, it is likely that she will adopt an attitude of apathy in order to accept what a probable future. This study also emphasizes the changeable nature of an individual's perception of herself, and regardless of the external situation, those "who are resilient, determined, and have a strong sense of self strive to rise above the darkness of life's injustice to the light of life's joys" (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005, p. 21).

The concept of a changeable self sheds light on the learned nature of behavioral emotions such as apathy, fatalism, and helplessness. A study of a Peruvian community with a long history of both endogenous development and outsider-imposed projects showed how the community lost its willingness to act and its sense of self-reliance as "they learned that it is better to wait and receive than to exercise their own initiative" (Vincent, 2004, p. 117). Nielsen's thesis on the importance of an individual and shared sense of hope in community-based conservation projects lends support to this occurrence, in which "past experiences or learning history in goal pursuits can either

reinforce or diminish hopeful thinking through feedback from successful or unsuccessful goal attainment” (Nielsen, 2006, p. 74).

However, just as negative attitudes can be learned, they can also be unlearned and replaced with positive attitudes such as hope, resilience, and self-reliance. Freire (1973) writes that the oppressed can only begin to overcome their oppression after they realize that it has been put upon them – and that they must be the ones to overcome it. Until this realization, they will be fatalistic in their perceptions – “what can I do, I am only a peasant?” The only way out of this is for the oppressed to develop a sense of hope that they have the power to change things. *Against all Odds*³ is a compilation of successful development projects that resulted in the empowerment of the people involved. In all of the stories, what was held in common was a shared sense of ‘internal empowerment’, in which the people gained confidence, became passionate and excited about the prospect of changing a situation that they previously believed to be hopeless. Nielsen (2006) lists several ways in which hope and empowerment can be established in development interventions: facilitation for trust-based interpersonal relationships; valuing and empathizing with goals of individuals and communities; recognition of the capacities and capabilities of all people; progressive change based on individual and community strengths, goals and participation; serving as a resource to accompany individuals/groups and mutual learning through open communication.

It is believed that hope can be increased through facilitated interventions that assist individuals or groups to: focus on clarifying workable goals and their attainment via

³ (Bhaskara & Panos Institute., 1989)

multiple pathways, form strong trusting alliances, build interpersonal relationships, find hope in past experiences, address barriers, and reflect on and celebrate previous successful actions (Nielsen, 2006, p. 74).

Social identity and Solidarity

A second dimension of ‘internal’ empowerment is the ability to see oneself as part of a larger community, a community to which one owes loyalty, respect, and solidarity. To many, this sense of ‘connectedness’ is thought of as a person’s social identity, the combination of cultural, political, and social factors that add up to an individual’s place in the world. For members of remote indigenous communities, this social identity is partially determined by the physical boundaries of one’s tribe, but depending on spiritual beliefs may also extend to a sense of brotherhood with people from other tribes, nonhuman life forms, and even a deep respect for inanimate objects that make up the natural world, such as the sun and the moon. Where a group of people has a shared social or cultural identity, it can make up the backbone of any struggles that they hold in common. In the indigenous societies of the Andes Mountains in Peru and Bolivia, the people refer to their shared sense of identity as ‘nurturance’. In these communities, the point of life is “to nurture and to be nurtured”, where nurturance is the “knot that ties the community together” (Vasquez, 2005). In this sense, social ties and community cohesiveness is that which must be upheld above all other things – sustaining ‘community’ is not about freezing such traditional structures in time, but rather about maintaining their value and prioritizing their importance over all other things. “Community, the collective, is not external, but is the basis of existence. By

associating with others, the community itself is what links everyone and everything so that what matters is the collective harmony that is found in the life of the entire community and not each of the ‘forms in themselves’” (Vasquez, 2005, p. 38). Such a strong sense of cultural identity is very powerful, as a divided community or society would find itself unable to unite for a common effort. Those in power often capitalize on societal divisions in order to maintain control by further polarizing opposing factions.

Respect for the social identity of a person or community, is directly connected to a sense of power. If a person sees herself as in low standing to others, whether as a result of formalized political oppression or informal social exclusion, their sense of power and freedom to make decisions over their own lives is limited. The same holds true for entire societies. Where power relations between two societies are unequal, the society with more power is likely to impose certain aspects of their ‘shared’ social identity upon the society with less power. The destruction and replacing of social identities is a common consequence of oppressive relationships between and within societies, and its prevalence in the modern world is apparent in spread of globalization and the readiness with which cultures across the world have abandoned traditional modes of existence for the Western notion of consumerism. While many may be quick to attribute the global embrace of a desire for material wealth and success on an ‘innate’ sense that it is a ‘better’ way of living, it is rather an issue of power, in which the ‘low-power’ society is forced, pressured, convinced, or manipulated into believing that the

‘high-power’ society knows what’s best. This abuse of power has existed throughout history, and is evidenced in the wiping out of entire civilizations by more powerful tribes. In modern times, severe economic inequity among nations has resulted in the adoption of the ‘money-driven’ policies and characteristics of nations with more economic power by nations with less economic power.

If people and societies are to feel empowered, they must have a strong sense of social identity. It has been shown how the upholding of indigenous knowledge can lead to communal feelings of self-reliance and hope, while the ‘scientific’ disregard of such knowledge causes local people to lose confidence and become dependent on ‘imported knowledge’, and to wait for others to tell them what to do and how to do it (Howes & Chambers, 1979). Teran’s research on the Vernacular Education Center in Oaxaca, Mexico illustrates how the reinforcement of the shared social identity of a community leads to empowerment, as people develop pride, confidence, and respect for the traditional way of doing things in a given culture.

Regeneration means reconnecting with the community. The young members of the Vernacular Education Center explain that as various aspects of modernity invade their lives - such as television, video games, and cell phones - young people have been loosening their ties to the communities. Having been brought up in a more traditional lifestyle that values the role of elders and that considers obligation to the community as central to belonging to a specific place, the young men of the Center have fashioned an educational agenda that strives to reconnect youth with community. They do this by contributing to the community - building dry latrines, adobe stoves, fish ponds, and promoting reforestation projects. They do so also by learning from elders and by sharing their own knowledge with the elders. This is how the community begins to recognize them and remember them as part of the community and they in turn remember the community by learning and retelling the stories of their elders. Re-member here means making members again through a process that remembers history. And local history and the stories are the basis for the construction of an educational agenda that incorporates the dreams and desires of the people at the local level (Teran, 2005, p. 75).

Action

A final component of empowerment is merely the physical manifestation of the above elements. Where there exists inner strength, a shared social identity, capabilities and capacities, active and equitable participation, and political spaces, a community is in possession of the tools to make their own destiny. But empowerment is more than just about having the tools, it is also about using them; “the opportunity to continue to exercise new-found skills is of paramount importance. It is then that empowerment could be seen as sustained” (Lyons et al., 2001, p. 1244).

Action comes in many forms, and does not necessarily mean protest and mobilization in the traditional sense. Where power imbalances are moderate, political spaces and existing avenues to recourse may be enough. However, for communities that face severely inequitable power relations, active resistance may be necessary. “Mobilizing against development projects happens for local people in ‘real time’ - action is compelled if there is to be any hope for self-determination. Grassroots groups do not have the luxury of academic debate. Instead, action must be taken to create the opportunity for future action... One has to fight to survive; but survival is essential for one to fight again” (Wagle, 1996, p. 296).

Social movements commonly arise as a manifestation of this type of resistance, which unite people through collective challenge, common purpose, solidarity and the sustainability of social action (Tarrow, 1998). Such ‘contentious action’ is dependent on the previously mentioned elements of empowerment, without which there would be

no opportunities for action. The following case study of an indigenous mobilization of the Amazonian peoples of Bolivia sheds light on how action, combined with additional components of empowerment, led to the success of the movement.

The Importance Of Action: The Long March For Land Rights In Bolivia⁴

In August of 1990, after suffering centuries of abuses at the hands of those in power, 300 people from eight of Bolivia's indigenous groups of the northern Beni region undertook a historic march of 560 kilometers from the borders of their forests to the political offices of the capital city of La Paz. During the thirty-four days that the marchers walked, over 500 more people joined in their journey. Almost two decades later, this march is considered to be a historical turning point in the struggle of Bolivia's native peoples for land and political rights.

Historically, the Amazonian peoples were disregarded in Bolivia as 'less human' than the rest of society, a perception that lingered in the minds of many through the latter part of the twentieth century. Their presence in the forest was viewed as a nuisance that retarded the growth of the budding nation, a view that justified those in power to deal with 'the nuisance' through varying degrees of exploitation and political exclusion. As a result, on several occasions when the lands where the indigenous peoples resided were discussed, their stake in the matter was ignored, or worse, entirely forgotten. Longstanding agrarian legislation in Bolivia deemed such indigenous peoples

⁴ Much of this analysis was built upon from Kevin Healy's chapter, *The Mouse that Roared: An Amazonian March to the Andes for Land Rights* (2001).

as “jungle groups in a savage condition with a primitive organization” (Healy, 2001, p. 75), articulating the disdain of the government (as well as the general population) for their social standing. For the march to be successful, the notion of an ‘*indigena*’ needed to be reframed from one that conjured images of backwardness, laziness, disorganization, savagery, and stupidity to one that represented qualities esteemed by the Bolivian mainstream, which would push turn public opinion in their favor and subsequently persuade the elites to respect them as well (Higley, Kullberg, & Pakulski, 2002). The march did this in several ways.

First, the indigenous peoples used the power of organization. The strength of this ‘weapon’ first became clear in the early days of the mobilization, when a strong leadership worked to consolidate the support of the widely dispersed groups, which “turned heads as far away as La Paz” (Healy, 2001, p. 367). Through organization, the cause grew in size and was able to attract support that spread further than the boundaries of the indigenous territories, bringing important international actors, such as NGOs and scientists, into the struggle. The involvement of civil society and especially, that of the international community, helped to mount political pressure on the government. The support of civil society also helped to give more authority to their cause; when questioned about the level of external support by people skeptical of the indigenous mobilization, march organizers were able to reply “that the (supporting) institutions were many, mostly from Western Europe and the United States, as well as from all over Bolivia” (Healy, 2001, p. 377). The impressive scope and diversity of the

backing for the mobilization also helped to attract the attention of that national media, until “stories of their protest and heroism filled the newspapers and television screens” (Healy, 2001).

By turning a local issue into a global one, the leaders of the mobilization also found that they had greater access to important ‘back doors’. In many societies, a ‘back door’ can circumvent the enormous amount of time and resources necessary to address a problem through official means, and “break down barriers between public and private worlds” (Singerman, 1998, p. 274). For the indigenous people in Bolivia, the trend towards ‘indigenous chic’ that was happening outside of the nation’s borders increased the disposition of government officials to listen to what people had to say when they walked through the door. The use of personal contacts to arrange meeting with powerful people in government also enabled the opportunity to make important political allies. When a close friend of the mobilization became involved with government, he had the unique chance to tell the president of Bolivia the long history of the Amazonian peoples’ struggle for indigenous rights, helping to change the government position of the marchers as being ‘low-status Indians’ to one of real people with “a just cause” (Healy, 2001).

But in order for the marchers to convince others, they first had to convince themselves. Ultimately, the march succeeded because of the endogenous conditions that enabled for the mobilization of resources from within. From the start, the mobilization was designed to be inclusive, encouraging the participation of everyone

and anyone interested in participating, regardless of race, tribe, status, gender or age.

As the participants marched in the name of a common struggle, their solidarity became indestructible and prevailed on the several occasions when it was put to the test.

Greatly furthering this sense of solidarity were the overnight stays in the towns along the way, where children and townspeople would unfailingly give the marchers a 'hero's welcome', with food and speeches, and would provide the marchers with an opportunity to participate in celebrations that "symbolized the cultural pluralism they were bringing to the consciousness of the nation" (Healy, 2001, p. 379). The leadership of the mobilization continued to keep up the morale of the marchers even in the face of material losses by making constant appeals to the ideal interests of the group. At the end of each day, it became clearer that the march was about much more than land rights, transforming a specific cause into a movement based on the idealism of shared beliefs, meanings, and identities.

Although the external support provided the protection that the marchers needed to make their demands heard (without which the mobilization likely would have been put down with violence), that support was a direct result of the internal capability, strength and solidarity that radiated from within the mobilization. In the end, it was the power with which the mobilization was able to utilize all available resources to their advantage that enabled them to transform their political identity, a transformation that "won the hearts and minds of the nation" and gave Bolivia a "new face" (Healy, 2001).

CHAPTER 4
EMPOWERMENT AND DISEMPOWERMENT
IN DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

In development practice, practitioners and organizations play many different roles, which can serve to empower or disempower certain populations within communities, or even entire communities themselves. Historically, there are trends within development practice, marking the various ideas, stages and fashions that have arisen at given moments and have inevitably transitioned to new ideas, stages and fashions. This maturation has been positive in that the theory of development, along with its many practitioners, has proved to be self-critical and open to change. However, the unfortunate reality of this continuous ‘transformation’ of the field is that most of the growing pains are experienced not only by the practitioners themselves, but also by the subjects of such development ‘experiments’. While agents and institutions may suffer through crises of being, in general, it is the people who are to be ‘developed’ who must deal with the larger consequences of such interventions, whether they become poorer, richer, happier, sadder, less dependent, more dependent, empowered or disempowered. When a project goes wrong, the development practitioner has the option of quitting his job and going home, but the development subject cannot ‘go’ anywhere; she is already home and must deal with the situation as it was left behind.

Historical Roles of The Development Agent

Development organizations tend to play multiple roles in the planning, implementation, and diffusion of the ideas and projects that they seek to promote, regardless of the methods used. Some of these roles are mainly empowering, some are mainly disempowering, but most have both elements of empowerment and disempowerment that contradict or complement one another. In their important book, *A voice for the excluded: popular participation in development : utopia or necessity*, Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) analyze the different ways in which participation by the 'hitherto excluded' in development projects can render them further dependent on outside help, and thus disempowered.

NGO action and alliances with 'organized efforts of the excluded' can easily lead to manipulation and may create new bonds of clientelistic dependency... While on the one hand NGOs state their aim as fostering self-reliant development among the poor, on the other they build themselves up as institutions that looks set on staying. With one voice they go to the poor with something to offer, with another they say that the poor should stand on their own feet (Stiefel & Wolfe, 1994, pp. 207-208).

As Rescuer

In post-WWII usage of the term, 'development' in practice was understood as a form of international aid; American president Harry Truman enacted the Marshall plan in 1947 in order to provide massive post-war reconstruction to European countries whose national economies were destroyed by the war. Though the allied countries were the major recipients of the economic aid, Axis powers such as Germany and Italy also received substantial amounts of assistance, as one of the central motives of the plan was to repel the onslaught of communism in the Western World. Even the Soviets were

invited to participate as recipients of the plan, an offer that they rejected on the belief that the economic 'relief' would make the recipient nations more vulnerable to political pressure from the West, and equated the plan to a 'political weapon' used to 'impose its will on other independent states' (Vyshinsky, 1947).

Although the myriad of motives behind the Marshall plan was more complex than a simple rescue mission, the basis of the plan was to provide emergency relief to countries in great need. This basic premise underlies much of development work in the last half-century, and continues even today under the heading of humanitarian assistance. Indeed, most multinational NGOs that conduct 'community development' projects at present grew out of emergency relief activities. CARE International, World Vision, and the Red Cross are all examples of NGOs that originally operated through basic 'rescue' techniques, providing emergency supplies and basic assistance such as food, water and medical supplies to needy populations in times of crisis (war, drought, famine).

The role of development as a Rescuer is necessary when people are unable to help themselves due to severe physical limitations and can give people basic strength through adequate nourishment and good health, without which they might be powerless to survive, let alone to seek 'development'. However, this role can have disempowering qualities when it directs its efforts at people who do not need to be 'rescued'. The Rescuer can become a force of disempowerment in several ways. By 'rescuing' a hungry nation with imported food aid, especially where the threat of famine is not

extreme, the Rescuer can decrease demand for food produced in the region with detrimental impacts to local and national farmers. Where demand decreases, supply will follow, as returns on production become too low to justify farmers' investment in terms of time or resources. Thus, when the next famine occurs, there will be even fewer local supplies to abate the crisis, and starving people will be in even greater need of a Rescuer. Unfortunately, development trends do not always follow-up on the same region, and people that were 'rescued' from one famine with food aid cannot necessarily count on their Rescuer to come through again.

Research done of a government welfare program in Botswana referred to as *atlhama-o-je* ('Open your mouth and eat') showed how such strategies actually worked against empowerment: "Approaches and policies which encourage *atlhama-o-je* thus contribute to the passivity of the poor, where the latter become dependent receivers without taking part in the development process. This may lead to negative attitudes, unwillingness to participate, a lack of trust, and resistance to change" (Lekoko & Merwe, 2006, p. 326).

As Provider

The role of the Provider is very similar to the role of the Rescuer, but unlike the latter, the former role is not limited to times of crisis. Rather than providing emergency aid, the Provider focuses on giving the 'gift' of charity to less fortunate communities and individuals. Development organizations that operate through this role tend to measure their impact, at least in part, by tangible outcomes provided by donations of

material resources or time and energy by 'volunteers'. Examples of projects enacted by the Provider are schools or churches built (with outside resources and/or manpower), child sponsorship programs in which the 'benefactor' sends gifts of money or other materials to needy children, as well as infrastructure projects done on a larger scale, such as the implementation of regional irrigation schemes through the digging of wells and the building of canals. Though the Provider operates through many different methods and projects, with or without the participation of the local people, the unifying characteristic of such projects is that they are in large part generated and paid for by people whose lives will not be directly impacted by the project.

The majority of international development organizations that operate in the area of 'community development' play the role of the Provider in many of their activities. Even where projects are designed with significant input from the local population, the role of 'providing' becomes apparent when a majority of those impacted by the project perceive themselves as being materially 'benefited' by the development organization. While it can be empowering to provide services and resources to those who lack them, the role of the Provider often has a disempowering effect on local populations by doing things for people instead of helping them to do things for themselves. Such interventions often focus on the end product of the development activity (i.e. the number of children going to school) rather than the process through which the activity takes place (i.e. the historical, economic, political and social contexts which influence the number of children going to school and the quality of education). As a result, the

strategy used to fix the problem is usually simplified and surface-level. For example, development projects that are focused on children's education might correctly observe that the lack of economic resources in households makes it difficult for parents to cover the costs of notebooks, uniforms and other materials needed for their children to attend school. Thus, in their role of Provider, they might seek to solve this problem by paying for such materials. Though this assistance may make the difference for some children, underlying issues that were not addressed by the development organization remain unchallenged (such as alcohol abuse by parents which drain economic resources, political policies that favor the education of the urban elite over the rural poor, and historical marginalization of certain social classes that are engrained in the psyches of individuals). By limiting the solution to the provision of notebooks and uniforms, the problem is simplified and quantified; results may show that more children attend school, but they do not show the long-term effects of such schooling. They do not show the stigmatizing and dividing effects that such charity can bring to an individual or community, nor the lack of sustainability to continue such a project into the future, when outside funds are withdrawn.

A Peruvian case study that analyzed local resistance to participating in development projects illustrated that Provider-type development projects had the effect of making local people believe that their own efforts were inadequate and that it was more effective to wait for donor handouts and prepackaged projects than to attempt to do things for themselves (Vincent, 2004).

(The people) have learned that it is better to wait and receive than to exercise their own initiative... A new political relationship with outsiders has arisen in which they are supplicants and expect to be helped not by themselves, but by trustee-donors" (Vincent, 2004, pp. 117-118).

As Modernizer

In response to the continued problem of poverty in some of the 'developing' nations, as well as the determination of the 'developed' nations to continue to pursue their own development, the idea of 'modernization' arose. Modernization theory began to infiltrate into development practice in the 1960s through the concept of 'trickle down' economics, in which economic development in richer core areas would eventually increase the wellbeing of the poorer periphery. The role of development as a Modernizer often accompanied its role as a Rescuer, as it was believed that injections of capital into needy societies would put the modernizing effect into motion. The International Financial Institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have often played the role of the Modernizer through the making of conditional grants and loans to poor nations. Such loans, for a multitude of reasons, have led many nations into endless cycles of debt; it is estimated that the poor countries of the world pay more in debt to rich countries than they receive in economic assistance (World Bank, 1999).

Since the 1950s, modernization has been spread to 'underdeveloped' countries through such techniques as technology transfer, mechanization, agricultural extension, state-led credit, and the implementation of free trade agreements and policies. The Green Revolution, a highly debated experiment in modernization, helped to double

yields in much of South and Southeast Asia through the intensification and mechanization of traditional farming techniques. However, the inputs needed for such drastic increases were dependent on large amounts of water, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which greatly polluted waterways and worsened problems of water scarcity in drought-prone regions (Cavanagh, 2002). The Green Revolution also led to price declines of basic foodstuffs, which greatly benefited consumers while leading to losses of income for many small-scale farmers, whose lack of appropriate land excluded them from participation in the project (Evenson & Gollin, 2003). Many critics agree that the exclusion of the poorest farmers resulted in increased rural-to-urban migration and greater poverty for the land-poor. Research has shown that while food production increased, the number of hungry people also increased by equal or greater percentages – independent of increased population; while there was more food available per person, the poorest were unable to access it (Lappé, Collins, Rosset, & Esparza, 1998). Other ‘modernization’ projects have had similar results.

In Brazil during the 1970s, when soybean exports increased phenomenally – to be shipped to Japanese and European markets for animal feed – hunger also increased from one-third to two-thirds of the population. During the 1990s, Brazil actually became the world’s third largest agricultural exporter, with the area devoted to industrial farming of soybeans growing by 37 percent from 1980 to 1995, displacing millions of small farmers in the process (Cavanagh, 2002, p. 174).

Within countries, the State can also act as a Modernizer by implementing national policies at the local level, sometimes through tactics of violence or coercion. The appropriation of land is a common method of the Modernizer to carry out development on a larger scale and to impulse economic growth at the national level.

But in many cases the appropriation of land has led to the displacement of farmers and their more sustainable methods of diversified, small-scale agriculture. The following case study of state and private forestry plantations on indigenous Mapuche lands further illustrates the disempowering elements of the Modernizer's role in development.

The Impact of Forestry Plantations in Chile

Forest plantations have a long history of economic success in Chile. In Chile, fast-growing Oregon pines were introduced in the early part of the 20th century, and reforestation projects and the sustainable exploitation of the remaining rainforest was supported throughout the century. However, with the onset of globalization in the 1970s and the increased global need for wood products such as pulp and wood chips, existing tree plantations were expanded and available land was sold off at a fraction of its true value to foreign forestry companies.

There have been both direct social and environmental consequences to the expansion of these plantations. Although some of the land currently under forestry cultivation is area that had been previously deforested for cattle ranching and agricultural activities, large sections of virgin temperate rainforest were also bulldozed in order to make space for the more economically lucrative tree farms. In both cases, the monoculture "forests" that make up 13.5 percent of the total forest area in Chile and cover 2,118,840 hectares are relatively devoid of biodiversity (CONAF, et. al., 1999). The clearing of native forest areas has resulted in the near-extinction of several tree species endemic to Chile's territory and the exotic species that make up the vast

majority of the tree plantations (principally pine and eucalyptus) require large amounts of water and chemical inputs. The petroleum based fertilizers and pesticides wash downstream, polluting rivers and contaminating the drinking water of nearby communities, and the tree plantations are held responsible by both local people and scientists for draining water tables and drying up the land with their thirsty roots (Raintree, 1991).

These environmental impacts are interconnected with many of the social and cultural consequences of the plantations, as indigenous people living in the region depend on both the biodiversity and the ecological stability of the land for the maintenance of traditional communal livelihoods, cultural and religious expressions, and basic economic sustenance. Mapuche spiritual beliefs are directly tied to the land and nature, and a seemingly small loss such as the endangerment of a native tree species in the vicinity of an indigenous community can have dramatic cultural, spiritual and societal consequences for the people who are dependent on that tree for religious and medicinal purposes.

As Liberator

Although the decade of the 1970s was marked by so-called 'integrated services' by the dominant development institutions, around the same time there was an alternative development role that was being promoted by scholars who were critical of the mainstream, top-down roles described above. The Brazilian social scientist, Paulo Freire, was one of the most prominent advocates of the role of the development agent to

be one of a Liberator, and wrote extensively about the concept of the 'liberation of the oppressed' from the bounds of their oppression, namely poverty, social injustice, and inequality. Father Gustavo Gutierrez, a priest from Peru, was another important figure in the development of 'liberation' as a theory, and published one of the most important books on liberation theology, which integrates the religious practice of Christianity with that of political activism.

In general, the role of the development agent as a Liberator was one of education of the masses, political activism, and solidarity with the poor. Freire, in particular, developed his 'liberating' method in pedagogical terms, mainly through the teaching of literacy to raise participants' awareness of the 'world' in their process of discovering the 'word' (Blackburn, 2000). Other practitioners who took on the role of the Liberator focused on the political oppression of the poorer classes, and acted out their parts by living alongside the poor (Ernesto Cardenal), fighting alongside them in armed revolution (Fidel Castro), and even dying as martyrs for the cause (Che Guevara). The practice of Liberation was to be conducted from the bottom up, rather than the traditional, top-down development scheme; "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (Freire, 1973, p. 49).

Though the role of the Liberator has had strongly empowering effects on a great number of people, particularly those in societies such as Nicaragua and El Salvador

where oppressive political and economic structures were engrained in decades of dictatorship, it also has had disempowering effects through its tendency to polarize issues, divide populations, and act in itself as a tyrannical force. Liberators tend to see the world in black and white, or as Freire depicted, as made up of the oppressed and their oppressors – the only way out is to instill a ‘revolutionary’ consciousness among the people, create a ‘new man’. In this light, the Liberator will seek to overturn worldviews that are perceived to be ‘oppressive’, regardless of the cultural or spiritual importance of that worldview for the individual. By denying people the right to make up their own minds and disputing the validity of their perceptions, the Liberator can unintentionally disempower the same people that he desires to ‘liberate’ (Robinson, 2005).

Liberation can also become its own tyrannical force in turning the ‘oppressed’ into ‘clients, beneficiaries, and customers’ of the privileged educators or activists who are actively engaged in the process of liberating them (Prakash, 2005). Revolutionary governments often err in this way by nationalizing previously privatized (and usually oppressive) systems and businesses for the collective good. While the goal is to spread equity among the people, the result is often less positive, as services become centralized, markets become regulated, and the poor are rendered dependent on the same people who hoped to ‘free’ them.

In Nicaragua in the 1980s, the Sandinista government regulated the market in order to ensure that the entire population had access to food and to abolish the

oppressive relationship between the merchant and the peasant. However, the state was not able to fulfill the less formal elements of the merchant-peasant relationship that were of great benefit to the peasant, such as mail service, communication, short-term credit, and transportation.

Thus, although the merchant-minifundista relationship was ultimately an exploitative one, even those peasants most committed to the revolutionary process - those awarded land early in the process because of their loyalty - recognized that the state in its role as merchant was becoming equally, if not more, exploitative of the minifundista (Saldaña-Portillo, 2003).

Alternative Roles of the Development Agent

So if the traditional development roles of the Rescuer, Modernizer, Provider, or Liberator do not work, then what does? What kinds of actions can development agents carry out in order to encourage sustainable development? First, it must be clear that actions, activities and processes, are not inherently sustainable. As noted in the beginning of the chapter, 'closed-loop systems' are necessary for sustainability. In a given society, institutions and businesses often seek to induce actions among the population that will be able to be maintained over time. Such motivation can be externally imposed through physical or mental means (it is done because of the external benefits of doing so – regardless of whether or not the intrinsic value of the activity is perceived), or they can be internally adopted by the individual doing the action (it is done because the intrinsic value to doing so is perceived). External motivation can come in many forms. A person can be forced to do an action because of economic need, mentally obliged through societal norms, or tricked through psychological

manipulation. On the other hand, a person who does something for intrinsic reasons has only one motivation – she believes that the action is beneficial in itself, regardless of external rewards to doing it.

According to the self-determination theory of Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan (1991), people who act because they who are externally regulated are controlled by specific external contingencies. They work to avoid punishment or to gain a specific reward. Those who are regulated by internal factors feel free to follow their own interests and engage in the actions spontaneously and of their own volition. The latter group tend to have more interest, confidence, excitement, persistence, better performance and better overall understanding of the materials studied (Arnold, 2007, p. 109).

The ‘alternative’ development roles that follow make use of indirect approaches that appeal to peoples’ ‘internal’ motivation. Rather than insisting or obliging, these development agents ask questions, encourage good ideas, and support poor peoples’ struggles as cheerleaders – not as ringleaders.

