

THESIS

A VISION OF TRANSFORMATION:
WOMEN'S ORGANIZING AND DEVELOPMENT IN GUATEMALA

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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This thesis presents an analysis of research I conducted with Somos Mujeres, a community-based women's organization in Guatemala. The sisters who founded the organization subscribe to a comprehensive model of women's development that attempts to address the underlying social, economic, and political factors that perpetuate women's inequality. I examine the evolution of Somos Mujeres' mission and programs, and I explore the impact of the organization on the lives of women who join. I argue that this holistic approach holds the promise of broad change. However, formidable barriers prevent the organization from implementing its mission. Lack of resources, limited access to the global handicraft market, as well as pressure from outside funding organizations undercut the organization's ability to implement its vision. This study highlights the challenges community-based organizations face at the ground level as they negotiate the development sphere. I argue that the mission and programming of Somos Mujeres is shaped not simply by the interests of the women the organization serves, but also by the agendas of powerful donor institutions, and I consider potential avenues of change that could provide community-based organizations greater power to determine the course of their own development.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Background

The early afternoon sun breaks through the foliage of scraggly lime trees. Below the trees, unkempt shrubs, collections of empty Coca-Cola bottles and mismatched planters decorate the open area of the courtyard. Women slowly stream out, in twos and threes, from the arched stone doorway of the meeting room and break off into small groups under the trees. Maritza, Carmen and their *compañeras* chat beneath the mottled shade. Women straighten their *huipiles*, the colorful embroidered blouses they wear, and pat the front of their woven skirts, or *cortes*, now wrinkled after many hours of sitting. They hold their hands up to shield the light from their eyes, the brightness jarring in comparison to the darkness of the room. The sound of women speaking in Tz’ujil, their indigenous language, with its sing-song intonation and abrupt clicks, mixes with coquettish laughter. They are enjoying this short break after the morning spent in a *capacitación*¹ on business administration. The laughter and noise grows louder. Several women float between groups, catching up on the news. After coming here, to the headquarters of Somos Mujeres, a community-based women’s organization in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, several times a week for the last year to attend day-long *capacitaciones*, the women know each other well. “We share things,” Emelia, a short,

¹ Capacity training classes. *Capacitaciones* are topic-based classes that typically involve greater participation and discussion than conventional teacher-led classes. I provide an in-depth discussion of the function of *capacitaciones* in Chapter 4, which explores the mission and programs of Somos Mujeres.

thin woman with thick curly hair and a wide smile that showcased several gold teeth, explained to me in an interview.

Somos Mujeres was founded on the basic idea of sharing. In 1998, three sisters from Santiago, Juana, Chonita, and Magdalena, began the organization with the intention of providing a place for women affected by the violence of the civil war and desperate poverty to come together and find comfort with others who shared their experience. “Only through speaking can we heal,” Juana told me in our first meeting (interview, June 19, 2009). In the absence of outside support, the sisters and women organized themselves and relied on each other to assuage the sadness and grief that had marked their lives. From this initial beginning, more than ten years ago, Somos Mujeres has evolved into an organization devoted to a unique, locally rooted conception of women’s development—one that combines social change, economic opportunity, and political action. The sisters who founded the organization envision a future in which indigenous women, so long excluded from many facets of their own and the larger Guatemalan society, exercise their rights, agency, and talents, and in so doing, transform the reality that has constrained them.

This thesis presents an ethnography of Somos Mujeres’ evolution, its impact on the lives of women who join the organization, and the current challenges the organization faces as it attempts to realize its vision. Understanding the factors that have shaped Somos Mujeres requires approaching the organization from multiple angles, and my research explores the vantage points of various stakeholders in the organization. The sisters who began Somos Mujeres, women who join, and development practitioners from outside the community all have particular interests in Somos Mujeres and view its

purpose in different ways. Exploring the organization from these perspectives allows for a sense of the complex, and often conflicting, values that converge upon the organization.

I show how as the sisters gained experience and understanding of women's struggles, they developed a deeper commitment to the women in their community and arrived at a vision of women's development wrought from their own personal experience and work organizing women. I describe their tremendous efforts to change women's place in society by addressing the social, economic, and political practices they see as the root of women's difficulties. Patriarchy and the exclusion of women from educational, economic, and political systems are the primary obstacles that underpin women's inequality and inhibit women's development in the sisters' view. Juana and Chonita envision a comprehensive approach to women's development that challenges the systemic factors that perpetuate women's marginalization. Through education, capacity training (*capacitaciones*) and economic opportunities through *artesanía* (handicraft) production, the sisters seek to create lasting change by promoting a shift in local gender relations and building women's capacities.

I also show that women who join the organization bring with them their own hopes for change. Most women who come to Somos Mujeres have experienced great hardship, and many have endured great loss—the death of husbands and children, the loss of their homes and *milpas* (small agricultural plots). Women worry about how to buy food for the next day, how to afford the school supplies their children need, and how to sell the *artesanía* products they make. Those who join Somos Mujeres want to better their lives and to find a way to provide for their families' basic needs. They invest time

and energy in Somos Mujeres' programs in hopes that the organization will enable them and their families to lead more stable, secure lives.

Women in the community undoubtedly have the greatest stake in the organization: their lives are intimately bound up in its success. However, outside development practitioners also have an interest in Somos Mujeres' efforts. In September, 2007, the Guatemalan Red Cross provided funding and oversight for a two-year entrepreneurship initiative at the organization. The Red Cross operates from its own unique set of priorities and expectations. Similar to the sisters and members, the Red Cross values economic opportunities for women. However, its model, which focuses intensively on entrepreneurial and occupational training, does not correspond to the holistic conception of development the sisters promote.

Despite the sisters' work to bring about change, formidable barriers prevent their vision of comprehensive development from fully taking shape in practice. Somos Mujeres lacks financial capital, material resources, strategic partnerships with other development organizations, and access to the handicraft market. The sisters have strived to offer programs and assistance by any means at their disposal, often drawing upon their own energy and skills. Despite their creativity and dedication, they have not been able to fully implement the model they envision. In particular, the *artesanía* production program remains an unstable and erratic component of Somos Mujeres. The unevenness of the organization's programs, in turn, shapes the experience of women who join the organization with hopes of finding a way to improve their lives. The lack of resources at Somos Mujeres' disposal has another important effect. It renders Somos Mujeres

susceptible to the influence of outside organizations like the Red Cross that, through funding and supervision, exert influence over the organization.

The case of Somos Mujeres highlights that community-based organizations, which often have an intimate understanding of the fundamental challenges their own community members face, are often unable to put their knowledge into action. They are restrained not by a lack of ingenuity or capacity, but by barriers that are largely external over which they have little control. Thus, it is especially important to consider not only the distinct viewpoints of women within the organization, but the external forces that influence Somos Mujeres' efforts. Global economic, political, and development trends have played important roles in creating the conditions in which Somos Mujeres exists, most recently through the Red Cross partnership.

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide the background necessary to understand the local, national, and global forces the organization encounters as it struggles to carve out a space in which a unique vision of women's development can take root. First, I look at Santiago, where the sisters and women live. This context has informed the sisters' and women's conception of development and hopes for the future. I then outline shifts in political, economic, and development policy in Guatemala and the global level. Economic restructuring and state reconfiguration have contributed to the proliferation of organizations like Somos Mujeres. At the same time, these forces have also constrained the degree to which community-based organizations can fully exercise autonomy and help people achieve stability and satisfaction in their lives.

Ethnographic Background: Santiago Atitlán

Somos Mujeres is located in Santiago Atitlán, an indigenous community that lies on the southwestern shores of Lake Atitlán in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. It is a large town relative to other towns around the lake with a population estimated at 44,000 people (Municipal Government of Santiago Atitlán 2010).² The town is located in an inlet, nestled between two stunning volcanoes, Atitlán and Tolimán. Santiago slopes down toward the lake, and concrete buildings rise up from the ground and form a geometric medley of height and color. It is a densely populated center³ surrounded by rural agricultural land and forests.



View of Santiago Atitlán from the northeast. July, 2009. Photograph by John Walthour.

Ninety-eight percent of residents of Santiago are indigenous (Municipal Government of Santiago Atitlán 2010). In Guatemala, language is used to identify

² The population of Santiago was 32,254 in 2002, and the projected population for 2009 was 44,220 (Municipal Government of Santiago Atitlán 2010).

³ The town has a population density of 304.4 persons per square kilometer (Municipal Government of Santiago Atitlán 2010).

indigenous groups,⁴ and the primary language of ninety-four percent of the population is Tz'tujil (Schram and Etzel 2005). The city and immediate surrounding areas are divided into nine *cantones*, or municipal divisions. Where one lives in the town often communicates status, and *cantones* are associated with distinct socio-economic groups. Pachichaj, a *cantón* in the heart of the town close to the market and plaza, is home to many wealthier *Atitecos*. Well-maintained multi-story homes line the wide streets. In Panul and Xechivoy, homes are smaller, alleyways wind like paths in a maze and open unexpectedly onto clusters of stone and cane structures that serve as homes for many poorer residents. The disparity in *Atitecos* living conditions is striking. Wealthy residents comprise a small portion of the population, and the majority of *Atitecos* earnings fall below the legal Guatemalan minimum wage of 1274 Queztales (Q) (approximately USD160) per month (Schram and Etzel 2005). In addition to poverty, lack of access to education, illiteracy, limited economic opportunities, inadequate health and sanitation services, and environmental concerns also pose significant challenges in the city.

Despite these challenges, Santiago is a vibrant place, full of activity and life. In the early mornings, roosters crow; cheese vendors push metal carts down the cobblestone streets shouting “*queso crema*” (cream cheese); newspaper sales boys cry out “*Prensa libre*” (*Free Press*, the national newspaper in Guatemala), rousing people from their sleep. Diesel buses vibrate and creak to a stop in the center of town, and the sharp odor of fumes mixes with the chalky billows of dust. The low tones of truck engines are punctuated by the shrill honks of *tuk-tuks* (small three person taxis) that fly down the streets, darting around pedestrians and other vehicles as they carry women and their

⁴ There are 21 distinct indigenous language groups in Guatemala. The majority of the population is concentrated in the Western Highlands of the country. In addition, there is a small Garífuna population concentrated in the eastern region of the country (Fischer and McKenna Brown 1996).

baskets of produce toward the dock. Mothers walk their children to school. Women skillfully balance baskets of dried fish, plantains, and chilies on their heads as they make their way to the marketplace. Men with machetes and woven bags head toward the mountains to cut wood. Others climb into the back of trucks that taxi them to *fincas* (large agricultural plantations) in the surrounding areas. Women stand near *tortilleras* (street carts or in-home windows where tortillas are sold) and chat as they pat out tortillas by hand. The flat corn cakes sizzle as they are thrown onto the grill to cook. Hot air, thick with a sweet and savory aroma, wafts into the nostrils of passers-by.

Heading away from the center of town, paved roads give way to dirt paths lined by high cinderblock walls and trees. Smoke rises from one-room abodes. Many poor and older women cook by fire. Children play barefoot in the dirt entrances to their homes. Women wash dishes. Others sit outside embroidering. In the afternoon, school children return home, and teenagers crowd into internet cafes. Women remove laundry from wash lines in anticipation of afternoon showers. On Sunday and Wednesday evenings, the sound of singing emanates from Catholic and evangelical churches throughout the town. Evangelical families pass the better part of the evening at church. Those with the means, retire home to a small meal followed by *postres* (desserts) and instant coffee. In the late evening, teens and young couples meander down the streets. Groups of men congregate on sidewalk corners, in front of stores, and by the market. The high-pitched sounds of the *tuk-tuks* subside. By 10 p.m., most people have returned home, and the town is quiet except for the occasional crow of roosters.

While *Atitecos* have maintained many aspects of their identity and culture, the impacts of land consolidation, civil war, and economic restructuring have altered

subsistence, economic, and social practices in the community and shaped the challenges the group faces. Though Santiago was a relatively peripheral community during the Spanish colonial era, attempts to liberalize the Guatemalan economy after independence altered land distribution and use in the town (Carlsen 1996). Between 1880 and 1950, the government seized vast swaths of agricultural land to sell to wealthy business people and companies for cash crop production, especially coffee. By 1950, over 70 percent of the agricultural land in Guatemala was in the hands of two percent of the population (Carlsen 1996). During this time, Guatemala's *ladino* (also called *mestizo*, indicating persons of both Spanish and indigenous descent) elite sought to modernize the country. In their view, Guatemala's entry onto the world stage was contingent upon the eradication of indigenous populations and their "backwards" cultural practices. Through policies of force and economic restructuring, the government attempted to mold indigenous populations into a pliable labor force and assimilate them into the country (Annis 1996).

Shifting economic and subsistence practices also changed indigenous social relations, especially related to gender. Bossen (1984) has argued that as communities were integrated into the economy, indigenous gender relations underwent a transition. Indigenous gender relations had previously been characterized by system of mutual dependence in which men and women had relatively defined roles but ultimately worked together, sharing responsibility for production (subsistence) and reproduction (domestic). As indigenous men increasingly served as a labor force for on colonial plantations, women took on greater association with the domestic sphere. By the 1930s, indigenous men were migrating to *fincas* in large numbers (Carey 2008). Economic restructuring dismantled subsistence and domestic practices and with them, men and women's

collaborative roles (Bossen 1984). As a result, indigenous gender relations came to resemble *ladino* gender norms, which relegated women to the domestic sphere.

However, indigenous populations were not passive bystanders to these processes. Indigenous groups and economically marginalized labor classes organized throughout the 20th century in opposition to liberal economic and socially discriminatory policies, forming the base of support for leftist politicians like Juan Jose Arévalo Bremejo and Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, who won presidential elections in the 1940s and 1950s (Wilkensen 2002; Carey 2008). However, in 1954, Arbenz, who had pledged to redistribute land to the indigenous and poor, was ousted in a U.S.-backed coup. In 1960, tension between indigenous groups, marginalized labor classes, leftist intellectuals and *ladino* and capitalist interests came to a head when a group of military officials rebelled and formed the guerrilla force the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) (Nelson 1999). This event sparked a brutal thirty-six year civil war. The violence peaked during 1981–1983 when the military government sought to silence leftist dissent by indiscriminately destroying indigenous villages in a “scorched earth” policy. During the height of the war, an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Guatemalans were killed or disappeared (Jonas 1996). Many residents of Santiago were victims of the violence and scores of others experienced persecution at the hands of the army.

Somos Mujeres and the Emergence of Civil Society in Guatemala

Somos Mujeres was founded in 1998 during a period marked by exponential growth in civil society in Guatemala. By 1985, various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) began to play an important role in the social and political landscape. That year, the country returned to civilian rule after 25 years of military dictatorship and violence.

The newly elected government negotiated a structural adjustment plan with the World Bank and embarked on a program of economic restructuring characterized by privatization, free markets, and export-oriented production (Berger 2006; Bräutigam and Segarra 2007). Scholars have argued that this transitional period opened up space for the emergence of social movements, political organizations, and NGOs (Escobar 1995; Fischer and McKenna Brown 1996; Garrard-Burnett 2001; Berger 2006; McNeish 2008). Tightening budgets and limited state capacity necessitated the emergence of NGOs to provide important services and render aid to the populace. In this context, social movements such as the Pan-Maya movement and the women's movement took hold as the political climate became more favorable to organizing (Kleymeyer 1994; Fischer and McKenna Brown 1996; Nelson 1999; Berger 2006). These emerging movements provided avenues for indigenous groups, women, and marginalized laborers to voice dissent. However, throughout the mid-1980s and early 1990s, organizations remained relatively disjointed, operating primarily at the local level with limited ties to a broader network of organizations (Berger 2006; Bräutigam and Segarra 2007).

In 1996, the Guatemalan government and the URNG signed the Peace Accords officially ending the war. The United Nations played a key role in the peace process and brokered the negotiations between the guerrilla force and the government. In response to pressure from international development agencies, especially the United Nations and World Bank, the Guatemalan government adopted a post-war doctrine of multiculturalism and open political participation and made commitments to democracy, human rights, and ending poverty (Nelson 1999; Chase-Dunn 2000; McNeish 2008).⁵

⁵ Though post-war Guatemalan government espoused support for political participation and the inclusion of indigenous groups in post-war reconstruction policy, many scholars (Nelson 1999; Fischer and McKenna

The espousal of an inclusive politics further encouraged the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations and solidified civil society as a component of the political scene (McNeish 2008).

Bräutigam and Segarra (2007) have noted that the Peace Accords in 1996 ushered in a shift in NGO operations. Before the accords, most NGOs were characterized by an “informality factor” and focused on providing aid (Bräutigam and Segarra 2007:167). However, as development became a post-war priority, NGOs increasingly took on development projects. To receive funding, previously informal organizations were required to attain official status and meet the professional standards of more powerful donor institutions operating at national and international levels (Jenkins 2008). In addition, the surge of community-based organizations with the end of the war increased competition among local organizations for funding (McNeish 2008).

Scholars have described global trends in which processes of institutionalization, formalization, and professionalization accompany the expansion of civil society in neoliberal democracies (Kamat 2004; Berger 2006; Jenkins 2008). This is also the case in Guatemala (Berger 2006; McNeish 2008). These processes have solidified relationships of power within the development sphere and reproduced patterns of inclusion and exclusion among organizations. Community-based organizations often lack the means to meet donors’ standards and, thus, struggle to access monies. In addition, powerful donor institutions are able to exert influence over how development is carried out at the community level by funding projects that reflect a mainstream approach to development (Sharma 2008).

1996; Chase-Dunn 2000; McNeish 2008; Fischer 2008) have argued that such reforms have been limited or not been pursued.

In this context of an expanding and formalizing development sphere, Somos Mujeres has tried to find a way to carry its own vision of women's development. The organization was founded to address the distinct needs of women from Santiago who were affected by the civil war. Since then, it has attempted to address not only women's immediate difficulties, but also the underlying processes that generate inequality such as discrimination; patriarchy; and exclusion from the economic and political system. However, the economic vulnerability of the organization undermines the leaders' ability to implement their vision of development. As a small, grassroots community-based organization, Somos Mujeres requires the support of donors and funders. Its marginal position relative to other organizations leads to an inescapable dependency on more powerful development institutions. The way out of this predicament is neither easy nor clear.

Theoretical Perspectives on Development: The Ambivalent Relationship between the Local and Global

Because community-based organizations often rely on external funding, they are especially vulnerable to the influence of donors within the development sphere. This would not be of such grave concern if donors regarded community-based organizations as knowledgeable and capable of carrying out development in their own communities. While mainstream development institutions such as the World Bank, United Nations (UN), and the Red Cross *do* espouse support for local organizations, in practice these muscular organizations often continue to exercise power over the activities of community-based organizations. The ambivalent relationship between community-based organizations and national and international organizations reflects the highly contested

nature of what development means and who should carry it out. In this section, I briefly review major shifts in development theory and approaches. I argue that mainstream development institutions continue to privilege a narrow conception of progress as economic growth, which can be at odds with communities' own efforts to realize broader change.

The concept of development arose in the post-World War II context with the UN's Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Morvaridi 2008). According to Latham (2000), modernization emerged as the paradigm for aiding underdeveloped nations to obtain prosperity by emulating a Western model of capitalism. Proponents of modernization assumed that countries in the south only required the "right conditions to move from a traditional economy to modernity or from a state of 'underdevelopment' or poverty to that of developed" (Morvaridi 2008:11). It was the responsibility of the state to regulate markets, induce industrialization, provide infrastructure, and adopt technology in order to achieve economic growth. Poverty and traditionalism were seen as the primary obstacles blocking countries from modernity, and modernity was measured in terms of economic progress.

