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# **Empowerment Examined:**

## **An Exploration of the Concept and Practice of Women's Empowerment in Honduras**

**Joanna Mary Rowlands**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD**

**University of Durham  
Department of Geography**

**1995**

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**30 OCT 1995**

# Empowerment Examined: An Exploration of the Concept and Practice of Women's Empowerment in Honduras

Joanna Mary Rowlands

## Abstract

In this thesis I set myself the task of defining empowerment with a view to considering whether the concept has useful meaning in the gender and development debate and the practice arising from that debate. 'Empowerment' is used by a wide range of people and agencies across a range of disciplines. In order to understand the variety of meanings given to the word, I undertake an analysis of the models of 'power' which underpin the various usages of empowerment. I show that power can be constructed as 'power-over', as in the more traditional, zero-sum models, or as 'power-to' or power-within', where power is seen as generative, fluid and relational. 'Empowerment', therefore, can have a range of meanings according to the intentions, explicit or implicit, of the user. This range of meanings can be seen in the ways in which 'empowerment' has been used in relation to development and, in particular, to development interventions with women.

The thesis presents two case studies of organisations in Honduras working with 'grassroots' rural women. One, PAEM, is a locally initiated educational programme for women in north-western Honduras focused on devising and following a methodology of self-reflection and analysis, including a deliberate focus on women's lives. The second is of a Health Promoters Training Programme in Urraco, in northern Honduras, a programme initiated by an external agency.

I argue that empowerment is most usefully defined as a *process* which reflects a definition of power that is generative and productive. Through my analysis of the achievements of each of the case study organisations, I construct a model of empowerment which shows that empowerment is not a fixed entity, but is made up of components according to context and to the specifics of the situation in which any given woman or group of women finds herself/itself.

When empowerment is defined more precisely, both in terms of what constitutes power, and of the specifics of the process, the notion of an 'empowerment approach' to development for women becomes a more useful tool for analysis and planning.

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## **Declaration:**

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

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## Glossary of Spanish words used in the text

aldeas	small village
ambiente	environment
animadora	animator
aplastada	flattened, crushed (referring to female)
bajareque	'wattle and daub'
barrio(s)	neighbourhood(s), slum(s)
botiquín	first aid post, medicine chest
cacique	political boss/'strong man' (local level)
caciquismo	style of leadership/culture based on rule by (local) political bosses
campesino/a	peasant
caseríos	hamlet, settlement
caseta	hut, small building
caudillo	political boss/'strong man' (national level)
caudillismo	style of leadership/culture based on rule by (national) political bosses
celebración de la palabra	church service taken by a lay preacher
centavos	cents
champita	roughly built hut, hovel
clausura	closing ceremony, graduation
clubes de amas de casa	housewives clubs
compañero	comrade/partner
consejo	council
delegados	delegates
delegado de la palabra	delegate of the word: lay preacher
dignidad	literally, dignity. In Spanish this has the meaning of self-esteem and worth, with an expectation of being seen by others as having worth and value
dinámicas	dynamics - exercises
directiva	management committee
empaquadora	packing plant
encuentro	meeting
encuentro de zona	zone meeting
enlace	network
fincas	farm
grupos campesinos	peasant groups/co-operatives
guaro	maize liquor
hechería	witchcraft

latifundista	owner of a large estate
lempira	Lempira - Honduran unit of currency
leña	firewood
machismo	male pride, male chauvinism
machista	full of <i>machismo</i>
manzana	land measure: 1.75 acres
maquila	assembly plant; factory in export processing zone
milpa	maize plot
minifundios	small farm
mujer	woman
municipio	municipality
padre	father
pareja	partner, couple
patronato	village council
parcelero	farmer working small farm
pecado	sin
pena	grief, sorrow, regret
plan básico	basic secondary curriculum
platanera	banana plantation
prestaciones	payment made on leaving a job
problemática	set of problems, issues
'promoción femenina'	the Catholic church's organisation for pastoral work with women
punta	Honduran 'latin' dance
quehaceres	household chores
sectorial(es)	sectoral meeting(s)
sociodrama	role play
tamales	a maize food
tortilla	flat maize bread, the staple food
unión libre	common-law marriage
vicios	vices - alcohol, sex, drugs.

## List of abbreviations

ACPH	Asociación Cultural Popular Hondureña (Honduran Association for Popular Culture)
ADP	Asociación para el Desarrollo Popular (Association for Popular Development)
AFL	American Federation of Labour
AHDEJUMUR	Honduran Association for the Development of Youth and Women
AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
ANACH	Asociación Nacional de Campesinos Hondureños (National Association of Honduran Peasants)
ANAMUC	Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas (National Association of Peasant Women)
ANDAR	(Andar = to walk)
ASEPADE	Asesores para el Desarrollo (Consultants for Development)
CAFOD	Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
CARITAS	(Catholic charitable organisation)
CCD	Comisión Cristiano par el Desarrollo (Christian Commission for Development)
CDM	Centro para los Derechos de la Mujer (Centre for Women's Rights) (formerly CLADEM-H)
CEM	Centro de Estudios de la Mujer (Centre for Women's Studies)
CNTC	National Union of Rural Workers
CODEMUH	Colectivo de Mujeres Hondureñas (Collective of Honduran Women)
CODIMCA	Consejo para el Desarrollo Integrado de la Mujer Campesina (Council for the Integrated Development of Peasant Women)
COMUNICA	(NGO working with NGOs and Popular Organisations on Communication)
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
FEHMUC	Honduran Federation of Peasant Women

FFHC/AD	Freedom from Hunger Campaign/Action for Development
GAD	Gender and Development
GEM	Grupo para la Educación Popular de Mujeres (Popular Education Group for Women - Mexico)
FENACH	Federación Nacional de Campesinos Hondureños (National Federation of Honduran Peasants)
FHIS	Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social (Honduran Fund for Social Investment)
FUTH	Federación Unitaria de Trabajadores de Honduras (United Federation of Workers)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
IHMA	Instituto Hondureño de Mercadeo Agrícola (Honduran Institute for Agricultural Marketing)
INA	Instituto Nacional Agrario (National Agrarian Institute)
MOMUCLAA	Movimiento de Mujeres de la Colónia Lopez Arellano y Area (Women's Movement of Colonia Lopez Arellano and Area)
NGDO	Non Government Development Organisation
NGO	Non Government Organisation
OCH	Organización Campesino Hondureño ( Organisation of Honduran Peasants)
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
OPD	Organismo Privado de Desarrollo (Private Development Organisation)
ORIT	Organización Regional Interamericana del Trabajo (Inter-American Regional Organisation of Labour)
PAEM	Women's Educational Programme
PCH	Partido Comunista de Honduras (Honduran Communist Party)
PDCH	Partido Demócrata Cristiano Hondureño (Honduran Christian Democrat Party)
PINU	Partido de Innovación y Unidad (Innovation and Unity Party)

PL	Partido Liberal (Liberal Party)
PN	Partido Nacional (National Party)
SECPLAN	Secretaría de Planificación, Coordinación y Presupuesto (Secretariat of Planning, Co-ordination and Budget)
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association (India)
SITRATERCO	Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Tela Railroad Company (Union of Workers for the Tela Railroad Company)
SNV	(Dutch development agency)
UN	United Nations
UNC	Unión Nacional Campesino (National Peasant Union)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA	Unidad de Servicios para Fomentar la Participación de la Mujer Hondureña (Services Unit for encouraging the participation of Honduran Women)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development

## Chapter One: Empowerment, Gender and Development.

Many basic services ... are best managed at the local level - even the village level - with the central agencies providing only technical advice and specialist inputs. The aims should be *to empower ordinary people* to take charge of their lives, to make communities more responsible for their development, and to make governments listen to their people. Fostering a more pluralistic structure - including non-governmental organisations ... - is a means to these ends. (World Bank, 1989)<sup>1</sup>.

What is this word 'to empower'? Two more quotations will establish the emphasis it receives in official sources:

The specific emphasis on the concept of empowerment derived chiefly from Cay Stratton, special advisor to each secretary of State for Employment since 1989: "Our starting point must be not to fit [Training and Enterprise Councils] into well established Training Agency patterns. Rather it must begin from a position that *empowers*, that encourages ... real choices about the way public funds are invested". Empowerment was further seen as a means of reorientating from the producer to the consumer: it was intended to be a clear break with corporatism. (Official UK review, led by geographer Robert Bennett)<sup>2</sup>.

Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. ... Since participation requires increased influence and control, it also demands *increased empowerment* - in economic, social and political terms (UNDP, 1993)<sup>3</sup>.

Does this usage of 'to empower' reflect the possible meanings of 'empowerment' that emerge from interviews with women in rural Honduras and from learning materials they use, or is the official view something entirely other? First, Teresa, Margarita and Esperanza:

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<sup>1</sup>World Bank (1989): Sub-Saharan Africa: from crisis to sustainable growth, Washington D.C., World Bank. Quoted in Thomas (1992). My emphasis.

<sup>2</sup>Bennett, Wicks & McCoshan (1994) p. 26., emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup>UNDP (1993) p. 21. My emphasis.

... we knew what was happening to us and that we had to find our own solutions. People from outside couldn't do that for us.. perhaps they would only know what we had told them about things, but the people who knew about our problems were us. (Teresa, 50 year old grandmother, mother of twelve, eleven still living, 'animator' of women's group)<sup>4</sup>.

When I started I was embarrassed even with the other women. We met, talked a bit; you begin to talk in meetings, have more confidence. Then later, the domestic work in the home, the way you behave... You change a lot with your husband and children. You learn things there that you didn't know. It helps a lot... When you start you're shy; later you lose it; more confidence with the women and with others. Before I was shy; now I feel more.. I rarely feel shy, because of what I've learned. (Margarita, 36 year old group member, mother of eight).

I have [confidence] with whoever; ... now I will not be shy, but before I would stay like that to one side of the door. 'Come in' , oh no; or 'come and eat' , no I'm not hungry; I was so shy. Today, no. If there's food you have to eat. So that's how things have been, I've woken up, my mind, and I know things. (Esperanza, 47 year old 'animator' of women's group, grandmother, mother of nine, five still living).

These words are echoed in words published by peasant women for peasant women (see page 116):

Many of us have got used to having sad, negative thoughts. And sometimes we don't even want to think. But if we cultivate our minds with love, if we apply fertilizer, if we keep pulling up the weeds which unsettle us and sowing good quality seeds, little by little we will discover, with happiness, that our minds produce new, beautiful fruits. Fear and shame will begin to disappear, if we have the courage to overcome them and encourage ourselves to learn and to think new, unknown things. (PAEM, 1990)<sup>5</sup>.

We have seen that many of us have the same problems. For example, in our village there is no water, no light, no adequate school, no land to work, no employment, no health centre or medicines or nurses and food is scarcer and more expensive every day. All this is an injustice

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<sup>4</sup> The names have been changed. See Appendix One for details of interviewees.

<sup>5</sup>PAEM (1990) p. 42.

that makes us feel bad. But if because of this situation we keep complaining and spending time in talk, making ourselves victims, we are like the cat which chases its own tail. We go round in circles and do nothing.

But if we see these injustices and feel angry, that's good, so long as we do not take it out on our children. This anger should make us look for possible solutions. Because most other women in the country have the problems we have. We need to stop being individualistic; we need to join with other women who have the same problems and interests. We need to learn to unite, getting to know ourselves, regaining our dignity and identity, actively participating in our group, in our community, in our country. With faith, hope and happiness, because we are constructing a new form of living <sup>6</sup>.

## 1.1 Introduction

'Empowerment' is a concept used by people who hold a wide range of views, to the right and left of the political spectrum<sup>7</sup>. Within the context of 'third world'<sup>8</sup> development, the word appears in the discourse of, among others, neo-liberals, neo-marxists, feminists and 'third world' grassroots groups:

- How is it that such a diverse range of people can talk of 'empowerment' with enthusiasm?
- How has 'empowerment' come to 'fit' with the various ideologies? Can they mean the same by it? If, as I suspect, they do not,
- Does 'empowerment' have meaning(s) that is (are) useful in the gender/development debate and in the practice that arises from it?

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. p. 76-7.

<sup>7</sup>I do not intend here to give a complete account of the various theoretical developments, since they are well outlined elsewhere and I mention them here for historical and theoretical context rather than because they are essential to my argument in this thesis. See, for example, Hunt (1989), Todaro (1994) and Toye (1987).

<sup>8</sup>Various terms have been put forward to describe those countries where poverty is a current reality for a high proportion of the population. I have not yet found a term that is accurate as a collective noun for these countries and which avoids communicating as an undifferentiated mass a group of countries which varies widely in size, resource base, population, character and so on. I use the term 'third world' in this thesis cautiously, as one which is generally understood even though it has become technically outdated with the demise of the 'Second World' of Socialist/centrally planned countries, and to avoid for the most part more clumsy terms or expressions I like even less.

These are some of the questions that prompted the research on which this thesis is based. The first of those questions is touched on briefly in this introduction. The second is the subject of Chapter Two and the third, the rest of the thesis. Much of the existing literature on 'empowerment' as it relates to gender and development originates from or uses examples in South Asia. In contrast, my research uses case study material from Honduras in Central America.

## 1.2 Development Theory

Within the political right, the dominant ideology of neo-liberalism and a monetarist approach to economics have held sway throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in many countries of the world, promoted and supported by the major international financial institutions. There was a loss of faith on the part of the major development institutions in the state as the automatic prime mover of development processes and an increasing emphasis on private bodies, whether 'firms' or other non-state organisations, as a central plank in neo-liberal economic theory. It became evident, however, in the latter half of the 1980s and the early 1990s that undiluted neo-liberal policies were not preventing the escalation of the third world debt crisis and were having unacceptable consequences in particular for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of populations faced with Structural Adjustment Programmes. Talk of finding ways of approaching development with a 'human face' began to appear<sup>9</sup>, along with attempts to incorporate 'non-economic' issues into the development agenda<sup>10</sup>. Although this 'humanizing' brought a fresh emphasis on the role of the state in development, there was continuing growth in interest in non-government organisations (NGOs) as development agents, in activity at the 'grassroots' and in processes of 'democratisation'. In addition, large-scale development projects, such as major hydro-electric schemes, had received much adverse criticism in terms of their impact on local populations and their inefficient use of financial and other

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<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Cornia, Jolly & Stewart (1987).

<sup>10</sup>For example, with the UNDP Human Development Index, UNDP (1993).

resources. Neoclassical economic theories are now being adapted to construct a 'new growth theory' which re-introduces a role for government policy in promoting the conditions necessary for long-run growth and development<sup>11</sup>. It is in this context that the World Bank could make the argument quoted at the opening of this chapter, drawing on the neoliberal emphasis on the individual being freed from the constraints of the state in order to take responsibility for meeting his/her own needs.

From the left of the political spectrum, theorising on development in the 1960s and 1970s was prolific, with the elaboration of various theoretical approaches including the Structuralism of the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America, dependency theories and World-Systems theory. By the 1980s, however, these theories were generally discredited, particularly because of the rapid growth and industrialization taking place in the so-called 'Newly Industrializing Countries' like South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, based on the export of mass-produced consumer goods. Many theorists of the left felt that an 'impasse' had been reached<sup>12</sup>. In addition, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ending of the cold war have challenged left-wing thinking and are compelling a major reassessment. Theorists drawing on postmodernism have provided another source of challenge to development thinking, with a new emphasis on diversity and the politics of difference<sup>13</sup>. So in the 1980s and 1990s there has been a switch in emphasis on the left away from grand theories towards empirical and local level analysis, and a greater focus on practical issues. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a growing emphasis on the work of NGOs and grassroots organisations appearing also in the literature of the political left.

The thinking generated within grassroots organisations and some NGOs began to be incorporated into theories and practical approaches to development. This can be seen, for example, in the literature on credit provision to the poor, where practical

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<sup>11</sup>Todaro (1994).

<sup>12</sup>See Schuurman (ed.) (1993) and Booth (1993).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Nicholson (1990), Goetz (1991).

measures for targetting particular groups and managing funds, particularly in India and Bangladesh, have been widely disseminated<sup>14</sup>. There was a growing interest in 'bottom-up' development, (as opposed to the dominant 'top-down' approach that was the legacy of Modernisation theory and the 'trickle-down' model)<sup>15</sup>. Thus words like 'participation'<sup>16</sup>, 'consultation' and more recently, 'partnership'<sup>17</sup> began to enter the vocabulary of both theory and practice. This language reflects the increased importance being given by many development organisations to an 'enabling' approach which respects people's abilities to identify and articulate their own needs and priorities<sup>18</sup>. It also reflects a political commitment on the part of some individuals and organisations to remove practices based on neo-colonial attitudes and structures that perpetuate relations of inequality. The term 'empowerment' has also arisen within this context and can be found in many accounts of development practice.

### 1.3 Women and Gender

In parallel to the debates on development theory, and without doubt influencing them, has been the emergence of theory on women and development and, later, gender and development. Initiated by the ground-breaking work of Boserup<sup>19</sup>, the Women in Development (WID) 'school' provided a powerful critique from a liberal feminist perspective of development theories which concentrated on men as

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<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Egger (1986), Berger (1989), Rose (1992) and Kabeer (1994)

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, Stöhr & Taylor (1981).

<sup>16</sup>Techniques of 'Rapid Rural Appraisal', for example, were adapted into 'Participatory Rural Appraisal'.

<sup>17</sup>Many Northern NGOs working on development issues now refer to the organisations they fund and/or work with, previously 'beneficiaries', as 'partners'. See Fowler (1991b).

<sup>18</sup>It is important to note that this has often been used in an instrumentalist way, using 'participation' to achieve other, often efficiency-related goals. See, for example, Shetty (n.d.) and Oakley et al. (1991).

<sup>19</sup>Boserup, (1970).

producers and household heads and completely ignored women except in their roles as housewives and mothers, as recipients of welfare<sup>20</sup>. WID theorists had a strong impact on development agencies, and many WID units were established, seeking to bring women 'into' development, mainly by including 'women's components' in wider development projects and programmes. The assumption was that if women were made visible and women were included in the development process, by implementing a change of policy from welfare to equality, they would no longer be marginalized and everyone would benefit. As neo-liberal approaches to economic development became more popular, the integration of women into development was seen as an 'efficient' approach that utilised women's productive potential that had been wasted with welfare approaches<sup>21</sup>. This was an approach, however, which did not question the existing social structures or the causes of women's subordination, and which focused predominantly on women's role in production. It was (and continues to be) an approach which instrumentalises women, using them as a resource for meeting other development goals such as population 'control', sustainable development and so on<sup>22</sup>. Marxist feminist critics of WID, identified as the Women and Development school (WAD), argued that women have always been a part of development processes, but that they have been invisible and under-represented because of structural inequalities in society. Neither WID nor WAD tackled issues of women's household and social reproductive activities, areas which constrain and shape women's activities in economic production, political activity or other aspects of their lives<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup>Again, I will not elaborate the arguments here, since they are well documented elsewhere. A particularly clear account can be found in Kabeer, (1994). See also Rathgeber (1990). WID theorists include Boserup (1970), Buvinic (1983), Tinker (1976) and Rogers (1980), to name just a few. Staudt (1985) gives an account of the history of WID in USAID.

<sup>21</sup>Kabeer (1994 p.26.) quotes a World Bank position paper: "If women continue to be left out of the mainstream of development and deprived of opportunities to realise their full potential, serious inefficiencies in the use of resources will persist".

<sup>22</sup>Jackson, (1994).

<sup>23</sup>Rathgeber (1990).

In the late 1970s and 1980s a new analysis emerged which tackled not just the nature of women's various roles, but the interactions of those roles with those of men. Gender and Development (GAD) is an approach not simply concerned with women's roles, therefore, but with the dynamics and structures of gender relations. Women are not, for example, housewives in a vacuum: they are housewives in a context where men and other women expect them to be housewives, as does the society at large. Gender relations are seen as central to social processes and social organisation (though not as their only important feature) and therefore to development, which is defined as "a complex process involving the social, economic, political and cultural betterment of individuals and of society itself"<sup>24</sup>. GAD theorists have highlighted the value systems which lead to a sexual division of labour, varyingly constituted, and lay emphasis on the socially constructed nature of gender and gender relations. An understanding of the processes by which gender relations are negotiated and re-negotiated, and the resultant social formations, can assist greatly in understanding the nature of households, of the constitution of the labour force, of the 'informal economy' and other basic constructs of development analysis. Gender analysis which takes account of the variety of 'women' (and men) and the diversity of their circumstances, necessitates a move away from the simple dichotomies of public/private, formal/informal, urban/rural and production/reproduction. It also requires the inclusion of all aspects of women's lives within the ambit of 'relevant issues' - their physical situation, intra-household relations, health, sexuality, education, means of livelihood and so on, since gender inequalities touch all aspects of women's lives. In particular, a GAD approach makes visible the power relations that exist between men and women in most societies, the situation of subordination that most women face. Gender analysis also enables a critique of the many supposedly neutral institutions<sup>25</sup> and the many manifestations of male bias<sup>26</sup> in the development process.

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<sup>24</sup>Young (1988a) p. 6.

<sup>25</sup>Kabeer, (1994).

<sup>26</sup>Elson, (1991).

A difficulty in practice with GAD as with WID/WAD, is that gender can be used in an instrumentalist way to facilitate other objectives within the prevailing ideologies; 'gender' can become a proxy for 'women'. So, for example, a focus on women heads of household as beneficiaries might be put forward as a way to tackle the issue of women's non-involvement in a project. That may well increase women's participation in quantitative terms. It is very likely, however, that women's work load will have been increased; the onus is on women to make the changes in their activity patterns in order to become involved. But the gender issues of women's 'non-participation' are complex, and targetting women in this way does not tackle those underlying issues: why is the incidence of women as heads of household increasing? Why is the division of responsibility for domestic and reproductive activity apportioned in a way that makes women's burden so heavy? Why is work not being done with men towards changing the nature of men's participation so that women are more able to become involved? Such instrumentalization also leaves untouched other, uncomfortable, pressures on women that affect not only their economic or project participation, but also their other activities and responsibilities and their general well-being, such as violence and abandonment. These gender issues affect women's lives just as surely as limited access to credit or training opportunities. Such categorization of women and women's needs also excludes the needs of women who are not household heads who are rendered invisible within male-headed households.

The notion of the 'empowerment' of women has been increasingly a part of the gender and development discourse over the past ten years or so. In her categorization of the spectrum of development interventions with women, Moser identified the 'empowerment approach' as one approach available to be used by gender planners<sup>27</sup>. Where the 'welfare', 'equity' 'efficiency' and 'anti-poverty' approaches might be seen to come out of a WID/WAD analysis, the 'empowerment approach' can be seen as arising from a Gender and Development perspective, perhaps combined with an approach to development that values 'bottom-up' or

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<sup>27</sup>Moser (1989). A clear account of the 'Moser Gender Planning Framework', and of other approaches to gender planning, can be found in Williams (1995).

'actor-oriented' strategies. The focus on empowerment has been strengthened by the theoretical advance which enabled a distinction to be drawn between women's practical and strategic gender interests<sup>28</sup>. Women's condition<sup>29</sup>, the material situation of her life, mean that she has practical needs, resulting from her gendered position in society. That gendered position means that she also has strategic needs, needs that challenge the gender hierarchies and other mechanisms of subordination<sup>30</sup>. Although I do not see practical and strategic interests and needs as being as clearly separable as most of the use of the distinction in the literature implies<sup>31</sup>, the formulation of the distinction has made it possible to think deliberately and strategically about what is required to tackle gender and development issues in a pragmatic way in the context of existing programmes and projects without losing sight of the fundamental changes required to truly tackle gender inequalities<sup>32</sup>. Eliminating male bias and moving women out of the condition of near-universal subordination they still currently occupy will require cultural, economic and political changes; it will not be achieved by tinkering with the structures of employment or national accounting. Differentiating between the 'practical' and the 'strategic' has also made it easier to see clearly in theoretical terms that in order to tackle 'strategic' issues, the power dynamics of gender have to be addressed. The terminology of empowerment has, however, not grown just out

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<sup>28</sup>Molyneux, (1985).

<sup>29</sup>Young, (1988b) .

<sup>30</sup>Alsop (1993) provides a clear critique of the practical/strategic framework in the context of gender planning in Northeast India, cautioning that the complexities of gender relations and social/economic factors and the limitations of 'projects' can easily lead to unintended outcomes, especially if 'outsiders' are identifying the needs/issues. She suggests that satisfying a practical need can positively support a strategic concern and that women need to be identifying the needs and issues for themselves.

<sup>31</sup>Molyneux (1985); Moser (1989) and subsequently, many other writers.

<sup>32</sup>Wieringa (1994) criticises the concept of practical/strategic gender needs or interests (and women's condition/position, on similar grounds) as theoretically flawed, since a) they change over time, b) they vary depending on who is defining them, c) they encourage a homogenisation of 'women's interests' where these are diverse, d) the distinction implies a hierarchical relation between the two which lends itself to a top-down approach, e) it is empirically impossible to distinguish between the two. She suggests that "the 'success' of certain development efforts may be better 'measured' by the way new interests surface or come to be defined along the way, than by the progress made in relation to certain interests which were defined during the planning stage". (p. 836).

of some theoretical debate, but primarily out of the practical experiences of women working for change at the grassroots level in many parts of the world. Unlike the WID/WAD analysis, significant contributions to the thinking behind the 'empowerment approach' have come from 'third world' women<sup>33</sup>. Debates on the empowerment of women have been strong in South Asia and the Philippines, among development practitioners and grassroots activists in their search for effective ways of supporting and enabling women to make changes<sup>34</sup>.

In general, neither the 'development' use of empowerment nor the 'gender' use is very precise, although the latter has a clearer implied understanding. The word tends to be used in a way which presupposes that the reader/listener will know what is meant; and that the 'how' can either be assumed or ignored. The word appears to be included in order to communicate 'good intentions', to imply some unspecified recognition of a need for changes in the way power is distributed. I will pick on some rather arbitrary examples. Chambers talks about "enabling and empowering poor clients"<sup>35</sup>. He discusses the need for service organisations to "see that clients know their rights and have power to demand them, enabling them to ensure quality of service and access"<sup>36</sup>. But how? Of what does the crucial process of getting to that point consist for those poor 'clients'? Wasserstrom, for example, talks of the Inter-American Foundation's focus on the "delicate and challenging task of *empowerment*, of helping poor people to create viable organisations of their own"<sup>37</sup>. Why is that perceived as the means? There is no explanation of empowerment to help us. It then becomes possible to sustain a notion of empowerment as something that can be done 'to' people, an issue I discuss on page 28. Without more concrete meaning, it runs the risk of being relegated to being an imprecise term which, along

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<sup>33</sup>In terms of quantity and quality. Most notably, from the women in the 'Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era' network, see Sen & Grown, (1988). Also Batliwala (1993).

<sup>34</sup>See, for example, Batliwala (1993).

<sup>35</sup>Chambers (1983) p. 214.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid. p. 215.

<sup>37</sup>Wasserstrom, (1985), p. 2. Emphasis in original.

with 'participation', can be ignored or used to obscure, confuse or even divert debates<sup>38</sup>. In my view, the absence of definition and exploration of the practical details of its achievement considerably weaken the value of the concept of 'empowerment' as a tool for analysis or as part of a strategy for change.

My own interest in 'empowerment' dates from my experience first as a community and peace activist and then as a feminist in the late 1970s. I was involved in many discussions about power, the forms it can take, the way one achieves/obtains/creates/wields it and so on, particularly in the context of nonviolent direct action campaigning<sup>39</sup>. The issue of how to translate principles into practice was a very 'live' one, and we talked about 'empowerment' as part of processes of social change. That preoccupation continued into my feminist activism, where along with others I developed an analysis of oppression, first around gender and then class, race, disability, age and sexual orientation. Issues of power - who has it, who does not - continued to interest me in my work as a management consultant with non government organisations. So when I started to work with 'third world' organisations and I immersed myself in the development and gender-and-development literature, I was both pleased and irritated, as well as interested to find 'empowerment' being used as a concept, particularly in relation to women. Pleased, because it fitted with my own conceptions of what is important in the work for equality and liberation, and irritated because of the lack of exactitude. Issues of power seem to me utterly fundamental to the debate, yet they are so rarely explicitly addressed. I found myself agreeing with Sarah White that "it is in its avoidance of discussing power that the fundamental weakness of the literature on women and development lies"<sup>40</sup>. When I came across 'the empowerment approach' to gender planning I realised that I

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<sup>38</sup>See, for example, Yuval-Davies (1994)

<sup>39</sup>Much of the theory of nonviolence grew out of the Gandhian model of 'passive resistance'. It is concerned with how the apparently less powerful can draw on creative forms of resistance, often based on a strict moral code and on finding ways to make 'human contact' with people in positions of power and authority. It can also be based on the 'power' of nuisance value or of adverse publicity. The environmental campaigning work of Greenpeace is perhaps one of the best known and successful examples of nonviolent campaigning.

<sup>40</sup>White, (1992) p. 22.

wanted to take a closer look at the meaning of empowerment in a development setting, and specifically, at empowerment in the context of women's organisations: What it is, and how it can be encouraged, especially in the light of Kabeer's conclusion that,

If there is a single most important lesson for feminists to learn from the past decades of development, it is that the political will for taking on more politically controversial issues which address women's strategic gender interests is contingent on women themselves organising to demand and promote change.<sup>41</sup>

'Development' is, after all, about change. Does 'empowerment' imply any specific kinds of changes, and if so, for whom?

#### 1.4 Thesis Outline

It is interesting to note, then, that 'empowerment' as a concept has roots in many places: in academia, in the large development institutions, in NGOs, in grassroots organisations; and in many parts of the political spectrum. It also has roots outside the field of development altogether, as will be shown in Chapter Two. As Shetty has pointed out, there is no consensus on the meaning of 'empowerment' and it is therefore possible for it to be used in a politically meaningless way, and often as a replacement term for 'participation' or 'integration' in agendas that have been set elsewhere<sup>42</sup>.

In this thesis I set out to provide definition for the term 'empowerment', looking in particular at how it might be used in relation to women, using a gender and development analysis. My intention is to encourage more precise usage and to explore how a more disciplined use of the concept of empowerment might provide

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<sup>41</sup>Kabeer, (1994) p. 91.

<sup>42</sup>Shetty (1991). As Fowler (1992) points out, even research dedicated to exploring the empowerment dimension of development fails to give a definition: "We are therefore forced to deduce what is meant by this term from the context of its inclusion in existing literature.", p.8.

a useful tool for gender planning, project planning and evaluation. In Chapter Two I explore the meaning of 'empowerment', starting from an exploration of theories of 'power' and drawing on various academic disciplines to do so. Having reached a starting-point 'model' of empowerment, the main body of the thesis is dedicated to an exploration of two case studies based on field research in Honduras, looking at how 'empowerment' relates to two very different women's organisations. Chapter Three provides background information on Honduras in order to put the case studies in context; Chapter Four outlines the methodology I used in conducting the research. In Chapters Five and Six I give a description of PAEM, the *Programa Educativa de la Mujer* (Women's Educational Programme), and then an analysis of what the programme achieved and its impact on participant women in the light of the discussion on empowerment. Chapters Seven and Eight cover similar ground for the second case, the Health Promoters' training programme in Urraco Pueblo. Then in Chapter Nine I draw analysis of the two organisations together to re-examine the model of empowerment and to revise it extensively in the light of clearer understanding gained through the case studies. In the concluding chapter, Chapter Ten, I re-consider the use of the term 'empowerment' in the context of gender and development, assess the implications of my model of empowerment for planners and practitioners and, in the course of doing that, identify areas of research which would take the issue further. A glossary of Spanish terms used in the text and a list of abbreviations can be found on pages x and xiii. Details of interviews conducted and their content/format can be found in the appendices, along with a tabular restatement of figures 9.1-9.8.

## **Chapter Two: Power and empowerment**

'Empowerment' as a concept is widely used, but weakly defined. Development is not the only context where the concept of empowerment appears; we now hear it from Western politicians such as Bill Clinton and John Major. Its use in some disciplines, adult education, community work and social work in particular, is much more established, but there is no clear commonly understood definition. The easy usage of the term 'empowerment' in the literature disguises a problematic concept. Some of the confusion arises because the root concept of empowerment, power, is itself a disputed concept, understood in differing ways by different people. Every usage of the concept of empowerment is based on a particular understanding of 'power' - of which the user may or may not be aware. In order to be more precise about the meaning of empowerment, the definition of power to which it is related must be understood. In this chapter I explore the issue of 'What is power?', and then relate that to meanings of empowerment. I then look at how empowerment has been used in other disciplines, before moving on to considering how empowerment has been used within the field of development.

### **2.1 Models of Power**

Power has been the focus of much debate across the social sciences and several models of power have been developed<sup>43</sup>. Many focus, with varying degrees of subtlety, on the ability of one person or group to get another person or group to do something against their/its will. The emphasis is on who prevails in cases of decision making where there is an observable conflict<sup>44</sup>. If A and B have incompatible wishes, and A prevails, then power has been exercised. Power in this model, therefore, is located in decision making processes and conflict. Decisions are made

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<sup>43</sup> See amongst others, Dahl (1961), Polsby (1963), Wolfinger (1971), Weber (1947), Bachrach & Baratz (1970), Lukes (1974), Foucault (1982), Gordon (1980), Giddens (1984), Hartssock (1985 & 1990), Boulding (1988), Barnes (1988), Davis *et al.* (1991) and Radtke & Stam (1994).

<sup>44</sup> Dahl (1961), Polsby (1963), Wolfinger (1971).

at many levels, from the international to the household; they might be, for instance, about use and distribution of resources, about divisions of labour, allocation of time, policy or recreation. The form that power can take includes violence and other kinds of force, but can also involve, for example, the taking away of resources (or the threat of it), or the offer of extra resources in exchange for certain behaviour that would not otherwise be forthcoming. Power in this sense can be wielded by individuals or by groups.

Conflict, however, is not always publicly aired, and decisions are not always easily visible. A powerful group might create a set of 'rules of the game' that effectively prevent a less powerful group from voicing its wishes. The basic model has been widened<sup>45</sup> to include an understanding that as well as decision making, where choice is made among alternatives, non-decision making - i.e. a decision not to do something, not to object, etc. - is also a place where power is wielded. Thus coercion, manipulation, misinformation and other ways of influencing are also recognised as forms of the exercise of power, since they in effect suppress what would otherwise have been open conflict.

Lukes identified another dimension of power by insisting that power was not only present in the observable areas of conflict or suppressed conflict described above, but also in 'unobservable conflict'<sup>46</sup>. He argued that the supreme effect of power is to prevent people not from expressing conflict but from even having the conflict in the first place:

the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent ... conflict arising in the first place ... by shaping [people's] perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine

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<sup>45</sup> Bachrach & Baratz (1970)

<sup>46</sup> Lukes (1974).

no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial<sup>47</sup>.

This can be achieved, for example, by making it impossible for people to imagine anything different from the status quo, or by perceiving the status quo as the natural way of things or as divinely inspired. The conflict therefore becomes one between A's interests and the interests B would have were B in a position to think clearly and articulate B's own real interests; if B really had a choice. For Lukes, therefore, power is still about decision making and conflict, but the understanding of how and why decision making and conflict can be invisible and also latent is a crucial development. This could occur, for example through control of information or processes of socialisation.

These models of power are zero-sum: the more power one person has, the less the other has. Other models differentiate between various kinds of power, which can then be understood as serving different purposes and having different effects in/on society. For Boulding, these are 'threat power' (the stick), 'economic power' (the carrot) and 'integrative power' (the hug). This last is "the power to create such relationships as love, respect, friendship, legitimacy and so on"<sup>48</sup>. For Friedmann, distinctions rest more on the locus of power within society: state power, social power, economic power and political power<sup>49</sup>.

Most current models of power are apparently 'neutral', that is, they make no mention of how power is actually distributed in society. There is no consideration of the power dynamics of gender or indeed of race or class<sup>50</sup>, where it is predominantly one group (men, white people, propertied people/elites) which has

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<sup>47</sup> Lukes (1974) p. 23-4.

<sup>48</sup> Boulding (1988) p.10.

<sup>49</sup> Friedmann (1992), p 27-9.

<sup>50</sup> Or, indeed, of many other issues, including, for example, disability, sexuality, age and so on.

power over another group (women, people of colour, working class people). Such 'neutrality' precludes analysis, therefore, not only of, say, gender power dynamics, but also of how one set of such dynamics can interact with others to produce complex power relationships. This absence, particularly as it relates to gender issues, is tackled by a number of feminist theorists<sup>51</sup>. Hartsock describes the theories outlined earlier as an obedience definition of power; others have called it 'power over', since the exercise of this kind of power involves some people having control or influence over others<sup>52</sup>. A gender analysis of 'power over' shows that it is wielded predominantly by men over men and women. 'Power over' is thus domination.

The use of 'power over' can be very subtle. Various writers have described the way in which a group of people which is systematically denied power and influence in the dominant society will internalise the messages it receives about its supposed roles and capacities, and will come to believe the messages to be true<sup>53</sup>. This 'internalised oppression' is adopted as a survival mechanism, but becomes so well ingrained that the effects are mistaken for reality. Thus, for example, a woman who is subjected to violent abuse when she expresses her own opinions may start to withhold her opinions and eventually come to believe that she has no opinions of her own. When control becomes internalised in this way, overt use of power over is no longer necessary<sup>54</sup>. Many groups of people have controlled their own behaviour and

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Hartsock (1985 & 1990), Davis *et al.* (1991) and Radtke & Stam (1994).

<sup>52</sup> For example Starhawk, (1987).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Pheterson (1990), Jackins (1983).

<sup>54</sup> This mechanism is also described by Foucault in relation to Bentham's Panopticon prison model: "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be minimal cost." (in Gordon, 1980, p. 155).

sense of self in this way, as the current thinking emerging from groups of women, black people, people with disabilities and many others demonstrates<sup>55</sup>.

Drawing on the writings of various women writers<sup>56</sup>, Hartsock contrasts the obedience definition of power with what she calls an 'energy' definition of power<sup>57</sup>. This is power which does not involve the domination of 'power over', but is a power which is generative, for example "the power some people have of stimulating activity in others and raising their morale"<sup>58</sup>. One aspect of this 'power to' is the kind of leadership that comes from the wish to see a group achieve what it is capable of, where there is not necessarily any conflict of interests and the group is setting its own agenda. It is a form of power which can persuade or open up new possibilities.

Foucault uses a different model of power. For Foucault, power is not a finite entity that can be located; power is relational, not a substance, and is something which exists only in its exercise. It is constituted in a network of social relationships among subjects who are free to act to at least a minimal extent; without power those relationships cannot exist<sup>59</sup>. He sees power as a "mode of action upon actions"<sup>60</sup>. His is a notion of power as productive, as intimately bound up with knowledge. Foucault's model of power includes an understanding of resistance as a form of power (a form of action upon an action); he suggests that where there is power there is resistance. His focus is mainly on micro-politics: the local exercise of power at

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Collins (1990) and Lorde (1984): "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us" (p. 123).

<sup>56</sup> including Hannah Arendt, Mary Parker Follett, Dorothy Emmett, Hannah Pitkin and Berenice Carroll

<sup>57</sup> Pitkin calls this 'power to'; Parker Follett and Emmett call it 'power with'.

<sup>58</sup> Hartsock, (1985) p.223.

<sup>59</sup> See Gordon (1980), Foucault (1982) ; Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982), Kritzman (1988).

<sup>60</sup> Foucault (1982) p.222.

particular points, and the resistance to it. Power relations, in this model, are multiple and are rooted in systems of social networks.

Some authors have found Foucault's model of power useful in their analysis of power from a feminist perspective. In many ways power according to Foucault appears similar to the generative or 'energy' definition of power. There are, however, problems for feminists with the Foucault model. One of these lies in the 'slippery' quality Foucault's concept of power has: if power is everywhere, if every individual capable of acting upon the actions of others (including when resisting) has power, it becomes quite difficult to account for the imbalances of power relations between particular groups of people<sup>61</sup>. It is also relevant to a feminist analysis that Foucault, as Deveaux points out, sees power and domination as two different phenomena<sup>62</sup>. Once someone is enslaved and in chains, according to Foucault, they are no longer in a position to 'act upon actions' or resist, and are therefore not in a power relationship<sup>63</sup>. For the feminist, this is a false dichotomy:

To define male power as an inherently separable phenomenon from male force and domination, as Foucault would have us do, is to disregard the ways in which this power is frequently transformed into violence. A woman living in an abusive relationship feels the continuum of her partner's anger and force, sees that the day-to-day exercise of power is the stuff out of which explosions of abuse and violence are made. Foucault's distinction between power and violence, freedom and domination, do not allow us to ask whether this woman feels complicit or victimized, powerless or empowered to leave the situation of abuse.<sup>64</sup>

Basing his notion of power on 'acting on actions', Foucault does not allow for the internal processes which can interfere with the individual's agency and choice. He

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<sup>61</sup> Although, as Deveaux (1994) also points out, a wider view of Foucault's work reveals political concerns.

<sup>62</sup> Deveaux (1994).

<sup>63</sup> "where the determining factors saturate the whole there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when a man is in chains". Foucault (1982) p. 221, quoted in Deveaux (1994).

<sup>64</sup> Deveaux (1994) p. 235.

does not seem to conceive of any relationship where the individual is not 'acting on' another, and he therefore does not account for more than one individual joining together to act with each other:

Foucault's power analysis prevents us from seeing or conceptualizing relationships in which the object is *neither to act upon* another in a power relation or to *resist* the attempts of governing conduct or a local manifestation of power; [Foucault's analysis] is a framework that seems inappropriate for describing co-operative efforts aimed both at political transformation and personal empowerment or consciousness-raising.<sup>65</sup>

A feminist model of power, then, would draw on the thinking of Foucault, but would incorporate a gender analysis of power relations that includes an understanding of how 'internalised oppression' places internal barriers to women's exercise of power, thereby contributing to the maintenance of inequality between men and women<sup>66</sup>. It would also draw on an analysis of how the gendered phenomenon of male violence against women conditions women's experience. For Radtke & Stam, power is the "capacity to have an impact or produce an effect"<sup>67</sup>, so that "Power is both the source of oppression in its abuse and the source of emancipation in its use"<sup>68</sup>. It is therefore useful to differentiate between different types of exercise of power: 'power over' as controlling power, which may be responded to with compliance, resistance (which weakens processes of victimisation<sup>69</sup>) or manipulation and 'power to' as generative or productive power (sometimes incorporating or manifesting as forms of resistance and/or manipulation)

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 242. Emphasis in original.

<sup>66</sup> Foucault, in his later work, does show some awareness of this: "I don't believe that this question of 'who exercises power?' can be resolved unless that other question 'how does it happen?' is resolved at the same time" (1988b), p. 103. For me, however, this is not sufficient. Perhaps, had he lived longer, he would have provided a more satisfactory account!

<sup>67</sup> Radtke & Stam (1994) 'Introduction' p.8. I take this to include the possibility that the impact or effect produced can include the maintenance of the status quo.