As Catalyst

There are many different capacities in which development agents can operate as catalysts, or agents for change, at various levels of practice. Catalysts can come in the form of individuals, organizations, or even entire communities, working together for a common purpose. The main objective of the Catalyst is to spark a new idea or action, with the hope or expectation that it will lead to a change in a given direction.

Catalysts are different from ‘change agents’ or ‘extension personnel’ in that they are not promoting a particular change or new technology. Instead, they aim to help communities build their own capacities for identifying and solving problems, emphasizing autonomous action and self-reliance (Datta, 2007).

Catalysts tend to work in indirect ways, as their role is only to get the ball rolling, but not to undertake the responsibility of keeping it moving. Indeed, the role of

the Catalyst is often unintentional, with the origin of the new idea or action often forgotten as others take responsibility to cultivate the new knowledge and follow through on determined action (Lancaster, 1992). Researchers who work directly with local people can often inadvertently play the role of the Catalyst by seeking answers to questions that hadn't previously been contemplated by the respondents. Individuals who cross cultural or social boundaries can also become unwitting catalysts, as they bring new information, beliefs, and perceptions in sharing their own ideas and experiences with others. In this way, catalysts are constantly reshaping the knowledge that they encounter.

The practice of horizontal learning can also be a catalyst for change in communities, as local people share experiences and ideas with peers, whether from within the same region or even through 'south-to-south' encounters between people who deal with similar struggles but come from different parts of the world. "Exchanges can provide a catalyst for a development process within a new community as they see the development approaches that they are using" (Patel & Mitlin, 2002, p. 130).

While such experiences are not always directed to the creation of a specific project, the simple opportunity for hearing new ideas and presenting one's own has a catalyzing effect by planting seeds of possible change in peoples' minds, along with the shared hope and inspiration to cultivate their growth. A research project in Canada called the Caragana Project showed that in helping rural people to identify problematic issues affecting their communities, they enabled them to become empowered so that

they could continue the process of resolving such issues on their own. Thus, the Caragana project acted as a Catalyst, enabling the “community to mobilize and continue the process to resolve the issues identified” (Gaboriau, 1993). In a separate study of ‘islands of sustainability’ in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Andes, it was demonstrated that catalysts played a significant role in strengthening local ‘social capital’, which in turn facilitated local processes that led to economic empowerment and environmental sustainability; “in all these cases, these individuals not only brought ideas, but more importantly they brought networks of contacts that helped bridge gaps between the locality and non-local institutions and resources” (Bebbington, 1997, p. 194).

As Facilitator

Another alternative role that development practitioners can play is that of the Facilitator. Though facilitation is not a new concept in the development field, its use as an indirect approach, unaccompanied by some of the more direct roles mentioned earlier, can have empowering effects on communities. Facilitators can serve communities in several ways: by bringing people together – especially in cases in which political, social, or cultural differences have led to historic divisions within populations – by aiding the organizational process through which a community can begin to mobilize for action, and by acting as a objective observer, whose impartial eye can bring to light power imbalances that might have been ignored otherwise. The role of the Facilitator is especially important for marginalized populations within communities, such as women or children in patriarchal societies, who are not always invited to

participate in the decision-making or implementation of community projects. In such cases, the Facilitator can ask community leaders if meetings are representative of entire populations, and if they are not, then what the leaders can do to make them so. They can also challenge existing community leadership or organizational structures that have disempowering effects, such as a lack of transparency or democracy in decision-making.

Datta's research on organizational sustainability in Bangladesh sheds light on how the role of the development agent as the Facilitator can contribute to the external and internal capacities of community-based organizations (CBOs). While it was recognized that CBOs are most successful when initiated from within, the organizational structure and effectiveness of such groups could be strengthened by outside assistance in the area of facilitation, such as "decision-making roles and processes, resource mobilization and management, communication and coordination, and conflict resolution" (Datta, 2007, p. 53). The role of the Facilitator is also vital in order to get the community on the same page by providing spaces in which people can meet and by guiding people through brainstorming activities in which new ideas or solutions to community problems can arise. In this way, there becomes less of a tendency to set the 'goodies' against the 'baddies', borrowing the phrase from (Stirrat, 1996), and a stronger inclination to seek understanding of how inequalities arise in local settings.

As Ally

Perhaps one of the most important roles that a development practitioner can play is that of an Ally – a friend and supporter to individuals and communities in need of economic, social, or political empowerment. Allies can act in many different ways to support and empower communities, such as legal representatives, intermediaries, interpreters, educators, and spokesmen. They can play out their roles individually, as a priest or anthropologist, or in collective, as an institution, organization, or movement (Stiefel & Wolfe, 1994).

One of the most important words for an Ally is ‘solidarity’, “a willingness to engage in collective effort to create and sustain a caring society” (Bhattacharyya, 2004, p. 15). Solidarity is vital for the development agent because it encompasses the spirit of compassion, respect, unity, and collective action, without which the ‘helper’ will never be able to connect with the ‘doer’. Montoya describes a new process of ‘community marking’ which “seeks to attain collective well being in an organized manner through a practice of new values of solidarity, community, cooperation, and mutual aid. It is this novel undertaking – whereby people through their own efforts seek to obtain a material and spiritual well-being that cannot be reduced to simple economics – that we call community economic development” (A. Montoya, 2001, p. 179)

The Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka is a good example of how outsiders can inspire change by adopting the role of the Ally: “When Sarvodayans are invited to a village, they bring no blueprints for change, but rather good listening skills with which

to empower the villagers” (Wilson, 1996, p. 623). It is not about ‘working on’ people, but rather, about ‘working with’ them. As the Ally is aware that development relationships constitute a two-way street, in which both the development agent and the development subject must work together in order to make positive and sustainable change, she will be inclined to ask how she might help, rather than making assumptions about what she thinks she should do. As in any friendship, the goal is not charity or dependence, but rather trust, support, and love.

Allies can also be found in horizontal relationships between individuals or communities, in which the emphasis is on friendship and equal exchange, rather than the relationship being based on an unequal flow of resources or knowledge from one to the other. The Nicaraguan Network is one example of a large group of allies – a network connecting sister-city and peace and justice committees in the United States with community groups, environmental organizations and labor unions in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan Network carries out its work by arranging opportunities for Nicaraguans and North Americans to learn from one another and share experiences through conferences, speaking tours, publications, and participation in political and social campaigns. Although the Network also works in more direct ways by supporting social movements and carrying out advocacy work, its main purpose is to express solidarity and strengthen friendships between people from the United States and Nicaragua.

Charity talks. Solidarity listens. Charity assumes it has all the answers. Solidarity learns. Charity can be *patronizing*. Solidarity is humble. Charity decides what its recipients need. Solidarity asks for input and participation from both sides (from speech, Jeffries, 2007).

As Advocate

Related to the role of the Ally is the role of the Advocate. Though the Ally and the Advocate are similar in their expressions of solidarity and support with individuals and communities, the Advocate plays more of a politically active role in his work. Advocates tend to be passionate supporters of contentious politics and seek to support oppressed peoples in their struggles through involvement in social movements (as marchers), through political advocacy (as lawyers or politicians), or through the spreading of propaganda (as reporters, spokesmen, or artists).

While Allies are usually connected through ties of friendship, and thus have had physical or verbal contact with the individuals and communities that they support, a person can play the role of the Advocate without necessarily knowing firsthand the specific people or communities behind the issue. Indeed, the Advocate is often more concerned with the issue itself, whether it deals with environmental, social, cultural, political, or economic rights, and seeks to champion causes based on moral or philosophical grounds. The German novelist who writes a book on the cultural and economic impacts of widespread logging on indigenous tribes in the Amazon, the Canadian high school student who becomes a vegetarian after reading about the environmental destruction of meat production in the Americas, or the Californian housewife who writes letter after letter to local newspapers and politicians for the closing of the Guantanamo Bay prison facility are all examples of ordinary citizens playing the role of the Advocate. Development practitioners and organizations can also

act as Advocates by taking political and moral stands in support of the people they seek to help. They can provide legal aid to victims of human rights abuses; they can publish reports on cases of political corruption; they can march alongside oppressed people in mobilizations.

The role of the Advocate in development is especially important in order to bring local issues into the global arena for broader change. Even where an issue might appear to be local (the building of a dam on Mapuche land in Chile), causes and impacts often extend into further geographical arenas (national electricity needs, urban water supply, indigenous land rights, etc.). Alger argues that because global problems are in essence local problems, the global policy paradigm must be broadened “to extend from small communities affected by global policies, sometimes referred to as the grassroots, to global institutions” (Alger, 1990, p. 155).

However, it is important for Advocates to keep people at the heart of their advocacy work in order not to become too wrapped up in theories. Ideologies are important as a means, but if sustainable development is to be designed from the bottom upward, then the everyday realities of oppressed communities must be put first.

Underlying this perspective on the advocacy role is an understanding that institutions exist at the service of community. We do not live in NGOs, we do not live in universities. These are institutions created to improve and sustain the life of our communities. We have forgotten the order of things. How can we keep our attention fixed on the maintenance of our communities? How can we root our decisions in community? How can we ensure that the institutions created for the advancement of our communities do not lose sight of their reason for being, which is in a democratic society to serve community?”(Keough, 1998, p. 194).

Table 2 illustrates how the aforementioned roles may lead to empowerment or to disempowerment, and subsequently will have a high or low potential for sustainable development.

Table 2: Development Roles and Empowerment

Role of Dev Org.	Elements of Empowerment	Elements of Disempowerment	Type of Development Scheme	Potential for SD
Rescuer	Basic survival, physical well-being	Dependency; may weaken local structures for emergency prevention and rehabilitation	Food aid, disaster relief	Low
Provider	Improved access to basic services	Dependency, lack of initiative for people to help themselves	Child-sponsorship, humanitarian charities	Low
Modernizer	Opportunities for economic advancement; access to new technologies	Increased poverty and inequality, less local power	Privatization, free-trade agreements	Low
Liberator	New ways of thinking; freedom from systemic oppression	Dependency, polarization of issue, increasing divisions, severe threat of violent repression by those in power	Political revolution, social mobilization, ideological education	High
Catalyst	Inspiration; new ideas from within; awareness of local capabilities; self-reliance	Change may be attributed to Catalyst and not to community itself	Participatory research, priest, motivational speakers, horizontal learning experiments	Medium to High
Facilitator	Increased local participation and organization	Community may become reliant on Facilitator	Guided community meetings, invited research teams, created committees	Medium to High
Ally	Access to resources and information;	Could cause envy and jealousy between community members	Mentors and educators, social networks, sister-city partnerships	High
Advocate	Hope; feelings of solidarity; social identity	Threat of violent repression, potential to create divisions, issue prioritized over people	Legal representation, media advocacy, social movements	Medium to High

CHAPTER 5

ARRIVING IN ARENAL

In March of 2006 I crossed the Costa Rican border into Nicaragua for the first time with the goal to find an appropriate community in which to conduct my research. I had only one solid contact at the time, a Jesuit who had been living in a rural community since the late 1980s and had worked as a layman in one of the local farmers' cooperatives. I had little additional information besides the name and location of the community – a place called Arenal that was home to approximately a thousand souls and was about an hour's drive south of Managua. I first arrived on a Thursday and was greeted by a group of about ten community members. They welcomed me with *fresco* (a typical Nicaraguan juice drink) and a cake (for someone else's birthday), and listened carefully as I explained the nature and purpose of my research. I told them that I was studying the nature of sustainable development, which I explained to be “improving the social and economic situation in a community, while at the same time taking care to protect and preserve the natural resources.” My interest in Arenal was first to “determine the current state of sustainability,” by looking at the social, economic and environmental problems of the community, and second, to try to figure out how sustainable development could actually be feasible in a place like Arenal. After I had finished speaking, those gathered took turns expressing their perceptions of the research and all agreed that it would be “a good thing for the community”.

It was in this way that I was unofficially invited into the community of Arenal, if only by a very small percentage of its population. I agreed to come back in May for a three-month stay, during which time I completed the bulk of my field research. I returned again for a week in December, then again for a month in June of 2007, another month in December, and then for three more months in the spring of 2008. However, after the initial three-month period, much of the time during subsequent visits was spent living outside of the community (writing reports or conducting interviews) and visiting Arenal only on the weekends.

The group of individuals who initially welcomed me to the Arenal community belonged to a community solidarity group called Grudesa – Grupo de Solidaridad El Arenal. Grudesa was initially formed in 1996 by twenty-two individuals, the Jesuit among them, with the mission of “keeping alive the values and the hope of the Sandinista Revolution” by working to create an organized, responsible and self-sufficient community. Although Grudesa has political roots in Sandinismo and studies the life of Jesus during its monthly meetings, it describes itself as non-partisan with respect to politics or religion. While in theory this is true, in practice many people in the community tended to perceive Grudesa as being affiliated with the Sandinista political party and the Catholic religion.

As an ‘independent’ researcher who sought to connect with all of the people in the community, my work was cut out for me. To start, I didn’t enter the community on neutral footing. Not only had I arrived with the assistance of Grudesa, but also the two

homes that I resided in (one during my initial visit in March, and the other for the remainder of my time in Arenal) were both closely affiliated with Grudesa. Though I had initially planned to counter this dilemma by staying for shorter amounts of time with several different families (of diverse political and religious tendencies), in the end I decided to stay with the second family, as much due to logistical reasons as to a close relationship that I formed with that family.

Thus, my experience was never quite neutral, even though I made a consistent effort to befriend and interview community members from all of different political and religious factions, and occasionally spent a night or two in their homes. At times this effort caused personal difficulties, as my determination to obtain as objective a footing as possible forced me to limit my time spent with any single person or group, which led to some misunderstandings among friends. But in the end it appeared that I succeeded in my mission, as was clear from the wide array of friendships that I was able to cultivate during my time in Arenal: members of the Sandinista-affiliated farmers' cooperative, leaders of the Liberal political party, Evangelical pastors, members of a Catholic youth group, community organizers for local organizations, and of course, the many individuals who were connected with Grudesa. On the last day of my initial three-month stay in the community I was given a *despedida* (goodbye party), organized by Grudesa and held in their Guardabarranco community center. Over one hundred community members attended, including many who were not connected with the solidarity group and had never been to the center. To many with whom I spoke

afterwards, I was the first foreigner to *relacionarse* with ‘all’ of the different groups in the community. It seemed that friendship was the deciding factor. It is through this experience that I examine the relationship between development and power relations in the community of Arenal.

Implications of “Participatory” Research: Gossip and Knowledge

Unlike everyday life, participant observation is a research method of a social science that purports to advance understanding and offer explanations of social realities to a wider community. Ethnographies, unlike everyday conversations, carry the seal of science, and the responsibility that this entails. Representations put forth in everyday conversation are not held up to the light of falsifiability, nor are these interpretations accepted to be none other than idiosyncratic opinions. Ethnographies, however, are interpretations and representations ‘under oath’, so to speak, broadcast publicly, precisely to be scrutinized for their verifiability in the advancement of science (P. J. Montoya, 1999, p. 24).

The lens through which a researcher views a situation, in particular one which involves interactions between people, can never be entirely transparent. The lens is always colored by personal values, circumstances and subjective evidence. Even for a newspaper reporter who seeks to ‘get to the bottom of things’ and present findings in an objective manner, those findings will invariably be determined by who the reporter talked to, the way in which the reporter understood the implications of what was related and even the expectations the reporter had before initiating the investigation. Thus, it is important to clarify that much of my information came to me as ‘gossip’, or as the stories that people told me about their lives, the lives of others and the context of those lives with regards to the history, politics and culture of Arenal. Roger Lancaster, an anthropologist who conducted research in Managua during the Sandinista years, wrote that his experience was very much influenced by gossip;

I imagine that if anthropologists were honest about their sources of information, most of us would have to admit that we work a great deal in and through the medium of gossip. And it is also clear that I was a particularly fertile subject for gossip's ongoing and open-ended negotiation with reality. I was, at least in first, an outsider, about whom very little was known, in a neighborhood where people are accustomed to knowing the most intimate details about a person's life. Over time I became sensitive to the sorts of information that could be shared, or concealed, in gossip" (Lancaster, 1992, p. 72).

In Arenal, I too became a recipient and subject of much gossip and from the start, I tried to turn this in my favor as much as possible. To begin with, I attempted to communicate the general subject and purpose of my research project and the institutions that I was working with, as well as my stance of impartiality to as many people as I could, using any and every opportunity to do so. I made the rounds with neighbors, trusting that they would speak with one another about the new *visitante* and would find that their information concurred. I also used public events to explain my research, again with the hope that those not present would hear about it 'through the grapevine'. Sometimes I found that my efforts were successful but I also realized how quickly progress could be derailed and even reversed. When an American high school student came to Arenal to learn how to 'work like a farmer' and moved in with a local family just up the road from where I was staying, many people automatically assumed that we were together. Even though he was ten years younger than I, spoke almost no Spanish and stayed for less than two weeks, residents of Arenal asked me for months after he had left where 'the other one' was. As a result, my status as a subject of gossip affected the way that people perceived me, whether positively, negatively, or in a neutral light. If people viewed me as having good intentions, it was clear that they were more apt to answer my questions in a straightforward, honest way. However, if people viewed me

as a threat, or having malicious intentions, then it was probable that they would not want to talk to me at all, even if their resistance was passive. A third perception by some was that I could ‘help them’ in some way – whether through direct monetary assistance or through the bringing of a project to the community. I attempted to clarify my presence in the community by insisting that I was only a student, that I was not affiliated with any organization and that it was not my intention to bring a development project into the community. By making a consistent and ongoing effort to make my purposes clear I felt assured that people were honest in the information that they shared with me, as much as a person’s perception of things can be considered to be truthful.

Much in the way that my presence as a subject of gossip and subjective perception was a major issue in my research, my role as a recipient of such gossip and subjective perceptions by others greatly influenced the research outcomes. For the subject of my research, it was vital that I understood the complications that can arise when soliciting ‘local people’s knowledge.’ Even if people relay information in an honest manner, truth is subjective and dependent on many variables. Knowledge is not fixed, but able to be adapted and changed according to circumstances; it can be introduced with as much facility as it can be retained, which makes it difficult to record what is found as something ‘traditional’ or ‘inherent’ to the community. Because of this, it is important to record this knowledge in the midst of a wider context of history, power relations, intercultural differences, and development interventions.

In his book, *Life is Hard*, Lancaster illustrates such permeability of knowledge with an example of ‘traditional’ Nicaraguan medicine. When a Nicaraguan friend of his becomes sick with the flu, he prepares chicken soup for her, much to the amusement of the neighbors who have never heard of the use chicken soup as such a cure. When, years later, he too becomes sick with the flu and a neighbor offers to make him a ‘traditional cure’, he is shocked when he is brought a bowl of steaming chicken soup. In my own research, I often had a sense of certain knowledge being recent or even memorized, rather than something that was engrained in the beliefs, practices, and ways of life of the community members. For example, in conducting a survey that sought to gain insight into how people define their ‘natural environment’, young people commonly recited a general schoolbook definition, while older people were often unable to even attempt to make a guess at its meaning. For them, *el medio ambiente* (the environment) was a recently introduced concept, something that many people knew the meaning of but that few had truly integrated into the context of their own lives.

Knowledge is also shaped through power relations, whether directly or indirectly. While it may be obvious that the most powerful (power-rich) members of society are more likely to have their opinions and perceptions taken into account and recorded as fact than the least powerful (power-poor), individuals will also often adjust their beliefs for the purpose of gaining power. For example, development organizations will often seek out ‘local knowledge’ with the goal of tailoring projects to the needs of the community that they are working in. However, it has been shown that the

‘participatory’ research styles used to collect this knowledge tend to produce “a rather peculiar type of knowledge, strongly shaped by local relations of power, authority and gender” (Mosse, 2001, p. 19). If people perceive that the knowledge that they put forth will bring them benefits or power of some sort, they will be apt to adjust that knowledge accordingly. Thus, “what is read or presented as ‘local knowledge’ (such as community needs, interests, priorities and plans) is a construct of the planning context, behind which is concealed a complex micro-politics of knowledge production and use” (Mosse, 2001). For this reason, I took great pains to avoid being directly connected with any particular organization or group that was working to ‘benefit’ the community in some way, and largely let the community members determine the topics of conversation in conducting informal interviews.

Research Methods

When I arrived to El Arenal in 2006, my research objective was to gain insight into the causes of environmental degradation in the community and to identify and analyze available options for a transition to sustainable development. I attempted to do this by finding answers to the following questions:

1. What is the current state of environmental sustainability in El Arenal?
2. If the current situation is found to be unsustainable, what must change for a transition to sustainability to occur?
3. On a practical level, how can outsiders assist in this transition?

In order to find the answers to these questions, my research incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. First, I sought to conduct a broad technical assessment of the environmental situation within the community. The focus here was on practical issues such as waste management, water systems, energy use, the acquisition and/or production of food, subsistence and cash crop farming techniques and transportation, among other issues. The main objective was not to carry out a detailed technical evaluation of the above topics but rather to understand how daily life in the community affects the surrounding environment. Information was gathered through methods such as participant observation and quantitative research methods such as surveying and the measuring of biological indicators.

Secondly, the research involved the enactment of a participatory methodology in order to understand how the members of the community perceived the sustainability or lack thereof of their community and surrounding environment, as well as to provide opportunities for the sharing of opinions, knowledge and solutions. This incorporated the use of several participatory research methods in order to learn what was important to the community members and to understand the different perspectives that existed among the local population. Methods employed during this part of the research included informal interviews and seasonal calendars, as well as focus group activities such as community mapping and problem trees. These methods will be described below.

Informal Interviews

Although much of my research was carried out through the informal methods of observation and gossip gleaned by spending great amounts of time with the local people, I structured most of this information into a series of 'informal' interviews. I did this in several ways. As a basic rule, I made sure to explain my purpose in the community when introducing myself to someone for the first time. Secondly, I sought out local 'interlocutors', community members who would introduce me to their friends or neighbors as a trusted *amiga* to take me on tours of the community. Very rarely would I approach an unknown home on my own and introduce myself, both out of respect for the privacy of the local people and also to protect myself from guard dogs. I chose my interlocutors based on a number of factors. Did they have the time/energy to spend several hours introducing me to people? Were they well liked in the community? Were they viewed to be impartial with regards to political or religious affiliations? If not, could I expect that they would only take me to homes where their affiliations would not be viewed in a negative light (and by association, that I would be viewed in that light as well)?

Most of my interlocutors turned out to be young leaders in the community, usually students or recent graduates, who had the time and the energy to spend half a day introducing me to their neighbors. Other interlocutors chose me, rather than the other way around, by suggesting that I should speak to a certain friend or relative of theirs and offering to introduce me to him or her. Though most times, I let the

interlocutor decide where to take me, occasionally I asked them to introduce me to a specific person. Sometimes I even sought out interlocutors based on what sector of society they were affiliated with. As my goal was to get to know all parts of Arenal, I wanted to make sure that my interlocutors would take me not only to homes of different political and religious affiliations, but also to meet people who were not involved with any of the various groups or projects in the community.

Through this method, I was able to interview many different types of people, even though the majority of those interviewed were Catholic and subscribed to the Sandinista political party. In total, I conducted ninety informal interviews, of which 51 percent were women and 49 percent were men. Of those who were forthcoming with regards to their religious and political affiliations, 61 percent considered themselves to be Sandinistas, 39 percent Liberales; of religion 76 percent were practicing Catholics and 24 percent had converted to Evangelism.⁵

The length, subject matter, and setting of the informal interviews varied considerably. In some instances, an informal interview was a several-hour event in which specific questions were thought up ahead of time and notes were jotted down in a small notebook. On other occasions, a casual encounter such as running into someone in the road and talking together for a short while made up the informal interview, and

⁵ As I did not specifically ask interviewees about their political or religious tendencies, in a minority of the cases I could not detect a close affiliation towards either political party or religion. Although in most cases, I could guess a person's affiliation based on family ties and geographic location of the home (as the different groups tended to live close together), I have chosen not to make assumptions, as in recent years it has become more common for individuals to 'convert' religiously, and even politically.

though the conversation was unplanned, I would invariably take out my notebook either during or after the encounter to make notes. Though my main focus was on environmental issues, I tended to ask open-ended questions that I believed would lead to a more holistic understanding of the situation within the community.

Formal Interviews

In addition to the informal interviews, I also carried out sixteen ‘formal’ interviews with individuals from outside of Arenal in order to ‘fill in the gaps’ where information that the community members provided me with was either contradictory or incomplete. The main purpose of these formal interviews was to better understand the regional and national context that impacted the potential for sustainability in the community. In general, I sought to learn what changes (economic, social, and environmental) were happening in the region, what outside forces had positive or negative impacts on the potential for sustainability within the community, what was being done on an institutional level to improve the situation, and what was the wider geographical context of the reality that the people of Arenal were faced with. Types of people interviewed were local government officials, personnel of development projects, environmental officials and Nicaraguans from outside the Arenal community. In these interviews I used either a digital tape recorder or made notes in my notebook, depending on the situation.

Environmental Survey

I also developed a survey in order to obtain a more 'objective' understanding of how most community members understood their natural environment, as well as the impacts that daily life in the community had on the sustainability of their natural resources. The survey consisted of eleven closed-ended questions, half of which led to open-ended questions, depending on the given answer (see Appendix A). For example, for the question, "Do you believe that there are ways to protect the natural environment in the community", in the event that a person gave an affirmative response, the question would follow, "In which ways?" A final open-ended question was added to the end of each of the surveys in which the respondent was asked to offer up their own solution to any problem facing the community. I was also able to gather general demographic information through the administration of the survey.

The majority of these interviews were administered by my research assistant, Donald, a patient young man from the nearby community of La Sabanita. The advantages to hiring Donald were multifold. He was known and trusted by many members of Arenal, and well liked by those who knew him personally. He was also a local, and as such was better equipped to use vocabulary and a manner of speaking that would be easily understood and non-threatening, which proved to draw honest and detailed responses by those surveyed. Because of Arenal's long history with outsider intervention, I was concerned that if I approached unknown homes without a trusted

interlocutor (and no interlocutor had time enough to accompany me to over one hundred homes) people would not have been as willing to answer the questions.

In order to ensure that the survey respondents would be a mix of all sectors of the community, we visited virtually every house within the geographical boundaries of Arenal, regardless of political, religious, or even personal connections. If there were any homes in which Donald felt that his intentions would be viewed with suspicion, I would ask a trusted neighbor to act as an interlocutor and I would carry out that particular survey personally. In total we carried out 133 surveys, 55 percent of those interviewed were women and 45 percent were men. There were far more young people included in the survey than older people, with more than half of the respondents being under the age of 35, and a full 30 percent of all respondents under the age of 25. Older community members, aged 50 and above, only represented approximately 27 percent of the 133 people surveyed.

Community Groups

In addition to the methods mentioned above, I also worked closely with ten community groups, attending their meetings and events and organizing 'focus' activities during which I would obtain data for my research. The extent of my involvement in these groups varied from case to case and depended both on my intentions and the nature of the group. For the purposes of this study, I have identified three different levels at which I involved myself with groups. The first was that of *participation*, or simply being present and involving myself in the activities but not with the intention of

directing them in any certain way. By being present in the meetings and activities of a group, I was able to introduce myself to more community members, explain the purpose of my presence in the community and establish greater trust with the local population. The groups that I was only involved with at this basic level were the local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Folkloric Dance Group, the Catholic and Evangelical churches, as well as the group of women that made bread.

A second degree of involvement was that of *facilitation*, when the group provided me with a space in which to create and carry out an activity for my research. When the opportunity for *facilitation* arose, I chose a technique that was either already proven as an effective participatory research method (such as community mapping), or I invented one on my own that I believed would be more appropriate to the needs of the group. With some groups I was given the opportunity to conduct more than one participatory method and thus obtained more information from some groups than from others. The groups that I was involved with at this level were Grudesa, the group of university students affiliated with GRUDESA, the environmental group within the group of university students, the Youth Pastoral Group (affiliated with the local Catholic Church), a large assembly of women from Arenal and the surrounding communities (organized by a political 'resistance' group from Managua), the Pikín Guerrero farmers' cooperative, the teachers at the Arenal primary school, the second grade class at the Arenal primary school and the *Asociación de las Comunidades del Norte de Masatepe* (an association of local leaders organized by World Vision).

A third degree of involvement I only carried out with one group. This degree of involvement I refer to as *creation*, as not only did I organize and facilitate the activities that the group was to perform, but I also created the group myself. This group I called the ‘leader’s group’, and I organized it with the purpose of trying to bring together leaders from within the Arenal community that represented all factions of the community.

It is important to mention that there were many groups that I did not become involved with, both due to lack of time or lack of access. For example, I did not meet with either the local Sandinista political team or the Liberal team, although I did attempt to meet with the Liberal team unsuccessfully. I did not meet with the Sandinista team because most of my research subjects were already of the Sandinista tendency, and I did not want to further skew my research in a political direction.