The "one-size-fits-all" approach to modernization came under criticism by social scientists in the late 1970s and 1980s. Though alleviating poverty was a primary tenet of modernization, scholars argued that poverty and social stratification had increased in developing countries. Post-development theorists condemned the approach as a justification for Western hegemony operating under the guise of altruism (Escobar 1995; Latham 2000). Escobar (1995) argued that the goal of ending poverty transferred Western notions of progress and class onto non-Western countries. In doing so, he says, Western

nations were able to exert mechanisms of control over “underdeveloped” countries by requiring them to implement invasive interventions upon their populace (Escobar 1995). Those in the post-development camp called for the end of development.

Other critics of modernization took a less radical stance and sought ways to improve development theory and practice. Normative approaches to development including the human rights-based approach and the capability approach pioneered by Amartya Sen (1993) and Martha Nussbaum (2001) emerged from these critiques. Sen (1993), for example, charged that economic growth alone did little to improve the majority of people’s quality of life in developing countries because economic gains were uneven. Increasingly, scholarship on development moved from a neutral stance to a concern with social well-being and inequality (Morvaridi 2008).

During the 1990s, participatory approaches to research and development also gained widespread support from proponents of sustainable development and rights-based development (Chopra et al. 1990; Burkey 1993). Grounded in critiques of top-down models of development, participatory approaches sought to include local people in the development process, albeit to varying degrees (Ericson 2006). Yet, participatory approaches have also been the target of criticism. Post-development theorists have interrogated participatory approaches, arguing that they are thinly veiled reincarnations of hegemonic development schemes aimed at disciplining and controlling the knowledge and dissent of marginalized populations (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Fernando 2003).

Despite academic debates amongst scholars, these ideas proved influential in shaping the *discourse* of development among global institutions. By the mid-1990s, prominent development entities like the World Bank, United Nations, and the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) had adopted the language of social justice, empowerment, and participation. The UN currently promotes a participatory human rights-based approach in which “participation is both a means and a goal” and “the development process is locally-owned” (UN 2003). The Red Cross’ description of its goals for the initiative with Somos Mujeres reflects the influence of these ideas: “The aim of the project is to strengthen the important work of Somos Mujeres, to diversify and improve their level of training activities, and to support the empowerment of indigenous women at the community level” (Cruz Roja 2008).

The emphasis on empowerment, quality of life and community involvement within development occurred during the global shift to neoliberal democracy during the 1980s and 1990s. Powerful development entities like the IMF and World Bank supported neoliberal economic policy, though to varying degrees, and viewed access to the free market as the vehicle to engender prosperity and, in turn, social and political change via democratic participation. The supremacy of this approach is reflected in the rise of microcredit and entrepreneurship initiatives (Weber 2002). By offering women in the developing world access to credit, they can enter the market as entrepreneurs. The Red Cross initiative, while it does not provide credit, focuses on offering capacity training in entrepreneurship to women. It is assumed that women will then have greater freedom in the household and community. However, scholars have noted that increasing women’s income does not necessarily translate into greater autonomy and power within the household and society (Kabeer 1994).

There are concerns with the view that the market is the ideal mechanism for bringing about development. This model places responsibility on the individual to

exercise agency within the market. At the heart of the economic-based model is the assumption that the market is an equalizing force. Little attention is paid to the distribution of resources and other structural forces that create differential access and outcomes related to the market (Ferguson 2006; Morvaridi 2008).

It is clear that scholars, development practitioners, and local communities often hold conflicting conceptions of development. Exploring the efforts of women in Somos Mujeres provides a glimpse into how these competing notions collide at the community level. I will show that despite the emerging consensus amongst international development institutions that local communities and organizations “own the development process,” as the UN (2003) asserts, global institutions seldom adhere to the moral underpinnings of local, grassroots approaches. While local organizations are lauded as indicators of strong, vibrant civil society and are esteemed as agents of development, mainstream development institutions continue to wield power over their activities. In this complex arrangement binding local initiatives to global institutions through hidden rules of engagement, community-based organizations like Somos Mujeres struggle to exercise autonomy and carry out their own vision of development.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research Background

I came to Santiago in May, 2009, as a student in an ethnographic field school. I had initially planned to study tourism in the town after learning from the field school coordinators that tourism to Santiago was increasing. I prepared for this focus in a variety of ways. I conducted a literature review on tourism in Guatemala, interviewed a Guatemalan woman in Denver who had fled the country during the civil war, and submitted an Internal Review Board protocol before leaving. However, once in the field, I found that while tourism was considered a development strategy by the municipal government, residents had not experienced a marked change in their lives related to tourism. Strategies to increase tourism to Santiago remained in the planning stage, and the number of tourists coming to Santiago had not significantly increased. In fact, residents explained that tourism had dropped off in recent months. “El crisis,” they explained, referring to the global economic recession. For others, fear, spurred by the news media, over “el gripe,” the H1N1 flu virus, was the reason. Despite these disheartening early results, I continued conducting informal interviews with food stall operators, handicraft vendors, and tourists. The days were quickly ticking by, but my adviser, who I spoke to regularly by phone, assured me that if I continued asking questions and seeking out informants, I would find a topic that warranted study.

One afternoon, as I was walking near the dock where tourists browse at handicraft stalls, chat over drinks at outdoor *tiendas* (stores), and photograph local women as they weave, I noticed Chichuc, a handicraft cooperative near the shore. A woman dressed in brightly embroidered *huipil* and *corte* stood near the door. I approached her and inquired about the cooperative. I explained that I was a student conducting research study on tourism and asked if she would be willing to speak with me about the cooperative. Gloria and I sat on the floor of the small sales room surrounded by ornate woven fabrics and delicate beadwork. She pointed to the different creations—beadwork, woven blouses, embroidered purses—and described that each woman had made and brought them here in hopes that they would catch the eyes of tourists. “But there is a lot of competition,” Gloria explained. Between other store owners, individual women, and women’s organizations, the local market for handicrafts was inundated with products and vendors. She explained that they were looking for a way to export their products, but that there were other similar groups of women that had also organized to sell their products outside the community.

I was intrigued by the number of distinct organizations that worked in *artesanía*. Once I decided to focus my research on these organizations, it became clear that I needed to learn more about the relationships between organizations, the models they employed, their impacts on women’s lives, and the advantages and disadvantages they encountered as they attempted to produce and sell their products. After my conversation with Gloria, I had a short list of organizations, which I sought out and interviewed over the next two weeks.

From interviews with coordinators, I realized that organizations' models ranged from business models to more comprehensive efforts like Somos Mujeres, which combined handicraft production with education, capacity training, and material assistance. Ixcaco, for example, was founded in the 1980s by an American woman named Lacy and Ishmael, an *Atiteco*, to preserve traditional weaving styles. The headquarters are home to a textile museum as well as a storehouse of raw materials, or *materia prima*, to make products. The organization has developed a successful *artesanía* program. Ixcaco employs skilled weavers from the community to create high-quality, stylized fabrics for purses, hats, and other items, which are exported to boutique stores in the United States. As needed, women attend workshops in which they learn how to make the different designs and produce high-quality products. They are paid per piece they produce. Francisca, who produced materials for the organization, explained, "The prices depend on the type of weaving. Bamboo patterns, the ones that are striped in different colors, get Q85 [USD10.60] for 24 inches. And the pattern with flowers pays Q120 [USD15] for 24 inches," (Francisca, interview, June 29, 2009).

Ixcaco, more than other organizations, designed its *artesanía* program around a business model with an emphasis on specialization and quality. Women were hired based on skill and received monetary compensation for their work. Another organization, La Asociación de Mujeres Artesanas de Santiago (AMAS),⁶ was formed by a group of women from a *cantón* north of Santiago to help women who lost their homes and belongings in the mudslides caused by Hurricane Stan in 2005. AMAS brought together women with a range of weaving, embroidery, and beadwork skills in hopes of creating products to export to other parts of Guatemala and internationally. They have struggled to

⁶ The Association of Women Artisans from Santiago.

locate stable buyers; however, they have distributed earnings from several orders to women.

Similarly, the mission of Tejedoras Unidas is to support women from Panabaj, a *cantón* south of Santiago, whose homes were also destroyed in the mudslides. This organization, which interestingly is coordinated by a man from Santiago,⁷ provides materials to women to make handicrafts that he then exports internationally with the help of an American hotel owner in Santiago. The organization then purchases items including food, clothes, furniture and construction supplies, and distributes them among the women. Unlike Ixcaco, which is primarily an employer of skilled artisans, AMAS and Tejedoras Unidas were explicitly concerned with bettering disadvantaged women's lives through economic and material support.

Through this series of interviews with coordinators, I became aware of Somos Mujeres. The coordinators of AMAS and Tejedoras Unidas both mentioned the organization, and two members of my host family explained that Somos Mujeres was well-known in the community. I decided to seek out Juana, one of the sisters who founded the organization. In our first interview, she explained that while Somos Mujeres tries to provide women with economic opportunities through the *artesanía* program, the organization's larger goal is to bring about a vision of development that includes improving women's social and political position. The mission of Somos Mujeres was distinct from other organizations like Ixcaco, which employed women for their work,⁸ or

⁷ In Spanish, the name Tejedoras Unidas ("United Weavers" in English) implies a group of women. However, both the coordinator and the hotel owner who assisted the organization with locating funds and buyers are both male.

⁸ Though most women who produce textiles for Ixcaco have a business relationship with the organization, there are at least four women who have long-standing relationships with the coordinator and have received significant material assistance. Two women, who lost their homes in Hurricane Stan, have received furniture and construction materials as well as assistance to rebuild their homes. However, this is not the

Tejedoras Unidas that focused exclusively on improving women's material conditions. I was interested in examining the mission and impact of Somos Mujeres in greater depth and proposed to Juana that I focus my research on the organization, which she accepted. My grounding research questions included: How did the organization arrive at its model of development? How does that model take shape in practice? What impact does the organization have on the lives of women who join? And what advantages and disadvantages does the organization have as a community-based organization founded by local women? As I explored these questions, I became aware of the barriers the organization faced in implementing its mission, and I expanded my research questions to better understand these challenges. I wanted to know what obstacles the organization encountered as it attempted to realize its vision of women's development.

Research Set-up

My research reflects an iterative methodology in which I continually refined my research questions and methods as I acquired data and insight. My initial step was to research the number of *artesanía* organizations in Santiago and to gain a better understanding of their respective missions and models. I had limited time, and expected that coordinators would be aware of similar organizations in the community. I asked coordinators to list other organizations they knew of that also worked in *artesanía*. Bernard (2006) refers to this strategy as snowball sampling, and notes that it can be used when there are small, discrete groups of informants who share characteristics.

As I interviewed coordinators, I identified one organization, Somos Mujeres, which became the focus of my research. The decision to focus on Somos Mujeres was

case for the majority of women who work for the organization. I was informed by Ishmael that roughly 80 women had worked for Ixcaco, though the recent economic constraints brought on by the global economic recession had prompted the organization to decrease the number of employees.

informed by several factors. First, the organization appeared to share similarities with other organizations in the sense that women derived economic gains from their work as artisans with the organization. However, most important in the decision to research Somos Mujeres was Juana's description of the organization and its mission. Somos Mujeres was founded and led by indigenous women from the community who saw it as an agent for women's development. Juana was the only coordinator who emphasized the role of the organization in creating social change. Focusing on Somos Mujeres offered a way to study the challenges related to funding and accessing markets that were shared across organizations while also exploring a comprehensive model of women's development. There were also practical considerations to take into account. I wanted to interview the women who were involved in the organization. I felt it was necessary to explore not only the perspectives of the leadership, but the experience of the women who stood to gain from the organization's efforts. Women in the organization attended classes and *capacitaciones* at the organization's headquarters twice a week. Juana said that I could ask women to participate in interviews when they arrived at the organization to attend *capacitaciones*.

My research design to study Somos Mujeres incorporated interviews, participant observation, and a quantitative survey. I developed a semi-structured interview protocol for interviews with women who had joined Somos Mujeres. Interview questions related to three broad topic areas: how women became aware of the organization, the reasons they joined Somos Mujeres, and the impact of their participation on their lives.⁹ I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with women from the organization on five different occasions. I would arrive at the organization before the *capacitación* began and

⁹ Interview protocols utilized for interviews with women in Somos Mujeres are included as Appendix 1.

Juana or Chonita would ask the women to take part in interviews. Given the influence of the sisters in shaping my interview sample, my ability to generalize to all women in the organization is limited. However, because the sisters have a personal stake in the perception of the organization, it is likely that they encouraged women they felt would represent the organization's mission. I also conducted three formal interviews with the sisters, two with Juana and one with Chonita. In addition, I recorded notes from a variety of casual conversations with both sisters over the course of my time there.

Because women in the organization did not speak Spanish, I required the assistance of a translator during interviews. Dolores, whose family I lived with, served as a translator for ten of the twelve interviews, and Rolanda translated two interviews. I presented both translators with the interview questions the day before the interviews, and asked them to translate each question for the women. During interviews, women often gave long answers to questions in Tz'tujil. Both Dolores and Rolanda found it difficult to translate the answers in detail while the interviews were taking place. In order to ensure that the translations were thorough, I met with Isabel, a Spanish tutor who I met through another student, during the evenings to listen to each interview. Isabel became an important informant during my research. Though she was not born in Santiago, she had lived there with her family for over ten years. We were close in age and formed an immediate connection. She answered questions that arose, offered her own insights and analysis, and helped me find Rolanda to serve as a second translator for interviews. Our meetings offered a respite from the grueling pace of research—a time when I could relax, gain insight, and ask questions candidly, a time when I didn't have to be "on."

Though the bulk of my data came from interviews, I gleaned a great deal of data from observing four classes and three *capacitaciones* (capacity training sessions) in their entirety. I also observed women between interviews at the organization, which helped me get a sense of the daily activities at the organization and how women interacted with one another while there. Finally, to verify the information I had gathered through interviews and observation and to raise new questions for further exploration, I conducted a survey with eight women from the organization. Two of the women also participated in interviews. In total, I collected data from 18 individual women. Because of the high rate of illiteracy, I developed visual icons and reviewed the survey with Dolores, who explained the survey process to participants on the day it took place.¹⁰

To further contextualize the data I collected about the organization, I conducted one interview with a co-coordinator of the government Municipal Office of Women (La Oficina Municipal de la Mujer). This government office is charged with representing women's issues at the local level. I wanted to understand the relationship between women's organizations like Somos Mujeres and local government. I learned from the co-coordinator that the office was aware of a number of women's organizations, but there was not a strong network of support between the various organizations and government. I was informed that increasing energy was being directed at creating ties among the groups. To gain insight into the process of *artesanía* production and sale, I also conducted an interview with a local businesswoman, Maricela, who owns a bead-working business. I felt her success would provide a point of comparison with Somos Mujeres and perhaps highlight what resources and connections were needed to operate a viable *artesanía* business.

¹⁰ The survey administered to women in Somos Mujeres is included as Appendix 2.

Apart from observation at the organization, I tried to immerse myself in the community. I attended cultural and family events with my host family. For example, Anita, the young mother in my host family invited me to a party to celebrate the procession of the Virgin Mary at her parent's home. Members of their Catholic church take turns housing the life-size statue of Mary in their homes throughout the year. Each time the statue is relocated, church members parade down the street, Mary hoisted above their heads on a platform decorated with candles and flowers. At the party that followed, I was asked to distribute plates of food to guests. Anita explained that the eldest members of the church should receive the plates first, and discretely pointed out the social hierarchy so that I could deliver the food according to status. On regular days, I often spent time observing the activity and rhythm of the town. I went for long walks. I sat at *palapas* (thatched roof structures) near the dock and on the stone benches by the central Catholic church, jotting descriptions and questions.

During the evenings, I typed up my field notes. I began data analysis while in the field. I outlined and reviewed the interviews I conducted with women in Somos Mujeres in order to highlight sections for Isabel to translate. After reviewing interviews, I transcribed relevant sections and coded the themes using Fieldworks software. When I returned from Guatemala, I continued the process of transcribing and coding interviews, and developed a spreadsheet in which I grouped interview responses by topic. These patterns form the basis of the analysis and the conclusions I present in this thesis.

The names of all organizations, excluding the Guatemalan Red Cross (Cruz Roja Guatemalteca), have been changed to preserve anonymity. Informants' names have also been changed. For women in Somos Mujeres, I have altered identifying details to ensure

their anonymity and to avoid the possibility that their statements might be identified. Like Jenkins (2008), I feel that critiquing community-based organizations is a delicate practice because the lives of the women who are part of these organizations are bound up in their success. I want to be clear that I firmly support the work Somos Mujeres is doing. The goal of my research and analysis is to explore how their work takes shape in practice and to offer insights regarding the barriers the organization faces—barriers I argue reflect Somos Mujeres' marginal position within the organizational hierarchy of the development sphere.

Methodological Challenges

While in the field, I encountered a number of research challenges. In the case of this study, the time frame was the most constraining factor. I had two months to complete my research. Though I attempted to develop an exhaustive list of women's organizations that work in *artesanía*, I was unable to do so given my limited time. However, I do feel that I interviewed the most well-known organizations in the community, and that the patterns across organizations I interviewed would likely extend to other organizations that work in *artesanía* production and sale.

Language also posed significant challenges. Though I speak Spanish at an intermediate level, occasionally conversations proved challenging. I recorded all interviews and reviewed them, dictionary in hand, to ensure that I accurately understood the responses of my informants. Interviewing women who spoke Tz'tujil was even more challenging. Dolores, who served as my translator for the bulk of the interviews, would often ask questions of her own or make comments during interviews. I worried that her interjections might affect women's responses, and I spoke with her about how to ask

questions and leave room for women to respond on their own. I feel that this did improve the reliability of women's responses. However, I was also concerned that Dolores incorporated a number of Spanish words when she spoke Tz'tujil. In our first meeting, Isabel verified that Dolores' use of Spanish would have made it difficult for women to understand the questions.

I asked Isabel if she knew of other women who could serve as translators. The first woman fell through. Given the time constraints, I decided to continue interviewing women with Dolores. I was also in a delicate situation because I was compensating Dolores to serve as a translator, and I did not want to offend her by working with another translator. The situation was complicated by the fact that I was living in the same house as Dolores and her family, and wanted to maintain a positive relationship. Near the end of my research, Isabel informed me that she had found another translator, Rolanda. I decided to conduct the last two interviews with her.

Interviews took place at the organization's headquarters, and though I conducted interviews in semi-private rooms, other members and at least one of the sisters were present at the organization at the time of interviews. Women may have experienced the "third-party-present" effect or "observer" effect in which having another person present or relatively nearby affects informants' responses (Bernard 2006). In addition, the "deference" effect also likely occurred (Bernard 2006). As an American woman interviewing indigenous women, it is possible that they emphasized their needs hoping that I would be able to offer assistance. Finally, several women were concerned about how the sisters would view their statements about the organization. Though most women

explained that they wished Somos Mujeres could provide more support, several women expressed reluctance to criticize the organization.

Though I administered a survey to eight women in the organization, the survey did not reflect women's individual responses. As I asked women to complete the survey with the help of Dolores, women discussed the responses to the questions as group. For research methods to effectively collect data, they must be in line with cultural norms. Women in Somos Mujeres had little to no experience taking surveys. Though I asked Dolores to explain that I was looking for their personal responses, women discussed and negotiated their answers. I rely less on the survey data and more on interviews with individual women to support my conclusions. However, women's group discussions and responses corroborated two important findings. First, women placed importance on the economic and material benefits of joining the organization, and second, they felt connected to and supported by the other women in the organization.

Finally, the limited time in which to conduct this research meant that I was not able to develop a deep level of rapport with my informants. I developed some rapport with several of the women I interviewed and saw regularly as I observed classes and *capacitaciones*. However, the language barrier made it extremely difficult to have casual conversations that would enable a relationship to develop. I feel that I did develop personal connections with Juana and Chonita over the course of my research, and I remain in contact with the sisters. However, the brevity of my fieldwork did not allow for a relationship of greater depth to develop. Though I encountered challenges throughout the research process, the data I present in this thesis reflects the patterns that emerged

across the women's experience. My data and analysis focus on the areas in which I feel I have the most solid data.