<sup>68</sup> Radtke & Stam (1994) p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Faith (1994). For an exploration of forms of resistance, see Scott (1985).

which creates new possibilities and actions without domination. Some analysts also identify 'power with', which "involves a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles problems together"<sup>70</sup>, and 'power from within', "the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals"<sup>71</sup>.

## 2.2 So what is empowerment?

The meaning of 'empowerment', in the light of the above discussion, can now be seen to relate to the model of power being assumed by the user. Using a traditional model of power, empowerment must be about bringing people outside the decision making process into it; this puts a strong emphasis on access to political structures and formal decision making and, in the economic sphere, on access to markets and income that enables them to participate in economic decision making. Empowerment could involve devolving 'power over' to those with none<sup>72</sup>. It can also be seen as "a process that unburdens the state and reduces its role and some responsibilities towards citizens"<sup>73</sup>. Empowerment according to Lukes would encompass the individual maximisation of opportunities, but would also have to include gaining access to 'un-observable' decision making processes and to the ability to exert influence over decisions made<sup>74</sup>. In other words, in place of acceptance of the status quo as the only possibility, people would become aware of their own interests and how those relate to the interests of others in order that they could participate knowingly in decision making .

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<sup>70</sup> CCIC: 'Two Halves make a Whole: Balancing Gender Relations in Development' quoted in Williams (1995), p. 234.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, the approach of Bennett *et al* (1994), quoted from at the opening of Chapter One.

<sup>73</sup> Fowler (1992), p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> Lukes (1974).

Empowerment according to a Foucauldian model of power seems to be a non-issue: since all relationships between people capable of 'acting on actions' are constituted by the exercise of power, 'empowerment' is a meaningless concept. That is, unless you expand Foucault's conception of power to include some account of relations of domination - in which case 'empowerment' could be seen to mean the increasing of the individual's ability to exercise power in the face of a dominant form of power.

A feminist interpretation of power leads to a much wider understanding of empowerment than the others, since it goes beyond formal and institutional conceptions of power, and encompasses both 'power over' and 'power to'. Empowerment in relation to a feminist reading of 'power over' has similarities with the definitions above, but includes an understanding of the dynamics of oppression and 'internalised oppression'. As I argued earlier, these affect the ability of less powerful groups to participate in formal and informal decision making and to exert influence; they also significantly affect the way that individuals or groups perceive themselves and their ability to act and influence the world around them. Empowerment in this sense has to be more than simply opening up access to decision making; it has to include also the processes that lead the individual or group being enabled to *perceive themselves as able to occupy that decision making space*<sup>75</sup> and to use that space effectively<sup>76</sup>. In this, it overlaps into 'power to'.

Empowerment that is based on 'power to' involves gaining access to a full range of human abilities and potential. As feminist theorists have clearly shown, the abilities a group or individual is perceived to have by society as a whole are at least to a large degree socially constructed<sup>77</sup>. Particular categories of people, including women, are constructed to have less than the full range of possibilities. What is socially constructed can, however, be re-constructed. People who are not perceived as powerful can learn to use 'power to', to re-assess their self-concept and open up

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<sup>75</sup> This is one aspect of what was achieved through 'consciousness-raising groups' in the 1970s.

<sup>76</sup> for example by learning 'meetings skills' and the language/protocol that might be required.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Crowley & Himmelweit (1992)

new ways of being and acting, in order to bring about changes in their position in society; in so doing, their self-perception will change.

We can conceive of power as 'power to', power which is creative and enabling, the essence of the individual aspect of empowerment. Most people describe situations where they felt powerful as those in which they solved a problem, understood how something works or learned a skill<sup>78</sup>.

As Deveaux implies, discussions of agency, identity and the subject's understanding of her conditions of oppression are relevant to empowerment in this sense<sup>79</sup>. Combining an analysis of 'power over' and 'power to' into a feminist model of empowerment therefore involves "a radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women's subordination as a gender"<sup>80</sup>.

This thesis will argue that this wider picture of empowerment can be seen in three dimensions: the personal dimension where empowerment is about developing the sense of self and individual confidence and capacity (which involves undoing the effects of internalised oppression); the dimension of close relationships, where empowerment is about developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within that relationship; and the collective dimension, where individuals work together to have impact that is wider than each could do alone. This last includes involvement in political structures, but can also be collective action based on a co-operative rather than a competitive model. Empowerment in a collective dimension in practice needs to be broken down further as a category, since it encompasses a wide range of scale, from, for example, a village level through to the level of, say, the United Nations. A local or informal collective aspect and a formal or institutional collective aspect can thus be distinguished (see Figure 2.1).

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<sup>78</sup> Williams (1995) Handout 33, p. 233.

<sup>79</sup> Deveaux (1994).

<sup>80</sup> Young (1993) p. 158.

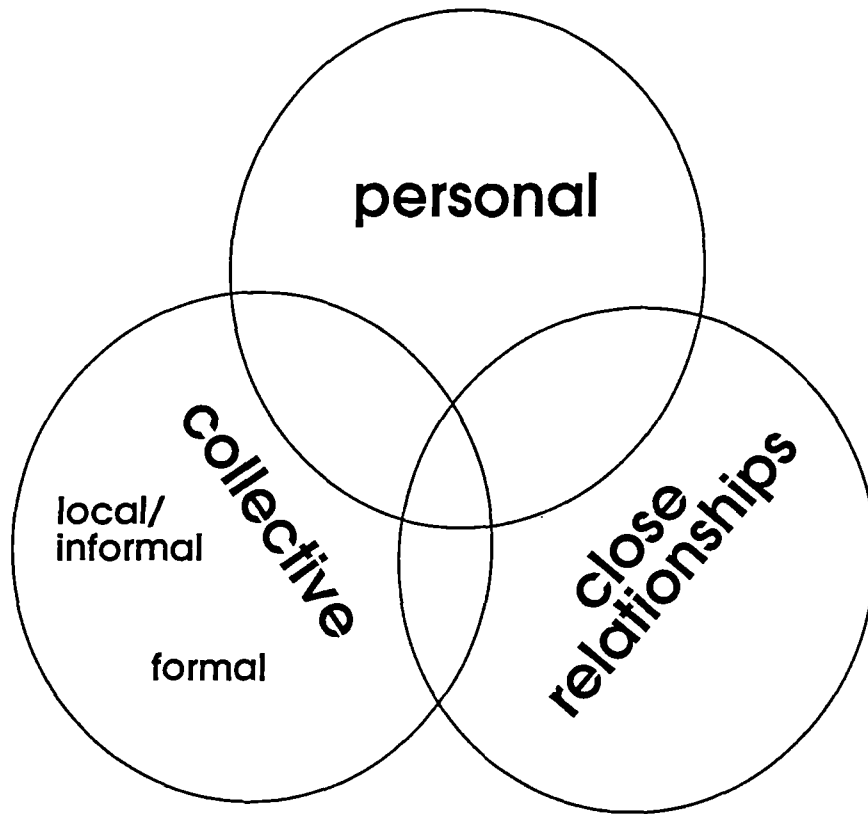


Figure 2.1: Simple model of empowerment

The existence of differing models of power on which to base an analysis of empowerment explains the incongruity of people and organisations as far apart politically as feminists and the World Bank using the word 'empowerment' with enthusiasm. The dictionary definition of empowerment reflects one particular view: Empowerment is "the action of empowering; the state of being empowered"<sup>81</sup>, where to empower is primarily seen as equivalent to delegation<sup>82</sup>. This usage is common. It can be seen, for example, in the literature of business management<sup>83</sup>, including among geographers: "Empowerment is a force of reform developed primarily in business management to devolve more power down the management hierarchy"<sup>84</sup>. The rest of this chapter will look at empowerment in practice, putting a particular emphasis on the generative view of power.

### **2.3 Empowerment in Practice: Richer Countries**

The concept of empowerment is being used increasingly in many contexts as a tool for analysing what is needed to change the situation of poor and marginalised people<sup>85</sup>. Most notable among these are education, social work, counselling/psychology, community and youth work. Definitions of empowerment are many in the literature of these disciplines. There is broad agreement that empowerment is a process; that it involves some degree of personal development,

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<sup>81</sup> O.E.D. (1989) p. 192.

<sup>82</sup> O.E.D. (1989) p. 192. "**Empower**: 1). To invest legally or formally with power or authority; to authorise, license". " 2). To impart or bestow to an end or for a purpose; to enable, permit". There is also an interesting obsolete version: "To gain or assume power *over*". (Emphasis in original).

<sup>83</sup> For example, Peters (1987) talks about delegation as the *sine qua non* of empowerment (p. 451).

<sup>84</sup> Bennett, Wicks and McCoshan (1994) p.1.

<sup>85</sup> I am not equating this group of people with 'the powerless'. As bell hooks has pointed out with her notion of the 'politics of location', marginality has a double role as a 'site of deprivation' and as a 'space of resistance'. (hooks (1990)).

but that that is not sufficient; that it also involves translation into action<sup>86</sup>. In a counselling context, McWhirter defines empowerment as:

the process by which people, organisations or groups who are powerless a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and d) support the empowerment of others in their community<sup>87</sup>.

She makes a useful distinction between a situation of 'empowerment', where all four of these conditions are met, and an 'empowering' situation, where one or more of the conditions is in place or being developed, but where the full requirements are not present.

Through all these definitions runs a theme of the need for analysis: if you understand your situation you are more likely to want to act to do something about it. There is also a theme of acting collectively. In McWhirter's definition it is clear that, in taking action, the gaining of 'power over' is not the intention (points c and d). Ward and Mullender, writing about social group work, insist that empowerment must be used in conjunction with an understanding of oppression: that empowerment is about working to remove the effects of and existence of unjust inequalities<sup>88</sup>. Empowerment can take place at a micro level, linking people with others in similar situations through self-help groups, education groups, support groups, social action groups and network building, or at a macro level, through community organisation, campaigning, legislative lobbying, social planning and policy development<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> For example, Kearney and Keenan, (1988); Gutierrez and Ortega, (1991). Some uses of empowerment are focussed on the individual, for example within Clinical Sociology or Psychology (eg. Identity Empowerment theory, Hall (1992), but it is the group-oriented literature that is of more interest and relevance here.

<sup>87</sup> McWhirter, (1991) p. 224.

<sup>88</sup> Ward & Mullender, (1991).

<sup>89</sup> Parsons, (1991).

Some writers are careful to stress what empowerment is not. McWhirter is clear that an increase in autonomy is not enough<sup>90</sup>; Adams argues that delegation or enabling do not in themselves constitute empowerment<sup>91</sup>. Collins is clear that empowerment is not about replacing one set of wielders of power with another<sup>92</sup>:

Black women have not conceptualised our quest for empowerment as one of replacing elite white male authorities with ourselves as benevolent Black female ones. Instead, African-American women have overtly rejected theories of power based on domination in order to embrace an alternative vision of power based on a humanist vision of self-actualisation, self-definition and self-determination.<sup>93</sup>

In many ways, the definitions of empowerment used in education, counselling and social work, although developed through work in industrialised Northern countries, are similar to Freire's concept of conscientisation<sup>94</sup>, which centres on individuals becoming 'subjects' in their own lives and developing what he calls 'critical consciousness' - an understanding of their circumstances and the social environment that leads to action.

In practice, much of the work towards empowerment in these disciplines involves forms of work in groups. The role of the 'professional' in this context becomes one of helper and facilitator; anything more directive is seen as interfering with the empowerment of the people concerned. This has involved professionals in re-learning how to do their job and developing high levels of self-awareness, since the skills of facilitating empowerment have to be exercised with subtlety if they are to be effective. In some cases, the 'professional' has to become a member of the group concerned, and be willing to do the same kind of personal sharing as is encouraged

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<sup>90</sup> McWhirter (1991).

<sup>91</sup> Adams (1990).

<sup>92</sup> This is presumably what many people, particularly people who have a position of power within the current order, assume when they respond defensively to mention of empowerment.

<sup>93</sup> Collins (1990) p. 224.

<sup>94</sup> Freire (1972, 1973).

from others in the group. If empowerment is authentic, then the 'professional' cannot hope to control any outcomes. Taliaferro, writing about education, points out that true power cannot be bestowed: it comes from within. Any notion of empowerment being given by one group to another hides an attempt to keep control. She describes any notion of 'gradual empowerment' as "especially dubious"<sup>95</sup>. Real empowerment may take events in directions unanticipated by any 'professionals' involved in the process, (or, indeed, by the individuals or group themselves) who should therefore be clear that any 'power over' they have access to in relation to the people they work with is likely to be challenged. This raises an ethical issue: if the reality is that as the 'professional' you do have power over, as is the case with statutory authorities or people with significant economic power, it is misleading to imply that that is not the case.

#### **2.4 Empowerment in Practice: Third World contexts**

Can empowerment be used in a similar way in a development context? The empowerment literature referred to above originates from work in 'developed' countries. Do the situations of the poor and marginalised in the developed countries share any similarities with the poor and marginalised in the South? In both cases, their lack of access to resources and to formal power is significant, although the contexts within which that lack is experienced are very different. The definition of empowerment that McWhirter uses seems to me to be equally relevant to either context. Any difference is more likely to show up in the way in which it is put into practice, and in the activities that are called for. This would appear to be confirmed by one of the definitions of empowerment that has been made specifically with a development focus. Keller & Mbewe describe empowerment as:

a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to

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<sup>95</sup> Taliaferro, 1991, p.1).

make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination<sup>96</sup>.

Caroline Moser's definition of empowerment is

more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over material and nonmaterial resources<sup>97</sup>.

Janet Price argues that empowerment also "moves beyond [personal change and growth] to increasing participation in the broader field of politics and needs identification"<sup>98</sup>. This is significant in raising the question of the relationship between an individual's internal sense of power and the broader structures of society. The issue of "Who identifies women's needs?" is an important one, since so many approaches to development have the needs identified by some outside body. In the case of SUTRA, an Indian NGO, she describes how the move to having the women defining their own needs and priorities was an essential part of the empowerment process.

Many usages of the terminology of 'empowerment' within development literature are incidental and occur as part of accounts or debates on other issues<sup>99</sup>. Some people, however, approach the subject more directly and present more detail in their thinking. For example, Friedmann explores further the meaning of empowerment in a development context as a central part of his theory of 'Alternative Development'<sup>100</sup>. Largely basing his analysis on the household<sup>101</sup>, he considers

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<sup>96</sup> Keller & Mbewe, (1991), p. 76.

<sup>97</sup> Moser (1989) p. 1815.

<sup>98</sup> Price ( n.d.) p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> For example, Jesani (1990), Schenksandbergen (1991), Kassam (1989), Watts (1991).

<sup>100</sup> Friedmann (1992).

that households potentially have three kinds of power: social power (in terms of information, knowledge, skills, financial resources and participation in social organisations), political power (in terms of access to decisions affecting their own future, whether through the vote, or through collective action) and psychological power (in terms of the individual's sense of potency or self-confidence). He sees the latter as coming out of the first two. The Alternative Development he proposes "seeks the empowerment of households and their individual members in all three senses"<sup>102</sup>.

Thomas, in relation to the work of non-government organisations, is critical of attempts to present empowerment as a model of development<sup>103</sup>. He identifies two main empowerment approaches: that of 'tools for self-reliance', associated with the ideas of E.F. Schumacher<sup>104</sup>, and that of participative action research, associated in part with the ideas of Freire<sup>105</sup>. He portrays both of these approaches as attempts to use 'participation' of local people as a route to solution of local problems, seeing them as limited to particular situations and not easily replicable elsewhere. This portrayal of empowerment, whilst more detailed than most, does not enter into a discussion of what empowerment consists of, but focusses instead on the evident limitations of attempts at empowerment to date, including the structural limitations of NGOs and the reality that many local problems have 'causes' well outside the immediate community.

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<sup>101</sup> Friedmann does not present the household as an undifferentiated unit, and acknowledges power imbalances within the household; nonetheless I find this a serious limitation on the usefulness of his account for considering the empowerment of women in particular.

<sup>102</sup> Friedmann (1992) p.33.

<sup>103</sup> Thomas (1992).

<sup>104</sup> Schumacher (1973).

<sup>105</sup> Freire (1972). Freire does not use the term 'empowerment' in his early work. Interestingly, in his later work he specifically criticises any notion of empowerment as an individual phenomenon, or even as a community or social activity; rather, he insists on empowerment as 'social class empowerment': The question of social class empowerment involves how the working class, through its own experiences, its own construction of culture, engages itself in getting political power". (Freire & Shor (1987) p. 112).

Johnson, looking more specifically at women's empowerment in the context of the increase in women's organisations and collective activities in Latin America in recent years, identifies that

women's empowerment involves gaining a voice, having mobility and establishing a public presence. Although women can empower themselves by obtaining some control over different aspects of their daily lives, empowerment also suggests the need to gain some control over *power structures*, or to change them.<sup>106</sup>

She associates empowerment with the taking of some sort of *collective public action* beyond the individual on the basis of a collective class, gender or other identity, often based on the needs of family survival. For Johnson, empowerment is a process that may be very slow, involving self-discovery and the development of a collective identity. The public action that comes out of this process may challenge existing power structures, and may identify different development priorities.

Perhaps the most commonly cited work that relates to empowerment, and specifically to women's empowerment, is that of the DAWN network of Third World women theorists and activists<sup>107</sup>. They highlight the empowerment of women as of central importance in the slow process of social, political and economic change that are needed to turn the alternative visions they present into reality. They give particular emphasis to the various ways in which organisations, through internal democratic and participatory processes, can contribute to women's empowerment.

The role of the 'professional' or the outsider in a development context is just as important as in the other contexts described earlier. Price describes the crucial role played by local women staff of the NGO, giving an example of an occasion when a key woman worker talking about her own personal experience enabled others to

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<sup>106</sup> Johnson (1992) p. 148.

<sup>107</sup> Sen & Grown (1988).

do likewise<sup>108</sup>. This is in stark contrast to the tendency in many development projects, as in Ngau's account of the Kenyan Harambee movement, for professional/client relationships to be fostered by paraprofessionals, fuelling resentment and withdrawal among local people<sup>109</sup>.

Where empowerment is being used as an approach to development, it is clear from the above discussion that the issue of 'dimension' is important. While individual empowerment is one ingredient in achieving empowerment in the collective dimension, whether informally or formally, concentration on the individual dimension alone is not sufficient; neither does individual empowerment automatically lead to empowerment within close relationships. For an empowerment approach to development to be successfully implemented, changes are needed on each dimension in the abilities of individuals and collectivities of individuals to take charge of the identification and meeting of their own needs, as households, communities, organisations, institutions and societies. For women's empowerment, this means:

to take control of their own lives to set their own agendas, to organise to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on society itself for change. With the collective empowerment of women the direction and processes of development would also be shifted to respond to women's needs and their vision. The collective empowerment of women of course, would bring with it the individual empowerment of women, but not only for individual advancement.<sup>110</sup>

This review of empowerment shows that the concept has potential to be useful in terms of organising and planning around development issues in a way that ensures that the needs of women are met<sup>111</sup> - but that its current usage is generally

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<sup>108</sup> Price (n.d.) p. 16.

<sup>109</sup> Ngau (1987).

<sup>110</sup> Young (1993) p. 159.

<sup>111</sup> For example, this is presumably reflected in the inclusion of the term in Oxfam's Gender and Development Policy adopted in 1993: "[Oxfam] is committed to... developing positive action to promote the full participation and empowerment of women in existing and future programmes so as to ensure that

inconsistent and ill-defined. Views about the term can be polarised: in interviews with senior British NGO staff, Dolan found that "Empowerment was a term avoided by some interviewees as being dangerously political, but embraced by others as the key to meaningful development"<sup>112</sup>. The fieldwork for this research is designed to support the development of a clearer definition (or clearer definitions) of empowerment by looking at work which is actually being done with women and its results, as well as to provide case study material in the practice of empowerment.

In South Asia, practitioners have been debating 'empowerment' for over a decade. The Food and Agriculture Organisation's Freedom From Hunger Campaign and Action for Development sponsored a training workshop in 1983 with a focus on empowerment of the rural poor<sup>113</sup>; more recently, FFHC/AD sponsored another workshop on 'Education for Women's Empowerment', in association with the Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education. In the document produced from the latter, Batliwala gives one of the most detailed accounts of empowerment in a development context that I have yet encountered<sup>114</sup>. It was not available to me when preparing or carrying out the field research for this thesis, and I have therefore decided to leave a discussion of Batliwala's account until Chapter Nine, where I will compare it with my own findings. Similarly, Harold's work on empowerment in the Caribbean<sup>115</sup>, Young's account<sup>116</sup> and Shetty's discussion of assessing empowerment in development projects<sup>117</sup> were not available to me; nor was

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Oxfam's programme benefits men and women equally". Oxfam (1993) p. 4.

<sup>112</sup> Dolan (1992).

<sup>113</sup> see Bhasin (1985).

<sup>114</sup> see Batliwala (1993).

<sup>115</sup> Harold, (1991)

<sup>116</sup> Young (1993).

<sup>117</sup> Shetty, (1991)

Kabeer's discussion of empowerment, which post-dated my field work<sup>118</sup>; I will also consider their arguments on empowerment in Chapter Nine.

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<sup>118</sup> Kabeer, (1994)

## **Chapter Three: Honduras: the Context for Researching Empowerment**

Honduras, as one of the countries of Central America, has much in common with its near neighbours. With them it shares a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and an economy dominated by plantation/export agriculture and the demands of the United States market. Honduras is also very different from its neighbours in a number of significant ways, including the composition of its oligarchy, the nature of its trade union movement, the absence of a significant guerrilla movement, and its strategic significance to U.S. foreign policy in the region.

### **3.1 The Honduran Economy**

Although Honduras has a small population for the size of the country, (5.4 million people in 1992<sup>119</sup> in an area of 112,492 sq. km.)<sup>120</sup>, the cultivable land is under great pressure, as much of the country is mountainous, and Honduras lacks the volcanic soils that give land in other Central American countries high fertility. The Honduran economy is nonetheless dominated by agriculture, as are the economies of other Central American countries, and although there has been a steady rural-urban migration in the past two decades, the population remains predominantly rural, with about 60% of the population living in rural areas<sup>121</sup>. The most fertile agricultural land is in the northern coastal area, and is given over to plantation agriculture dominated by the two big U.S. fruit companies, United Brands (Chiquita) and Castle & Cooke (Standard Fruit/Dole), producing bananas and African palm.

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<sup>119</sup> World Bank (1994). The 1988 census gives 4,248,561; the 1992 Household survey gives 4,968,320.

<sup>120</sup> This figure increased from 112,088 in 1993 with the settlement of the long-running border dispute with El Salvador at the international court at the Hague.

<sup>121</sup> 1992 Household Survey. No definition of urban or rural is given. In the 1988 census, urban areas are defined as population centres with more than 2,000 inhabitants, piped water, road or railway communications or regular maritime service, full primary education facilities, post or telegraph office and which have at least one of: electricity, drainage and health centre.

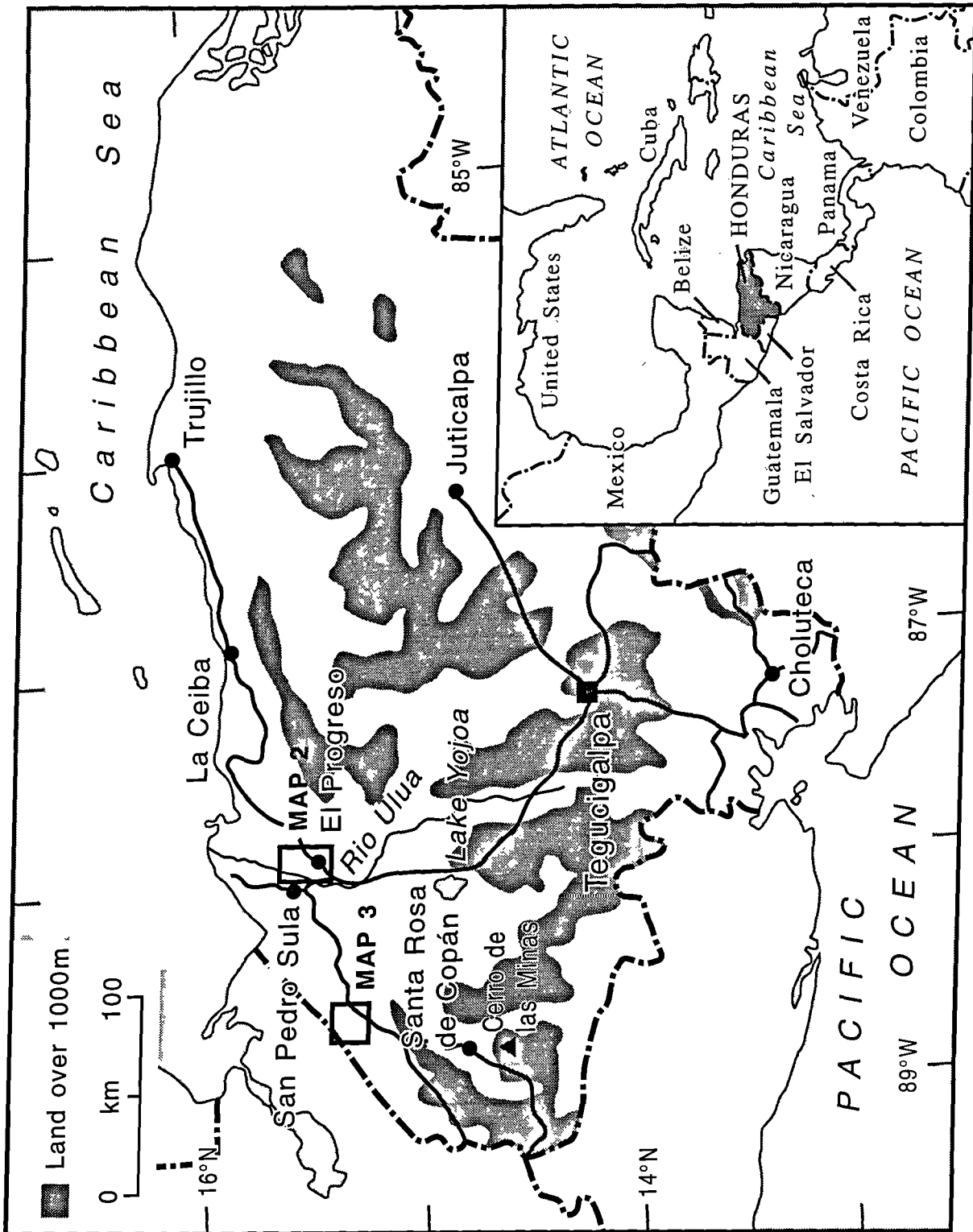


Figure 3.1 Map 1 Honduras, showing research locations  
 Source : after Instituto Geográfico Nacional

There has been coffee production since the 1940s, but prior to then Honduras lacked the infrastructure to gain access to world markets; also rural populations were stable and did not provide the labour flexibility required by coffee. Honduras therefore was not able to benefit from the 'coffee boom' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the way that other Central American countries were<sup>122</sup>. Other export agriculture did not develop until the 1950s and 60s, when larger landowners began to introduce cotton and sugar and some non-traditional crops such as pineapple and melon and to expand beef production<sup>123</sup>. Seafood is a growing new area of agro-exporting, as is cattle rearing (see Table 3.1). Despite this, the economy is still dependent on banana exports for over a third of its export earnings (see Table 3.2). The majority of the rural population is still reliant on self-provisioning agriculture, though the expansion of export agriculture is pushing other production on to more marginal land.

**Table 3.1: Main Honduran Exports (\$m)**

	1989	1990	1991	1992
Bananas	183	180	193	293
Coffee	208	145	153	136
Shellfish	17	32	46	41
Meat	18	25	29	37

Source: E.I.U. (1994)

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<sup>122</sup> Lapper & Painter, (1985)

<sup>123</sup> Barry & Norsworthy (1990)

**Table 3.2: Honduran External Trade: Top Ten Leading Products, as Percentage of Market, 1992**

Bananas	39.7
Coffee	18.4
Crustaceans and Molluscs	5.6
Meat	5.0
Nuts	2.4
Ores and non-ferrous metals	2.0
Rough wood	1.6
Fresh fruit	1.4
Unissued stamps, banknotes etc	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>80.0%</b>

Source: Derived from CEPAL (1994)

Industry, including manufacturing, does not play a very significant role in the Honduran economy although its share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is growing (see Table 3.3). Manufactured goods contribute about 20% of export earnings<sup>124</sup>. Forty percent of Honduran manufacturing is artisanal in nature<sup>125</sup>, and the two big banana companies operate much of the factory-based manufacturing, producing plastics, cans, soap, cement, boxes, rubber, margarine and vegetable oil<sup>126</sup>. Export manufacturing grew during the seventies and eighties, aided by the Central American Common Market and the development of the Puerto Cortez Free Zone. Some 45,000 people worked in the export processing sector in

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

1994, with 20,000 of those jobs created between 1990-92, mostly in clothing assembly for duty-free re-import to the U.S.A<sup>127</sup>. Manufacturing for the home market stagnated during this period. Until 1953, Honduran governments were greatly hampered by debt incurred in the late nineteenth century for the building of a railway system, very little of which was ever built<sup>128</sup>.

**Table 3.3: Structure of Honduran Production:  
Distribution of Gross Domestic Product (%)**

	1970	1992
Agriculture	32	22
Industry	22	29
Manufacturing	14	17
Services etc.	45	49

Source: World Bank (1994)

It is very significant that in Honduras a strong local agrarian capitalist class failed to emerge and that a Honduran middle class did not begin to develop until the 1950s and 60s. In other parts of Central America the introduction of export crops, and in particular coffee, in the second half of the nineteenth century linked economies to the world market in a way that created powerful local elites. For example, in Guatemala, the development of coffee plantations took place alongside political changes which encouraged centralised government and the development of infrastructure. This left the country in the hands of a powerful elite made up of a handful of families<sup>129</sup>. In Honduras, the major investors in export agriculture were foreign companies and the rise of export agriculture was not accompanied by the

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<sup>127</sup> E.I.U. (1994).

<sup>128</sup> Lapper & Painter (1985).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

development of a national elite and the subsequent political changes seen elsewhere<sup>130</sup>. Coffee is controlled by Hondurans, but it remains an important crop for primarily small farmers<sup>131</sup>, with between 30,000 and 40,000 independent producers<sup>132</sup>. This left a power vacuum that could easily be filled by local powerful individuals (who were not particularly motivated by the wish to create better conditions for investment on a national level, such as stability, infrastructure, communications, or local industry), and by foreign capital. The Honduran economy is therefore dominated by two extremes: peasant self-provisioning agriculture on the one end, and multinational fruit companies on the other. These extremes are reflected in the distribution of wealth. In 1992 Honduras had a *per capita* GNP of US\$580<sup>133</sup>. Of the population as a whole, the poorest 20% have 5.5% of the income, where the richest 20% have 54.2%<sup>134</sup>. Land ownership is very unequal, with 20% of the productive land owned by a mere 279 landowners. Conditions in rural areas are correspondingly difficult. Of rural households, 61% lack piped water and 62% lack sanitation; rural infant mortality stood at 65 per thousand in 1985 (compared to an urban rate of 45 per thousand)<sup>135</sup>. Poverty is a major problem (see Table 3.4) according to an unpublished government survey using 1991 Household Survey figures<sup>136</sup>. In 1987, approximately 50% of households had inadequate intake of calories<sup>137</sup> and in 1993 some 20% of children under five were moderately or severely malnourished<sup>138</sup>. External debt is a significant burden on the Honduran

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<sup>130</sup> Dunkerley (1988).

<sup>131</sup> Barry & Norsworthy (1990)

<sup>132</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit Country profile, 1994-95, p. 46.

<sup>133</sup> World Bank 1994.

<sup>134</sup> Central Bank/CEPAL figures quoted in CEM (1992)

<sup>135</sup> CEM (1992)

<sup>136</sup> *Tiempo*, 6/9/93

<sup>137</sup> Kawas & Zúñiga (1991)

<sup>138</sup> *Tiempo*, 11/5/93

economy. The 1992 debt of US\$3,573 million represented 92% of GNP and 258.9% of exports.<sup>139</sup>

**Table 3.4. Levels of Poverty in Honduran Households (%)**

	1989	1991
Non-poor households	25.5	17.6
Poor households	16	13.9
Households below absolute poverty line	52	59.3

Source: Tiempo 6/9/93

(NB: source does not make clear why the percentages do not add to 100%)

The economic strength of the fruit companies, combined with the failure to develop a strong local agrarian capitalist class discussed earlier and the dominance of *caudillismo* - a patronage system based on powerful charismatic 'strong men' - have led to the development of a weak state. This has been reflected in the frequent changes in regime over the past century and more. Honduras has had sixteen new constitutions since it gained independence in 1838. Between 1821 and 1876, 85 different presidents ruled Honduras<sup>140</sup>; since then there have been moves from civilian to military rule and back again, with coup and counter coup. Even the much vaunted 'return to democracy' of 1981 hid a continuing domination by the military until the ousting of General Alvarez in 1985, and some essential aspects of government such as foreign policy continue to be under the ultimate control of the military. The massive military aid to Honduras from the U.S. during the eighties enabled the military not only to develop the most powerful airforce in the region but also to move into control of some key areas of the economy, including telecommunications, the cement industry, insurance and banking<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>139</sup> World Bank, 1994. This compares with external debt of US\$1,472 in 1980.

<sup>140</sup> Lapper & Painter, 1985.

<sup>141</sup> Barry & Norsworthy 1990

Military rule in Honduras did not take on the predominantly repressive characteristics of military rule in other parts of the region. The Honduran military lacked its own strong organisational structures and relied heavily on a logistical alliance with the Nationalist Party<sup>142</sup>. Much military rule was achieved through negotiation and co-optation, with repression as a last resort.

Although ostensibly a multi-party democracy, Honduran politics have been dominated by two main parties since the 1890s, and there are only four parties in total with legal status. Of the two big parties, the National Party (PN) is more to the political right than the Liberal Party (PL), though both are 'right of centre' in their politics. The more recent Christian Democratic Party (PDCH) and the Innovation and Unity Party (PINU) have held a small handful of seats in Congress. The Honduran Communist Party (PCH) has never had legal status, and nor have its offshoots. When elections are held, voting is largely still determined by patronage<sup>143</sup>, and the incoming party re-distributes government jobs among its own supporters, civilian or military.

### 3.2 The Role of the USA

Honduras has been influenced by the USA since the first involvement of the US fruit companies, and US diplomatic pressure was used to support the plantation interests. In the early years of this century, US warships were sent to Honduras several times, and US troops occupied Tegucigalpa in 1924. US support for the Honduran military began in the 1950s and has continued. It was with the overthrow of the Somoza regime in neighbouring Nicaragua in 1979 that Honduras took on a more central role

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<sup>142</sup> Dunkerley (1988).

<sup>143</sup> Latin American societies are heavily dominated by social structures of kinship, pseudo-kinship and patron-client relations. The latter involves complex sets of mutual obligation, for example with a landlord helping a tenant out in hard times in exchange for the tenant's vote at election time. For a concise description of Latin American social relations, see Cubitt (1988).

in US foreign policy in Central America<sup>144</sup>. Under US pressure, Honduras ostensibly returned to civilian rule, giving the US a supposedly legitimate basis for providing significant military aid to a 'democracy' surrounded by countries in the throes of civil war (Guatemala and El Salvador) or under revolutionary government (Nicaragua). US support to the Honduras-based Contra, the opposition to the Nicaraguan revolutionary Sandinista regime which ousted the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, was also significant, much of it finding its way to the Honduran military. Direct military aid between 1980 and 1989 came to \$442 million<sup>145</sup>. The US was able to negotiate to build a number of its own military bases in Honduras, as well as a large training facility, mainly used for training Salvadorean troops until it was forced to close in 1985, and there have been many U.S./Honduran joint training exercises<sup>146</sup>.

US influence on Honduras was not limited to military support. Economic aid between 1980 and 1989 came to \$1,143.4 million, and the USA provides over 50% of all economic aid (see Table 3.5). In 1981, the US installed a new ambassador, John Negroponte, in Tegucigalpa, and raised the diplomatic status from grade four to grade two. Until the change of ambassador in late 1985, Negroponte directed Contra activity and maintained a close collaboration with the head of the army, General Alvarez and the newly elected civilian President Suazo on political as well as military matters<sup>147</sup>. USAID<sup>148</sup> funded almost all the 1989 electoral process in Honduras as well as the campaign leading up to it and is still a major (although

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<sup>144</sup> "Our political objectives for Honduras are clear: to strengthen democracy and democratic institutions, to elicit full cooperation against nondemocratic forces in the region, to encourage regional cooperation and solidarity, and to obtain the greatest Honduran support possible for our objectives in the region and elsewhere. Our economic objectives must bolster and reinforce our overall objectives which can and would be undermined if political and social progress is not achieved". Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams, quoted in Barry & Norsworthy 1990 p111.

<sup>145</sup> E.I.U. (1994)

<sup>146</sup> Barry & Norsworthy (1990)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> United States Agency for International Development is the official U.S. aid agency

decreasing) source of foreign development assistance<sup>149</sup>. US influence was also strong on the development of the trade union movement from the 1950s, as we shall see. Honduras was seen as the key to US foreign policy throughout the Central American region.

**Table 3.5. Total Overseas Development Assistance to Honduras (gross)<sup>a</sup>**

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Bilateral (incl. USA)	177.0	207.7	243.8	225.4	255.4	215.8	389.0	659.9	215.0
USA	125.0	161.0	179.0	155.0	158.0	105.0	218.0	535.0	90.0
Multilateral (incl. IADB)	118.4	70.2	49.2	41.2	81.1	47.9	90.2	96.8	157.8
Inter-American Development Bank	73.4	36.0	16.8	6.3	38.4	14.7	53.3	15.4	58.8
Total	295.4	277.9	293.1	266.7	336.6	263.7	479.2	756.7	372.8

<sup>a</sup> Totals may not add due to rounding. Disbursements. Official Development Assistance is defined as grants and loans with at least a 25% grant element, provided by OECD and OPEC member countries and multilateral agencies, and administered with the aim of promoting development and welfare in the recipient country. IMF loans other than Trust Fund facilities, are excluded, as is aid from the eastern bloc.

Source: EIU Country profile 1994-95

### **3.3 Popular organisations, Trade Unions and Non-Government Organisations**

Popular organisations and the trade union movement are well established in Honduras, and have exerted influence on government and the military to a noticeable degree. This situation arose because of the weak state and absence of local oligarchy

<sup>149</sup> Barry & Norsworthy (1990).

described earlier. Large numbers of *campesinos* (peasants) in Honduras became proletarianised early on because of the labour demands of the banana plantations. Early trade union organisers in the plantations in the 20s, 30s and 40s met resistance, but a substantial strike in the plantations in 1954 spread to other parts of the country, closing down 60% of the economy<sup>150</sup>. A settlement was reached that granted union recognition to the more moderate unions, and made it possible for organising throughout the country and the economy to get under way. The unions and the popular movements became a force to be reckoned with. This was an important development; but it was also an opportunity for further US influence, as the unions in Honduras received significant backing from the right wing American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the associated Interamerican Regional Organisation of Labour (ORIT)<sup>151</sup>. This support has ensured that the majority of trade union organisations in Honduras are moderate or right wing in their approach. Thus it became possible for popular organisations to become closely allied with some of the military governments<sup>152</sup>. There is still, however, some left wing union activity, such as that of the United Federation of Honduran Workers (FUTH), established in 1978 (though it only achieved legal status in 1989)<sup>153</sup>. The FUTH was active in its opposition to the Contra presence in Honduras and campaigns against human rights violations (which increased during the eighties). Members of its own leadership have been subject of such violations<sup>154</sup>.

The *campesino* movement also became organised during the 1950s; as with the early trade unions, the Honduran Communist Party provided support to the early organisations. The National Federation of Honduran Peasants (FENACH), a left

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Dunkerley (1988)

<sup>152</sup> Barry & Norsworthy, (1990)

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

wing organisation, was established in 1960<sup>155</sup>, at a time when many ex-plantation workers, who had been leased land or had squatted it when they lost their jobs, were being pushed off their land to make way for an expansion in cattle production. At this point the government had already introduced the first Agrarian Reform legislation of 1962, but the land-owning *caudillos* and the fruit companies had ensured that only public land could be redistributed. In order to prevent FENACH from pressuring for land redistribution, the US union AFL was encouraged by the government to establish another *campesino* organisation that would not challenge the government. Thus the National Association of Peasants (ANACH) was set up in 1962 to provide a non-radical channel for *campesino* organising, and was effective in channelling *campesino* pressure for land during the 1960s<sup>156</sup>. FENACH became a target for repression by the security forces and its leadership was imprisoned. Further land reform legislation was enacted in 1972 by the liberal military regime of Colonel Lopez. This allowed 'unproductive' land to be expropriated from private as well as public ownership. However even in the most active period of land transfer, up to 1975, government targets were not achieved, and much of the transfer that took place was in response to land invasions<sup>157</sup>.

There are numerous other rural organisations, both of *campesinos* and co-operatives, including women's organisations such as FEHMUC, the Honduran Federation of Peasant Women, and CODIMCA, the Council for the Integrated Development of Peasant Women (see below). More recently, the National Union of Rural Workers (CNTC) was set up as a confederation bringing together several *campesino* and co-operative groups under a progressive social-democratic banner. The links between the various organisations and the political parties are complex.

Popular organisations and trades union are two categories within a thriving array of Non-Government Organisations. Another category of particular relevance to this

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<sup>155</sup> CEDOH Boletín No 68, July 1994

<sup>156</sup> Dunkerley, (1988).

<sup>157</sup> Benjamin (1987).

thesis is that of Non-Government Development Organisation (NGDO). In addition to official agencies such as the UNDP and UNICEF, there were an estimated 200 'Private Development Organisations (OPD) in 1988<sup>158</sup>. These vary widely, from church-run organisations to consultancy agencies, from organisations running small scale, 'shoestring' projects to ambitious Integrated Rural Development programmes. Large sums of foreign 'aid' money are channelled through these organisations, and they provide a significant source of employment for the educated middle class/professional sector of the population (whose other main source of employment outside commerce and manufacturing is the unreliable, politically appointed government sector). I encountered much cynicism about the NGDO sector among its own members and amongst aid workers. NGDOs are often seen as providing 'jobs for the boys', and as designing activities to maximise job security and income rather than to meet the needs of the supposed 'beneficiaries'. Nonetheless, many organisations do excellent work, and Honduras joins the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean (except Haiti) in having significantly reduced its levels of infant mortality and increased life expectancy between 1985 and 1992<sup>159</sup>. NGDOs working specifically with women are discussed further below.

### **3.4 The situation of women in Honduras.**

Women make up just over half of the population of Honduras<sup>160</sup>. On paper they have a positive position in Honduras since the Honduran government accepted the U.N. Charter abolishing all forms of discrimination against women that was a product of the International Decade for Women 1975-85, although Honduran women

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<sup>158</sup> Caballero (1988).

<sup>159</sup> From 57 to 46 deaths per 1,000 live births. USAID figures from Grassroots Development 18/2 1994.