Analysis of Community Development Schemes

In addition to the participatory research methods carried out during the initial three-month fieldwork period, I returned to Nicaragua for two follow-up visits, each a month in length, in order to carry out a comparative analysis of two radically different approaches towards sustainable community development in Arenal. This part of the research was unplanned and unanticipated previous to conducting the fieldwork during the initial three-month stay but was determined to be of great benefit to the research because of the implications of each of the approaches for the empowerment or disempowerment of the community.

The first of these approaches was carried out by an international child sponsorship non-profit organization called World Vision that began operations in the region in the early 1990s and formalized them with a community-wide Area Development Program (ADP) in 1997. The second was a grassroots approach to community work – a group of friends from within Arenal that called itself Grudesa (Grupo de Solidaridad Arenal). The members of Grudesa established themselves as a formal group (not an organization) in 1996, but have been carrying out community work in Arenal since the decade of the 1980s.

As my research was not primarily focused on the impacts of either Grudesa or World Vision (as the decision to do a comparative analysis was unanticipated), I had not developed methods for obtaining information previous to my first stay, nor had I obtained official permission to do so. Thus, in order to obtain detailed information (in a very short amount of time and with limited access) with regard to the organizational structure, budgets, impacts and sustainability of the various activities conducted by Grudesa and World Vision, I used several strategies.

With World Vision, a multibillion-dollar, international humanitarian organization with a reputation to uphold, I had the most difficulty obtaining necessary information. Although I visited the Program offices no less than ten times and contacted the country headquarters multiple times, I was only able to speak directly with the local project manager on two occasions, and both times the interviews were limited in time and information. However, I was able to speak more at length with

project staff who resided in or near Arenal, as well as with local ‘leaders’ who had participated extensively in World Vision projects in the community. In total I conducted formal interviews with four community members who worked as ‘leaders’ in various program committees, five staff members at the local offices of the program, two staff members at the World Vision headquarters in Managua and two officials from outside the immediate community who were unaffiliated with World Vision but were knowledgeable about their work. In addition, in a full third of the conversations carried out in the informal interviews the subject of World Vision was discussed, not including the more formal conversations held with the community leaders already mentioned.

In order to complement the more subjective information gathered through the interviews with community members I was able to obtain several internal organizational documents, on which I have backed up many of the conclusions arrived at in speaking with the local people. One of these documents was a 200-page intermediate evaluation (World Vision, 2005) that was carried out in 2005 by Nitlapan, an independent Nicaraguan research institute, in which the results of two surveys (taken before and after seven years of World Vision involvement in the region) were analyzed and the overall impacts of the development project was evaluated. For this reason, the quantifiable information on the project comes from the intermediate evaluation, which surveyed 181 households (both in 1997 and in 2004) in the seven communities that made up the Arenal ADP, with the informal and formal interviews backing up such statistics in a more qualified manner.

While the information gathered regarding World Vision's program in Arenal is described as accurately as possible given the limited extent to which the research was focused on the program, it is important to note that this study depicts only one of its thousands of projects across the globe and therefore cannot in anyway be said to be representative of its work of the organization as a whole. Rather, it is hoped that the roles played by World Vision in Arenal will be recognized as typical of those adopted by many development organizations, whether they work through child-sponsorship or use other techniques.

In comparison to World Vision, I had far greater access to the workings of Grudesa. Unlike World Vision, Grudesa had no official offices to visit nor security guards to screen visitors but rather a community center where I, or any other person in the community, was welcome regardless whether or not I had an official invitation or appointment. In addition, several of Grudesa's members had been those who had initially invited me into the community, so a strong level of trust existed from the start between the community group and myself. As a result, I participated in the activities of many of the groups that were affiliated with Grudesa, as Grudesa operates as a 'group of groups', rather than an organization with projects. In addition to a basic level of *participation* in the activities of the Group (such as baking cakes with the women, exercising with the juvenile dance group, or attending celebratory events), I was also able to carry out some *facilitation* with several of the groups, which led to greater understanding of the general opinions and perceptions of the groups' various members.

One exercise in particular gave me additional insight into problems between the different groups, as I facilitated the creation of a ‘problem-tree’ of issues that one of the groups felt needed to be addressed by the others.

In addition, I repeatedly carried out detailed formal interviews with four of Grudesa’s key members, as well as speaking with several community members who had previously been involved in Grudesa, but who had withdrawn their involvement due to various reasons. As Grudesa is not an officially recognized organization, there were few documents on which I could base my observations, nor was there any survey to use to examine perceived impacts. In order to compensate for the lack of objective information I questioned a number of community members, both those who had been directly involved with Grudesa and well as those who had never stepped foot in the group’s ‘Guardabarranco’ community center. Although perceptions and opinions varied from person to person, there were several themes that were repeated on a consistent basis among those interviewed and could thus be viewed to represent community members’ perceptions of the work carried out by the group.

It is also important to note that I shared the information that I gathered with regards to Grudesa with the group on multiple occasions before the publication of this thesis. The sharing of information was not an easy process, as on several occasions the members of Grudesa felt that I had not accurately portrayed the way in which they carried out their work in the community. In particular, I made the mistake of attempting to analyze the activities of the group through what they referred to as a ‘NGO prism’ in

comparing their activities with those of World Vision. However, after much back and forth and considerable effort to make sure that the information that I was reporting was not only true to the group, but true with regards to what I had learned from the rest of the community, I feel confident that the assessment of Grudesa is both accurate and fair.

Community Context

In order to gain a better understanding of the historical, political and cultural contexts of Arenal, I sought to learn as much as possible about local legends, history and the stories of the community members. Much of this was done by collecting and reading previous reports and articles that had been written on the region and even on the community of Arenal itself. An ethnological study on the history of Arenal, written by Rene Mendoza in the late 1980s, was of exceptional value for this purpose as were reports put together by World Vision on the demographical and socioeconomic details of the region. In addition to these documents, I gathered newspaper articles, read previous research conducted in the area and visited the two ‘ecological museums’ located in the region – one at the Masaya Volcano national park, the other in the nearby town of Diriamba.

In the next chapter, I hope to communicate as concise a version of this information as possible in order to give the reader the basic context of Arenal. Of particular relevance to the main premise of this thesis are the recurring themes of systematic inequality, verticalism and disempowerment. The term verticalism, or *verticalismo*, is commonly used among political scholars in Latin America to refer to

the 'top-down' and centralized processes of making and implementing decisions in a given society. Vertical political structures tend to exclude the opinions of the 'power-poor' in favor of including the opinions of the 'power-rich', which has such consequences as corruption, dependency and disempowerment.

CHAPTER 6

AN INTRODUCTION TO ARENAL

Arenal is a rural community thirty-three kilometers to the south of Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. The community sits to the south of the Masaya volcanic complex, which consists of an active crater wedged between two inactive conical volcanoes. To the west of the crater and to the northeast of the community lies the Laguna de Masaya, a crescent-shaped lagoon formed from the cooling lava of multiple eruptions over thousands of years (MARENA, 2008). The land is fertile in parts and overtaken with molten rock in others, but luck has spared the community from the harmful carbon and sulfur dioxide gases that pour out of the Santiago crater at a rate of 3500 tons per day. Communities to the west of the volcano, however, are not so fortunate, and the acid rain caused by the gases ‘burns’ the surrounding vegetation, making it impossible to cultivate little besides hardy crops such as pineapple and pitahaya.

Arenal gets its name from the sandy (*areñosa*) quality of the soil and is under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Masatepe. It has a population of 942 individuals, residing in approximately 184 households, of which 37 percent is under the age of fifteen (INEC, 2005). The population density of the region is approximately fifteen inhabitants per kilometer. *Arenaleños* are similar and different to one another in many ways. There are different religions, political ideologies, economic classes and

education levels among the local population, but the people are very connected to their community and identify it as 'home'. What it means to be an *arenaleño* has changed throughout the centuries, as the community has reshaped itself throughout the centuries, not only culturally, but socially, politically and geographically as well.

A History of Dependency

Before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers, the original inhabitants of the region were the indigenous people of the Dirianes tribe who lived in constant fear and veneration of the nearby volcano, then called Popocatepetl, or 'mountain that burns' in their native Sonora Nahuatl language. The local people lived in an economically self-sufficient capacity, farming traditional crops such as maize and yucca and hunting wild animals for their subsistence needs. When the Spanish colonizers arrived in the 16th century, they brought with them Christianity, a greed for land and gold and exploitative measures to subdue and control the local population. The newly introduced systems of production emphasized scale over diversity and although small-scale farming continued to provide the subsistence base for most of the families in the community, the new systems occupied greater amounts of land and indigenous peoples were hired or forced to do day labor on these larger plots of land.

With the invasion of the Spanish colonizers came a collision of two worlds, two production systems, and two cultures... The love for the way of life in the community and the love for gold became entwined in battle. The Spanish system, with its slave-based mode of production, imposed itself upon the indigenous population... The indigenous world, in spite of the technological superiority of the invaders, did not disappear; their resistance embarked every angle of their being: they resisted with their minds, with their blood, and with their eyes. (Mendoza, 1990, p. 12).

In the 1750s the Spanish colonizers began to expand their influence by seeking to change the basic economic, social and religious structures of the indigenous people. They introduced cattle and other livestock and the new ranching activities forced the community members to relocate, pushing them into the agricultural frontier. In 1772 the Masaya volcanic system erupted, filling part of the present day Laguna de Masaya with lava and forcing the inhabitants to move out of the valley to the nearby towns of Masatepe and La Concepcion, whose higher altitudes protected them from the dangers of the volcano. However, the ranchers who lost their land on the slopes of the volcano were quick to reestablish themselves on newly invaded territory and their rapid takeover of the fertile lands on the outskirts of Arenal caused those indigenous to the region to move back to their previous homes. "This is the dance of the peasant: thrown off their land, thrown back to their land" (Mendoza, 1990).

The arrival of coffee to Nicaragua in 1848 added to the relocation of the most land-poor families back to the valleys to the south of the volcano, as along with the introduction of coffee came the establishment of a system of land tenure. This removal of the indigenous peoples from their land intensified in the late 1800s due to a law that established the sale of a determined amount of land to indigenous groups, while the rest was retained by those in power (Wheelock, 1985). Although the proximity of the volcano spared the Arenal region from becoming entirely converted to coffee plantations, because of the new system of land tenure many people lost access to land

on which they had previously farmed for their subsistence and were forced to travel outside of the community to look for work on coffee plantations.

The latter half of the 19th century was also the time when the Arenal region was repopulated not only by the land-poor, many of whose ancestors inhabited the region long before the arrival of the Spanish⁶, but also by wealthy landowners from nearby towns who sought to buy up much of the fertile land in the region. One family that arrived during this time to the community of Arenal was the Reyes⁷ family. Like many of the other landowning families in the region, the Reyes came from the township of Masatepe in the latter half of the 19th century to grow tobacco and other cash crops. Other families that arrived to populate the region were not as wealthy and their inability to secure adequate landholdings put them in a position of relatively low economic and social status to that of the Reyes. As a result, the land-poor became cheap man labor (*mozos*) for the Reyes family and other large landowners who soon possessed most of the land both within the community and in the rest of the region. The system of land tenure became more unequal in the next century, as large landowners were able to obtain man labor and land for next to nothing.

⁶ Although there is little genealogical evidence to link the ancestry of present day *Arenaleños* to the pre-Colonial indigenous settlements in the area, the continuity of indigenous legends among many families sheds light on possible roots. Some of the oldest members of the community insist that in the 'past' (according to their grandparents, who learned from their grandparents), there was no Laguna to speak of and that a large Guanacaste tree grew where now the land is buried under 40 meters of water. Many of the oldest *Arenaleños* insist that the Laguna was made by a magical serpent that dug itself into the ground and cried until it filled the hole with its tears, thereby creating the present-day Laguna de Masaya.

⁷ Name changed to protect family.

The land-poor, however, were caught in their own ‘cycle of debt’. No longer able to subsist on their land, many community members were forced to work as *mozos* on the large farms or rent land on which to grow their own crops. The wages were extremely low, typically consisting of less than five *cordobas* for a day’s worth of labor for a man, and four *cordobas* for a woman.⁸ This was the most a person could expect to earn for eight hours of hard labor and no food, as sometimes daily wages reached only two *cordobas* per day, and was not enough to feed a growing family. In the region, landowners made up less than one percent of the population but owned the vast majority of the land. This hugely unequal system of land tenure continued for the greater part of the 20th century and was supported by economic, social and political structures whose oppression left a legacy of poverty and dependency amongst the peasants that endures to the present day.

Arenal in 20th century Nicaragua

Historically, Arenal encompassed a much larger area, approximately twelve squared kilometers, which was then split into five separate ‘*comarcas*’ (shires) in 1936 due to a political decision from the capital to facilitate the electoral process.⁹ Since the 1930s, Nicaragua had been ruled by a series of dictators, most of who came from the

⁸ The *cordoba* is the principal monetary unit used in Nicaragua. In 2008, one *cordoba* is equivalent to approximately US\$.05. In the mid-1990s, the value of a *cordoba* was greater. To give a reference for the above salaries, a chicken cost approximately seven *cordobas* in this time period.

⁹ The five *comarcas* that make up ‘*Arenal historico*’ are El Arenal, La Sabanita, El Guarumo, El Pochote, and Cruz de Mayo. Although this study is specifically focused on the smaller *comarca* of Arenal, much of the research is based on the wider experience of the residents of the entire historical region.

same notorious family of the Somozas. The Somoza dynasty began when Anastasio ('Tacho') Somoza Garcia was appointed to head the newly formed National Guard in 1933, an instrument created by the United States government to replace the military presence that the U.S. Marines had held in the country since the start of the century. The role of the Marines had been to suppress the popular and political rebellions that were aimed against the nation's vertical power structures that had greatly benefited the interests of the wealthy business classes in Nicaragua and the United States, a role that was then passed on to the National Guard. One of the first tasks of the National Guard was to assassinate the famous revolutionary leader, General Augusto Sandino, who fought against the injustice of Nicaraguan aristocracy and U.S. imperialism until his murder in 1934. Following this first act of 'taking care of business,' with the backing of the U.S. government Anastasio Somoza was then appointed to the presidency in 1937, the first of three Somozas and five puppet presidents who maintained complete economic and political power over Nicaragua for forty-two years.

If there was money to be made anywhere in Nicaragua, the Somozas took notice and squeezed out the competition. They extracted personal income from public utilities and the financial sector, monopolized the cotton industry when it surged in the 1950s and, later, meat, shrimp, and lobster export in the 1960s and 1970s. They owned the nation's prime food-processing industries, sugar refining, cement production, the cardboard, tobacco, and recording industries, and sea and air transport. In fact, it is said that by the late 1970s, the Somoza family owned everything in Nicaragua worth owning (Berman & Wood, 2003, p. 372).

Verticalism

Although small-scale farming continued to provide the subsistence base for most of the families in the community, cash farming occupied greater amounts of land and

local residents were hired or forced to do day labor for these larger plots of land. Rene Mendoza identified the five types of producers that were predominant in the middle of the 20th century, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Producer Types in Arenal in Mid-1900s

Type	Amount of Land	Characteristics
1 – Mozo	<.5 – 2 manzanas (mzs.)	Unable to survive off of land; dependent on outside salaries; traditionally worked as mozos (hired laborers) on large coffee farms outside the community; occasionally rented land in order to produce own crops; principal economic concern was daily wage
2 – Subsistence farmer	3-10 mzs.	Small subsistence farmers; produced basic grains and some citrus for family consumption and occasional sale in Managua; owned small livestock (pigs, chickens); occasionally hired out labor during off months; principal economic concern was fulfilling basic needs.
3 – Basic producer	Approx. 20 mzs.	Produced basic grains and several acres of cash crops (tobacco) for family consumption and sale in outside markets; hired extra labor during harvest periods; owned oxen and carts, as well as wooden mills for processing.
4 – Landowner	50-400 mzs (outside community); 20-50 mzs. (within community)	Owned farms that were located both within and outside of the community; previous to 1950 used lands as pastures for livestock or rented lands to type 1 and type 2 producers; after 1950 produced cash crops such as tobacco and beans; hired wage labor to run the farms; lived outside the community in Masatepe.
5 – Landowning family	Similar to Type 4	Constituted by one large family in the community (the Reyes); same characteristics as Type 4 except that they lived within Arenal and controlled much of the economy within the community: the local store, access to credit, and local transport.

Source: Table adapted from text in (Mendoza, 1990, p. 38).

Note: One manzana is a unit of measurement equal to 1.73 acres.

In Arenal, the majority of *arenaleños* were dependent on the Reyes not only for employment, but also in order to meet needs that could not be fulfilled within the community (Mendoza, 1990). Because there was no regular public transportation to the community other than what the Reyes would provide with their vehicle, community members had to walk several miles to meet other basic needs, such as water and healthcare. For water, the local women walked twice a day to the Laguna de Masaya, which occupied many hours of the day. The construction of a large tank in the Reyes family compound reduced the consistency of this chore, as the tank harvested water during the wet season for sale to some families in the dry months. This landowning family also owned the community '*pulperia*' from which they sold products on credit to their workers, further increasing their economic power over the land-poor peasants, and they were the only owners in the community of a steel mill for the processing of sugarcane and coffee. In later years, they also were the main holders of outside information and external communication as the main recipients of mail and the owners of the only television in the community in the late 1960s.

The peasant had few alternatives. The doors were closed... And the families were always multiplying, bringing up a larger number of *mozos* with a larger demand for work, so that salaries went down. They were made dependent on the system in order to later become orphans of that system. Francisco Garcia of Arenal tells us the following: 'the sons would help their fathers to pay the bank. A large family, like our own, had to rent land if we were to harvest it, but the cost to rent was very high. The older people would go to the bank and obtain a loan in exchange for their land title as a guarantee. Then, when the harvest would go bad, the bank would take away their land and it would go back to the *patron*' (Mendoza, 1990, p. 40).

Further strengthening their control over the community were the important ties that the Reyes had to regional and national political and religious institutions. The first

chapel was constructed in the community in 1960 and a religious community committee created, over which presided the head of the Reyes family. The first Catholic priests who came into the community sought only to connect with the leadership of the Reyes family, thus the vertical relationship between the *patron-mozo* was extended to religion through that of the priest-peasant.

The costs of this 'verticalism' were very high. Economic poverty took its toll by widening the divide between the landowners and the land-poor with regards to health, education and access to political spheres. The peasants recognized their own low social and political status and saw themselves as less than equal to their *patrones*, on whom they had become dependent for their own survival. There was even the tendency for *mozos* to cast their votes in political elections according to the party of their *patron* (Mendoza, 1990).

These relationships began to mark what it is to be an *arenaleño*, who became the heirs of a type of historical imposition similar in its authoritarianism as that of feudal times; a dependency that due to familial ties and the landownership of the *patrones*, many times with their patriarchal appearance, was even further accentuated through religion. Throughout the years this social relationship began feel like something natural, or perhaps even 'divine'; God appeared to the peasants with his 'fair-skinned' and 'bourgeois' face (Mendoza, 1990, pp. 40-41).¹⁰

Stirrings of Change

However, in Arenal, as in the rest of the country, the late 1960s and 1970s saw the beginnings of much change. 'Development' came to the *comarcas* in the 1960s

¹⁰ However, there is much evidence of covert or overt attempts at resistance and rebellion by the peasants towards this way of life. The Masaya region in which Arenal is located is notorious for the tendency of its inhabitants for violent rebellion. As stated by one Nicaraguan textbook, "the city of Masaya has been at the forefront of liberating struggles on behalf of the Republic and public freedom."

with projects to build schools and churches and to install pipes for potable water, a brief period during which national wealth was trickled down into the Nicaraguan countryside. In Arenal, formal education was provided through the construction of a primary school in 1965, potable water followed in 1967, a health clinic was established in 1970 and electricity was brought to the region in 1972. Although such wealth was in part due to a national economic boom that was the result of the growing export industry, the vast majority of Nicaraguans continued to live in poverty. Land had become ever more scarce – families had grown and so while some plots of land were divided up and became smaller, others became larger as they were bought up by the land-rich and converted into large-scale farms (Ciera-Midinra, 1986).

When the third Somoza, Anastasio ('Tachito') Somoza Debayle, retook the presidency in 1967, the political and economic oppression became even worse. Several years before, a small group of university students had founded themselves as a 'National Liberation Front,' and began calling themselves 'Sandinistas' after their martyred hero. Although the group worked clandestinely in the initial years, by the 1970s they were launching covert military attacks against the brutal National Guard, most of which resulted in many deaths and further political oppression by Tachito and his powerful allies, even as the Sandinistas and their supporters continued to grow in number. In Arenal and elsewhere, voting was held for the sole purpose of reinforcing Somoza's position and to most people it was a joke – Somoza would win no matter what.

Men, and to an even lesser degree, women, did not view themselves as autonomous, knowledgeable political subjects in the Somoza era. Miraflores (a Nicaraguan town) resident recalled, 'There were elections and we all voted for Somoza. It was the custom. We saw Somoza as the administrator of the country.' Residents described themselves as 'asleep', unseeing and unaware of the social reality that surrounded them and without voice, until participation in revolutionary movements 'awakened' them to a more critical class consciousness in the late 1970s" (Horton, 2007, p. 26).

It was the same situation in Arenal, where those in power controlled the communication and information channels and community members had been 'uninformed' and 'asleep' for decades. According to a community member who had served on the community committee for the opposition party, "the national guard laughed to watch us vote because they knew that they were going to fix it" (Mendoza, 1990, p. 34). In Arenal, the dictatorial structure on the national sphere reflected the oppressive reality that the peasants experienced in their own community. The community members were not unaware of what was happening around them nor of the injustice that they suffered; the corruption of the Somozas was well known throughout the Nicaraguan countryside. Rather, the majority of the people felt powerless to change it. Sandinismo was not yet viewed as a viable alternative to Somoza, but the vertical foundation between the *patron* and his *mozos* was slowly beginning to change through the introduction of new ideas.

The first of these new ideas was brought into the community through the supposedly traditional vessel of Catholicism. In the early 1970s a new social movement called Liberation theology was gaining ground among Christian missionaries in Latin America with the main purpose of bringing justice to the oppressed, mostly through political and social means. In Nicaragua, Liberation theology reached the people

through the creation of community groups called '*Delegados de la Palabra*' (Delegates of the Word) by local priests who supported the new movement. In Arenal, the first group of *Delegados* was established in 1975, a group in which the Reyes family did not participate. The first president of the group was a community member who was neither wealthy nor powerful, but rather was simply one of the '*mozos*' who worked on the Reyes land. He was elected to the position because of his previous experience in heading the community religious committee, a position that had been barely tolerated by his *patron* and scorned at by the regional diocese.¹¹

Although as a Central American movement the '*Delegados de la Palabra*' had purely religious roots, by the time the first *Delegados* committee had been set up in Arenal the national leaders of the movement had already established a working relationship with the *Frente Sandinista*. Thus, much of the work of the *Delegados* carried out in Arenal was, from the beginning, connected with the revolutionary movement, however much this was unknown to many of the community members who participated in the religious activities. The *Delegados* carried out their work in the community at different levels of depth,¹² and only the most trusted community members were invited to participate in the politically focused work of the *Delegados*. It was within this smaller group that the *Frente Sandinista* eventually found a base of community support within Arenal.

¹¹ From interview with community member, April 15, 2008.

¹² The first level dealt only with Bible study, the second sought to connect the Bible to 'real life', and in the third, members discussed more political issues and looked at how the community could organize itself politically to resolve local problems.

The Revolution and the Sandinista Years

As the Sandinistas began to make military gains on the National Guard and found ways through which to let the people know about their victories, the citizenry began to accept the Sandinistas as a real alternative to Somoza. Several widely publicized cruelties on the part of Somoza sparked the anger and indignation of the citizenry, such as the devastating earthquake of 1972 after which Somoza hoarded a large part of the international aid sent for his own benefit, leaving the rest of the country to suffer in the aftermath. *Arenaleños* became firsthand witnesses to the atrocities of the dictatorship, watching from their homes as military helicopters descended over the Santiago crater to drop the bodies of political dissidents into the steaming volcano. Some members of Arenal had begun to become involved through their work with the *Delegados* and then more directly, using their homes to hide weapons and even Sandinista soldiers in the last years leading up to the revolution.¹³

By the late 1970s, the Somoza regime was close to toppling. In 1978, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the editor of the only significant opposition newspaper to the Somozas, was murdered, resulting in revived national outcry against the dictatorship. In 1979, U.S. support for the Somoza administration was withdrawn after the killing of an American journalist, Bill Steward, at the hands of the National Guard. By June of 1979, a wide variety of anti-Somoza resistance groups had joined the *Frente Sandinista*

¹³ From interviews with community members and from Mendoza, R. (1990). *Hacia El Volcan: Arenal Historico*. Universidad Centroamericana, Managua, Nicaragua.

and a provisional government was formed in Costa Rica to take over power after Somoza's inevitable fall. By the end of the month, most of Nicaragua was under the control of the *Frente*, and on July 19th, the *Frente* Sandinista launched the final insurrection in Managua, winning the revolution. The next day, the previously established provisional government moved into office and began working towards the goals of the revolution: political freedom, social justice and autonomy from foreign imperialism.

After the revolution, change became a continuous part of life in the community, as everywhere else in Nicaragua. Sweeping national programs brought free healthcare, education and land to Arenal, as it did to other rural areas across the country. Although Arenal had had a primary school since 1965, the majority of the families did not send their children to school due to economic and social reasons. The poorest households needed the labor that their school age children could provide and the patriarchal nature of society resulted in the relatively few number of female students. This situation changed with the new reforms and mandatory attendance resulted in the vast majority of children going to school. In addition, literacy programs taught illiterate adults to read and state-formed farmers' cooperatives gave land, credit and capital to the previously landless.

However, not all were in favor of the new reforms. Nicaragua's wealthier classes feared the implications of the nationalization of private businesses and banks; in particular those who were connected with the previous governments were concerned

about what would happen to them under the Sandinistas. Even more of a threat was the defeated National Guard that retreated into the mountains and began the waging of a guerrilla war that would continue for a decade and take 50,000 lives before its ultimate defeat in the late 1980s. Outside of Nicaragua's borders many people also had their eye on what would be the fate of the nation. Since the revolution, the tiny nation had become the hot spot on which the ideological, political and economic battles between more powerful nations were being waged. The United States, in particular, played a devastating role by instating an economic embargo on the country and running an illegal mission to train and fund the contra-revolutionary forces with the aim of unseating the Sandinista government, whose nationalist programs threatened U.S. business interests in the nation.¹⁴ Aid from socialist nations, such as the Soviet Union and Cuba, helped the new government to fight the insurgency and survive the embargo by supplying the Sandinistas with basic foodstuffs and financial aid, in addition to weapons and military training. Nicaragua truly was the stage for the last act of the Cold War.

Although Arenal was not subject to a strong military presence during the war, many community members were drafted into the army, a few of whom perished in the mountains at the hands of the Contras. Other *arenaleños* worked for the government as spies (*orejas*), looking for pockets resistance in the region and reporting them to their

¹⁴ The United States Congress specifically prohibited the federal funding of the Contra-revolutionary forces in 1983; despite this, the Reagan administration continued to do so by channeling proceeds to the Contras made through the illegal selling of weapons to Iran.

local Sandinista representatives. But most of the community members were simply involved as regular citizens, eagerly participating in the new government programs or passively resisting them. One of the most influential and controversial programs was that of land tenure, in which the government appropriated all lands that were not currently under production and developed them into 'cooperatives' where land-poor farmers could become members for access to land, credit and subsidized inputs. Within Arenal and the nearby region, land tenure had tremendous impacts on the way of life for many community members. While landowners who were not directly affiliated with the Somoza regime did not typically have their land taken from them, the new government viewed the fallow land of those who fled the country after the revolution as free for the taking. As a result, unlike the absentee landowners in the neighboring communities of La Sabanita and El Pochote, the Reyes family, who were unaffiliated with the Somozas and whose land was constantly under production, was not directly impacted by land tenure. Two farmers' cooperatives were established at this time and merged into one in 1988, El Pikín Guerrero, one of the few cooperatives in Nicaragua that has survived to the present day. In his study, Rene Mendoza identified the evolution of five types of producers mentioned earlier after the decade of the 1980s, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Producer Types in Arenal in the 1980s:

Type	Amount of Land	Characteristics
1 – Mozo / Subsistence farmer	<.5 – .75 mzs.	This type of farmer continues to represent more than half of the population. These families combine subsistence production with commercial activities, most of which is carried out by women; many plant fruit trees. Their main problem continues to be that of land and throughout the decade, the value of their wage labor has decreased.
2 – Subsistence farmer	3-10 mzs	The main economic strategy of these farmers is to get the most use out of their land as possible through family labor and the sale of harvested fruits and grains; they tend to rent oxen to plow their land and they raise small livestock. Many of the families who were considered Type 2 in previous decades were benefited by the system of land tenure by joining cooperatives and were further able to engage in commerce in the decade of the 1980s.
3 – Basic producer	approx. 20 mzs.	These families stayed much the same since the middle of the century. However, the number of families of this type has reduced over the years due to large family sizes and the dividing up of land among children, primarily sons.
4 – Landowner	50-400 mzs (outside community); 20-50 mzs. (within community)	These landowners have mostly disappeared, their lands replaced by farmer's cooperatives after they fled the country. These landholdings were turned into two cooperatives after the revolution and then merged into one in 1988 (El Pikín). They own a truck and have more than 150 mzs on which to work.
5 – Landowning family	Similar to Type 4	Constituted by one large family in the community (the Reyes); their land was not impacted by the reforms of the 80s because they were not directly connected to Somoza's regime. Over the years they have managed to accumulate a greater quantity of land as well as greater control over local transport to regional markets; "their power has transcended the economic to the political and the religious, but in subtle forms" (Mendoza, 1990, p. 138).