Outline of Data and Analysis Chapters

In the following four chapters, I present my research findings. In Chapter 3, I outline the historical context during which the organization was founded. I consider how the sisters' backgrounds and personal experiences were central to their decision to begin the organization. I describe the patterns in the experiences of women who join Somos Mujeres, and outline the challenges they face. In Chapter 4, I explore the mission and programming of the organization, arguing that it attempts to employ a locally rooted, comprehensive model of women's development. In this chapter, I also describe how Somos Mujeres began a partnership with the Guatemalan Red Cross, which initiated a shift toward entrepreneurship and occupational training. Chapter 5 examines women's reasons for joining the organization, their expectations of Somos Mujeres, and the impact of the organization on their lives. In Chapter 6, I focus on three barriers that impede the sisters' ability to implement their model of development. Finally, in the conclusion, I outline three sites of tension that arise in the development process, and consider potential avenues for enabling organizations like Somos Mujeres to command greater control in dictating the terms of their development.

Chapter Three: Meeting Somos Mujeres

In this chapter, I describe the origins of Somos Mujeres. In 1998, Juana, Chonita, and Magdalena¹¹ founded the organization to serve as a support group for women affected by the civil war and poverty. I explore the backgrounds of the sisters and the members of Somos Mujeres and argue that women's personal experience related to class, education, and gender relations plays an important role in their decision to become involved in the organization. I also consider how these factors shape relationships of power and decision-making among women in the organization.

The Beginnings of Somos Mujeres

One morning several weeks into my fieldwork, I called Juana, the president of Somos Mujeres, to schedule an interview with her and learn more about the organization. I had spent the previous weeks conducting interviews with leaders of women's organizations in Santiago, and several had referred me to Somos Mujeres. Juana was friendly and open on the phone. "We are having a meeting right now. Come by and we can talk," she said. She gave me directions to the headquarters, and I packed up my supplies—my audio recorder, notebook, smaller pocket notebook, and camera—all of the things I shuffled in and out my backpack each day and night.

¹¹ Though all three sisters were active in the early years of the organization, Magdalena has become less involved in Somos Mujeres. In the early years, she was instrumental in bringing women to the organization. One woman explained that Magdalena assisted her in completing the paperwork to receive compensation for the death of her husband through the National Commission of Reparations (Comisión Nacional de Resarcimiento). However, my research uses data from Juana and Chonita since they remain the most active in the organization.

Down a winding cobblestone street, I located the two-tone green building. I peered through a purple glass pane in the black iron door and knocked. A petite woman came to the door, her long black hair parted perfectly down the middle. She wore a *huipil* and *corte* over her small frame. Her oval face displayed delicate features. Her mouth curled into a smile but her liquid brown eyes conveyed seriousness. “*Buenos días*,” she said and welcomed me inside. She explained that a *capacitación* was in progress and asked if I would like to observe for a moment.

We walked through the courtyard to a larger room where the organization holds meetings. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness inside, I saw a woman, dressed in slacks and a blouse, standing at the front of the room. She gestured to a dry erase board propped unsteadily on a makeshift stand. Crowded inside the room, forty or so women sat on rickety wooden and plastic chairs. Their brightly colored *huipiles* and *cortes* formed a mosaic of color against the drab white walls, its paint cracked and peeling in sections. Some women stared in silence. Others chatted quietly amongst themselves. They looked up as they saw me, and my eyes searched slowly around the room, making contact with several of the women. Juana called to me from the courtyard, and we made our way to the front room where we sat. Juana began to talk about the organization, its origins, its objectives, and its programs.

“We serve widows, children, and poor women. There are many widows in Guatemala because of the war,” she began (interview, June 17, 2009). In the mid-1990s after the Peace Accords were signed, she and her two sisters, Chonita and Magdalena, decided to help women who had lost their husbands, family members, and friends in the civil war. Many widows and families were struggling to feed their children. The

prolonged terror had left indelible sadness and grief in the lives of survivors. Juana and her sisters wanted to offer women a place to come together and talk about their pain and loss, a space to find comfort and compassion with others like themselves.

Many of the organizations founded in the wake of the civil war, including Somos Mujeres, began as grassroots efforts. According to Kleymeyer, “Grassroots development is a process in which disadvantaged people *organize themselves* to overcome obstacles to their social and economic well-being,” (1994:4). Such organizations often enjoy greater freedom and autonomy to conceive of innovative approaches because they are not subject to the oversight of a central authority (Magazine 2003). Thus, scholars often see grassroots and community-based organizations as more in tune with local exigencies and as sources of alternate forms of development (Kleymeyer 1994; Jenkins 2008). At the same time, community-based organizations often lack resources such as money, training, staff, and strategic partnerships to access resources. Characteristic of these patterns, Juana and her sisters had no experience organizing women. The sisters also lacked relationships with organizations and individuals that might offer assistance. Despite these obstacles, or perhaps because of them, the women organized around the common experience of trauma, poverty, discrimination and their Tz’ujil Mayan culture. Juana explained,

I was afraid to talk to the women and to organize them also, because I did not know how to lead an organization; I did not know what to do with the women. I had no experience, the same as my sisters, but on June 4, 1998, we called the widows, young women on welfare, and poor mothers to meet in this house where we celebrated a date on the Mayan calendar marked by the eight ideas, eight threads. One is that women are leaders. The other is the wisdom of our people. We asked for the energy to start a project or to start an organization. We made an invocation where we lit forty candles and asked la Madre Tierra, the all-powerful force of energy to help us overcome our fear. ...we started from an idea to organize, to overcome our fear, for women to begin talking. Because in my country, there is strong discrimination against indigenous women. First, because

of the degree of illiteracy that exists in the country, it directly affects indigenous people because they did not have the opportunity to attend school. And also the country's situation is that it celebrates men more than women. These were the obstacles that we saw. Widows were both mother and father at the same time to their children. They had certain needs and together we talked about these. Chonita, Magdalena, and I were in charge of the group. We supported the group during these ten years. The first thing women asked for was psychological support. Support to raise their self-esteem. We [Juana and her sisters] did not have the experience to help them with these issues, and the state did not support women who were victims of the armed conflict. The state did not send a psychologist for counseling the women. This was the crisis experienced by the women during the armed conflict (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

Juana sought out women she knew in the community who had been affected by the war and encouraged them to join the group. This assemblage of forty women became a place where they found support in one another, but Juana and her sisters worried that they were not qualified to offer the psychological assistance the women needed. They tried to contact psychologists, but were met with indifference. "No one said, 'Great, you have organized,'" Juana explained. Instead, the women relied on each other and the sisters for psychological support.

In the organization for the past ten years, my sister [Chonita] and I were the psychologists because no one supported us. Each woman expressed her feelings and each one responded... it created, *uhm*, solidarity between women, so they could express their feelings. One cried because her husband was killed, another woman because her entire family was kidnapped and another because of poverty. Another woman cried for her father and mother because the army kidnapped and killed her family. This did not happen to us [Juana and her family], but we were persecuted by the military. In our experience, only through speaking can we heal. During those ten years, we didn't have any help. No doctors. No technical support. Only ourselves. We were 40. We are 116 women today. We started alone. We knocked on doors; we responded to the needs of those around us (Juana, interview, June 17, 2009).

Despite the emotional and social support the group provided, women's problems persisted. The civil war disproportionately affected indigenous populations. Post-war economic shifts along with the deterioration of social relations within communities

fostered continued and worsening poverty for women and their families. Though Guatemala's gross domestic product (GDP) grew after 1985, when the country instituted structural adjustment policies, economic gains were uneven and indigenous populations faced heightened economic insecurity (Benson et al. 2008; Nelson 1999; Pearce 1998). Between 1980 and 1991, the cost of living quadrupled due to inflation (Berger 2006). In 1996, 75 percent of the Guatemalan population were poor, of them 58 percent were extremely poor. Indigenous groups comprised 93 percent of the population in poverty (Pearce 1998). The war had eroded social relations in communities. During the conflict, family members and neighbors had reported one another to the army as suspected guerrillas or guerilla sympathizers. Distrust and suspicion undermined the social fabric of communities, fostering divisions that remain to this day (Carlsen 1996; Kalyvas 2004).

The violence also produced gendered effects within communities. Men comprised the majority of war victims, and the loss of husbands and sons positioned many women as heads of the household (Garrard-Burnett 2001). Families that previously relied on a combination of male and female labor to meet basic subsistence and economic needs were dismantled. In Mayan society, married women's status is linked to their husbands. The post-war "gender vacuum" (Garrard-Burnett 2001: 71) meant that women, whose position and access to kinship networks were tied to their husbands, became disconnected from family networks that might offer support. The violence of the civil war heightened widow's responsibility toward their families while placing them outside the traditional avenues of support, namely kin groups. Most women lacked time and occupational skills to seek out employment, and their livelihoods grew increasingly insecure. In 1990, an estimated 91 percent of indigenous women were unemployed (Berger 2006).

Berger (2006) has noted that rising poverty and unemployment encouraged women to seek out alternate avenues of survival, including joining women's organizations that could offer support and assistance. Economic hardship played an important role in creating the conditions for indigenous women to form part of the burgeoning civil society in the mid-1990s. Women who joined Somos Mujeres when it formed included widows, single mothers, married women, and young women in need of psychological as well as economic support. As part of the group, women shared their struggles, and Juana and her sisters became aware of the acute economic and material needs of the women. In the first year, the sisters decided to expand their efforts beyond psychological support to help women meet pressing basic needs. Juana explained,

We formed in June of 1998. We included widows, single mothers, youth on welfare, and poor women with the objective of bringing the women together to heal their sadness, fear, and pain from the armed conflict. As a result of this, we [the three sisters] saw the women's needs and we went to our parents to speak with them. My father and mother had land where they produced corn and beans, and the widows and young girls on welfare would not have to look for work. We spoke with my father about how it was important to support the women. In our country, there are many organizations that help these women and we were able to speak Spanish and could help the women with their needs (Juana, interview, June 17, 2009).

In addition to providing immediate material support to women by allowing women to harvest food from the family's farm, the sisters wanted to address underlying causes of women's poverty and marginal position. They were concerned about cultural and historical processes of discrimination and patriarchal gender relations, which they saw as the root of women's social and economic vulnerability.

Here in Guatemala, especially in our municipality, in the past and still today, women have been devalued. The objective of Somos Mujeres is to strengthen women's involvement in economic, social, cultural, political, and educational realms. So that she can be an agent of sustainable community development. That

is our focus. We are working so that women are seen, to promote the work of women. We do not want women to say, 'We only belong at home.' But also that women's work at home is of value. Women get up out of bed and light the fire. They make tortillas, and this has value. The work we are doing is to raise women's self-esteem and to recognize the value and dignity of work that women do (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

As the sisters' knowledge of the women's challenges grew, Somos Mujeres evolved from a support group into an organization focused on women's development. In the first two years, the organization acquired legal status, began capacity training (*capacitaciones*) to promote a shift in gender relations, and worked to establish an economic development program through handicraft production (*artesanía* program). The evolution of Somos Mujeres reflects changes in the sisters' own lives. In particular, Juana's personal experience working with women who were affected by violence and poverty led her to become increasingly political. As Garrard Burnett has noted,

The violence of the early 1980s pushed an unprecedented number of Mayan and *ladina* women into the political arena. Overwhelmingly, the proximate cause of political mobilization was trauma: the loss or disappearance of a loved one, or the economic and social exigencies of widowhood. The most important national and local women's organizations have their origin in trauma (2001: 74).

In the next section, I explore the backgrounds of the sisters and members. I focus primarily on Juana's story to illustrate the complex host of factors that were central in shaping her decision to begin the organization. I then outline the patterns in the backgrounds of women who join the organization to illustrate the local challenges in their lives that Somos Mujeres attempts to address. Both the sisters and the women who join Somos Mujeres share a cultural heritage, language, and locally grounded knowledge and experience. Yet, their respective class backgrounds make clear important differences related to education, culture, and gender relations. These differences, in turn, give the

sisters greater control and authority to determine the focus and programming of Somos Mujeres.

The Sisters

Juana, Chonita, and Magdalena grew up in Santiago. Today, they live with their parents in the family's home, which also serves as the organization's headquarters. The sisters come from a higher economic class than the women who join the organization. Though I did not gather information on the sisters' individual incomes, other aspects of their lives underscore the distinctiveness of their experience and the role of class in shaping it. One important symbol of class-based difference is the family's home. Inside, each family member has their own room. There are televisions and radios. The home has additional space to house the organization. While their home reflects their economic status, it alone does not account for the uniqueness of their experience.

Education has been an important factor for Juana and Chonita's lives, a luxury that relates directly to economic class and distinguishes them from the majority of women in their community. As children, their parents privileged education, providing the encouragement and financial support for the sisters and their brother to attend school. In Guatemala, education is compulsory through the sixth grade. Children may attend schools free of charge. However, there are costs associated with attendance such as uniforms, school supplies, meals, and fees, which make education prohibitive for many families (Gorman and Pollitt 1992; Hallman et al. 2006). Juana and Chonita's parents also offered them the financial assistance necessary for them to obtain college degrees. According to Juana, her parents, who were successful agriculturalists in the community, wanted a different life for their children free from the strenuous labor of agriculture. Her

parents had not been afforded the opportunity to become educated and saw education as key to their children's future. For Juana, their gift of education was central in shaping her personal identity.

Ever since I was young, my parents gave me the opportunity [to attend school], but my parents' lives were difficult. They did not have the opportunity in their time. The importance of education is that it changes a person. It changed me. Having a degree changed me. Having a title as an accountant is a way for me to survive in life. I have a job in the office [The Municipal Office of Women]. I have learned that it is important, what I have. I know how to read and write. I have a diploma, a degree that says that I can work, that I am able. If I had not had education, I would be a very different person than I am now. I am an example to other women, as are my sisters, that we can be transformed. Mercedes, too, has used her knowledge (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

Their parents' economic status enabled the sisters to achieve a high level of education. Through their education, Juana and Chonita acquired knowledge that would prove vital when they founded Somos Mujeres, including fluency in Spanish, knowledge of accounting, and teaching experience. Their personal lifestyle choices would also be important. Juana, who is in her early forties, and Chonita, who is older, are unmarried and have no children. Juana openly admits that this sets her apart from the women in Somos Mujeres. Yet, her decision to remain single was an important condition for founding a grassroots organization, allowing her the time to devote to directing Somos Mujeres.

After college and in the wake of the civil war, Juana returned to live with their family. She had dreams of being a singer, but upon returning to Santiago, she saw firsthand the struggles of women in her community. She became increasingly political, organizing women and taking local and national political positions to promote women's rights and justice. As we sat down together on a warm July afternoon, Juana talked passionately about how she became involved in community organizing and politics.

It is an honor for me to be able to be a part of our association. I am a woman fighting in a process. I am also a woman of the people, a woman of many roles. But the roles and the obstacles in my life is to always be working and positioning the association. I was challenged when I was twenty years old. My dream was to be a singer because I liked to be on the stage. But my life changed. I became a person who worked with women. People wanted me to speak; they elected me to public office to discuss, to negotiate on behalf of women and their needs. Perhaps this is my song, to use my voice as a representative of women. It was a radical change in my life. When I was twenty, I learned about women, about their families, about how they were both mother and father in their children's lives. They changed me. Now I am thirty-four, and I haven't married. That is a basic difference in my life [in contrast to women in the organization]. And during my thirty four years, I have had the experience through my organization to be able to work at the national level. I was elected by a popular vote, by more than five thousand people, to a position with the Comisión Nacional de Resarcimiento [National Commission of Reparations]. I am very proud because so many people voted for me. It was a dream of mine. ...thanks to my organization for supporting me. And for supporting me when I was a candidate for governor at the department level. Yes, in a political party. My political party is the life of fighting for women. And while working, day by day closely with the mayor, he asked me to support this [women's cause] by working in the Municipal Office of Women [la Oficina Municipal de la Mujer], (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

For Juana, organizing on behalf of women's issues has been the defining force in her life. Even while she and her sisters directed Somos Mujeres, she held other positions, most notably as a representative on the National Commission of Reparations, which compensates individuals, especially widows, for the loss of family members during the civil war. Today, Juana serves as the president of Somos Mujeres. It is the highest office in *junta directiva*, the group of officers who occupy formal leadership roles within the organization. In July, 2009, she became the Coordinator of the Municipal Office of Women. Juana has been the formal leader of Somos Mujeres since its inception, representing the organization at government meetings and public events. She is also present at meetings for Somos Mujeres and when she is not working at the municipal office, she is often at the organization observing classes, tending to administrative duties, and chatting with members.

Like Juana, Chonita followed a similar path. She obtained a degree in teaching and returned to Santiago. She, too, has not married. Chonita has been actively involved in running Somos Mujeres since the beginning, but, unlike Juana, she works behind the scenes. She is present at the headquarters almost every day, leading literacy and health and society classes, assisting the teacher who leads the *capacitaciones*, and coordinating the *artesanía* program as well as the fledgling coffee production program Somos Mujeres recently started.

Women who Join Somos Mujeres and the Challenges They Face

At the time of my research, which took place more than ten years after Somos Mujeres was founded, there were 116 members in the organization, not including the sisters. Widows comprise a smaller portion of the organization's membership than in its early years as the organization has widened its focus to include all economically, socially, and politically marginalized women. Though there is variation in members' backgrounds, most women share striking similarities in their everyday lives related to class, education, and impact of gender relations.

The women in the organization I interviewed (n=12) and surveyed (n=8) ranged in age from 19 to 72. All were part of the organization's *artesanía* (handicraft) program, and were currently undergoing occupational and entrepreneurship capacity training funded by Guatemalan Red Cross. All had experienced severe economic insecurity throughout their lives. Nearly 80 percent were married, and I asked women to estimate their total household income. Women reported that their household income ranged from Q70 to Q200 (USD8.25 to 25) per month. Chonita estimated that women's household income ranged from Q300 to Q400 per month. Though the women's reported income and

Chonita's estimate differ, the highest possible income—Q400 (USD50)—places their families well below the official Guatemalan minimum wage of Q1274 (USD160) (Censo de Santiago Atitlán 2006). Though the majority of *Atitecos* earn below this standard, the women who joined Somos Mujeres were from some of the most disadvantaged families in the community, and included women who had lost their homes and belongings in landslides caused by Hurricane Stan in 2005. Ariana, who joined the organization after the mudslides in Panabaj destroyed her home, described the terror she and her family experienced.

The night it happened it started to rain very heavily. I went outside to look at what was happening. My husband came outside too. We thought it was only rain and that it would pass. But then we saw that was a lot of rain. It didn't pass and we closed ourselves in the room. When it came through the door, we went up to the roof. We thought we were going to die. There was so much rain. We saw our neighbors pass beneath the mud screaming but we couldn't help because we were above and we thought we would be taken in the mud. The following day the firefighters and other people came to rescue us. The mud was everywhere. It took everything. After, we were put in temporary housing but I didn't want to stay there because it was in the same place as the mud, (Ariana, interview, June 29, 2009).

Ariana's family lost everything in the storm. Though their family was poor before the mudslides, the loss of their home and *milpa* (small agricultural plot) plunged them into desperate poverty. Though most women were not victims of the storm, all described the struggle to provide for their families. Women who join Somos Mujeres come from families who have struggled to integrate into the shifting economy. Capitalist expansion has altered traditional systems of subsistence and exchange as land was consolidated for large-scale agricultural production and the number of men who enter the formal economy as laborers continues to rise (Carey 2008; Carlsen 1996). Currently, the local economy in Santiago is complex amalgam of traditional subsistence, cottage industry, market

exchange, large-scale agricultural production, and tourism. In conjunction with economic destabilization, cultural understandings of women's roles have also restructured men and women's economic production patterns.