<sup>160</sup> The 1988 Census gives 50.3% as the proportion of women; the 1992 Household Survey gives 51.09%.

were the last in Latin America to get the vote<sup>161</sup>. They have significant protections under the Family Code and the Labour Code, and in 1993 the Agricultural Modernisation Law removed the blatant discrimination against women that had existed under the old Agrarian Reform Law. In 1989 a National Policy for Women was agreed. However, there is a large discrepancy between the theoretical rights women have and the situation that obtains in practice. There are weaknesses in the legal system and law enforcement; regulations and procedures to make the law operational are often missing. The social and cultural climate of Honduras, heavily dominated by *machismo*, continues to reinforce the subordinate position of women in Honduran society, and there is widespread ignorance among women of their legal rights. This position is clearly reflected in many of the common demographic indicators, outlined below.

The specifics of an individual woman's situation are influenced by her socio-economic position, her stage in the life cycle and her relationship to the labour market. Whether she lives in a rural or urban area also makes a significant difference; 58% of women live in the rural areas and 42% in the urban areas<sup>162</sup>. The situation of many Honduran women is dominated by childbearing and their role as carers and maintainers of the home. The national average fertility rate is 5.98 children. Rural women average 6.72 and urban women 5 children. The total fertility rate is declining, from 7.2 in 1970 to 4.9 in 1992 (World Bank, 1994). Maternal mortality is the principal cause of death among women between 15 and 40 years old, at 2.2 deaths per thousand live births. The World Bank suggests that between 1988 and 1993, 47% of married women used contraception (including women whose husbands use contraception). This is a misleading figure, given the high prevalence of *unión libre* (common-law) relationships in Honduras (see Table 3.6)<sup>163</sup>. CEM

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<sup>161</sup> Acker (1988)

<sup>162</sup> 1988 Census figures, as are other data in this chapter unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>163</sup> World Bank (1994). There is no definition of 'married' given. Neither does the World Bank figure indicate whether or not sterilization is included in the definition of contraceptive methods.

suggests that only 17.7% of women of reproductive age use contraception<sup>164</sup>. The figures for undernourishment mentioned earlier [page 39] suggest that a large number of women are undernourished, a condition exacerbated by childbearing. Data from the Secretariat of Public Health show that 42% of women attending health centres suffer from anaemia<sup>165</sup>. Their figures also show that 70% of lactating mothers have deficiencies in Vitamin A and 15% lack iodine.

**Table 3.6. Relationships: 1988**

	Total	Urban	Rural
Single	44.4	39.5	39.7
Married	25.5	23.8	22.7
Free Union	24.7	23.1	28.1
Separated	6.2	8.3	5.2
Divorced	0.4	0.9	0.2
Widowed	4.2	4.4	4.1

Source: Dirección General de Estadísticos y Censos, Republica de Honduras: Censo Nacional de Población, 1988, Tegucigalpa.

Women's access to education has improved significantly since 1974, with a 32% drop in levels of women's illiteracy between 1974 and 1988<sup>166</sup>. However, in 1988 over half of all women and more than two thirds of rural women had received three years or fewer of formal education<sup>167</sup>. Not surprisingly, this means that there continue to be high levels of illiteracy among women, especially in the rural areas (see Table 3.7). It is predominantly urban women who have benefited from the

<sup>164</sup> CEM, (1992). There is no indication of the year for which this applies, though they state their general sources as the 1988 census and the 1989 Household Survey.

<sup>165</sup> Secretaría Ejecutiva del Gabinete Social, (1992).

<sup>166</sup> CEM (1992)

<sup>167</sup> 1988 Census.

improvements since the previous census. More women now take up secondary education, although they remain concentrated in areas of study that reflect women's traditional roles, such as secretarial studies, nursing, tailoring, and primary teaching.

**Table 3.7. Female Literacy (1988)**

	Literate	Illiterate
Urban	81.57	18.43
Rural	57.21	42.79

Source: Dirección General de Estadísticos y Censos, República de Honduras:  
Censo Nacional de Población, 1988, Tegucigalpa.

Women comprise over a fifth of the recorded economically active population<sup>168</sup>, a significant increase over previous years (1974: 15.7%). Some of the increase reflects better recording, but it is also likely to reflect the realities of survival in a period of economic crisis. The numbers of economically active women over 55 have doubled and those of young women between 10 and 15 have quadrupled since 1974. The majority of the economically active women live in the urban areas, and a large proportion of these are active in the informal sector. The majority of women work in service provision, commerce and catering or manufacturing industry (see Table 3.8).

Rural women have a low level of recorded participation in the agricultural labour force, although the production of basic grains absorbs nearly half of the economically active rural population<sup>169</sup>. Paid employment in agriculture for women is not widely available, with coffee harvesting (women are 12% of the labour force

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<sup>168</sup> The economically active population is defined in the census as people aged ten or over who are engaged in economic activity, ie. in an occupation that brings them money, working for someone else, whether paid or not, and including people looking for work. There is no indication of whether or not this included women who 'help' on the family plot, although it is likely that it does not.

<sup>169</sup> Howard-Borjas, (1989).

in the main harvesting period) and banana packing (almost all the labour force is female) being the main sources. Women raise small animals for consumption or sale,

**Table 3.8. Women's economic activity (%), 1992**

	Total	Urban	Rural
Communal, social & personal services	37.00	41.98	30.28
Commerce, restaurants & hotels	28.91	29.47	28.14
Manufacturing industry	23.92	20.31	28.81
Agriculture, hunting, forestry & fishing	6.19	2.62	11.01
Finance, real estate and business services	1.99	3.34	0.15
Transport, warehousing & communications	1.20	1.37	0.97
Construction	0.49	0.60	0.35
Electricity, gas, water	0.21	0.24	0.18
Mining and Quarrying	0.07	0.04	0.11
Other	0.02	0.02	0.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Dirección General de Estadísticos y Censos, Republica de Honduras: Encuesta Permanente de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, Octubre 1992 Tegucigalpa D.C.

and may grow vegetables and process agricultural products, for consumption or sale, but generally do not admit to participating in field labour<sup>170</sup>. Until the Agricultural Modernisation law came into force in 1993, women were only 2% of the

<sup>170</sup> Kawas & Zúñiga (1991). However, Kuhn (1990) refers to a USAID document which puts forward that women's unpaid agricultural activity is much greater than might be suggested by official figures: of rural women, 59% participate in sowing, 41% in digging/hoeing, 39% in harvesting and 22% in weeding. Buvinic (n.d.) makes a strong case for disbelief of census data on women's agricultural activity, citing seasonal factors/timing of census interviews and the fact that for many women economic activity is not the 'primary activity' that census questions relate to. She also points out the fact that women she interviewed continued to perceive themselves as housewives even if they undertake income-generating activities.

membership of agricultural co-operatives and were fewer than 4% of the beneficiaries of agrarian reform<sup>171</sup>. Rural women have been estimated to work an average of 100 hours per week, including paid and unpaid work<sup>172</sup>.

The low availability of paid work in the rural areas for women, combined with the greater opportunities for work in the urban areas, especially for young women in manufacturing industry and domestic service, mean that women are migrating to the cities at a faster rate than men; the majority of female migrants from the rural areas are single mothers and young women<sup>173</sup>.

The adoption of structural adjustment policies in 1990 by the Callejas government has had a disproportionate effect on women. Prices, especially for basic foodstuffs, have risen and there has been a series of shortages of foodstuffs and other basic necessities. These have led to job losses and have adversely affected informal sector sales, as well increasing the stresses on women as primary carers. There have also been tax increases in the formal sector and through indirect taxation, and a rise in the costs of public services (as well as cuts to those services). Women have adopted a wide range of strategies to cope with these conditions. The government recognised the difficulties faced by women and in particular, those faced by women single parents, by setting up the Honduran Social Investment Fund (FHIS) to provide a package of investment in employment projects and other benefits, including a monthly payment of 20 Lempiras for which single mothers with children of school age are eligible<sup>174</sup>. Women heads of household<sup>175</sup> make up nearly a quarter of all household heads<sup>176</sup>, a significant increase on the one fifth reported on the 1988 census.

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<sup>171</sup> Secretaria Ejecutivo del Gabinete Social, (1992)

<sup>172</sup> Survey referred to in Howard-Borjas (1989).

<sup>173</sup> Kuhn (1990).

<sup>174</sup> CEM, (1992).

<sup>175</sup> The head of household is defined as the person who is recognised as such by other household members and who exercises authority through the making of decisions which affect the family group.

<sup>176</sup> Household Survey, (1992).

Although there are no official figures on levels of violence faced by women in Honduras, there is no doubt that violence is a common feature of many women's lives. The press often carry stories about violence against women and the issue is included in the national policy for women and understood to be a growing problem<sup>177</sup>.

To summarise, therefore, the situation of women in Honduras, and their position vis a vis men, is dominated by the location of Honduras within the global market economy and the patriarchal nature of Honduran and Latin American society<sup>178</sup>. The 'structures of constraint'<sup>179</sup> within which Honduran women operate as women intersect with those of age, race, class and sexual preference<sup>180</sup> to provide an intricate relationship with "the complex, multidimensional quality of social power"<sup>181</sup>. Honduran women contend with inequalities on many fronts, as recent feminist analyses clearly show<sup>182</sup>. The sexual division of labour leaves women carrying the burden of domestic and reproductive labour within a mode of production that scarcely recognises that work. They are also severely restricted in the paid work they have access to, except in services and *maquila* (assembly plant) work, and have poor access to regular salaried work, even in the urban areas where far more women are economically active. Honduran women are expected to fit into the gender role, common to Latin America in general, of wife-mother-maintainer of the home. To be a woman, for the vast majority, is to be long-suffering and

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<sup>177</sup> Secretaria Ejecutivo del Gabinete Social, (1992).

<sup>178</sup> In her work on Western Europe and North America, Walby concludes that "...patriarchy is composed of six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions." This does not necessarily provide an accurate definition for Latin America but offers a useful guide. (Walby, 1990 p20).

<sup>179</sup> Folbre (1994): "A structure of (...) constraint can be defined as a set of assets, rules, norms, and preferences that fosters group identity and creates common group interests. It generates patterns of allegiance and encourages forms of strategic behaviour based on social constructions of difference." p.57.

<sup>180</sup> Not an exhaustive list.

<sup>181</sup> Folbre (1994) p. 57.

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, Caballero (1988); Centro de Estudios de la Mujer (1992).

resourceful<sup>183</sup>; you carry the responsibility for the welfare of your children and often your partner; you have ambitions, but they are generally expressed through your hopes for your children and what they might achieve if you can support them to get more education than you did, rather than through your own achievement. You live with *machismo* and violence in various forms, enduring with a fatalism shared with large numbers of other women. If you live in an urban area you have more options for making a living, but generally your life will be lived within similar constraints to your rural equivalent though you are more likely to be a single parent.

### **3.5 The History of Women's Organisations in Honduras.**

Despite membership of a culture dominated by *machismo*, Honduran women have a history, albeit a patchy one, of activism. The first women's organisation was the '*Sociedad de Cultura Feminina*', Society of Feminine Culture, set up by Visitación Padilla in 1923<sup>184</sup>. In the late 1940s women were organising to demand freedom for political prisoners<sup>185</sup>. In the fifties there were two major campaigns by women. The first of these was the 1954 strike (see page 44), which was successful largely because of the efforts of women, who organised communal kitchens and made it possible for the strikers to survive physically the 69 day long ordeal. Their tactics also included closing bars and brothels to prevent men from spending money<sup>186</sup>. The second campaign was for the right to vote - a goal that was achieved in 1956. This campaign included some women who were related to men in positions of power, and it was able therefore to use tactics such as public demonstrations that might otherwise have been repressed<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup> Some detailed illustration of Honduran women's lives can be found in the case study chapters.

<sup>184</sup> Mendoza, (1989).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Central America Report Spring 1989 p10

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. p.90.

In the late sixties, a significant development in the history of the organisation of women in Honduras came with the setting up of a network of 'housewives clubs' (*clubes de amas de casa*) in rural and urban areas. This was initially instigated by a private organisation with links with the Catholic church, but was soon taken over by CARITAS, the Catholic church's organisation concerned with social affairs<sup>188</sup>. The housewives clubs were used for the distribution of donated food, some of which was through a 'food for work' programme. By 1974 there were around 1000 clubs around the country. The CARITAS programme with women was intended to work with them to improve their ability to fulfil their traditional role, and was focused therefore, in addition to food donations, on issues such as health, nutrition, needlework, housing and small productive projects. Women were given training and support through a network of promoters, who were local *campesina* women paid small daily allowances for their work.

In 1975 CARITAS stopped working with the housewives clubs after the massacre in Los Horcones where priests, *campesinos* and students were killed. This was part of a general withdrawal from activities considered too political. There were also political differences within the CARITAS programme. Some of the promoters decided to continue on a voluntary basis. They managed to obtain support from the National *Campesino* Union (UNC) and some funding, and set up the Honduran Federation of *Campesina* Women (FEHMUC).

FEHMUC has concentrated on providing finance for women, attempting to incorporate women into the development process through economically productive projects. They have also provided training on health issues. They maintained the organisational structure of base groups and promoters developed in the housewives clubs, but now it was those women themselves who were running the organisation. They also received advice and support from ASEPADE, an NGO which administered funding which FEHMUC obtained from the United Nations. There were problems, however, with projects which failed because of errors of various

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<sup>188</sup> This account is based on Hilhorst, 1989 p. 13-15 and Kuhn, 1990 p134-6.

kinds in the advice and support received. FEHMUC worked closely with the UNC, but this relationship was threatened by pressures within the UNC to establish their own programme with women and a women's affairs section (for which funding was available), which each *campesino* organisation is required to have by law. Eventually the various internal conflicts came to the surface. In 1985 the leaders of FEHMUC most critical of the organisation, mostly from the north and west of the country, were expelled. Another internal conflict has led to a further division in 1989.

Some of the FEHMUC leaders expelled in 1985 set up another organisation, CODIMCA, having brought 'their' base groups with them. CODIMCA, the Council for the Integral Development of the Campesina Woman, works with women on organisation and training, with a particular focus on natural medicines. CODIMCA has a similar organisational structure to FEHMUC, with national, regional and local levels, and similar leadership. They maintain links with the Organisation of Honduran Peasants (OCH), which was set up by ex-members of the National Campesino Union. Other *campesino* organisations also set up women's sections, including the National Association of Honduran Peasants (ANACH), with ANAMUC, the National Association of *Campesina* Women, and the CNTC with its section for women's affairs.

The eighties saw increasing interest in gender issues. The Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala and the increasing influence of US politics and military presence in Honduras all served to internationalise the domestic problems of the country and to highlight the problems of dependency, of violence and of corruption. The US bases encouraged a sharp increase in the numbers of women and children surviving through prostitution. HIV and AIDS became an increasingly serious problem, with Honduras having 60% of Central American cases<sup>189</sup>. Reported rapes and other crimes against women also increased greatly. The first women's organisations focusing specifically on class and gender issues started to appear, and intellectual interest in gender increased, with the first

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<sup>189</sup> CEDOH Bulletin No. 159, July 1994

research on women's issues at the university in Tegucigalpa. In 1984 an urban middle class women's organisation, the Committee for Peace "*Visitación Padilla*", was set up, concentrating among other things on women's rights and violence against women, with an analysis that links economic exploitation and the position of women. From 1988 it has worked with women's groups in the *barrios* (slums) of Tegucigalpa to involve women in its activities and to encourage their participation in community organisations. Other NGOs began to focus on women's issues, encouraged by a rise in interest in funding women's development projects from funding organisations and international agencies; a number of women's NGOs were also set up towards the end of the eighties and in the early nineties. Many of these are based in Tegucigalpa. The Centre for Women's Studies (CEM) provides a documentation centre and a counselling service for women. The Centre for Women's Rights (CDM, formerly CLADEM-H) trains women on legal issues, among other activities. The Association for Popular Development (ADP) opened the first refuge for women in Honduras fleeing domestic violence in 1993 in Tegucigalpa.

### **3.6 Organisational Forms for Work with Women**

Honduran organisations involved with women in a development context in Honduras can be broadly divided into five categories<sup>190</sup> (see Table 3.9). In the course of preparing for my fieldwork I met with women from all five categories. The first of these is grassroots women's organisations. These are organisations which exist independently of any union or association. They exist in urban and rural areas, although there are not many of them. They include PAEM (see the case study in Chapters Five and Six) and CODEMUH, the Collective of Honduran Women, which is based in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, and is an organisation of women in the *barrios* organising around their own needs in the community.

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<sup>190</sup> This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of organisations; there are many others not mentioned in this section.

**Table 3.9: Organisational Forms for Work with Women in Honduras**

Type of Organisation	Examples
Grassroots Women's Organisations	CODEMUH; PAEM; MOMUCLAA
NGDOs	CEM; CDM; ADP; ANDAR; UNISA; COMUNICA; AHDEJUMUR
Popular Organisations	FEHMUC; CODIMCA; ANAMUC
'Institutionalised'	Women's Commission; SECPLAN, INA, other government ministries
Network	<i>Red de Mujeres de la Zona Norte; Enlace de Mujeres Rurales Cristianas</i>

Another such organisation is MOMUCLAA, the Women's Movement of Colonia Lopez Arellano and Area, which is an organisation of women in a suburb of San Pedro Sula, organised around various needs of women in the community including childcare. I met with women from all three of these organisations and discussed my research and issues of empowerment with them. They were eager to discuss their activities with me and all expressed willingness to co-operate with me as case study organisations<sup>191</sup>.

A second category of organisation working with women is Non-Government Development Organisation (NGDO)<sup>192</sup>. Some of these are women's organisations, such as CEM, CDM and ADP mentioned above, as well as Asociación ANDAR

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<sup>191</sup> One organisation was initially hesitant and told me about a previous experience of co-operating with research which was supposedly to be participatory but which they felt had badly exploited them and distorted their views.

<sup>192</sup> I use the term NGDO rather than the more common NGO, to emphasise the point that not all non-government organisations have a development focus or intent. The all-inclusive term NGO can include, for example, sports associations.

(working with women in a small number of communities in southern Honduras, originally a mixed organisation but now only women), and UNISA, the Support Services Unit for Encouraging the Participation of Honduran Women, which works with women in the *barrios* of Tegucigalpa. Others are 'mixed' organisations which have developed policies and programmes for work with women. These include the Christian Commission for Development (CCD), which has a strong policy for prioritising work with women within its integrated rural development programme, COMUNICA, which provides technical support on communication and graphic design for publicity and training materials, and AHDEJUMUR, the Honduran Association for the Development of Youth and Women, which operates a credit programme<sup>193</sup>. These organisations vary in character, as I found through interviewing staff and discussing my work. Some of those which I encountered are strongly feminist (mixed as well as women's organisations), with strong commitment to political and social change for women. Others have a more 'instrumentalist' feel to them, and a welfarist approach to their work, rather than a commitment to capacity building or the promotion of autonomy. Most of them were 'middle class' organisations, in that they were professionals aiming to provide a service 'for' disadvantaged women, although some had staff who had become involved in the work through their own participation as 'beneficiaries'. NGOs in Honduras are legion, and I could not possibly meet with them all in the course of my fieldwork. I was assured many times, however, in the interviews I conducted with Honduran women's NGOs that many Honduran NGOs either have no awareness of or give no priority to women's issues, or cynically exploit the current focus on women by the funding agencies in order to secure funds.

A third category of organisation working with women is that of Popular Organisations. These include FEHMUC, CODIMCA and ANAMUC, and the women's sections of the *campesino* unions mentioned above. I found it difficult to make contact with these organisations, and faced more suspicion in my interactions with them than with any of the other categories. I assume this is a reflection of the

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<sup>193</sup> There are many other organisations who work with women in many ways, but not necessarily as a deliberate policy, or specifically to meet the needs of women.

history of splits, divisions and political manoeuvring that has characterised the popular movement since its early days, as well as of the repression it has had to contend with in the past.

A fourth category of organisation I will call 'institutionalised'. There is a Women's Commission, made up of the women members of the national congress, which has an advisory group that includes representatives from most of the women's NGOs<sup>194</sup>. Various government departments work with women, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Assistance, the Ministry of Natural Resources (unit for technical co-operation with women and rural youth), the Ministry of Health and the National Agrarian Institute (INA) with its department of promotion and training of women and rural youth. There is also a women's area within SECPLAN, the secretariat for planning, co-ordination and budget. In most of these institutions the focus is on women as the people responsible for the well-being of the family<sup>195</sup>. Work with women is generally a marginal area with a very limited budget. It is worth noting that all the development programmes and projects of government institutions, mixed sex as well as women's, have been funded by international agencies, including USAID<sup>196</sup>. I met with staff at the Women's Commission office, and left with a strong impression of a well intentioned but severely under-resourced and therefore ineffective body.

A fifth category of women's organisation is the Network. This is a recent development in Honduran women's organising. I found three examples of women's networks. The *Red de Mujeres de la Zona Norte*, the network of women of the north zone, is a grouping of various women's groups, organisations and individuals in and around San Pedro Sula and Progreso. It has a feminist philosophy and acts as a co-ordinating and campaigning group. *Enlace de Mujeres Rurales Cristianas* is a network of *campesina* groups which has formed recently, partly through the work

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<sup>194</sup> CEM (1992).

<sup>195</sup> Kuhn, (1990).

<sup>196</sup> Kuhn (1990) p. 187.

of PAEM. There is also a network of women's organisations and individuals in Tegucigalpa working around the issue of violence against women. These networks mainly draw on the NGDOs and Grassroots Organisations for their membership. I attended meetings of all three networks. They were meetings full of energy, enthusiasm and activity.

### 3.7 'Foreign' Organisations Working with Women in Honduras

In addition to the Honduran organizations working with women mentioned above, there are also 'foreign' organizations, most of them NGDOs. As with the local NGDOs, there is a varied approach to women/gender and development. Some organizations, such as CARE and World Neighbours, tend to work with women in an instrumentalist way, seeing work with women as a means of delivering welfare or efficiency targets. Others, such as Oxfam UK/I, the Dutch SNV and Save the Children (Britain)<sup>197</sup> have a specific, gender-aware approach, with spelt-out gender policies and, in the case of SNV, an in-country gender specialist member of staff. These organisations tend to work through 'project partners', providing funding, rather than by running their own projects and programmes. Some of them have a Honduran office, generally staffed by a mix of ex-patriates and Hondurans.

Perhaps the most influential 'foreign' organization working with women is USAID. USAID has had a WID policy since 1982<sup>198</sup>. For the most part their work with women is within mixed programmes, although recent self-build schools projects, working specifically with women, have been deemed a success by the agency and may lead to more women-only work. My interview with Emily Leonard, the head of Human Resource Management in USAID Honduras, gave me an interesting and different view of 'empowerment' which reinforced for me the crucial need to identify and specify what is meant by 'empowerment' and what view of 'power' it

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<sup>197</sup> which, while I was in Honduras, was radically re-structuring its Honduran programme away from a long-standing welfare-oriented child nutrition programme.

<sup>198</sup> USAID (1982). A member of AID staff in Honduras who asked not to be identified commented to me that the rhetoric is in place but the practice is not.

represents (see Chapter Two). She spoke about ‘women’s empowerment’ as a desired outcome, but was clearly talking about a different phenomenon from the ‘empowerment at the grassroots’ that other organizations concerned about empowerment had discussed with me. Empowerment, for USAID, was about encouraging women to stand for public office and to move into positions of public responsibility, or to become ‘entrepreneurs’ on a large scale<sup>199</sup>.

Honduras, then, provided me with a promising location for my case study work on empowerment. As this chapter has shown, it is a country where women have great disadvantages and there is therefore much scope for ‘women’s empowerment’. Many different kinds of organizations are working with women, using a variety of approaches; some of them deliberately intend to empower women, whether implicitly or explicitly, and some of them do not. I could make my choice of case study organizations (explained in Chapter Four) taking this diversity into account and locating the final choices within a broader context that reflects the range of approaches to development work with women and possible meanings of ‘empowerment’.

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<sup>199</sup> Emily Leonard invited me to attend a meeting of a Charter 100, a professional women’s group made up of women who were doing just that. The main agenda of the meeting I attended was concerned with raising funds to pay the schooling costs of a number of ‘poor’ people, and the tone of the meeting was of philanthropy mixed with self-advancement. The invited speaker’s subject was beauty techniques.

## Chapter Four: Research Methodology

### 4.1 Methodological Challenges in Researching Empowerment

In devising a methodology for researching 'empowerment' I came face to face with two challenges. The first was that of working with such a contested and ill-defined subject<sup>200</sup>. I needed a methodology that would help me tease out the various dimensions of the subject and explore possibilities; I was looking for meanings more than for 'hard data'<sup>201</sup>. This suggested to me that qualitative/intensive methods would have to be central to my methodological approach. Some approaches to qualitative research (for example, grounded theory methods<sup>202</sup>) require the researcher to start with a clean slate, without preconceptions about the material to be collected. I find that possibility attractive, but I was not starting out to research a theme that was previously un-researched and I wanted to use and build on the work that already existed in other disciplines as well as in the field of development. I also wanted to be able to draw on my own previous experience, as a trainer and consultant, of work with women on issues of empowerment. I therefore started by examining the theoretical base and various usages of 'empowerment', of which the discussion in Chapter Two is the revised result. As Chapter Two showed, I put together a rough model of what I might be looking for. I made a list of possible components of empowerment, and grouped them into categories. This was to give me a sense of what I might be looking for. I then put together a possible list of questions that might give me a better understanding of those components and from that list produced a draft interview guide (see Appendix Two). I also compiled a

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<sup>200</sup> This was compounded by the absence in Spanish of a direct translation of 'empowerment'. Some people are beginning to use an invented equivalent, *empoderamiento*, but it is not widely understood. I therefore had to work with a variety of component ideas in Spanish, which was problematic but at the same time useful in preventing me from assuming people meant the same by the word as I did.

<sup>201</sup> Many attempts have been made, particularly by organisations needing to evaluate the effectiveness or their work, to find ways of quantifying the less tangible aspects of development. Many 'proxy indicators' have been tried (see, for example, the UNDP Human Development Reports. In terms of empowerment, I would suggest that these indicators generally focus on changes arising from the empowerment process rather than on the process itself (see Chapter Nine).

<sup>202</sup> Glaser & Strauss (1967), Strauss, & Corbin, (1990)

basic data questionnaire to use to gather personal data from individual informants. The absence of a direct Spanish equivalent for 'empowerment' presented a difficulty in the formulation of questions (see footnote 200, page 62); I was unable to ask direct questions about people's understanding of the concept, or about how it featured in their work. NGDO staff had sometimes come across it through their contact with funders, but I generally had to give quite a lengthy explanation if I wanted to ask direct questions about it.

Secondly, as a researcher who is a committed feminist approaching the work from a gender-and-development perspective, I had a priority for my work: that it be designed in such a way as to contribute to empowerment processes wherever possible, and as a 'bottom line', that it should not in any way disempower my informants; I felt a strong obligation to make my work of direct relevance to potential informants/non-academic users of the end product<sup>203</sup>. This requirement also led me to focus on qualitative methodology. In addition it led me to decide against a 'total immersion', ethnographic approach, which I believe would have been an indefensible imposition on the organisations I was studying. It would also have introduced a potentially distorting factor into the research, since my mere presence would have introduced dynamics into the situation which would not have otherwise been there.

In my exploration of the empowerment literature, it became apparent to me that empowerment, as a process based on a 'power-to' notion of power, requires the 'outsider' to abandon any preconceived expectations of outcomes (see page 27). To be methodologically consistent with my subject I would need to relinquish 'ownership' of my project - yet to produce a doctoral thesis I needed to keep hold of the fieldwork as in some way 'mine'. Whether I liked the idea or not, I needed to learn from my informants, albeit within a qualitative framework, in order to complete the task I had set myself, following a research agenda that I had chosen.

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<sup>203</sup> Edwards (1989 & 1993) has called, in my view rightly, for academic work on development issues to become more directly useful and more accountable. How research findings are disseminated becomes a vital issue, and the present format will not facilitate that dissemination.

I decided, therefore, to attempt, through my fieldwork, to provide an opportunity for my informants to participate in activities which had the potential in themselves to contribute to processes of empowerment. In order to do this I would need to be very deliberate in explaining what I was doing and why and to get the full and informed agreement of the organisations and individuals concerned, not just from the 'top' layer of leadership<sup>204</sup>. I expected, therefore, that the process of obtaining agreement to co-operate would take time.

#### 4.2 The Original Plan

In England before undertaking fieldwork, I thought about the possible locations of empowerment processes. Since my interest is in the development agency/Non-Government Development Organisation (NGDO<sup>205</sup>)/'grassroots' relationship, I originally planned to attempt to trace the empowerment process at the grassroots in direct relationship to the intentions of the funding bodies. Before I went to Honduras I spoke with various funding NGDOs in the UK with the intention of finding out which Honduran NGDOs received funds from them and thence to identify grassroots organisations in Honduras. I planned to choose case studies where I could relate grassroots organisations and NGDOs in a series of pairs. I planned to interview people at different locations in each NGDO or grassroots organisation: people in leadership positions, people with specific responsibilities, and general members/workers. My intention was to use semi-structured interviews as the main vehicle for investigation, using my rough model of empowerment (see after page 24) and categorisation as a flexible guide, supplemented by life history interviews and, if appropriate, more formal survey techniques. Since I have good knowledge of the

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<sup>204</sup> I know from my own experience that many individuals or groups in Britain are no more thrilled to be an 'object of study' than those anywhere else: many people find it hard to 'open up' to outsiders.

<sup>205</sup> I use the term NGDO, rather than NGO, Non Government Organisation, which is a much wider term and encompasses many organisations, such as sports associations, which do not have a development focus.

kinds of social dynamics and political issues that can operate within organisations from my work with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in the UK, I was interested to see how those kinds of issues and dynamics related to 'empowerment' in the context of my fieldwork<sup>206</sup>.

Identifying possible case study organisations before I went to Honduras proved difficult. NGDO linkages were not as clear-cut as I had anticipated and my tidy plan began to crumble. In general, information on Honduras is not easily available in the UK. Literature searches came up with very little; personal contact with development agency staff and other individuals with knowledge of the country gave me more information about what relevant organisations existed, but it was clear to me early on that this information was very incomplete. I therefore planned to spend the first part of my time in Honduras familiarising myself with the NGDO/popular organisation sector.

#### 4.3 Structure of the fieldwork

One key decision I made, for both personal and methodological reasons, was to undertake my field research in two parts, October 1992-February 1993 and April-September 1993, with a period of time in the middle to reflect and do some preliminary analysis. Methodologically, the break enabled me to separate my initial exploratory 'getting to know the field' process from the main bulk of the interviewing process and hence get some 'distance' from the subject. It also meant I could do my pilot interviewing and then do preliminary analysis and modification of methodology away from the mental and physical pressures of 'the field', and I could seek academic feedback in England.

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<sup>206</sup> Much, though not all, of my experience has been based in Britain. I have also worked in Latin America, and found many similarities in the kinds of issues raised with me in both places - with, of course, major differences of context and detail.

The first visit, after language training in Mexico, was given over to getting to know Honduras and Honduran NGDOs, identifying the range of possible case study organisations and carrying out a pilot study with one organisation. I then returned home and had a period of two months to do some preliminary analysis of the pilot interviews, reflect on and revise the methodology I had used, and reach some decisions about the final choice of case studies -although illness meant that I had less time to do this than I had anticipated. I then returned to Honduras for a further period of fieldwork. It proved very effective to take 'time out' in the middle and have a space for reflection and the opportunity to discuss my work with colleagues. The preliminary analysis of my initial material could then feed in to my later interviewing - a very useful step that in theory researchers plan to do in the field but apparently rarely actually manage to do because of the pressures of time and the involvement in data collection and interviewing. It also enabled me to go through the initial transcripts I had had done and decide that the quality was poor and I needed to find a different transcriber. Taking 'time out' in this way was therefore very useful to me - though not without its costs. There was disruption in continuity of relationships and I needed a period of time to re-settle when I returned to Honduras.

#### **4.4 What I actually did**

Getting to know the NGDO sector in Honduras was a larger job than I had realised. Aid money has poured into the country because of its geo-strategic position in relation to US foreign policy during the 1980s, as was described in Chapter Three. This has resulted in the existence of a very large number of NGDOs with a 'development' focus, between them involved with a vast number of development projects and programmes. Since my research specifically related to women, I decided to focus my energies on the NGDOs specifically and deliberately working with women. Even so, I could not possibly familiarise myself with all of them, and there was certainly an element of chance (whom could I get through to on the telephone, whom could I find or to who did I get referred on) in the contacts I made. I asked the ones I met 'who else should I be in touch with who works with

women'; eventually I reached the point where people were referring me to organisations I already knew. Some of the information I had gathered in the UK was out of date, and the rest was full of 'gaps'. In some cases it became clear that although the NGDO had a stated objective of working with women, the actual work was not happening; I was told this applies to a large number of NGDOs, which have been applying to the funding sources which are aimed at work with women, often with no intention of reaching that target population.

Many NGDOs in Honduras exist as a result of past divisions or conflicts. Honduras is a small country, and the way individuals and organisations interact is strongly affected by such divisions; I was aware of needing to be careful if I was to avoid being labelled in relation to them and therefore to cut off my access to some groups. The recent history of repression in Honduras also meant a high possibility of encountering suspicion and lack of co-operation; in the event, amongst the women's organisations this was not an obvious dynamic, although I did encounter suspicion and caution among the trade union and *campesino* organisations.

I started looking for two or three 'pairs' of grassroots groups and NGDOs (or Northern 'partners'). But I soon discovered that most of the relationships between the NGDO and the group were far more tenuous than my 'desk' image had anticipated. Many of the relationships involved a one-off input - such as a training session - or a few scattered inputs; but partly because of the vagaries of funding and partly because of the NGDO having multiple objectives (which often include influencing public policy or legislation), the links were not as direct as I had expected. The organisations with more consistent links with grassroots groups were either not deliberately focusing on women or were working with complex integrated rural development programmes that made them inappropriate for the scale of my study. I did explore the possibility with one of these organisations of taking one community within their programme as a case study. However by the time I had got these things clear, after several long and bumpy trips accompanying fieldworkers to various communities, I already had a full timetable of work, having chosen two organisations and, as I then thought, having a third one almost chosen. In addition,

the community concerned would have been an indigenous community and I would have had to familiarise myself with the culture as well as the specific case. I decided I did not have the resources to do a good enough job. I chose, therefore, to take the focus off the NGDO side of the relationship, and concentrate on the grassroots organisation, while maintaining an awareness of the impact of the relationship with any NGDO involved.

The other key decision I made in the field, once I was concentrating on grassroots organisations, was concerned with what kind of organisations to study. I had had many discussions before I left the UK about the relative merits of researching rural and urban settings in relation to empowerment. In the case of Honduras<sup>207</sup> the rural/urban dichotomy is not a particularly meaningful one. Many people live in both, either themselves or through their immediate family members; many people migrate on a seasonal basis; remittances from urban areas are significant. This all became clearer to me once I was in Honduras, as did the understanding that differences between contrasting rural areas, such as between plantation life and *milpa* (ie. smallholder) culture can be at least as great as differences between rural and urban settings. The specifics of empowerment may look very different for rural or urban women, or for poor or better-off women, but it is likely that most women will have aspects of their lives where empowerment could happen: it seems to me that empowerment is something which has relevance to women regardless of their physical or social circumstances. There was an argument for deciding between urban and rural settings on the grounds of finding more comparable case studies; but even similar situations have a wealth of diversity between them. I decided, instead, to go for including diversity in my case studies. I planned, therefore, to include both urban and rural cases. In the event, my intention was thwarted by circumstance. I identified an urban organisation that was also interesting to me because it had never received NGDO support. An initial discussion with them led to a strong expression of interest. They told me that later in my schedule would suit them better because of their own timetable of work but that they couldn't confirm their participation

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<sup>207</sup> And elsewhere in Latin America, as is shown clearly in Gilbert (1994).

definitely until all members had considered it. So I got on with other cases and waited for their decision. To cut a long story short, they didn't reach a clear decision to co-operate until late in my stay. I had put the time aside, but had not anticipated that they would say that yes, they were interested, but I could only work with their group in San Pedro Sula. This did not fit with my need to be in Tegucigalpa towards the end for other aspects of the work. Pragmatism won out and I decided reluctantly not to include them.

Having visited 21 organisations to discuss my research plans and gather information, I finally settled on one organisation which was 'self-started', ie. had been initiated by local people without intervention from any external agency, and one that had been externally initiated. The former is in a largely mountainous area with agriculture dominated by coffee, maize and beans, with mostly small producers; the latter on the coastal plains, dominated by banana and African palm production in large plantations. The former has women organising autonomously (although in the shadow of the Catholic church) and doing their own direct fund-raising; in the latter women have more formal links with the Catholic church, and the work is directly funded by the external initiators. Towards the end of the first stage of fieldwork I conducted pilot interviews, with one group and with three individuals in each of four of the villages where the first case study organisation is active. The amended interview guides I used, for group, depth and life history interviews can be found in Appendix Two. Two of those four villages were selected, on the basis of contrast, for the more detailed interviews in the second stage of fieldwork. Pilot interviewing enabled me to identify the areas where informants had difficulty understanding my questions and modify them accordingly, and to tune my use of Spanish in to local vocabulary and usage.

With both groups, I made my initial approach to an identifiable leader, (in the first case, the initiator of the organisation; in the second, the programme co-ordinator) and then met with a larger team of people acting in a leadership position within the organisation. We discussed my plans in detail, and they had (and used) the chance to ask me questions, both about the research and about myself. In both cases I asked

them to discuss it again at a meeting where I was not present before reaching a decision to participate (or not). With each group, my request for their co-operation led to a wide-ranging discussion about the situation of women and what they were trying to achieve with their organisations. They used the opportunity of my presence and my questions to do some evaluation of what they had achieved and identify where they had not yet done what they wanted. Once consent had been given, I arranged a timetable of visits with each group, to include as many of their regular meetings as possible as well as longer stays in the communities to familiarise myself and conduct interviews. Interviews were done with as many group members as I could, mostly individually but occasionally in twos or threes. In addition I interviewed some of their husbands, prominent community leaders and church leaders, and where appropriate, other organisations undertaking similar activities in the area. Where I could I also conducted interviews and collected data from funding organisations and talked with individuals who had been involved with the groups in the past. Very nearly everyone I interviewed consented to the interview being recorded; later the most promising interviews were transcribed by a native Honduran Spanish speaker (who was able to decipher many less clear sections that I would not otherwise have been able to use).

Individuals and the groups were very generous in giving of their time, and I did not want to accept such generosity without 'giving something back' (in addition to the small amount of practical support I was able to provide by giving lifts). This is one of the big dilemmas of the feminist researcher who 'needs' to produce a single-authored account of her work. I was aware that, given the constraints of time and money, I could only make a gesture towards mutuality - which, given the nature of my subject, was ironic. I was also working cross-culturally, cross-ethnicity and (with the case study organisations), cross-class. Some would question the validity of research conducted across such differences<sup>208</sup>; I agree that there are difficulties of power and meaning/interpretation/representation, though I, with Sarah Radcliffe, believe that it is possible for the 'first world' feminist researcher to produce

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<sup>208</sup> See, for example, Mohanty (1991a&b) and Ong (1988).

meaningful, authoritative work but that "changes are needed to the processes by which productions enter the academic domain and circulate between First and Third worlds"<sup>209</sup>. I would have liked to have had the resources to enable a process of dialogue to come out of my work, such that the women who were the focus of my research could directly contribute to the formulation of the analysis and end product. As it was, once again pragmatism was the (uneasy) arbiter of my decision/action. Once I had completed the interviewing, I arranged a meeting with each organisation where I could review with them what I had done and share my impressions (which were, necessarily, mediated by my own interpretations and my own 'situatedness'). Both organisations were eager to hear what I had been finding, though I had to be clear with them that I had as yet done little formal analysis of the interviews and at that stage what I shared with them was impressionistic and not considered analysis, and was an 'outsider's' viewpoint. One organisation used the opportunity for further reflection and self-evaluation; they confirmed that I had highlighted a number of important aspects and dynamics. The other organisation, short of time that day, asked a few questions and identified subjects for future discussion.

#### 4.5 Analysis

Analysing the contents of 81 recorded interviews is a daunting and time-consuming task. I had 24 interviews transcribed in Honduras. Those had to be checked for accuracy and I spent many hours with my tape recorder, listening to interviews, sometimes several times, and transcribing sections of interviews that I had not already had transcribed. I first listened to check my understanding of what they were

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<sup>209</sup> Radcliffe, (1994), p. 29. The paper opens with a quotation from Lugones & Spelman (1983) p. 573: "No quiero hablar por ti sino contigo. Pero si no aprendo tus modos y tu los mios la conversaci3n es s3lo aparente. Y la apariencia se levanta como una barrera sin sentido entre las dos. Sin sentido y sin sentimiento. Por eso no me debes dejar que dicte tu ser y no me dictes el mio. Porque entonces ya no dialogamos. El di3logo entre nosotras requiere dos voces y no una". "I don't want to talk for you but with you. But if I don't learn your ways and you mine the conversation is only an appearance. And the appearance rises up like a barrier without sense between us two (female). Without sense and without feeling (sentimiento). For this reason you mustn't let me dictate your being and don't tell me mine. Because then we won't talk. The dialogue between us (female) requires two voices and not one." Translation by Radcliffe. Ramazanoglu (1992) discusses the importance of alliances "from each of our standpoints".

saying, comparing the tape and transcript with notes taken at the time of each interview. From that, I was able to draw some preliminary conclusions about potentially significant issues, events and attitudes relating to empowerment, as the women identified them, and about the nature of their vision of what they were trying to achieve. I then listened again to the tapes and, using transcriptions, went through the material highlighting key words and phrases and 'coding' for areas of meaning in relation to the analysis of empowerment I had reached before I started interviewing (see Chapter Two). All the interviews for the two organisations were analysed in this way. I made sure I covered in detail all the group 'interviews' and all interviews where I had been aware of 'unusual' content or a 'different' perspective, using my field notes and my memory of the interviews; not all interviews were analysed in the same detail, since I reached the point after about half the interviews where a 'new' interview would seldom add new headings - a point of 'saturation'.<sup>210</sup>

Through the process of repeatedly returning to the interview material, I gradually assembled a picture in my mind of the empowerment processes at work. I then set out to see if that picture was confirmed or challenged by a more structured analysis. For each organisation, I listed, from my coding, the aspects of the programmes that the women were identifying as in some way important to them, or as having enabled them to make a change in their behaviour or their involvement in decision making. I then went through the material again, noting where each woman raised these aspects, and identifying possible passages for quotation/illustration. A section from one of the resultant tables is reproduced in Appendix Three. I categorised these items in terms of the emphasis the woman gave the item and then drew out the aspects that were repeatedly identified most strongly. I compared the aspects the women identified with the aspects that significant individuals within the local communities identified (the local priest, the village council, leaders of the *grupos*

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<sup>210</sup> Whilst my methods did not follow the methodology of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) I found that approach to coding of interview material very helpful in setting about my own analysis. Riley (1990) was useful in helping me find a variety of ways to approach the interview material and organise the repeated reviews of transcripts and tapes.