Source: Table adapted from text in Mendoza, R. (1990). *Hacia El Volcan: Arenal Historico*. Universidad Centroamericana, Managua, Nicaragua.

In many ways, the changes in land tenure greatly benefited many families economically and increased their social status as owners of land, releasing them from the subjection of the *patron-mozo* relationship. In addition, the monopoly on commerce played by some of the landowning families (such as the Reyes family) was replaced by that of state institutions, through which all families were entitled their ration of grains at established prices. However, this same system maintained structures of verticalism and dependency through the top-down manner in which the land was allocated. Instead of giving families the option to elect to individually own a small piece of land for their needs, the Sandinistas determined that the majority of land was to be allocated by membership in such cooperatives. In addition, the central government maintained ownership over the inputs and outputs of production by telling people what to produce, how to produce it and then purchasing the harvest at the government established price.

Indeed, Sandinista agricultural policy was itself a regime of subjection: its intention was to produce a model subject in agriculture, one with a revolutionary consciousness that would benefit the citizen and the nation. But this theoretical revolutionary subjectivity did not emerge from the material reality in which the peasants found themselves. Consequently the peasant formation ended up outside a Sandinista vision of revolutionary imagination, the FSLN implemented an agricultural development policy that negatively impacted its peasant base of support in the countryside...(Saldaña-Portillo, 2003, p. 111).

By the end of the decade, the initial gains in healthcare, education and free press were being reversed due to the fragile state of the national budget. The civil war, which had incurred a national draft, and the embargo, which led to great shortages of basic products, had taken an immeasurable toll on the country, both in terms of morale as well as economically, and the population was looking for some degree of peace and

stability. Aside from the imperialist measures conducted by the United States to weaken the nation, the Sandinista government had disappointed many as it took on authoritarian characteristics that threatened the freedom and autonomy of its citizens. The leaders of the *Frente* had never been representative of the people who they fought to ‘liberate’ from their oppression – they mostly came from the educated, urban classes who knew little about the reality of the poor *campesino*. As a result, some of their measures added to the lack of autonomy and opportunity that characterized life in rural Nicaragua, and the *patron-mozo* verticalism was replaced with a government-*campesino* verticalism. The Sandinista leaders had assumed that the peasantry would ‘naturally’ share their revolutionary ‘vision’ of a society working together for the common good and had enacted reforms that went along with that vision, such as working in ‘cooperative’, ‘voluntary’ community labor, and the government regulation of market prices.

The revolution didn’t fight the dependency syndrome. In the landlord-peasant dependency relationship, for example, the state simply tried to substitute itself for the landlord, preserving the same top-down structure (Mendoza Vidaurre, 1990).

At the same time, the local leaders who had been among those actively involved in pre-revolution activities within Arenal were given duties at regional and national levels, thus taking them away from local concerns and the reality of the community. By the mid-1980s, the local was, for all practical purposes, forgotten in the struggle to develop a ‘National Unity’ (Mendoza, 1990). As the pro-Sandinista leaders from the community were engaged in issues at ‘higher’ spheres, the local leaders who remained behind were primarily those who were opposed to the revolution and the reforms

enacted since. For the new government, “the local-national relationship was disappearing almost entirely” (Mendoza, 1990, p. 141). It should not have been a surprise to the local cadres then, when within the *comarcas*, the *Frente* did not emerge the victor in the 1984 elections (although nationally, they won by more than 66 percent of the popular vote).

After the War

In 1986, the political scandal known as the Iran-Contra affair, through which the Reagan administration had illegally continued to support the contra-revolutionary forces in Nicaragua, became known to the general American public. As a result, the United States was forced to discontinue its commitment to assisting the contras in overthrowing the Sandinista government. However, even with lessened pressure on the military front, the economic embargo was still intact and the Nicaraguan economy was on the verge of collapse. The ruling structure of the party in the late 1980s had become almost as top-down as that of the previous dictatorship. They were out of touch with the reality of the local sphere as more attention was paid to sealing deals with the opposition and the wealthy business classes, even if such deals went against the original ideals of the revolution. Thus, when national elections were again held in 1990, the incumbent government watched in disbelief as the opposition UNO party took the victory, voting the Sandinistas out of power. The national ‘cadres’ had disregarded and underestimated the ability of the local people to make up their own minds about what was best for them

and their country; the vote that was cast had little to do with ideology and everything to do with practicality, a hope for a better life.

All these years there was an emphasis on national consciousness, anti-imperialism, the war against the contras, Sandinismo, "patria libre o morir." But sadly—or perhaps happily—the people first want to live. They want no war and no hunger, which are other forms of death. After that, yes, they want patria libre, the land of Sandino. Not the reverse. To understand that, you don't need an excessively rational mind...(Mendoza Vidaurre, 1990)

In Arenal, community members felt strongly about the results of the 1990 elections. While some were fervent supporters of the Sandinista party and felt devastated by the loss, others believed that the result was the only option if the country was to move into a period of relative peace and stability. As the victor of the elections, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro of the National Opposition Union (UNO) moved to take over the presidential office of a nation that was not only divided along warring factions, but also financially bankrupt. The U.S. embargo and the billions of dollars in losses and damages incurred by the war had put Nicaragua in a position of economic dependence on nations and foreign institutions willing to assist it. Happy to see the Sandinistas out of office, the United States lifted their embargo and reinstated aid to Nicaragua.¹⁵

¹⁵ The United States gave Nicaraguan \$21 million dollars in the first year of aid, which was only a fraction of the estimated \$18 billion that the International Court of Justice ruled that the United States pay to Nicaragua in recompense for their illegal role in the contra war. The Republic of Nicaragua vs. The United States of America (1986) was brought to the International Court of Justice, which ruled that the United States had breached international law and violated the sovereignty of Nicaragua by: armed attacks against Nicaragua by air, land and sea; incursions into Nicaraguan territorial waters; aerial trespass into Nicaraguan airspace; efforts by direct and indirect means to coerce and intimidate the Government of Nicaragua; using force and the threat of force against Nicaragua; intervening in the internal affairs of Nicaragua; infringing upon the freedom of the high seas and interrupting peaceful maritime commerce; and killing, wounding and kidnapping citizens of Nicaragua ("The Republic of Nicaragua Vs. The United States of America," 1986).

The newly instated UNO government moved quickly to bring peace to the country by greatly reducing the size of the national military and granting the contra revolutionaries immunity from political persecution and land on which to resettle after returning from their guerrilla camps in the mountains of Honduras. The turn of the decade saw the birth of a 'formal' civil society in Nicaragua, made up both of international development organizations and homegrown community groups. The administration also managed to get inflation and the economy under control by maintaining a fixed exchange rate with the help of massive foreign aid.¹⁶

However, such aid came with a price. By 1995, real poverty had worsened as unemployment grew and wages fell, and austerity measures, as dictated by the Structural Adjustment Policy agreed to with the IMF, resulted in the privatization of basic services and cutbacks in public programs. Such cuts put into effect cost-sharing measures in order to help cover the education costs in a reduced national budget and families were charged a monthly tuition of ten *cordobas* per attending child. For poor families with many children, this cost sometimes proved to be prohibitive, and many children were forced to drop out of school. In Arenal, the local community group called Grudesa fought the instatement of this tuition and won, but in the neighboring *comarcas*, primary and secondary school attendance saw a drop in the mid 1990s. As one young man from La Sabanita told me, "the extra charge of ten *cordobas*, plus all of the other costs for going to school, made it impossible for me to attend for several years.

¹⁶ Between 1990 and 1994, Nicaragua received the highest per capita foreign aid of any developing country: \$182 annually (Nitlápán-Envío, 1995)

I had to drop out for a while and only went back to high school after I turned eighteen, with the assistance of a local youth group.”¹⁷

As the decade went on, the United States government put further pressure on the Chamorro administration to seize private property that had been confiscated by the Sandinistas. Much of this property had been owned by supporters and associates of the Somoza dictatorship which put putting the new government in the position of retaking the land that had been given to poor farmers in order to give it back to the rich. Economic reforms passed in the early 1990s resulted in a ‘Free Trade Zone Law’ that saw the rapid establishment of *maquilas* (low paying garment factories)¹⁸ in the country.

By 1996, Nicaraguans were once again ready for a change and they elected the opposition candidate, Jose Arnoldo Aleman Lacayo of the Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC), to the presidency. Aleman continued with the free market scheme established in the previous administration and encouraged further privatizations and direct foreign

¹⁷ From interview with community member, July 10, 2007.

¹⁸ *Maquilas*, or export-processing assembly factories located in Free Trade Zones (FTZs), began to spread across Nicaragua with the Aleman administration in the late 1990s. At present, there are at least 60 *maquilas* operating in Nicaragua, employing approximately somewhere between 50,000 and 70,000 workers, most of whom are women (Berman & Wood, 2003). Though better-paying than some alternatives, *maquila* workers did not typically earn enough to cover basic needs, often necessitating a second (or for women, third) job in order to pay the costs of food, housing, healthcare and education (Méndez, 2005). *Maquila* wages in Nicaragua are the lowest in Central America; workers earn on average 32 cents an hour, as compared with \$1.51 in Mexico and \$1.30 in El Salvador ("Special Advertising Section: Central America," 2000). According to a study by the Nicaragua female worker's movement, Maria Elena Cuadra, three out of ten women reported experiencing or seeing cases of verbal or physical abuse and less than 50% of those surveyed said that they were able to obtain permission to leave work to see a doctor (*Diagnostico Sobre Las Condiciones Socio Laborales De Las Empresas De Las Zonas Francas*, 1999).

investment that helped the national GDP to grow while further worsening the plight of the poor majority. The number of *maquilas* doubled, which worked like an unemployment band-aid by providing work to the land-poor for miniscule salaries, and the privatization of the telephone and electric companies led to price hikes and reduced service.

In 2000, Union Fenosa, a Spanish-owned corporation, bought the exclusive rights to energy distribution in the Pacific region of the country, with the promise to “make electricity cheaper and better” (Alpert, 2003, p. 17). Instead, prices were increased by up to 40 percent, reaching \$123 per megawatt-hour, the highest in Central America. This increase was mostly due to the company’s exorbitantly high markups on distribution costs, which added a 70 percent increase to the costs incurred by generating the electricity (Acevedo, 2005). In addition, contrary to expectations that privatization would reduce distribution losses, such losses rose by 5 percent to almost 33 percent in 2003. In comparison, distribution losses in neighboring countries are far under 20 percent (Acevedo, 2005).

Quasi-secret pacts with the leaders of the Sandinista party and widespread corruption were foul remnants of the Aleman administration, and in 2002 Aleman was formally charged with embezzlement and money laundering under the newly instated administration headed by former vice-president to Aleman, Enrique José Bolaños Geyer. Aleman was sentenced to twenty years in prison for stealing over \$100 million

from the Nicaraguan people, a term that was lessened to five years due to a law passed in 2007 by legislators of both the Sandinista and the Liberal parties.

Aside from the new president's anti-corruption campaign, President Bolaños continued with the economic reforms of the previous administration, further seeking to privatize the public water service and working to get the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) passed in the National Assembly. However, much of Nicaragua's active 'civil society', made up of international NGOs, advocacy groups and community-based organizations (CBOs), fought the further privatizations and the installation of the CAFTA.¹⁹ Although the conglomerate of groups succeeded in forcing the retreat of potential investors in the water industry, national legislators passed CAFTA by a vote of 49-37 in October of 2005.

A New FSLN

In 2006, a presidential election was held in Nicaragua, returning ex-president Daniel Ortega to the presidency with only 38 percent of the vote. Once again, the Sandinistas were back in charge. However, the Sandinistas of the 21st century were

¹⁹ Although civil society has been adamant in its protests against further privatizations in Nicaragua, in particular those regarding water, such protests to the privatization of Nicaragua's water services have come almost after the fact, as the people of Nicaragua were not aware that their water supplies were up for grabs on the international market until well into 1999, more than two and a half years since the IMF began making water privatization a conditionality for access to loans ("Politics of Deprivation: Water Privatization in Nicaragua," 2006). When plans to privatize were finally made public, demonstrations were held across the nation, especially in poor neighborhoods in Managua, where such private ownership would install water meters, made payable by the local people through a microfinance scheme. "In other words, not only would the desperately poor people who live in the sprawling shanty towns around the capital would be forced to pay much more for water, they would also have to borrow money to pay for their own water meters" (Alpert, 2003, p. 17).

very different than those of the 1980s – even if retaining the same personalities and slogans. Immediately after the electoral defeat in 1990, the FSLN committed several acts that betrayed the original goals of the 1979 revolution. One of these acts, known as '*la Piñata*', was the massive government appropriation of millions of dollars in properties, businesses and homes carried out before the inauguration of the Chamorro administration for the benefit of middle and top-level FSLN leaders, which resulted in the demoralization of party leadership and a widened class gap within the party.

Another act which made Sandinista supporters question the leadership from above was the infamous '*Pacto*' made between Daniel Ortega and then president Arnaldo Aleman in 1999. The pact brokered between the two leaders was meant to ensure the political dominance of the their two parties and maintain their own control over the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, as well as providing Ortega and Aleman with seats in the national assembly for the new two terms, granting them parliamentary immunity from criminal persecution (Watts, 2006). Previous to the election, Ortega also ensured the passing of a law that lowered the percentage necessary to win the general election to 35 percent of the vote, without which he would have likely lost the 2006 contest due to the split vote among the Liberal party contestants.

Thus, the FSLN of 2006 appeared to have more in common with the corrupt and power-hungry administration under Aleman than it did with the liberation movement of the 1970s. Despite this, or perhaps even because of it, as Ortega's 'alliance-making'

approach helped him to garner support even among conservatives, the *Frente* was back in power in 2007.

The Present and the Future

Since the Sandinistas' return to power, little has changed for the poor majority in the Nicaraguan countryside. Though some things have gotten worse (rising inflation and higher prices for basic foodstuffs), not much has gotten better. As anticipated, Ortega has been a contradictory force in Nicaraguan politics, while on one hand chastising the 'U.S. imperialist agenda' in order to court Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and South American petroleum, on the other hand, signing agreements with the IMF to uphold a national commitment to debt servicing.

If there is a lesson to be learned from Che Guevara, it is that revolutionaries are well advised to die young lest they make fools of themselves. That is the risk facing Daniel Ortega, Nicaragua's president... Only two others of the original nine-man Sandinista directorate still support him; his wife, Rosario Murillo, is now his most influential adviser. In nine months in office, four ministers, as well as numerous junior officials, have been fired for speaking out of turn. Mr. Ortega can still sound a bit like Che Guevara. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly last month, he railed against the "avarice of imperialist capitalism". Shortly afterwards, however, his government signed a new loan agreement with the IMF. It is "committed to macroeconomic stability," says Antenor Rosales, the head of the central bank (Economist., 2007).

The next presidential elections to be held in Nicaragua will be in 2012, however, Ortega and leaders of the opposition parties (including Aleman, who was recently released from prison) are hoping that the nation will make the shift to a parliamentary system, in which Ortega could hold power indefinitely. The last eighteen months have shown the government to be increasingly in favor of private censorship, economic reforms *al gusto*, and increasingly tolerated abuses of power. The Somoza legacy of

corruption, oppression and verticalism was not defeated by the revolution, and Nicaragua of the 21st century must deal with many of the same issues as did the original Sandino, almost 100 years ago.

In 2008, Grudesa published an opinion piece in the national newspaper, El Nuevo Diario, in protest of the hypocrisy that the new government has shown during its first year of instatement:

They shout out against imperialism while at the same time doing exactly what the IMF asks; they put members of the National Army in the ominous School of the Americas; they welcome contingent after contingent of soldiers from the United States in distinct parts of the nation. While they condemn the genocide carried out under colonization, they allow Union Fenosa to raise their prices again and again for a service that leaves us all in the dark. How little does the example of Carlos (Fonseca) mean to them: “what is most important is not to use the words of great revolutionaries but rather to apply their teachings.”

They criticize vehemently ‘savage capitalism’ while begging Taiwan and the United States to open up more *maquilas* in the country; they insist on paying every last cent of an illegal and immoral debt to the national banks, while teachers, nurses and doctors are left with crumbs. Education is declared to be free, yet classrooms are without adequate materials for students and teachers...

And the list of hypocrisy continues... But history will have the last word...

CHAPTER 7

STATE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN ARENAL

In the past it was very hard for the poor man – there were no options and there was no way of speaking out against the oppression – the government didn't allow such talk. But with the arrival of the Sandinistas, people began to loosen their tongues and so came the revolution. And so the poor were given land as well. But now the community is divided along political lines and there are other problems. There is not enough clean water for the community and some people say that it's because of everything is becoming privatized.²⁰

Arenal in 2008 exists between two worlds, between two moments in time, between two societies whose values and modes of being are in constant contradiction to one another. One of these worlds belongs to the past, to the traditional, agrarian-based society in which the majority of *arenaleños* were dependent on the land to provide for their subsistence needs. This world was one of tradition, culture and subsistence; the soil was healthy and fertile; a person's position in society was determined at birth and unchanging. This was a society of farmers – rich farmers and poor farmers – but all dependent, for profits or for survival, on what the land could provide.

The other world, the new world, is that of a possible future. Agriculture is no longer the way of life for most and the rural pocket in which the community lies is threatened by modern and urban things: paved roads, tourism, imported products and professional jobs. What it means to be an *arenaleño* is different than in the past, mostly because it is sometimes forgotten; community identity tends to be important only to

²⁰ From interview with older community member, May 30, 2006.

those members who spend most of their days within that community, and Arenal, more and more, is becoming a place to return to after long hours spent elsewhere – the connection to the land as a means for survival is becoming lost in the search for a new way of life.

Arenal in the 21st Century

While before, life in Arenal was determined by the seasons of nature and by the natural environment that the majority of the population depended upon, by the turn of the century not even the seasons could be counted on. For generations, every May 15th²¹ in the evening, the first rains of the wet months would fall, marking the beginning of the first planting season. The farmers would have already begun to clear and prepare the lands on which they would plant rice, corn, beans and different varieties of cash crops. The harvest would come in late July and the second planting season would follow a two-week period of no rain, an ‘Indian summer’, in the month of August. The heaviest rains would fall in late September through mid-October and then dwindle through the month of November with the last rains falling about a week before *la Purisima*.²² But by the mid-1990s, farmers could no longer depend on the first rains falling on May 15th, and by 2006 the rains did not come until June and lasted through the end of the year.

²¹ May 15th is celebrated in Nicaragua as the Day of Saint Isidore the Farmer (el Día Patronal de San Isidro), who is the Catholic *patron* saint of farmers.

²² A Nicaraguan celebration equivalent in importance to that of Christmas for North Americans, on December 9th

Aside from changes in climate, the decades of the 1980s and 90s brought momentous political, economic and social changes to the entire nation and Arenal was not unaffected by the impact of these transitions. Free Trade agreements with other countries meant that it was no longer profitable or even practical to continue to cultivate the traditional crops that the people of Arenal had subsisted on for centuries. Changing economic roles have also placed greater demand on fulfilling needs unmet within the boundaries of the community. Community members must travel ever-greater distances for employment and even young people must make their way to nearby townships if they wish to go to high school. In response to this demand, public transportation reached the dirt roads of Arenal in 1998, which also served to increase the flow of commercial goods in and out of the community. Garbage, which had previously been almost entirely organic and biodegradable, litters the roads and individual yards of the community in various shapes and designs of plastic and Styrofoam.

Not all has changed. Still, in most households, there is little 'waste'. Water is precious and used sparingly, and even the 'gray' wash water is used to water fruit trees or collected to toss on the dirt road in the dry months to keep down the dust. Poverty ensures that most people still eat basic diets of rice and beans, whether they produce what they eat or buy the grains at a local *pulperia* or at a regional market. Any by-products from the production of food serve as feed for the animals or are reserved for secondary use. Electricity use is measured by a lack of electronic appliances and conservation efforts on the part of community members to keep costs low. However,

Arenal *is* changing, and with such change comes many questions involving issues of development and sustainability. Has development up until now been sustainable? Is there a need for more development? And finally, how can a transition to sustainable development be feasible in a place like Arenal?

Unsustainable Development

Despite its past as a nation of people in close connection to their natural environment, Nicaragua in the 21st century is not a model of environmental sustainability. Respect for the natural resources in the ‘land of lakes and volcanoes’ has dwindled in the face of economic greed by the rich or desperation by the poor. Over-hunting, over-population and over-harvesting have led to loss of biodiversity, rampant deforestation and water scarcity across the nation, which in turn are causes of further environmental problems. In Nicaragua there are fifty-nine species in the Animalia Kingdom that are vulnerable or endangered of global extinction (IUCN, 2007), and between 1990 and 2005 Nicaragua lost over 20 percent (1,349,000ha) of its total forest cover (FAO, 2005).

Nor has the nation taken care to protect such resources against increasing levels of solid, liquid and gaseous wastes. International pressure and national policies have supported unsustainable farming, irresponsible industrial practices and household wastefulness that pollute the country’s watersheds. Freshwater covers more than 10 percent of Nicaragua’s surface, yet the quality of almost all of the available surface

water supplies has seriously deteriorated due to agricultural runoff and the dumping of industrial chemicals, raw sewage and solid waste (Mobile District and Topographic Engineering Center, 2001).

Indeed, the environmental situation in Arenal is reflective of the country as a whole. Community members indicated that there are fewer large mammals, reptiles and other animals today than in the past, which they attributed to hunting, loss of habitat and deforestation. Deforestation has also resulted in the removal of most of the larger trees in the zone, and even younger trees that haven't yet reached maturity (less than 30 inches in diameter) are targeted by illegal logging operations who take advantage of the fact that these trees cannot be extracted by 'official' means.²³

Unsustainable agricultural practices have also led to the destruction of the natural environment. Basic soil measurements taken on land that had experienced moderate levels of agricultural usage in the past indicated that erosion was greatest on steeper slopes (<20cm) and that layers of topsoil were deepest on flatter areas (>30cm), which confirmed local perceptions that planting on inclines caused *lavados* (the washing away of fertile top soil by heavy rains). Other principal causes of loss of soil fertility cited by farmers were the application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, as well as the practice of clearing fields with fire (*quemadas*). The use of agrochemicals in the region has had adverse effects on soil fertility and the general health of the local

²³ Interview with illegal logger, August 10, 2006.

ecosystems. The vast majority of farmers utilize chemical fertilizers and pesticides²⁴ and less than 20 percent of those interviewed indicated that they worked with organic methods, either exclusively or in combination with chemical methods.²⁵

Farmers in the region work with both native and 'improved' seed varieties, some of which have been genetically modified. Farmers noted that while the improved varieties tended to provide better harvests on the short term, they usually also required more applications of pesticides as they tended not to be as resistant to plagues and funguses as native varieties.²⁶ Also, improved varieties often demanded greater costs, as the seeds produced are sterile and cannot be replanted in subsequent harvests, but must be repurchased year after year. These improved varieties present the threat of crop contamination, as cross-pollination by birds and insects between fields with improved varieties can affect the chemical structure of native species in neighboring fields, thus reducing fertility and hardiness, and increasing levels of sterility (Pollan, 2001).

The local watershed is also one of the most polluted in the country. The main body of water in the area is the Laguna de Masaya, a volcanically formed crater located at a distance of 3km from the community of Arenal. The watershed of the Laguna

²⁴ Some of the most commonly used agrochemicals are Chlorpyrifos, Methamidophos and Methomyls, all of which are listed on the Pesticide Action Network as Bad Actor Pesticides, which refer to the moderate to high toxicity levels of the chemicals. 'Complete' fertilizers such as 18-64-0 and 20-20-20 are also commonly used for applications with beans and vegetables, and herbicides such as Paraquat bis (Methylsulfates), which are listed as highly toxic and listed as one of the Dirty Dozen pesticides by PAN International.

²⁵ Information gathered during environmental survey, see Appendix B for frequencies and percentages.

²⁶ Farmers interviewed by author, May-August 2006.

covers an area of 219Km², within which there are nine municipalities (MARENA, 2005). Until approximately twenty years ago, this Laguna was a principal source of water and food for the community; water was pumped to serve the needs of Masatepe and other nearby towns, and fish, crabs and other animals were caught to supplement the local diet (Ramirez, 2005). However, at present, the Laguna de Masaya is infamous for its extreme levels of pollution, the result of a dirty combination of urban sewage, constant streams of agrichemical runoff and solid waste from the surrounding villages during the wet seasons.²⁷ Studies indicate that there is a high level of eutrofizacion, the product of the 76,602 cubic meters of sewage²⁸ dumped into the lake daily, which is causing the gradual extinction of the few species that exist in the Laguna (MARENA, 2005).

When I was young we used to drink the water from the laguna. We swam in it and the women washed clothes in it. There was a center for tourism for the Managuans who came on the weekends to enjoy themselves. But then one day some scientists came and made some tests and told us that the water was no longer safe to drink. Now it's no longer safe to swim in either – not unless you don't mind getting a skin rash from all the pollution.²⁹

It is also estimated that an approximate volume of 7,109 tons of solid waste (mostly in the form of plastic), originating from the surrounding municipalities, finds its

²⁷ Historically, the contamination of the Laguna de Masaya has its origins in the establishment of the 'old' hospital in Masaya, which sat upon the edges of the crater lake and began discharging its wastes into the Laguna in 1936 (INIFOM, 2007). Around the same time, sewage tanks were built that contained fish and turtles to consume the human excrement dumped daily into the tanks, thus ensuring that the waste would not contaminate the Laguna. However, after the 1972 earthquake in Managua, the population of Masaya grew from 40,000 to 100,000, and despite plans to increase the capacity of the sewage tanks, nothing was done, and the waste spilled over into the Laguna (Blanco & Carcache, 2003).

²⁸ Although the sewage is treated, this treatment does not comply with national environmental laws (Decree 3395) in that levels of nitrate and phosphorus are not eliminated (SINIA, 2005).

²⁹ From informal interview with older community member, May 23, 2006.

ways into the Laguna each wet season. Much of this pollution is a direct result of the lack of waste management in the rural communities that neighbor the lake, where the non-biodegradable packaging of store bought products is littered along roads or dried-up riverbeds. In the rainy season this waste is washed downstream through the riverbeds, eventually ending up in the Laguna. As the Laguna de Masaya has no surface exits, it channels directly to subterranean water, further polluting local sources of potable water (MARENA, 2005).

Need for Further Development?

As development in the past has been shown to be unsustainable, it important to ask if there is need for further development. The research has shown that the answer to this question is yes, as the majority of community members consider economic and social problems to outweigh environmental problems at present. As shown in Figure 1, when asked to choose which component – economic, social or environmental – was the most important at present, over 40 percent selected the economic component above the others. Approximately 72 percent of families in Arenal suffer from various degrees of poverty (INEC, 2005). In general, *arenaleños* are land-poor, eat unvaried diets of cooked grains and struggle to find sufficient resources to take advantage of education and healthcare opportunities. When discussing economic concerns, most people cited lacks and deficiencies in basic infrastructure (water, roads, electricity), economic assets (income, land, savings), and public services (healthcare and education).