Both men and women contributed to the household income. However, their respective forms of labor were highly gendered. Men performed specific income-generating activities and were more likely to work within the formal economy. Most of the women's husbands worked in the agricultural sector or as laborers at nearby *fincas* (agricultural plantations), *jornaleros* (firewood cutters), and fishermen. Women estimated that their husbands earned on average Q30 for each full day of work, yet many found it difficult to locate reliable work. On the other hand, most women earned money as artisans through cottage industry production of *huipiles*, textiles, and beadwork. Others sold *comida típica* (traditional Guatemalan food) and foodstuffs from their *milpa* (small agricultural plots) in the marketplace. Only one woman, Alejandra, traveled outside the village, going as far the Western coastal regions to sell tortillas and *patín*, a traditional Guatemalan dish. As young girls, many women had learned to weave, embroider, and prepare *comida típica* from their mothers and sisters. Carmen, who joined the organization to capitalize on her weaving skills, described how weaving had been passed down from her mother.

Thanks to my *mamá*. I learned to weave from her. She began to teach me when I was eight years old. Since then, I was always weaving until I became a young woman and married. My husband worked, but I always had my weaving, my *telas de huipiles* [woven fabric made to be made into blouses]. I didn't like having to ask my husband for much money, and I, too, could work, (Carmen, interview, June 29, 2009).

These activities are traditional forms of female labor; accepted avenues for women to contribute to the household income (Ehlers 2000). However, informants consistently

described the local market for *comida típica* and *artesanía* as saturated and characterized by severe competition. Many women said they were unable to make a viable living from their work. The overwhelming majority had joined the organization in hopes that the *artesanía* program would enable them to access handicraft markets outside the community where they could receive higher prices for their products.

Women's economic insecurity had also affected their access to education. Hallman et al. found that amongst school-age children in Guatemala, "Poverty was the most consistent indicator of educational disadvantage, reducing chances for entering the school system and advancing within it" (2006: 13). Many women explained that their families lacked the financial resources to send them to school when they were young. Only one out of six women I interviewed had attended primary school. Some women explained that they did not receive an education because their brothers were sent to school. When financial constraints force families to choose which children will receive an education, male education is often prioritized. Today, less than 11 percent of Maya girls living in rural areas complete primary school, and the most common reason for leaving school is to help the family with household duties such as cooking, cleaning, and child care (Hallman et al. 2006). Women who joined Somos Mujeres described facing these same challenges as parents. For example, Mercedes, who has seven children, could only afford to send two of her children to school. "I have seven children, but of the seven, only two are studying right now because I don't have work. I don't have the money to give them for trips to school, for their notebooks, for all the things the school requires. I don't have the ability to do so," she explained. "I was so happy when I found out that Colóm (the Guatemalan President) would give my children help to go to school until the

sixth grade,” Mercedes said, referring to government plans to offer scholarships for poor children (interview, July 24, 2009).

The literacy rate of 39 percent amongst Maya women ages 15–64 underscores the staggering educational disadvantages they encounter. Within Somos Mujeres, the literacy rate was even lower. According to Chonita, only three of the 116 women in Somos Mujeres were literate and spoke Spanish. In Santiago, Tz’tujil is the primary language of 95 percent of residents (the other 5 percent being *ladina* Spanish speakers), and, of this group, only 54 percent speak Spanish (Schram and Etzel 2005; Censo de Santiago Atitan 2006). Within Somos Mujeres, however, only half of the women I asked (n=12) reported that they understood some Spanish; none were able to speak the language as a means of communication.

Gender norms and roles not only impacted income generating activities of women and access to education, they also shaped women’s role within the family. Most women described having significant family and household responsibilities. The majority have between two and eight children, though one had fourteen children. In interviews, nearly all women explained that they were responsible for household work such as buying food, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and caring for their children. Traditional understandings of the gendered division of labor continue to structure male and female relations in the household. For example, Arena’s description of her morning activities before she goes to the organization highlights how understandings of women’s domestic roles play out in their daily lives.

I don’t have problems with my husband or with my children because on days I know I will go to Somos Mujeres, I wake up early, early to make tortillas, to wash and clean. I take care of everything before I go. My husband doesn’t have a problem [with her going to the organization] because I am organized in my

caseras [house-keeping or domestic responsibilities]. I make the food early, and I leave it for them and I go (Arena, interview, July 2, 2009).

Women often described having less decision-making authority than their husbands regarding labor and income in the household. Five of the women I interviewed stated that their husbands had agreed to let them join Somos Mujeres only after learning that they would be compensated for attending *capacitaciones* and possibly receive material aid. Concepción explained, “My husband gave me permission to be in the project. We are hoping that we will get some fertilizer for the coffee we are growing. Something to help us maintain our plants” (interview, June 23, 2009).

Because women’s household and economic responsibilities outside the organization require significant time and energy, women often found it challenging to balance their participation in the organization with other duties. Several women indicated that they did not attend voluntary meetings because of household responsibilities. Lack of attendance and participation due to lack of time and energy means women have less say in decisions regarding the organization’s mission and programs. In addition, their lack of basic language skills directly affects their power and decision-making within the organization. Apart from Juana, who serves as president, none of the *junta directiva* officers speak Spanish; nor do they read or write in either language. Chonita concedes, “This is a problem.” Because the women who are officers and *vocales* lack the language and literacy skills necessary to perform the daily administrative tasks of running the organization, Juana and Chonita make many of the daily decisions regarding Somos Mujeres’ programming. However, Juana and Chonita have attempted to increase women’s participation by encouraging women to take part in meetings where the organization’s future is discussed, taking leadership positions within the organization,

and attending literacy classes. Yet, for many women, the competing demands of home and work take precedence over participation in Somos Mujeres. For those who do participate, they require assistance from Juana and Chonita to accomplish basic tasks. The sisters' capacities and their longevity within the organization coupled with the limitations of women who join have meant that the sisters have largely shaped the organization's mission and programs since its founding.

In the next section, I explore the sisters' vision of the organization. I describe how the sisters have attempted to develop a comprehensive model of women's development that responds to locally rooted obstacles and strengthens women's capacities to promote social change. At the same time, I explore how the barriers they face have meant that their model remains an ideal in important ways, never fully taking root. In turn, the ineffectual dimensions of some of Somos Mujeres' programs often color women's experience in the organization, a topic I explore in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: The Sisters' Vision of Somos Mujeres: A Comprehensive Approach to Women's Development

The Comprehensive Model of Women's Development

Juana and Chonita have been the guiding force behind Somos Mujeres' mission and programming since its formation in 1998. As their vision of the organization developed over time, Somos Mujeres evolved from a support group into an agent of women's development. Chonita explained,

We didn't always see their [women in the organization] needs. We were new to this. We didn't know what the needs of the women were and we didn't know how to identify them. When we started to lead the organization, over time, after we [Chonita and her sisters] received training [referring to *capacitaciones* the sisters attended in the early years of the organization], we saw the needs of the women and we began to work to address their needs (Chonita, interview, July 7, 2009).

Today, the sisters see women's development as a complex process that involves changing women's roles in cultural, economic, and political spheres. They hope to alter the underlying forces that maintain inequality amongst indigenous women—not simply to improve women's economic and material conditions, but to strengthen women's position in society. I argue that the sisters subscribe to a “comprehensive model” of women's development.¹² I use this term to underline the multi-pronged approach they favor and to distinguish it from other one-dimensional models of development, in particular market-based development programs that privilege the role of economic growth. Juana's brief

¹² Though the sisters did not use this term, I elected to describe their vision as “comprehensive” given the multi-faceted nature of the organization's mission and programs.

summation of the organization's mission illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of the model.

Our objective is to foster participation in economic, social, cultural, political, and educational aspects so that women can be actors in sustainable community development. That is our general focus (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

In this comprehensive model, the organization's programs work together to address specific obstacles the sisters have identified over the course of working with women. Through providing capacity training, education, economic opportunities and material assistance, the organization responds to local challenges including repressive gender relations, the exclusion of women from the education and political system, and economic vulnerability due to limited money-making opportunities for women. However, not all programs are equally successful. In particular, the organization's programs that aim to bolster women's economic position and provide for basic needs, namely the *artesanía* program and effort to provide material support have been unstable due to lack of resources, funds, and strategic connections with donors and *artesanía* buyers.

Gender Equality as the Linchpin in Women's Development

Juana and Chonita see historically and culturally rooted processes of discrimination and patriarchy as the cause of women's marginal position within their families, the local economy, and the political system. As a model, the comprehensive approach to development attempts to address these dimensions simultaneously. However, the sisters' see women's rights and gender equality as the linchpin upon which all other dimensions of women's development rest. In other words, they view patriarchal gender relations and women's own internalization of repressive gender norms as the greatest obstacle to women's development. Only when women come to see themselves as

valuable members of society, will they invest in their own individual education and economic capacity and take political action.

The sisters believe that women must be transformed. In their view, transformation entails creating lasting, substantive change in all dimensions of women's lives. This goal arose from Juana and Chonita's recognition that women needed more than psychological support and material assistance, which only addressed the proximate effects of violence and poverty. The sisters saw the need for programs that would enable women to exercise agency to change the cultural, economic, and political reality from which they had been excluded. Both Juana and Chonita hold a shared conception of an ideal, empowered woman, which opposes long-held assumptions about women's place in society. They see their task as helping women recreate themselves in the likeness of this ideal. In interviews, both Juana and Chonita described a number of characteristics that paint a picture of their ideal. An empowered woman believes that women are equal to men and that women and men should enjoy the same rights and opportunities. She is a partner to her husband, not a servant. She makes decisions regarding her household, and is free to leave her home. She can seek employment. She has the knowledge and skills to be a productive economic actor, to advance her own standing and the position of her family in the community. She uses her voice and engages in discussion with her husband, children, and *compañeras*.¹³ She makes her opinions and beliefs heard. She is an example for other women, and she promotes change within and beyond of her community.

¹³ Other women she knows; companions.

According to the sisters, women's transformation hinges on a process of *sensibilización*.¹⁴ Changing women's attitudes and behaviors through *sensibilización* has been a part of Somos Mujeres mission and programming since 1999, the organization's second year. Juana described the process, emphasizing the mental and emotional aspects that characterize *sensibilización*.

The way we carry out the process of *sensibilización* is to legitimize our dignity, to legitimize our rights. It is a process of change, of transforming women so that they can make demands, so that they can speak, and overcome our fear, our shame, we can carry out many processes. But this process has not been easy for us, for women to overcome their fear and shame. Because these are the challenges that we have confronted—that if a woman does not speak, she is lost—since the time of the conquest. It left our eyes closed, and women were devalued instead of valued. I believe the work we are doing now empowers us. What we want is to transform women like I have been, as an indigenous woman. I can speak, I can talk about the reality that in my country there is *machismo*, there is discrimination against illiterate women, against indigenous women. (Juana, interview, July, 19, 2009).

According to Chonita, *sensibilización* requires that women “talk, they speak, that they be a part of the organization, that they participate, that they work, that they demonstrate this in *capacitaciones*. This is *sensibilización*” (interview, July 7, 2009). Juana and Chonita see *sensibilización* as the process that enables women to shed their fear, to acknowledge their value, to make demands to improve their lives; they emerge empowered women, changed and inspired to bring other women to the fold.

To bring about this process, Somos Mujeres offers a number of programs including *capacitaciones*, educational classes, and *reuniones* where women discuss the organization's mission. These programs introduce women to issues of women's rights and gender equality, and are important in prompting women to reevaluate beliefs about

¹⁴ In English, *sensibilizar* translates to “to raise awareness of.” However, Juana and Chonita use the term to mean both changes in women attitudes and values as well as the action women take as a part of the *sensibilización* process. Because the English translation does not capture the importance of action, I have decided to use the Spanish word.

their assumed inferiority. Somos Mujeres is open to all women, but Chonita explained that for those women who want to join, there are requirements. “They have to participate, to take part in the social aspects. They have to want to *capacitar* [to raise their awareness of the issues facing women and build their capacities]. Women who only want aid and don’t want to work are not good candidates,” Chonita stated (personal communication, June 26, 2009). Women who join are strongly encouraged to attend literacy classes, *capacitaciones* through the Red Cross initiative, and *reuniones* where they are expected to take part in discussions, and both the sisters and the Red Cross monitor women’s participation. Before I take a more in-depth look at specific programs the organization offers, I first want to return the topic of local gender relations and to make clear the patterns the sisters hope to change.

Gender Relations in Santiago: Conformity and Contravention in Public and Private Spheres

The sisters’ shared ideal of an empowered woman rests on a critique of established gender roles. According to the sisters, Guatemalan society, including indigenous communities, have been and continue to be highly patriarchal. To examine gender relations in the community, I draw upon the concept of separate spheres (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974), and consider how understandings of public and private structure women’s activities and experiences. Anthropologists and scholars from diverse fields have critiqued the idea of separate spheres on the basis that this binary model obscures how women and men transgress these boundaries (Ferree 1990; Bhattacharjee 2006). Feminist theorists have argued that this dichotomy overlooks the role of women’s contributions in maintaining social systems (Power 2004). As I explore how

understandings of gender affects women in the community, I draw attention to how women cross these boundaries and how their labor contributes to the family. In addition, I demonstrate how the sisters' message of women's rights and women's development reflects local gender norms as it simultaneously promotes a shift in men and women's roles that upholds the importance of the family.

In the community, the idea of separate spheres—that women are bound to the home while men operate in the public arena—does influence where women can go, who they can spend their time with, and what activities they can pursue. Women most often bear the principle responsibility for child care, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic duties, and in general, men exercise authority in determining women's social and economic activities. Throughout my time in Santiago, many women explained to me that their husbands did not want them to leave the house. In the middle class family I lived with, the daughter, who is separated from her husband with whom she has a child, explained that, at times, her husband would become violently angry with her when she left the home to do the shopping or to visit family. When asked, "How did you come to the organization?" about half of the women I interviewed explained that they asked their husbands for permission, and that their husbands had agreed because their participation would help the family economically.

Though there are relatively clear cultural *norms* regarding male and female activities, women transgress the public/private dichotomy *in practice*. Women in the organization explained that they left their homes to sell *comida típica* and other foodstuffs in the marketplace. They made trips to sell handicrafts to other women in the community, and they spent on average from 12 to 20 hours per week at the organization.

Class is important in understanding how gender norms play out in the lives of women. As Ehlers (2000) has noted, women from wealthier economic backgrounds are often more isolated in the home than poor women, their activities more restricted because there is no economic need for them to leave the home to work. For women in *Somos Mujeres*, meeting the basic needs of their families often requires that they, and their children, leave the home to supplement the household income. Yet, as I described earlier, even as women transgress the private boundary to contribute to the household income, cultural understandings of gender influence the types of work women perform. Producing handicrafts, selling *comida típica*, and operating food stands in the marketplace are all forms of labor that are seen as strictly women's work though they do not take place inside the home.

While women in *Somos Mujeres* may enjoy greater freedom to leave the home and work, men continue to exercise authority and power within the family and women's labor at home and in the public sphere remains highly circumscribed. Juana and Chonita want to change these patterns. Because of the deeply embedded nature of gender relations in the community, the sisters present gender equality and women's rights to members in a way that straddles continuity and change. Their conception of gender equity preserves the family as the fundamental unit of society, but promotes equality amongst men and women. It simultaneously celebrates women's contributions while promoting a shift in men and women's roles.

Our general approach is that the man and woman are equal. The woman can make tortillas but the man can support the family, he can help the mother, and clean the house too, tend to the animals. The woman can do the same roles that men do. And the man can do the same roles as women do. That's the concept that we tell people to raise awareness. Equality of opportunity. There are some things that we cannot do, but there are the things the man cannot do. But generally, we have the

same rights. But in our culture, the man goes and brings wood from the mountain and returns. He lays back, and woman washes his feet. The woman has to serve man. But gender equality is from the West, yes? How can we focus on this in our culture and not lose our identity? This was also a problem. Sadly women have been devalued. We started raising questions. What are the problems of women and what are the problems of families? What can the man do, what can the woman do. Questions of sharing activities and work. Can the man wash clothes? Yes, he can do so. The woman washes the clothes so why can't the man? The woman sweeps so why can't the man? The woman can go to the mountain and cut wood. She can take her machete and go to the mountain just like the man. We have spent a lot of time trying to change the roles (between women and men) though *capacitaciones*. We have talked about treating sons and daughters equally because men are not superior to women. We are equal. These are basic things that can transform life. It has been a process of *sensibilización* and capacity building through *capacitaciones* and *reuniones* on these topics (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

For the sisters, gender equality requires changing women and men's roles within the household so that power and decision-making is equal and responsibilities are balanced. Importantly, the sisters connect the message of women's rights to the everyday practices of the women and their families. Juana and Chonita explain gender equality in terms of women's daily lives. According to Lind (2005), activism related to women issues is often a personal, culturally specific practice, especially when performed by grassroots organizations.

Feminism has multiple meanings in the context of community women's organizing. How it is interpreted within small, grassroots women's groups that have little access to political and economic power depends on the group members' own learning processes and the terrain within which they relate to and negotiate with actors and institutions outside their own neighborhoods. Their own forms of identification with feminism depend more on these relationships than on their individual 'readings' of feminist thought or activism (Lind 2005:105).

The message the sisters present reflects their own experience and learning as well as their observation and knowledge of the lives of other women in the organization and the community. In Santiago, the family remains the anchoring unit of society. Thus, women's development is not an individual act but is bound up in social relations. Women's

development, which, in the eyes of the sisters, hinges on enjoying the same rights and having equality, necessitates a shift in the family so that women enjoy equal power. The sisters do not argue that women should not perform household work or serve as caregivers. Instead, they assert that men can also perform this labor. At home, men and women can share the domestic load, which in turn, enables women to invest in themselves through education, entrepreneurship, and political action. Women can then be both mothers and business owners. Wives and entrepreneurs. The sisters' critique of gender roles differs from other feminist perspectives such as *cultural feminism*, which argue that men and women are fundamentally different (Ghodsee 2004). Instead, they see men and women as equal, deserving of the same opportunities and capable of the same work. Their conception of an empowered woman does not radically contest the association of women with the domestic sphere. The family unit and women's activities remains firmly entrenched in this vision of society. Creating a shift in gender relations, as Juana assured me many times, is a process. Were the sisters to present gender equality in terms that deemphasized the family, the organization's message might not resonate with local women.

Capacitaciones: The Vehicle of Sensibilización

To induce a shift in gender relations, Somos Mujeres have relied primarily on *capacitaciones*. *Capacitaciones*, as Berger (2006) notes, are a common practice of women's organizations in Guatemala. *Capacitaciones* resemble workshops and aim to provide participants with useful knowledge of a subject relevant to their lives. In contrast to conventional classes, *capacitaciones* encourage a greater degree of participation, engagement, and discussion. From 1999 to 2007, Somos Mujeres offered *capacitaciones*

on topics such as self-esteem, women's rights, gender equality, and domestic violence. In September, 2007, the organization entered into a partnership with the Guatemalan Red Cross, beginning a two-year long entrepreneurship initiative, and *capacitaciones* shifted to a focus on business administration and production of *artesanía*, a topic I return to later in this chapter.

Throughout 1998 and 1999, the sisters traveled to cities across Guatemala to attend *capacitaciones* on women's rights, gender equality, and domestic violence funded by the Foundation of Guillermo Toriello (la Fundación de Guillermo Toriello¹⁵). Upon their return, they recreated the capacity training they had undertaken. Doing so required few resources, and the sisters held the *capacitaciones* in the family's home. For nearly ten years, the sisters led the *capacitaciones* with the goal of promoting a shift in local gender roles and women's rights. The *capacitaciones* serve as a space for women to learn about women's issues, to observe others engaged in discussion, negotiation, and planning, and to exercise agency by voicing their opinions and concerns.