*campesinos* (agricultural co-operatives), trade union leaders (where relevant) and with what the women's husbands told me. I also compared them with the aspects identified by NGDO workers, Northern NGDO staff, government officials and other individuals with experience of the organisations in some way, and with my own observations, thereby bringing an element of triangulation into the analysis.

The more structured analysis, as it emerged, confirmed the more informal analysis I had reached through my repeated reviewing of the material. Having developed the analysis of what had been achieved by each organisation with respect to empowerment, I then reviewed the material again to identify what had made it possible for them to achieve what they had, and what had restricted the achievements. I then set out to organise the results of my analyses to produce the model of empowerment found in Chapter Nine.

#### 4.6 Methodological issues

My main criticisms of my work stem from the decisions I made because of the limited time and resources available to me. My fieldwork material is very reliant on the perceptions and perspectives of my informants, who, confronted with this 'foreigner' made their own choices as to what to tell me and what to leave out, what was important or relevant and what was not, what to conceal and what to share, where to deliberately mislead and where to tell me what they perceived I wanted to hear. I did not do as much observation of my own as I would have wished, particularly at different times of year to see how different seasonal activities affect women's lives. This limitation arose in part because I had decided not to go for the 'total immersion' approach, as discussed earlier, but also because I had to juggle my time to fit in with the day to day and monthly schedules of the two case study organisations and my time with each was therefore disjointed. This prevented me from building as strong or as many relationships with either organisation as I wanted, and from spending uninterrupted time in each community. The two communities were the best part of a day's travel apart (see map, after page 35).

Undertaking the case studies consecutively instead of concurrently would have reduced the problem, but my time available did not make that practical given the monthly cycles worked to by both organisations. However, working on both at once did help me make immediate comparisons and highlighted aspects of each organisation that I may have been less aware of otherwise. For example, I succeeded in interviewing more women in PAEM than in Urraco; working on the two cases concurrently highlighted the different attitude to being interviewed that I encountered among the 'ordinary group members' in each place.

As a researcher working on my own rather than in a team, group 'interviews' presented a particular difficulty - not in terms of conducting them, but in terms of recording. My tape recorder managed to record the content, but the field conditions were such that, given the high level of background noise (cockerels crowing, children playing, children crying, passing vehicles, donkeys braying, people passing by... not to mention several people talking at once, which is a common Latin American/Spanish occurrence) it is not always possible to hear who said what. Recording such information manually through the course of the interview was too complex a task for me to undertake whilst paying attention to the direction and research questions. The group interviews yielded a mine of material, but I could not, retrospectively, use information about the speakers to fill out the significance of their contributions, which I regret.

Had I been able to include as planned a further case study, it would have been very useful to look in detail at an organisation focused specifically on income generation. Control over economic resources is a major aspect of women's empowerment, and its absence as a specific case from the study is a weakness in terms of putting together a more complete picture of empowerment processes. Income generation is present in the study as a factor, however, and it is useful to see both the restrictions encountered by its absence in one of the cases and the identification of the need for it in the other.

The process I went through in identifying organisations for case studies was in some ways very frustrating. I realise that despite my best intentions, my careful analysis and planning, I had very little direct control over the final outcome. In some ways that was to be expected in a methodology that respected the potential case study organisations as decision makers. My position as the researcher was one of responding to the possibilities available to me, contingent on the decisions of others. With hindsight, I suspect this to be a common position for researchers to find themselves in, and it makes me question many of the apparently seamless accounts I have read of research methodology.

I chose Tegucigalpa as my 'base camp', which made geographic sense in the beginning as the place where most NGOs have their offices and a good place to be to gather information. After much agonising about the pros and cons of using local transport versus providing my own, I bought a second hand jeep. With hindsight, I would have had less travelling to do (and perhaps might have managed with public transport, saving myself considerable money and stress) had I been based in San Pedro Sula, and perhaps (only perhaps), I might have been able to make space to do the third case study that I originally intended. From there it would have been difficult to stay in contact with the range of people that I wanted, however, and I do not regret my early decision.

By choosing to focus on rural grassroots organisations and to make sure that the decision to participate involved the general membership and not just one or two leaders, I had chosen an often frustrating and stressful option. Communication was at best poor and at worst infuriating; the best laid plans and timetables could vanish without notice. My attempts to pack in as much as possible fell foul of local attitudes to time, to unanticipated events in the lives of the organisations or the individuals within them and to technical difficulties (such as, to choose just one example, a

blown cylinder-head gasket, four hours bus-ride from the nearest parts stockist, where the only mechanic available had a severe case of dengue<sup>211</sup>).

The issue of 'objectivity' in research has been identified in recent years as contested. 'Objectivity', in the sense it has been used within 'scientific' research methodology, as being in some way separate from the subject of study and 'free from bias' or 'value-neutral', can no longer be assumed to be either achievable or desirable in social research<sup>212</sup>. The researcher always makes choices about what to research and how to research it, that come from the researcher's own priorities, experience and preconceptions. In researching the issue of women's empowerment I had no interest in attempting to take or communicate some supposedly 'neutral' stance: as a component in the ending of the oppression of women, empowerment is a subject I feel strongly about; I am not 'objective' or 'free from bias' in the sense that positivist methodology would deem necessary<sup>213</sup>; nor do I consider it possible in social science. I do not see this as a problem; more that in acknowledging my position I am making something visible that would be present anyway in the text and sub-text.

The next four chapters are given over to the two case studies. Each case has a chapter outlining the context and describing the organisation, and a chapter entering into an analysis of empowerment processes. I have used pseudonyms in the text to avoid violations of privacy and because I have not had the opportunity to confirm my interpretations with the individuals concerned except in a few cases. This applies for all informants apart from the most public figures in each setting who could be easily identified by anyone with a little knowledge of Honduras however hard I attempted to disguise their identities.

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<sup>211</sup> I will here express my indebtedness to (British) Save the Children Honduras for the support I received in sorting out that difficulty!

<sup>212</sup> See, for example, Harvey (1985), Mies (1983), Harding (1991) and Haraway (1988).

<sup>213</sup> Good detailed arguments in favour of this position can be found in Berninghausen & Kerstan (1992) and White (1992); it does not seem to me necessary to re-present them here.

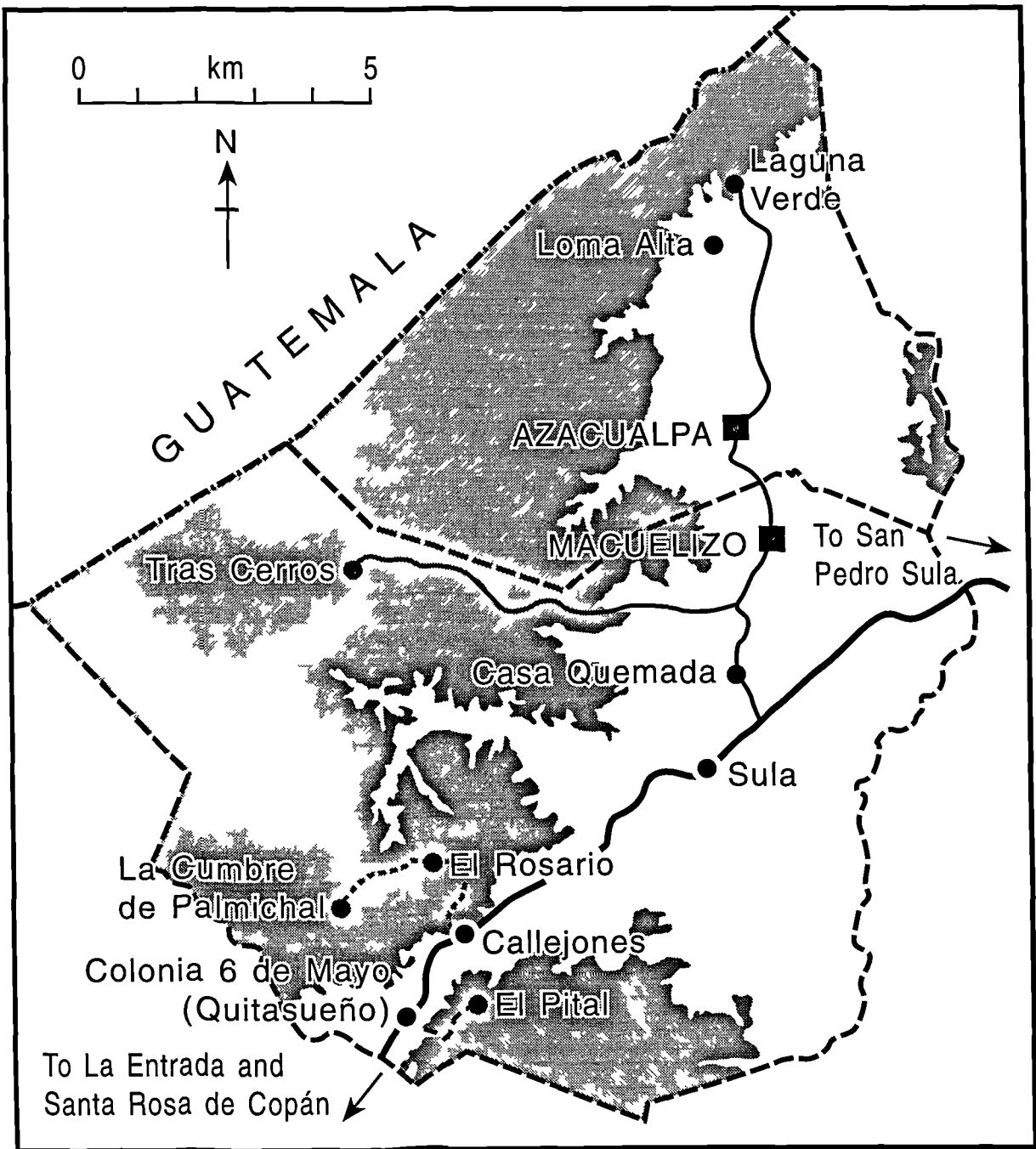
## **Chapter Five: Case Study 1: Programa Educativo de la Mujer,**

### **Santa Barbara**

This chapter and the one which follows are based on field research carried out in Honduras in 1992-3, as outlined in Chapter Five. This chapter will provide an account of the context within which the *Programa Educativo de la Mujer* (PAEM, Women's Educational Programme) is working, and an account of the history, structure and activities of PAEM and an analysis of PAEM in relation to empowerment. Chapter Six will then provide an exploration of how and why empowerment was achieved. Both chapters draw on my interviews with women in PAEM, individuals who have been significant to the organisation and with individuals and organisations which have seen PAEM from the outside. I also draw on my own observation during fieldwork and on published sources (as referenced). Later, in Chapter Nine, after the second case study, I will return to PAEM, with an analysis of both cases and of the model of empowerment, in the wider context of the empowerment, gender and development literature.

#### **5.1 Macuelizo: Background.**

The parish of Macuelizo where PAEM is located (see Figure 5.1), lies in the north of the Department of Santa Barbara, in north western Honduras. It covers two municipalities, Azacualpa and Macuelizo, both of which are on the western border with Guatemala. The parish encompasses a diverse geography, with mountains to the west and north, and part of the Quimistán valley, a fertile plain, running north-eastward towards the coast. The town of Macuelizo is in the north of the municipality of the same name, with a population of 2,456. Azacualpa town, somewhat smaller, is some five miles further north, on a good dirt road. They are the only large bodies of population in the parish; the rest of the two municipalities' combined 45,967 population lives in 48 *aldeas* (villages) and 212 *caseríos* (hamlets)



- Municipal town      ● Village      ■ Land over 500m
- Paved road      - - - Unpaved road      ····· Track

Figure 5.1 Map 2 Macuelizo parish  
 Source : after Instituto Geográfico Nacional

scattered across the mountains and the plain<sup>214</sup>. It is one of the most densely populated areas in the department of Santa Barbara.

The area is agricultural. The varied geography and climate allow a wide range of crops. In the mountains the predominant crops are maize and beans. Most cultivation there is for own consumption, and is done on tiny plots of land (*minifundios*) sometimes owned by the small farmers or by co-operatives, but often rented or squatted. Where conditions allow coffee is cultivated for the market. Lower down the mountains and on the plain other crops can be grown. Some small farmers are beginning to diversify into other crops such as tomatoes, peppers and chiles. On the plain, where the climate is drier and land is fertile and of good agricultural quality, most land is in the hands of large farmers (*latifundistas*)<sup>215</sup>. The predominant crops are sugar cane and rice, and cultivation and processing is dominated by one big company, Chimbagua. The municipality of Macuelizo, which encompasses part of the Quimistán valley, appears in the 1974 census as the second most significant sugar cane producing area in the country. There are also tobacco, and cattle ranching, with the amount of land in pasture having increased dramatically in the past thirty years. The one main road, which was being paved while I was there, runs through the Quimistán valley, linking San Pedro Sula, the second city and industrial centre of Honduras, with Santa Rosa de Copán, the Guatemalan border and the tourist attraction of the Copán ruins. Macuelizo town is about five miles north of the paved road.

The great majority of the employment in the parish is in agriculture, either on an own account basis or as labour for the larger farmers and for Chimbagua. Agricultural work is very predominantly male, with trucks collecting and depositing workers at the start and finish of the day. The large farm/*fincas* have some mechanisation, but most of the work is hard physical labour with a machete, on a day labourer basis, and requires no formal education. Employment for women is

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<sup>214</sup> Tábora (1992).

<sup>215</sup> See, for example, Posner & McPherson (1982).

scarce, except during the period of the coffee harvest, and there is much migration of younger women to the Sula valley in search of work in the *maquila* (assembly plants). Migration to the coast is common; there is also migration over the border to Guatemala and to Mexico and the United States, often illegally. Many people currently living in the parish are in-migrants, having come from further west or south. Usually migrants arrive in search of an improvement in conditions, often in search of land rather than employment. Many migrants have moved from much remoter settlements to the relative accessibility along the recently paved road.

Most villages in the parish now have a primary school, and there is a secondary school in each of the municipal centres (a prerequisite for municipality status) and one small agricultural college. This by no means implies that access to primary education is universal: many of the *caseríos* are long distances from the villages with difficult tracks and paths, many of which become impassable during wet weather. In the mountains the levels of poverty are such that many families do not send children to school, or only do so for a short time, because of the cost of uniforms and materials and the need for the children's labour. A small number of villages now have electricity (all either on the main paved road or on the road connecting to Macuelizo and Azacualpa towns); a larger number have potable water supplies - at least in theory. But within those villages there are many people without water or electricity, and supply is inconsistent, with power cuts and water cuts. During my visits to Casa Quemada, for example, which has both, we had occasional power cuts and spent long periods reverting to the old water supply, going to the river ten minutes walk away to wash, and carrying buckets of no doubt contaminated water back to the house for drinking and cooking. It was explained to me that the man with the job of maintaining the water supply was a drunk...

Most housing in the area is made of adobe, *bajareque* (a kind of wattle and daub) or wood, with dirt floors. Few houses have more than one or two rooms and perhaps a separate kitchen. Roofs are thatched, or of tile or zinc (the latter being much cheaper). Most households in the villages closer to the roads have pit latrines or, sometimes, septic tanks; more isolated hamlets and villages make do without

them. Cooking is on wood stoves, which are 'improved' in comparison to the open ground or platform fires of much of the rest of rural Latin America, but which, although they have 'covered' fires, give off much smoke and can therefore cause respiratory disease and lung cancer; there is rarely a chimney and usually ventilation is poor. At least one village has organised to have a 'wood lot' to supply the fuel needs of the community, but generally there is an increasing difficulty of supply, with deforestation a growing problem.

The parish has five health centres, including one in each of the towns. For most of the population outside the towns this means that formal health care is very poor. Health centres are under-staffed and under-resourced. They are likely to have medicines for only a few days each month. Women I interviewed did not expect to receive treatment at a health centre: they expected to be told there was no medicine, or to find the centre closed, or to be ignored. If they can afford it (which few can), people in communities within easy reach of the paved road have access to private doctors in La Entrada, about half an hour to the west using the bus services, and to hospitals in Sta Rosa de Copán or San Pedro Sula. For the more isolated communities, health care is much less accessible, with walks of six to eight hours, perhaps carrying the sick, in order to reach the paved road. Most communities have a midwife, though not necessarily with formal training or practising modern hygiene. Malnutrition and the diseases of poverty are the main health problems; problems with alcoholism and violence seem to be present in some communities and not so much in others. There is much illiteracy; of the women I interviewed, few had achieved more than two or three years in primary school.

Many households in the villages and small settlements now have radios; there are some televisions in the towns, but in the villages they are rare - maybe one or two in a village; they pull the crowds for football matches for a small fee. Generally, 'urban' culture is absent, although young people are perhaps now beginning to be influenced by older siblings who have moved away. The underlying culture of *machismo* is very much the norm, with women clearly in a formally subordinate role in just about every way.

This part of Honduras is firmly Catholic in religion, although there is a presence of some of the protestant churches, including the pentecostals.

## 5.2 The experience of women in Macuelizo

The lives of women in the parish of Macuelizo are very definitely bounded by the expectations of a clear sexual division of labour, a firmly *machista* culture and an absence of social services. Their dominant role as adult women is as housewives, mothers and carers for small livestock; in some cases to this is added an agricultural role<sup>216</sup>. Depending on her circumstances, a woman's day will begin early or very early. *Tortillas* must be made (a time consuming process, which can take up to three hours per day) and a meal must be prepared for her *compañero* to take with him to work or to the *milpa* (or she may take it to him herself later). In the bigger villages there are now mills, either privately or collectively owned, where the soaked maize for *tortillas* can be ground; in smaller settlements it is still done manually using a grinding stone or a simple hand mill (or there is a long walk to the nearest motorised mill). Use of contraception is very uncommon. Women are strongly influenced in this by husbands and priests, and there are strong pressures on women to have 'all the children God gives'. Reproductive health care is scarce, and gynaecological problems are common and go untreated. Most women have large numbers of children, starting with the first at the age of 15 or 16 (or younger in some cases); some children will die, but most women carry a heavy childcare burden, with its attendant load of washing and cleaning and feeding. Water carrying is also a woman's or her children's work where there is no piped supply. Some women opt for sterilisation after having a number of children, though if formally married or in a steady *unión libre* (common-law marriage) they need the consent of the husband for this. Only women with several children who have different fathers will in practice not require a man's consent to be sterilised. A woman will also probably

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<sup>216</sup> The contribution of women to agricultural production varies widely throughout Latin America (see, for example, Deere & León, (1987)). It also varies through Honduras. See also Townsend (1993) on processes of 'housewifeization' on the agricultural frontier. Also see page 50, footnote 170.

be responsible for the care of a few small animals - a hen or two (or maybe more); perhaps (though rarely) a goat or pig. These may be for the family's consumption, or may be for sale, either to other villagers, or in the nearest town. If they are for sale, the income is quite likely to stay in the woman's control. Men generally bring the firewood to the house, though if a woman is a widow or separated and has no sons old enough, she will gather wood too.

More girls are having the opportunity to receive some formal education now than was the case even as recently as a decade ago. That the main villages now have schools is one factor; another is that the attitude towards girls and education is slowly changing. However, many fathers still do not want their daughters to be educated, seeing it as encouragement to go out of the domestic sphere. Also few girls have mothers who were educated, and there is therefore an absence of a strong model that would help girls (and their mothers) exert pressure on the issue.

It is unusual for a woman to continue to live in her house after the death or desertion of her *compañero*<sup>217</sup>. Any land will almost certainly be in his name, and until the recent reform of the Agrarian Reform law<sup>218</sup>, women could only inherit land if there was no suitable male relative, and it is very rare for a woman to be able to take over her husband's rights as a member of a co-operative. So a widow or woman who has been abandoned will usually move in with a married child or back with her parents if that is an option, or leave for the city. There are hardly any other options for her, as the only paid work for women is seasonal labour in the coffee harvest. Other income generating possibilities are scarce; other than in the towns, few people have much cash, so the fall-backs of selling *tamales* or doing washing and so on are few. A few women travel the mountains with bags of second hand clothing (shipped in from the U.S., though not by them) to sell. That is about the most lucrative occupation for a woman but it is a limited market and you have to have circumstances (and a *compañero*) that permit you to be away for days at a time. Men

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<sup>217</sup> Respectability is an important issue. See Townsend (1995).

<sup>218</sup> *Ley de Modernización Agrícola* (Agricultural Modernisation Law), 1992.

are generally very vigilant and strict about what the women may do. Sonia, now aged 34, told me of being locked into her windowless house when her *compañero* left for the *milpa* in the morning and staying there all day every day until he returned in the late afternoon. She was then in a *union libre* and 16 or 17 years old. She recounted it as an extreme form of something quite normal. When the man comes home there is another meal to prepare before night falls, and servicing of the man in what ever form he requires. Some women have other members of their extended family living in the same or next village, and are able to visit or share tasks. Many others do not, having migrated from further afield. Women are generally very isolated from each other, and may not know their own neighbours or the wider community. This varies from one community to another and is linked closely with the lack of any history of organisation, campaigning or church activity.

The *union libre* (common-law marriage) form of relationship with a man is common. A woman is considered married in this way as soon as they start a sexual relationship. Unlike formal state or church marriage, *union libre* does not require payment of a fee. It leaves women with no protection under law if the man leaves (which in practice makes little difference as access to legal justice is impossible for people without money), and gives the man no obligations to the woman or their children.

Parts of the parish have seen many attempts at organising people. The Catholic Church, through CARITAS, has organised a large number of women's groups over the past 25 years. A few other NGDOs that work with women have done the same more recently. Such groups have usually been organised around donations of food and/or seed, and have involved women in activities such as growing vegetables, and around nutrition and child care. Generally, as soon as the donations stop, the groups collapse. The other main organisers have been the *campesino* organisations such as the CNTC. Most of the CNTC's work has been with the men, but they have also worked with women's groups in some communities. In some parts of the parish, PLAN Honduras, a branch of the big U.S. based aid agency Foster Plan International, has been very active. It is not common for women to be active

members of the *patronato* (village council) or other formal community organisation, although women are active members of base community church groups where they exist.

### 5.3 PAEM: A Brief History

PAEM, the *Programa Educativo de la Mujer* (Women's Educational Programme) was set up in the parish of Macuelizo in 1986. It grew out of the work and vision of María Esther Ruiz, a *campesina* woman who had had unusual opportunities which gave her access to education and experience outside the range of possibilities normally available to a poor rural woman. For a long time it was very likely that she would become a nun. The local priest made sure she received primary education, and she became an activist, working for five and a half years as a CARITAS promoter with women's groups, working as the only woman leader with the ACPH Radio Schools (Honduran Association for Popular Culture) and as the only woman leader in two co-operative federations. Later she worked for the CNTC, where part of her work involved being on the three-person committee responsible for formulating policy and strategy. All these experiences left her feeling that there had to be some other way of working with women that did not reproduce conditions of dependency. PAEM was the result. A new priest, Padre Jesús María Aechu, a Basque Passionist in his early thirties, had come to the parish in 1978. He had decided to revitalise Catholic Church activities by having a 'mission' in 1981, spending a week in each village with programmes of activities centred around the church and people's faith. He asked María Esther to play a particular role in working with women during the mission, and out of that work came ten initial groups which formed the basis of PAEM. The idea was to build a programme very deliberately from the bottom up, with women identifying their own needs and wants and to work towards being in a position to act on those needs. María Esther wanted to undertake

work which would be an alternative way of organising women, which would be built from the bottom; I had no right to give it a name, or start an NGO, or have an organisation with one, two, three groups. I hadn't the right; nor had two or three of us... We were going to do it together with the women who we got involved. The conclusion that I, at least, had come to was that all the work is done from the top down; it was this verticalism that I didn't like, I didn't think things worked that way; we needed to build from the base, which implied more time, more dedication, which is slow work. I thought that was where I had to start.<sup>219</sup>

The women decided to identify themselves as the 'Group of Christian Women of the Parish of Macuelizo'. They remained as a loose association of groups which met regularly to explore together their lives as women. By 1985 they felt ready to have a more specific identity - in part to help them in communicating with other groups, as groups were beginning to meet in other parishes as well. They chose a name, PAEM, which maintained their informal, non-NGO status, and which described their work.

PAEM grew significantly. At this time Oxfam UK had a Deputy Regional Representative for Mexico and Central America, Deborah Eade, with specific responsibility for their Honduras programme who was looking for innovative work to support with a gender dimension<sup>220</sup> that was not present in their existing programme with campesino and trade union organisations. She was also looking for work to support that was outside the factionalism so common in Honduras. Church based organisations were a possible location for such work, since Oxfam worked with churches elsewhere in Latin America. She met María Esther and discussed the work in Macuelizo. She decided to take the risk of providing funding to a new, unconventional programme with clear aims but without the spelt-out targets and objectives usually required by funding agencies. This funding enabled several part-time co-ordinators to work more intensively, covering their travel and other costs, and the number of groups in the programme increased; the work had also spread

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<sup>219</sup> Ruiz, quoted in Tábora (1992) p. 43.

<sup>220</sup> "Or, at least, an absence of hostility, fear and incomprehension", Deborah Eade (personal communication).

beyond the parish into other departments. At one point there were some 110 groups in four departments, Santa Barbara, Colón, Comayagua and Intibucá.

One problem that became apparent after a while was that María Esther was spreading herself too thin. Discussions with Oxfam about how María Esther's input could be most effective, as well as about the sustainability of the work, led to a proposal that PAEM produce its own educational materials as a way of making the work with the groups more reproducible. The result was '*Conociéndome a mi misma*', ('Getting to know myself'), a 'popular education' booklet for use by members of the groups in meetings and the '*Guía de la animadora*' ('Guide for animators'), a booklet providing guidance to group animators in how to use the other booklet with the groups, and providing some supplementary materials such as relevant biblical passages and explanations of issues raised. Some extracts from these are given in Figure 5.4 at the end of this chapter. Both booklets were put together out of the experience of the women in the groups, in a way that involved them in determining the content and producing the results (for example in acting for the photographs). The booklets took about three years to produce and the materials were developed and piloted with the support of Luisa María Rivera, a consultant from Mexico. Luisa María's work with PAEM was also funded by Oxfam<sup>221</sup>. She had already worked with PAEM before the booklets were thought of. She had met María Esther when in Honduras doing a different consultancy job with NGOs for Oxfam, and they had got on well. When it became apparent that a difficulty PAEM was facing was María Esther's intellectual isolation and lack of people with whom to explore and develop ideas, Oxfam made funds available for Luisa María to fill that role. She was therefore known and trusted by the time the booklets were to be developed. Towards the end of the process of developing the booklets, technical support was received from an NGO called COMUNICA which works on media and communication with popular organisations (and which has also received Oxfam funding). The booklets were distributed to the various groups, and are still in regular use there as well as being used by other organisations.

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<sup>221</sup> She later worked directly for Oxfam in the Mexico office.

Each group is autonomous, and consists of up to about fifteen women. There was an early decision to keep the groups small, and have more than one group in a community rather than a bigger and bigger one. This means that there can be space within the activity of the group for each woman to contribute and participate. The groups generally meet on a weekly basis, setting their own programmes; meetings start with a recitation of the 'women's prayer' (see Figure 5.2). Sometimes they study a section of '*Conociéndome a mi misma*', discussing and reflecting on some aspect of their lives as poor rural women. Each group works to its own agenda: some of them take on small projects such as growing vegetables or making *tamales* for sale. They raise small amounts of money which enable them to cover any costs the group may have. Each group chooses two women to act as animators<sup>222</sup> of the group. These women get to go to meetings with other animators to prepare the themes that will be worked on in the groups and to discuss any issues that arise. Figure 5.3 shows PAEM's current structure.

The structure was not like that from the beginning. After the mission, the early groups were formed in a conventional way, with president and vice president, secretary, treasurer etc., as can be found in most Honduran organisations. But in 1987

there was a general workshop to analyze the organisational structure of PAEM, and it was decided that the traditional form was too vertical, putting too much responsibility onto a few people. It did not allow enough participation and impeded

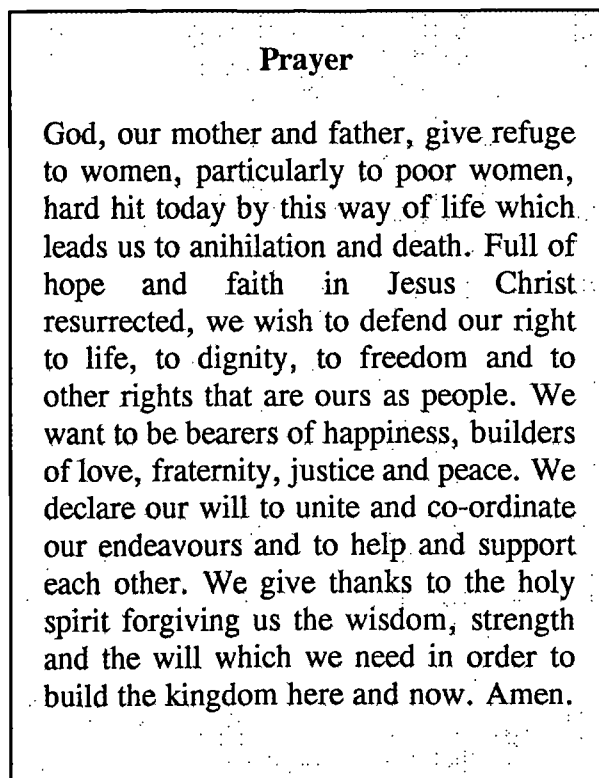


Figure 5.2: The Women's Prayer

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<sup>222</sup> Animator is a term used to describe someone whose role is to motivate individuals to participate in group activities and to motivate the group to continue to meet and be active.

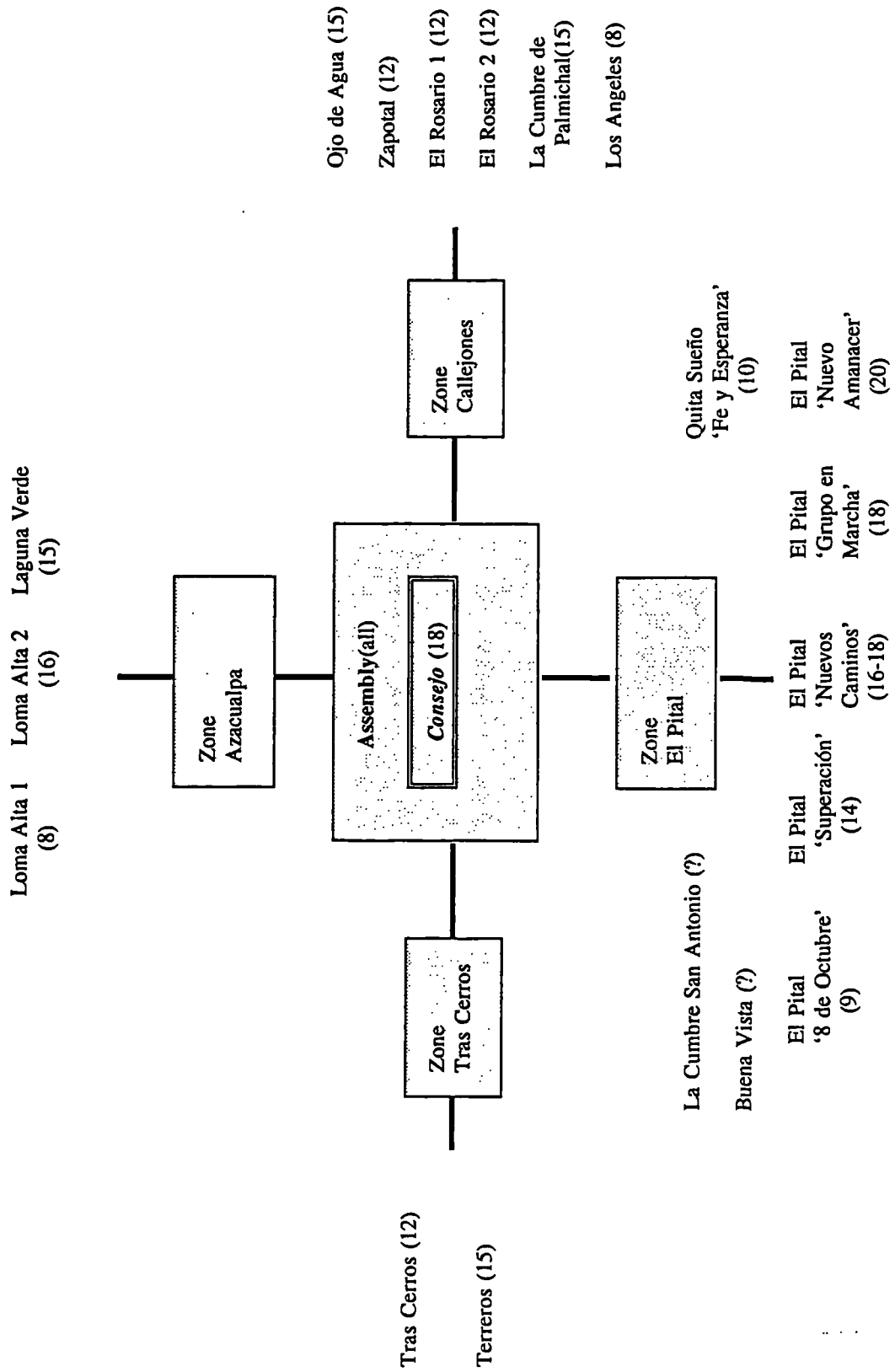


Figure 5.3: Organigram of PAEM (Figures in brackets represent approx. group membership)

the development of confidence and self esteem among the rest of the women. An alternative structure was tried briefly with a team of women filling each of the leadership functions, but it was soon abandoned in favour of a more radical change. The notion of having promoters who come in to animate a group from outside was abandoned, and the task of animating the group is now filled from within the group, and is no longer a permanent task of one person. The groups get together in zonal meetings (there are four zones in Macuelizo) with perhaps six to ten other groups; there is a theme and each group brings an activity to share:

...sociodramas [acting out events or situations], songs, *dinámicas*<sup>223</sup>, jokes. Women of the zone meet there together and share a moment of entertainment, of good fellowship; we make food to share, we all eat the same food. We learn to be better, to live united, to share our problems and at the same time see what solutions we can find. We do that in the group meetings too<sup>224</sup>.

A *consejo* (central council) of about 20 women also meets regularly to discuss any issues that arise, analyze and plan activities, and generally play a co-ordinating role. Decisions in this group are taken by a process of consensus, with the decision evolving gradually out of discussion and exploration rather than being taken by the more customary vote.

As well as the regular group, zone and council meetings, and an annual assembly, a series of bigger workshops has enabled PAEM to look at some themes with benefit of support from outside. In the mid eighties, awareness of gender issues within Honduran NGOs was more or less non-existent, and the NGOs that now exist with specific gender analysis and focus had not yet formed. PAEM found help from a Mexican NGO, *Grupo de Educación Popular para Mujeres* (GEM; Popular Education Group for Women). María Esther had been invited to Mexico by Oxfam in 1988 to enable her to visit a number of organisations working in the field of popular education and of women and development in order to find out how other organisations tackle the issues she and PAEM were facing. Whilst there she met

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<sup>223</sup> Literally, dynamics: any kind of group exercise.

<sup>224</sup> Tábora (1992) p96

GEM. Then when the women in PAEM started asking to cover subject areas where she did not have the expertise, she and GEM put together a proposal for the workshop series, to be run by people with experience of working with rural Christian women, and again approached Oxfam for funding. As a result, GEM sent facilitators to run a series of week-long workshops, one a year from 1988 to 1990, on themes that had been requested by the women such as the role of co-ordinators (as opposed to promoters), gender, gender and sexuality, gender and democracy; they also worked with PAEM on the analysis of their experience. The themes for these workshops were identified by the women in the groups as being important. The workshop series also helped tackle a problem which the women in the groups had begun to identify and complain about, that María Ester was doing the travelling and getting to make the contacts with people elsewhere, and that such contact should be fed back into the programme. The workshops were a way of bringing the outside world into the programme.

The evolution of PAEM was not all plain sailing. Difficulties arose with the change from a promoter approach, where someone from outside the community comes in to encourage the group and support its activities, to an animator approach, where the encouragement and animation is done by a member of the group itself. There were important differences of opinion between some of the stronger leaders. María Esther was clearly in favour of the more horizontal approach; leaders from the groups in the other departments were less in favour of the change. As a result, some of the groups became more independent and the programme became a less unified structure. María Esther focused her PAEM work in Macuelizo. This has, however, opened up new possibilities and a recent development is an attempt to build a network of rural women's organisations across the country which includes those that were previously a part of PAEM.

The other main area of difficulty has been in the relations between PAEM and the Catholic Church. The PAEM women identify specifically as Catholic women and their organising was centred around the church from the beginning. Padre Jesús María, the Spanish Passionist priest who organised the mission in 1981, was very

supportive of their organising efforts. As he freely admits, he did not understand what María Esther was trying to do:

I realised that the CARITAS groups weren't making any noticeable advance; they were organising women around certain needs of the parish, but not helping them to excel as women. So I began to see that the work of María Esther was bearing fruit. I began to understand the necessity of a special work with women. But at first I wasn't clear about it... What I did was support them morally. I left the weight of the work in the hands of María Esther and the other women. If they called for a mass, I went. If there was a problem or difficulty with one of the groups in the community, I would give my support when I went to visit. But I didn't do more than that... I knew there was clarity among the people leading the programme, that they knew where they were going and what methodology to use. I wasn't clear what it was but I knew they were clear. So I supported them. And slowly I saw the results and saw that the method of work was correct. (Padre Jesús María).

However the organisational shift from promoter to animator also brought María Esther into conflict with some key women in the parish, one of whom had been a promoter before the change and was also a CARITAS promoter, who saw the work of PAEM as a threat to the functioning of the church and perhaps to her own leadership within it. In 1991 Padre Jesús María was moved to a different parish in Santa Barbara, and the incoming priest, Padre Ricardo Pradilla (also a Spanish Passionist) did not share his supportive attitude to the PAEM women. Padre Jesús María had seen the autonomy of PAEM as a strength, as something that fed the life of the church in Macuelizo, and he had therefore shielded PAEM from a conflict that was beginning to smoulder over their activities and relation to the parish council and other church activities. When he moved, that shield went. Padre Ricardo seemingly perceived PAEM as a threat. Word went out that women were expected to choose between their participation in PAEM and their involvement in the church. The rumour was that the *padre* would not baptize the babies of women who continued in PAEM. According to Padre Ricardo, PAEM was asked to clarify whether they were part of the church or an independent organisation; he described the 'conflict' as an issue of control over resources; as he put it to me, he was concerned that PAEM was receiving funds that should have been going to the parish

- though Deborah Eade was emphatic that there would have been no question of Oxfam funds going to the parish.

For many women the apparent choice was too hard. Their faith and membership of the Catholic Church are a core component of many women's identities; it is the thing that helps them keep going when life feels impossible. As a result of the conflict with the priest (as it was perceived, though it was not only he who opposed PAEM or its degree of autonomy) the number of groups in PAEM in Macuelizo halved, from 30 to 15 in 1991.

The period of the conflict was a difficult one for PAEM; the women were full of doubts and uncertainties. María Esther in particular was under immense pressure. It certainly tested the achievements of the programme to the limit. What is clear is that the women on the *consejo* maintained their unity and have been strengthened because of the experience. During the worst of the conflict, in 1992 they went from meeting monthly to meeting once a week, and used the time to voice doubts and express strong emotion as well as to plan and strategise. María Esther had to move into a less visible role because she was the target for much of the conflict: this meant other women moving forward and taking a firm stand. The personal relationships between the *consejo* members are very strong as a result.

Having survived the conflict, PAEM is facing changes. One of these is a change of name. With the move to a network of rural Christian women's organisations *Enlace de Mujeres Rurales Cristianas*, the programme in Macuelizo needed a more individual identity. This has coincided with a shift in focus of the organisation's work. The educational work will continue, but the women have decided that they have done enough of the groundwork now to move on to tackling some of the needs that have been identified. The new name had more or less been settled on by the time I completed fieldwork as *Grupo de Mujeres Nueva Esperanza* (New Hope Women's Group). The other great change is the move towards new activity in order to address the serious problems experienced in the area in the supply of basic grains. PAEM is hoping to take over a disused grain warehouse in one of the communities

on the paved road, a warehouse that is part of a national network of such warehouses owned by IHMA, the Institute of Agricultural Marketing, which was funded with European Community economic aid. PAEM has negotiated with and received the support of IHMA in the capital, and has located a source of initial funding. As I left in the Autumn of 1993, they were tackling the complex local political issues that their plan has raised and moving towards achieving legal status as an organisation.

#### 5.4 El Pital and Quitasueño

Rather than try to work with all the groups in PAEM (I shall continue to use the old name here, since I am looking at what was achieved by that programme rather than specifically at recent changes), I chose to work in more detail with two of the communities and with the *consejo*. I chose two strongly contrasting communities, El Pital and Quitasueño.

##### 5.4.1 El Pital

El Pital is about five miles from the paved road up a recently improved but steep and winding dirt road in the west of the parish of Macuelizo. It has a population of about 1,100 in about 120 households and is a beautiful village with enough trees left to hide many of the predominantly adobe or *bajareque* houses with thatch roofs that sprawl up the sides of the valley. Some of the houses have concrete floors; some have running water and latrines, but electricity has not yet reached the village. Land is owned by two *campesino* groups (with about 50 members between them and approximately 350 hectares) and by *parceleros*, small landowners of up to 20 hectares. Perhaps a third of the households are landless<sup>225</sup>. The community is well established - many of its population were born there - and very well organised, with

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<sup>225</sup> Land ownership data is approximate, since the catastral register for Macuelizo is inadequate.

most villagers, men and women, being involved in some sort of organisation - the *patronato*, the two *grupos campesinos*, 'base communities' of the Catholic Church, a CNTC women's group and so on. PAEM has five groups in the community, one of which is a recently formed group for young women. The groups meet separately and have their own activities; they also meet together to study '*Conociéndome a mi misma*'. Four women from El Pital are on the *consejo*. Significantly, one of the animators from the groups is a member of and secretary to the *patronato*, and is very active in decision making at the village level.

In El Pital the PAEM groups are lively and proud of what they do. Most of the women I interviewed talked easily with me despite my arrival with little warning, a foreign-looking stranger with an unfamiliar accent. They understood the majority of my questions easily and gave mostly full and thoughtful responses. Each of the groups has its own activities in addition to studying *Conociéndome a mi misma*. There have been several attempts at collective vegetable plots, *milpas* and growing beans, most of which have not been very successful. Other activities have worked better. *Superación*, for example, runs the motorised mill for the community; *Nuevos Caminos* now has a building, or *caseta* where they cook and sell food - though they were not doing so at the time of my longest stay, as the grain scarcity of pre-harvest time meant that people were not buying. The building of this *caseta*, with which the women's husbands helped, had been the focus of a big conflict, in which the community took the women's side (see page 113).