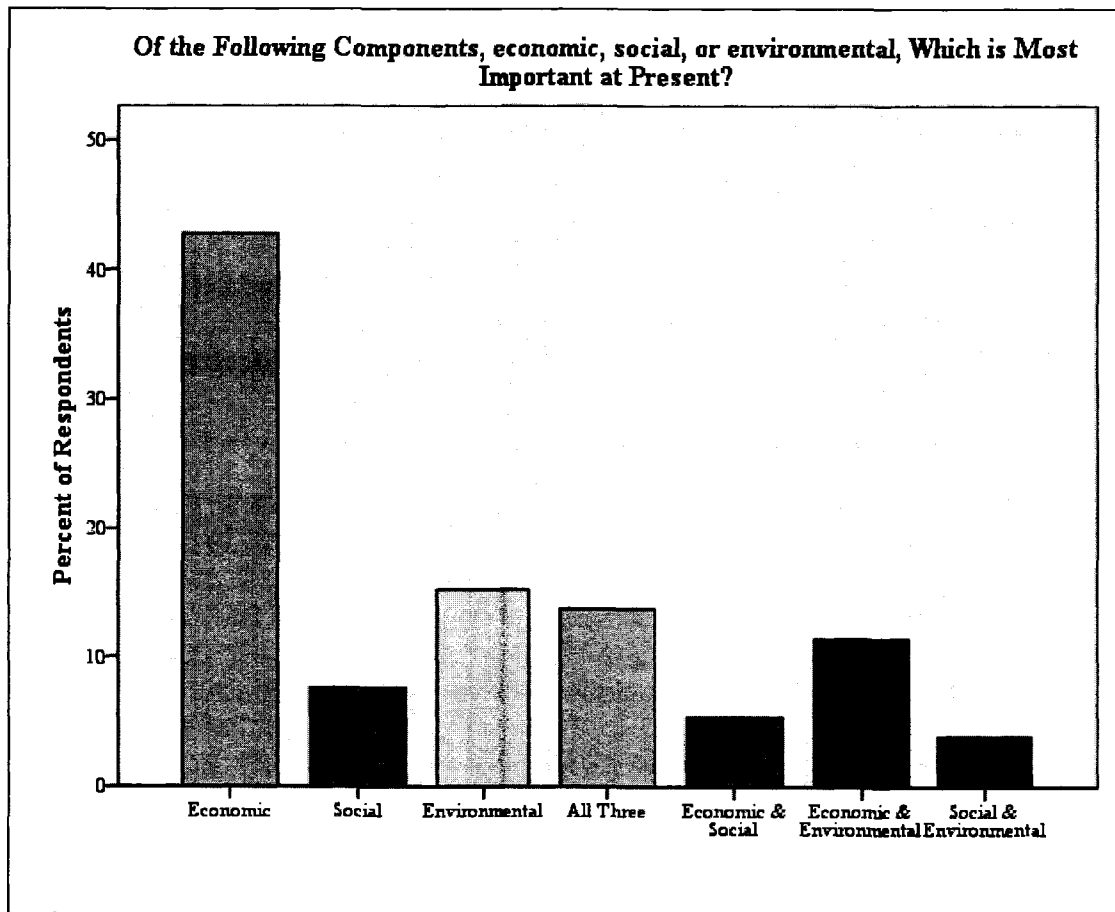


Figure 1: Priority of Component by Percentage of Respondents

Note: The question was stated, “Of the following components, economic, social or environmental, which has the most serious impact in the community at present? See Appendix B for frequency tables.

Extreme poverty is experienced by more than a third of the population (INEC, 2005). The poorest families are mostly landless or own only a very small plot of land on which to build their home and plant a few banana trees. As they do not have their own land to plant on, they must find a way to rent land, or more commonly, look for outside employment. Members of these families work for extremely low wages (less than \$2/day) as day laborers on large farms or make a living in the ‘informal’ sector, for

example, by collecting firewood to sell or making ‘brooms’ with gathered twigs. These households do not tend to have access to basic infrastructure and cannot often afford the basic costs of healthcare, hygiene, or education.

During my research I met several families that lived in extreme poverty. One man told me that he worked as a day laborer at a nearby farm for approximately 180 *cordobas* a week (\$10), but that he needed 200 *cordobas* a week just to feed his wife and six children. He said that in some ways they were fortunate – their clothing and water was donated, as was the tiny plot of land on which he had constructed their ‘house’ of sticks and plastic. But his children did not go to school because he was unable to cover the costs of pens and notebooks and the labor of the oldest children was needed to help pay for food and medicine.

Livelihoods

As noted earlier, livelihoods based on agriculture are not as common as in the past. Most community members no longer view farming to be a profitable enterprise or even a viable option for livelihood security. Of forty farmers questioned as to whether or not farming continued to be a profitable venture at present, only a quarter said that it was. Another quarter of those interviewed indicated that it could be, if the current economic situation changed or if they were given more access to inputs, extension services and land, but a full half responded that it was not profitable (see Appendix B).

It’s no longer profitable to plant basic grains because it’s cheaper to buy the beans than to plant them. Only farms with over seventy-five hectares of land can turn a profit in the production of grains. Otherwise it is wise to invest in non-traditional crops – okra, herbs or ornamentals. The reason for this is because farmers must purchase the seeds, in

addition to fertilizers and pesticides needed. The seeds are mostly genetically modified now - they only produce for one year, and then new seed must be purchased. There aren't too many places anymore where you can find native seed species.³⁰

As farming has become unprofitable, *arenaleños* must turn elsewhere for employment and income-earning opportunities. From Tables 5 and 6, we can see how traditional employment has changed in Arenal. Whereas the vast majority of men over the age of 35 work in agriculture, that number is reduced to less than two-thirds in men between the ages of 26 and 35, and to less than half for men under the age of 25. Similar, but less striking, statistics are found in looking at the changing economic role of women in the community. Whereas approximately two-thirds of women over the age of 35 are primarily occupied in household work, the percentage drops to about half for women between the ages of 15 and 35. Twenty years ago, these percentages would have reached to almost 100 percent in every age bracket for both men and women.

Table 5: Traditional Male Employment: Agriculture

Age group	Number of men surveyed within age group	Number of male farmers within age group	Percentage of farmers by age group (%)
15-25	12	5	42
26-35	13	8	62
36-49	14	10	71
50-64	12	9	75
65-79	8	7	88
80+	1	1	100
Total	59	40	----

Source: Demographic information gathered during environmental survey, see Appendix B for frequencies and percentages.

³⁰ From conversation with community member who has a degree in Agronomy and works with a microcredit organization that gives financing to small farmers, July 23, 2006.

Table 6: Traditional Female Employment: Housework

Age group	Total number of women surveyed within age group	Number of housewives by age group	Percentage of housewives by age group (%)
15-25	28	15	54
26-35	15	8	53
36-49	16	10	63
50-64	8	6	75
65-79	5	3	60
80+	1	1	100
Total	73	43	----

Source: Demographic information gathered during environmental survey, see Appendix B for frequencies and percentages.

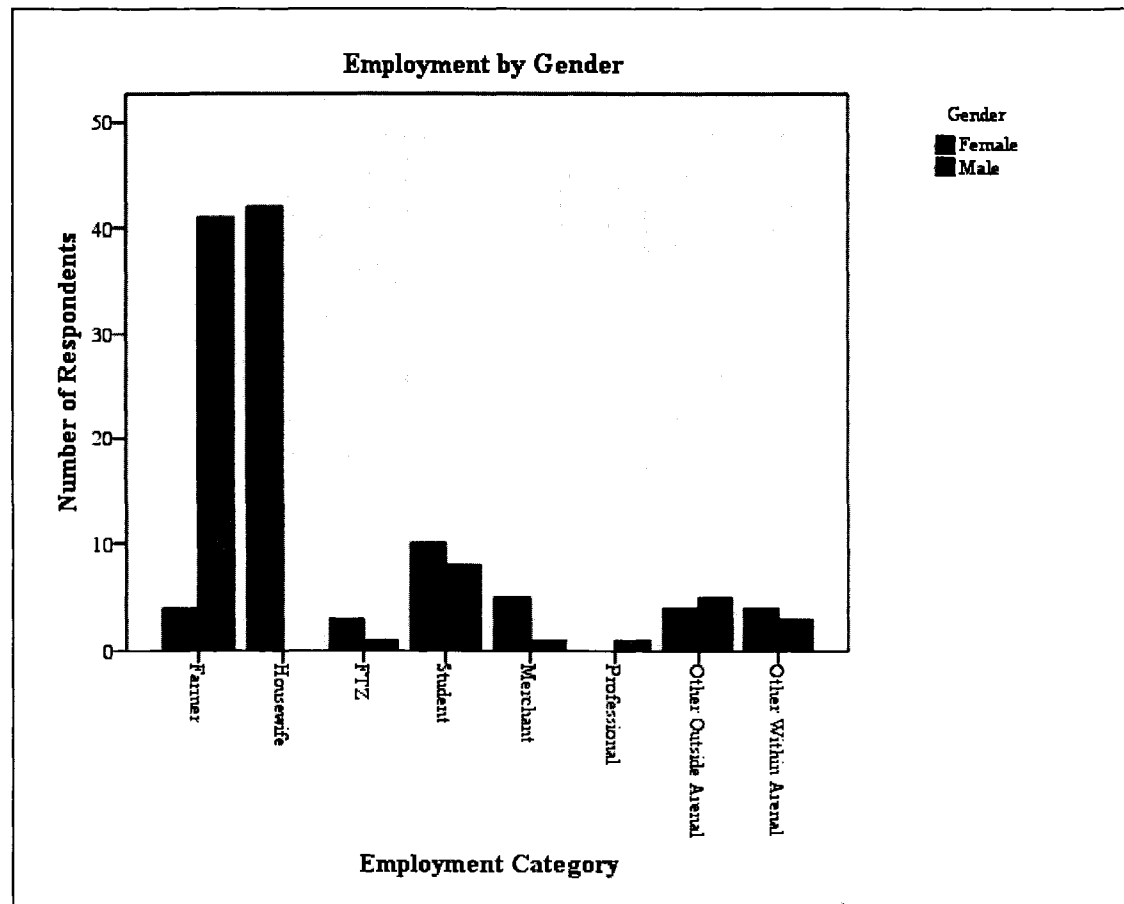


Figure 2: Employment by Percentage of Respondents

Note: Demographic information gathered during environmental survey, See Appendix B for frequency tables.

Though some young people continue to farm, whether as day laborers or in helping their parents on the family land, very few of those interviewed indicated that they wished to make a living from agriculture in the future. Instead, many young people sought jobs related to tourism, business, medicine or other professional careers. According to the local population, the number of community members, especially women, employed at one of the three *maquilas* in the nearby region has increased dramatically over the past five years (see Figure 2).

Infrastructure

Approximately 12.5 percent of the homes in Arenal were deemed to be inadequate and 27.7 percent are overcrowded according to a national census (INIDE, 2005). Almost 40 percent do not have their own private latrine and there is no garbage collection (INEC, 2005). Concerns regarding basic infrastructure tend to center on the issue of potable water, as 47 percent of the households do not have potable water (INEC, 2005). Although Arenal has a network of underground pipes for the distribution of potable water, the system has not been expanded to meet the needs of the growing population and many of the pipes are in danger of breakage, making them unable to handle the higher water pressure that is needed for the water to reach many homes. As a result, many families receive no potable water at all, and even those who do only receive it once a week in the rainy season and as little as once a month during the dry months.

An interview with the regional managers of ENACAL in 2006 revealed that more than half of the water (over 200,000 gallons per month) that is pumped into the community of Arenal goes unpaid.³¹ Although the costs of water (approximately \$4/month) are prohibitive for some families, the main issue is one of distribution. While households at lower elevations have running water much of the time (as distribution is dependent on water pressure), some households at higher elevations receive no water at all. For homes without potable water, obtaining water demands great expenditures of time, money and energy. In the household where I resided during my stay in Arenal, potable water had not reached the family for almost a decade. In order to deal with the problem, the family was forced to invest their savings in the purchase of two oxen and a cart with which to haul water from nearby communities. Families who cannot afford the high prices for such water, which can top two dollars per 10-gallon drum, are forced to make the journey to the Laguna de Masaya to fulfill at least some of their water-based needs.

Water is the biggest problem for my family. Every few days we have to haul water from the Sabanita – they charge us 12 *cordobas* a barrel. My husband works as a street cleaner in Managua and we don't have enough money to pay so much for water.³²

Access to electricity is better than access to water in Arenal, where 80 percent of households have the service (INEC, 2005), but in recent years it has not been reliable

³¹ Interview with Miguel Molina Manteny, Director of ENACAL, July 4, 2006.

³² From informal interview with community member, July 5, 2006.

because of nationwide rationing.³³ In visiting the home of one of the *mas adecuados* in the community, the family said that they paid over 700 *cordobas* (US\$50) a month for the spotty service. “It’s hurting businesses everywhere,” the mother said, “and it’s not safe. Last week I bought a frozen chicken that had gone bad – it must have thawed and then been refrozen.” To illustrate, she took a pair of melted homemade ice creams out of the freezer and placed them in my hand. “How can we sell these?”

The telephone system in Nicaragua is also notoriously expensive and inefficient,³⁴ and there are only three landlines in the community of Arenal for public use and a couple more in the homes of the *mas adecuados* for private use. However, in 2008, nearly every household has one or more cellular phones – a complete transformation since I began doing my research in 2006, where only a handful of people had cellular phones.

³³ With electricity prices reaching levels comparable to the United States, in a country where the majority of the population lives on less than two dollars a day, electricity is no longer accessible to many Nicaraguans. The family that I lived with in Nicaragua was one of many that could not afford the payments enforced by Union Fenosa. Somehow, their three light bulbs and one small radio incurred bills of over \$30 per month and when they protested the charges, their electricity was cut off. In addition to the higher costs, Union Fenosa neglected to invest profits earned in additional power sources, which resulted in nationwide rationing for much of 2007. Entire regions were ‘blackout’ for up to 48 hours at a time, and it has been estimated that as a result, the national economy suffered millions of dollars in losses. The national overseer of water supply and distribution (ENACAL) determined that such rationing reduced its ability to pump and distribute water by 10 percent, equivalent to a deficit of ten million gallons of water per day (García & Gómez, 2008).

³⁴ In 1997, a foreign owned company, BellSouth, won a concession to buy 49 percent of Telefonía Celular de Nicaragua. But only three years later, the BellSouth owned 89 percent of the country’s telephone service, allegedly acquired through a scandal involving the bribing of members of the legislature to pass a bill, which changed the law that had put limits on foreign ownership of public services (“Nicaragua: U.S.-Based Bellsouth International Involved in Influence-Peddling Scandal,” 2003).

Bad roads are another common complaint in Arenal. In conducting the environmental survey, when asked what they would like to see changed in the community, almost a quarter of those questioned said that they were unhappy with the current state of the roads. Bad roads mean more to the local people than simple inconvenience. The state of the roads has become more important as the community members are forced to travel outside the community for work, purchases, education and healthcare. Bad roads cost people time and money by limiting public transportation, and the poorest community members who cannot afford the rising costs of transportation must do their business on foot.

Public Services

Within the community of Arenal there is a primary school, with taught levels from Preschool (3-5 years old) to 6th grade (11-13 years old). Approximately 238 students attend the primary school, and it is estimated that thirty children (12 percent) do not attend due to the economic limitations of the household (World Vision, 2005). There is one teacher per grade, and between twenty-five and thirty students per classroom. Until recently, some classes held up to three grades due to lack of resources. Teachers are paid very low salaries (approximately \$2 a day) and receive poor health insurance. Discipline is a major issue, and due to the low level of resources provided by the Ministry of Education (MINED) there are no salaries available to pay for additional staff that could assist teachers with behavioral problems. As a result, disruptive children are dealt with in the classroom, taking away from the lesson plans and reducing

the overall quality of education. Another limiting factor is the amount of time that the children are kept in school. Because there is not often funding within the MINED for lunch programs, the children only attend a half-day (approximately a four hour long session) at school before they are sent home for their main meal, eaten at noon in Nicaragua.

The salary is so poor that we might as well be working as volunteers – we barely make enough to eat. This is a source of frustration for many teachers, as some have to find outside employment to make ends meet. And it's especially hard in the countryside because of there's no culture of education in the homes – kids come to school without a uniform or a notebook to work with and because of the difficult economic and social situation at home, the mother has a hard time and doesn't give her children the attention needed. So they come to school with violent and disruptive behaviors. These kids need extra attention, but there are no programs to help them – so it's up to the teachers to keep things under control in the classroom.³⁵

There is no secondary school located within Arenal (although construction began in 2008 to accommodate students attending the first and second years of secondary school) and children of high school age must travel several kilometers to attend either in Masatepe (4km) or San Juan de la Concepcion (3km). Public transportation is available a cost of five *cordobas* each way, but many families are unable to pay for their children to take the local bus. Additional costs, such as notebooks and uniforms, make schooling unaffordable for many families, and it is estimated that half of high school age children do not attend at all (World Vision, 2005). According to a government census, 17.9 percent of adult men and 21.8 percent of adult women are illiterate, and even among young people, approximately 7 percent of those aged 14-29 cannot read or write (INEC, 2005).

³⁵ From informal interview with teacher at elementary school, June 30, 2006.

Healthcare is another issue of concern to many *arenaleños*. Three nurses work at the center Monday through Saturday and often make house visits to the surrounding communities in order to vaccinate children, check on pregnant mothers and distribute anti-parasite pills. However, a doctor only arrives from Masatepe twice per week and local demand for medical attention and cheap medicine is far greater than existing supply. Occasionally, international health brigades visit the area and bring more advanced medicine, but more often than not, community members must travel to Masatepe, Masaya, or even Managua to receive adequate medical attention – if they are able to afford it. According to a national census, 114 women did not give birth to their last child in a hospital or clinic (INEC, 2005). As a result, healthcare remains a principal concern for many community members, as very few can afford basic insurance and a life-threatening illness or injury will often be under-treated because of lack of finances. During my time in the community I met several people with ‘mysterious’ ailments that had gone undiagnosed and untreated.³⁶

A Note on Gender

In all of the above areas, the impact is much greater for women than it is for men. Women are often dependent on men economically, as traditional gender roles dictate that men work for income while women take care of the home and the children without economic remuneration. Such economic dependence results in women putting

³⁶ In one case, I spoke with a woman who had seldom left her home in over two decades because she suffered from daily fainting spells.

up with irresponsible or even abusive behavior by their husbands in order to ensure that she and her children have enough to eat. In most cases, men were still considered to be the 'heads of household' and women in the community were still expected to do virtually all of the housework and childrearing, even if they also worked in outside jobs that provided income for the family. Women were only considered to be heads of households in the case that there was no male authority figure capable to undertake the role. In Arenal, 80 percent of homes were 'headed' by men (INEC, 2005). As official decisions and benefits are usually accrued to heads of household, women are often dependent on men for basic functioning in society. For example, the majority of land titles in the community are held by men, even in cases in which they have abandoned their families, which is extremely threatening to women who attempt to adopt the role of head of household once the man is gone and can only hope that he will not return to retake his property. The family that I lived with in the community was headed by the mother, as the father had long since chosen alcohol over his familial responsibilities. Unfortunately for his wife and children, the land title that he had been granted during the Sandinista years was in his name as head of household – land that was worth upwards of \$50,000. The mother expressed bitterness at learning that he intended to sell the land for his own benefit, with no thought to share any of the proceedings with his children, who she had struggled to put through high school and college.³⁷ "I could sue him," she said. "But for what? He would probably get the land anyway and there

³⁷ This family was assisted by both Grudesa and World Vision.

would only be more bitterness. There are many women in my situation – it is the fault of the government who never took the women into account when they gave the men all of the power over the land.”

Perhaps as a direct result of women’s low economic and social power in the community, statistics indicate that women tend to have less formal educational training than men. One survey showed that over 30 percent of women in the region had no formal education at all, compared to 12 percent of men (World Vision, 2005). However, this trend appears to reverse itself in higher levels of education and the same survey indicated that the number of women with advanced degrees was four times that of men.³⁸

Women’s disempowerment can also be clearly observed through population indicators, which show that in households where machismo is clearly the reigning ideal, women are powerless to make decisions regarding family planning. Common perceptions among men are that women don’t want to have more children because they want to remain attractive to other men – and such cultural beliefs work in reverse, in which women hope to keep their husbands from straying by bearing them as many children as possible.

You can’t trust Nicaraguan women – they’ll leave you if you give them half a chance. That’s why us men have to make sure they know their place – so that they stay inside and don’t go out too much. My wife doesn’t want me anymore and neither do my children. I know that it’s because she’s found another man to fulfill her needs.³⁹

³⁸ However, this could be due to the impact of Grudesa (see Chapter 8).

³⁹ From interview with ex-alcoholic, April 15, 2008.

Compounding these issues are national policies in the Ministry of Health regarding contraception. In 2007, all forms of abortion were declared illegal under national law, even to save the life of the mother. Health workers are not allowed to encourage use of contraceptives among unmarried women and sex education in public schools is prohibited. The only promotion of contraception allowed is for married women, but because of culturally engrained beliefs based in machismo and religion, many women refuse it.

One of the biggest problems in the community is pregnancy. Unmarried girls getting pregnant at the age of fifteen and even married women with ten, fifteen, eighteen children. But the Ministry of Health in Nicaragua is against contraception because of religious reasons, especially among young, unmarried women. As health workers, we are not allowed to encourage use of contraceptives among unmarried women and sex education in public schools is prohibited. The only promotion of contraception allowed is for married women. But even many of these married women refuse it for reasons of their own – religious beliefs, their husbands don't like it or they're just not aware.⁴⁰

Facing the Environmental Problem

As rural dwellers, *arenaleños* have a close connection to their natural environment and a great appreciation and knowledge of local resources. For generations, they have been dependent on the health of the land and the Laguna for subsistence and on the caprices of the sky and the earth for survival. As time has passed and the health of these basic resources has withered, as the land has become less fertile and as the Laguna has become polluted, the community members continue to have high esteem for their natural resources, indicated in the survey answers as explained below.

⁴⁰ From interview with community nurse, June 22, 2006.

Although most of those surveyed placed importance on economic issues over environmental ones, when asked whether they would feel the same in ten years time, their answers changed to give more priority to the environment over the economy, as shown in Figure 3.

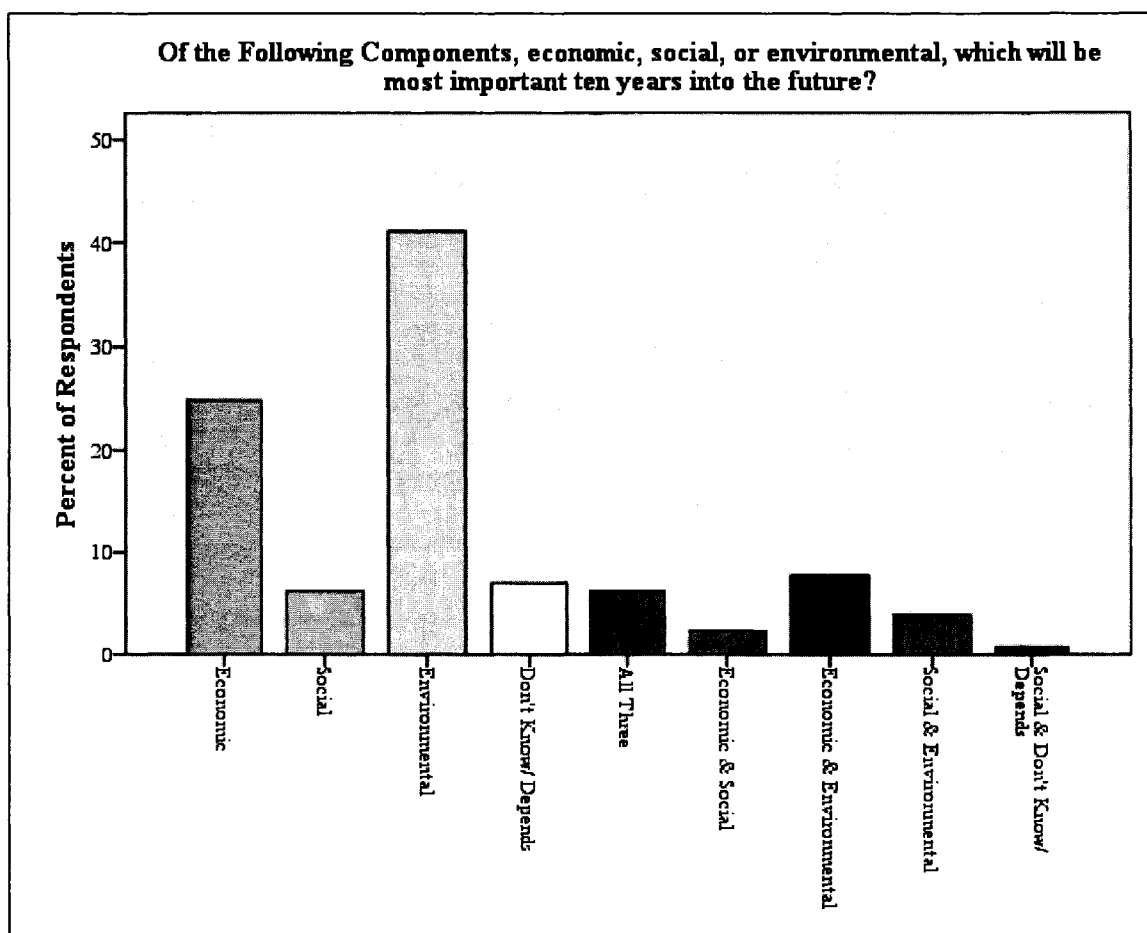


Figure 3: Priority of Component by Percentage Ten Years in the Future

Note: The question was stated, "Of the following components, economic, social or environmental, which has the most serious impact in the community ten years in the future? See Appendix B for frequency tables.

The vast majority of *arenaleños* also expressed the belief that the natural environment held great value, not only for commercial purposes, but also for spiritual and medicinal reasons. Many indicated that the environment was the key to survival and was the basis of all life.

God created the environment and so without the trees and the oxygen that they provide, we could not live. Most of us in the community know the environment to have spiritual values, but some destroy it for economic reasons. If people cut down trees they should take care to reforest, but not all have such awareness.⁴¹

While lack of environmental awareness was a significant problem, most community members interviewed indicated that they were conscious of the role that they played, individually and as part of the community, in the destruction of the natural environment. When questioned as to whether they engaged in activities that harmed the environment, 85 percent answered affirmatively.⁴² Examples of some of the activities mentioned were pollution, deforestation and unsustainable farming practices.⁴³

Overall, the majority of those who I spoke with expressed interest in my research and were eager to speak about how the natural environment had changed over the past several decades. Almost everyone had something to say about the current environmental situation and people frequently commented on the increased incidence of logging in the region. While older people tended to mention the loss of biodiversity

⁴¹ From interview with community leader, July 7, 2006.

⁴² The question was stated, "In your daily life, do you think you do things that harm the environment? See Appendix B for frequency tables.

⁴³ The question was stated, "In what ways do you think you harm the environment? See Appendix B for frequency tables.

(fewer trees and animals), younger people often discussed the increasing incidence of garbage and the pollution of the Laguna.⁴⁴

Do you know what ‘Masatepe’ means? It means ‘the land of the deer’, but now neither deer nor trees abound in the region. Many people believe that *el despale* (logging) affects the rains, the fertility of the soil and the climate in general. People should be educated to plant two trees for every one harvested. But this has not been the case – instead people cut down trees and destroy the small ones in the process.⁴⁵

However, most community members did not consider the situation to be a lost cause – 90 percent of those surveyed said that they believed that the natural environment could be protected and three-quarters indicated that they would be willing to participate in activities for the protection of the environment.⁴⁶ Some of the activities for the protection of the environment mentioned were reforestation, good farming practices, proper disposal of trash, the organization of the community, environmental education and water conservation.⁴⁷

Many *arenaleños* already do participate in the protection of their natural environment, albeit on a very small scale. Traditional farming of the region incorporates sustainable methods such as terraces, intercropping and the use of agroforestry techniques. One farmer practiced organic methods despite the lack of a national market for naturally produced fruits and vegetables. He took me on a tour of

⁴⁴ Although middle-aged people also made common mention of the pollution of the Laguna, most of the oldest community members had not made the trip down to the laguna in over a decade.

⁴⁵ From informal interview with community member, June 13, 2006.

⁴⁶ The question was stated, “Would you be willing to participate in community activities for the protection of the environment?” See Appendix B for frequency tables.