In the sisters' view, women's participation in *capacitaciones* and *reuniones* are fundamental to the process of *sensibilización*, in which women come to value themselves and put into practice their newfound agency. Participation—by speaking, discussing, and questioning—is a signal that women are engaged in the process of transformation. It is an outward expression, a visible indicator that reevaluation is occurring, that women feel confident to express themselves, to make their opinions known. Juana explained, “The

¹⁵According to the foundation's website, the FGT was created in 1996 by mandate of the Peace Accords agreement. During 1997 and 1998 the foundation instituted programs “to contribute to development in the country and promote national harmony” (FGT N.d.). The FGT sponsored *capacitaciones* on gender equity, women's rights, and domestic violence in years following the ratification of the Peace Accords, which had called for the promotion of gender equality and an end to discrimination against indigenous women.

first thing is participation, how women organize. It's important to the process of *sensibilización*. It's part of a process of change, of transforming women. Yes, we can be successful. We don't have to be afraid or ashamed" (interview June, 17, 2009).

For Juana and Chonita, *sensibilización* also involves a political dimension. Scholars (Berger 2006; Nelson 2009; Fischer and McKenna Brown 1996) have demonstrated that at the national level, women's issues have been neglected or only partially addressed. Increasingly, women occupy some important positions. In 2000, six of the twenty-two governors at the department level were women. However, representation remains low at the municipal level (Garrard-Burnett 2001). In Santiago, women's rights have typically been deemphasized by the municipal government. The Municipal Office of Women, which Juana heads, is one of the only formal government institutions in which women are represented. All of the representatives on the municipal council are male. Though women do serve as representatives for their *cantón* (neighborhood) and present agendas to the council, for the most part, women occupy few political positions within their community. Because patriarchal notions of gender have also impacted women's political representation and participation, the sisters hope that by transforming women, they will play a more active role in political and social processes of change.

The hope is that women can use their voice and be involved in civic and political participation. A woman could be a mayor or the governor, even president. We hope that more women can be involved in community councils (*cocoldes*). That they participate and are heard by the municipal committee and are also involved in political parties because, from that position women can make decisions. Our hope is that women can focus more on development (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

Education

Juana and Chonita found that *capacitaciones* were not enough to create a marked shift in gender relations or women's position in their families and community. While *capacitaciones* were essential to the process of *sensibilización*, other programs such as education and economic and material assistance were needed to build women's capacities and create tangible change. Thus, education became vital component of Somos Mujeres programming. Somos Mujeres began offering classes in the mid-2000s as the sisters became concerned about the effects of illiteracy on women's participation in the organization and local economy. As I described in the previous chapter, illiteracy inhibits members from taking on decision-making roles in the organization, civic organizations, and government. In addition, illiteracy and lack of education confines women's economic activities to their own community where markets for forms of women's labor, such as handicraft production and selling *comida típica* and foodstuffs, are characterized by considerable competition.

With Chonita's background in teaching and the investment of the sisters own time and energy, Somos Mujeres was able to offer classes. As a community-based grassroots organization, Somos Mujeres had limited funds and resources at its disposal, and providing educational classes was feasible because it required few resources apart from the sisters' skills. In the beginning, Chonita taught literacy classes in which women could learn to speak, read, and write in Spanish. When a local NGO, la Asociación de Desarrollo Comunitario de Cantón Panabaj (ADECCAP),¹⁶ funded a teacher to take over the literacy course, Chonita began a health and society course. At the time of my research, both classes took place at the same time on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

¹⁶ The Association for Community Development in Cantón Panabaj.

evenings and typically lasted from one to two hours. After joining the organization, women first complete the literacy class and then move onto the health and society course.

These classes, though to a lesser degree than *capacitaciones*, provide opportunities for the sisters to present their message of women's rights and gender equality to members. In one class, Chonita reviewed the parts of the body. She drew a man and a woman on the board. She told the four women who were present, "Our bodies are equal." She explained that the "female and male bodies have the same parts," she paused, "for the most part." The women laughed quietly, and Chonita smiled. She then reiterated with a calm seriousness, "Our bodies are equal. We are equal."

For the sisters, education takes on great importance against the historical backdrop of discrimination against indigenous groups and women in particular—a way to counter inequity, give women autonomy, and enable them to access greater opportunities. In the previous chapter, I examined how education was fundamental to Juana and Chonita's own experience and important in their decision to begin Somos Mujeres. Understandably, the sisters want to provide women with opportunities akin to their own.

Although Somos Mujeres has offered classes for nearly five years and invested a great deal of time and energy into women's basic education, the classes appear to have had little impact in improving women's language capacities. When I observed classes, attendance was usually low: four to eight women came to each class. The sisters strongly encourage women to attend, and even record attendance to chart each woman's participation. Concepción, who joined Somos Mujeres six months before our interview, felt that the classes were beneficial. Yet, a minority of women regularly come to classes. The program itself has enjoyed relative stability. Chonita and the other instructor reliably

hold class, but women's participation is constrained by factors outside the organization. Because women often find it difficult to attend due to competing household and economic responsibilities, classes are less of a priority than *capacitaciones*, for which women are compensated.

Economic Opportunities through the Artesanía Program

In the sisters' eyes, capacity training and education are central to the *process* of women's *sensibilización*. However, women face dire economic and material conditions that the organization also strives to address. Providing economic opportunities and material assistance has been a part of the organization's efforts since Juana's parents first allowed women work on their land to harvest food. Since that time, women's economic development has become a core pillar of their comprehensive mission, and the sisters see it as key to creating lasting change. Somos Mujeres has attempted to support women's work, build women's economic capabilities, and provide avenues for women to earn money through the *artesanía* program. As she told me the first time we met, "Women's work in Guatemala has been and continues to be devalued. We work in *artesanía*. Our goal is that women's work is valued. That women can be stronger economically" (Juana, interview, June 17, 2009).

In Juana and Chonita's view, patriarchal notions of women's work have limited women's economic activities. The *artesanía* program, which began the same year the organization was formed, is an economic development strategy that capitalizes on women's existing knowledge and skills. In theory, it takes women's labor, which has historically been devalued and confined to the informal economy, and renders it a viable way to make a living through formal economic exchange with national and international

distributors and buyers of handicrafts. Somos Mujeres would receive steady orders for various types of handicrafts from stores and buyers, and the organization would provide women with the *materia prima* to produce products free of charge. Groups of women, depending on their specialization, would then make the products, and the profits, less the organizational costs, would be distributed amongst the group of women who produced products.

Ehlers (2000) who conducted research with women in Guatemala has argued that the economic vulnerability of women renders them dependent on men, whether as husbands, fathers or even sons. For the sisters, building women's capacity entails equipping women with the skills and knowledge to be strong economic actors. Economic autonomy reinforces women's ability to make life decisions, and, in the view of Juana and Chonita, gives women greater power to engage in political action and social change.

We want to transform women's lives by positioning ourselves economically. Through our work in *artesanía*, we want to generate work, we want to mobilize sales and export orders and create revenue. Over these ten years we have worked to value women's work. We are a collective organization with a social mission to promote women's autonomy and to be a part of the whole development process in women's lives. It has not been easy to change the lives of women. It's a process. It was not overnight (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

In 1998, Somos Mujeres began searching for organizations, businesses and other institutions that would order *artesanía* products from the organization. That year, Mejorar la Vida, a regional NGO, provided Somos Mujeres with the material to make an order for purses, and the *artesanía* program was formed in response to the request. Yet, Chonita explained that from the beginning of the *artesanía* program until 2007 when Somos Mujeres entered into a partnership with the Guatemalan Red Cross, the organization only received sporadic orders. One of the larger orders the organization received was from a

woman in Guatemala City who wanted woven and embroidered pillows. It took the women two months during summer 2007 to complete the order.

Though the organization has received sporadic, one-time orders in the past, the sisters found it difficult to develop stable, long-term relationships with other NGOs or buyers. Instead, the organization mobilized women as they received orders for products. On some occasions, Somos Mujeres provided women with the raw materials, or *materia prima*, to make products. At times, especially when orders were small, women were required to subsidize their own work, purchasing thread and beads themselves and were reimbursed later, often much later. Since the beginning of the organization, the *artesanía* program remained a fledgling component of the comprehensive agenda, never fully taking root as the necessary raw materials and ever-elusive market remained out of reach.

The Partnership with the Guatemalan Red Cross

In 2007, Juana traveled to a conference in Xela where by chance she met Romero, a representative of the Guatemalan Red Cross. Chonita told the story of how this chance encounter led to a relationship with the organization that would greatly change Somos Mujeres.

He was looking for a women's organization, and my sister said, 'my sisters and I have a women's organization.' He said, 'I can meet with you.' Juana gave him directions and then came Romero. He saw us as we are, and then went. Then he came again with his coordinator. Then came another visit to see the work we do and we had a small exhibition of handicrafts. It is our view that no one supported us, just us working there. Well, they saw what we needed. A year went by. We called, but they did not answer. We called and no answer. And the year passed and we were no longer thinking about it, and then came Romero. He called on the phone that morning and told us 'we're coming tomorrow with a surprise.' We called the *junta directiva*, and when Romero arrived, he said that we needed to sign the contract right now. And so Juana and I went to Guatemala [City], and Juana signed because she is the representative (Chonita, interview, July 7, 2009).

The Red Cross offered Somos Mujeres funding and assistance to implement an entrepreneurship and occupational training initiative centered on *artesanía* production, which altered the organization's focus and capacity in important ways. As a part of the initiative, *capacitaciones* that had focused on topics of gender equality and women's rights became forums for instruction on business administration and *artesanía* production. The Red Cross provided instruction materials for the *capacitaciones* and compensated teachers who were contracted through another local NGO, ADECCAP. Romero, the Red Cross worker who facilitated the partnership, worked full-time at the organization for two years beginning in September, 2007. He monitored women's attendance at *capacitaciones*, reported on the impacts of the program, and led workshops on *artesanía* techniques.

According to Juana, the Red Cross supported three types of *capacitaciones*: business, associative, and occupational. The business class centered on financial management and administration and the occupational component instructed women in production techniques. The associative component included topics such as leadership, self-esteem, women's rights, and human rights. However, three women I interviewed who had joined the organization in the six months prior explained that they had not been introduced the associative topics in *capacitaciones*. In addition, when I asked women to list *capacitaciones* they had recently attended, only one mentioned a *capacitación* on domestic violence in the family. Instead, women listed business and occupational *capacitaciones*. It appeared that business and occupational instruction dominated the training. Thus, the initiative marked a significant shift in the organization's focus from

issues of gender empowerment toward an emphasis on economic, market-based development.

As a part of this transition, the initiative included measures to increase the production capacity of the *artesanía* program. Stable funding enabled the number of women in the program to grow, and more women gained skills to produce handicrafts. Groups of women specialized in a particular type of *artesanía* production, and combined, 70 of the 116 women in the organization participated in some form of training in *artesanía* (see Table 1). Monetary incentives were key to the expansion of the program. For each *capacitación* women attended, they received Q20 (USD2.50). *Capacitaciones* took place two to three times per week, and women had the potential to receive as much as Q240 (USD30) per month for taking part, a considerable amount in relation to their estimated average household income of Q400 (USD50) per month. This practice had not been possible for earlier *capacitaciones* on gender given the organization's limited funds. With the culmination of the initiative in September, 2009, *capacitaciones* and monetary incentives ended, and at present, it is unclear how the absence of these funds have affected women.

Specialization	Number of Women
1) <i>mostecilla</i> , bead working	20
2) <i>cose de máquina</i> , sewing machine	15
3) <i>cose de mano</i> , embroidery	15
4) <i>teledor</i> , weaving program	20

Table 1: Women's Specializations in the *Artesanía* Program

Apart from enlarging the labor reserve within the organization, the Red Cross also increased the production capacity of the program by donating mechanized equipment, which enabled Somos Mujeres to produce *artesanía* on a larger scale. In 2007, the Red Cross supplied six industrial sewing machines for the *cose de máquina* (sewing machine) *artesanía* program and two pedal-operated looms. For Somos Mujeres, the partnership with the Red Cross marked the greatest source of funding and material assistance the organization has had to date, as well as the greatest degree of outside oversight.

This is the first agencia that has supported us, that came to support our work. Before, no. There were others that helped us but none like the Red Cross today. Yes, for us it is very big. Other institutions, yes they have helped us but only a little (Chonita, interview, July 7, 2009).

Though funding from the Red Cross enabled the number of women in the *artesanía* program to grow and provided equipment to produce handicrafts, the Red Cross initiative did not address the crucial problems of locating raw materials to make handicrafts and accessing the *artesanía* market. The initiative focused explicitly on training: how to produce *artesanía* on a large scale, how to run a profitable business, how to manage financial resources. At the time of my research, Juana explained that Somos Mujeres had not developed relationships with any additional donors or buyers. The actual work of building connections to access raw materials and identify potential markets remained the responsibility of the sisters and the women.

Because of the persistent lack of access to the market, the initiative appears to have done little to bolster Somos Mujeres' long-term financial stability. Instead, it offered temporary funding and directed the organization's energy and effort toward capacity building in entrepreneurship. Upon the termination of the partnership with the Red Cross

in September, 2009, Somos Mujeres faced the daunting task of identifying *artesanía* markets and buyers as well as managing all steps of the production and exchange process.

From the perspective of Juana and Chonita, the Red Cross partnership has helped Somos Mujeres acquire the capacity to produce handicrafts. The sisters view the initiative as a vital step in process of building a viable *artesanía* program—a goal they had not been able to achieve since founding the organization. However, the initiative has also deemphasized the *sensibilización* component of the organization’s comprehensive mission, which detracts from its ability to bring about social change. Juana was reluctant to acknowledge this shift, perhaps afraid to criticize the Red Cross, upon whose support the organization was reliant.

Material Assistance

Somos Mujeres also provides occasional material support to women in the organization and their families such as foodstuffs, fertilizer and clothing. The organization has been able to offer material support on a more regular basis due to more relationships with donor NGOs and the local government. However, because Somos Mujeres does not have the financial resources to purchase the resources itself, it relies on funding and donations from other NGOs to offer aid and material assistance, which it then distributes. From 2003 to 2007, Vemos la Necesidad¹⁷ donated chickens, rabbits, corn, and some fertilizer to the organization for it to distribute amongst members. In 2007, the organization provided 120 rabbits and 600 chickens to members. Another organization, Mejoramiento de Vivienda Campesinas,¹⁸ provided corn, beans, machetes, and hoes for two years

¹⁷ Vemos la Necesidad translates to “we see the need” in English.

¹⁸ Mejoramiento de Viviendo Campesinas translates to “Rural Housing Improvement” in English.

during the early 2000s. The local government also provided fertilizer to the organization from 2005 to 2008.

However, at the time of my research, Somos Mujeres had been unable to provide aid to women because Vemos la Necesidad no longer donated items to the organization. Like the *artesanía* program, providing reliable material assistance requires Somos Mujeres to have long-standing, strategic relationships with other organizations. Even when NGOs provide materials, the items may not meet women's pressing needs. When I met with a group of women in Somos Mujeres to conduct a survey, Josefina told me that she received rabbits from the organization, which she accepted and took home, allowing them to run free in the dirt yard surrounding her small house. When I asked about the rabbits, Josefina chuckled then paused. "They ran away," she explained. This example, while amusing, illustrates an important aspect of the organization's programming, especially the material and economic dimensions: Somos Mujeres lacks the resources to direct and implement its own programs. Instead, it relies on support from external organizations and donors, whose goals and programs may be disconnected from the locally bound exigencies of women in the organization. A donor organization had rabbits to give, and Somos Mujeres accepted them because they were offered. And they ran away. Yet, women in the organization remain in need of basic items: corn, beans, sugar, oil, fertilizer, vegetable seedlings. These items are in demand, and Somos Mujeres tries to provide them by seeking out donors and partners. When these aren't available, they'll take the rabbits.

In the past, Somos Mujeres began a small coffee production program, or *café cultura*, though less energy was dedicated toward its growth. However, at the time of my

research, Chonita had begun making greater attempts to expand the program. Somos Mujeres now hopes to teach 40 women and their families to grow organic coffee. The organization's goal is to supply the plants and fertilizer as well as educational classes about growing coffee to families. The families' *milpas* are likely too small to produce coffee, and it was unclear what land would be used for coffee production.

Programs for Children and Adolescents

Somos Mujeres has also established programs aimed at youth in the community though this is a secondary focus of the organization. Programs for children and adolescents began in the early years of the organization. In 1998, Somos Mujeres started a typing academy for adolescents from the community, which continues to this day. The program received 26 typewriters from *la Fundación de Guillermo Toriello*, and every year roughly 400 adolescent students undergo a six- to eight-week typing course through the organization. Two groups of approximately 20 students attend typing classes for an hour every Friday and Saturday morning, which Chonita oversees. The wide reach of the typing program has spread awareness of the organization throughout the community. Anita, who was a young married woman in my host family, had attended the academy as a teenager. Teenagers, irrespective of class or *cantón*, often take typing classes at the organization because they are not offered in regular school.

Somos Mujeres also provides childcare services on Saturday mornings for women in the community. In the past, the organization has received donations of children clothing, which it has distributed to children who are present at the organization for childcare. Often, Juana, Chonita, and women in the organization with children perform childcare services for other women who bring their children to the organization. In

interviews with women in the organization, many explained that they became aware of the opportunities that existed for them because their children were involved in one of the programs.

Concluding Thoughts

As a model, the sisters' approach epitomizes the ideals of many development institutions and scholars who critique top-down, economic-based approaches to development (Morvaridi 2008; Sharma 2008). Somos Mujeres is a grassroots organization, comprised of women from the same community who have organized to address their self-identified challenges. Development scholars increasingly express support for local development initiatives, arguing that they are in sync with culturally specific challenges (Kleymeyer 1996). Somos Mujeres programs are structured to respond to a host of local obstacles, including repressive gender relations, the exclusion of women from the education and political system, and the limited economic opportunities for women. It is a comprehensive approach. However, close scrutiny of its programming in action highlights cracks in the comprehensive model. Though capacity training and education have remained stable components due in large part to the limited financial and material resources they require, classes in particular have not garnered widespread participation. Women do attend *capacitaciones* in strikingly better numbers; however, women are also compensated for attendance, the costs of which were underwritten by the Red Cross. Efforts to implement programs that improve women's economic and material conditions have been even more unstable since the organization was founded. Somos Mujeres has struggled to identify markets for selling *artesanía* and form strategic relationships with other NGOs or donors that might provide raw materials

to make products. Somos Mujeres is capable of providing training and classes, but the organization struggles to meet women's concrete needs.

The organization's economic vulnerability was an important condition in the sisters' decision to enter into a partnership with the Guatemalan Red Cross. The promise of stable funding and support was a welcome respite from the reliance on internal resources. Yet, the partnership has significantly reshaped Somos Mujeres' programs. During the early 2000s, Somos Mujeres was known in the community for its support of women's rights and gender equality. The organization promoted this mission through radio advertisements, declarations at public events and municipal meetings, and grassroots advocacy by the sisters and some fervent members. At the time, programs focused intensively on creating a shift in gender relations at the local level. In 2007, when Somos Mujeres entered into a partnership with the Red Cross and began an entrepreneurship and occupational training initiative, *capacitaciones* transitioned from a focus on women's rights and gender equality to entrepreneurship and occupational development. In addition, the partnership with the Red Cross has ushered in a period of prolonged training, and the outcome of this initiative remains unknown. While women attend classes and *capacitaciones*, their impoverished economic and material situations persist and, for some, worsen.