I was interested to know whether the public visibility of women in El Pital had changed since PAEM became active. According to the *patronato*, Padre Jesús María and María Esther, changes have been considerable. There used to be no women in the *directivas* of any of the community organisations. Now as well as the aforementioned woman secretary to the *Patronato*, there are four women officers in the *Sociedad de Padres de Familia* (Parents Society). The membership of the latter is now half female where before it was all male. Each of the *grupos campesinos* now has one woman full member. It was the men I interviewed, and the members of the *patronato*, who were clearest about the significance of this change. Women who

were always quiet, if they ever went to public meetings, now participate and express opinions. The changes have also happened at a personal level. Almost all the women I interviewed at El Pital, and all of the men, confirmed that there had been a change in the nature of their relationships with their spouses. Most women were having more discussion with the man about domestic issues, how to spend money, and about wider issues of the community. Some women would now do things they wanted to do even if he was against the idea (particularly, going to meetings).

#### 5.4.2 Quitasueño

Quitasueño is a very different community, and is a community with important historical significance to the *campesino* movement. It is situated where the road to El Pital leaves the main paved road. Prior to the formation of the CNTC in 1985, the national *campesino* movement was full of in-fighting and factionalism<sup>226</sup>. There were five left-of-centre and far-left organisations. The land ‘reclamation’<sup>227</sup> that established the *grupos campesinos* in Quitasueño (where previously there had only been a small settlement) was organised by *campesinos* at the grassroots, working across those five organisations, and not by the national leadership. The people at the base were clearly expressing dissatisfaction with the in-fighting going on in the capital, feeling it had nothing to do with them. One slogan was ‘*las bases rebasan a los jefes*’, ‘the grassroots are overtaking the bosses’. The effect of the land reclamation in Quitasueño was cataclysmic for the national *campesino* movement; the five organisations met and decided to dissolve and to form the CNTC.

A large number of the male inhabitants of Quitasueño are members of the 10 *campesino* groups (co-operatives) that were formed on the ‘reclaimed’ land. Most of the inhabitants are in-migrants from other parts of Santa Barbara or further afield.

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<sup>226</sup> I am grateful to Deborah Eade for background information about the CNTC and Quitasueño.

<sup>227</sup> Occupation of private land, known by some as ‘land invasion’. The occupation of unproductive land was in certain circumstances permitted under the Agrarian Reform law of 1976.

The CNTC has been very active - the fact that there are so many *campesino* groups on so little land is because of internal politics of the CNTC; although the previous five organisations dissolved, many people still kept their separatist agendas; within the organisation, the allocation of voting rights is related to numbers of groups rather than size. This community has a history of organising, but without having produced a 'well organised' community. Various NGOs and church organisations (such as the Mennonites) have also had a presence in the community over the years, although this has not resulted in much noticeable improvement in the lives of community members, despite the community's advantageous location and easy access to markets. The households of co-op members mostly have 'good' housing, with cement block houses and cement floors, since co-ops have access to credit. Non co-op households live in small adobe or *bajareque* houses with dirt floors. The village has mains electricity and piped water, though not all houses are connected. However, despite apparent material advantages in the community, the position of women in Quitasueño is not noticeably different from that of women elsewhere in the parish. There is one PAEM group, *Fé y Esperanza* (Faith and Hope). There are also CNTC women's groups which operate small shops and undertake other small scale economic activities.

When I first visited Quitasueño, the PAEM group was a marked contrast to those in El Pital. The women were very quiet and seemed to have great difficulty understanding my questions. I joined them for a group meeting, and very few of the women participated in the discussion. On subsequent visits, some of the women opened up a bit more and there was more participation, but it remained clear that the changes achieved in El Pital were not replicated in Quitasueño, despite the use of the same methodology. The PAEM group has undertaken some economic activities as a group, including selling *tamales*, and a sub-set of the group is involved in running a small shop (not using the identity of the group, and using CNTC funding). Women have not yet moved into public spaces in the community, which has a history of internal divisions and animosities. In El Pital, everyone I asked was co-operative and willing to give their time to talk to me about the women's activities. In Quitasueño my task was much harder. The animators and

some members of the group were co-operative; some of the husbands were also happy to talk to me. Others, however, were not. I had several abortive attempts to meet with the *patronato* (I finally managed to speak to the president of the *patronato* by following him to where he was guarding a pineapple field); there were several instances of apparent 'mis-communication', where an agreement to meet an individual or group of people was made but then no-one was there when the time came. I had a definite sense that apart from the women in the PAEM group, people experienced me as an unwelcome and possibly even dangerous intrusion. These differences encouraged me to identify not only the group activities and structure but also the contextual aspects as relevant to processes of empowerment, as will be seen in Chapter Nine.

### **5.5 What has PAEM achieved?**

Although the word 'empowerment' is not used by PAEM as such (its equivalent in Spanish does not really exist - see Footnote 200, page 60), it is clear that what I would call the empowerment of women, using the generative view of power as defined in Chapter Two, is a specific implicit intention of the programme<sup>228</sup>. In the analysis of María Ester Ruiz, the approaches to work with women of CARITAS and of other organisations are based on a dependent relationship with the promoting organisation and on activities that perpetuate the subordinate position of women. PAEM, then, is an attempt to find a different structure and organisational form. It is an attempt to devise a method of working that will strengthen the women's sense of self, their identities as social and political actors, and to help them identify and move to meet their own needs. Extracts from the booklets produced by PAEM and used in their work, (and referred to in this chapter and the next) can be found at the

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<sup>228</sup> María Ester Ruiz uses such words as *formación*, training, transformation and autonomy; she "would steer clear of any word or phrase with power in it, such as *acceso a poder* (access to power) ... It suggests to me that María Ester and others are clearer than outside commentators that empowerment derives from the root word power, and that this is something about which to exercise caution in how you describe your intentions, especially in a culture which imagines that feminism is only about wresting power from men, rather than challenging the basis of power". (Deborah Eade, personal communication).

end of this chapter. The impact of the programme has not been uniform across the groups, but in general has been impressive. I shall look at what was achieved using the model of empowerment developed in Chapter Two.

### 5.5.1 Personal Empowerment in PAEM

Almost everyone I spoke with in PAEM or interviewed about PAEM identified, without prompting, increased levels of confidence and self esteem in the women as important achievements of the programme. Padre Jesús María described to me the situation before the programme:

Before PAEM the position of women was as it still is for most, as PAEM has changed the lives of some women but not of many. These people are very dependent that someone leads them from in front. Women need someone to tell them what they should be doing. Women have a great capacity for suffering, and a great responsibility for filling their responsibility as mothers. But without the liberty to opt for themselves, to defend their own rights. I think in the church women feel better; there she is more respected and taken to account. But still dependent on the priest and community leaders, still very dependent. If the *padre* says something you don't question it. Similarly with the *delegados*<sup>229</sup>. That's how it was before. Many women are still like that as the programme hasn't reached them. (Padre Jesús María).

The changes achieved by the women are very noticeable. Jenny Vaughan, then co-ordinator for CIIR, who first introduced María Esther Ruiz to Oxfam, told me "When I first went [to visit the communities] it would have been hard to sustain a discussion". Yet on my own first visits I had discussions with PAEM groups where many women participated actively. Many women described the changes, often attributing them to 'being organised':

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<sup>229</sup> *Delegados de la Palabra* (delegates of the word) are people trained to lead church services (but not to take the eucharist) and in other ways compensate for the shortage of priests. In Santa Barbara they are all, or almost all, men.

When I started I was embarrassed even with the other women. We met, talked a bit; you begin to talk in meetings, have more confidence. Then later, the domestic work in the home, the way you behave.. You change a lot with your husband and children. You learn things there that you didn't know. It helps a lot... When you start you're shy; later you lose it; more confidence with the women and with others. Before I was shy; now I feel more.. I rarely feel shy, because of what I've learned. (Margarita, 36, El Pital).

When you're organised you realise things that you didn't know. For example, about women's rights, development; the support there is from other countries. You find out how women aren't considered for anything, you feel you're hardly worth anything. And with the things you study you see that there's support; you gain more strength for meeting. You want to meet with the others. The meetings are good. Better to be in a group organised than alone, because no-one explains anything to you. It's a little, but... I felt shy; if someone asked me a question I wouldn't know what to say. But in the group that's been leaving me.(Alicia, 31, El Pital).

I felt more confident; happier. If I didn't come to the group I'd be in the house, I wouldn't know anything. It gives me encouragement; study, you learn. ... (Elsa, 22, El Pital).

..through becoming organised I have gained knowledge and I have felt an advantage for myself, that I have woken up my mind; because I was a woman who would never speak to a rich person because I was afraid. And today no, I'll... whether they have money or not, I speak to people. So you can see that I have left my timidity behind because of being organised.(Esperanza, 47, Quitasueño).

So the confidence extends to how they feel about interacting with strangers:

I have [confidence] with whoever; ... now I will not be shy, but before I would stay like that to one side of the door. 'Come in' , 'oh no'; or 'come and eat' , 'no I'm not hungry'; I was so shy. Today, no. If there's food you have to eat. So that's how things have been, I've woken up, my mind, and I know things. (Ibid.)

Having the confidence to get out of the house and begin to interact with the world outside appears to be a very basic and essential prerequisite to other activities. The accounts I heard gave 'getting out of the house' literal meaning: that physically leaving the four walls of the house, or going outside the fence of the yard, was what they were talking about. Certainly from what I observed, most errands outside the

home were done by children; it appeared that once they have children women rarely leave the home unaccompanied by a man. But the notion of 'leaving the house' may also refer to the difference between the private and the public sphere: that through PAEM women have claimed their right to have input and influence outside the immediate limitations of the family.

Before women never had time, everyone was busy in her home, doing the housework, nothing else, and looking out through the cracks to see who was going by. Now you can see that women have a day to meet each other; on that day she frees herself up, even though she may have other things to do; she knows she must go to the meeting; or if she knows there's going to be a gathering of women or a study group meeting she knows what the day is for and there she is. Before, that space for women didn't exist. (El Pital group).

I've noticed another achievement, that perhaps before there were problems, it made me anxious perhaps to leave here and go to a meeting and now it doesn't make me anxious any more, I go to the meeting and I come back with less timidity. (Quitasueño group).

The isolation of women in the home, where for long periods of time they are alone except for their children, is clearly an obstacle to the empowerment process, and the women of PAEM are well aware of that:

Q: What have you done that you wouldn't have done without the groups?

A: Perhaps we would have stayed at home (laughter). I think.. I think that the women's meetings... that if we'd been only at home, we wouldn't have... we wouldn't have been able to get more women trained. Because now we're getting trained, we're getting trained through our studies, and we wouldn't have achieved that alone in our homes... looking out through the cracks, as the song says. (El Pital group).

Participation in meetings and in decision making in the group was also identified as important. Women talk about how this has changed over time; that they started by being quiet and rarely expressing opinions, but over time developed their confidence and found their voices. The animators encourage each woman to speak, and many group activities are structured to create un-threatening opportunities, using smaller groups for discussion and tasks when the main group is large.

I have seen that there have been a lot of changes, especially when the women here meet, we all participate. Perhaps at first we didn't but now you can see that we all participate. That's an achievement." (Quitasueño group).

As a women who is organised you feel more... stronger, with more courage to be able to speak, because before, before when you had never been organised, you don't know what organisation is, you are scared to speak. How were you going to speak to someone you respect? You can't. But now I've seen.. I've seen the change that I've made. Before I was very timid and now I'm not, I feel that it's going. Before I was very shy, I was too shy to talk with the other women, but now I feel different, I have changed. (Sonia, 34, El Pital).

Women I interviewed also talked about the importance to them of having space in the group to talk about personal problems, and in particular, to think with the other women about solutions for those problems. In the group they get access to information. This is another way in which the isolation of each woman in her house can be broken. She gets to see that her individual problems are also shared ones and that she is not the only woman with that particular problem. A problem ceases to be an individual shortcoming, and can begin to be seen as a social or political issue that might have causes and solutions outside the four walls of the home. There may also be access to real practical support, for example if someone falls ill.

A woman on her own, without anyone to help her understand the situation she is living in, she couldn't do anything. ... If we met here without putting anything out, just feeling the things we feel inside without expressing it outside, how... but no, through the training you start to talk about what you feel, about what you see, what you talk about, with the other women. I haven't forgotten when she [María Esther] told us in a meeting that she had some friends.. 'I have some friends who can help me to study' ... that was to encourage us to get organised, so that we would realise that getting together and talking together about problems would help us.. (El Pital group).

The increase in confidence and self-esteem is not just something that the women feel and experience for themselves. Changes can also be seen from the outside, as this male community leader describes:

[I] have come to see that they have shown more courage to speak; that they have recognised the rights they have through the training they've had, through the programme of education they've been given. (El Pital *patronato*).

Personal empowerment involves more than increases in confidence and self esteem, though other aspects are closely interlinked with those two basic components. Women also need to develop ways of having some kind of 'time for themselves' where their every ounce of energy and effort is not going in to daily survival and maintenance of the family. The PAEM meetings seem to provide such 'space'. It is interesting to find it described as 'rest'.

women never used to have any rest, because they never used to get out of the house for these moments, but now in these moments women have these hours of rest (El Pital group).

Also a part of the personal empowerment process is the development of a capacity to think and analyse, and to develop your own opinions. The women did not spell this aspect out in their interviews, but it was clear to me in observing discussions that as confidence gradually increases and as the women begin to get a sense of their own worth as human beings and as members of the community that their ability to express themselves increases as well. So, too, does their ability to understand, interpret and when necessary disagree with other people's opinions.

### 5.5.2 Empowerment in Close Relationships

In considering what has been achieved by PAEM in relation to the empowerment of women in their personal relationships, I will again begin by quoting Padre Jesús María in his description of the 'normal' state of affairs:

The relation of woman with husband is of usually complete submission. She fulfils her obligations of faithfulness, always looking after her husband, even when he doesn't reciprocate and doesn't treat her well. But she has obligation to see to him. So it's an unequal relationship. The man doesn't respect women's rights. Not even the



woman believes she is entitled to certain rights and to defend them. So often, perhaps for fear of losing the man, or for cultural reasons, from very early it seems they are taught that they have to obey the man; they were married so that she would serve the man. It's a very unequal relationship, and I've always asked myself if in such a relationship there can be affection. I doubt much whether there can be love. There may be to begin with, but it dies, and the woman stays because of her responsibilities as a woman; she's been educated to serve the man. (Padre Jesús María).

For women to empower themselves within such relationships it is clearly necessary to have personal empowerment; but women also have to develop an understanding that the situation described above is not what they want, not only for other women and their relationships, but also for themselves. For changes to happen in the power dynamics of close relationships, it is not only necessary for the women themselves to change, but also for the other person/people, and in particular the *pareja* to cooperate with that change. Some women have not yet achieved the changes they want:

I can hardly ever go out to the courses I'm supposed to go to because I'm always given difficulties, that 'you have to care for the children', 'how can you leave them with other people who perhaps can't care for them in the same way'; yes I have problems in all this... (El Pital group).

Some PAEM women talked about changes in relation to having a bit more liberty:

...we were marginalised by our husbands and now because of the training we've received... you go home and you tell them all about it, so they have given a bit more freedom. Not complete freedom, but on the other hand we're not like the marginalised women we were before, they've given us a bit of freedom and that's an achievement that we've made because it was difficult to get it, so it's an achievement that's happened. (Quitasueño group).

They also talked about changes in terms of being able to leave the house - either by getting permission where before it was absent, '*ahora no me impide*' (now he doesn't stop me) or by going out in the absence of permission:

You can see that some of the women are capable of expressing their opinions, even in front of their husbands, of men; opinions that they didn't give before. And to take attitudes they certainly wouldn't have taken before, for example, 'I am going to the meeting even if my husband does get cross'. You would never have seen this attitude before. And you don't normally see this in the CARITAS groups. (Padre Jesús María).

One woman talked about a change in the mood of the relationship - not necessarily dramatic change, but a noticeable difference:

He seems to be a bit milder now, it seems we have more trust in each other, that we talk to each other more, that's what I've achieved. It may be because of old age, but yes, I've seen that he has changed.

Q: But is he still the head of the household?

A: Yes, he's still the head of the household, I tell you, we haven't been able to free ourselves from that, he still is, and perhaps that's how it will end. (Ana María, 42, El Pital).

Such changes often follow long periods of difficulty, as in her case:

... I was an animator for a while when I started, and my husband started on 'damn it, why do they call you so often' and 'damn it, you've been neglecting the house, I didn't get married to have my wife...' he said, 'not so that she'd be going here and there, I don't like it'. Well, the little I heard, I would say something to him, and in the end I stayed silent. We're not raised to defend ourselves. Well, perhaps when I had to go out again, I would say 'look, I have to go out on such and such a day to such and such a place because the group has told me we're invited, I'm going to go and I will get someone to stay here, to give you and the kids something to eat and I'm going to go'. Well, sometimes he would say nothing, and sometimes he would put obstacles in my way or get annoyed. In the end it all got too much and he gave me problems with my nerves, 'but you are so ill, you'll get worse if you go, you're no use for this' and later he said to me 'I'm the one who's been messed around, that I have to be battling, spending out money so that you can get better to go and attend your study workshops...' he said, 'that is ending up messing you up and it's messing me up too'. Well in the end, about two years ago I got depressed, and I had to completely leave the work co-ordinating the group. I'm still in the group, but partly to recuperate my health and partly to not be always having problems

with him, perhaps that's why I haven't been able to free myself from that. Perhaps I'm one of the ones who hasn't been able to free myself from that, that I'll do this, I'll do that without consent - I haven't managed that, and I recognise that it's a serious mistake that he is taking that right from me, that freedom, but I haven't yet been able to do anything about that. (Ibid.).

Empowerment in these relationships is a hard struggle for many women. The tiniest differences become significant when the process of change is so hard. This woman, who has lived with repeated desertion and abuse from her husband, was still able to identify something that was different now from before:

Well, the changes I've seen, really.. my husband has been very annoyed and he stayed at home angry if I went out to meetings and when I came back he said 'better if you were to go once and for all'. I never would have said that I would have this capacity to go; I always put up with him and then he... he saw that... recently he's said 'back then I shouted at you but you stayed in the organisation, well, stay in it anyway'. Now he doesn't shout at me but at first he would threaten to punish me. (Esperanza, 47, Quitasueño).

Achieving one change such as permission to participate does not necessarily lead on to others:

He doesn't stop me going to the group. But he doesn't let me be *animadora*. But I'd like to do it - to enjoy oneself and... and learn, but he won't let me.

Q: And you haven't thought about doing it even if he says no?

A: (Laughter) Afterwards there would be problems. (Elsa, 22, El Pital).

Some women have succeeded in more substantive changes in their relationships with their *pareja*; discussion and negotiation play a central role in such changes:

My husband doesn't discourage me. He knows I'm not alone. Also if the man is organised, the woman should be too. Sometimes I feel discouraged because of the children, the work. I have support from him. The relationship is always changing. He gets to know about my rights, discussion; the way of making agreements when I have to go out and he stays in the house.(Alicia, 31, El Pital).

..how to learn to leave the house ... yes, there were serious problems with that. When we chose someone (to go on a course) it was the first thing we thought, the thing that made it all more difficult, it was the thing it was hardest to leave, to convince the husband and look for someone to leave the kids with, the hens and all that. And now whichever woman it is who goes for a week, the man has to have someone to 'do' for him unless he sees that he can do things himself, that is, unless the man has assumed some of the woman's tasks so that she can have the freedom to do other things elsewhere, I think that various women have been achieving some of that....(El Pital group).

Some of the women specifically say that their ongoing struggle to be free (as they put it) within their own relationships and homes is a process that will take time and effort - but they are agreed about what they are trying to achieve:

many of the women have achieved a little freedom from their husbands, but things won't finish with that. ... there are still women who haven't been able to achieve complete freedom, to go here and go there without having problems with their husband. The struggle is so big, ... the power that the husband has over the woman, it's like that all over Latin America and who knows, maybe in much of the rest of the world, and it may always be a bit like that, but that's what we've got a lot of in our people. They oppose it because they say that they have a wife so that she will look after them, when they get home from work, and when the woman wants to go out they don't want to suffer. They don't want even a little bit of it. So it's not over. But you don't have to think we'll always have this struggle for women's liberation, but we can only achieve it through our organisation, through our studies. (El Pital group).

..Perhaps we want to send a woman on a course, and she says, 'well I can't because my husband.. that's why, I can't go, but later I will'. She says 'perhaps, I always have faith that one day my dear husband will agree'... Now for example, when there are preparations, here in the community we do our studies if we're not behind but ... to go and be away from home for a few days, that's what they don't like, they miss the warmth (laughter). We have to carry out the struggle in the home, it's getting chilly!... (El Pital group).

Some of the men, too, describe changes:

... now let's say, a woman has authorization to go where she wants, all over. It's good that the man doesn't forbid her the activities she

has a right to. Before he didn't let her go out of the house, so something has been achieved. (El Pital *patronato*).

There's more dialogue about what they must do, what they do. It's different now. There are changes in them. You can discuss things. We talk about things now; before we didn't agree; now we discuss. I don't oppose her going out. (Enrique, husband of Miriam, 42)

The men see that there is some dialogue that didn't exist before:

- A: ...perhaps in some, or perhaps in all homes, if you're going to do some work you communicate first with your wife about what you are going to do and when you're going to do it. You plan the time and develop the work as well.
- Q: And if she isn't in agreement with something that happens?
- A: You'd have to look for a way of.. of seeing if you'll do something else or if you'll not do it at all. You make an agreement, because if the lady isn't agreed that you do the work, if she doesn't give her support, you can't do the work.
- Q: And how would it have been before?
- A: Well, before, for me, it was as if... before, it's said that the man used a lot of *machismo*, right; the man said he was going to do a thing even though to her it didn't seem... but she said nothing, she had to do what the man told her to do. [...] So it was just the man's decision, right. (El Pital *patronato*).

They know how to live with the family, there's more dialogue with the family, about how people should behave, the rights they have. Before this had been denied. Here? Perhaps it offends you that the woman is in a group. At the beginning one doesn't even want to be in a group oneself. We think they'll say things against men. But no. It's a training. At least we talk about the ways to resolve things. Before I would have done the administration of the home; now we collaborate, both. Also you can see the development of the family. Health. Improvement in hygiene. Many things they've done. You don't see this when there aren't groups. Women are oppressed, not appreciated. Men and women have the same rights. They must both think about the problems for the household. It's hard in practice, but the idea.. there's no tradition, so it costs to change. (Javier, husband of Guadalupe, 44).

Most of the men I succeeded in interviewing were themselves members of *grupos campesinos* and from what they and the women told me, there is some evidence that the men are more open to change in the relationship if they themselves are

'organised'. The men in the *grupos campesinos* seem to be able to perceive the benefits of women also organising - although these may be seen in terms of the woman 'being a better wife and mother' as a result. However, many of the women had husbands who were not in groups, and they, too, reported being able to go out more freely, so the evidence is by no means conclusive on this point.

The possibility of negotiation changes the nature of the relationship. When power-over was used by the man in decision making, the woman's response to his actions would be submission or resistance (see pages 19 & 21). Once it is established that responsibility is shared, the woman has a new kind of power in the situation and shares the responsibility that goes with that:

...perhaps there wasn't any place for dialogue. So they couldn't discuss things, if he was going out, or if there was going to be some disaster over something he planned to do. But instead if there's a disaster, both have in some way... for example if some work hasn't turned out right, the woman can't accuse the man over it because it was a decision of both of them to do the work, and the man can't blame the woman because the two of them decided together, and if things turn out well, well so much the better. (El Pital *patronato*).

Empowerment in close relationships is not restricted to the relationship with the *pareja*; it also includes relationships with children, parents and in-laws:

...there's a change at home because now if I tell my children I'm going to go somewhere now they know where they will be, now they are aware and don't put obstacles in my way so that I won't go. ... And also my husband does a few things so that I can go when I'm not... because I'm going. So I've achieved that change in the home. (El Pital group).

### **5.5.3 Collective Empowerment: the PAEM groups**

The PAEM groups have acted as the vehicle for much of the process of personal empowerment; they have also enabled the women to create an identity and a place from which to act in the world. Padre Jesús María again:

I saw that there were women who already had a certain capacity to meet on their own, to organise their own meetings, have assemblies; there were women who were able to raise the awareness of their husbands, to change certain attitudes. I realised that women were growing; that they weren't just meeting in order to have some project but they were growing as people, they had more ability to decide for themselves. For example they organised the assemblies, their team, their *directiva*; before the priest or a nun would have done it. And I began to see the maturity in the thinking of certain women, at least of those who were leading the groups, and later in the women in the groups. I saw that they had an identity different from the other women in the community.

These women were capable of taking decisions that other women wouldn't have taken. I suppose that they were developing an awareness based on what they did when they met, themes about their situation, their oppression as women, *machista* culture, and how to help their husbands. I think that in all the meetings and assemblies they had they were growing an awareness that the way they had been living hadn't helped them or anybody. They had meetings, marches, assemblies, did plays and all this was about women's issues. I think all this raised their consciousness; the fact of all these meetings and so on gave them an identity. (Padre Jesús María).

The collective identity of the groups has been forged through a process, of meetings and courses, of the sharing of problems and the search for solutions.

... we knew what was happening to us and that we had to find our own solutions. People from outside couldn't do that for us.. perhaps they would only know what we had told them about things, but the people who knew about our problems were us. (Teresa, 50, El Pital).

...you leave your timidity, whatever it is, because you join with other people, get to know others, perhaps talking and finding out that they have the same problems as you have had; other people have them too. So because of that you no longer feel alone when something happens, no, there are many of us with the same problems.(Ibid.)

Friendships have developed which have nourished the group as well as the individuals. The process of development and testing of *Conociéndome a mi misma* and the *Gua de la Animadora* and their subsequent use contributed both to group identity and self-respect.

Each PAEM group decided for itself what kind of activities it would undertake in addition to the study programme. These consisted of small income or food-generating activities such as growing corn and beans, making and selling *tamales*, and so on. Each group took charge of raising the income needed to enable it to participate in the wider PAEM activities, and some also raised money for themselves:

... we did beans, and with the sacks of beans we sold we bought more sacks of beans which we stored and in the season when they sell at a good price we sold them. So we managed to buy some land at 150 *lempiras* for a *manzana* and we cultivated coffee. Then a part of it was ruined, a pest got into another part of it, and we harvested the remaining quarter of it that was good and from that we shared out the proceeds a bit for each one of us. (Teresa, 50, El Pital).

Not all income generating activities were successful, for a variety of reasons. But they ensured that each group took responsibility for itself, and also enabled the groups to construct an identity visible to the wider community.

In terms of collective empowerment, the crucial achievement of the PAEM groups has been the development of a sense of collective agency and purpose; of an identity and understanding of themselves as groups of people which could and would act in the wider community, taking charge on their own terms of what they did, how and when. Padre Jesús María described this:

For example, this problem of needing commercialisation of basic grains. So they think about it and decide whether to do it or not to do it. The problem they have now with the priest: other groups wouldn't have faced up to the problem; a CARITAS group that has problems stops meeting and ends; but these groups have maintained themselves, and are achieving a strong maturity. In face of problems, they look for solutions, they don't ask others for the solutions or abandon the group because of the problem. ...they've taken the decisions. They see what's necessary and look for how to achieve it. They're walking for themselves in their problems. (Padre Jesús María).

In order to achieve this sense of agency, the women had to decide to ignore any gossip about them. They were, for example, often referred to by their detractors as

being involved in *hechería* (witchcraft)<sup>230</sup>. In El Pital, where a majority of women in the community are in PAEM groups, their purpose actively included the development of new groups:

We organised the group that Janda is in; from there we set about organising the 'Women on the March' group; After organising that, well, there were more women who weren't organised. We went to communicate with them then we went out again, you see, to find more women, enrolling them, until we ... until we organised the other group. Well, now we had four groups. But the young women were not organised. In the assembly they suggested that there should be a group just of young women, so we called the young women together and we enrolled them too and so the young women's group was organised. (Teresa, 50, El Pital).

#### 5.5.4 Collective Empowerment: the PAEM Consejo

The women who have made up the PAEM *consejo* have gone through an additional process of empowerment. As well as being in their groups in the communities, and animators of those groups, they have met regularly in a different group, the *consejo*, with a different purpose, that of providing leadership and co-ordination. The empowerment impacts of being in a self-directed group, described above, can also be seen in the *consejo*, though because of the different nature of the group, the outcomes have a different quality. With *consejo* members, the effects are 'bigger': the levels of self-confidence are higher; the sense of agency and purpose is more pronounced, covering a wider area of possibilities.

I had the opportunity to observe several meetings of the *consejo*, to talk with members and to see members operating both back in their communities and outside the parish. Meetings of the PAEM *consejo* happened while I was there at Casa Quemada, in María Esther's house. Fifteen to eighteen women and a variable number of young children would arrive any time from 8.00am onwards; by 10.00am

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<sup>230</sup> This accusation has been levelled at women countless times when they push against the societal norms.

everyone would have arrived, having come on foot and/or by bus from the various communities. If the weather was fine the meeting would be held outside under a spreading tamarind tree. If not, the women would stay inside, squeezed into the largest room in the house. The meetings I observed were very efficiently run, with one woman facilitating (this job rotated, although some did it more often than others). First would be the recitation of 'the women's prayer', (see page 87). Then, after the minutes of the last meeting had been read, an agenda would be put together and then steadily worked through, with a break for lunch. The meetings had a strong atmosphere of goodwill and friendship, with many jokes and much laughter. All women participated actively, with some more dominant, as can be seen just about anywhere. All opinions were respectfully listened to and considered. Before going to my first full *consejo* meeting I had heard several people in other organisations malign PAEM and particularly María Esther's dominance of the programme. It was interesting, therefore, to find that at that meeting María Esther spent most of her time preparing the lunch. The meeting got on without her, making decisions when necessary and planning for the future. At subsequent meetings I attended her participation was greater - she can hold forth at great length on subjects she knows well or feels strongly about - but there were always parts of the meeting where she was quiet or absent, and her absence did not seem to impede the proceedings.

From observing *consejo* meetings, it became clear to me that the women in that group have developed not only confidence but impressive abilities to analyse and plan. Some of the women who attend the *consejo* were already active in some way outside the home before the programme started; others were not, and had come to their current activity through participation in the PAEM programme. As animators they receive some training in the form of regular preparation sessions for the study of *Conociéndome a mi misma*; as *consejo* members there is no formal training and they learn as they go along.

When there were tasks to be done, a small group, or perhaps an individual, would be delegated to do them and report back to the next meeting. There was no immediately discernible difference between their willingness to take on mundane

tasks or to take on tasks that involved travelling to negotiate with a government official in Santa Barbara - except where a particular child-care situation was a relevant factor. Discussions in the *consejo* showed a good knowledge of and interest in local and national politics. When there were obstacles to be overcome, there was a sense that something would always be possible. While I was there the negotiations to take over the grain warehouse were under way. They originally hoped to take over the one in Sula, not far from Casa Quemada, on the main road. Local politics won out on that bid, as Sula, in its attempt to become a *municipio* in its own right, needed somewhere to put the prerequisite secondary school, and took over the building. Undeterred, the *consejo* worked out an alternative plan, to go for the more derelict building in Quitasueño. This involved them in a much more complex situation, facing active opposition from some of the *campesino* groups and the CNTC. They re-negotiated with the relevant government body, and were beginning the process of dealing with the local political situation when I left.

The process of collective empowerment of the *consejo* has included learning to take charge of and gain access to resources. María Esther was responsible for the original application for funding to Oxfam and then CAFOD<sup>231</sup>. When I left the women had just received general funding for a further three years from Oxfam, and a significant sum from CAFOD for the grain warehouse project. This time it was other members of the *consejo* who put together the application and budget (on which they were congratulated). The application was submitted later than they had intended, but María Esther did not give in to the temptation to step in and help them with it. She told me she felt it was better that they learn for themselves, and they would just have to manage for a while without the money. The treasurer is a *consejo* member who is very meticulous, and who has learned to manage the money 'on the job', with support from María Esther.

The *consejo* meetings provide a forum for leadership development. After each series of *encuentros de zona* detailed reports are given as to how they went and what they

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<sup>231</sup> Catholic Fund for Overseas Development.

did. If the animators co-ordinating one of the zone meetings were not happy with some aspect of the meeting, they describe the problem to the *consejo*, and then there is a discussion. In one meeting I attended there had been a problem with the food not going round at one of the zone meetings. There was a difficulty with it not being handed out fairly. It was a 'hot' issue, and the discussion went on for about half an hour. They worked out that the problem was a mix of several things: some people would come back for a second portion before others were served; a number of women would come to eat who weren't actually at the meeting and hadn't been catered for. There was also the difficulty of estimating the right size for portions. They decided that they needed to reflect on the problem with all the women in the groups and work towards people having a position of respect so that each of these problems would stop. 'Collective reflection' on the problem, with everyone involved in thinking about the difficulties and possibilities was seen as important. By tackling the issue in this way, both in the *consejo* meeting and in the groups, the *animadoras* got to think the issue through for themselves and work out a strategy to tackle it, and then to go through the process of tackling it with their own group - with the support of having the other *consejo* members behind them.

#### **5.5.5 Collective empowerment: Outside PAEM.**

In several of the communities where PAEM has been active, the women's groups and individuals within them have been entering into active relationships with other community organisations. In El Pital, one of the women is now in the *patronato*. The women's groups there have become very visible in the community, and have succeeded in enlisting the support of other community organisations when they need it. One of the groups had a conflict with a local teacher. The women had built a small building to use for cooking and selling food; the teacher's land adjoined theirs, and when they built a fence, he knocked it down again repeatedly. They took the case to the municipal authorities in Macuelizo, who ruled in the teacher's favour. So the women went to the *patronato* and the *campesino* groups for support, with the result that the teacher left the community.

In another community, Trasceros, the PAEM group was playing a significant part in another dispute. This was with the municipality of Macuelizo, which wants to resolve a serious water supply problem for the town of Macuelizo by piping water from one of the rivers at Trasceros, some ten miles away. The people of Trasceros were apparently not consulted over this, and are very concerned that their own water supply will be insufficient as a result of the proposed action. The women of Trasceros have been the leaders of the opposition to the scheme, and have mobilised the community and pushed for further meetings. When I left, it seemed likely that the women would lose their campaign - despite having, at one point, locked the mayor in a room! But the important point in terms of the empowerment process is that they now perceive themselves as able to act, and to be a force to be reckoned with in the wider community, in this case with willingness to confront the political authorities in the region.

In the negotiations over the grain warehouse project, PAEM is now able to tackle negotiations with national organisations, such as the Honduran Institute for Agricultural Marketing, IHMA, which is in charge of the grain warehouses. IHMA has decided to support the women's application: "the organisation has maturity; they're not moving forward because they have no productive project. They have capable people, if we give them training. ...Yes, we have confidence in them". (Raúl Contrera). The women have a track record now with Oxfam and CAFOD, and also with the ODA who supplied some of the funding via Oxfam. However, as María Esther explained to me, they do not intend to limit their contacts with external agencies to the small and familiar:

... we thought, well, we've had training now, so we are going to negotiate a project to initiate work on our survival needs. We have to develop a capacity for negotiation and the project will be negotiated with the government, with the United Nations, right, and we are not going to ask Oxfam or CAFOD, because this is the responsibility of other organisations now; their role is to contribute to what is the first step, to help us to lift ourselves out of the crushed state we have been in historically. And this year we are going to start. That is to say we are in the middle of formulating the project and we are opening a space for negotiation with the United Nations. We'll see what happens. (María Esther).

Relationships with the Catholic Church locally have been problematic since Padre Jesús María left. But PAEM has better relationships with the church further afield. This is largely due to María Esther's personal relationships and track record with various church organisations, priests and bishops. She was recently invited to present a paper at the Latin American Bishops conference in Colombia in 1992. So PAEM, through the person of María Esther, has access to an influential source of power in the wider community.

Another example of collective empowerment reaching outside PAEM and the local community is the *Enlace de Mujeres Cristianas Rurales*, the Rural Christian Women's Network referred to earlier. Having moved to make the PAEM groups in other parts of the country separate and autonomous, the women have decided to create an organisation that can function on a national level and can provide a collective voice for rural women. *Enlace* is still a very young organisation, and it is largely the brain-child of María Esther; but she is determined not to be the only leader - in fact, she is insisting on not being on its committee -and the Macuelizo women are keen to see the new network take shape.

PAEM, then, has enabled the women participants to enter into a process which has moved them collectively and individually into new areas of activity and influence. In Chapter Six I shall explore what it was that made such changes possible.

**Figure 5.4: Extracts from *Conociéndome a mí misma***

(The text is divided into short readings, and illustrated with photographs and drawings. The separate booklet *Guía de la Animadora* (animator's guide) provides a structure for meetings, with suggestions for small group activities, questions for discussion and some bible readings to accompany the main text).

If I don't know who I am, if I don't know what my qualities, my capabilities and my strengths are, neither do I know my weaknesses, I don't value myself for what I am, I don't respect myself, I don't love myself.

I need to know myself in order to grow and to develop as a person. If I know myself better I will be able to help others and help myself. (p. 5)

An important step in the development of our minds was when we started to distinguish good from bad. As we grew older we discovered that in this world there are good things, things that are not so bad, things that are more or less good and bad. And when we were going to do something we could now tell if there was something good or bad about what we were going to do. Sometimes we weren't sure, but as the years passed we knew more and more things. Who gave us this knowledge of good and bad, and of all the things we learned? Our parents, teachers, aunts, granny, the priest. We also learned through our own experience. What our parents, teachers and elders were putting into our minds through their words and actions are like seeds planted in our brain. Some of these seeds are of good, prime quality. Others are of middling quality, with some defects. And some seeds are useless. (p. 20-1)

...what we must keep in our mind and our heart is this truth: God has given us a marvellous gift, a mind to think with; and if we like we can use it for our benefit and for the well-being of the community. (p. 29)

In the previous theme we saw that many men and women have used their minds, thinking and reflecting, in order to discover new ways of doing things. Some of us said we had never used our minds to do anything new or better. Many of us women think we are idiots and aren't any good for anything. Why? ... Since we were little we have been told over and over we are stupid. ... Sometimes we make mistakes when we do things because we are scared. We are scared of our parents, teachers, those with authority and those we think know more than we do. Fear gets in our way, sends our mind to sleep. Fear doesn't let us think well. So we do things wrong. It is fear that makes us make mistakes; it's not because we are stupid. ... The third reason why we seem stupid sometimes is because our mind lacks exercise. If we tie up an arm and don't move it for a month, when we get it back it will be weak, we won't be able to even lift a spoon, even less carry the baby. ... The same happens with our brain, with our mind when we don't use it to think about how to make the housework easier, to educate our children, to participate more in the meetings of the group and look for solutions to our problems. ...if we think and reflect, our mind wakes up as we brush off the cobwebs. Perhaps at first it's difficult and we have to work at it. But as the saying goes, all good things have a price. So let's get going on conquering fear and laziness. (p33-6).

Sometimes, although we are adult women and have many years of thinking behind us, we don't understand our feelings very well. We think that it's not important to dedicate time and effort to understanding them better. But many, many of the things we do are moved by some kind of feeling. Let's have an example: They invite us to be co-ordinator or animator of a group. It's work we don't know, it's a new responsibility. So we say *I can't. I've got so much to do at home. I have four young ones and one is still breastfeeding. I can't accept. Because if I did it wouldn't go well, for you or for my family.* What this woman is saying is true. She has many obligations at home. She is right in part, to say she can't accept the responsibility of co-ordinator or animator. Why say she is right in part? Because in her soul she has a feeling which is pushing her to say *I can't*. What is that feeling? She feels fear, fear of what she doesn't know, fear of doing badly, fear of getting it wrong. It's true that she has a lot to do, but it's the same for other women who have accepted the responsibility. If we don't understand our feelings we can make wrong decisions. We can also delude ourselves. On the other hand, if we understand our feelings better we can rule our lives better and give our children better guidance. (p. 60-2).

If someone lacks respect for us, if someone betrays us or treats us badly, it's normal to feel sadness, discouragement, anger or fear. Moreover if, since we were girls at home, we have received little love, little affection, and we were not respected, now we are big mistreatment or betrayal hurts us a lot. And it almost always costs us much effort to treat our children, others and ourselves, with respect, with justice. (p. 68-9).

We have seen that many of us have the same problems. For example, in our village there is no water, no light, no adequate school, no land to work, no employment, no health centre or medicines or nurses and food is scarcer and more expensive every day. All this is an injustice that makes us feel bad. But if because of this situation we keep complaining and spending time in talk, making ourselves victims, we are like the cat which chases its own tail. We go round in circles and do nothing. But if we see these injustices and feel angry, that's good, so long as we do not take it out on our children. This anger should make us look for possible solutions. Because most other women in the country have the problems we have. We need to stop being individualistic; we need to join with other women who have the same problems and interests. (p. 76-7).

## **Chapter Six. An Analysis of Empowerment in PAEM**

In Chapter Two we saw that the empowerment of women can most usefully be seen as a process; that it is a process involving change personally, collectively and in close relationships, leaving women more able to take charge of their situation and act to meet their needs. In Chapter Five I have shown that PAEM has been successful in generating empowerment among the women in the programme. The next questions to ask are 'why' and 'how' did it happen, in order to develop an analysis of the underlying elements that have enabled a process of empowerment to take place. My responses to those questions are grouped according to a number of subject areas which can be seen to have a simultaneous impact on the three dimensions of empowerment described in Chapter Two. These areas are: the role of key individuals, the support the programme received, the methodology used, the philosophy of the programme, the leadership style, and the role of the conflict.

### **6.1 Key Individuals**

I have no doubt that PAEM has been as successful as it has because of the qualities of María Esther Ruíz. Not only did she provide the initial momentum to the programme, but she has also provided many other qualities and skills that have enabled it to grow and survive. She is herself a *campesina*, and is a local woman, having been born in Casa Quemada and lived in the area for most of her life. This is an important factor: the programme was neither dreamt up nor implemented by outsiders. Local women could see that, although she had had opportunities to develop skills and abilities that they had not had, she was a woman like them and understood their situation. Her thinking and analysis, and therefore her proposal for action, came out of that understanding, and the women could take the step of trusting her and her judgement about what they needed to do without suspending their own judgement.

Another aspect of María Esther that I can see as having been significant is her level of skill as a community and political activist. Her years as a worker and leader within the church, the CNTC and the radio schools have given her wide experience and have earned her the respect of local, regional and national leaders of those movements, including those who disagree with her. She was known in the region, and had a wealth of contacts to draw on in her work. She also had good local knowledge, understanding well the dynamics and activities of the various organisations operating in the area.