⁴⁷ The question was stated, “How can the environment be protected?” See Appendix B for frequency tables.

his farm, showing me with pride the pineapple and papaya plantations that he had recently converted to 100 percent organic production. When I asked him why he was trying to produce organically, he smiled and said, “I’ve always liked *las cosas naturales* (natural things), ever since I was young. So I’ve struggled to produce in natural ways, even if it’s harder and more expensive.”⁴⁸

Local groups have organized to do clean-ups of the Laguna and to plant trees in the community and some community members also did what they at an individual level to protect their local environment, if only because they enjoyed doing so. One young woman was studying for her college degree in ecology before she was diagnosed with cancer and forced to withdraw.⁴⁹ She considered herself to be a particular ‘fan’ of the environment and said that what was needed was a nationwide environmental campaign. “We can do our part here in the community by teaching children in the schools the importance of protecting natural resources, but we can’t teach the parents – and so it’s difficult to change the overall culture. What are needed are anti-littering, anti-hunting, anti-logging campaigns and also to give people the infrastructure and capacity in which to pursue such alternatives.”⁵⁰ Another young man said that he and his brother have been working to combat local deforestation for many years by planting trees on their land and along the roads.

⁴⁸ From informal interview with community member, May 1, 2008.

⁴⁹ In the community I met at least five people who had been diagnosed at one time with cancer.

⁵⁰ Informal interview with community member, July 27, 2006.

I've always loved the environment – I learned about it by watching the discovery channel and try to learn more where I can by reading about the issues. The problem in the community is that the farmers cut down trees to give sun for the plants, and while they'll have a good first few harvests, in the end the land will lose its fertility as the soil becomes eroded. We plant trees because we know that they help to hold the soil together – it's for the benefit of the entire community.⁵¹

Indeed, many community members often took great care to protect the trees that are on their land, even if the sale of those trees would assist them economically.

Biodiversity measurements were taken in both in an undeveloped 'commons' area on the northern border of El Arenal and along the main road in the community, in which a total of eighty trees were identified and measured.⁵² The Simpson's Diversity Index was calculated from the results, with a diversity richness four times higher on the road than that of the commons area (see Appendix C). The higher incidence of biodiversity along the road indicated that community members were much more likely to protect trees on their own land than on 'common' land, which was subject to much illegal logging and the communal harvesting of firewood.

One family had the option to sell one of their trees to an illegal logger for \$150, more money than they could typically earn in three months. But they refused and explained to me, "This tree is worth more to us than the money that those loggers could pay. It is an investment, something that we could count on if one of us got sick or

⁵¹ Informal interview with community member, June 15, 2006.

⁵² In order to measure the biodiversity of two chosen sections in Arenal, one in a commons area and one in the private family plots along the main road, a 250 meter transect was stretched across the sections and then divided up into twelve meter intervals. Each individual plot consisted of four sections, for each of which the circumference and species of the tree closest to the center point of the plot was calculated, as was the distance between the tree and the center point. A total of forty trees were sampled from each plot.

needed an operation. But it's best if we can always leave it there. It gives good shade and holds up the soil".⁵³ Another tree on the land of a different family had a circumference of over 26 feet! The owners of the land, a relatively poor family, said that logging companies had offered them hundreds of dollars for the tree, but that they would never cut it down because it was part of the 'cultural heritage' of Arenal.

Obstacles to Sustainable Development

From the above it becomes clear that sustainable development is necessary for and desired by the community of Arenal – but how to do this? What are the main obstacles to such a transition? And how can they be overcome?

In Chapter 3 it was explained how empowerment, both at individual and collective levels, is essential for a transition to sustainable development. However, there are many obstacles that limit the potential of *arenaleños* to become holders and enablers of the power necessary to enact such sustainable change. While some community members can plant trees and use organic agricultural methods on their own lands, high levels of disempowerment in Arenal greatly reduce the impact of such activities. A lack of internal and external power can lead to individual and collective feelings of dependency, fatalism and high levels of social mistrust, which in turn renders the community unable or unwilling to mobilize for change, as shown in Table 7.

⁵³ Informal interview with community member, July 15, 2007.

Table 7: Levels of Disempowerment

Levels of Disempowerment	External	Internal
Individual	Low civic participation Dependency on others for livelihoods Sickness, poverty Lacks in capacities and capabilities	Fatalistic attitudes Dependency Helplessness No intrinsic motivation Selfishness
Community	Existing inequalities Immobilized community Lack of resources to make change Lack of external allies or support from institutional structures	Low/no belief in the power of the community Prejudices, intolerance (social mistrust) Divided community

Systemic Poverty

Poverty at local and national levels is a serious obstacle to sustainable development as impoverished individuals and communities are forced to place economic concerns over social or environmental concerns and to act in accordance. As a result, trees are sold to illegal loggers, lands are overworked and common areas are exploited for the natural resources that they can provide. Political decisions made within and outside of Nicaragua further compound these problems. Much of the over-harvesting and pollution of the environment is due to problems with the regulation of natural resources; the government ministries charged with overseeing and implementing the laws regarding the responsible exploitation of national natural resources have little power for enforcement due to lack of funding and widespread corruption. Because economic issues take precedence over those that deal with the environment, those in political power have been reluctant to enforce laws that will have negative impacts for

the economy – even if the resulting destruction will lead to greater economic problems in the future.

Such economic concerns have also been a main driver of Nicaragua's dependence on the insertion of quick capital that other nations and the IFIs can provide through foreign direct investment and conditionalized loans. In exchange for these investments and loans and in order to comply with the stipulations placed in the subsequent free trade agreements, Nicaragua has been forced to take a back seat to the 'autonomy' of the global market, placing public welfare in the hands of private interests (Khor, 2001).

To illustrate how the tendency to place priority on economic issues can be a serious obstacle to sustainable development, one can take the case of deforestation in Nicaragua. As noted earlier, deforestation is a major problem in Nicaragua where there is an average –1.4 percent change in forest cover annually (UNDP, 2007). Despite the impressively detailed national environmental laws and statutes, the centralized ministries have been unable to curtail the many environmentally destructive practices that play out in the various departments. As the situation has grown worse, these ministries have adopted poorly conceived measures to put a halt to further destruction. In a desperate act to stop deforestation, the central government declared a national state of emergency in 2006, prohibiting the extraction, sale and transportation of all wood in the four major wood-producing provinces in the country. In countries where such an action has been attempted in the past, it has generally led to an increase, rather than a

decrease, in the rate of deforestation due to illegal logging and forest fires. Since the enactment of the ban, many critics, including environmental groups, have claimed that it has disproportionately hurt the indigenous Miskito peoples located in the wood-producing provinces, whose communities are directly dependent on the extraction of timber for their livelihoods (Carroll, 2006). In this situation legal timber operations are punished disproportionately to illegal operations as the price for illegally extracted wood will increase as demand exceeds supply.

In Arenal, this situation has led to the benefit of the both the legal and illegal logging operations in the community, as Masaya is not one of the regions included in the ban. The loggers pay landowners in order to remove trees from their land, which they sell through official or unofficial means. An interview with a local man who worked as an illegal logger revealed that their main buyers are the local artisans, as Masatepe is famous for its beautiful and inexpensive wooden furniture. As supply exceeds demand, the furniture makers must seek ways to cut costs in order to maximize very low profit margins, and buying illegal wood is one way to do so. The illegal logger indicated that he was aware that cutting down trees was harmful to the environment and had negative consequences for the community.

I work in this because I don't have another job. The sustainable way to log is to plant trees and let them grow for ten years before cutting them down and planting more trees. Then they would give good wood. But to do that only makes sense if you have a permit, and to get a permit, you have to go through INAFOR. And INAFOR doesn't give permits to everybody.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Interview with illegal logger, August 10, 2006.

Local Inequalities and Marginalized Populations

Although poverty is almost universal among families in Arenal, economic assets are unequally distributed between the wealthier families, the *mas adecuados*, and the poorer families, the *menos adecuados*. As mentioned earlier, the *menos adecuados* must struggle for adequate access to healthcare and education and do not always have enough food to eat. But on the other side of the equation are the *mas adecuados*, the families with significant land holdings, varied income possibilities and extra 'comfort' assets such as vehicles and expensive electronic appliances. These households represent the smallest percentage of the population but hold a significant amount of economic and social power. They own the local *pulperias*, run the daily transport to Masatepe or Managua and hire day laborers to work their land. These families have the economic capacity to pay for the higher education of their children and can afford the better treatment that the private clinics and hospitals in Nicaragua provide. As economic power often translates into social status and political power, the interests of the *mas adecuados* are more likely to be addressed at regional and national levels of government than their poorer counterparts. As the poorest families rarely have the time or the resources to participate in community groups that seek to have political impact, their specific needs are often forgotten or ignored by their better-off neighbors.

Other than the poorest families, another group that has traditionally been marginalized and excluded from participation in decision-making is that of women. As is the case in much of Latin American, Nicaragua has traditionally been a patriarchal

society, one in which it was decided that men should have greater economic, social and political power over women. Though the revolutionary idea of the 'New Man' that emerged with the Sandinista movement in the 1970s and 80s began to change historically engrained beliefs about gender roles, the typical *machista* attitude that men are superior to women continues to exist in much of Nicaragua. In Lancaster's ethnographical study, he asked of a Nicaraguan man, what is the Nicaraguan idea of a good man, with the following response:

Do you mean now or before? These ideas have changed a lot, and are still changing, since the revolution. Some people have the old ideal, other people have the new one, so it's hard to say. The new idea of a good man – that is, the revolutionary New Man – is someone who studies to improve himself and his country, who works hard, who is responsible toward his compañera, his children, and is generous with those around him. The old idea of a good man – the ideal of machismo – was someone who could drink, fight, gamble, and have a large number of sexual conquests. It was as simple as that (Lancaster, 1992, p. 175).

Just as in the decade of the 1980s when Lancaster did his research, the mixing of the two ideals of what a 'good man' is in Nicaragua is still apparent twenty years later in Arenal. While most men who were questioned spoke about how they adhered to the ideal of the 'New Man', by making comments such as "I don't beat my wife", "I work for my community" or "I help out with the housework at home," evidence showed that the old standard of machismo was alive and well.

Through my experiences in attempting to work with local leaders it was apparent that very few women in the community were comfortable adopting leadership roles, and even where they did feel comfortable, their participation was not as valued as that of the men. One conversation that I had with a group of community leaders clearly illustrates the challenge for female leaders. In a gathering of five community members

– four of whom were men and one who was a young woman with ‘feminist’ notions of gender equality – one of the men, an Evangelic pastor, asked her in a conversational manner how she expected to get married and handle a husband if she had such anti-*machista* ideals. When she responded that she expected to live in a household in which the authority and responsibility would be shared by both parents, a lively discussion arose about the equality between men and women. The men in the group all gave lip service to the idea that men and women are equal, and men should do half of the work in the household (the pastor mentioned how he washed and ironed his own clothing), but in the end all the men agreed that the man is the authority in the household and should demand respect from his family. When the young woman attempted to challenge this notion, a couple of the men brought up the Christian belief of ‘original sin’, which blames Eve (women) for the downfall of Adam (men).

Fatalistic Attitudes and Dependency

Intertwined with the external components described above are the disempowering attitudes, beliefs and perceptions held by many community members. Within Arenal, attitudes of fatalism and dependency were very common. Even those who were most active and committed a great amount of their personal time and energy frequently expressed frustration that “things are getting worse” or “people just don’t care anymore.” Among those who were not involved in any activities the tendency was even stronger: “the government needs to help us”, “they need to come and fix things here.”

In this way, people tended to see themselves and their community as objects that others could act upon, rather than subjects who were able to make their own decisions regarding the future of Arenal. In general, the least motivated and hopeful community members also tended to be those in the most difficult economic and social situations: single mothers with many children, men who worked as day laborers to feed a growing family and families with little to no land of their own. Such lack of external power was commonly translated into a lack of internal power and the poorest people were among those who told me that they didn't attend community meetings or participate in activities and projects because, "I'm poor – no one cares what I have to say."

Fatalism was also apparent in perceptions and opinions regarding the collective power of the community to work for the common good. One commonly cited impediment to making organized and collective change at the community level was that of community divisions. People often talked about the difficulty in getting things done because of political, religious and ideological differences among community members and groups.

Community Divisions

As in much of the country, Arenal is divided between two political factions: the Sandinistas and the Liberales. In general, political lines run through bloodlines and most children support the political party of their parents when it becomes time for them to

vote.⁵⁵ In the last two decades, political divisions have often become the deciding factor as to whether a project would go forward or would ‘get stuck in the mud’. Leadership *envidia* (envy) and political *celos* (jealousy) were commonly cited explanations for project failure. “Community leaders that are members of one political party don’t want leaders who represent the other political party to get the credit for coming up with the project,” commented one community member, “so then the project just gets thrown out, all because of *envidia*.”

Religion is another dividing issue, in Arenal and in the rest of the country. Up until about fifteen years ago, the vast majority of the population belonged to the Catholic Church. However, in the last decade a new wave of Evangelism has swept across the country and has converted many to the religion. According to recent statistics, 15 percent of Nicaraguans now identify themselves as Evangelists (Berman & Wood, 2003).

In Arenal, there are three Evangelist churches, all built in the last twenty years, and one Catholic Church, constructed in 1960. Anywhere from a quarter to one-third of the community belongs to one of the three Evangelist churches, making religion a potentially dividing force within the community. Indeed, several interview respondents

⁵⁵ Although the last fifteen years has brought much change and with it varying political interpretations, some of the ‘old’ classifications still hold true. Liberal supporters tend to be less in favor of government intervention in economic and social affairs, while Sandinista supporters made frequent reference to the important role that the local and national government should play in supporting the community. Liberales, regardless of how they make a living, mentioned a preference towards working independently for their families, while Sandinistas often spoke passionately about community organization and their work in ‘cooperatives’. However, both Sandinistas and Liberales are very involved in their community and political affiliation was not found to be a determinant of willingness to participate in community activities or to make ‘improvements’ for the wellbeing of Arenal.

mentioned they did not affiliate with certain groups or projects in the community because, “that is where the Catholics go,” or, “that is an Evangelist group.” I came across the power of divisions across religious lines when scheduling the first meeting of a diverse group of different community ‘leaders’ at one of the Evangelical pastor’s homes to the disapproval of the Catholic attendees.

Outsiders with vested interest in the community, whether for political, ideological or religious reasons, will further exploit these divisions or even create new ones in order to garner the support of the local population. They will empower specific ‘leaders’ with resources and access to political spaces to further their own interests. An example of this is in the local Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) created by the new Sandinista administration. Since its reelection, the Sandinista party has made a purposeful effort to align with the Catholic Church for the consolidation of power. In Arenal, the local CPC is made up of sixteen members – all of whom are affiliated with the Sandinista party and the Catholic Church. The government channels resources into communities through the CPCs, who then make decisions on behalf of the entire community with what should be done with the money. When I was last in the community, the new leader of the Arenal CPC proudly informed me how they had decided to spend the money. When he told me that a good portion of it was going to the renovations of the Catholic Church, I asked him what they were doing for the Evangelical churches in the community. The leader looked confused before responding, “They have their own people to support them.”

Immobilization

The above components of disempowerment have led to an impasse with several local attempts to organize the community in order to demand better public services. The best example of how such attempts have often failed due to the community divisions, fatalistic attitudes and inequalities described above can be found in Arenal's personal struggle to improve community-wide access to potable water. Water has always been a scarce resource in Arenal and as such it has been a centerpiece for community struggle.

Since the late 1990s, there have been several community efforts to deal with this problem. Options have been proposed and debated within the community and with outside institutions. However, independent of the practical nature of any of the proposed ideas (finances, technology, water availability), the biggest impediment to reaching a resolution has been the political nature of Arenal as a divided community: politically, ideologically, religiously and even geographically.

An attempt by a young leader from Arenal sheds light on how community divisions have brought attempts to solve the water problem to a standstill. Jorge⁵⁶, a 20-year old male from Arenal, had been extremely active in his community for several years and was elected to be the Arenal 'líder' for the World Vision activities in 2000. His family is associated with the Liberal political party and he lives in 'Sector 2' of

⁵⁶ Name changed to protect identity.

Arenal (as opposed to ‘Sector 1’, a distinction that was created by World Vision upon their arrival to community). Jorge felt very motivated to do something about the water situation in his community and so for more than three years he struggled, going to meetings and appealing to institutions at the regional and national levels, until with the help of a senator in Managua he was finally able to secure a project to put piping in that would benefit fifty families with running water from Masatepe. When he proposed that people from Arenal help dig the trenches, only those who would be directly benefited (in ‘Sector 2’) agreed to help. Those in ‘Sector 1’ said that the idea was ‘crazy’ and weren’t interested in participating. In 2004, the tubing was installed and water successfully reached the designated homes for the first time in years. However, many homes in ‘Sector 1’ remained without water.

Jorge again approached the (mostly Sandinista) leaders of ‘Sector 1’ in order to see about expanding the project. He had continued to work with ENACAL and had obtained primary approval for the installation of a community well (to provide water for three communities: Arenal, El Pochote, and la Sabanita) paid for by the Japanese embassy. But as many commented afterwards, community divisions got in the way. A ‘Sector 1’ meeting was held, in which some of the Sandinista leaders were reported as saying, “What is this kid doing here? He’s a Liberal and from the other Sector.” To complicate matters, where they had hoped to install the well was on a piece of private land, whose owner insisted that he be granted free water in exchange for the community use of his land. Unfortunately, the owner was one of the community’s *‘mas*

adequados’, with a large citrus plantation that would greatly benefit from irrigation during the dry months. The community protested and the project fell through.

In 2007, the community members once again began to take up the water issue to the local and national offices of ENACAL. However, two community groups were working on the issue at the same time – both with some knowledge of the existence of the other but with no communication or coordination between the two. In 2008, this lack of collaboration became apparent when both groups showed up independently to a meeting at the ENACAL office in Masaya in order to discuss solutions to the water issue.

It was shameful. It was apparent to everyone there, including the ENACAL officials, that we hadn’t come together and that we didn’t have the same agenda. And so before the meeting could start we had to kind of huddle together and come to some basic agreements on our strategy. But even that didn’t work so well – because even if we all have the same long-term goal, we have very different approaches.

A Glimpse of Collective Power

Despite the many components that have served to disempower the community, it should be noted that Arenal is by no means without hope or internal strengths. In particular, the concept of ‘community’ is very important to most *arenaleños*. People appeared to be proud of their community and expressed interest and desire to ‘work to make it better’. In one exercise conducted in 2006, I asked a group of community leaders of different political factions, religions and genders to make a list of the things that they had in common with one another, leaving all differences aside. The group had little trouble in coming up with the following: they were all Nicaraguans with basic economic needs,

they had the same culture and spoke the same language and they all cared about and were dedicated to helping their community.

Although in 2008, the individual leaders who had participated in the exercise were not much closer to bridging existing political and religious divisions, continuous effort by several of the leaders to bring water into the community appears to have resulted in success. The two groups that had been most involved in the struggle for water were unrelenting in the pressure that they put on ENACAL and in May of 2008, the local municipalities and a national development fund signed a document to commit over \$100,000 to address the water problem in Arenal and the two neighboring communities. This commitment, if it comes to fruition, will be an empowering achievement for a community that has fought to have adequate access to potable water for over a decade.

In addition, in conducting my research I met many *arenaleños* who were actively involved in working for their community – there was no lack of willing and determined leaders, even where there was a lack of unity and organization amongst them. I interviewed many individuals who sacrificed significant amounts of time and personal resources to make improvements for the common good. Teachers worked extra hours without pay to tutor children in need, students gathered to plant trees or do community clean-ups and local religious groups did what they could to help families in need. Such ‘neighborliness’ was clearest whenever a member of the community died, as the entire community would gather to comfort the grieving family and accompany

the funeral procession to the local cemetery. Many *arenaleños* communicated to me their strong sense of hope, passion and love for a better Arenal and demonstrated their willingness to work for such a future by sacrificing scarce resources of time, money and energy on ‘putting their grain of sand’.

CHAPTER 8

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ARENAL

As the other chapters have addressed the need for sustainable development and its connection to empowerment, this chapter takes a close look at the work of two very different approaches to sustainable community development in Arenal. This analysis is vital to understanding different ways that sustainable development is being promoted in rural communities in countries like Nicaragua, as projects that claim to promote sustainability and empowerment can have disempowering and unsustainable results.

As Nicaragua is a country with a deeply entrenched history of oppression and verticalism, certain development roles have served to further engrain mentalities of fatalism and dependency among the population. In particular, the roles played by Providers and Modernizers have been particularly damaging where they have weakened local power by undercutting homegrown efforts of people doing things to help themselves. As I once offered to a friend by way of an apology, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” and many attempts to develop Arenal have not only paved the way, but have pointed its people down its path.

This chapter examines the work of World Vision, an international child-sponsorship organization, and Grudesa, a community-based solidarity group, through the lenses of sustainability and empowerment. Although Grudesa and World Vision

have little in common in as far as the way in which they carry out their work, the concepts of sustainability and empowerment are integral to their respective missions.

World Vision

If a development organization donates notebooks to a community, they should be aware that what the community will receive are notebooks.⁵⁷

World Vision is the largest Christian-based humanitarian organization of its kind, carrying out disaster relief and development programs in ninety-seven countries across the globe. Its multibillion dollar budget comes mainly from private donors, most of who participate in the organization's popular international child sponsorship program, which connects sponsors from rich countries with children from poor countries through monthly remittances, letters, and gifts. The Area Development Project (ADP) is the main vehicle through which World Vision facilitates community development and was developed after the organization's shorter-term "top-down" development projects of the 1980s were phased out (Cookingham 2004).

World Vision arrived to El Arenal in the early 1990s and established the Arenal Area Development Project in 1997. Seven *comarcas* (Arenal, Pochote, Sabanita, Guarumo, Cruz de Mayo, Santiago, 6 de Julio, and Nimboja) make up the geographical 'area' of the project, with a total population of 10,795 inhabitants among 1,794 families. The project began with the sponsorship of 600 children in the area and set up a time frame of ten years, ceasing operations in September of 2007. In 2003, the ADP was

⁵⁷ Quoted from development professional with regards to the wisdom in donating school supplies to a poor community.

supporting the sponsorship of 1,608 children. The main offices of El Arenal ADP are located in the Pochote community, less than half a kilometer from the geographical boundary between El Pochote and El Arenal. The offices consist of a large, one-story building on a plot of land and surrounded by a tall, barbed-wire fence. All of the employees are Nicaraguan, but very few are residents of the communities themselves. The vast majority of the funds come from World Vision Germany, donated by individual child sponsors, and are then channeled through World Vision Nicaragua's central offices in Managua. It is estimated that more than three million dollars has been spent in the ten years that the Arenal ADP has been in existence, which operates with an annual budget of approximately 300 thousand dollars. A loose estimate suggests that over \$500,000 was spent in the *comarca* of Arenal alone in a ten year period.

The Arenal ADP develops projects in several 'strategic areas': health, education, sustainable agriculture, advocacy for children's rights and management of the child sponsorship program. Within these areas, many specific projects were created and implemented in order to realize the primary objectives of the ADP, such as: donations of school supplies, skill building workshops, construction of schools and other educational centers, microcredit projects, introduction of irrigation systems, agroforestry and reforestation, building of community networks and community development committees and creation of small businesses, among others. In addition to their goal of improving the socioeconomic situation within the zone, the ADP aims to "empower communities and help build capacity so that the community itself retains

ownership of the development process,” with the ultimate goal being “community self-sufficiency, reaching a level where the community can provide for themselves and for their children” (World Vision International, 2007). The emphasis that World Vision places on the community as the architect of its own destiny gives the project the dual-focus that not only will it empower the people, but that such empowerment will lead to lasting change.

In 2000, ‘transformational development’, an idea adopted by World Vision India, was added to the organization’s international rhetoric and transformational framework and indicators were developed and put into place at the local level in ADPs across the globe. According to World Vision’s core documents on the subject, ‘transformational development’ is a process that is “community-based and sustainable, focused especially on the well-being of all girls and boys” through which “children, families and communities move toward fullness of life with dignity, justice, peace and hope” (World Vision International, 2003, pp. 12, 24). In Arenal, the concept of ‘transformational development’ worked its way into the setting of objectives at the local level, and in 2005 the immediate objective of the Arenal ADP was to “strengthen the organization and capabilities of the community members and their organized leaders and provide them with the necessary resources in order to allow them to formulate, facilitate and implement sustainable community projects in the following development areas: social, economical, and environmental, in order to help improve the quality of their lives” (World Vision, 2002).

Community Involvement and Leadership

World Vision's organizational rhetoric places a strong emphasis on the importance of local leadership and community participation so that projects are 'owned' by the community. In each of the seven communities, four community members are elected by their neighbors to head the local program committees with the following titles: president (*el líder*), vice-president, secretary and treasurer. The local committees are responsible for communicating the activities of the program to the rest of the community, as well as assisting in the planning and the implementation of projects. In selecting which projects would be likely to benefit the communities, the committee gathers opinions among the population, and then meets with the World Vision staff, who then determine the feasibility of the proposed projects. Occasionally, the staff asks for additional input from community members who will be directly impacted by the projects in order to adapt their particular needs to project design. In addition, some projects are proposed by the staff themselves, such as reforestation and education in Christian values, depending on the needs and conditions observed within the communities (World Vision, 2005, p. 61).

Even though the majority of ideas for projects come from within the community, local participation is very limited in the planning, implementation and follow-up stages of the project design. It is only once the projects are established that local leaders announce the projects to the community members and ask for their participation and cooperation. Outside technicians arrange the activities and set the dates for trainings,

often without consulting the community members, which makes it difficult for people to attend meetings or participate in trainings. According to one community member, “the majority of us farmers are losing interest; we think about how the program staff have everything guaranteed, but for us farmers we are always on the clock, for us every minute is important. For example – me with my chickens – I can’t leave them alone. I have to feed them, give them water and in the case of an unexpected meeting I can’t attend’ (World Vision, 2005, p. 58).

Many community members mentioned feeling excluded from participating or benefiting from WV projects, and often made comments such as, “they don’t invite me,” or “the same people always get all the benefits.” Other community members indicated that they did not participate because of similar feelings of being ‘unwelcome’ on the occasions that they did attend meetings. Common complaints were, “I don’t participate because my family is very poor and so people don’t listen to what I have to say,” but even one of the wealthier families in the community said that they did not participate because of community ‘*chisme*’ – “the neighbors started talking about how we weren’t poor enough to participate, so we stopped going.”⁵⁸ Those participating in WV projects also indicated the lack of project follow-through and bad planning (by program staff, technicians and leaders) resulted in many people losing the motivation to continue participating in such projects. Such lack of input from community members resulted in incomplete knowledge of risks facing projects, ultimately leading to their

⁵⁸ From interviews with community members, July-August, 2006.

failure. For example, several agricultural initiatives were unsuccessful because the project designers did not realize that a lack of water would make the projects unfeasible (World Vision, 2005, p. 59). A pineapple-planting project failed because the seeds only arrived after the rainy season had come to an end, so no one planted. Community members and program staff said that such errors were not only a waste of time and resources for the organization, but also resulted in community members becoming less motivated and interested in participating in future development projects.

However, World Vision staff was not always willing to accept responsibility for the lack of local participation in the projects, rather citing the '*falta de voluntad*' or '*falta de interes*' (lack of willingness or interest) on the part of the locals: "there are still some children who are underweight because their mothers don't apply prescriptions correctly due to *falta de voluntad*" (World Vision, 2005, p. 37). While some activities were successful and show potential for continuity (such as a project in which chickens were donated to families and have reproduced), other projects failed from the start (such as the family garden project, partly because the seeds were distributed at the tail end of the rainy season and because "there wasn't much interest on the part of the families helped by the project") (World Vision, 2005, p. 40).

Development Impacts

As a newcomer to the community in 2006, my first impressions of World Vision were less than favorable. During the first few weeks of carrying out informal interviews with people in the affected communities, I became aware of a general sense

of ambiguity regarding the impacts of the program. In general, it was much more common to hear negative remarks rather than positive ones and most people spoke rather vaguely about their like or dislike of the organization, commonly making unsubstantiated statements such as “World Vision has helped us,” or “the project has caused more harm than good.”

Upon closer investigation and more specific questioning, my understanding of both the historical context of the communities as frequent beneficiaries of outside aid and the role that World Vision played in that history slowly became more complete. It was clear that the mixed reviews of the ADP among the community members could in part be attributed to the different stakes that some people held in relation to the ADP as opposed to others. Interestingly, although the staff at the ADP claimed that the selection process regarding which projects would be carried out and who would benefit from them was determined in an inclusive, participatory manner, it appeared that while some people consistently participated in the process, others had little knowledge of its existence.

Accordingly, people who praised the organization tended to be directly involved in the projects and referred specifically to personal benefits that they or their families had received on behalf of the ADP, while those who spoke more negatively discussed issues such as jealousy and partiality resulting from the distribution of project benefits, increased dependency of community members on outside aid and a frustration at a

perceived lack of transparency and openness on the part of the World Vision staff. As a result, project impacts varied tremendously between households.