Chapter 5: Women's Experience in the Organization

Thus far, I have argued that Somos Mujeres' vision and programs attempt to respond to a host of local obstacles that women face, according to the sisters. I now turn to the experience of women's in the organization, and examine the impacts of the comprehensive model on their lives. Most women joined the organization to improve their livelihoods and material conditions. I found that the overwhelming majority prioritize programs that provide tangible gains such as material assistance and *artesanía* production over those that aimed at changing women's values, capacities, and social position such as education, capacity building on issues related to gender, and *reuniones*. Though women experienced positive changes from their participation in classes, *capacitaciones*, and interaction with other women, the economic and material expectations of most women have gone unmet. I argue that the inconsistency of the economic and material assistance programs diminishes women's confidence in the organization, with the effect of compromising its broader comprehensive mission. My goal is to provide a nuanced view of these patterns and to highlight the complex relationships individual women have with Somos Mujeres.

The Spectrum of Women's Experience in the Organization

I conducted in-depth interviews with twelve members of the organization who were a part of Somos Mujeres' *artesanía* program and were currently undergoing capacity training in entrepreneurship through the Red Cross initiative. The interviews

with the women made clear that women's experiences in the organization varied, and their experiences directly influenced their satisfaction with the organization. I focus on three women whose experiences reflect larger patterns amongst the twelve women I interviewed. I then turn to a discussion of the larger patterns in which I argue that a majority of women who join Somos Mujeres appear to lose confidence in the organization over time. Women invest a great deal of time and energy into the organization, but their economic and material conditions do not significantly improve. As a result, women appear to become less motivated to participate and invest in programs such as education, unpaid *capacitaciones*, and *reuniones*, which aim to foster social change and political action. I conclude that the myriad programs the organization offers *do* attempt to respond to local needs, but that barriers, which I detail in the following chapter, undercut the effectiveness of the programs.

Concepción: "I believe that help will come because the President is working for us."

Concepción had joined Somos Mujeres six months prior to our interview. At thirty-six years old, she was married with several young children. Concepción had rarely left her home before joining Somos Mujeres. Similar to many women I interviewed, she cared for her children and her family's home while her husband worked as a *jornalero* cutting wood to sell in town. Through her neighbors, she became aware that the organization provided weekend childcare and occasionally gave food and clothes to children. Concepción brought her children to Somos Mujeres in hopes that they would receive help.

Juana's sister, Chonita, told me that if my children enrolled in this partnership, they would receive help, but the help did not come. Then Juana told me that if I wanted to be in classes and that maybe later I would receive help. That is why I

joined. Because of the help they said they could give my children more than anything (Concepción, interview, June 23, 2009).

Initially, Concepción had not intended to join the organization herself. Instead, she was seeking a way to provide for her children's basic needs. However, Juana explained that if she joined and participated in classes, she and her children would be more likely to receive support. If she joined, she could take part in the capacity training through the Red Cross, which paid Q20 per *capacitación*. The sisters would find an assignment or a specialization within the *artesanía* program for her, and she would make products once buyers placed orders. Concepción spoke with her husband about Juana's offer, and he allowed her to join the organization. She joined in February, 2009, and since then has attended literacy classes, entrepreneurship *capacitaciones* through the Red Cross initiative, and *reuniones*.

Since joining Somos Mujeres, she had come to see her involvement as a promising strategy to find work and provide for her family. "I would like for the organization to offer the materials and opportunity to work so I can raise my children," Concepción explained (interview, June 23, 2009). Before joining, she had embroidered the colorful *huipil* blouses women wear, selling them to vendors who then resold them to women and tourists. She was hopeful that Somos Mujeres would provide her with more stable and lucrative opportunities to work as an artisan. She explained that Juana and Chonita were searching for buyers so that she and the other women in the program could make and sell their products.

Concepción was optimistic about the ability of the organization to better her economic position. Her confidence was based on the statements of other women who confirmed that they had received help in the past as well as on her assessment of the

sister's efforts to locate buyers for products and donors who would provide food, clothing and other items for the organization to deliver to women.

I have heard that Somos Mujeres has benefited the others [women in the organization]. Up to now, I have not received anything. But others have received their materials, food like corn and beans in the past. ... I think [help] will [come] now. The President is working so that help comes but it takes time. I believe that it will come and because the President is working for us to move forward (Concepción, interview, June 23, 2009).

In addition, Concepción described literacy classes as a positive aspect of her involvement. "I am learning to read and write," Concepción said. "I still have the classes while I wait [for help to come]." Though she enjoyed the classes, Concepción was uncomfortable taking part in *capacitaciones* and *reuniones* where women are encouraged to speak and give their opinions. "I don't participate in the *reuniones* or decisions. I'm too nervous. I attend but I don't participate," she explained.

In general, Concepción felt that devoting her time to the organization and its programs was beneficial to her despite the fact that she had experienced little improvement in her economic situation as a result of joining. Instead, her hope was firmly anchored in the future, what the organization *would* do for her. Her perspective of the organization mirrored the opinions of other newer members who, like her, focused on potential benefits and described the sisters as working on behalf of their interests.

Maritza: "They have promised but haven't followed through yet."

Like Concepción, Maritza became involved in Somos Mujeres through her young children. In 2005 when torrential rains from Hurricane Stan caused mudslides to cover much of Panabaj, the outlying *cantón* where Maritza and her family lived, her family lost their home and belongings along with the *milpa* where they grew their food. After the storm, Somos Mujeres reached out to women and children in the *cantón*, and the

youngest of Maritza's fourteen children began attending childcare at the organization on Saturdays. Juana approached her about opportunities to work as an artisan for Somos Mujeres. Maritza had been making purses and wallets for Artesanas Mayas, another organization headquartered in a nearby town, and she saw Somos Mujeres as way to supplement her income. At the time of our interview, Maritza had been involved in the Somos Mujeres for nearly four years, and her perspective was markedly different from Concepción's.

Maritza felt that joining Somos Mujeres had done little to improve her economic condition. Though she had received occasional material support such as corn, beans, and oil, she had joined in search of stable long-term opportunities to work as an artisan. She compared the *artesanía* programs of Somos Mujeres and Artesanas Mayas, describing Somos Mujeres' program as unreliable and inconsistent. Maritza was especially worried because Artesanas Mayas had recently downsized their *artesanía* program and offered her less work. She was increasingly reliant on Somos Mujeres to earn a living.

Right now, I'm in Somos Mujeres but I would like to join another organization for more support. But I don't know if they would allow this. Life before [Somos Mujeres] was very difficult because I had to care for my children and didn't have sure work but in comparison to now, it is the same. It was better with Artesanas Mayas [the other organization] because I had a contract and a salary and was able to buy 3 quintales [roughly 300 lbs] of corn every two weeks because I have 14 children. But right now it is even harder because [Artesanas Mayas] does not have much work and is not paying and I can't buy corn. And in the last month I could only buy 1 quintal [100 pounds]¹⁹ of corn. [Somos Mujeres] has promised but hasn't followed through yet with the loom so I can sell *huipiles*. As of now, it hasn't come (Maritza, interview, June 24, 2009).

¹⁹ One quintal of corn or approximately 100 pounds divided amongst Maritza's sixteen person household is roughly 6 pounds of corn per person each month. Per capita analysis of corn intake in Venezuela estimated monthly intake at 6.8 pounds per person (Imhoff-Kunsch et al. 2007). However, poor families often eat a corn-based diet, and few foods, apart from beans, oil, and occasionally eggs, contribute to their caloric intake. Thus, Maritza's family consumed an average amount of corn; however, their diet consisted of little else.

Maritza's concerns were also compounded because her family's stake in the success of Somos Mujeres was especially high. Two of her daughters had joined Somos Mujeres after her. They had woven shawls for the organization but had not been compensated for their work. Maritza talked about the worry that she and other women felt about the prospect of going unpaid.

My daughters are working and making *telas* [woven fabric] but up to now, they have not been paid. I worry about whether they will get paid because we are hungry. My daughters are working and giving their time. At the same time, for example, there are two older women here [in Somos Mujeres] that are also working. They are upset too. They wonder, 'What are we going to do if they don't pay us?' They're giving their time. But we are hoping that we receive something (Maritza, interview, June 24, 2009).

Maritza was confused and frustrated by Somos Mujeres' inability to fulfill the promises she felt that they made. She had devoted a great deal of time and energy in the organization over four years. She had complied with the sisters' wishes that she attend classes and *capacitaciones*, that she be present for *reuniones* and meetings. Though she was concerned by the lack of work through Artesanas Mayas, her frustration centered primarily on Somos Mujeres, as she felt that her investment in the organization warranted a return in the form of stable work and reliable payment. Artesanas Mayas had not required her to invest time outside of making products to sell. The relationship was similar to a business partnership. On the other hand, Somos Mujeres had required her to take part in programs that she saw as burdensome. "I have taken classes from the organization. But the others [women in the organization] and I don't want to give any more time. I don't have the time for classes," Maritza explained.

Maritza, joined the organization to improve her economic conditions. Initially, she accepted the requirements of membership, which included attending classes,

capacitaciones, and *reuniones* in addition to working as an artisan and receiving support. Over time, she came to doubt the ability of Somos Mujeres to offer a viable economic strategy. Though she was receiving money for the *capacitaciones* she attended, this did not provide a sufficient income, and she also worried about what would happen once the *capacitaciones* ended in September when the Red Cross would leave. She even sought out another local organization that helps women, but explained that she was turned away because the organization did not have the resources to help any additional women. As a result of Maritza's lack of confidence in the organization's *artesanía* program, her commitment to other programs had weakened, and she no longer wanted to invest the time and energy in education and *reuniones*.

Carmen: "There have been many changes in my life."

Carmen, who joined the organization in 2001, learned about Somos Mujeres through a radio advertisement. "They [Somos Mujeres] were promoting themselves, that they had help for women who were talented artisans, and I had the ability to weave," (interview, June 24, 2009). However, Carmen also explained that she was attracted to the ideological underpinnings of Somos Mujeres, "When I entered Somos Mujeres, I felt that opportunities had always been given more to men than women," she explained (interview, June 24, 2009).

When she came to the organization, Carmen was in her mid-forties. Her husband, a severe alcoholic, was often absent. She was responsible for caring for her seven children. One of her older sons had lost his arm in a machinery accident while working at a nearby *finca*, and she struggled to pay for medical expenses. She sought out Somos Mujeres herself hoping to earn an income by working as a weaver. Though Carmen came

to Somos Mujeres to improve her family's economic and material conditions, her experience differed from most women. She emphasized the importance of *capacitaciones* on gender equality and women's rights, and explained that they had a profound effect on her life.

Before I joined, in the past, my husband had a serious problem with alcohol. He didn't understand. He didn't try. But now, after I have been in the organization, there have been many changes in my life and with my husband because of all the information they share here in the organization. I told my husband about these things, it helped me to help him quit this vice [drinking]. Now, we have a better relationship and he understands that I have to come here when they call a *reunión* and that I have to travel to sell things (Carmen, interview, June 24, 2009).

The knowledge and confidence Carmen derived from the *capacitaciones* and process of *sensibilización* were essential to the changes she experienced in her personal life.

According to Carmen, the information she learned as a participant in Somos Mujeres *capacitaciones* and discussions on women's rights helped her confront her husband about his drinking. Her relationship with her husband changed over time enabling her greater freedom to make decisions about her own life. Her husband no longer decided when and where she could go. Understandably for Carmen, the *capacitaciones* became as important to her as earning a living through the *artesanía* program. Unlike other women I interviewed, Carmen had taken on a leadership role in Somos Mujeres as the *vocal segunda*²⁰. While she conceded that the *artesanía* program was struggling, she explained that the *junta directiva*, of which she is part, "is trying to find a way to export the *artesanía*. We are looking for a market." Because gender empowerment and participation were central to Carmen's experience, these components were as important to her as the economic and material assistance she had received. "Despite this [the problems with the

²⁰ Literally, "second voice"; an official position in the *junta directiva*, the group of seven women, not including Chonita, who occupy formal leadership positions in the organization.

artesanía program] the organization promotes and provides training to improve the lives of women,” she explained. Carmen’s personal stake in the comprehensive model of the organization likely makes her less critical of the economic programs. She is quicker to see where the organization has had a positive effect in her life, how the leaders are struggling to improve the *artesanía* program, and how each program in the comprehensive model is important.

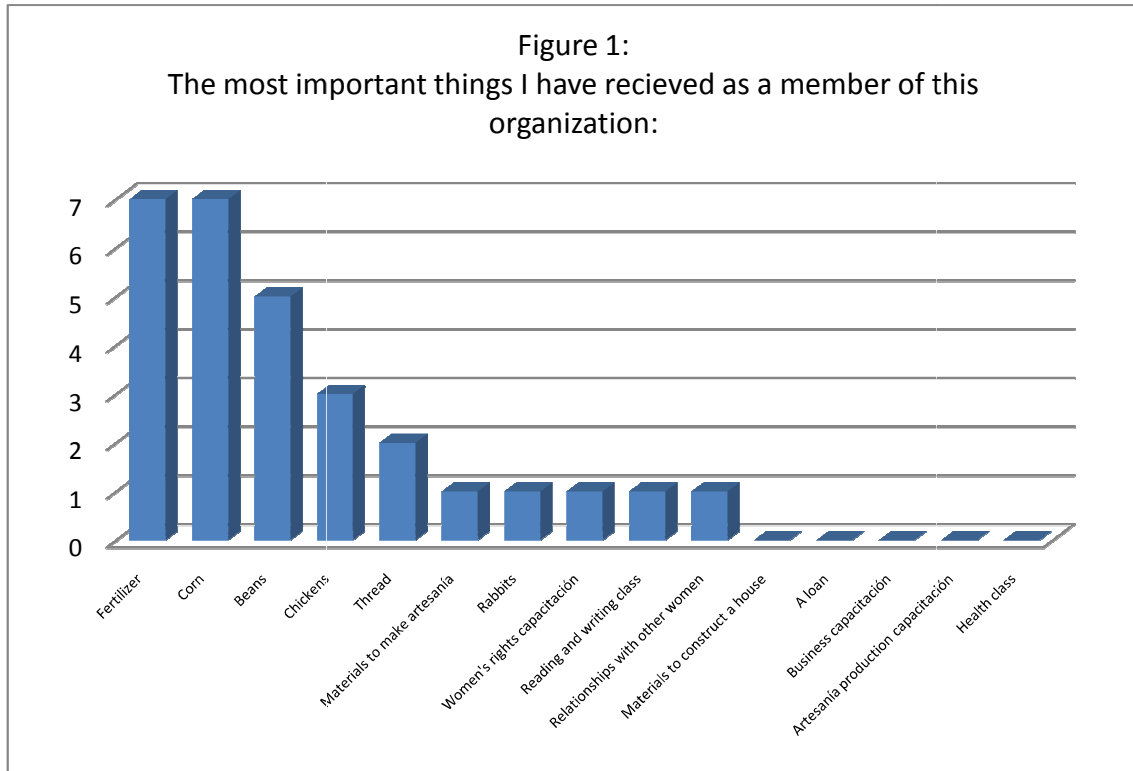
Patterns across Women’s Experience in Somos Mujeres

Of the women I interviewed, nearly all were motivated to join Somos Mujeres primarily to improve their economic and material conditions. The slim local market for handicrafts led many women to become involved in organizations. Though many women enter the organization with *artesanía* skills, they rely on Somos Mujeres to provide important resources and markets they cannot access themselves due to poverty, poor language skills, and limited social capital. For other women, the opportunity to receive material support such as food and clothing was the primary motivation for joining. Yet, both for women who prioritize work and those who value material aid, the decision to join rested on women’s desire to improve the economic and material conditions they faced.

As I described earlier, economic and food security have been and continue to be pressing concerns for women in the organization. Once members, all women hoped to earn money by working as artisans or to receive material assistance such as food, fertilizer, and clothing. A survey I conducted with eight women from the organization²¹ illustrates the importance women place on the concrete benefits the organization attempts

²¹ Of the eight women who participated in the survey, two had taken part in in-depth interviews. Six were new informants who were part of the *artesanía* program.

to provide. I asked women to circle the image of the most important thing they had received from the organization. Overwhelmingly, women prioritized tangible goods, particularly food items and materials to make *artesanía* (see Figure 1).



However, since founding the organization in 1998, Somos Mujeres has lacked adequate financial and material resources. Juana and Chonita explained that locating donors and buyers has been an ongoing challenge, which has limited the organization's ability to offer women viable economic opportunities and much-needed material items.²² The majority of women were unsatisfied with the economic and material support they had received through the organization, especially women like Maritza who had been in

²² I conducted research in the context of a global economic recession, and many of the leaders of organizations I interviewed including Somos Mujeres explained that locating basic items had become a great struggle. Ixcaco, for example, typically receives high quality thread from another donor organization, but that the donor did not have the thread to supply them (interview, Ishmael, June 29, 2009). Stories such as this one are commonplace. The economic and material resources of such organizations, even those with established donor relationships, were increasingly vulnerable in the context of the global economic recession.

the organization for a considerable amount of time (generally over one year). All women, except for three who had joined the organization within six months to a year of my interview, explained that they had occasionally received materials to make handicrafts such as thread, food such as corn, beans, and oil, and items to grow food such as fertilizer and seeds. However, the women described the support as erratic, insufficient, and at times, out of sync with their needs. “I hope it doesn’t take much longer,” was a common refrain from women in reference to the items they hoped the organization would provide.

Newer members were more hopeful that the sisters would be able to offer support, while long-term members expressed skepticism; their hopes had been worn down over time as their expectations went unmet. Augustina now cares for her six grandchildren after the death of her daughter and son-in-law. She joined the organization five years ago. For Augustina, receiving material and economic support was the most important reason for joining. “More than anything it was for the children, so they could eat, for clothes.” She continued, “But this year it hasn’t gotten better, it’s very slow. I haven’t received anything and what we need most is corn so we can eat” (interview, June 24, 2009). Emelia, who had been involved with Somos Mujeres off and on for eight years, talked about how her faith in the organization changed over time. “I’m really worried. In the past, yes, I had confidence. I knew that they would give us help, like with the fertilizer they promised. But now, it’s been a long time and it hasn’t come. Why hasn’t it come?” (interview, July 2, 2009).

Given the critical condition of many women’s livelihoods, it is understandable that members highly value economic and material assistance and feel frustration and confusion when these programs do not meet their needs and expectations. Women’s

dissatisfaction with the economic and material support they received appeared to influence some women's commitment to education and capacity training related to gender like Maritza. One clear reflection of the reluctance to participate in such programs is the fact that women did not attend classes and *reuniones* in the same numbers as *capacitaciones* for which they received compensation.

One of the primary factors that contributed to the lack of commitment was lack of time due to external obligations. Alejandra, who had been in the organization for six years, explained, "I have attended *reuniones* in the past, but I have to travel to the coast to sell *patín*. I ask the President for permission because I can't be there the day of *reuniones* and then I go to work" (interview, June 24, 2009). In addition, some women felt that time spent on topics related to gender and participation was not a good use of time. With the Red Cross initiative, *capacitaciones* no longer centered on gender equality and women's rights. However, topics related to gender arise in *reuniones* and educational classes. However, according to Emelia, some women felt that even these minimal discussions of gender detracted from time that might be spent more effectively. Emelia hesitated before speaking, perhaps afraid that what she was about to say would not portray the organization in a positive light.

There are women that talk during *una tema* (a topic presented in a *reunión* or class) about how it irritates them, about how they're angry. They say, 'we don't want to listen to this, it doesn't serve us. It's not good for us or why are we wasting time talking about this?' But that's not me. I use what they talk about at home with my family, and I put it into practice (Emelia, interview, Jul 2, 2009).

For the most part, women seemed uncomfortable sharing in *capacitaciones* and *reuniones*. Concepción explained that she was too nervous. Other women felt they lacked the knowledge to take part in decision-making. When work permitted Alejandra to attend

meetings she rarely talked. “I don’t feel that I am capable of making the decisions,” she stated (interview, June 24, 2009).