A third quality María Esther brought to the work with PAEM was a fierce commitment to the work and to the women. This meant that she was not easily distracted from her purpose by difficulties or by the attractions of other possibilities. So, for example, although for personal reasons she lived for a few years in Tegucigalpa, she did not stay in the capital, but returned to Casa Quemada permanently to live. She was able and willing to fight hard to resist pressures to 'hand over' the groups to other organisations (many non-government and popular organisations needed to be able to show they were working with women, and Deborah Eade told me that María Esther resisted inducements for the PAEM groups to become part of the programme of other organisations), and to withstand the intense pressure and stress of the conflict with the parish priest, in which she was the target of much attack and gossip, particularly as an 'older' (late thirties) single woman (until her marriage). Her commitment, and her philosophy of work (see below) enabled her to keep going despite all that.

Padre Jesús María was in my view another key individual in terms of the empowerment process in PAEM. His initial personal and intellectual support and encouragement to María Esther was significant. Also, importantly, Padre Jesús María gave the women's groups important protection when they were new:

He gave her the space to work, to develop groups, put theory into practice. They had a strong intellectual relationship. María Esther has had a very rigorous training. Jesús María didn't always understand, but he was prepared to support her work because he could see gender inequities and could see that CARITAS hadn't worked, and he could

see the changes in women's confidence and ability to participate. Jesús María was very important in mediating between María Esther and the CNTC (which was very hostile to the work). María Esther would convene meetings and encourage them to respect her groups and not go in offering projects and trying to take over. (Jenny Vaughan)

Also, as was seen in Chapter Five, he supported the autonomy of PAEM, and he encouraged the formation of the *consejo*:

... in order to form the *consejo* we also consulted Padre Jesús when he was in Macuelizo and he helped us form it, he told us it was a good idea that we had, because that way we would be able to achieve better spaces within the church and with faith, so that's why the *consejo* was formed. (El Pital group).

## 6.2 Support

Both PAEM as an organisation and María Esther as an individual have received support from outside the programme that have made the establishment, growth and survival of the programme a possibility. The programme as a whole received and continues to receive financial support from external bodies. It is not just the money, but also the nature of the relationship with the funding bodies that has been important. María Esther was clear that she was not willing to compromise the nature of PAEM, or to adjust the programme to fit a funding agency's agenda, in order to receive funding.

...we haven't been able to establish relations with other agencies because of our own character, it really hasn't been possible, we don't fall within the criteria of the agencies or the methodology they use. (María Esther).

In Oxfam according to Deborah Eade, they found an agency that was willing to take risks and be flexible; to support a different approach to work with women than was happening in other organisations; to work with a structure that was not the usual 'three-year project'.

That particular project in Santa Barbara and so on was brand new at the time. One of the things I found very impressive about her - I met her in 1985 - she said 'well I've got a project proposal for the next year but really I'm working on a time scale of five to ten years'. And that seemed to me absolutely right; I mean that so many of the other people I was talking to at the time among our existing project holders were presenting projects for annual funding and getting the annual funding and claiming to achieve all sorts of results in one year, and here was somebody who actually seemed to be talking in a timescale that was realistic in the context of the country and in terms of what she was trying to do. (Deborah Eade).

This, as I understand it, allowed the work of PAEM to respond specifically to the needs of the women as they identified them and at their own pace. As it turned out, that pace was faster than María Esther had anticipated, as she had thought it might take up to ten years to get the women in the communities to the point where they would be initiating their own solutions. But Oxfam was willing to work slowly.

Support also came in the form of an advisor from Mexico. Oxfam funded Luisa María Rivera, an ex-nun and a social worker. She initially came to work with PAEM on book-keeping and practical skills as part of a package of work with a number of organisations. She later returned. Deborah Eade's evaluation was positive:

...she knew her way round the kind of *ambiente* (environment) that María Esther was working in very well indeed, and that was important. We wouldn't have sent just anybody; and it happened that they hit it off very well and established a level of trust in each other that went beyond what it was that Oxfam was engineering. That was something that Oxfam as Oxfam wouldn't have given María Esther; there was no way that I could sit down with one project holder as long as Luisa María did with her; and also I don't have the skills and I didn't have the knowledge; but I did have the contacts so that was what essentially I put at María Esther's disposal. And then out of that the two of them started to work exclusively on producing the booklet, *Conociéndome a mi misma...* (Deborah Eade).

Having someone with whom to discuss her work and explore ideas with was very helpful to María Esther, and helped her deal with the isolation of her early work. This was an investment not just of skills but also of time.

Personal support was forthcoming to María Esther from ‘outsiders’ in a significant way. As well as from Deborah Eade and Luisa María Rivera, it came from the CIIR<sup>232</sup> representative Jenny Vaughan, in whose house María Esther stayed in Tegucigalpa, and from Hazel Johnson, a CIIR volunteer also in Honduras at that time. PAEM was being set up at a time when NGOs in general were gender-blind in Honduras, and PAEM was being seen as ‘divisive’ or as falling outside the (rigid) definition of the popular movement and therefore as not relevant. It was also a time before Honduran feminism had developed<sup>233</sup>. Personal support from these key aid workers provided encouragement, and an environment where it was possible for María Esther to develop her analysis beyond the point where local Hondurans would have been comfortable to go.

Further support and contact from outsiders came with the workshops run by the Mexican women’s organisation GEM referred to on page 85. These workshops were very helpful in helping the women work out new ideas. The presence of outsiders also provided a form of external validation to the women and their work. The technical support provided by COMUNICA in the production of the booklets and of a short video on PAEM also gave validation. This came at the height of the conflict with the priest, and was important in helping the women and María Esther in particular to survive that difficult period.

Another form of support grew as the programme developed, namely the support of a number of men in the communities. Deliberate work with men has not been part of the programme, but men have been welcomed at zone meetings and many of them participated in a big rally that took place during the conflict. María Esther has had good support from her husband, himself a well-known community activist, who,

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<sup>232</sup> Catholic Institute for International Relations

<sup>233</sup> Indeed, there was a ‘terror of feminism’ (Deborah Eade, personal communication), with feminism seen as a Western, man-hating diversion that would weaken the popular movement. This has been a common view of feminism in many ‘third world’ countries, where a particular version of Western feminism has been equated with feminism. The growth of local feminist movements in Latin America has shown that, far from being a Western, elitist, imported indulgence, feminism is highly relevant and takes its own form in each location. See Vargas (1990&1991) and Mohanty (1991).

among many other things, has been happy to have their house invaded regularly by large numbers of women, who often stay overnight or longer. This kind of support provides a source of encouragement, especially when things get difficult for María Esther or for the *consejo*.

### 6.3 Philosophy

I think that one of the strengths of the PAEM programme in terms of empowerment is the clearly communicated attitude that poor rural women are capable of developing their capacities to take charge of their lives. The programme has taken on a philosophy that is egalitarian and feminist. Its feminism comes not out of an intellectual analysis of inequality, but out of María Esther's analysis of women's rights as human beings to take part in change on their own terms. Again, Deborah Eade:

she was saying, and she didn't have the words to say it with, that the personal is political. She was recognising, because that was where she herself had come from, that the way in which women are oppressed gets right into their souls, right into their lack of self esteem, the fact that they don't think of themselves as having human rights, let alone civil, political, social, all the rest of it rights, and that that was her starting point...(Deborah Eade).

As María Esther sees it, if women participate as protagonists in development on their own terms, a different analysis is reached about what needs to happen.

she believes so profoundly that it is women themselves who are going to have to transform gender relations; they can't have them transformed for them; that they themselves are going to have to be the agents of change in their own favour. And she has an absolute clarity on that, where other people will tend to say, 'Oh well that's how it is', or 'Oh well that's natural', or 'Oh well that's cultural', and therefore '*No me toca*' (it's not my business) (Ibid.)

María Esther believes that if the quality of the work is good, that it will spread outwards of its own accord; she is therefore not concerned too much with quantity. The philosophy has also been one of letting things take their own time; of not forcing the pace of change. There is recognition that empowerment may be a slow process, and that a part of that process is for women to work at their own pace and not be pushed into taking things on that they are not ready for.

The other main aspect of the philosophy of PAEM is its rootedness in Catholicism. There is a strong belief that all human beings are created equal in the eyes of God, and a concomitant fierce belief in human rights that is informed by Liberation Theology. There is a belief also that women are excluded from exercising their human rights if they are oppressed. The women in the PAEM communities are strongly Catholic and their faith provides them with an anchor in their lives. That PAEM has a Catholic base makes it attractive to the women, and also makes it something they can be committed to in a way that will help them persevere with it through the difficult times. The church has been one of the few places where women have value and have a role; it has also provided one of the few reasons for women to be able to leave the house, and to exist as something other than wives and mothers. The work of PAEM built on that spiritual validation, transforming it into a general validation of women and women's abilities and work. The element of faith and spirituality in the programme gives the women access to a kind of power to which springs from power from within, in the form of a source of energy, renewal and commitment, particularly through adversity; it also encourages their ongoing participation.

So PAEM has been working with a philosophy that both expects women to be able to think and act, and which puts them in charge of the process of change. Given the weight of the existing culture that communicates the opposite message, this organisational philosophy has been a crucial part of creating an environment where empowerment can happen.

## 6.4 Methodology

The methodology of the programme has many aspects that I believe encourage and contribute to the empowerment process. The most fundamental of these is the emphasis, in the materials and the way the groups run, on helping women create a concept of themselves as active agents in relation to the world. Deborah Eade comments on this:

what was innovative was at least [María Esther's] grasp of the fact that for things to change, and to be participative, actually required everybody to hold responsibility; but that building up the capacity to hold that responsibility is a very very long haul indeed. Because you have to start with people having a sense of themselves as human beings. I was very moved; the last time I was in Honduras in mid-1992, I saw COMUNICA's video of PAEM's work - there were women, whom I'd met in 1986-7 and who couldn't talk without having their hand over their mouth and saying *soy muy tímida para hablar* (I am very nervous of speaking), addressing the camera or addressing a bunch of women and they had become people who were assertive, and as strong as they'd always been, but able to.. able to live it and project it, and that was just fantastic. And I've not seen anything like that in any other popular education work at all. (Deborah Eade).

Eventually I think that self concept can be enlarged to include some sense of being able to take responsibility for what happens and decide to act. Work on building a capacity to take charge and act like this requires a willingness to focus on very personal and apparently small issues in women's everyday lives. Take for example the worry that a child is falling ill. This is the kind of issue that will preoccupy a woman and make it hard for her to participate in other things. Within the PAEM methodology, the situation can be analysed: why may the child be falling ill? Why does it preoccupy us so much? What support can we give each other, such as sharing what we know about treatments, or helping each other get the medical resources we need? How could we help prevent the illness? Through such discussion, women get to analyse, to gather information, to express their feelings and get support, to develop new understandings and perspectives and to act. In doing this they are taking power in the sense of 'power to'. In the wider scheme of development I

suspect such issues can look trivial or insignificant, but they are the issues which most immediately affect and preoccupy women living in the conditions of the PAEM communities, and I believe they cannot be ignored if those women are to experience empowerment.

Also important, both in terms of the empowerment process and in terms of the survival of the programme, has been the focus on changes that women could feel in their own lives. Their involvement was not focused towards some change that would materialise in the future, but towards areas where they could begin to make changes right away, with their families and relationships with each other and the community. These changes may not have been visible to the outside - in fact many people outside the groups, including husbands, commented that the groups did nothing. They certainly were not doing the 'normal' kinds of development activity. But the women themselves kept coming to the groups, and I believe they would not have done so if they were getting nothing from them.

Another central aspect of the PAEM methodology is its awareness of the need to combat the isolation that many women feel. This is achieved 'physically' by getting women together, in their immediate communities and with women from further away, and 'mentally' by encouraging communication of ideas and the sharing of experiences. As part of achieving this, the women develop confidence and self esteem as seen earlier. Women begin to receive positive feedback (very likely after rarely having had any before). They begin to learn to think for themselves, to have information, and, importantly, to have a physical, intellectual and emotional 'space' in which to do it. They begin to develop a sense of the wider context within which they live, and to have an aim and purpose outside their immediate families. By bringing women together with the clear intent of achieving those ends, PAEM has many opportunities to enhance the process still further by including carefully selected materials.

The methodology includes the encouragement of complete respect for each individual, for each person's right to *dignidad* - which, in Spanish, conveys more

than the literal translation of dignity, including self-respect, self-esteem, and a sense of being not only worthy of respect from others, but having a right to that respect. This shows clearly in *Conociéndome a mi misma* and was evident in the various meetings that I attended<sup>234</sup>. For women to take power in their own lives, especially where this requires a struggle, self-respect is essential; without it the individual gives in in the face of opposition. Many women feel badly about themselves and I heard many instances of women in the groups putting themselves and each other down, which I understand as an internalisation of having been treated badly, an expression of feeling powerless, of feeling you have no rights and do not deserve to be treated well. Part of the empowerment process is learning to stop doing that. Women in the *consejo* rarely spoke that way, and often appreciated each other verbally.

One of the aspects of methodology on which María Esther insisted from the beginning was that of the women identifying their own needs and solutions to those needs. I think this was an essential part of the empowerment process. María Esther had seen the importance of this before starting her work with the groups, and the practice confirmed it. Identifying their needs was not simply a matter of them saying what was needed. It involved a whole process for the women of self examination and of learning about and understanding the circumstances of their lives. This, crucially, included learning about their position as women, and their rights as women. Thus in El Pital:

...in the group, that is where we talk among ourselves about what we have to do, how we are going to do it, and what we want to do, like 'how could we improve our life?'. Because what we want is that we should have good health, good housing. We talk about all those things. We say that between all of us is how it must go, talking about what we have to do to get from here to there and about what we know. Because sometimes things happen and you don't get to know about them when you're closed in alone, but together things can be solved, even though the things you suffer are unbearable. (Teresa, 50, El Pital)

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<sup>234</sup> See page 116 for extracts from *Conociéndome a mi misma*.

It also included learning about 'forbidden' subjects, and in particular, sexuality, which is an area where women are particularly constrained - and not the kind of thing often touched on in a 'normal' income-generating project. In these areas, too, according to Deborah Eade, the women identified their own agenda:

what [María Ester] did was to have workshops where people did tell her some pretty difficult home truths and genuinely out of these they would devise an agenda for what work needed to be done. Women themselves had said that sexuality was something they wanted to discuss; though she, probably in a rather puritanical sort of way, hadn't thought it was so central, but women themselves were saying 'we're totally dominated by our sexuality, we don't have freedom of choice, we have children whether we want them or not, this is a way in which we are oppressed'. (Deborah Eade)

So it was important not only that the women named their own needs, but that the methodology encouraged and enabled them to probe beyond the surface needs that they could easily identify to see what needs lay behind those. That required a degree of introspection and discussion of personal issues, and it was important that the skills be available to help them with that work. As I see it the identification of needs was done in a way that enabled the women to get a wider picture of their situation than they had before. There was no automatic acceptance of 'what we need is a goat project'; the identified need must be deconstructed first. Why is it that we think we need goats? Why is that the solution we see? Is there perhaps some other way of meeting the hidden need behind that idea? Who would be in control of such a project? Are other people doing the same? What has been their experience? What problems might there be? And so on.

Most of the meetings I attended, of the groups and of the *consejo*, were punctuated by laughter. Occasionally there were also tears. The methodology of PAEM encourages the women to talk about and express their feelings. During the height of the conflict with the priest, the *consejo* was meeting weekly, and I was told that those meetings were often occasions for the expression of emotion - tears, rage and laughter. In terms of the empowerment process, I see this aspect of the programme as significant. Expression of emotion in this way is one part of the undoing of the

effects of 'internalised oppression'; if people can express the emotion rather than keeping it bottled up inside them, they can think more flexibly and creatively about what they want and need and how to get it<sup>235</sup>.

As well as using discussion in the groups, there is much use of creativity: the local groups prepare *sociodramas*, drawings and poems for the zone meetings and assemblies as a way of expressing their thinking. The inclusion of creativity, and by inference, enjoyment as part of the methodology seems to me to help the process of empowerment. If the women enjoy themselves they are more open to developing ideas and to trying out new things. The use of humour can also serve the purpose of deflating the 'powerful', of cutting them down to size<sup>236</sup>.

PAEM is deliberately a women-only programme, which I argue to be important and appropriate for their cultural and local context. In order to participate anywhere near equally in a mixed programme within a *machista* culture, women have to have already empowered themselves significantly. Otherwise, as can be seen in many of the mixed programmes that exist in Honduras and other Latin American countries, women will be silent and scarcely participate beyond being physically present. In the women's groups they are able to develop the skills and the confidence they need for participating in mixed organisations, and some PAEM women are now doing just that. Their women-only identity as an organisation does not, however, preclude the inclusion of men in some of their activities, and this has been important in not isolating the organisation from the wider community in which it exists.

The early work of PAEM was firmly under the wing of the Catholic Church (see Chapter Five). As the groups developed, PAEM established a form of 'protected autonomy', encouraged by Padre Jesús María, which then became full autonomy<sup>237</sup>. This meant that the women and the organisation were not in a

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<sup>235</sup> See, for example, Jackins (1983).

<sup>236</sup> Thanks to Deborah Eade for this observation.

<sup>237</sup> This is part of a wider debate amongst Latin American feminists in the popular movement.

position of having to run before they could walk: they could take the time they needed to develop their leadership and their organisational capacity. I think that the autonomy has been a crucial feature in terms of their ability to tackle issues in their own way and to broach subjects that the church doctrine would not condone. Having autonomy also meant that the change in priest, from one who was supportive of the programme to one who was not, did not automatically bring radical change in the methodology, structure and purpose of the programme (though the 'conflict' did of course ensue).

Another aspect of the PAEM methodology I would highlight has been the opportunity the programme has provided to many women to move physically out from their own communities into the wider world. The annual assemblies and the zone meetings serve this purpose for the women in the groups. For the women in the *consejo* there are also opportunities to attend conferences in other parts of the country or to undertake various tasks that need doing. This moving outwards contributes to the growth of confidence and self-esteem by giving them another way to take charge of what they do and how they do it; it also gives access to information and the sharing of experience with other women in similar or different positions to their own. In the case of the *consejo* members, it provides the chance to learn about a range of new issues and to be active in negotiation and other activities. The empowerment process is an incremental one, and each successful foray outwards adds something. The networking, regionally, nationally and to an extent internationally, has opened up possibilities for dialogue with other women and organisations, and gives a wider sense of context as well as solidarity with others. The contacts are not always experienced as positive ones, for example according to María Esther and to feminists I met elsewhere in the country, PAEM women had a difficult time at the first Central American feminist meeting, but it means that they are known in a larger arena and have an expanded sense of possibilities.

A further aspect of the methodology, perhaps a more controversial one, is the organisation of the programme around something that did not immediately set out to fill an economic, income-generating purpose. Many people have argued that if

development work is to be done with poor women it must make some contribution to meeting their economic needs if they are to be able to make the time available. Because of this, much organisation of women has been geared around donated food. María Esther was strongly against this form of encouraging dependency:

I wanted to test the thesis and see if it was true, that women will only get together if they give us things. And the experience of Macuelizo has shown us otherwise. That we poor women have the capacity to meet with others to think about ourselves, not only over projects; that has been proven. On the other hand, we've also shown that projects must be... must respond to urgent needs and problems, identified by women themselves. We have identified, for example, the problem of... for us the first problem was the lack of organisational confidence of women, education, they way they are devalued by themselves and by society ... (María Esther).

Deborah Eade agrees:

... it's a commonplace that very poor people haven't got the time, the space and energy to do social organisation work. They've got to have their basic needs met first and then they can give themselves the luxury to think about human rights. Well in my experience it's totally the reverse. That when people have got nothing - OK well I'm not talking about the extremes that you might see in Somalia right now, that's beyond my experience, I can't speak about it - but certainly I mean we were dealing with people in very extreme circumstances, repressive states, for instance in El Salvador, and they were quite clear that guaranteeing their human rights and their social, civil and political rights was the guarantee without which their material needs would not be able to be met in a sustainable way. (Deborah Eade).

So the methodology was designed to avoid the relationships of dependency which are so embedded in Honduran culture. María Esther again:

They didn't go to the group to receive things; they went to talk about themes. It's not easy to find the cause of an effect. Possibly there were many reasons for all this. One I've seen is that women who before were always dependent on the priest, and who didn't do things if no-one gave them the money - these women were capable of taking their own decisions. Normally women's groups, like those in other parishes that I've seen or heard of, if the promoter isn't there, they don't meet. There aren't actions if there's no-one telling them what

needs to be done. It's not the responsibility of the women in the working of the programme - sometimes they don't even know about their women's programme, or where it is going. (María Esther)

It was not that María Esther did not believe in the need for income generating projects. But her experience with CARITAS and other organisations had left her sceptical of what such small projects can achieve:

Small projects won't resolve our problems; we need big projects. A few seeds or a shop with 1,000 pesos invested isn't going to make a difference. That lets us say we have something, but doesn't resolve anything. There is no grain marketing in the region; no organisation is interested in basic grains; it's a real problem. That would stabilise prices. At least in our groups there would be grain at a fair price. And with a collective project... With the shops people stay isolated; there's no regional organisation. And it maintains vertical relationships. The isolated group with a small shop in a community but without relationships with... they don't build relationships between women. It is the promoter who makes relationships with everyone; well, and it's the leaders who relate to everything, but the women among themselves... and I ask myself, why don't they let us talk, why don't they let us know each other? because this gives another dimension, and this gives power... and those people interested in power are not going to permit it. (María Esther).

So by María Esther's decision, the programme set out to work with women in a way which would move them towards having the capacity and confidence to tackle a larger project - which they are now doing. In terms of the empowerment process, I would argue that this illustrates the importance of having a larger vision of what might be achieved.

The fact that the programme was not linked to income generation also meant that the women had the opportunity to practise organising, running events, and to take on the tiny economic activities in the different groups in a way that let them make mistakes without putting their economic well-being at risk. They could learn and develop their organising skills. The absence of specific quantitative performance indicators on the part of the funding agencies helped here, as there was no pressure to meet specific targets.

## 6.5 Leadership style

A structural factor that plays an important role both in developing the sense of collective agency and in encouraging personal empowerment and the general effectiveness of the groups is the style of leadership and approach to leadership development. At the beginning, María Esther, as the main initiating force of the programme, provided the leadership. She knew, however, that she did not want to perpetuate that 'single powerful leader' model:

...I had, so to speak, a responsibility to co-ordinate... to co-ordinate what the programme was, as a process of initiating and training leadership. That is to say, my primary task was to facilitate, so to speak... to 'accompany' the training of leadership using a new conception of what leadership is. That is, a new style of leadership both at the level of the co-ordinating team as the programme then was, and at the level of the animators in the case of Macuelizo... (María Esther).

She planned to do herself out of a job:

...not to stay co-ordinating if I don't have to do it... the thing is to remove the necessity for me to be there. If I'm there, the *compañeras* won't assume responsibility. And I am concerned that they do assume it, they've been trained for that; there is no one who will say now that 'no, they're not ready'; they were trained for that... (María Esther).

She also argued that in the empowerment of women, the form of leadership is very relevant to the results achieved. She did not want the programme to adopt a leadership model that would perpetuate a sense of dependency or powerlessness:

If you start a project with three co-ordinators you don't have conflict with anyone. Women don't meet each other... If they meet each other and organise - and have a big demonstration and so on - these women are going to have power. Now it is clear that NGOs and the church don't strengthen the self-management of women, because then they won't be able to take the decisions. (María Esther).

The shift from having external promoters to having animators from within the groups held up the possibility to all the women that they were at least potentially capable of taking leadership; it also, claims María Esther, pushed the women into acting outside of old habits of dependency:

...when we have full time staff it gets in the way; on the one hand they contribute; but on the other hand they prevent more women from getting involved: 'there are already people doing it, why should I get involved?'. So how to create an atmosphere of shared responsibility? There has to be a structure that permits shared responsibility. (María Esther).

The women in the groups discussed the issues and told me that they were aware of the dangers of the old model:

...we know that people from outside are not going to come and solve our problems, so it's us then, because you could have a promoter, and we'd just be there complaining. So that was what we saw, that the animators were very important now; what helped in the groups was that each group had its animator, and it was the animators ourselves who had to help the group develop, that was when we were really taken into account. (Teresa, 50, El Pital)

It was important, in my view, that the women taking leadership were supported, by their group and by the process of training and interaction with other animators.

...they gave us a short course of three days, that's how we trained like that, and at the end of the month we were giving the training to all the groups. (Ibid.)

After the formation of the *consejo*, that group functioned as a leadership support group as well as a planning and co-ordinating body. This allows them to learn, to take risks and to learn from any mistakes made. They have the chance to learn how to strategise and plan. It also helps them avoid the pull to fall into the old model of 'power over' leadership, which would impede the empowerment process for the other women in the groups.

In my experience, the big challenge in developing this style of leadership with a group is for the original leader to find a way of stepping back and of handing over the power of leadership to the new leaders. When the initial leader is as charismatic as María Esther this can be a problem, especially in interactions with the outside world, where people have expectations not only that the old model of leadership will continue, but that the particular individual will be the person they relate to. The process of transition for PAEM has not been all smooth, but appears to be succeeding, judging by what I saw at *consejo* meetings. María Esther's own determination and commitment to change is essential for this. It is one reason why the PAEM programme was officially ended, so that a new beginning could be made:

The programme has finished. It has now ended. It finished in 1992. I didn't... I didn't want to make a funding application last year, because I had no more interest in that, and I realised that I didn't want to carry on in a co-ordinating role; I'd rather wait for the group to get on with making its own decisions, its own responsibility. And I'm not going to co-ordinate the network. (María Esther).

The new national network of rural Christian women, *Enlace*, ties in with these changes. María Esther has provided the initiating leadership there too, but is equally determined not to be put in a permanent leadership role. A number of women active in the other member organisations were a part of or leaders in the original wider PAEM organisation, and developed their skills alongside the Macuelizo women. In María Esther's terms,

...they are trained now, they have to take it on, right, they have to learn. They have a space; they have a methodology; they now have more ideas; they have gone through a whole process of valuing themselves, and when I started they didn't have all of that. I started with nothing. Then we were able to create that, so now we are at a different point. I think they are going to know how to take it on. I am going to have a power to help, right. It's not that I now want to know nothing... I am a part of it all you know. But I won't do it as if I had power that I haven't; that's how things are. (María Esther).

The leadership model and the rigour with which it is developed and with which power is handed over to it, has been an essential part of the empowerment process

for the PAEM women. This is one of the areas where more traditional programmes working to empower women run into difficulties in moving women beyond a certain point. In looking at this aspect, I believe that the reality of who holds power in a situation and their attitude to that power are vital issues if empowerment is to take place.

## 6.6 The 'conflict'

The conflict between PAEM and Padre Ricardo, the new priest, and people around him described in Chapter Five played an interesting role in the empowerment process for the PAEM women. Although it resulted in the halving of the number of groups, its impact on the women who decided to stay with the programme was in the end, according to them, a positive one for most of the women. The conflict, as I see it, provided a focus for a number of aspects of the empowerment process. For example, the fight to maintain their identity in the face of strong opposition had the effect of pushing the women to defend themselves, to articulate exactly why the programme was important to them, to make their voices heard and be visible in a way that they had not had to before. It also pushed the women to make a decision about the importance to them of what they were doing. It made them assert their independence and value their decision making abilities and articulate their desire to continue taking charge of their activities. They had to analyse what the Catholic Church meant to them and where they saw themselves in relation to it, both as individuals and as groups. In addition, the women had the chance to consider what the alternatives were that were on offer. This account from a group discussion in El Pital illustrates some of these points:

...the priests are in favour, they support us, right, the bishops support us, it's just him.. ... the ones of us who have been around the longest, we have already spent a time with CARITAS and we didn't see that that moved us forward. That is, there was a bit of training and little projects, visits around over the years, but the women's groups weren't developed like they are now. it's like we'd be organised into those same old groups again. We saw that it was better

to stay with this education programme for women, where we're receiving better training. Moreover the groups were even making presentations, right, in big meetings where we talked a lot about women's rights which we were wanting to claim; we were taking steps forward and why would we want to take steps backwards, to return to the same old thing?

So that was our decision, right, and the reality was it was only our new priest who was the one who didn't accept that ... We were in our own organisation and according to him he wanted us to put ourselves under the authority of that organisation.. of CARITAS. Well, we didn't want to arrive at that, after being in our women's organisation for a while, to return to being what they call the son of authority. ... And so we didn't accept it, and the priest couldn't... now he more or less says nothing and it's better now. But with the training that we've had... we're here not because... With the conflict there's been perhaps we wouldn't be here now, because there were bad things they called us... but at the same time we knew the training we had had and we weren't going to leave the organisation for that.

And also the *consejo* that was set up, it was firm right through. If the *consejo* had weakened perhaps all of the women would have weakened; but no, there was great resolution. ... I think that if we hadn't formed the *consejo*, the women's groups wouldn't exist. (El Pital group).

Many rumours were circulating about the women and the programme during the conflict. The women were under pressure to believe them, and had to do their own thinking and analysis in order to resist them. For example, one rumour was questioning the integrity of the programme by implying that the women were being manipulated by outsiders for political ends, by implying a communist source of funding. They were able to resist this one, knowing as they did that Oxfam, as the group in El Pital told me,

... has its office in Mexico, not in Cuba like they say (laughter). I know it's ignorance, ignorance and wanting to finish by obstructing more, more, by increasing our ignorance. It's alright, because for me Cuba isn't a monster, Cuba is human beings too and according to what I've heard on the radio, perhaps they live a thousand times [worse] than we do, and they present it as if it were a tiger, but it's not like that, it's not like that when you meet with the others to study you listen to the radio and you realise that things aren't how they are presented... (El Pital group).

During the conflict the *consejo* played a crucial role of communicating with the groups and of strategising to resist the pressures and overcome the problem. They decided that a contributing cause of the conflict was that they had not been following the usual path for work with women. María Esther said,

If we had thought, well, we'll do little projects, we wouldn't have had problems. But our concern wasn't in doing little projects, our concern was in reflecting, in reconceptualising the role of women... (María Esther).

Again according to María Esther, they were open to dialogue with the priest, the women's pastoral committee and members of the parish council throughout the conflict, but did not achieve it:

...we proposed that we identify common problems to see if we could establish some mechanism for coordinating. But no, this wasn't possible because the priest's proposal wasn't... well, it wasn't to legitimise our space; instead the proposal that he made... I don't know how far he actually had these feelings, but what he did and what he was doing... one perceived what he wanted was for our space in the parish not to exist ...

...he resisted talking to me, because he thought that those ideas were mine but not those of the rest of the women. So well, we analysed it in our meeting of the *consejo* and saw that, well... I said to them, right, I have no interest, I have every faith that you all have the capacity to deal with it, and let's name a team to continue the dialogue, and I'll pull out from it. So the team carried on the dialogue, which was a monologue, really, it wasn't a dialogue, so that we would accept; and we maintained the possibility of coordinating, of mutual respect, that we belonged to the same church, that we have problems in common. So we saw from there the need for autonomy, that we should take our own decisions. That's where the conflict was, in the taking of decisions, who decides... [A delegation went to the parish assembly in 1992] ... in the discussion they tried to humiliate them, and moreover they threw them out. That's to say it was the behaviour of politicians, not of Christians.

...they said with the whole campaign, that we wanted to order men around, that we are an organisation from outside, that we receive money from Cuba, when Cuba doesn't even have enough to feed itself and couldn't give to others - rather they need us to give to them because we still have something to eat. And on the other hand, if we

take our own decisions and continue maintaining our own space, then we no longer belong to the church. In order to belong to the church we have to belong to the CARITAS programme and destroy what is the women's programme...

Then we had our assembly to analyse the conflict, to reflect on the conflict and to share. And we agreed our watchword, that we will not belong... we won't be anyone's groups. The pattern here in Honduras is that women's groups have to be church groups or groups of some nearby masculine structure, or groups of an NGO. And we were very clear that we will not be group *of* anyone because the *of* signifies subordination, signifies submission. So we will be Christian women and we will carry on being Christian, that is to say Christian women with all that that implies...

We called an open meeting to decide what we would do, with everything that was happening. Fifteen groups came, and with those fifteen groups we reflected on the conflict, ... and fifteen groups decided to stay with us, and the others passed to CARITAS. Fifteen groups stayed with us. ... It has been emotionally hard for the all the women, and I myself have had moments .. of doubt ... it was very important that the *compañeros* of COMUNICA were here at the hardest moment in the process. ...they didn't say 'well, as there are conflicts and all we'll go back to Tegucigalpa ... you resolve it and we'll come back when it's all over' No, they were militantly in solidarity and said 'if you have decided what you want to do our obligation is to accompany you.. (María Esther<sup>238</sup>).

What is clear is that the women on the *consejo* maintained their unity and have been strengthened because of the experience. During the worst of the conflict they went from meeting monthly to meeting once a week, and used the time to voice doubts and express strong emotion as well as to plan and strategise. María Esther had to move into a less visible role because she was the target for much of the conflict: this meant other women moving forward and taking a firm stand. The personal relationships between the *consejo* members are very strong as a result. María Esther describes this:

One thing which I think saved us was that in the face of conflict we agreed to have frequent meetings. ... They allowed us to share, although they also served for crying about everything that was

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<sup>238</sup> These are extracts from three different interviews.

happening but, but at the same time to give us strength, to make new proposals, to revise proposals; and although there was much suffering, there were also successes that we wouldn't have achieved by other means. We created an atmosphere in the *consejo* of comradeship, of solidarity, of sisterhood that we couldn't be divided as a co-ordinating body, they couldn't divide us. ... Often in conflicts they divide the management body in order to destroy it. ... So the great thing is that we weren't divided. And now we're sisters. Before, perhaps we saw the *compañera* who represented such and such a place; and now we love each other and we have confidence in each other... we are family. Here we're one family ... I still don't understand how it was possible in the face of such an avalanche that the group didn't divide. ... I think we came out recognising our space, that what we can maintain is fifteen groups and from here we'll move forwards. (María Esther).

### **6.7 Aspects working against processes of empowerment**

The women I interviewed themselves identified a number of aspects which they perceived as obstacles to their personal and group development, either currently or in the past; some of these have been touched upon earlier. They talked about problems in their relationships with their husbands or families and the strong culture of *machismo*. They also talked about the levels of dependency fostered by relationships with development agencies and other organisations which organise around donated food and/or small projects - and the demoralising effect of having such projects fail or be withdrawn. They see poverty as their lot, and have a fatalistic attitude to many things.

They see that practical and tangible difficulties impede the empowerment process as well. For example, Alicia refers to the issues of leaving the house untended and of childcare:

...they said to me that if I wanted to be animator for the group... but I haven't wanted to up to now partly because of the little boy.

Q: But once he's bigger you might?

A: Bigger, yes, although there's also another thing, [...] you have to find someone to look after the house for you, right, you'd have to pay someone, and the groups don't have the money... so what can you do? You can't just leave the house. They've told me to go on the animators' course, but this is why I haven't wanted to, with the young one it's difficult. (Alicia, 31, El Pital).

This appears to be a particular issue for younger women. The animators are mostly women who have older children who can care for the younger ones and mind the house, and are therefore in their mid-thirties or older. The exceptions to this are mostly women without children. The work of raising young children in Macuelizo appears to be such that it precludes active engagement with the process of empowerment in the absence of any deliberate measures to counteract it. The groups have members who have young children and who bring them with them to meetings - but from what I saw, they tend to be more passive in their participation. Women who have no means of divesting themselves of any part of their childcare or other domestic responsibilities are greatly constrained by the limited availability of the time to invest in other activities.

The women I interviewed and who talked to me in the groups talked consistently about their roles as wives, mothers and housewives, and talked about those roles as inevitable ones for women. Very few of them talked about any role as active providers of livelihood or as workers. When I asked questions about what they thought life would be like for their daughters, most of them expected them to be similar to their own (though 'hopefully she'll find a better man and won't have the troubles I've had' was a common rider to the reply). A few expected their daughters to find work in the *maquila*. It seems to me that in order to become empowered, these women will need to free themselves further from the traditional strictures of what it is to be a woman. Some of these women were the same women who were talking also of their plans for the warehouse project, assuming they would be fully involved in it, so it is not that they do not see themselves as able to move into new areas of influence. As I see it, the 'internalised oppression' that women carry is firmly embedded in their/our psyches, and is constantly being reinforced by the

expectations of the people and society around them/us. They/we can make decisions and act 'despite' the 'internalised oppression', but its existence inhibits the empowerment process and conditions the way they/we think about them/ourselves. Also, in a situation where women's hopes may have been raised and dashed many times, it is understandable that there will be reticence and caution.

There is also the issue of access to land and to control over land. Many of the PAEM groups have taken on small agricultural projects, usually using land lent by a *grupo campesino*. These projects have usually failed, often because of the land being unsuitable (perhaps too far away), or because it is reclaimed from the women once it becomes productive. Another common problem with these projects has been crop failure, which may in part be due to inexperience, and in part due to another factor, the lack of appropriate technical support.

A lack of appropriate technical support also affects the work of PAEM as a whole, now that they have started actively to undertake a project that will meet some of their needs for income and reliable basic grain supply, as María Esther identifies, in the context of the warehouse project :

we need technical support because we can't do what we want to do alone, not that we don't want to.. [...] but we haven't found a qualified technical advisor with gender awareness, with awareness of the problems that poor women face - not your typical professional or technical advisor, who makes their own proposal, but someone who wants to work with us to build something - that's where the problem lies. Maybe there is someone like that in the country, but [...]we've been looking for them and we haven't found them; we're bothered because it seems to be out of our reach. (María Esther).

This problem was partly about finding technical support that is 'neutral' and will not make them dependent on an NGO or government body that will then want to put its own perspective and agenda onto the work of PAEM. When I first arrived, a female technical advisor was working with the *consejo* to help them assess the feasibility of the warehouse project. She could only work with them for two sessions, however, whilst between jobs. By the time I left they had not found a replacement. There was

less concern about finding help to learn the practical skills of running a warehouse, since through María Esther's husband they have access to a successful warehouse project in Yoro. According to Raúl Contrera, part of IHMA's willingness to pass the warehouse over to the women (see pages 92 & 114) is based on knowing that technical support is there; but the aspects of technical support that require particular sensitivity to process and to the women's needs and situation are harder to fill.

Other aspects inhibiting the process of empowerment can be located in the context and socio-political history of the area. Some of these, such as the tradition of *caudillismo*, local and national politics dominated by strong individual leaders and patronage, are common to Central America. *Caudillismo* is still a strong force in Honduras. This means that the presence of key individuals, described earlier in the case of PAEM as something that has helped the empowerment process for PAEM, can also be a factor working against it, with individuals leaning on the leader to the detriment of their own development. The presence of the *animadoras* chosen from within the groups, and of the *consejo* work to minimise this effect, but it is nonetheless a dynamic that continues to operate within the groups. It is also imposed from the outside, with people often referring to PAEM as 'María Esther's groups', and making assumptions about who makes decisions and how they are made, who to contact and so on. Also, of course, María Esther was herself raised within this culture of *caudillismo*; she has a strong personal commitment to the empowerment of the PAEM women and to working to end *caudillismo* as a political and social force, but her confidence and articulateness, her network of contacts and her astute political analysis contribute to some reinforcement of the *caudillo* style, since they of course interact with the habits of deference to strong leaders that exist in the culture and therefore in the women in PAEM and in people outside.

The nature of the local community and the political make-up of the area also affects the empowerment process. This can be seen by looking at the contrasting communities of El Pital and Quitasueño. In El Pital, where the community is long established and there are many long-term residents and a well developed community identity backed up with well functioning and co-ordinated community organisations,

largely developed through the efforts of community members, the PAEM groups have flourished. Many women within the groups are animated, optimistic and active. The women's groups have moved into public space and have won support and influence in local organisations. By contrast, the one PAEM group in Quitasueño has remained small and has not taken on a strong public identity. The tone of the group's meetings is much more subdued, and although the animators are lively and optimistic, I did not get the sense that they carry the group with them in that. Quitasueño, as described earlier, is a recently established community, almost entirely made up of migrants from other parts of the department or from further afield. There is a history of much organisational activity, both by peasant organisations and NGOs, but with an atmosphere of manipulation, of conflict and of competition for limited economic and political resources rather than co-operation. More women in Quitasueño than in El Pital told me of having to contend with husbands who are violent and/or drink a lot and/or are womanisers. The women in the PAEM group have received little encouragement from the community, and there is local suspicion about what they are trying to achieve. That the group has survived so long in an atmosphere of suspicion and negative judgement is perhaps an indication that the women have achieved some measure of empowerment - though to me it felt fragile, except in the *animadoras*, who, with regular participation in the *consejo* meetings, have access to encouragement and the optimism of others, and to opportunities to develop a wider perspective, in a way that the other group members have not. I would therefore include a local culture of negativity and suspicion, and an unstable and *machista* local political climate in my list of aspects inhibiting the empowerment process for women.

## **Chapter Seven. Case Study 2: Health Promoters Training Programme, Urraco**

As with the previous two chapters, this chapter and the one which follows are based on field research carried out in Honduras in 1992-3, as outlined in Chapter Five. This chapter will provide an account of the context for the second case study, of a Health Promoters Training Programme in Urraco sector. It will then give an account of the training programme and consider to what extent empowerment has been a feature. In Chapter Eight I will give an analysis of the reasons for the programme's impact. Both chapters draw on my interviews with women training to be Health Promoters or already filling that role as a result of training in the programme, with women who have left the programme and with the members of the co-ordinating team. In addition I draw on interviews with individuals who have been significant to the organisation or who have seen the programme from the outside. I also draw on my own observation during fieldwork.

### **7.1 Urraco: Background**

Urraco is in the department of Yoro, north of El Progreso (see Figure 7.1). It is an agricultural area dominated by the production of bananas (Yoro produces 75% of the Honduran Banana crop<sup>240</sup>) and african palm. There is one small town, Urraco Pueblo, and the rest of the population lives in scattered villages and hamlets and in the banana camps owned by the Tela Railroad Company, which is actually a big banana company, part of the multinational United Brands. African palm production is dominated by three co-operatives. The other significant agricultural activities in the region are cattle raising and, on a smaller scale, plantain production.

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<sup>240</sup> CNTC (1988).