In the areas of health and hygiene, the evaluation indicated that the alliance between World Vision and the Ministry of Health (MINSA) helped to increase access to health services and information and to reduce the prevalence of certain sicknesses, such as diarrhea and pneumonia. While in 1997, only 10.5 percent of those surveyed had received educational training in this area, in 2004 this number was increased to 45 percent (World Vision, 2005). Other significant impacts are the increased number of months (from one to four) of mothers nursing their infants and increased awareness about sexual diseases. Many families attributed the assistance provided through the ADP to improving their health, as the project paid for the purchase of medicine and the provision of medical examinations, which also helped families economically (World Vision, 2005, p. 39).

In the area of sustainable agriculture, forty producers in the participating communities were organized into two groups of producers, who received various types of assistance from the ADP, both technical (trainings, visits from agronomists, technology transfer, land evaluation and planning, specialized diagnostics, farmer-to-farmer exchanges, etc.) as well as material (provision of inputs such as agrochemicals, tanks for lombriculture, gifts of minor livestock, credit, processing mills and the distribution of fruit trees and other plants). While soil conservation and crop diversification methods are practiced by a significant number of producers, the

evaluation indicated that the ADP had little impact on the spreading of such practices. For example, despite being trained on how to produce organic fertilizer, only one of five farmers interviewed said that he practiced such methods. Common reasons cited by farmers questioned as to why they did not use organic methods were “it takes too long” or “the methods don’t work”.⁵⁹

Internal documents indicated that the economic impact of WV projects in the community was less than satisfactory due to the limited number of community members participating in such projects. The midterm evaluation indicated that less than a quarter participated in any of the projects proposed by the ADP for the economic advancement of the region (such as the rearing of small and large livestock, veterinary training, marketing, irrigation schemes, etc.) (World Vision, 2005).

One of World Vision’s major focuses within the communities was in the area of child development, in particular with regards to access to formal and informal education. Project coverage in the area has been extensive, with 66 percent of school age children participating in diverse trainings and activities facilitated by the ADP and close to 95 percent of children receiving information with regards to their rights as expressed in the International Children’s Code (World Vision, 2005). In the seven communities, 1,500 children were given ‘school packages’, which consisted of notebooks, pens and other needed materials and 188 received official ‘scholarships’ to cover additional expenses of primary and secondary schools (World Vision, 2005).

⁵⁹ From interviews with community members, June 26, 2006.

Internal documents and local education ministries claimed that the ADP succeeded in reducing the number of school age children deserting their studies, “the support provided by the ADP in the area of education has been essential and has helped to overcome the serious problem of dropouts” and affirmed that “school retention has greatly improved since World Vision began its work in the municipality” (World Vision, 2005, p. 79).

. However, statistics provided through the ADP’s own survey indicated that the percentage of dropouts actually slightly increased between 1997 and 2004 and that the incidence of class absences rose in the same period from 14.2 percent to 27.3 percent.⁶⁰ In addition, child employment increased from 9.4 percent in 1997 to 13.3 percent in 2004, and an additional 10 percent of those surveyed indicated that their children would be unable to continue in school without the support of World Vision.

Interviews with ADP staff and community leaders indicated that the most positive impacts on the community were intangible rather than material, such as leadership training and community organization, as well as knowledge, education and awareness about the importance of health and education. In addition, several community members who participated more actively in the trainings and projects that World Vision had to offer indicated that the program had changed their lives in positive

⁶⁰ It is important to note that these incidences cannot necessarily be attributed to World Vision’s impact in the community and that many other factors (increased poverty due to government policies and Free Trade Agreements, increased violence and drug use, etc.) are very likely to have played important roles in reduced attendance.

ways. World Vision's commitment to promoting gender equality and informing community members of their rights and duties as citizens have been successful in improving the lives of many in the community. For example, the ADP carried out educational campaigns directed at informing women of where they could go to seek legal advice in cases of domestic violence or child support, leading to an increase from 18.2 percent to 68.5 percent in the percentage of community members who indicated that they had access to such information (World Vision, 2005, p. 103). In addition, through World Vision community members have been informed of opportunities to participate in national forums and social mobilizations for the promotion and protection of children's and women's rights.

Sustainability and Empowerment

Many community members were dissatisfied with the role that World Vision has played in Arenal, citing issues of project envy, community divisions, dependency and a lack of sustainability. Among those interviewed there were clear differences between people who demonstrated eagerness to become involved in the projects of the ADP as compared to those who had little interest or less capacity to participate. A common complaint among community members was that "the same people are always the ones getting the benefits," and a couple of people additionally noted that "the project staff and leadership never changes – they never give anyone else a chance but keep the same people in charge" (World Vision, 2005). Other community members had even worse impressions of the organization's presence in the community, and said that it had "done

more harm than good” because it had deepened divisions, weakened collective power and reinforced a ‘culture of poverty’ in the minds of the population.

For example, a teacher at the local elementary school noted that during ‘gift seasons’ (Christmas, birthdays, etc.) World Vision personnel came to the school to distribute gifts to the sponsored children. Children without sponsors were left out of the process and watched as the ‘benefited’ children return to their seats with their new foreign-bought gifts.⁶¹ Such unintended consequences of child sponsorship have been noted in similar programs, and a study of “the double edge of child sponsorship”, questioned whether the material and emotional benefits of sponsorship outweighed the in disruptions family and community relations by creating experiences of “localized lack” based on feelings of inequality and jealousy (Bornstein, 2001, p. 614). Another division created by World Vision was geographical. In the communities where World Vision worked, ADP staff determined that it would be easier to address local needs if the target areas were smaller and decided to break up the communities into two or three ‘sectors’. Thus, Arenal became Arenal One and Arenal Two, which added to existing community divisions.

In addition, local leaders supported by World Vision were not always perceived positively by their local communities. In the midterm evaluation, only a third of respondents indicated that their local leader had done a good job in carrying out projects provided by World Vision. Though such dissatisfaction was more commonly heard

⁶¹ From interview with teacher at primary school in Arenal, December 4, 2007.

from those who had not participated much in the activities of the ADP, even some people who were actively involved in World Vision projects opined that the selection of the projects was “only open to debate after those in charge (World Vision staff and community leaders) had already implemented them”.⁶² Many people indicated that leaders tended to be very partial in the way in which they distributed resources and projects, only “privileging his group of supporters” (World Vision, 2005, p. 99). Perhaps more problematically, some leaders have been forced to step down due to accusations of corruption or mismanagement, and one leader was even charged with filing a lawsuit against another community member for ‘slandering’ him to other community members.

A third concern mentioned in interviews was ‘*la cultura de subsidios*’ (the culture of subsidies), or the unintended consequence of some projects that provided direct ‘hand-outs’ or subsidies to community members. One community member (who also worked as a paid employee at the ADP) explained the impact of the *cultura de subsidios* in the following way:

Before World Vision came we had our own small community association within the community that would do small projects. Whenever we wanted to do something, attend a training or take a trip to the mayor's office, we would pool our money – each contributing one *cordoba*. But then World Vision came and said that the people no longer had to spend their own money, they said that they would pay for everything. This became the rule in the beginning. Then after a couple of years this policy changed. World Vision no longer wanted to pay 100 percent - rather it should be a collaborative effort, they said. But the people were already used to the handout policy. On top of World Vision's policy, many people were used to this system of freebies from the decade of the eighties, when the Sandinista government gave everything for free

⁶² From interview with community members, July 24, 2006 and August 13, 2006.

(food, land, fertilizer, etc.). So microfinance projects, or giving people animals and then telling the people in turn reproduce them and give them to their neighbors, didn't work. The people took their 'free' chickens and ate them, and the projects died.⁶³

Community leaders explained that the main obstacle to the sustainability of such projects is a result of the dependency mentality that World Vision initially reinforced among the local population in the first few years of operations. Indeed, the midterm evaluation indicated that very few of the activities developed in the various strategic projects areas had potential for sustainability (World Vision, 2005).

.The municipal offices of the nearby townships of Masatepe and La Concepcion also expressed concern about the sustainability of World Vision projects. In the area of health, the ADP helped to temporarily 'fill holes' where the Ministry of Health (MINSA) lacked resources. But according to the MINSAs from of the local municipalities:

The ADP has made the people somewhat dependent on their help, principally economically. They need to teach the community to organize itself and to self-facilitate and be self-sustainable in their projects... The people who work with the ADP continue to do so because they receive different types of support in the form of *becas* (direct material assistance). They are used to receiving, they've adapted to the assistance. It is most likely that if the ADP stops helping the *brigadistas* (community health facilitators), they will stop supporting the health activities" (World Vision, 2005, p. 49).

Other aspects of the ADP led to further dependency and disempowerment among the population. Some community members referred to methods used by World Vision to get local people to participate in organizational meetings and sponsored projects, such as the practice of serving food at project activities (*refrigerios*), created

⁶³ From interview with community member who worked at the World Vision offices in community, December 1, 2007.

‘bad habits’ among the population. “Now everyone expects to receive something for participating,” said one local leader. Staff interviewed at World Vision’s national headquarters in Managua echoed similar concerns about the unintended consequences of such practices as *subsídios*, *becas* and *refrigerios*. The director of the Arenal ADP remarked that, “the most difficult part for me has been learning to work with the people – getting them to participate, getting them to understand that not all ‘benefits’ come in the form of money or gifts. Many of them don’t understand this.” Another staff member explained that mistakes made in the initial years of World Vision’s work in the community resulted in widespread expectations that project benefits were to come in the form of ‘*ayudas*’ and other direct forms of assistance:

People expect ‘tangible’ results - workshops for capacity building or community development are not viewed as ‘*beneficios*’. Rather, something tangible, like a roof for their house or a school is seen as a *beneficio*. So people don’t appreciate workshops or community projects as much. They generally want direct handouts.⁶⁴

Despite the above challenges to sustainability and empowerment, World Vision staff indicated that they were doing everything possible to ensure that projects would not lead to dependency. In order to ensure sustainability of at least some projects, the ADP helped to establish community organizations that would be the main recipients of remaining project capital and funds for the continuation of projects when the ADP terminated operations in 2007. World Vision staff at the organizational headquarters indicated that “although the new association is made up of people who seem to be

⁶⁴ From interview with World Vision staff, July 28, 2006.

enthusiastic about continuing the projects, it remains to be seen whether they will be able to raise the necessary funds and have the capacity to actually run the projects”.⁶⁵

According to some WV staff and community members, the people themselves are to blame for their inability to take advantage of what World Vision had to offer.

“According to the producers involved with the project, they themselves have failed many times for different reasons, principally in the application of new knowledge learned. One producer questioned himself, as he had been working with World Vision for seven years, and after so many trainings, the group had yet to establish a sustainable project in the community” (World Vision, 2005, p. 62).

Grudesa

Un pueblo desorganizado es una masa con la que se puede jugar, pero un pueblo que se organiza y defiende sus valores y su justicia es un pueblo que se hace respetar. (Mons. Oscar Romero).⁶⁶

In the same year that the Sandinistas were voted out of power, a small group of community members from Arenal began working together with the mission of keeping the memory, ideals and the dreams of the Sandinista revolution alive with the accompaniment of the Jesuits based at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in Managua. Initially, the major focus of the group was on helping to maintain the Pikín Guerrero’s farmers’ cooperative, of which one of the Jesuits was a member. From 1991

⁶⁵ Interview with World Vision staff at headquarters in Managua, Nicaragua, July 16, 2007.

⁶⁶ Own translation: “A disorganized community can be molded like a lump of clay, but a community that organizes itself and defends its values and sense of justice is not to be reckoned with.”

to 1995, the group worked in the area of education and healthcare, work that was closely tied to the productive activities carried out through the farmers' cooperative. By the mid-1990s, the economic, social, and political situation facing the community had become dire, and the small group of friends felt that the only form in which they could continue to resist and preserve their historical and cultural victories was to intensify their work in the community. In 1996, Grudesa was formed with representatives from each of the community projects that the initial group had created; in total twenty-three people, all members of Arenal and the surrounding communities, joined in the process.

According to the founding members, the main vision of Grudesa is to construct an 'alternative community' – "one in which a neighbor helps another neighbor without thought of compensation – one of working together, a vision of an organized community against the threats posed by a globalized, money-driven world. Not a pueblo free of problems but a pueblo working together to confront them".⁶⁷ Put simply, Grudesa considers itself to be a 'group of friends' trying to live out deeply felt community values of solidarity, collaboration, organization, sacrifice for the community and mutual responsibility: "our hope lies in a shared commitment that we will never give up in our struggle" (GRUDESA, 2007).

One aspect that sets Grudesa apart from many other approaches to community work is its focus on values over projects. Although the group promotes the realization of many community activities, the main emphasis is on changing mentalities of

⁶⁷ From interview June 12, 2006.

dependency and fatalism that have been deeply entrenched among the community members through the long history of oppression and verticalism as depicted in previous chapters. An important part of this effort comes through the solidarity expressed by friends and allies located outside the community, both nationally and internationally, who visit the community, live and work alongside its members, advocate on the behalf of the community and support the activities of the group through the sharing of ideas, values, financial resources and information. As the decade of the 1980s brought many outsiders to the region in order to express their solidarity with the Nicaraguan population, many friendships and connections were established that have lasted over the years. To the present day, Arenal and the surrounding communities receive national and international visitors several times a year. In the two-year period during which I conducted my research, I saw many of these guests come into the community and stay with families. One of the founders and core members of Grudesa, a Jesuit from the United States, arrived to the community in this manner twenty years ago and to this day plays an important role in facilitating the cross-cultural ties between Grudesa and their international network of friends.

Community Involvement and Leadership

Grudesa is not officially recognized as a non-profit organization, nor does it wish to be. It prefers to think of itself as a '*grupo de amigos*' without official titles or organizational structure. There is no president, director or even treasurer – at least in formal terms. Rather than projects, the main driver behind Grudesa's work is a focus on

‘attitude change’, inspiring hope and self-reliance among the local population to seek to make a change on their own. In essence, Grudesa operates like a ‘group of groups’, with the organizational core consisting of only five key individuals (in 2008). This core group meets twice a month in order to discuss values, upcoming activities, problems and proposed solutions. An important part of these meetings is to have discussions about the life and message of Jesus as it pertains to the political, social and cultural reality of Arenal. The core group also makes decisions about how available financing will be allocated - there is no fixed annual budget, but it is estimated that Grudesa spends approximately between \$15,000-\$20,000 annually in order to carry out the various activities of the different groups, the vast majority of which comes from the group’s network of friends.

Although in the past, the vast majority of the ideas for new groups and activities emerged from this core, at present many new proposals and ideas also come from within the smaller groups and are then proposed to the core group for approval and assistance with planning and financing. However, ideas are still brought up at these core meetings and then suggested to the other groups to determine interest and to solicit participation. For example, Grudesa’s core members will often find out about social or political mobilizations in Managua and announce such activities at the other group meetings and facilitate the transportation and costs needed for group members to participate.

Leadership is one of the key values within Grudesa, emphasized through a willingness to sacrifice one's time and energy to helping others within and outside of one's own community. Although among the different groups there are many types of leaders, Grudesa makes a constant effort to make spaces available for the leadership gifts of young people and women in the community. As children as young as five years old can get involved with Grudesa's activities, some of the group's leaders have been participating with Grudesa for over a decade.

The first group that came out of the work carried out by the 'group of friends' was the university group 'Xavier Gorostiaga', formed in 1995, one year before Grudesa was officially founded. The group began with the enrollment of two students from the community of Arenal at the UCA with the support of the community members and the Jesuits in residence at the university. Since then, more than seventy-five students from Arenal and the surrounding communities have been given the opportunity to attend higher education due to the motivational support, accompaniment and financial assistance of Grudesa. Students attend three monthly encounters at the community center to discuss values, improve communication skills (written, spoken, virtual), analyze the social and economic situation of the community through political lenses, and participate in a wide range of community activities, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Community Work of University Group

Activity/Program	Year initiated	Description
Children's Reading Library	1998	This program was started with the help of the international organization, Libros para Niños, which aims to inspire a passion for reading in young children by enabling access to books. Three days a week for three hours a day, fifteen to twenty children between the ages of three and thirteen attend the reading library. Student volunteers read children's literature (primarily Latin American) to the children and engage them in other activities such as drawing, and traditional Nicaraguan music and dance.
Community Pharmacy and Laboratory	2002 (lab), 2004 (pharm)	The community clinical laboratory and pharmacy were created in order to provide more affordable and accessible health care to members of the surrounding communities. The pharmacy is open six days a week, attended by student volunteers, and on Saturdays the laboratory is attended by a licensed laboratory technician, paid for by the income generated from the medicines and examinations. Part of the pharmacy and laboratory program are periodic presentations prepared for the patients concerning women's and children's health and basic first aid. Students who volunteer in the pharmacy also organize and participate in community cleanups and meetings regarding the garbage problem, in order to reduce the illnesses exacerbated by amount of garbage found in the community.
Computer Instruction	2004	There are two computers that are available for use by the different groups – one is specifically for use by the university students for the completion of assignments, and the other is used to give basic computer instruction to interested individuals. Students with strong computer skills share their knowledge through guided instruction several times a week.
Environmental Activities	1998	Many of the student volunteers opt to spend their time addressing environmental issues within the community and participate in the organization and the realization of various related activities. One of the main activities of the students who volunteer in this area is the upkeep and development of the community garden – a small 'demonstration plot' in which Grudesa members plant fruits, vegetables, and medicinal herbs, using organic methods. This small group of students has participated in additional activities such as community cleanups, the removal of garbage from the Laguna de Masaya, and reforestation efforts.

The second major group organized with the help of Grudesa was a local women's group, founded in 2000 in order to give women a place to meet together in a practical, non-threatening environment. Once a week, a group of approximately ten to twenty women gather to learn new skills, such as baking bread, learning how to cook

with soy beans and making cakes, with which they can improve their social and economic standing in society. Women who participate in this group are also invited and encouraged to participate in discussions and trainings that take place at the community center on topics such as gender equality, women's rights, reproductive health, sexual education and domestic violence.

The Folkloric Dance group was formed in 2003 with thirty-two young people from the surrounding five communities. The main activity of the group is to rescue the cultural folkloric dances of Nicaragua by learning them and presenting them locally, nationally and internationally. The dance group is well known in regional and national cultural circles and is invited to present their dances in various cultural, social and political events several times a month. Examples of events in which they have participated are protest marches (resistance to CAFTA, the privatization of basic services, the war in Iraq), festivals to celebrate national holidays, anniversaries of the deaths of political martyrs (such as Oscar Romero or Carlos Fonseca), as well as special invitations to present their dances in other countries within Central America and abroad. In 2007, eight of the dance group's members were invited by the Comité Oscar Romero of Cataluña, Spain to share their life experiences, discuss the reality of living in the Nicaraguan countryside, and express their cultural roots through traditional dance.

In 2007 and 2008, two additional women's groups were added to Grudesa's work, the *Maquila* Workers Women's Group and the *Amigas Solidarias* microcredit group. The aim of both of these groups is to organize the women in the community

with the purpose of becoming educated with regards to their rights and the existence of economic alternatives. According to Grudesa, working with women is of special importance because in the community the women are those who bring up the children and take care of the home, and additionally have demonstrated a strong capacity for organization. In particular, the microcredit group attempts to empower women and give them a greater say in the economic decisions in their homes through the provision of small loans.

Impacts of Community Work

Since the beginning of their work in the community, the main priorities of Grudesa – equal access to education, health and land – have not changed, but the ways with which to confront existing problems have evolved with the changing economic and social situation in the community. As noted above, one of the most important areas of work of Grudesa is in gender, and programs for greater access to healthcare and education have focused on the needs of women in particular. Within Grudesa's core, three out of the five members are women and have played an important role in making the decisions of the group.

This is one of the elements that the members of the farmers' cooperative Pikín Guerrero (an organization made up of men) take issue with⁶⁸ – that the women are those who

⁶⁸ Although initially, Grudesa and the farmers' cooperative Pikín Guerrero worked closely together, over time a divide emerged between the two groups. According to the core members of Grudesa, the members of the farmers' cooperative wanted Grudesa to operate like a typical NGO, channeling money and projects into the community in a similar approach to that of World Vision. Some of Grudesa's members (and even those unaffiliated with either group) also believe that many of the men in the cooperative are bothered by the strong female leadership in the group because of the *machista* culture in the community. The farmers in the cooperative dispute these allegations and claim that their separation from Grudesa is due to the lack of transparency and democracy with regards to how the

make the decisions and are the leaders. The women in Arenal are vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence and are subject to undertaking exploitative work in *maquilas*. But the women are also those who are willing to find new solutions to surviving the current reality.⁶⁹

In the area of healthcare, the establishment of the community laboratory and pharmacy has greatly improved access to affordable healthcare to the community members, primary women, who are able to take care of their healthcare needs close to home and for less money. In education, through the assistance and accompaniment provided by Grudesa, seventy-eight young people have had the opportunity to attend higher education, and since 2000, twenty-five students have graduated with technical or bachelor degrees. Nine more students are expected to graduate in 2008, thirty continue to study, and fourteen students (18 percent) have withdrawn from their studies since 1995 for various reasons (pregnancy, illness, economic need, poor grades, etc.). There are slightly more female students enrolled than men, with women representing 53 percent and men 47 percent. The most common degrees studied are in engineering, agronomy, nursing, accounting, law and business administration. 95 percent of the graduates have found steady employment, with approximately 85 percent working outside of the community and 15 percent within. One of the first graduates is currently enrolled in a Master's Program in rural development, which she is financing through her salary at a countrywide development fund organization. Other college graduates have

funding is allocated and decisions are made. In recent years the split between the two has widened due to political differences, as while the cooperative remains closely tied to the Sandinista political party, Grudesa denounces the 'Danielist' trend of the present administration and refuses to participate in political activities at election times.

⁶⁹ From letter sent to me by Grudesa, July 30, 2008.

gone on to work with a local microcredit organization, as a coordinator for *Libros para Niños* in Jinotepe, working with battered women in Managua, as an agricultural technician, or as the regional coordinator for an international agroforestry organization. A significant number of the graduates have also returned to do uncompensated work in the community in supporting Grudesa's various activities and groups.

As Grudesa has strong political beliefs and commitments, much of their impact has been in changing fatalistic attitudes and inspiring the local people to stand up for their rights as citizens and demand a better life for themselves, their families and their community. One of the first ideological battles that was fought (and won) by Grudesa was to assist the Pikín Guerrero farmer's cooperative in maintaining ownership of the land that was allotted to them after the Sandinista revolution. In the mid to late 1990s the group also fought (and won) against attempts by the national government to privatize the local primary school.

A more recent struggle has been for improved access to potable water in the communities of Arenal and La Sabanita. In order to get a response from ENACAL, the group first developed a proposal, complete with an outlined budget (of which they had already obtained a significant amount of funding), for the improvement of services in the communities. After more than six months of meetings with unsuccessful outcomes, Grudesa began organizing protest mobilizations against the state agency and succeeded in gaining the attention of the national press, *El Nuevo Diario*, which printed a series of articles detailing the community's struggle for water. These articles were designed to

inspire a passionate outcry against the apathetic behavior of ENACAL and succeeded in getting the company to react – if only to put a stop to the bad press that the articles had been generating. ENACAL developed a proposal with local municipalities and a national development fund in order to install a well in the community of La Sabanita, for the benefit of the entire population of the region.

Grudesa has also been increasingly concerned with the changing economic situation in the community, as small-scale farming, the traditional activity of the region, is being abandoned for more profitable activities found outside community borders, such as migration to the larger cities and factory work in *maquilas*. According to one of the founders of Grudesa, ‘land is the most important thing,’ and he affirmed that one of Grudesa’s main objectives was to instill in people the value of working the land in order to provide for local food needs and to be a self-sufficient community. Unfortunately, there has been very little real impact in this area. The activities organized by Grudesa to support economic alternatives to work in cities, factories or construction are more symbolic than practical. For example, once a year, Grudesa organizes a community-wide country fair, in which they invite community members to bring locally produced produce, crafts, and food to share in the spirit of ‘eating what we harvest’. While the hope exists that such activities will impact the economic activities of the community members in the long-term, seven loaded buses continue to depart daily for the Mercado Oriental in Managua, where community members exchange the produce from their land for foodstuffs and other products produced far from home.

The biggest impact that Grudesa has had in the communities has been in changing attitudes among the members of the various groups. In particular, young people indicated that participation in Grudesa has inspired and motivated them to work to serve their communities for the sake of a better future for all. Members of Grudesa's various groups accept invitations to participate in national, regional and international workshops and conferences. Every year, a group of young people attends a gathering of groups and individuals from across Central America to discuss specific topics of interest; conferences in the past have had themes such as women's rights and sustainable development.

Sustainability and Empowerment

As Grudesa is not an organization, but rather a group of friends with common goals and values, it is not possible to evaluate Grudesa through the same lens of sustainability that was used for World Vision. Whereas a professional institution or organization is dependent on the proven impact of its activities in order to attract funding and continue its work, a network of friends is only dependent on a sense of shared values and solidarity for it to maintain the connections that hold it together. Friendship and solidarity fall outside of questions of sustainability and exist independently of money, projects or proven impacts. Grudesa has a deep desire to represent a different way of thinking, acting and communicating with regards to community work. However, working within a community that has been subject to a history of verticalism and dependency raises many challenges for the group.

One of the challenges that Grudesa has dealt with over the years is that of financing. For the first ten years of the group's existence, information about all of the money that came into Grudesa was shared openly with all of the participating members. However, in time some of the leaders felt that the discussions surrounding such monetary issues led to many divisions and problems with the groups. The amounts of money were so substantial that many members began to argue over how it should be spent. In particular, the farmers' cooperative began to present detailed budgets to lay claim to the funds that were coming in. Thus, in 2005 the core group decided that it would be best to restrict knowledge with regards to the funding and as a result, the financial transparency that was part of the group from the beginning was cancelled. In the words of the group, the reasoning behind this decision was as follows:

The dominant culture of Arenal, for historical reasons, leads many to see all organized groups – and evaluate them – as NGOs. Unfortunately, the first rule of these traditional NGOs has been “take care of yourselves first.” A number of people joined Grudesa in its early years coming from this cultural background and with the ‘NGO mentality’. When they realized that Grudesa was not an NGO and was not going to function like an NGO (spending more time talking about money, and less about work to be done in the community), they decided to separate themselves from Grudesa. Some of these women and men, on seeing that Grudesa continued to move forward in its work with youngsters, youth, students, women, health, education, culture, gender issues, etc., justified to others their separating themselves from Grudesa, saying that there was ‘mismanagement of funds’. Within the existing culture, this was to be expected, and so Grudesa chose not to waste time in responding. The active members of Grudesa were so involved in their various commitments that all were happy not to spend hours and hours discussing money issues, while folks in the community went hungry, without medicines, missing classes, opportunities to continue studying, etc.⁷⁰

As noted above, many in the community expressed suspicions regarding the lack of transparency in the budget. At present, even within the core group only a couple of

⁷⁰ From letter sent to me by Grudesa, July 17, 2008.

members have an intimate knowledge of how much money comes in and how it is spent, leaving group members and community members to decide whether to place their trust in them, or not to do so. Difficulties have arisen when community members circulated rumors based on their lack of trust. Unfortunately, the decision not to respond to the concerns of those who had previously been involved has led to much misunderstanding throughout the community. Even those closely connected to Grudesa expressed doubt with regards to how the financing was being allocated, raising the question of whether canceling the financial transparency served its purpose in getting people to stop thinking so much about money or made the problem worse.

Another challenge faced by Grudesa deals with the extensive demands of time and energy placed on its core members. According to one member, “financial resources are scarce but human resources are even more scarce. What I need is another person like myself who will work forty hours a week without pay for their community.”⁷¹ Other community members expressed the perception that Grudesa was in a precarious position because of the small size of the core group. But in recent years some of the college graduates who were supported by Grudesa have taken very active roles in the continuance of the group; even those who live and work as far away as Managua return to Arenal on the weekends to carry out activities with the community. These are the individuals who eventually become integrated into Grudesa’s core and replace older leaders if and when they decide to leave. Thus, leadership within the group adjusts to

⁷¹ From interview with member of Grudesa, April 20, 2008.

accommodate new members and adopt new ideas to confront the constantly changing economic and social situation within the community.