Despite women’s dissatisfaction with economic and material benefits, some women did experience some positive effects because of their participation in the organization. Concepción valued the literacy classes Somos Mujeres offered.

Capacitaciones on gender also had an impact in Carmen, Fabiola, and Emelia’s lives.

However, the three women had been in the organization for over two years, and entered during the period in which Somos Mujeres placed greater focus on gender equality and women’s rights. As I described earlier, Carmen was able to confront her husband about his drinking. Similarly, Fabiola explained that her relationship with her husband had also improved,

No one tries to keep me from going out. I have the right to go where I want. It’s different now in my family because of what I learned about gender equality. I have applied it in my family, in my marriage. My husband knows I have value (Fabiola, interview, July 15, 2009).

Apart from Carmen, Emelia, and Fabiola, no women mentioned the importance of ideas of gender equality or women’s rights in their lives even when directly asked. Instead, women talked about the value of entrepreneurship *capacitaciones*. Violeta felt the *capacitaciones* on entrepreneurship were of use to her and especially to her children, with whom she shared the information.

They have made a difference in my life because the *capacitaciones* they teach are very important. They talk about how to manage money, how to invest money in a business, how not to waste money. It’s good especially because my sons can use the information to start their own business (Violeta, interview, July 2, 2009).

It is possible that women deemphasized gender equality and women’s rights because these topics are no longer the primary focus of *capacitaciones* since the partnership with

the Red Cross began. Though the sisters still introduce these topics to new members and bring up issues of women's rights and gender equity in classes, *capacitaciones*, and *reuniones*, the focus of Somos Mujeres has shifted toward developing women's capacities as economic actors. Of all the women I interviewed, only Carmen stated that she actively participated in *capacitaciones* and *reuniones*. Juana and Chonita emphasized the importance of participation to the process of *sensibilización*, of transforming women into ideal, empowered women. Yet, few women spoke of the goal of transformation they promoted.

Finally, one of the most salient patterns across women's experience related to the social benefits of being a part of the organization. Women explained that they enjoyed the time they spent with other women. Emelia explained that *capacitaciones* had improved her ability to communicate with other women. "What I like most about the organization is that when I come here, I get to talk, chat with my *compañeras*. I've become better at communicating with other women. We share things" (interview, July 2, 2009). Augustina also felt the time spent at the organization was beneficial. "It distracts me a little from everything that has happened in my life with my family. My grandchildren's parents both died, and I am taking care of them. It's to help them and it helps to relax my mind" (interview, June 24, 2009). Even Maritza, who felt that classes and *capacitaciones* were burdensome, said that liked seeing her *compañeras* at the organization. I often observed Maritza chatting and smiling with other women during breaks at the organization.

Women's relationships with Somos Mujeres were complex, and often ambivalent. Though nearly all the women expressed that economic and material components had not

significantly improved their lives, individual women also described a range of positive benefits. What each individual woman valued apart from economic and material assistance was highly personal and less patterned. However, the majority of women did not place the same importance on programs aimed at creating social change as on the concrete benefits the organization might provide. Because the *artesanía* program does not provide a stable, sufficient income, women continue to work outside the organization to provide for their families. Their external responsibilities often impede their participation in the organization's voluntary programs including educational classes and *reuniones*. In addition, it appears that because most women's economic needs and expectations are not met through the organization, most women feel less committed to Somos Mujeres' larger comprehensive mission. This reality is an important barrier to the organization's ability to realize its vision of women's development. In the next chapter, I explore the disconnect between the women's and sisters' expectations in more depth along with two other significant barriers: the lack of resources and access to the international handicraft market, and the mainstream development model.

Chapter 6: Barriers to Transformation: Three Obstacles Preventing Somos Mujeres from Implementing a Comprehensive Model of Development

Thus far, I have explored the evolution of Somos Mujeres mission and programs and have argued that the comprehensive model the leaders envision is rooted in local needs. Yet, not all of the organization's programs have enjoyed stability and success. I posit that the weakness of the economic and material assistance programs negatively impacts women's investment in the organization, which compromises the comprehensive model. In this section, I outline three principal barriers that prevent the organization from implementing its own vision of development. First, within the organization, there is a disconnect between the sisters who lead the organization and the members in terms of their expectations of the organization. Second, Somos Mujeres lacks resources and access to the international handicraft market, which limits the organization's ability to operate autonomously and implement its vision. Finally, the economic vulnerability of the organization renders it dependent on funding and support from outside donors. In the case of Somos Mujeres, the partnership with the Guatemalan Red Cross shifted the organization's focus to a market-based economic development model. I explore the factors that create these barriers and highlight how together they impede the sisters' efforts to bring about transformative change through a holistic development model.

The Disconnect between the Sisters and the Members

One of the most significant barriers the organization faces in implementing its model arises from the disconnect between the sisters and the members. I use the term “disconnect” to describe the divergent expectations the sisters and members have of the organization as well as the difference in their participation and investment in its mission and programs. The sisters emphasize a comprehensive approach to development, which includes changing women’s marginal position in society through the combination of education, capacity building, economic opportunities and material assistance. In contrast, members prioritize economic opportunities and material assistance over participation in educational classes, *capacitaciones*, and *reuniones*. The overwhelming majority of women joined the organization in hopes of working as artisans through the *artesanía* program, and they evaluate their experience in Somos Mujeres based on the degree to which they have derived tangible benefits from their participation.

It is helpful to refer to concepts of practical and strategic needs (Molyneux 1985; Moser 1989; Berger 2006) to understand the seeming disconnect between the sisters’ and members’ priorities for and expectations of the organization. Practical needs are those that must be met in order to maintain a basic quality of life. Adequate food, housing, working conditions, and environmental health comprise such needs.

Practical gender needs are those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience, in their engendered position within the sexual division of labor, and deriving out of this their practical gender interests for human survival...Practical needs therefore are usually a response to an immediate perceived necessity which is identified by women within a specific context (Moser 1989:1803)

Strategic gender needs, in the case of women, refer to “gender equity demands” (Berger 2006:9). Moser posits that strategic gender needs “are formulated in the *analysis* of women’s subordination to men” (1989: 1803, emphasis added). Meeting strategic gender

needs requires changes in social, economic, and political realms to alter practices that perpetuate inequality of women.

Women's needs, both practical and strategic, are shaped by the conditions and experiences in their lives. Women who join Somos Mujeres struggle to meet practical needs. They worry about having enough money to buy food, housing, and clothing. It is likely that they prioritize economic and material assistance in order to address the immediate, practical needs that arise from the precariousness of their livelihoods. The sisters, on the other hand, do not face the same concern about meeting practical needs in their lives. They view women's position as the result of women's subordination to men—an *analysis* informed by their personal, educational, and activist experience. For the sisters, women's practical and strategic needs are inextricably linked. The sisters take a long-term view of women's development, which includes meeting gender equity demands in addition to practical needs.

Another important difference in understanding the disconnect in the sisters and women's investment in the organization relates to the differences in their roles outside the organization. Members described having significant domestic and economic responsibilities. Women's work in the home and their labor as part-time artisans and food vendors requires time and energy outside the organization. Members often found it challenging to balance their participation in the organization with these household and economic activities. Several women indicated that they did not attend voluntary meetings because of household responsibilities. Others described their participation as a burden. However, Juana and Chonita see women's participation in classes, *capacitaciones* and *reuniones* as key to creating a shift in gender relations and promoting social change. Yet,

for many women, the competing demands of home and work take precedence over participation in Somos Mujeres.

I argue that the model the sisters envision is not out of sync with women's needs. The model does include economic opportunities and material assistance as part of the multi-pronged approach. However, programs that aim to improve women's livelihoods have not been stable or successful components of the model. As women find that their investment in the organization does not sufficiently address their practical needs by improving their economic situation and enabling them to acquire basic skills, they appear to be less willing to take part in strategic programs. If Somos Mujeres was able to improve women's livelihoods, it is possible that women would be more invested in the social and political dimensions of the model.

Access to Resources and the International Handicraft Market

The inability of Somos Mujeres to provide viable economic opportunities through the *artesanía* program is constrained by its access to resources and the global handicraft market. As I have highlighted, the *artesanía* program has been the least stable of the organization's programs. It is also the primary attractor, along with material assistance, for women who join Somos Mujeres. The program's success, or lack thereof, shapes women's investment in the organization and its comprehensive model.

Developing a stable *artesanía* program requires labor, equipment, raw materials, unique knowledge related to *artesanía* production as well as connections with exporters and buyers in the international market. The local market for handicrafts in Santiago cannot support the number of artisans and organizations seeking to sell products. Most organizations set their eyes on exporting to the United States, where they can receive

higher prices for their products and sell them in larger quantities. Since the organization's inception, Somos Mujeres has encountered difficulty in acquiring resources and developing strategic connections. The only resource the organization has not struggled to identify is labor. Members join the organization hoping to provide labor in exchange for monetary compensation.

Lack of resources is a common problem for grassroots, community-based organizations like Somos Mujeres that occupy a relatively marginal position within the organizational hierarchy of the development sphere. Grassroots and community-based organizations encounter a first wave of obstacles as they attempt to identify potential funders. Community members who lead such organizations in Santiago had fewer social connections and less knowledge of where to access money. The two more successful *artesanía* programs in the community were directed by Americans, who had international connections. For example, Ixcaco, which Lacy, an American, and Ishmael, a man from Santiago, established in the 1980s, found greater success in accessing money than organizations headed solely by members of the community. According to Ishmael, a significant amount of the organization's funding came from individual donors in the United States, many of whom Lacy and American volunteers and interns at the organization had directly petitioned (interview, July 13, 2009). Similarly, Diane, an American expatriate who has lived on the outskirts of Santiago since the 1980s, began an *artesanía* project in Panabaj after the community was devastated by Hurricane Stan. Her husband solicited funds from his connections in the United States. Interest from international development and aid agencies increased immediately after the storm, and an

Oxfam representative informed Diane that grant money was available and encouraged her to apply (Diane, interview, June 12, 2009).

After identifying potential funding sources, grassroots and community-based organizations confront a second set of obstacles as they compete with other organizations for resources. Scholars have argued that as NGOs become institutionalized, they also become increasingly “professional” in response to donor requirements (Jenkins 2008; Sharma 2008; Kamat 2004). Powerful donor institutions that allocate funds and resources have scaled up their expectations of NGOs and community-based organizations, requiring them to navigate bureaucratic systems and conform to professional standards in order to access resources. Bebbington (2005) has described the processes that have come to characterize the flow of monies and resources between international and highly-capitalized NGOs and recipient organizations. Organizations must collect data for their programs, demonstrate the efficacy of their interventions, and communicate this information convincingly in grant applications and to donor representatives (Pfeiffer 2003; Bebbington 2005). Even Diane expressed exasperation over the paperwork required to apply for the grant from Oxfam. “We got a lot from Oxfam, but my god the paperwork was amazing. But I learned a lot, that was good” (interview, June 12, 2009). Juana talked about the challenge of meeting these standards.

The most difficult [to access] is international cooperation. We do not have professional people in our association. We want to ask for resources but we have to create a project profile. We have to go through a diagnostic process and only people with professional and technical capacities can produce the types of documents we need to present. We intend to mail letters asking for help but we have to pay the person. We have to pay a technician. We do not have the ability to pay and professional people do not give their time for free (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

Somos Mujeres lacks the capacity to meet the requirements of donor institutions, which limits their ability to access resources. The professionalization of development has the effect of reifying existing patterns of inclusion and exclusion, as it privileges organizations with the capacity to conform to these standards (Pfeiffer 2003; Kamat 2004; Bebbington 2005; Mitlin et al. 2007).

In addition to funding in order to buy equipment and raw materials, successful *artesanía* programs or businesses require markets in which they can sell their products. Like funding, strategic connections, often with international (especially US-based) companies and non-profits are necessary. In addition, commodity trends require that products reflect what is fashionable. Lacy, who co-founded Ixcaco, was a clothing designer and has used her social capital and her design skills to develop a niche in the handicraft market by producing stylized purses, wallets, and scarves to sell to boutique vendors in the United States. Maricela, a successful businesswoman in Santiago, produced beaded purses, wallets, and earrings, which she exported to a man in the US who then distributed her products to stores. She met the man by chance one afternoon in Panajachel, a town across the lake that draws tourists in droves. As needed, Maricela's distributor would inform her of changing trends. She would then alter her designs to ensure they remained in sync with shifting consumption tastes. Exporting to the US necessitates an intermediary. For the overwhelming majority of Guatemalans, travel to the United States is cost prohibitive and difficult. The key for both Ixcaco and Maricela's successes lay in their stable partnerships with distributors and vendors in the US.

Unlike Ixcaco and Maricela's beadwork company, Somos Mujeres had not established long-term relationships with other organizations or buyers. Orders for

handicrafts, such as purses and woven textiles, remained infrequent and partnerships temporary since the formation of the organization. This was also the case for other CBOs that worked in *artesanía*. Coordinators of organizations who were from the community frequently expressed frustration when describing the struggle of locating potential buyers. More than once, coordinators asked me if I had connections with storeowners and for my opinion of their products. All identified access to the market as the primary obstacle impeding the success of their *artesanía* programs, yet the market remained an elusive and distant force.

Organizations that are directed by women from the community are often excluded from the international *artesanía* market. These women lack important forms of social and cultural capital necessary to open doors to funding and markets. Even for women like Juana and Chonita—educated women who have been active in women’s organizing for over a decade—international social connections are difficult to develop. Maricela’s relationship with her distributor was the product of a chance encounter and appears to be an anomaly. There are few contexts in which women such as Juana and Chonita could encounter international buyers and vendors. However, they continue to try.

Importantly, the lack of resources and relationships with donors and buyers not only impacts the *artesanía* program and members’ views of the organization they are a part of, it decreases the autonomy of the organization. The economic vulnerability of Somos Mujeres makes it susceptible to the influence of donors, and as the Red Cross partnership illustrates, these relationships can alter community-based locally responsive objectives.

The Mainstream Market-Based Model of Development

After many years of struggling to establish relationships and carry out its vision of development, Somos Mujeres entered into a partnership with the Guatemalan Red Cross. The Red Cross offered significant funding to support a two-year entrepreneurship and occupational training initiative beginning in September 2007—the greatest source of external funding Somos Mujeres has had to date. I argue that the partnership has shifted the organization's focus toward a market-based model of development, one which effectively depoliticizes the comprehensive mission. I also argue that the Guatemalan Red Cross' model of development through market-based entrepreneurship does not take into account obstacles women in the community face.

In addition to impacting the way NGOs operate within the development sphere, neoliberal economic policy has also shaped the dominant approach to development (Morvaridi 2008). According to Mitlin et al. (2007), the neoliberal democratic agenda has deepened since the mid-1990s and development institutions rely to a greater extent upon market-based solutions to address poverty, which has reemerged as the central problem preventing development. Jenkins (2008) and other scholars (Mitlin et al. 2007) note that mounting pressure to demonstrate poverty reduction has led to an emphasis on producing quantifiable impact. As a result, social and political initiatives that are difficult to quantify yet may hold the key to more sustainable, equitable development are often devalued. When grassroots and community-based organizations enter into partnerships or contractual agreements with donor institutions, these powerful institutions can require grantee organizations to conform to impact-driven, economic-based development initiatives.

Somos Mujeres struggled for ten years (1998-2007), seizing upon intermittent opportunities whenever possible to build its *artesanía* program. All the while, the organization's goals remained clear—comprehensive development through education, capacity building, and economic activity. In 2007, Somos Mujeres formed a partnership with Red Cross Guatemala. The Red Cross partnership marked a shift in the organization's orientation, as economic-focused development through occupational and entrepreneurial training became Somos Mujeres' primary focus. The energy and investment in promoting a shift in gender relations and women's participation in social change and political action took a back seat to entrepreneurial training.

On a hot Tuesday afternoon, I sat in the back of the meeting room at Somos Mujeres during a *capacitación*. The instructor stood before the packed room of women, and explained in Spanish the task that the women faced:

How can you make your business more successful? How can you earn more? How can you lower the cost of production and make the business earn more? (The women sit silent.) You need to produce in volume. You need to produce quickly. You need technology and sewing machines. You need to make copies. Foreigners do not care whether the product is original. The Chinese produce and produce and export what they make. To be successful, you have to produce *como los Chinos* [like the Chinese], *producción industrial* [industrial production] (Observation, July 1, 2009).

The instructor described an industrial production model characterized by costly technical inputs, production in volume, and an emphasis on growth. However, interviews with the leaders underscored important oversights inherent in the model. According to Juana,

The Red Cross only gives us the training. They (the women) are receiving training for how to lower the costs of production, how to earn a profit, how to organize the administrative part. They are also receiving training for how to handle the sewing machine, how to make skirts. To change the range of women's work (Juana, interview, July 19, 2009).

While the training the women receive does promote an understanding of business practices necessary to enter into the market-based economy, the women in the organization face a number of barriers that undercut the relevance of this model. The Red Cross model rests on the ability of women to conform to professional, market-based standards and to form connections with potential investors and buyers. Language literacy skills are a significant barrier to entrepreneurship. Of the 116 women in the organization, the vast majority speak no Spanish. They do not read or write. Many have had little to no formal education. Women's lack of skills will certainly impact the degree to which they can establish successful *artesanía* businesses, especially given that profitable handicraft production requires access to markets outside the community. The Red Cross model does not understand these barriers or take them into account.

At the same time, the outside model assumes that women are able to devote time and energy to entrepreneurial businesses, which require significant personal investment. The majority of members in Somos Mujeres have significant domestic responsibilities that stem from social understandings of women's work in the home. In addition, they have an economic responsibility to supplement the household income through informal, part-time labor. The entrepreneurial model presumes that women have the time, energy, skills and upstart capital in order to put occupational training into action. However, research on female entrepreneurs in India identified patterns across successful female entrepreneurs. The majority were unburdened by childcare responsibilities, enjoyed a degree of financial stability, and were often university-educated (Handy et al. 2006).

The model being promoted by the Red Cross, and by other development institutions, is grounded in an idealized version of entrepreneurship, and the model

assumes women are male, without full-time responsibilities in the household. This approach presupposes that if given training and technology, impoverished women can be transitioned into the market economy. It operates from the neoliberal assumption that the market will engender prosperity and ignores the barriers in place that prevent entry (Kamat 2004; Sharma 2008). In effect, these assumptions place responsibility for economic development on the women themselves rather than assisting them in making necessary contacts to negotiate the market. Clearly, the organization and the women who are members seek to improve the economic dimension of the organization's own model. The Red Cross initiative, however, has not enabled the sisters to develop relationships with distributors or buyers. Instead, the program centers on training. The teachers also encouraged women in the organization to begin their own entrepreneurial businesses outside the organization instead of working collectively within organization's program.

Though the leaders maintain that Somos Mujeres promotes a comprehensive agenda, which includes politicizing the role of women within the community, the organization and the women's energy is currently centered on occupational training. The Red Cross model appears to be depoliticizing the organization's mission while emphasizing market-based production as the ideal vehicle of social and political development. Yet, it ignores the barriers in place that render this model, not an equalizing force, but mechanism for reproducing patterns of access and exclusion. Kamat (2004) has asserted that the civil society has become a conflicting geography of interests, in which small organizations struggle to maintain their autonomy from powerful development organizations. The ability of Somos Mujeres to represent the women who the organization serves is shaped not simply by the needs of the women but by the agendas of

more powerful donor institutions upon which Somos Mujeres is dependent.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have traced the evolution of Somos Mujeres' mission and programs showing how it has shaped and, in turn, been shaped by the sisters and women in the organization. I explored how the partnership with the Red Cross affected the organization's focus, and I outlined the barriers that prevent the sisters from implementing a comprehensive model of development. In doing so, I critiqued the process of development, showing how it limits the opportunity for alternative conceptions of change to arise from community-based organizations. In conclusion, I want to clarify my critique by outlining what I see as three principal sites of tension in the development process. These contested sites highlight that at present, there is great ambivalence about what constitutes development and who should carry it out. I conclude by considering potential avenues for change that would enable Somos Mujeres and other similar organizations to command greater control in realizing alternative visions of development.