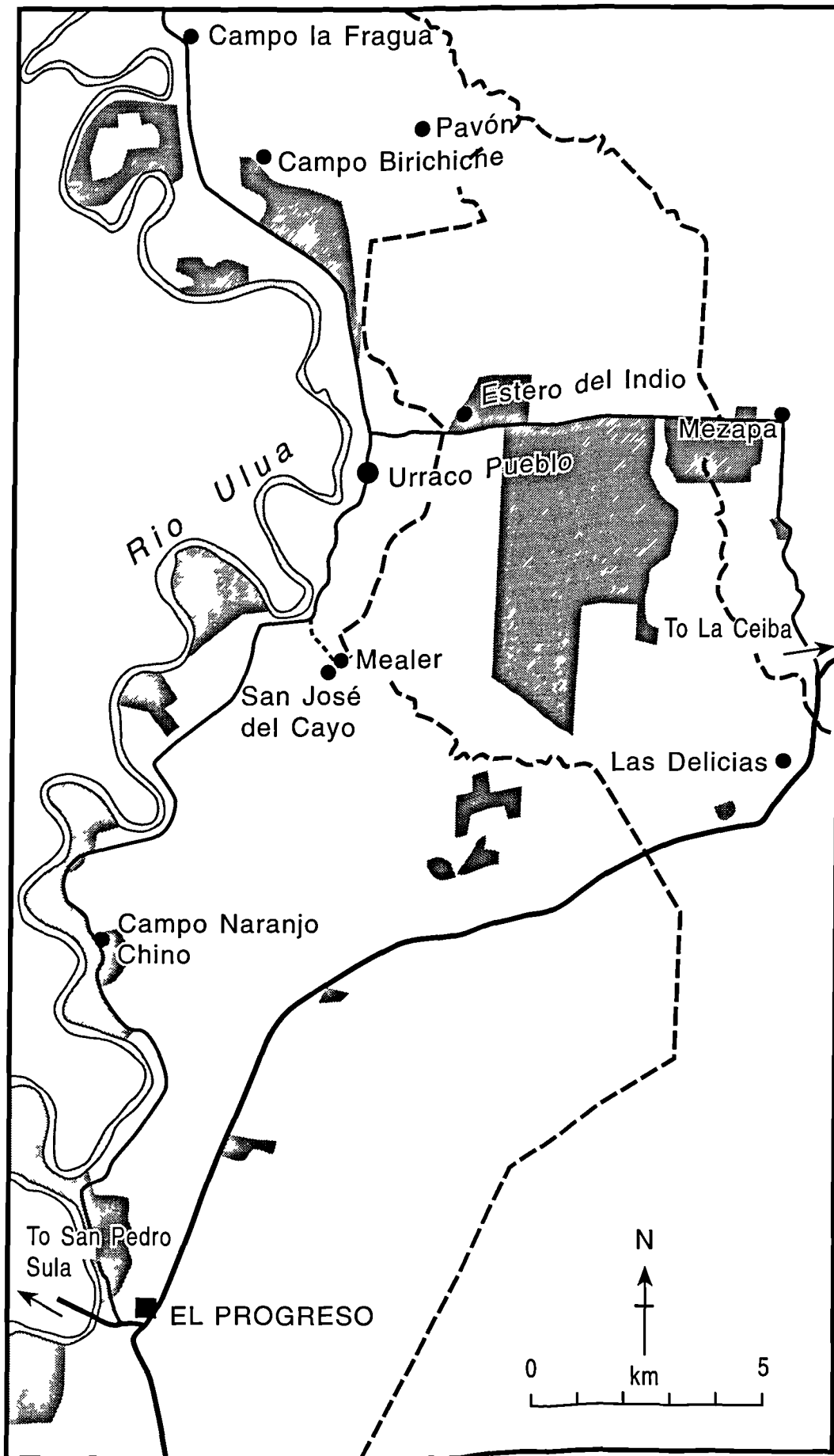


Figure 7.1 Map 3 Urraco  
 Source : after Instituto Geográfico Nacional

The Urraco sector has a population of approximately 8,000, of whom about 5,000 are in Urraco Pueblo. Satisfactory data about the area are hard to find<sup>241</sup>. I asked the local priest, an ex-Trade Union leader and the co-ordinator of the Urraco Literacy programme for information about the area, and they broadly agreed on the following estimates. The largest landowner is the Tela Railroad Company, with between 30 and 50% of the land (some 6,000ha.) Another 25-30% of the land is under African palm, owned by the co-operatives that make up Hondupalma. Of the remainder, about half is owned by cattle farmers and plantain producers; the rest is in the hands of campesinos growing maize, plantain, avocado, cassava and other crops largely for home consumption. There are also many people without land - an estimated 10% of the population does not even have a yard for a home garden. The area, therefore, has a number of people in reasonably well paid work, and a majority population of 'floating' temporary workers and *campesinos*, with the owners of wealth largely absent.

The Tela Railroad Company, or "the company", as it is known locally, is profoundly influential in the local economy. It arrived in 1895, and is the area's largest employer, both of permanent and casual workers. Its product touches the lives of most people in the area in one way or another. Work on the banana plantations is done by men; women are employed in the packing plants. Both generally work long hours, though the women's work varies depending on the size of the harvest on a given day, and some days there is none. Work for the company is better paid than other work available and is sought after - men will earn 28 *lempiras* per day as opposed to the 10-12 *lempiras* (about £1) for work on a *platanera* (plantain plantation) or other day-labouring work; women earn 32-35 *lempiras* per 12 hour day in the packing plants (for a maximum of three days per week), and there are few other possibilities for regular paid work in the area for them. Permanent workers also receive many benefits in kind. The most significant of these is the provision of free housing, to a standard hard to aspire to elsewhere in the sector outside Urraco Pueblo, with running water, sanitation, school

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<sup>241</sup> Presumably Tela Railroad Company has data, but I was not able to gain access to it.

provision, electricity and access to health care and recreational facilities. Only permanent Tela workers and their immediate families are eligible for this accommodation, which is in wooden, mostly 'semi-detached' houses on stilts with one room upstairs per family, one room or 'space' downstairs, and a tiny kitchen and toilet/shower room at the back. There are 12 banana camps in the sector, each housing about 100 workers and their families.

Labour laws in Honduras are quite favourable to permanent employees, who are among other things entitled to receive *prestaciones* - a sum of money for each year worked - when they leave their job. In the past six years or so, with the current economic climate in Honduras, many employers, including Tela, are replacing permanent workers with casual or contract workers. Not only does this change remove the job security and fringe benefits for Tela workers, but it also significantly reduces their annual income, as labour laws are such that the same person cannot be re-contracted immediately without their becoming eligible for permanent worker benefits. Workers in the past few years have been finding that they have a 90 day contract and then a 12 month gap before being re-contracted to the same work. For many workers this means regular long periods of unemployment. Some of the banana camp houses now lie empty.

By far the majority of the population in the sector arrived as migrants from other parts of Honduras, predominantly from Olancho, Choluteca and Valle but also from other parts of the south and west. They left with the dream of going to the north coast (perceived as where the opportunities are) and maybe to the USA; some arrived in Urraco having migrated twice or more before within Honduras. Many young people now were born in the sector, but according to an ex-official of the banana workers union SITRATERCO, none of the over 40s were. Many migrants left their families behind. The population is almost exclusively mestizo - though the non-Spanish part of the heritage of people in the area is very diverse, to judge by the range of facial and physical characteristics to be seen. The north coast of Honduras is where the black population of Honduras lives, some of whom came to

Honduras via the British Caribbean. Many people have relatives who have moved to the USA, mostly as illegal immigrants.

Urraco Pueblo is situated on the railway track about an hour's drive along a dirt road to the north of Progreso. It is a small town which acts as a minor commercial centre and focal point, with the sector's only secondary school (only equipped for *plan básico*, the first three years) and a small, poorly resourced clinic. The only further education available is sewing classes, which gives young women in particular the possibility of obtaining employment in the export processing zones around San Pedro Sula, the second city of Honduras and industrial, commercial and financial centre for the north coast. Many young people leave Urraco Pueblo and the surrounding villages in search of work and never return. The Catholic church has plans to open a carpentry class. There are several small shops and workshops, and the police have a post in Urraco Pueblo, but for most dealings with the state and for many non-everyday things people have to travel to Progreso. For other education beyond *plan básico* people have to go to Progreso or San Pedro Sula. There is a regular if crowded bus service between Progreso and Km 45, the furthest banana camp, which passes through all the camps and through Urraco Pueblo. There is also a passenger train, (the plantations were the reason for the construction of the only railways in Honduras), leaving Progreso early in the morning and returning in the early evening, on alternate days. Local transportation, however, is mainly by bicycle - the one-speed Chinese variety - which is used to get people to and from work and for transporting loads.

Housing in Urraco Pueblo is mostly basic or very basic. The relatively wealthier housing is either of breeze block, wood or adobe with zinc roofs and some concrete floors. The poorer housing is made of *bajareque* or plantain leaf spines with thatch roofs and dirt floors. Most houses in the town have electricity and water, either to a tap, or in a well which may have a pump. Most though not all houses also have sanitation, either in the form of a WC to a septic tank, or as a pit latrine. The houses vary in size, but rarely have more than a kitchen and one or two other rooms; most have a small yard where chickens and pigs are raised (the pigs also

roam the town freely) and where coconut and banana palms and perhaps a few vegetables may grow. Many households are very crowded, with one or two adults and up to 13 children. Some households now use bottled gas or electric stoves, but the large majority of households still use the traditional wood stove for cooking. Wood is in very short supply (as you might expect in the middle of banana and palm plantations) and most has to be purchased from the *leña* (fuelwood) sellers that pass through.

Like the rest of the country, Urraco sector has a predominantly Catholic population. There is a large Catholic church in Urraco Pueblo, which has a church hall and some residential accommodation and which also runs a rehabilitation centre for severely malnourished children. There is, however, a growing interest in the activities of several Protestant sects, five of whom have congregations in Urraco Pueblo.

Life in the *aldeas* (villages: there are about 40 of varying sizes) is very different from life in the camps or the town. Villages close in to Urraco Pueblo are more likely to have achieved a water supply, usually a well with a pump, and sanitation, usually pit latrines. But further out many people have neither, and still rely on often contaminated water supplies. In the villages where members of the African palm co-operatives live there are often concrete block housing and tin roofs, but elsewhere almost all the housing is of plantain leaf spines and banana thatch roofs with dirt floors, and many people lack sanitation. Many but not all of the villages have primary schools, but it is not unusual for a school to be closed because of a lack of teachers, or to have one teacher teaching five grades. The level of illiteracy in the sector as a whole is about 40%; there are wide variations, however. In some villages it reaches 90-100%; among older people, women are less literate than men; among younger people it is the reverse<sup>242</sup>.

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<sup>242</sup> Thanks to Andrés Albarenge Martínez of the Urraco Literacy Programme for information on literacy in the area.

Other than in the banana camps, health provision in the sector is poor. The clinic in Urraco Pueblo is poorly resourced and lacking in medicines; the only other options people have are to go to Progreso or to use the services of local knowledgeable people. The advent of the Health Promoter training, (the case study group), has made available a basic range of pharmaceutical medicines and the ability to prescribe and administer them, in many of the communities. There are many health problems. Malnutrition is a major problem and contributes to the level of other health problems, although the amount of severe malnutrition among children has been falling. Parasite infections are frequent because of poor hygiene and poor water quality. Malaria is endemic and dengue is common. Most houses lack any form of waste water drainage and stagnant water, because of this and because of flooding or heavy rainfall, is common. Cholera has also put in an appearance, with a reported eight cases in the eight months prior to my visit. Common, also, are respiratory infections, tuberculosis and syphilis (although the latter is not talked about). It is also likely that there is a hidden incidence of HIV/AIDS infection, given that Honduras is among the top ten countries worst affected worldwide, with 60% of Central American cases and the north coast is one of the areas of concentration<sup>243</sup>. If this is so, the problem is going undiagnosed, probably because people die of opportunistic diseases which are usual causes of death in areas of poverty.

There is a big cultural difference between the banana camps and the *aldeas*. The camps have a lively and loud atmosphere and are very sophisticated in relation to the villages. In the camps most households have a television and are exposed therefore to the outside world in a way that the villages are not; people have more money, which they often use for 'luxury' consumer goods, clothing and so on. This is very evident in the clothing and manner of young people in the camps, who dress in the latest fashions and whose posture and voice reflect a confidence and self-awareness not seen elsewhere in the sector. People also are more mobile, using

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<sup>243</sup> Tiempo 25/8/92

public transport to visit Progreso and San Pedro Sula. Televisions are common in Urraco Pueblo as well.

As has been seen in Chapter Three, Honduras is a country where *machismo* is strong. In Urraco sector it appears to be flourishing. There are differences between the camps and the villages, but the position of women is very evidently subordinate. *Machismo* can be seen very clearly in the overtly violent culture. Domestic violence is endemic and more or less hidden, but there is also much fighting between men and it is not at all uncommon for bodies to be found floating in the River Ulúa. It is said that criminals from other parts of the country come to Urraco to hide. Shots can certainly be heard from time to time, and walking home one Sunday afternoon, a man was shooting his gun into the air as I passed his house. The violence is compounded by a high level of drunkenness (affecting as many as 80% of working men) and there is much gambling<sup>244</sup>. There are about 40 bars in Urraco Pueblo (an average of approx one per 32 males over 15), and in the villages there will generally be a bar or someone selling *guaro* (spirits). There is also a growing drug problem among young people, so far, apparently, only marijuana, which is implicated in a rise in robbery over recent years. The force of law is virtually non-existent - certainly justice is beyond the reach of the poorest people (see Figure 8.1, p. 166). Although the country is now ruled by a civilian government, the military still wield much power, and in Yoro still hold much power as *caudillos* or *caciques*, national or local 'strong men'. When I interviewed an ex-union leader in his home near one of the banana camps towards the end of my stay, he told me "The armed forces are still strong here. We live in relative peace now, but if there was trouble I wouldn't be talking with you - there are ears all over. I would be in danger".

## 7.2 The experience of Women in Urraco sector

Women in Urraco tell you if you ask that life is hard, is difficult. They tell you this again and again. The general pattern of activity for women is broadly similar in the

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<sup>244</sup> Thanks to Monica Maher for information about these.

camps and in the *aldeas* although some aspects are less of a struggle in the camps because of the better conditions. "The women say 'We begin our day in the morning, 4, 4.30, milling the corn or taking it to the mill, and we do not end it when we lie down at night at ten'"<sup>245</sup>. It is still rare for women to have no children and you are not considered a real woman unless you do; formal marriage is not necessary. As in Macuelizo, you are considered married to the first man you have a sexual relationship with. Many women have their first child at 15 or 16, and families with more than eight children are common, although this pattern may be slowly changing. The migration history of the area means that few women have access to an extended family network for support, and their long day of activity is dominated by the requirements of child care and *quehaceres* (housework). The advent of mills for grinding maize for the staple *tortillas* have lightened the load for many women, though some women do not have access to one and others have to go quite a distance (one woman told me it took her half an hour by bicycle to get to the mill). The making of *tortillas* is still a very time-consuming activity that must be done at least once a day as they don't keep long. In many *aldeas* women have to carry water from the well or river, and go to the river to do the washing. Hauling firewood for cooking is traditionally a men's job in Honduras. But the high incidence of single mothers in Urraco means that, unless they can afford to buy it, the task falls to many women as well, or to their children; they have to search long and hard. Cooking is done on the traditional wood-burning stove used throughout Honduras, a raised platform made of mud, clay or occasionally, concrete, with a hole for the fire and a flat metal plate over it which provides the cooking surface. Improved fuel efficient stoves are so far rarely used. Women are therefore exposed to wood smoke for long periods, and few of the houses have any chimney. Women raise small animals; most households have at least a few chickens. If they can manage it they will also have a pig that will usually be sold rather than consumed in the home. Some but not all women take lunch to their husbands at work in the plantations, which may involve a long walk.

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<sup>245</sup> Monica p32

Given that there is so little employment available for women, income generation activity is predominantly home based. Women will cook food to sell - *tortillas*, *tamales*, biscuits, anything they might be able to exchange for a few *centavos*. Some make cheese. Some do other people's washing. But all these activities are very limited in scope, as the vast majority of the population are poor and the numbers of people who can afford to buy are small. Income generating activities that are aimed at the local market bring low returns and are also very labour intensive. The labour of older children becomes a significant factor both in caring for younger offspring and also in doing the selling. Many daughters, when they are old enough (14 or 15) leave to go to the *maquila* around San Pedro Sula. This move is seen with mixed feelings. It is a step that leads to (relatively) well paid employment, at least for a while. But the factories are infamous for exploitative working conditions. I was told a story, which may or may not be true but is certainly believed locally, about a girl who did something wrong and was called into the boss's office and instructed to dance *punta* (a local dance) naked. When she refused she was dismissed from her job without *prestaciones*.

In Urraco Sector it is unusual for women to be much involved in agriculture. Under the Agrarian Reform law of 1974 women were not permitted to own land (except as widows with no sons) and although the agricultural modernisation law of 1992 has changed that, it is unlikely that patterns of land ownership will change much for some time. Some women do succeed in getting access to land - perhaps lent by a co-operative or relative - but there are many stories of it being the least fertile land, or of it being taken back again as soon as they made it productive. Another possible source of income is gleaning in the African palm plantations; the going rate is one *lempira* per sack. There are also some women who will help their husbands from time to time with work on the *milpa*, the family maize field, mostly at sowing and harvest time, but the dominant pattern is for women not to be involved in agriculture at all.

Health is a major issue for women. If a family member is ill it is up to the woman to care for them, and to try to get medical treatment if necessary. Caring for sick

children is the most common reason for women to miss classes and meetings. The nutritional status both of the children and the parents is generally so poor that illness is common, and it lays a heavy burden on women. Most women still have many children and constant childbearing affects their health. The contraceptive pill is available sometimes in the health centre in Urraco Pueblo, and in pharmacies in Progreso, but is not easily available for most women. There is also a deep seated suspicion of it, judging from my interviews. Sterilisation of the woman is the more common means of controlling fertility, once she has a number of children; that, too, requires a visit to Progreso.

There are very few women active in any sort of organisation in the community. I heard of a small number of women members of village water committees, but of none in the *patronatos* (village councils). A small number of women have been involved in housewives' clubs or other women's groups. The largest number of women active in activities outside the home are involved in some way in the Catholic church, as catechists, cleaners and decorators of the church and so on. There is a very small number of (female) *delegadas de la palabra*<sup>246</sup> -people trained to lead church services and in other ways compensate for the shortage of priests. Women who work in the *empaquadoras* (packing plants) are members of SITRATERCO and may get to take training courses and go to meetings. But the general situation is that women do not participate in organisations.

A major factor in women's lives in Urraco is domestic violence. It is seen as "*casi lo normal*" (almost the norm); "there are men who say that the woman who isn't hit every day won't be free from worries, won't be happy"<sup>247</sup>. Although it is not always physical, "with just about every couple it exists, they have their problems...sometimes you can hear blows with the flat of a machete blade"<sup>248</sup>.

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<sup>246</sup> See note 229, page 93, Chapter Five.

<sup>247</sup> Urraco Pueblo group

<sup>248</sup> Andrés Albarengue Martínez

Violence is a factor that not only dominates women's lives but severely limits their choices, as one group of women described to me:

If the woman decides to separate from him, he kills her. He pursues her. If she tries to use the law, he kills her. Some women go to the U.S.A. instead, they escape. Some men even follow her there. (Urraco Pueblo Group).

Eva María, a member of the Health Programme co-ordinating team, summed up the kind of life that most women lead in the area in a rather graphic way when I asked her about the situation for women:

The man takes advantage. If only he is working he says 'I maintain you'.. he maintains you, but it's a life like that of a pig, I tell you, that he is fattening up, and at some point he will.. [laughter]. Women here suffer a lot. (Eva María, 33).

### **7.3 The Urraco Health Promotion Programme**

The Health Promoters programme in Urraco was set up in 1985. It was initiated by a volunteer from the USA who had been placed in the area by Concern America, a small NGDO<sup>249</sup>, to work alongside the Catholic church in *promoción femenina* and with the church's child nutrition centre. It seems that she found her work there very frustrating: that the mothers would appear from the *aldeas* with severely malnourished children, who would be nursed back to health and returned to their families - but there was no work being done that would tackle the problem from a preventive angle. So with Concern's support she set up the health programme to train health promoters to work in the communities. The programme was set up as a two-year training course, then repeated, to train members of the local communities

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<sup>249</sup> Concern's Progreso office received funding from Oxfam UK/I for a short time. (Deborah Eade, personal communication).

in preventive health and basic treatments. About eighty women were recruited to the course, of whom about half completed the two years. A second recruitment had a similar drop-out rate. The women participate voluntarily in the course and get a certificate of completion at the end.

The course is organised around study circles in 26 communities, including some of the camps, which uses the book *Donde No Hay Doctor* (Where there is no doctor) as a text<sup>250</sup>. The circles meet once each week for about two hours; there are also monthly *sectoriales* (sectoral meetings), where all the groups get together to study a theme, often with an outside speaker. Eighty health promoters have been trained within a three and a half year period; about 100 women were active in the programme at the time of fieldwork, 60 as health promoters and 40 in other peripheral activities such as meals for malnourished children, craft work or goat projects.

The main activity of the health promoters apart from the circles is to carry out a monthly child-weighing session in their community. Mothers bring children under five to be weighed and records are kept of the child's progress. When the child is underweight, the promoters will talk to the mother about what she could do to improve the child's nutritional status. These weighing sessions have shown good results in reducing the numbers of children suffering third or second degree malnutrition, though it seems there is more difficulty in reaching and maintaining 'normal' nutritional status<sup>251</sup>. Attendance has generally started off high but has dwindled. Some of the promoters put in a lot of time in persuading the mothers to bring their children to the weighing sessions, others do not. The sessions I attended were very varied: some of the time many mothers came and thoughtful advice was given to them when they needed it; on other occasions attendance was poor; some children were brought by elder siblings and it seemed to me unlikely that the advice

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<sup>250</sup> Werner (1989)

<sup>251</sup> There is a debate about the value of child weighing programmes; they can be seen as experts telling the mother what she already knows.

on nutrition would result in any changes in these cases. The session I attended at the height of a scarcity of beans in the period before the new harvest was depressing: the price of beans had increased dramatically and it was very unlikely people had much more than *tortillas* and salt to eat. All except one of the children at that session had lost weight that month, and it was clear that information about varying the diet and feeding vegetables was not going to have much impact. That said, however, Padre Chema, the parish priest in charge of the child feeding centre in Urraco Pueblo was full of praise for the programme and its impact in reducing demand at the feeding centre.

Once the promoters in a community have completed a certain amount of the course, they are given a *botiquín* or medicine chest, stocked with 15 basic medicines that they have by then learned to prescribe and administer. One *botiquín* goes to each community, and the promoters take it in turns to house it for a month at a time. People in the community can come to them at any time of the day or night for medical advice and treatment. When she hands it on to the next person, the promoter does an inventory of its contents and accounts are settled. The *botiquines* are replenished from central supplies maintained by the co-ordinating team, and the medicines are priced to cover purchase and transportation costs but not make a profit. When necessary the co-ordinators go to San Pedro Sula to buy stocks. The health promoters are unpaid volunteers.

The current Concern volunteer, Monica, has encouraged the women in the programme to put emphasis on networking with other women's organisations. Some of this has been with women's organisations on the north coast: several women go to the meetings of the recently formed *red de mujeres de la zona norte* (network of north zone women)<sup>252</sup> which is a mix of other *campesina* women's organisations, women from 'popular organisations' and women who work for NGOs. They have done exchanges with women working on health issues in other parts of the country. There has also been networking at an international level, with members of the co-

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<sup>252</sup> See page 59

ordinators' team going to conferences and seminars in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Chile.

Concern has been funding the Health Programme and the Literacy programme for about eight years, and is now planning gradually to withdraw its financial support<sup>253</sup>. Both programmes are planning ways of raising funds from other sources and of doing some of their own income generation. Because of this, the two programmes, which until recently operated completely separately, have started to strengthen their links and have joint meetings once a month, with the occasional 'retreat' together. I was invited to join them for one of these. The two teams spent 24 hours together in two beach huts in a village on the coast. There was discussion of the two programmes, and the opportunity to relax together in a way that does not happen normally because of pressures of work. A priest friend of Monica's came from San Pedro Sula and celebrated mass on the beach just before we left.

Until now the health programme, although officially part of the church's *promoción femenina*, has maintained a semi-autonomous status because of its external funding. This has enabled them to work freely in a way that they could not have done if they had had both feet within the church. It has not been a conflict-free relationship, but has been reasonably smooth.

The co-ordinating team consists of five women working full time for 450 Lempiras a month (about £45); the team co-ordinator gets a higher wage; there is also one part timer. They each have responsibility for 3-6 of the 26 circles (though they work in pairs where possible), and they meet with each circle regularly, and also attend the weighing sessions. They supervise the *botiquines* and generally encourage and motivate women to remain active or to start to participate. The sectoral meetings are planned and led by members of the team. The team co-ordinator now produces the regular reports to the funders and keeps the accounts. Previously this latter role was filled by the Concern volunteer, but since she has started planning to leave she has

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<sup>253</sup> The Concern Progreso office had funding from Oxfam UK/I for two years (Deborah Eade, personal communication).

been gradually handing over her responsibilities and training the team where necessary.

#### **7.4 Urraco Health Programme : What was achieved?**

The health programme was not set up with any specific aim of empowering women; this has entered in more recently but not as a programme aim; rather as an aim of the Concern volunteer and some of the co-ordinating team. The original intention of the programme was to do something about meeting an urgent practical need experienced in the communities for health care - which is most keenly experienced by women in their roles as mothers. As with the first case study, I shall use the model of Empowerment from Chapter Two to set out my understanding of what has been achieved through the Urraco Health Programme. As was pointed out in Chapter Four, the interview sample was smaller than for the PAEM programme.

##### **7.4.1 Personal Empowerment in Urraco**

Women I interviewed, both in study circles and in the co-ordinating team, put strong emphasis on the increase in both self-confidence and self-esteem that they had achieved as a result of their participation in the Health Programme's activities. Members of the study circles talked about losing their shyness and embarrassment (*pena*). This was described graphically by Mercedes, who lives in a village about half an hour's walk outside Urraco Pueblo. Before becoming involved in the programme, her life was heavily restricted:

A: ...I didn't go out, I was too shy to go out.

Q: Not even to go to the corner shop?

A: No, not alone. Not to go to mill maize or even to run errands, no, I was too shy. [My husband] ran the errands, he said 'if I don't run the errands we won't get to eat'; he brought everything to the house and I didn't go out, until I started to go to Urraco, where we

started to have some exchange, to get to know each other, to talk about things. It was only like that, with all the lasses there that I started to come awake, to talk. Even in school I was too shy to talk, I didn't like it when I was asked something because I was too embarrassed...

Q: So when you started with the programme you still didn't have much confidence?

A: No, no. [...]

Q: And did that change?

A: Yes, a lot.

Q: What is it like now?

A: Even with the women in the group I was too shy to speak, that's how I was. I listened from when I arrived, I sat there during the first days... Now it's not like that, we chatter like parakeets when we go there. Now we know each other well. Before, it wasn't like that. (Mercedes, 27)

Rosa, who lives in the Birichiche banana camp saw similar changes in the women in her group:

There are some who at the beginning hardly said a word. Now that we know each other more, now we tell each other with more confidence about the problems we have. This is the biggest change. There were some of us who used to arrive and stay quiet, that's different now. (Rosa, 18)

Laura, from another of the villages, also commented on this change:

I used to be one of those [shy and embarrassed women]. I couldn't even say a prayer, make a request or say the grace.

Q: And now?

A: Now it's not like that. I work with the church. Sometimes it's my turn to lead the prayers in the services (*celebraciones de la palabra*)

- Q: And how is it? Can you do it without being scared?
- A: I'm not shy any more. I say that if you're scared of asking something of the Lord, then he will be troubled. [...] You mustn't be shy of praying to the Lord.
- Q: So are you more confident now?
- A: More confident, yes. Now I can find more words to pray with. To begin with I was so shy I couldn't find any words to do it with.
- Q: And how did you achieve this change?
- A: Through having meetings, getting to know more people, that's how you lose your shyness and embarrassment, that's how you pick up more confidence and that's how you learn more. (Laura, 38)

Laura also talked about a change in her self perception relative to other women in her community, but with an interestingly mixed attitude:

Now I feel different. [...] Sometimes a neighbour will come in the night with a child who feels sick and I know which medicine to give her to get rid of the illness. So now I feel better than her. [...] You learn things in order to share them. If you learn and turn selfish, only using it for yourself, you're not doing anything. (Ibid.)

The increase in self-confidence was a factor in my ability to obtain interviews, as Mercedes pointed out:

I have changed a lot, and I can tell you now, talking to you like this, without shyness, or talking to a neighbour, asking her things, discussing things... before I would have been too shy. I could have been in pain, but I wouldn't tell anyone except [my husband]. (Mercedes, 27).

For her, the programme had made a big difference. My difficulty in obtaining many interviews, however, would imply that this effect was not particularly widespread. I had arranged a number of interviews with members of several study circles, but

I was confronted with an interesting series of reasons (sickness, forgetting, not there) why the interviews couldn't happen when the time came round.

Another aspect of personal empowerment highlighted by the women I interviewed was the learning of new skills. These included diagnosing common medical conditions and treating them, taking temperatures and giving injections, keeping track of children's nutritional status through weighing sessions, and so on. The women talk with great satisfaction of having learned these skills. Laura again:

I was happy to learn about things I didn't know, because around here we don't know about remedies. [...] Sometimes you don't know about simple medicines for the children. If a child gets a temperature what you do is wrap it up warmly, even though that bakes the child. Though these studies I've learned now about how to dress a child if it is ill. It's better to undress it and use damp cloths to lower the fever. They used to say not even to wash the child. But if the child is burning up it's better to put cool things on it. It's a joy to learn these things that I didn't know before. (Laura, 38).

Weighing children regularly has been a major activity of the programme. To begin with the women in the groups were not at all confident in doing this, as Mercedes describes:

...the first few times it was hard to learn the... that thing of weighing, you had to learn to use the scales, how to fill in the record card, how to explain it to the mother, all that was hard. A lot of times Lupe showed us and we didn't understand anything. She came there to help us, 'look at this, you have to do this and that', that's how we learned, fearfully, we filled in the card, 'that's right' she'd say, and that's how we gradually learned. (Mercedes, 27).

The weighing sessions that I observed all had a member of the co-ordinating team present and playing a central role.

For some women, the learning of new skills led them to be able to obtain employment, or to get involved in other projects. Iginia, who had left the programme because it could not offer her a salary, had joined a local committee

working on the provision of a hospital in Urraco Pueblo which was in the early stages of construction while I was there. She was optimistic of obtaining a job as a result of her involvement. The numbers of women who could get jobs using their new skills in this way was, however, very limited, especially since the health promoter training is nowhere near as comprehensive as nursing training, and opportunities are scarce. Three of the 120 women who have passed through the programme have been successful in getting jobs that use the skills learned on the programme. I find it interesting that some women who have left the programme have done so because they feel they should be paid to do the work that a health promoter does in the programme. The course raises hopes in the participants that they may be in a better position to generate income; one reason women drop out is that they don't want to do the work unpaid any more:

We have encountered serious problems, because now the promoters think, with the little bit of training we have given them, that they can aspire to other things, so they are asking us for a salary, for us to pay them, and how on earth can we pay them? (Marcela, 40, co-ordinating team).

It takes at least a minimum sense of self-worth and self-confidence for someone to state that their time and effort is worth payment, and to set conditions on their involvement. My fieldwork did not stretch to interviewing enough women who dropped out at the end of the programme - the timing was wrong as the two year course had just finished and it wasn't yet clear who had gone for good, so I don't know whether any empowering effect of the programme gave the women who left permanent changes in their lives.

In focusing on women's rights, the programme has helped some women change their self-image, and with it, increase their sense of self-esteem. Rosa illustrates this in her description of the man she wants to marry:

It'll be difficult, but when I marry I'd like my husband to be like this: that he shares the work with me. Men have a right to help in the kitchen too, to wash the dishes, to sweep, in complete democracy. Often the women will be washing and the man arrives tired from

work, he arrives demanding 'bring me my food' and she has to leave off washing to give food to him and the children. But he should be able to see that she is doing the washing and instead to serve the food, to fetch the *tortillas* [...]. Everything should be shared, including the washing up. (Rosa, 18).

Monica, the Concern volunteer, gave me her view of the changes experienced by women through participating in the Programme:

...women are more independent, more confident[...]. They're more willing to speak up, they're more willing to leave, they go on courses when their husbands aren't in agreement and they'll just leave them pouting. Whereas before they wouldn't have gone at all. (Monica, Concern volunteer).

The effects of the programme on personal empowerment are far more marked in the women who are members of the co-ordinating team than in the general groups. Some of them moved into the team after being in the groups, and team membership has given them many more opportunities to move out of their traditional position within the home and into the wider world. In some cases this has included moving out into the international arena, through attending training and conferences in other countries. Dolores, the team leader, who started her involvement as a trainee health promoter in a study circle, talks about travelling outside the local community:

I'd never been to Tegucigalpa. I went the first time with Monica [the US volunteer] and then alone. And I've been to La Paz, via Comayagua. I went on my own, asking for directions, scared. You find your way. (Dolores, 28, co-ordinating team)

She also describes her first visit abroad:

I had never imagined that I would go to another country. I went to the Dominican Republic the year before last. It was good. It was a course on natural medicines. It was the anniversary of the Dominican Republic's health programme. When Monica suggested it I told her I didn't want to go, I was afraid, of going alone, the airport, going through Miami, that I'd lose myself.. I spent a month thinking about it. But I liked it. I've received various letters from friends I made there. I learned a lot too. I decided to go. Lots of people have done

such things and nothing has happened to them. A decision. You have to be disposed to it. Monica came to have another go at me, and I told her I'd decided. And now I've been to Costa Rica and Chile. I think about the fact that I'm going to learn and later be able to share it with people. (Ibid.)

For Juana, currently working as a part-time member of the co-ordinating team, participation in the programme has changed her irreversibly:

It's where my critical consciousness started. I started to know about my reality as a woman and what women need. [...] I already had quite a bit of confidence because of my work in the church. I had awareness. [...] I've changed a lot, because before I was a very introverted woman because of being a single mother. People always.. they reject you, you're alone with a daughter.. I've always been sensitive to the criticism. The programme has helped me a lot. I have discovered for myself that I am worth something, even if I am a single mother. I know that I can achieve my goals. That I like to fight..

Q: And are there things you do now that you wouldn't have done before?

A: I go out. I go out freely, and now I'm not as bothered by what people say. I have more communication with people, I have more faith in.. sharing more with other women. [...] I will defend myself now. (Juana, 37)

Monica described changes she had seen in the co-ordinating team members during her time working with them. She noted the increase in levels of confidence, and observed that this was not only visible in familiar settings, but elsewhere too:

[You can see they are] more confident, the way they hold themselves. And both within the community and outside, daring to go to more professional settings and feel more comfortable, like with the banks. Knowing how to send a fax, or even knowing what a fax is, you know. (Monica).

#### 7.4.2 Empowerment in close relationships in Urraco

Some women connected with the health programme have made changes in their relationships with their husbands and families. Mercedes talks about her relationship:

[My husband] and I understand each other better now. [...] We say things to each other. We share things that he wants to share with me, like money, we decide what we will spend it on, what we will buy, all that, and sometimes we don't even have to talk about it, about what we're going to eat [...] because we know what each others likes are, we get on well together. (Mercedes, 27).

She later explains that he shares some of the childcare now:

Now if he has to go out to a meeting I stay at home, [and if I have to go out,] he stays at home to look after the girls. (Ibid.)

These kinds of changes are also experienced by co-ordinating team members. Reina, one of the co-ordinating team, describes changes she has gone through:

At first I wasn't trained. Before I was organised I didn't value myself; rather I was subject to the man. My first husband treated me badly. He told me 'you are no use as a wife' that 'you this, you that', and what I did was start crying, and he would say 'I'm going to look for another wife better than you'. Now it's not like that. Now I know that we're equal, that all women are equal, and with him, well... I'm not going to die over all that. Now I claim my rights, and I've done all sorts of things. (Reina, 31, co-ordinating team).

Changes are not only in relationships with husbands. Reina goes on to talk about her relationship with her children:

Before, with my children, I would hit them and get hysterical with them and all that. Now I don't do that. I treat my children with love. I don't go around hitting them, I care for them. Who else is going to care for them for me? Before I used to hit them with a belt like a madwoman, when I just lived shut in in the house. If my mother says to me 'the kids did such and such, you should hit them for it, you

haven't hit them' , I say 'no, if I don't care for my children, who will? (Ibid.)

Padre Chema, the local Catholic priest, told me that he had noticed changes in the relationships within the families of some women in the programme:

I couldn't generalise much, but in the families that I know, I have seen that there is... that the family is changing a bit. The woman participates now. The fact that they think about family problems and the abuses they experience, well, it gives them the capacity to put forward their own points of view. [...] So a woman who talks about her difficulties, on a personal level, with more sureness and more critical capacity, I think she's the same one that makes the man enter more into dialogue. You can see that the atmosphere within the family has changed a little. (Padre Chema).

Again, the most marked changes in close relationships can be seen in women who are part of the co-ordinating team of the Health Programme. The work of a team member demands that they move around freely among the communities, and the women have had to make the changes in their personal situations that were necessary to enable and sustain such freedom of movement. In Dolores' case, her life has almost certainly taken a very different form so far because of her participation in the programme. When I asked her what had changed because of being in the programme, she told me:

I've learned [...] to think twice before getting married. You have to think carefully about it. I think you have to train the man who'll be your husband well, so that when you get married you understand him. Perhaps if I hadn't got into the programme I would have got married, but I've had so much training, about the attitude the man should have towards women, [...] that you shouldn't have children without planning and wanting them.. Perhaps I'd be married with a pile of children. I'm not in a hurry. Everything in its time. I'll get married when I want to. Not when someone requires it of me. We'd have to be in agreement, and if one doesn't want to then we won't. (Dolores, 28)

Eva María, the longest-serving member of the co-ordinating team, has noticed important, though limited, changes in her relationship with her husband:

Before it was more him who made the money decisions, but little by little... it's changed quite a bit. [...] Now there's been some progress in relation to all that, to domination. [...] it's been about a year, and I've been working for five years. It's not in everything, though...(Eva María, 33)

#### **7.4.3. Collective empowerment in Urraco**

My interviews with women in the study circles did not provide much evidence of collective empowerment. There was a small indication of activities being undertaken as a group, but it was not activity that resulted in the groups becoming more able to organise collectively to meet the women's needs or leave them with more access to economic social or political power than they would otherwise have had. Much of this absence was to do with the way in which the programme was structured, and in particular its 'course' structure. I will return to this point in Chapter Eight. The Birichiche group gives an example of the kind of group activities that were undertaken. The women organised a small scale 'credit union' (as they called it), where each woman saved one lempira per month on a regular basis. The joint savings were later used to provide each woman with a uniform for the programme's graduation ceremony (*clausura*). This no doubt made an important contribution to their sense of belonging and identity, but falls far short of making a significant contribution to their ability to take charge of their lives. Another form of group activity was undertaken for the monthly sectoral meetings, and involved the preparation of role plays.

The co-ordinating team, however, did show evidence of collective empowerment. Having in the past been run more or less entirely by the previous US volunteer, the programme when I was there was almost entirely being managed and run by the team. This involved all of them, though it rested predominantly on Dolores as the team co-ordinator. Running the programme includes encouraging the study circles to meet and supporting them, supervising the weighing programme, supervising the *botiquines* (including the buying of medical supplies), organising the sectoral meetings and other practical details. Dolores was of the opinion that, if the previous volunteer had not been replaced, the programme would have folded at that point, but

that the replacement volunteer had worked to leave the programme capable of being sustained by the co-ordinating team when she left:

Monica has done a lot. She has given us follow-up support. If she hadn't come the programme would probably have collapsed. People were used to having someone from outside the country. [...] Above all she's given us confidence, because she's handed over the management of the books to us, which we didn't have the opportunity to do before; the accounts, the buying and selling of our medicines - we didn't have access to those books.

Q: And did she show you how to..

A: Yes, how to do them, especially to me, because I've been the person closest to her. We worked on the reports together. [...] She's encouraged us a lot. [...]

Q: And what will happen when she goes?

A: The programme will be in our hands.

Q: And what will that be like?

A: ...We're confident of succeeding. We're hoping the programme will continue. (Dolores, 28, co-ordinating team)

Members of the co-ordinating team are also involved in networking activities, including exchanges with organisations in other parts of the country, participation in the *Red de Mujeres de la Zona Norte*, the feminist meetings and *Enlace de Mujeres Cristianas Rurales* (and a small number of the women from the study circles are involved directly in these as well). They are known to other women's organisations, though this is perhaps more as individuals than as an organisation *per se*.

There is no doubt in the minds of local people that the existence of the Health Programme has had a positive impact on levels of child nutrition in the zone. Padre Chema, who is in charge of the emergency child-feeding centre acknowledges that the numbers of children being admitted to the centre with third degree malnutrition have significantly reduced and that the programme is the reason for the change. This, however, does not mean that the programme as an organisation has created possibilities for women to work together on activities that will enable them to take charge of their situations or act powerfully as a group to influence other aspects of

their lives, although the co-ordinating team have had some such opportunities. In the next chapter I will examine the reasons for this.

## **Chapter Eight: An Analysis of Empowerment in the Urraco Health Programme**

From the account in the previous chapter, it is clear that some empowerment has been achieved in the case of the Urraco Health Programme, but that this has been predominantly limited to personal empowerment. As with the PAEM case study, I want to ask questions about 'why' and 'how', in order to understand what enabled a process of empowerment to take place and what inhibited it. Where the points I want to make in relation to Urraco are similar to points I made about PAEM, I shall not repeat the arguments, though I shall indicate that they are relevant. Coming as it does after the PAEM case study, I shall make some comparisons between the two programmes here, although the main comparative content will be in Chapter Nine.

### **8.1 Aspects working in favour of the empowerment process**

As with PAEM, particular individuals have played key roles in the development of the Urraco Health Programme and therefore of any empowerment that has taken place within it, although there has not been one individual providing the strongest driving force throughout, playing the role that María Esther played in PAEM. The programme was initiated by a U.S. volunteer with CONCERN, Katherine Burke, who was a nutritionist. Her organising and encouragement and the efforts of Eva María, one of the first co-ordinators, helped the initial process of establishing the study circles and getting women out of their houses. Monica, the next U.S. volunteer, was not a nutritionist, but more of a general organiser. She was therefore in a position of having to encourage and support the co-ordinating team to take more responsibility for the content of the programme, while she concentrated on the organisational aspects. It is significant that Monica had a strong personal commitment to empowerment. So although the Programme *per se* did not have specific goals of empowering women, she was thinking about how to help the process happen and how to structure it into their activities. As she put it to me,

My goal in my own mind has been to see the women blossom, to use a qualitative statement. To see them come to life, to find the life in themselves, whether that be as a health promoter or whatever, but to come to life. To be able to have hope, for their own lives, for their communities, to feel animated... (Monica)

It was through her initiative that the themes covered in the sectoral meetings were widened out from directly health-related issues to include women's issues, including seeing violence against women as a health issue, but also seeing more general women's issues as appropriate issues for health promoters to learn about. She was clear that for personal empowerment to happen in the study circles, it needed to be happening within the co-ordinating team:

...the team spirit has changed a lot. We've worked through a lot of problems at the beginning. Definite conflicts. Personality conflicts. I hated the meetings when I first came, because of the tension amongst members, lack of respect, insults, mistrust, it was horrible. [...] I really have worked on that as a goal. [...] in meetings allowing them to talk about their personal lives. At first I thought we were really getting off the topic. And then I thought, 'wait a second, this is what it's about'. So that's been really good. I thought that if it really doesn't happen in the team it's not going to happen in the circles either. So that's changed the spirit a lot, sharing our personal lives. (Ibid.).