In any community, particularly one with a long history of outside interventions, divisiveness, envy and jealousy are typical. Grudesa has been subject to negative perceptions due to these tendencies from the beginning of its work in the community. Even within the groups divisions sometimes arise when some members are chosen over others to represent Grudesa in certain events. As some leaders stand out from their peers, Grudesa's core gives them additional opportunities to learn and grow by inviting them to participate in special events and activities. Every year, selected leaders travel outside of Nicaragua in order to share their experiences in facing the economic, social and environmental consequences of poverty in the Nicaraguan countryside. In addition to providing opportunities for horizontal learning and exchanges between different cultures, these travel experiences serve to increase the self-esteem of the young people, as well as pride in their communities. While such opportunities have greatly benefited those who participated, only a select number of the community members are chosen to attend these trips, which has invariably led to feelings of jealousy and envy among the majority who remain at home. Some members feel that there is favoritism, as oftentimes, the same individuals are chosen by the core members to attend such conferences year after year. However, those making such decisions said that it was important to give continuity in order to ensure that those who attend are well prepared and uphold the quality of the participation of Grudesa members in such encounters. In

addition, in every encounter there are opportunities for ‘new faces’ to attend and participate, where they then become more experienced and are able to have more opportunities to represent their community.

Another challenge faced by Grudesa is a result of the political divisions in the community. Most community members who were not involved with Grudesa perceived the group to be a political organization, affiliated with the FSLN. This perception is due to the distinction that the members of the group draw between the ‘Sandinismo’ of Sandino and the 1979 revolution, and the ‘Danielismo’ of the current administration headed by Daniel Ortega. Grudesa openly identifies with the former by celebrating important dates of the Sandinista struggle and by placing stickers that say things like, ‘*Siempre Sandinistas*’ on the windows of the group’s pickup trucks. But Grudesa rejects the current Sandinista administration, avoids campaigning or participating in activities at election times and has even published sharp critiques in national newspapers of the policies of the new government.

Unfortunately, many community members do not make the same distinction between the Sandinistas of the past and the FSLN of the present. However, this perception has lessened over time, especially in recent years due to the breach between the Sandinista-affiliated Pikín Guerrero and Grudesa, which widened after the 2006 presidential elections because Grudesa refused to participate in the pro-FSLN political campaign. Increasingly, community members from different political backgrounds have begun attending some of the activities organized by the different groups and

working alongside Grudesa in various community struggles. However, there is much work to be done, in Grudesa as in the rest of the community, in bridging the political divide in Arenal.

Despite the above challenges, perceptions by community members regarding Grudesa and its impact in the community are largely positive. Of those who have been directly or indirectly (through family members) involved in or benefited by the different groups, the vast majority of those questioned say that it has done very good things for many people. Those interviewed often mention that it is from within the community (all of its members are long-term community residents) and as a result the work of the group responds to the reality of Arenal. One community member cited how the group is always willing to help – “If anyone in the community goes to them and asks for help – they find the way to help. It’s not like World Vision, where you go and fill out a form and it gets sent to Managua for approval. With Grudesa you can go and tell them the situation is, and they understand. They always try to help – even if only a little bit.”⁷²

In addition, many individuals, groups and networks outside of the community have expressed the opinion that that Grudesa is a very positive force for Arenal and Nicaragua in general. According to a worker with Witness for Peace, an international organization that leads fact-finding delegations in several countries around the world, “Arenal is the most organized community I’ve visited in the entire country”.⁷³ In my

⁷² From informal interview with community member, April 23, 2008.

⁷³ From interview with Witness for Peace worker, July 17, 2007.

own analysis, the fact that Grudesa is owned by the same community that it works hard to serve is in itself a strongly empowering notion.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us. (Socrates)

In the previous chapters, we saw how a balance of power is necessary for sustainability and additionally how sustainable development projects can serve to either correct or exacerbate existing imbalances. As Arenal has been subject to a legacy of verticalism and dependency coupled with devastating oppression, the path to sustainability clearly cannot be through top-down and subjective measures of development. Whether at local, national or international levels, certain forms of development and types of roles played by outsiders are inherently disempowering to local populations because they weaken the collective power of communities and lessen the internal strength of their inhabitants. Governments, institutions and individuals who seek to incur positive and sustainable change globally must look locally to see how policies and agreements enacted ‘up above’ impact people ‘down below’.

In Arenal, while external empowerment (improved public services and infrastructure, dignified livelihoods) has been and continues to be vital for the community, it must be accompanied by internal empowerment (collective hope, community solidarity). Rather than only helping the people through direct measures, development projects must also seek to help the people help themselves through indirect approaches. Although some material assistance is necessarily to band-aid existing

problems, the community must be approached in an open and inclusive manner in order to discuss the roots of such problems and possible solutions. In this way, regardless of the specific activities or projects selected, those making the decisions will be those who will live with the consequences of their choices.

The research indicates that *arenaleños* have the awareness, interest and willingness to engage in activities to promote the sustainable development of their community; indeed, it is shown that a significant number of community members have been doing so for over a decade. However, additional evidence points to a lack of individual and collective power through which to make the changes necessary for a real transition to sustainability. As it stands, most decisions affecting development in Arenal are not made by the *arenaleños* themselves but rather by individuals and institutions with political power at municipal, national and international levels. Systemic poverty, within Arenal as in the rest of Nicaragua, forces people to place priority on economic issues over those that deal with the environment or the community and century-long experiences with oppression and verticalism have resulted in a collective mentality of dependency and “waiting for things to be fixed, rather than fixing things for themselves.” Compounding the disempowering effects of such poverty and oppression are the local inequalities and community divisions that run new ideas from within the community down dead-end streets where potential solutions get ‘stuck in the mud’.

The case study of World Vision sheds light on how outsider-driven projects can add to the '*cultura de subsidios*' and thus have disempowering effects if care is not taken to be aware of unintentional consequences. In addition, the analysis of Grudesa shows that while community-based activities are not without challenges, they are less likely to promote a 'dependency mentality' and as a result can contribute to the individual and collective empowerment of the community and its members.

However, as most funding and resources for sustainable development projects come from outside community borders, the question of how to help without harming remains. How can people who are not at the grassroots support those who are without falling into the same disempowering roles as depicted by World Vision? One of the central questions of the research was to determine how outsiders could work to 'bridge' the gap between local and scientific (outsider) knowledge for a transition to sustainable development. The answer is straightforward, but is anything but simple. Outsiders must themselves learn to be the bridges between aid institutions, environmental organizations and educational centers and communities in need, to share knowledge and information on a horizontal plane with those they seek to support. The alternative roles mentioned earlier, those of the Catalyst, Facilitator, Ally and Advocate, all undertake the function of a bridge by connecting different ways of knowing, perceiving, understanding and resolving. In this way, information, technologies, resources and opportunities are able to cross back and forth between groups and societies without the threat of one overtaking or undercutting another. The architectural equanimity of a

bridge ensures that there is a perfect balance on either side. Thus, the first step for development practitioners to take is to promote such a balance in their relationships with those at the grassroots.

Although every community has a different context and thus requires a case-specific path to sustainable development, the wisdom of many scholars, practitioners and scientists gained from living and working alongside people at the grassroots can provide the international community with a list of guidelines that can serve us in our struggle towards sustainable development. Each of the following guidelines comes from my own experiences in Arenal, wisdom that the *arenaleños* imparted to me, one way or another. In some cases the following proverbs and sayings were repeated time after time until I finally began to understand their meaning, in other cases they reflected specific errors that I made on my own.

Eyes that see do not grow old

One of the most important lessons that I learned in Arenal was taught to me by my host ‘grandmother’ – a tiny old woman named Maria who had spent the last decade sitting in a plastic chair on the porch of her daughter’s house and watching the people walk by. She would tell anyone who came to the house that she was old and sick and ready to die, but when I sat down next to her in the mornings or evenings she would tell me the stories of her life – and in those moments her eyes lit up like those of a young girl.

It was through spending time with Grandma Maria that I realized my most important task in the community was not one of a researcher, but rather one of a listener. Although at first, some of the long hours I spent listening to peoples' stories on their porches seemed like a waste of time when my goal was to learn about the environment, as the months passed I realized that these conversations became the essence of my research. In letting people tell me their stories in their own words and without interruption, I learned about the history of the region, the present-day struggles of the community members and the anticipated future of Arenal.

Those entering communities with goals for change, regardless of what that change might be, must develop an unquenchable thirst for information regarding the history, culture, religion and politics that form the context of the region where they will be working – not only to seek out the so-called 'facts' written down in history books, but also the personal 'his' and 'her-stories' that pervade a society. In this search for knowledge it is vital to seek out the underrepresented groups within a community: the women, aged, disabled and oppressed whose voices often go unheard by the more powerful majority.

Throughout this task, the most important role to undertake is that of the Listener. Those who think they know all of the answers usually forget what the questions are – and it is vital to ask the questions in order to listen to the answers. In order to learn how to help one must first learn how to quiet one's mind and to absorb unexpected information, to ask open-ended questions and to listen to the answers.

Don't speak to me of flowers – I am the gardener

Not long ago, I was sitting in a café in Granada, Nicaragua, and a fellow American woman asked if she could join me. Upon asking me about my business in the country and learning that I was studying the concept of sustainable development, she asked me my opinion of a dilemma that she was facing in her own work in Nicaragua. “I’m not really sure what to do,” she told me. “I’ve been volunteering for a while now here in Granada, teaching English to locals for free, and many of my students sell things here in the central plaza but can barely make ends meet. When I speak with them I come to the conclusion that the problem is one of efficiency. They don’t make a very efficient use of time or resources, and it seems to me that because of this their profits are very low. But this is my dilemma. Do I simply explain to them how they might be more efficient, or should I just sit back and nod my head sympathetically?”

Although I knew little of the specifics of the woman’s students, from my own experiences I knew enough to see that she thought she knew more than she did about her students’ problem. The woman might have known the basic economy of her students’ trouble in selling their product: low profit margins, lack of efficiency, economics of scale. But she did not know about the deeper issues at stake: informal rules between vendors, the difficulty in gaining access to wholesale prices, or even just the practicality of working long, slow hours rather than fast, short ones. None of this is easily understood or communicated from one person to the next, especially between people of different cultures. But when in doubt, the best attitude to adopt is one of

humility and to follow the wisdom of Socrates: “I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance”.

Those who seek to help must be aware of the extent of their own ‘blindness’ to see and understand the reality of the poor, and recognize that as part of the power-rich they are apt to commit embedded errors based on her own professional biases of distance, learning, and time (Robert Chambers, 1997). In order to avoid being ‘deceived’ by such power, they must realize that poverty is viewed differently by those who live it, and that the only way to gain insight into these perspectives is by listening to what the poor have to say. If they learn to listen well, they will find that the poor are not without solutions, but that they are constantly striving to improve their condition and oftentimes come up with practical ideas that would have never occurred to a development professional (Scott, 1990).

A favor given to man is appreciated by none

Although Nicaraguan people are known for their generosity and hospitality, their society is one of reciprocity, the passing of gifts and favors between neighbors and friends on a horizontal plane. While environmental and development organizations have a different type of relationship with community members than they have with one another, it does not necessarily have to be a vertical one. Donations of any kind should be accompanied by messages of solidarity and friendship – rather by those of charity and paternalism. Such ‘external’ empowerment should also always be coupled with measures for ‘internal’ empowerment – horizontal learning exchanges, opportunities to

participate in or organize activities and events, and giving people ways in which they can return the favor or gift paid to them.

Grudesa's method of receiving visitors shows how the act of obtaining 'contributions' from outsiders does not have to be a one-way street. The majority of those who assist Grudesa monetarily have spent time in the community and have friendships with some of its members. As a result, Grudesa's members refer to this international network of support as part of their 'group of friends'. These 'friends' play the empowering role of the Ally by spending time living in the homes and sharing meals with those who they seek to support. They come not only to 'give', but also to gain something for themselves.

This concept took me a very long time to understand, as from the beginning I was constantly asking those at Grudesa how I could help pay back the kindness and hospitality they had shown me by inviting me into their homes and sharing with me food and drink. But over and over I was told that I was thinking about it in the wrong way. "If you only think about how you are going to pay people back, then you are forgetting the friendship that makes them want to help you in the first place," they told me. Still, it took me many months to understand what they were trying to teach me, which I have finally understood as this: a gift in the name of charity is never remembered, but a gift in the name of friendship is never forgotten.

Everyone must put their grain of sand

One important lesson taught to me by a young leader in Arenal was the importance of recognizing that everyone has something to contribute to making a positive change in the community. He told me that a community is like a house – it has many different rooms (groups, religions, ideologies) but it is the columns of various shapes and sizes (members) that hold it together. Without all of these pieces, he said, the house will fall apart.

This was an important lesson for me to learn, as like many outsiders, I initially spent most of my time speaking with the ‘important’ people in the community and neglecting those who were less involved in the leadership of groups or activities. I organized a group of community leaders with the objective of bridging divides between community members (political and religious), but made the mistake of only inviting those who were ‘established’ rather than ‘potential’ leaders. Although my intention in the creation of an ‘invited’ space was to bring together those who normally did not come together, the meetings also ended up being exclusive in who could and couldn’t participate, which greatly limited their effectiveness in ‘bringing the community together’.

In the end, it seemed as if my efforts may have served to further divide the community, as those who did participate felt particularly ‘validated’ as real leaders and set themselves to undertake activities without the support of the rest of the community. For example, one leader decided that he was going to solve the water problem on his

own and set up meetings with the local offices of ENACAL, but neglected to invite the rest of the community to be involved. Although such efforts were positive in that they got the attention of ENACAL, they deepened ideological divides within the same community as Grudesa was attempting to get ENACAL's attention for the same purpose, but through different methods. In the end, both groups felt as if they were on opposite sides of the table – not only against ENACAL, but also against one another.

While efforts to organize a community may always have unintended consequences, perhaps the most important lesson to keep in mind is to always seek to be inclusive, rather than exclusive. There is little to be gained in exclusivity and little to be lost in being welcoming, inclusive and open.

There is more time than life

'Do-gooders' tend to share the common characteristic of impatience. Where there are so many problems in the world, there is never time, energy or money enough to fix them. Stress, frustration and cynicism are commonly felt at one time or another by environmentalists or development practitioners. During my own work in attempting to induce positive change, in Nicaragua and elsewhere, I often felt frustrated that there were not enough hours in the day or interested people to make a real difference. During my time in Arenal I worked fourteen-hour days and sometimes went to bed at night wondering if I had gotten any closer to finding the answers to my questions.

Many evenings, my host mother, Candida, would find me bent over my notebook with my eyes half-closed and say to me – “Ana, you work too hard. *Hay mas*

tiempo que vida, so don't work so hard.” At first I would just shake my head at her – our worlds were so different and in my world there was surely not enough time. But it wasn't until after I was bitten by a dog and was forced to cancel some of the ‘super-important’ activities that I had loaded my calendar with that I realized how insignificant they really were in the scheme of things. In the end, I found that some of the most important information that I obtained came from unexpected sources or moments, while some higher profile meetings and events that I attended told me nothing new. Indeed, when I stopped stressing out about not having enough time to get everything done, I found that I could listen better and that my mind was more open to new ideas and ways of thinking about things.

A few months ago I listened to a broadcast on public radio of a monk whose mantra was that of non-violence and ‘service’. When the radio host asked him if he had any advice for those who seek to make the world a better place, he said that the most important lesson was that of service – not change. In effect, he said a person cannot control change – there are many variables that affect change in a community or society – but a person can be of service. I have learned this as well through my own work – that one can never accurately predict the results of one's actions, but if one seeks to ‘serve’ for the good of service alone, then one is already doing good.

You make the road by walking it

Perhaps the most important lesson for the outsider to learn is one that cannot be taught. It is a lesson of love, passion and hope. It is the most important lesson, because

when all other guidelines are forgotten, it will steer the practitioner to relearn them again and again in determination to make things right. Development or environmental work is not a profession for the pessimistic, the cynical or the ruthless, though of course we all may feel these ways at times. And while other motives pervade the field of development work: greed, ambition, recognition, adventure – the practitioners who constantly question their motives and remind themselves of what is most important will always be less apt to make the worst mistakes but also be willing to learn from the errors that they will inevitably commit.

One must have faith that there are good ideas and determined individuals at the local level and that the best way to support them is simply to walk alongside them. In any community or society there are natural leaders with the know-how, intrinsic motivation and determination to improve their communities. In 1990, Rene Mendoza wrote, “In the countryside there are natural leaders who don't need to go through the party's school for ‘political ideological’ formation. They only need the space to play out their dreams, their economic strategy.” The same insight might shed some light in the development field today, if we only rework the sentence slightly: “In the countryside there are natural leaders who don't need to go through the capacity-building participatory methodology of the latest outside NGO to visit their region. They only need the space to play out their dreams, their economic strategy.”

Thus, for those who seek to serve their communities – whether they be local or global – we must remember that the best roles that we can play are not necessarily those

deserving of much praise, but rather those of a good friend: someone who listens without judgment, who serves without reward, and who walks the road if only for the sake of accompanying those who need not walk alone.

APPENDIX A

ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Datos del entrevistado (Nombre, Edad, Sexo)
2. ¿En que trabaja usted?
3. ¿Usted participa en algún grupo o en algunas actividades que se realizan en la comunidad? ¿En cuales y porque se participa?
4. ¿Que significa para usted “el medio ambiente?”
5. ¿De que manera cree usted que se puede conservar y proteger el medio ambiente en la comunidad?
6. ¿De lo económico, lo social o lo ambiental, cual componente tiene el impacto más grave sobre la comunidad hoy en día? ¿Cuál de los tres cree usted tendrá el impacto más negativo diez anos en el futuro?
7. ¿En su vida diaria, cree que hace cosas que perjudican el medio ambiente?
(Si contesta “no” – da pistas: la basura, la leña, el transporte, etc.)
8. ¿Usted cree que los recursos naturales tienen solamente un valor comercial, o cree que también tienen valores espirituales o sociales? ¿De que manera?
9. Para productores:
 - a. ¿De que manera fertiliza usted sus terrenos?
 - b. ¿De que manera proteja sus cultivos de las plagas y enfermedades?
 - c. ¿De que manera cree usted que puede diversificar su terreno? ¿Para que?
 - d. ¿Usted hace actualmente conservación de suelo? ¿Que hace?
 - e. ¿Usted cree que la agricultura es rentable?
10. Para comerciantes: ¿Usted compra lo que vende en el mercado o vende lo que cultiva en la casa?
¿Cuántas horas por día pasa vendiendo o viajando afuera de la comunidad?
11. ¿Usted cree que hay formas de proteger el medio ambiente en la comunidad? ¿De que manera?
12. ¿Estaría dispuesto a participar en las actividades que se realicen en la comunidad para la protección del medio ambiente?

APPENDIX B

TABLES FROM ENVIRONMENTAL SURVERY

FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES

Age Groups

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15-24	40	30.1	30.1	30.1
	25-34	28	21.1	21.1	51.1
	35-49	30	22.6	22.6	73.7
	50-64	20	15.0	15.0	88.7
	65-79	13	9.8	9.8	98.5
	80+	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	73	54.9	54.9	54.9
	Male	60	45.1	45.1	100.0
	Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Employment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Farmer	45	33.8	34.1	34.1
	Housewife	42	31.6	31.8	65.9
	FTZ	4	3.0	3.0	68.9
	Student	18	13.5	13.6	82.6
	Merchant	6	4.5	4.5	87.1
	Professional	1	.8	.8	87.9
	Other Outside Arenal	9	6.8	6.8	94.7
	Other Within Arenal	7	5.3	5.3	100.0
	Total	132	99.2	100.0	
	Total	133	100.0		

Type of Employment By Gender (Cross-tabulation)

			Gender		
			Male	Female	Total
Type of Employment	Farmer	Count	4	41	45
		% within V5	8.9%	91.1%	100.0%
		% within V4	5.6%	68.3%	34.1%
		% of Total	3.0%	31.1%	34.1%
	Housewife	Count	42	0	42
		% within V5	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within V4	58.3%	.0%	31.8%
		% of Total	31.8%	.0%	31.8%
	FTZ	Count	3	1	4
		% within V5	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
		% within V4	4.2%	1.7%	3.0%
		% of Total	2.3%	.8%	3.0%
	Student	Count	10	8	18
		% within V5	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
		% within V4	13.9%	13.3%	13.6%
		% of Total	7.6%	6.1%	13.6%
	Merchant	Count	5	1	6
		% within V5	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
		% within V4	6.9%	1.7%	4.5%
		% of Total	3.8%	.8%	4.5%
	Professional	Count	0	1	1
		% within V5	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within V4	.0%	1.7%	.8%
		% of Total	.0%	.8%	.8%
	Other Outside Arenal	Count	4	5	9
		% within V5	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
		% within V4	5.6%	8.3%	6.8%
		% of Total	3.0%	3.8%	6.8%
	Other Within Arenal	Count	4	3	7
		% within V5	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
		% within V4	5.6%	5.0%	5.3%
		% of Total	3.0%	2.3%	5.3%
	Total	Count	72	60	132
		% within V5	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
		% within V4	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%

Of the following Components: economic, social or environmental, which is most important at present?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Economic	56	42.1	42.7	42.7
	Social	10	7.5	7.6	50.4
	Environmental	20	15.0	15.3	65.6
	Economic, Social & Environmental	18	13.5	13.7	79.4
	Economic & Social	7	5.3	5.3	84.7
	Economic & Environmental	15	11.3	11.5	96.2
	Social & Environmental	5	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	131	98.5	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	2	1.5		
	Total	133	100.0		

Of the following Components: economic, social or environmental, which is most important ten years into the future?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Economic	32	24.1	24.8	24.8
	Social	8	6.0	6.2	31.0
	Environmental	53	39.8	41.1	72.1
	Don't Know	9	6.8	7.0	79.1
	Economic, Social & Environmental	8	6.0	6.2	85.3
	Economic & Social	3	2.3	2.3	87.6
	Economic & Environmental	10	7.5	7.8	95.3
	Social & Environmental	5	3.8	3.9	99.2
	Social & Don't Know	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	129	97.0	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	4	3.0		
	Total	133	100.0		

Do you do things to harm the environment?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	111	83.5	85.4	85.4
	No	17	12.8	13.1	98.5
	Don't Know	1	.8	.8	99.2
	Maybe	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	130	97.7	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	3	2.3		
	Total	133	100.0		

What things do you do that harm the environment?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Garbage	53	39.8	59.6	59.6
	Deforestation	6	4.5	6.7	66.3
	Agrochemicals	4	3.0	4.5	70.8
	Cook with Wood	2	1.5	2.2	73.0
	Garbage & Deforestation	9	6.8	10.1	83.1
	Garbage & Cook with Wood	7	5.3	7.9	91.0
	Deforestation & Cook with Wood	2	1.5	2.2	93.3
	Garbage & Agrochemicals	1	.8	1.1	94.4
	Garbage & Other	2	1.5	2.2	96.6
	Garbage, Deforestation & Cook with Wood	1	.8	1.1	97.8
	Agrochemicals & Cook with Wood	1	.8	1.1	98.9
	Cook with Wood & Other	1	.8	1.1	100.0
	Total	89	66.9	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	44	33.1		
	Total	133	100.0		

Do you believe natural resources only have commercial value, or do they also have spiritual/social value?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Only Commercial	9	6.8	6.9	6.9
	Other	119	89.5	91.5	98.5
	Don't Know	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	130	97.7	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	3	2.3		
	Total	133	100.0		

How?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Spiritual/God	71	53.4	60.7	60.7
	Survival	26	19.5	22.2	82.9
	Medicinal	2	1.5	1.7	84.6
	Spiritual/God & Survival	16	12.0	13.7	98.3
	All Three	2	1.5	1.7	100.0
	Total	117	88.0	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	16	12.0		
	Total	133	100.0		

For Producers: How do you fertilize?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chemicals	34	25.6	77.3	77.3
	Organic	5	3.8	11.4	88.6
	Both	4	3.0	9.1	97.7
	Don't Fertilize	1	.8	2.3	100.0
	Total	44	33.1	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	89	66.9		
Total		133	100.0		

For Producers: How do you protect from plagues and insects?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Chemicals	40	30.1	90.9	90.9
	Organic	3	2.3	6.8	97.7
	Don't Fertilize	1	.8	2.3	100.0
	Total	44	33.1	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	89	66.9		
Total		133	100.0		

For Producers: How do you think you can diversify?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	With the help of projects	1	.8	2.5	2.5
	With Agroforestry	27	20.3	67.5	70.0
	Crop Rotation/Diversification	4	3.0	10.0	80.0
	Don't Know/ Don't Think Can Diversify	5	3.8	12.5	92.5
	Multiple Methods	3	2.3	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	30.1	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	93	69.9		
Total		133	100.0		

For Producers: Why diversify?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Economic Benefits	6	4.5	25.0	25.0
	Health of Soil	5	3.8	20.8	45.8
	Protect from Natural Disasters	1	.8	4.2	50.0
	Survival/Sustenance	7	5.3	29.2	79.2
	Multiple Reasons	5	3.8	20.8	100.0
	Total	24	18.0	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	109	82.0		
	Total	133	100.0		

For Producers: How do you conserve soil?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Windbreaks	1	.8	2.4	2.4
	Terraces	18	13.5	43.9	46.3
	Don't conserve	16	12.0	39.0	85.4
	Water holders	2	1.5	4.9	90.2
	Multiple Methods	4	3.0	9.8	100.0
	Total	41	30.8	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	92	69.2		
	Total	133	100.0		

For Producers: Is agriculture Profitable?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	10	7.5	25.0	25.0
	No	20	15.0	50.0	75.0
	With Assistance	2	1.5	5.0	80.0
	With Better Prices	1	.8	2.5	82.5
	With More Land	1	.8	2.5	85.0
	Depends	6	4.5	15.0	100.0
	Total	40	30.1	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	93	69.9		
	Total	133	100.0		

Can the environment be protected?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	118	88.7	90.1	90.1
	No	4	3.0	3.1	93.1
	Depends/Maybe	9	6.8	6.9	100.0
	Total	131	98.5	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	2	1.5		
Total		133	100.0		

How can the environment be protected?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Reforest	36	27.1	30.3	30.3
	Good Farming Practices	5	3.8	4.2	34.5
	Don't Pollute	14	10.5	11.8	46.2
	Organization	8	6.0	6.7	52.9
	Education	5	3.8	4.2	57.1
	Conserve Water	1	.8	.8	58.0
	Laws	5	3.8	4.2	62.2
	Reforest, Good Farming Practices & Organization	1	.8	.8	63.0
	Good Farming Practices & Don't Pollute	6	4.5	5.0	68.1
	Reforest & Don't Pollute	21	15.8	17.6	85.7
	Reforest & Conserve Water	2	1.5	1.7	87.4
	Don't Pollute & Organization	1	.8	.8	88.2
	Organization & Education	4	3.0	3.4	91.6
	Reforest & Laws	3	2.3	2.5	94.1
	Reforest & Good Farming Practices	4	3.0	3.4	97.5
	Reforest & Education	1	.8	.8	98.3
	Reforest, Don't Pollute & Education	1	.8	.8	99.2
	Don't Pollute & Laws	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	119	89.5	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	14	10.5		
Total		133	100.0		

Would you be willing to participate in such activities?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	97	72.9	74.6	74.6
	No	15	11.3	11.5	86.2
	Depends	18	13.5	13.8	100.0
	Total	130	97.7	100.0	
Missing	No Answer	3	2.3		
Total		133	100.0		

APPENDIX C

SIMPSON'S DIVERSITY INDEX MEASUREMENTS

Section 1 –Private plots along road

Species	Number of Specimens	Percentage
Manguifera indica	5	0.125
Cedrela odorata	3	0.075
Bursera Simarumba	2	0.05
Guasuma sp	1	0.025
Melicoccus bijugato	3	0.075
Cordia dentate	1	0.025
Cocos nusifera	1	0.025
Spondias purpurea	3	0.075
Azadirachta indica	1	0.025
Gliricidia sepium	3	0.075
Citrus sinensis	1	0.025
Bombacopsis quinata	1	0.025
Grosea	1	0.025
Cordia alliodora	2	0.05
persea Americana	1	0.025
Simaruba glauca	1	0.025
Carana Sp	1	0.025
Lonchocarpus minimiflorus	1	0.025
pata de gallina	2	0.05
Llamarada del bosque	1	0.025
Enterolobium ciclocarpum	1	0.025
Brosimum alicastrum	1	0.025
Colubrina arborescens	1	0.025
Spondias mombin	1	0.025
Cassia grndis	1	0.025
	Sums squared	0.05625
	Diversity Index	17.77777778

Section 2 – Wooded Commons

Species	Wooded area	Road	%
Chlorophora Tinctoria		1	0.025
Bursera Simarumba		17	0.425
Gliricidia sepium		6	0.15
Plumeria rubra		4	0.1
Chilamate		1	0.025
Bombacopsis quinatum		5	0.125
Diospyrus nicaraguensis		1	0.025
Chichicaste		1	0.025
Ficus sp.		1	0.025
Spondias mombin		1	0.025
Cochlospermum vitifolium		1	0.025
Espadillo		1	0.025
		Sums squared	0.23375
		Diversity Index	4.278075

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