Sites of Tension in the Development Process

This ethnography has highlighted several key sites of tension that arise in the process of development that limit the opportunity for needed change to occur. First, there are differing, contradictory models of development—a neoliberal market-based model versus a comprehensive alternative—that are not easily reconciled. Second, relationships among organizations that carry out development are hierarchal and can serve to recreate the very patterns of patterns of inclusion and exclusion they propose to address. And

third, organizations struggle to meet the competing demands of providing for stakeholders' immediate livelihood needs while working to pursue critical agendas of broad change.

Contradictory Models of Development

In the previous chapters, I have described the sisters' comprehensive model of development as well as the economic-focused, market-based model promoted by the Red Cross. These conflicting models represent divergent definitions of development that organizations across scales and contexts hold. One important distinction in these models concerns the depth of change they call for. Mitlin et al. (2007) have shown how development institutions at the international level are more likely to support market-based development initiatives aimed largely at reducing poverty, while community-based organizations often envision alternative models that include progressive, radical change.

The sisters' multifaceted approach to development challenges underlying factors such as discrimination and patriarchy that maintain women's inequality. By changing women's attitudes about their place in society, building women's capacities related to education and work, and encouraging engagement in political action, the model directly challenges structural barriers and holds the greatest promise of transformative change. Conversely, the neoliberal model operates within the present state-economy-civil society arrangement, and does not directly interrogate the underlying processes that have generated inequality. It is backed by the neoliberal philosophy that engendering economic prosperity through market activity will enable women to engage in social and political action to change their realities. This indirect and one-dimensional route to development overlooks the barriers that prevent entry into the market and assumes the moral

uprightness of the state and civil society. The experience of Somos Mujeres illustrates that resolving these competing models often presents significant trade-offs. In this case, receiving funding and material resources meant emphasizing entrepreneurship and occupational training over issues of gender empowerment.

Relationships among Organizations in the Development Sphere

A second issue raised in this work centers on the nature of relationships between organizations in the development sphere. As I outlined in the introduction and have referenced throughout this ethnography, the development sphere is characterized by relationships of power based on resources and strategic connections, and is maintained by professional, bureaucratic rules of engagement. These characteristics are the product of processes of formalization and professionalization within civil society that have accompanied neoliberal democratic development (Kamat 2004; Jenkins 2008; Sharma 2008). Well-funded, professionalized, and often international institutions determine which organizations and projects receive funding and support, and this hierarchy has the effect of reifying patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Pfieffer 2003; Kamat 2004; Bebbington 2005; Jenkins 2008; Mitlin et al. 2008). Communities and organizations that occupy a marginal position struggle to locate and procure financial, material, and ideological support for their objectives.

Since the 1980s, powerful development institutions have come under heavy fire from scholars, development practitioners, and communities for their heavy handed, domineering approach to development (Escobar 1995; Pfieffer 2003; Walker et al. 2007; Sharma 2008). In response to these criticisms, muscular development institutions increasingly espouse support for community-driven development and empowerment

agendas (Murray Li 2007; Morvaridi 2008; Sharma 2008). However, Somos Mujeres' partnership with the Red Cross illustrates that, in practice, powerful institutions continue to exert influence over community-based organizations and reshape their activities. The Red Cross initiative streamlined and depoliticized the sisters' comprehensive vision of development. This study underlines that, at present, there is a deep ambivalence within the development sphere about who should be the primary agents carrying out development: local or external stakeholders.

Meeting Immediate Needs versus Long-term Change

Another site of tension centers on the difficulty organizations face in meeting the concrete livelihood needs of people while also pursuing broad agendas of change. There are costs associated with a comprehensive approach, especially for the sisters and women of Somos Mujeres who lack the resources necessary to support the scope of their programs. Devoting time and energy to education and capacity training can detract from an intensive focus on *artesanía* production and sale. The sisters have invested a great deal of time promoting gender equality and educating women, and these efforts have had positive benefits for some women. However, the sisters have promoted the organization to women as a means to improve their lives, and women who join Somos Mujeres expect to receive benefits from their involvement. Because of the pressing hardships women face, they prioritize economic and material gains. The effects of education and capacity training are not as tangible as receiving an income or needed items; the impacts of these components are less dramatic, especially from a short-term view. Somos Mujeres' experience makes clear the challenge of building support for long-term efforts to bring about systemic change among people who have immediate, often dire, livelihood needs.

This research suggests that for development organizations that pledge to improve people's lives, participants must be confident that the organization is responsive and capable of addressing their immediate concerns.

Implications

These three sites of tension highlight fundamental questions regarding development. The debate over the appropriate model of development centers on *how* development is carried out, and the concerns about relationships of power within the development sphere reflects ambivalence about *who* carries out development. At present, the neoliberal model implemented by external development organizations remains the prevailing approach despite voluminous critical scholarship that outlines its limitations (Escobar 1995; Kamat 2004; Morvaridi 2008; Sharma 2008). Mitlin et al. (2007) argue that the salience of this paradigm derives from its compatibility with the dominant neoliberal democratic political economy.

Because civil society, of which mainstream development institutions are a part, arose in the global transition to neoliberal democracy, it is unlikely that alternative conceptions of and approaches to development will arise from mainstream development institutions. Alternatives that promote equitable change are more likely to arise from within communities and organizations at a greater distance from this sphere of influence (Escobar 1995; Mitlin et al. 2007). Thus, critical scholars of development (Agarwal 1994; Rankin 2002) assert that the goal of development is to create conditions in which disadvantaged groups can organize to challenge and resist oppression. In this view, the authority and agency to carry out development rests with local people, not with outside institutions.

The sisters' comprehensive approach to women's development provides an example of an alternative model, and this ethnography highlights the constraints that limit the implementation of their model. Next, I consider potential strategies that might provide organizations like Somos Mujeres greater security and autonomy to realize alternative approaches.

Potential Avenues to Increase Support for Comprehensive Development

A central problem facing Somos Mujeres lies in its economic vulnerability and its resultant dependence on outside organizations for funding and support. As this case shows, these relationships of power can affect community-based organization's missions and programs. For Somos Mujeres, the lack of resources and, most importantly, of stable, supportive relationships within the development sphere and market placed Somos Mujeres in a position of dependence on to the Red Cross. The ability of organizations like Somos Mujeres to enjoy greater freedom will likely result from decreasing reliance on a limited number of external entities that have divergent agendas. There are a number of potential broadening strategies that may serve to counter dependency and build support not upon development organizations alone, but from actors across scales and sectors that buttress the comprehensive model the sisters envision.

Theories of social capital are helpful in thinking about how the sisters might harness and build social networks in order to strengthen their overall mission. In *The Forms of Capital* (1986), Bourdieu posited that in addition to economic capital, cultural and social capital impact access to resources. According to Bourdieu, social capital is comprised of the "durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition," which individuals can mobilize to access the

collective capital of the group (1986:51).

Social capital theory related to development has often focused on strengthening social ties within communities so that community members may organize to carry out development on their own terms (Portes and Landolt 2000). The most widely accepted approach within the anthropological and sociological literature is to build upon the social networks that exist, which takes into account local forms of association. Scholars argue that members of the same community, ethnic, or social group often exchange resources to one another based on mutual affiliation based on *bounded solidarity*. Similarly, when exchange is embedded in existing social structures within solidarity groups, *enforceable trust* ensures that members of that group or the community are obligated to make returns to other members (Portes and Landolt 2000). Both bounded solidarity and enforceable trust are understood to promote collective resource sharing and to facilitate community-driven development.

At the local level, there are a number of organizations that work in *artesanía* production, and forming stronger relationships with these groups might enable Somos Mujeres to access a wider network of resources and access to the market. Though Juana and Chonita are educated women who have held leadership positions at the local and national levels, their social networks have not enabled them to harness resources within the market-based context of *artesanía* production and sale. They possess cultural capital, or the culturally specific knowledge and competence that result from education, socialization, or the cultivation of a culturally valued capacity, required to begin an organization, but the lack of financial and social capital restrains their ability to implement their vision.

At the time of my research in Santiago, organizations that employed similar *artesanía* models operated largely in isolation from one another and drew upon their respective social networks to procure funding, resources, and access to markets. Ties between organizations appeared to be relatively weak within the community. It is possible that efforts to create links across local organizations would enable organizations to collectively share resources like production equipment and provide greater access to the market. Case examples of local collective organizing around the production of commodities highlight the unpredictability of these efforts (Colloredo-Mansfeld and Antrosio 2009). The process of organizing would require local groups to unify around a common goal of accessing the handicraft market and likely entail a significant degree of consensus building and negotiation regarding sharing resources and profits. However, developing a local network to support *artesanía* production holds the potential to disperse the time and energy spent developing connections with buyers and distributors across organizations that have limited resources (Colloredo-Mansfeld and Antrosio 2009).

Unlike other local organizations, *artesanía* production is but one component of Somos Mujeres' larger mission to bring about comprehensive development. The sisters strive to promote social and political change through programs such as education and capacity building. Since it is unlikely that development institutions such as the Red Cross will support alternative holistic approaches to development, Somos Mujeres could seek out partnerships with entities that share their vision of systemic change. Mitlin et al. (2007) have argued that by building connections with social movements that rest on a strong base of grassroots support may enable organizations to link up with larger efforts to create social change. In Guatemala, both the Pan-Maya movement (Fischer and

McKenna Brown 1996) and the women's movement (Berger 2006) are comprised of groups that might lend support to Somos Mujeres' programs. Relationships with other progressive actors might be characterized by a greater degree of *bounded solidarity* based on common desire to counter inequality.

However, the problem of locating resources and funding will likely persist for Somos Mujeres, and in seeking financial and material support from donors within the development sphere, the same strategy of seeking broad support across actors could be applied to relationships with donors. Developing a wider funding base could enable Somos Mujeres to disperse its financial reliance across various donors to reduce the likelihood that one or several external actors could shape its actions (Mitlin et al. 2007).

The sisters' model of development entails multiple dimensions: social, political, and economic. Each component of their approach—education, capacity training, political action, and *artesanía* production—will likely find support in different types of partnerships. For the sisters and women in Somos Mujeres, identifying and cultivating relationships with a broad network of supporters might allow them access to financial, material, and ideological resources that buttress the various facets of their model. However, the work of developing relationships is not easy. Cultivating strong connections entails a great deal of energy and time; yet, the relationships Somos Mujeres develops will likely determine the degree to which they can realize their vision in the future.

The principle of sharing, which the organization was founded on, is an important legacy to draw upon as the organization moves forward. Juana and her sisters founded Somos Mujeres to bring together women who shared common experiences and hopes for

the future. They knocked on doors and approached women in their community to create an organization aimed at transforming women's place in society. Today, their vision rests on their ability to develop relationships with actors that also share some part of their larger mission. At stake is not simply the opportunity to improve women's economic livelihoods, but the sisters' hopes for an alternate future in which women are not just equal earners, but equal members of society in all its forms.

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Appendix 1: Interview Protocol for Women in Somos Mujeres²³

1. Cuéntame sobre como usted se volvió parte de la organización.
2. ¿Cuántos años usted ha sido involucrada en la organización? _____
 - a. ¿Como decidió ser parte de la organización? ¿Decidió usted entre diferentes organizaciones? Ejemplos.
3. ¿Como usted encontró esta organización?
_____ Miembro de su familia _____ amigo(a) _____ miembro de su iglesia
_____ en una visita a la municipalidad _____ un(a) representante le encontró a
usted _____ Otra: _____
4. ¿Conoce usted otras organizaciones de Santiago que trabajan con mujeres?
¿Artesanas?
5. ¿Es usted parte de una organización que ofrece apoyo a mujeres artesanas? ¿Es usted parte de una otra organización?
6. ¿En su opinión o de que usted sabe, como son las relaciones entre las diferentes organizaciones?
7. ¿Que usted esperaba que la organización hacer para usted que otras no pudieran?
8. ¿Porque era esta organización más atractivo a usted que otras?
9. ¿Es esta organización diferente que otras? Cómo?
10. ¿Tenía usted expectativas de la organización?
11. ¿Ser parte de la organización ha afectado su vida?
12. ¿Hay maneras en que la organización ha afectado su vida para el mejor?
13. ¿Hay maneras en que su experiencia en la organización sería mejor o aspectos que no son positivos?
14. ¿Antes de participar en esta organización, como era su vida?
 - a. ¿Como era su situación económico?
 - b. ¿Su trabajo?
 - c. ¿Con su familia? ¿Su marido? ¿Sus niños? ¿Con su caseras?
 - d. ¿Como se sentía usted en su vida? ¿Su situación emocional?
15. ¿Qué tipo de apoyo recibe usted de esta organización?
 - a. Probes:
 - i. ¿Económico?
 - ii. ¿Material? ¿Que materiales ha recibido?

²³ Though I attempted to ask as many questions as possible during interviews, this protocol served as a guide. The emphasis in questioning depended on each individual woman's experience and responses.

- iii. ¿Educativo?: ¿Usted tomaba clases por la organización? ¿Que tipos de clases? ¿Las clases han afectado su vida?
 - iv. ¿Capitaciones? Cuantos capacitaciones usted asistió?
 - v. ¿Has recibido compensación para las capacitaciones? ¿Cuanto y sobre cuánto tiempo?
16. ¿Cómo la ayuda económica o material que usted ha recibido cambiado su vida?
- a. ____ Ha mejorado mu vida fuertemente
 - b. ____ Ha mejorado mi vida un poco
 - c. ____ Mi vida es un poco peor que antes
 - d. ____ No ha sido un cambio en mi vida
 - e. ____ Mi vida es mucho peor que antes
- i. Preguntas adicionales:
- 1. ¿Independencia?
 - 2. ¿Cuál puede usted comprar ahora que usted no podía a antes?
 - 3. ¿Usted continua luchar económicamente?
17. (Tiene) Ser en la organización ha afectado sus relaciones sociales? Cómo?
- a. ____ Yo tengo mucho más apoyo social que antes
 - b. ____ Yo tengo un poco más apoyo social que antes
 - c. ____ Yo tengo el mismo apoyo social que antes
 - d. ____ Yo tengo un poco menos apoyo social que antes
18. ¿Cómo usted describiría su relación con las otras mujeres aquí?
19. ¿Cómo que era una parte de la organización ha cambiado la manera que usted se ve?
20. ¿Ha cambiado cómo la otra gente le ve?
21. ¿Qué cosas usted hace en la organización que usted no hizo antes? ¿Cómo participando en estas actividades ha afectado a usted?
22. ¿Cómo era una parte de la organización ha afectado otros partes de su vida?
23. ¿Cuál es la diferencia más grande entre la persona usted era antes de ingreso en la organización y a la persona que usted es ahora?

Para las siguientes oraciones, indica el nivel de acordamiento de usted. El número cinco representa el mayor nivel de acordamiento. Si usted no está de acuerdo, escoge numero uno.

- | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| No estoy
de acuerdo
fuertemente | No estoy
de acuerdo | No tengo
una opinión | Estoy de
acuerdo | Estoy de
acuerdo
fuertemente |
24. Es muy importante para mí ser parte de una organización que es dirigida por (una) persona(s) de Santiago.
- 1 2 3 4 5
25. Organizaciones que tienen personas extranjeras encargada tienen una ventaja.
- 1 2 3 4 5

26. Yo he considerado un cambio a una otra organización que podría ofrecer más apoyo a mí.

1 2 3 4 5

27. Siento que mi voz es oído en citas donde se hacen decisiones.


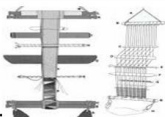











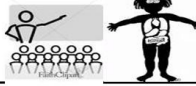

1 2 3 4 5

Locating data: Anos tiene ud. _____ Numero de hijos: _____ Canton vive ud. en
_____ De Santiago _____ Tiene usted otro trabajo de ser
vendedor(a) _____


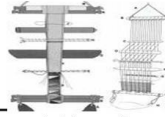













Vende usted los productos en otros lugares (cuando y donde)

Appendix 2: Somos Mujeres Group Survey


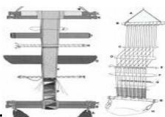













Favor de circular todas las cosas que usted ha recibido por esta organización en este año.

				
hilo	materiales para hacer artesanía	gallinas	Abono orgánico	maíz
				
conejos	materiales para construir una casa	frijol	Un préstamo	Una capacitación sobre un negocio
				
Una capacitación sobre los derechos de las mujeres	Una clase para leer y escribir	Una clase sobre como hacer artesanía	Una clase sobre salud	Apoyo de mujeres por la organización



Favor de circular todas las cosas que usted recibió por esta organización en el año pasado.

				
hilo	materiales para hacer artesanía	gallinas	Abono orgánico	maíz
				
conejos	materiales para construir una casa	frijol	Un préstamo	Una capacitación sobre un negocio
				
Una capacitación sobre los derechos de las mujeres	Una clase para leer y escribir	Una clase sobre como hacer artesanía	Una clase sobre salud	Apoyo de mujeres por la organización


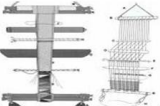













Favor de circular todas las cosas que usted recibió por esta organización dos años pasados.

				
hilo	materiales para hacer artesanía	gallinas	Abono orgánico	maíz
				
conejos	materiales para construir una casa	frijol	Un préstamo	Una capacitación sobre un negocio
				
Una capacitación sobre los derechos de las mujeres	Una clase para leer y escribir	Una clase sobre como hacer artesanía	Una clase sobre salud	Apoyo de mujeres por la organización


Favor de circular las otras cosas que usted recibió antes de los tres años pasados desde usted ha sido en la organización.

				
hilo	materiales para hacer artesanía	gallinas	Abono orgánico	maíz
				
conejos	materiales para construir una casa	frijol	Un préstamo	Una capacitación sobre un negocio
				
Una capacitación sobre los derechos de las mujeres	Una clase para leer y escribir	Una clase sobre como hacer artesanía	Una clase sobre salud	Apoyo de mujeres por la organización

De todas de esas cosas, favor de circular los tres que han sido los más importantes en su vida.

				
hilo	materiales para hacer artesanía	gallinas	Abono orgánico	maíz
				
conejos	materiales para construir una casa	frijol	Un préstamo	Una capacitación sobre un negocio
				
Una capacitación sobre los derechos de las mujeres	Una clase para leer y escribir	Una clase sobre como hacer artesanía	Una clase sobre salud	Apoyo de mujeres por la organización

1. Ser miembro de esta organización ha hecho _____ diferencia con respecto a su vida.

 Muchísima


 mucha

 un poco

 no mucha

 no

2. Antes de que pasó a formar parte de la organización, se preocupaba por mi familia _____.

 Muchísimo


 mucho

 un poco

 no mucho

 no

3. Ahora, como miembro de la organización, se preocupa por su familia _____.

 Muchísimo


 mucho

 un poco

 no mucho

 no

4. Asistir a las clases le ha ayudado _____.

 Muchísimo


 mucho

 un poco


 no mucho

 no


5. ¿En esta organización, cómo ha sido su convivencia con las demás mujeres del grupo?

 muy bien


 bien

 mas o menos


 podría ser un poco mejor


 podría ser mejor

6. Considera que su habilidad para entender español a _____.

 muy bien

 bien

 un poco bien

 un poco mal

 mal

7. ¿Que tema ha sido lo más importante que ha recibido en las clases?



negocio



derechos de la mujer escribir y leer



artesanía



agricultura



salud/cocinar

¿Por que le ayudo esta tema más?

Años tiene: _____

Años en la organización: _____

Cantidad que mi familia gana cada mes: _____ Numero de hijos: _____

Nivel de educación en escuela: _____ Casada: Si No Viuda