She also was very supportive of the team in taking on new things, such as travelling abroad, and latterly, taking over responsibility for the management of the programme's affairs.

The individuals making up the co-ordinating team have also been important in encouraging the women in the study circles. They are all 'local' women (whilst sharing the history of in-migration of large numbers of the local population). Several of them, including the co-ordinator of the team, Dolores, came into their role in the co-ordinating team through the study circles, and thus provide a model to the other women of what can be achieved by women just like them. None of them has the charisma of María Esther, which means not only that they have not had to contend

with the strong feelings in opposition that charisma seems to generate, but also that what they have achieved has been through dint of hard work and commitment that is greatly appreciated by women in the circles.

Another important individual for the Health Programme has been the Catholic Priest, Padre Chema. He came to the area around the time that Monica arrived. He has provided ongoing support and encouragement in many ways, including providing premises for the sectoral and team meetings, and using his role as priest to provide such reinforcement of the aspects of the programme as he could, for example insisting that women have a right to respect and equality. Monica gave me an example of this :

The women say that they really enjoyed learning about health, and they mentioned the women's rights stuff, that this was a whole new thing that they were exposed to and that they were discussing now, it was a topic that's legitimate. And I think it really helps that they see the priest supportive of that. At the *clausura* (graduation ceremony) he gave a speech on machismo as a *grave pecado* (sin). (Ibid.).

The Programme received support from CONCERN, in the form of the volunteers and the funding for the programme's activities, without which it is unlikely to have developed. There was some support from other external sources as well, in the form of visitors, some of whom then raised funds to contribute to activities. The co-ordinating team talked most about a visit from a women's group in New England, which had heard about the Programme through Monica. That visit was referred to several times to me, as well as the ongoing contact through letters, exchange of photographs etc., as an event of great significance. Not only did it bring a form of recognition and validation to the work of the programme, but it also appeared to be a factor in breaking the isolation and insignificance felt by the Urraco women. By the time I visited them, they had reached a point of not needing such external (U.S.) validation, as they were providing their own, but it seems to me that in order to reach the point of being able to validate themselves, some mechanism for challenging the cultural pattern of self invalidation and worthlessness was necessary

and that external validation and support is one way of achieving that. Other forms of networking and of maintaining contact with current debates, (I have a photograph of Marcela lying in a hammock outside a *champita*, a roughly built hut, in the middle of a banana plantation, totally engrossed in a copy of *Mujer Fempress*, the Chilean feminist magazine) in particular with various national and international women's organisations also contributed to this process.

The methodology used in the Health Programme was not innovatory in the way that PAEM's was, but some aspects of it nonetheless fed in to the process of personal empowerment experienced by the Health Promoters. The main 'building block' of the programme was the study circle, a small group of three to fifteen women. This small group focus provided a base group within which each woman could build confidence and take the risks involved in becoming more participative and active. The structure of sectoral meetings, as with PAEM, provided a forum for a wider exchange, meeting larger numbers of people, participating on a larger scale and in undertaking different activities. Sectoral meetings also served the purpose of giving the woman an identity as a member of the whole programme and not just her particular group. Within the sectoral meetings, the use of sociodrama was a central method. Women in the circles would prepare a roleplay on a particular theme. Sometimes these provided the opportunity for the expression of strong emotion, particularly when they related to areas of personal difficulty for the women. Monica again, speaking of changes she has noticed in the women since she first arrived in Urraco:

They've also been more active in presenting sociodramas. Some of the sociodramas just knock my socks off - about how explicit they were about the violence at home. Maybe they didn't see a lot of hope for getting out of it in some of the sociodramas, but that they had the awareness and were willing to present that publicly. And some of the women who presented it were themselves in a situation of violence and people in the audience knew. And they knew that others knew. But it was like a therapy, it was like art therapy or whatever. We had visitors, and afterwards the visitors were stunned by the obstacles that these women live with and they asked what do you do to deal with this, how do you survive? And Margarita looked at them and laughed

and said we do sociodramas. That's the way we release our tension.  
(Ibid.)

Women in the circles thus had the opportunity to move out of the home and immediate family both physically and psychologically, into a small group and then into a larger group, and for some of them, there was the step of participating in activities such as the *red de mujeres de la zona norte* which gave them an identity and entrance into activities in the wider world around them.

Another central way in which the Programme structure fed the process of personal empowerment of the women in the circles was through the teaching of specific skills. For a few women, the Health Promoter skills led directly to employment and therefore to a widening of economic choices available to them. For others, learning the skills and using them with members of the local community gave them a sense of self worth that had been missing before, as quotations in the previous chapter illustrated. Their standing in the local community and with their husbands and members of their families increased. It would require further research to find out if this effect was lasting for women who left the programme, but for those who remained in it and who maintained the *botequines* the effect was ongoing. I would surmise that, having once learned one set of new skills, a woman would be left with a greater sense of her capacity to learn and take on new activities and of having more ability to take opportunities should they arise. The women who left the programme because they were not being paid as promoters had developed a sense of their self-worth, although they expressed it 'negatively' in terms of the programme.

The Health Programme has a status of 'semi-autonomy' in relation to the Catholic Church structures. It operates under the wing of *Promoción Femenina*, the church organisation in the region focusing on women, participating in its activities and with a degree of formal input both ways (Eva María is on the committee of *Promoción Femenina*; Sister Bernadette has made input into sectoral meetings). The Programme is not, however, simply one more *Promoción Femenina* activity, since its independent funding gives it independent status and decision making. The co-

ordinating team were determined to maintain their independence even with the imminent withdrawal of CONCERN funding. I would assert that the degree of autonomy the programme has maintained has enabled it to provide a space where empowerment can happen more effectively than otherwise, particularly for members of the co-ordinating team. Some of the activities they have undertaken, such as their participation in *Enlace de Mujeres Cristianas Rurales* and the *Red de Mujeres de la Zona Norte* are not approved of by *Promoción femenina*.

The leadership style of the Programme has been another factor that has fed into the empowerment process, at least up to a point. Co-ordinating team members have been appointed from within the programme, because they had been able to develop their leadership skills within the study circles. Although the programme was heavily dependent on the foreign volunteers for several years, leadership and control of the programme has apparently successfully been handed over to the local women. This process has been encouraged and supported by the fact of a similar process happening in the other programme set up by CONCERN volunteers, the Literacy programme. A system of mutual support was being developed while I was there. I will return to the issue of leadership style later, as there are aspects which I see as inhibiting empowerment as well.

Like PAEM, the Urraco Health Programme has had an event recently which has put stress on the programme participants and the co-ordinating team. This was the brutal murder of one of the most active study circle co-ordinators, Nelly Suazo. (see Figure 8.1) This event initially was very disheartening to the women in the programme, and several people told me of feeling as if there was no point continuing the work soon after it happened. However, as time passed, Nelly's murder, and the organising that happened around it to try to obtain justice and to support her family had the effect of gathering women together and giving them more determination to continue. It gave them something to react against and organise around. Their efforts led to the second Honduran Feminist *Encuentro* being named in memory of Nelly Suazo, and the Urraco women saw their concern being taken up in a much bigger arena nationwide. The impact of this event was not as marked on the Urraco Programme

## Nelly Suazo

In 1991, Nelly Suazo joined the Urraco Health Promoters training programme. She arrived at the programme "a *mujer aplastada* - overwhelmed, crushed, without enthusiasm, discouraged, tired, squashed". She was the fifth of thirteen children, one of seven who survived. Her childhood was marked by poverty, and abuse from her father, who drank away his banana plantation wages. As the eldest surviving daughter, she worked hard in the home, helping her mother raise her siblings, and she left school after third grade to earn money selling what ever her mother could put together. At seventeen she moved into her boyfriend's parents' house, where she was responsible for domestic work. Later she and her boyfriend moved into their own house. He started being violent with her before the birth of their first child. Over the years it got worse, though Nelly never complained to others. The violence grew worse. It was after the fourth baby was born - the girl died at six months - that she joined the programme. At first Nelly would sit quietly. Gradually she began to open up and get involved. Then her husband began to object to her participation; he finally violently threatened to abandon the family if she did not give up her involvement. Something snapped inside her and she told him to go. Nelly continued with the programme, increasing her involvement. She became well-known for her creativity and her love of "sociodrama", through which she, with the others, expressed insights into their lives as women, often raising the issue of domestic violence. Nelly became involved in the *red de mujeres de la zona norte*, meeting with women from other parts of the country; one time she excitedly travelled to Tegucigalpa as a delegate to a national women's meeting, and was radiant with the impact of the visit for weeks afterwards.

During this time her sister Glenda had become involved with a man who was treating her badly. Nelly actively supported her and encouraged her to leave him, which she did. Then on April 8th 1993, - Holy Thursday - Glenda received a message from her ex-partner telling her to come to his house to collect some money from him. Suspicious, Glenda took Nelly with her. The man was not in when they arrived in the early evening. It was late, and they took a short-cut home though the banana plantation. They walked into a trap. The man and a friend were waiting for them with machetes. Nelly was brutally murdered and Glenda was left for dead. They were found seventeen hours later, hidden under banana leaves.

Nelly's murder was a profound shock for the Health Promoters programme and for the entire community; it took on a particular significance, the news coming as it did on Good Friday. At first there was shock and numbness. Then despair. Some women talked of abandoning the programme. Then some people got angry, and the fight to get the murder dealt with by the legal process provided a focus for action. Within the Honduran legal system it is very hard for poor people to get justice, and even reporting the murder took a month of bureaucratic to-ing and fro-ing. And this with the murderers known, and living in the community. Eventually, the community took matters into its own hands: one of the men was 'captured' by friends and members of Nelly's family and he was delivered to the authorities and imprisoned. Glenda's ex-partner was still at large in September 1993.

Figure 8.1: The Story of Nelly Suazo

as the conflict with the priest was in PAEM. Although it provided a focus for organising, it did not push the women to develop strategising and planning skills, to confront a powerful institution within their own communities or to have to defend their own programme and assert their commitment to it and belief in it. They were able, however, to move from seeing Nelly's case as an illustration of what happens to women who step out of line, to an example of a woman who had taken on great challenges, who must be remembered with pride, and who provides inspiration to those that remain to continue to push for equality and justice.

## **8.2 Aspects working against the empowerment process**

The chief obstacle to empowerment that I see in the structure of the Urraco Health Programme is the way that the programme has been structured around a two year training course. This has meant that women becoming involved in the programme have come into it with a particular set of expectations around learning a set of skills via a finite involvement as 'receivers' of what the course has to offer. I have already identified the actual learning of the skills as a positive factor in empowerment, but the expectations just referred to have in my view served to minimise the empowerment impact of other aspects of the programme and its methodology. The women participants have not taken on a sense of full 'ownership' of the programme as theirs to use and develop; they have followed a line of study and action identified by others as relevant to their needs or the needs of the community, seeing participation as a specific means to a limited 'end'. It is significant that, although several of the women I spoke to identified the desire to serve their community as their motivation for joining the programme, so many women left after the *clausura*, and that the thread of promoters wanting to be paid for their work was so strong. I am not wanting to imply that such a demand is unreasonable; merely to point out that the programme in and of itself apparently did not meet enough ongoing/perceived needs for the women to choose to continue to participate and invest their time and energy. As I see it, for the programme to provide an on-going forum for the empowerment process it would need to have a structure, focus and

methodology that would motivate women to continue to be active participants, and to give them the possibility of using their own initiative to tackle self-identified issues. It would need to develop a greater capacity to encourage a sense of agency for the programme as a whole and for the individual women and groups within it. If it took that route it is quite possible that the position of having only 'semi-autonomy' would need to be challenged.

I also have questions about whether having health as a main focus of activity gives sufficient scope for the empowerment process to operate. Health care problems are certainly a major drain on women's physical, mental and financial resources, and the provision of affordable health care and the reduction of child malnutrition have to make women's lives easier. But they do not lead women to challenge the social, political and economic relationships of power which underpin the position of women as main consumers (or would-be consumers) of health provision in a society such as Urraco. In focusing on training Health Promoters, the programme has chosen a structure and content that limits the numbers of women who can reasonably participate, since not many women in each community will want to take on that role. In doing so it also limits itself to working with the more confident (at least relatively) of the women in the communities, since many women are unable, as things stand, to conceive of themselves as being able to tackle a job such as being a Health Promoter. In addition, the programme faces a major challenge in relation to funding. The Health Promoters have to charge for medicines, but there is no likelihood of the programme meeting its costs through that route. Without funding, (which is currently being gradually withdrawn) it is hard to imagine the programme being able to sustain itself, despite the best intentions of the co-ordinating teams of both the health and literacy programmes to generate income.

As well as its structure, the methodology of the Health Programme has limited the empowerment process. The main method for teaching Health Promoters in the study circles was to work through the book Donde No Hay Doctor. The book itself is a text produced with exactly the kind of circumstances in Urraco in mind, and its contents are perfectly suitable. It was used as the only text, and each time the study

circles met, the women would read a passage once or more and use that as the basis of discussion. This gave the women a valuable chance to practise their literacy skills. But they were working in a way that limited the opportunities for developing their own themes and agendas. The study circles I attended may not have been typical, disrupted as they were by my presence as a foreigner and outsider, and coming as they did after the *clausura*, when a different book, *Buscando Remedio* (Looking for Remedy), from Nicaragua<sup>253</sup>. was being used as a text, but they seemed to me to be very rigid, and did not generate animated discussion or active enquiry. I had a sense that a formula was being followed. Most of the circles seemed to me to be very dependent on the co-ordinating team members in order to function. Monica confirmed this when I asked her about it:

The co-ordinators always say go ahead and run the meeting but they don't always do it because there's the mentality that it's like, a class. In some circles they do: some are better than others, but there's always a strain on the co-ordinators' time; they have outside meetings, outside trainings, so that's certainly the goal, to have them continue to meet. It's been easier in the communities where there's been somebody like Rosa working, who's one of the four who was really getting trained as a leader as well besides the team. Rosa would run the meeting, or Juana would run the meeting. So if we have a really strong woman she could go ahead and do it. You should be able to depend on any one of them. (Monica).

The reading of the text is supplemented with practising methods, when relevant, and by sociodramas and sharing of experience. However, unlike in the PAEM methodology, the experiences of the women themselves are not central to the programme. Centring the programme on working through a text, and on discussion usually led by someone from outside the group have both reinforced an attitude of dependency and an expectation of solutions coming from the outside. It has therefore not been a programme based on flexibility in order to respond to women's own needs and solutions as they identify them. Neither has it created many opportunities for women to make and learn from their own mistakes in the circles. It is also interesting to note that the accounts I was given of the expression of strong emotions

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<sup>253</sup> Ara & Marchand (1993).

within the programme were almost all (with the exception of events surrounding the murder of Nelly Suazo), connected with clashes between group members that ended with one or more people leaving the programme.

The limitations of the approach to leadership within the programme become apparent in relation to the methods used. Although there is a structure, mentioned earlier, of electing leaders from within the circles to act as circle co-ordinator, the methodology does not encourage those leaders as a group to develop their skills. Some of them have done so, but seemingly predominantly because of their individual personalities and prior confidence rather than through any deliberate training and development from the programme itself. That means that they were not in turn encouraged to deliberately foster the development of leadership skills among other members of their groups. In Rosa's case, that meant that she, having been elected to co-ordinate the circle, became the only person taking responsibility for any group activities. If anything needed leadership, she was the one to do it, taking on the role of treasurer and organiser of their 'credit union' as well. That gave her an important boost in confidence because of her group's confidence in her, but also limited the opportunities for personal development to her alone. The co-ordinating team did receive training in leadership issues through Monica, but it was too early to say how effective that has been in terms of the programme's continuing functioning and development now that Monica has left. It interests me that where, with PAEM, the programme is maintained now wholly by voluntary input, from group members and from *consejo* members, in Urraco the co-ordinating team are all paid for their work and the Health Promoters are not.

Cultural and local conditions have also played a part in limiting the process of empowerment in the Urraco Health Programme. Some of these are the same as or similar to those faced by the PAEM programme as well, including the strength of the Honduran culture of *machismo* and *caudillismo* (which, in the case of the department of Yoro, where Urraco is situated, takes a very strongly militaristic form). Others are more locally specific. In particular, many of the local communities in the Urraco sector are not particularly well established (as was the case in

Quitasueño in the PAEM case), because of the strong pattern of in-migration over the past ten years or so. Also, as mentioned in Chapter Seven, the local culture includes a strong violent element which, both in its reality and in perceptions of it, affects women's lives and their ability to react, respond or take action for themselves. It is possible, too, that the more employment-oriented nature of the area, particularly for the women in the camps, and the particularly difficult access to suitable land for self-provisioning agriculture, means that women have great difficulty in becoming and staying involved in a programme that requires a regular, inflexible commitment from them.

As a final point in considering the role that the Urraco Health Programme has had in empowering women, and the limitations of that process, I find myself interested to note that in Urraco, as with PAEM, the activities have had a non-economic focus. In my analysis of PAEM I identified this as a factor in favour of the programme's ability to support the empowerment process. In Urraco, I see it more as a hindrance. I think the reason for this must lie in the potentials opened up by both programmes. In Urraco, the non-economic focus was just that; it was also a programme with considerable economic costs and very little potential for generating resources other than by grant aid. The programme was, in many ways, compensation for the absence of state provision. In PAEM, the non-economic focus was a crucial part of the methodology, but used in a way that had the effect of opening up a wide range of possibilities for economic empowerment built on a foundation of social empowerment. For me this confirms my understanding that the most important aspects of programmes and activities intended to encourage a process of empowerment lie in the forms of organisation and the development of organisational strength and agency built on the foundations of individual agency. I shall explore this further in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Nine: A Model of Empowerment**

### **9.1 From Simple to Dynamic Model**

It now makes sense to return to the issue of 'empowerment': what it is and how it may be achieved. Before listening to women in Honduras (Chapter Two), I developed a simple model of empowerment, derived from a review of the literature. In this model I distinguished three dimensions of empowerment: the personal, close relationships and collective, with the latter being further divided into local/informal and formal/institutional scales. In this chapter I shall reassess the model using the knowledge gained from the experiences of PAEM and the Urraco programme to refine and redefine it. I shall also draw on accounts of empowerment that have become available since undertaking my field research, both to situate my work within the very recent literature and to provide further illustration.

Having used the simple model (Figure 2.1, p. 24) to aid me in my analysis of both PAEM and the Urraco Health Programme, it is clear to me that, whilst the structure of the model was useful in approaching the task, it was generally not adequate for aiding detailed analysis. It did not enable a description of the complexity of empowerment processes in either organisation in a way that left the processes transparent. The original three-part model describes the locations of the processes but not their detail, and does not distinguish between 'processes' and 'changes that are a result of such processes'. It was also inadequate for discussion of the operation of power in either context, of the different forms of power, or for the development of and/or access to power. In addition to these shortcomings, which can perhaps be seen as structural, the model does not give sufficient analytical capacity to make it useful to an external agency looking to identify appropriate interventions/forms of support.

I therefore find that I need to develop the model further, into something more dynamic that makes the complexities of the empowerment process(es) visible; that makes the workings of power more transparent; that differentiates between the

'ingredients' of empowerment and the 'changes' (but that does not see those as 'final changes' but rather as achievements which can then feed back into an ongoing process). This will make the model of more use in the process(es) of planning and strategy development.

Although Figure 2.1 communicates some degree of overlap and inter-relationship between the 'dimensions', it grossly oversimplifies the nature of empowerment which I found in my case studies. The reality of the empowerment process(es) is a complex interrelation and interaction between a multitude of different elements; in addition, those interrelations and interactions are not in themselves static. There is a need, instead, for a model that can account both for change and variation and which also can allow an analysis of the inter-relations and interactions of different elements. In order not only to separate out the sections ('dimensions') but to show how they interact and 'feed' each other, the model needs in some way to incorporate a three-dimensional quality.

In order to add detail to the original model, therefore, I shall divide out the three 'dimensions' - but with no intended implication that the 'dimensions' are 'separate' or independent. Also, because of the linear nature of written text, I shall give an order to the 'dimensions' that is not intended to imply a direct linear relationship between them. I am not attempting to identify causality within this revised model, since, for example, increased economic independence may contribute to an increase in individual self-confidence; or increased individual self-confidence may contribute to an increase in economic independence. Indeed, the two may feed off each other in a circular manner that makes it difficult to differentiate between them - or no positive interaction may occur.

In Chapter Four I described the methods I used to identify the various aspects of empowerment through the fieldwork interviews. Once these had been identified, I categorised them into three groups. Some were 'contextual', or 'material', being part of the environment in some way. Some were 'structural' (in terms of the nature of the organisations and its activities). Others represent fundamentally psychological or

psycho-social processes. This latter category is where I found the most consistency, between the two cases and across interviews. Most outside observers referred to aspects in this category as being the most significant area of change they perceived. It is also a category which I suggest, using the notion of the development of 'power to' and 'power from within' as outlined in Chapter Two, hinging as they do on self-perception and the 'un-doing' of 'internalised oppression', is central to processes of empowerment. In revising the model of empowerment, then, I want to distinguish between what I shall call the 'core' of the empowerment process, and the circumstances that appear to encourage or inhibit the changes which make up that 'core' (see Figure 9.1). The 'core' consists of the kinds of transformation of the individual or the group that, from my analysis of case study material and from my personal and professional experience, appear to be the 'keys' that open 'locks' on the empowerment door. In contrast, the elements that contribute to or obstruct the 'core' of the empowerment process are diverse, and vary from woman to woman or group to group.

It is important that a model of empowerment recognise that the individual or group comes to the process with existing experience and history. The 'empowerment process' is not something that suddenly starts at a certain point in time, but has been operating in various ways ever since the group existed or the individual was born. The model therefore needs to include recognition of prior experience. Prior experience can feed in to the empowerment process in many ways; it may affect the strength of particular encouraging or inhibiting pressures; it may 'bias' the areas of impact in which new power is gained; it certainly will influence the nature of the 'core' of the process. For example, a woman with scarcely any experience of interacting with people outside her immediate family may be developing her self-confidence and self-esteem in terms of her capacity to engage with her peers and with new situations 'close to home'. A woman with experience of some sort of leadership, perhaps as an animator, will also be developing self-confidence and self-esteem, but for her these processes are likely to be located in her interactions with more experienced leaders, with 'authority' or with organisational tasks which 'stretch' her in some way. These two women's experience of, say, 'inhibiting'

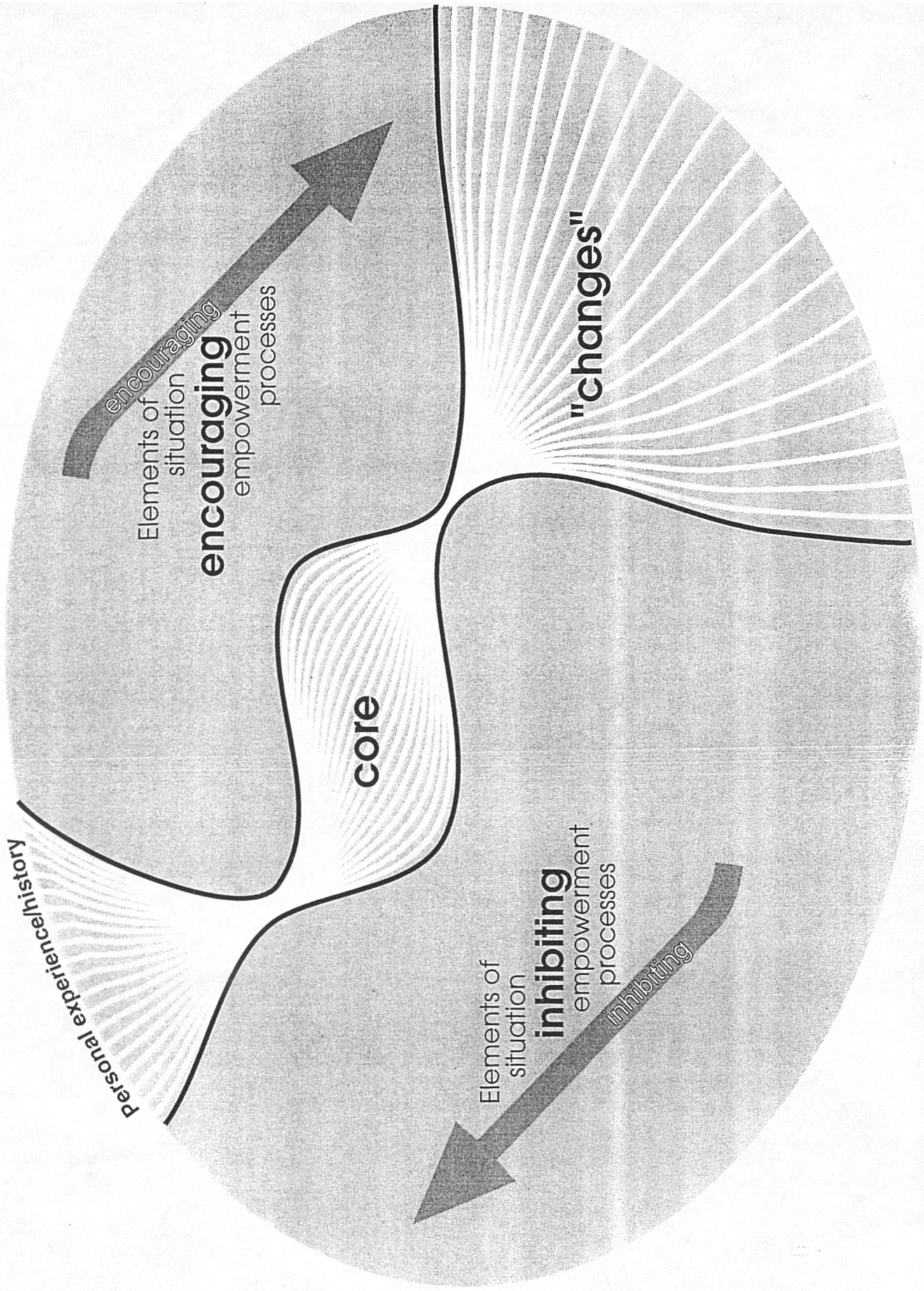


Figure 9.1: Model of Empowerment

pressures on time, will be different. The former is more likely to be immobilised by such pressures, whereas the latter, having coped with similar constraints in other situations, may have developed strategies to deal with them. I am indicating 'prior experience' at only one point in the diagram in order to keep the picture simple, (again, see Figure 9.1).

By definition, the empowerment process opens up for the women new forms of power and/or new areas in which power can be exercised. These are the areas in which the existence of the empowerment 'changes' can be observed more tangibly, and can be clearly distinguished from the 'core' elements. Again, these areas cover a wide range, depending on specific context and circumstances.

In order to fill out the new model of empowerment I have outlined, I shall use the two case study organisations to present two illustrations. Using the outline of the model, I shall look in turn at empowerment at the personal, collective and close relationships dimensions. From the description and analysis in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight, I have taken my codings of the elements identified as important or significant by the women I interviewed and applied them to the revised model of empowerment. Some of these elements were identified explicitly by the women in interviews or conversations. Some were implicit in what they were saying or were identified by outsiders to the programme (including myself) as important, and I have included them in the model because although the women themselves were either not aware of those elements or did not think to mention them to me, they form an important part of the overall picture, since my focus is on 'the empowerment process' rather than 'the women's view of the empowerment process'. Appendix 4 shows the contents of the applied model across the dimensions and organisations, for more easy comparison. I want to see how the experiences outlined to me in interviews fit with the revised model of empowerment outlined at the beginning of this chapter, and to discover whether the model can take my analysis of the two programmes a step further than I was able to do in Chapters Six and Eight<sup>255</sup>.

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<sup>255</sup> The reader is referred back to Chapters Five - Eight for the textual evidence drawn from the interviews, which will not be replicated here.

## 9.2 Empowerment in PAEM

### 9.2.1 Personal empowerment

#### **The 'Core'**

In the personal dimension, the 'core' of the empowerment process involves, as I have already suggested, some very fundamental psychological and psycho-social processes, to which individual women alluded repeatedly (see Figure 9.2). Central to these are the development of self-confidence and self esteem, and of a sense of agency, as being an individual who can interact with her surroundings and initiate/cause things to happen. Without them, the individual is not in a position to take/create/wield power except in the form of manipulation. I have added 'dignity' to the core aspects. It is a word many of my interviewees used, and is a term used in Latin America, more commonly than it is used in English, to mean self-respect, self-worth, honour and the expectation of receiving respect from others. These are all qualities which contribute to the individual's capacity for generating/wielding power. I have also included 'a sense of self within a wider context'. This is not as explicitly identified in interviews, but seems to me an essential part of the 'core' if the individual is to be able to move out of the gender-assigned roles that her context and culture have given her<sup>256</sup>.

#### **Encouraging aspects**

PAEM interviewees identified a number of features of the PAEM programme and their participation in it which I believe contributed to/encouraged the 'core' of the empowerment process for them (again, see Figure 9.2). Several of them, such as travel, activity outside the home, sharing of problems/support and being part of a group and sharing its activities in some way reduce the isolation of the individual woman in her home and immediate family, and give her access to and mechanisms for interaction with a wider sphere of influence. Some of them give the individual the chance to develop particular skills, both practical (such as literacy) and social

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<sup>256</sup> There is, of course, a vast literature on the development of the self. Fogel (1993) contends that the human mind and sense of self must be seen as developing out of the processes of communication and relationship formation (in which culture is a central part) between the subject and other individuals.

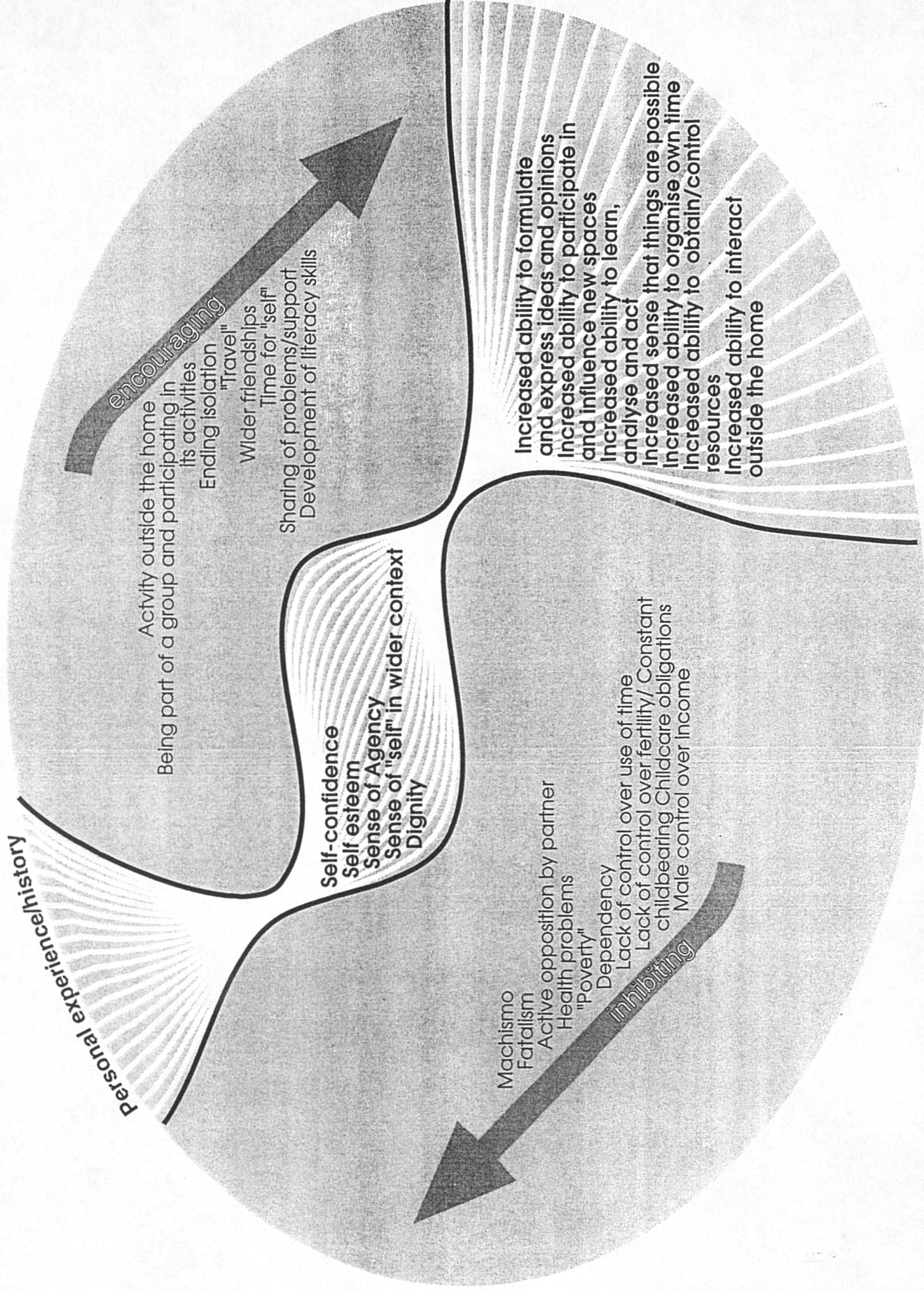


Figure 9.2: PAEM: Personal Empowerment

(participation in meetings and discussions). Importantly, many of them also have the effect of strengthening the identity of the individual separate from her role as housewife, mother and so on, and to have a space in her life to be a self not focused only on the needs of others but also on her own needs<sup>257</sup>. This makes it easier for the individual to generate ideas and hold opinions that differ from those of the people around them, which is a necessary ability for generating/wielding power. The spiritual base of the programme was also seen as important; as was the opportunity to express strong emotions.

### Obstacles

Figure 9.2 also shows features that the women identified as being obstacles or problems. I have defined them as aspects which inhibit (or obstruct) the empowerment process. Some of these, such as the women's fatalism, active opposition by their partners, *machismo* (including male control over income), and dependency are components of the cultural, social and physical conditions in which the women live, and of the gender roles to which they are expected to conform. Others, such as poverty and health problems are aspects of the political and economic situation these women face. Still others, such as their lack of control over fertility and resultant constant childbearing, childcare obligations, and lack of control over use of time do not fit neatly into any of those categories, but straddle the intersections between them. Put another way, the obstacles include elements of the oppression under which the women live, both as females and as poor people, and of the 'internalised oppression' with which they have to engage if they wish to change their situation and position.

The development of the 'core' of the empowerment process for the individual women in PAEM has been successful (or unsuccessful), therefore, to the extent that they have been able individually to overcome the effects of the inhibiting/obstructing

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<sup>257</sup> For many women this distinction between her own needs and the needs of others did not appear to have meaning: my question about her own needs was almost always answered with reference to the needs of others. In other words, the meeting of others' needs was perceived as her *own* need. It was the more visible leaders who were able to distinguish between the two. This illustrates the cultural embeddedness of 'woman-as-carer', especially in relation to 'practical gender needs'.

elements with the strengths they gain from the existence and/or development of the encouraging features, building on existing personal experience and history. The women, for example, with fewer children or with older children seemed to be more able to take an active role in the organisation (see Appendix One) and were more likely to have strong opinions and to be able to make changes in the close relationships dimension.

### **Personal Empowerment Changes**

In identifying the 'changes' in the personal empowerment dimension, I have put together a composite picture. Each woman has her own process(es) with her own 'changes', and how these are configured depends on her own history/experience, circumstances and actions. The specific configuration also depends on the nature of the interaction between the personal, close relationships and collective dimensions of the empowerment process. The 'changes' most often referred to by the PAEM women I interviewed (though not necessarily identified in the language I have used to describe them here) are shown in Figure 9.2. They include an increased ability to formulate and express ideas and opinions and to participate in and influence new 'spaces', to learn, analyse and act. There is an increased sense that things are possible, and with this, greater ability to organise time, access resources and interact outside the home.

#### **9.2.2 Collective Empowerment**

I shall turn next to the 'collective empowerment' dimension as I saw it in PAEM. This is very closely related to the personal dimension, since without empowerment at a personal level it is very hard for the individual to be active collectively. I deduce that it is also very difficult for a group to become independently active and effective without some critical mass of individuals participating who have achieved a degree of personal empowerment. To an extent, therefore, there is some linear relationship between the two dimensions; however, as I have already shown in

describing the personal dimension, there is also a circular interrelationship: participation in the group may feed the process of personal empowerment and vice versa.

### **The 'core'**

The process of collective empowerment builds on any pre-existing experience, whether of the group itself, or of individual members of the group, both through their participation in other groups or collective activities and their individual experience. The 'core' of collective empowerment is similar to that of personal empowerment, focusing on group identity, dignity and collective agency (see Figure 9.3). I have also included in the 'core' of this dimension something which could also be seen as a 'change', self-organisation and management. I include it in the 'core' because I see it as intimately connected with and reinforcing of the development of the other 'core' elements and as a fundamental way in which a group takes and wields power in relation to its own activities. So many times in the history of development projects with women where self-organisation and management have not been encouraged and developed, external politics or the withdrawal of external support have led to the collapse of women's groups and organisations; I was told of several in the course of my fieldwork. I am therefore choosing to identify self-organisation and management as a 'core' element in relation to collective empowerment.

### **Encouraging elements**

The features encouraging the development of the 'core' of collective empowerment are many (see Figure 9.3). Some of them are related to the organisational form used: the emphasis on developing leadership from within the groups and on training, the identification of own needs, the methodology based on respect and learning from the women's own experiences. Others are related to the activities undertaken, including small income generating projects, the workshop discussions on sexuality, and networking. There is also a group of encouraging elements related to the support received from key individuals such as the priest at the start, and, in a non-prescriptive, flexible way, from the agency which provided funding. María Esther,

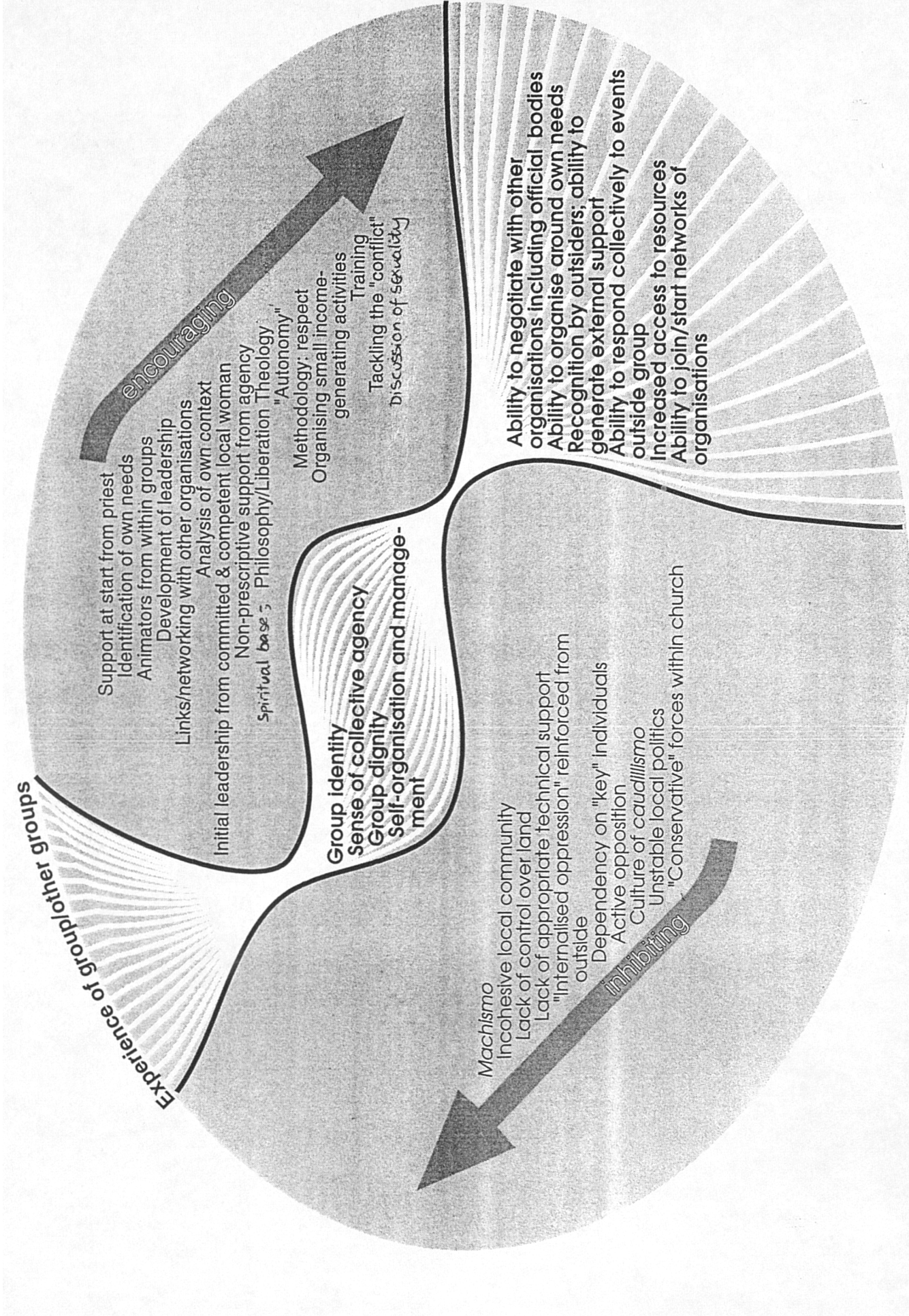


Figure 9.3: PAEM: Collective Empowerment

in giving initial and ongoing leadership as a competent local woman, also provided encouragement. Other features encouraging empowerment are the commitment to the empowerment of women implicit in the philosophy and methodology of PAEM, which has some of its origins in liberation theology, giving a strong spiritual base, and the 'autonomy' developed by the programme over time. For the groups that stayed with the programme and for the organisation as a whole, tackling the conflict with the new priest also strengthened the empowerment process.

### **Obstacles**

The elements inhibiting the development of the 'core' of collective empowerment are also many (again, see Figure 9.3). Dominant among them are cultural characteristics, in terms of *machismo* and *caudillismo*, both reinforced by the action of conservative forces within the church. Other elements, such as the incohesive local community and unstable local politics in the case of Quitasueño, lack of control over land and lack of appropriate technical support are related to the local or national political and economic context or the situation of women in relation to the law. It is important to note that some of the inhibition of the empowerment process comes from within the women themselves, in the form of 'internalised oppression' (which is then reinforced from outside) - the ways in which they believe and act on the idea that their role in society is limited in particular ways. Another obstacle to empowerment has been the dependency of the organisation on key individuals, and on María Esther in particular. For the groups that left PAEM because of the conflict, the conflict itself has been an obstacle and active opposition has contributed to the inhibition of empowerment.

### **Collective Empowerment 'Changes'**

The 'changes' of collective empowerment (see Figure 9.3) include an ability to negotiate with other organisations including official bodies, and PAEM now has recognition from outsiders and an ability to generate external support for its activities. The women are now able to organise around their own needs collectively, to respond together to events outside the group and to join/initiate networks of organisations. Importantly, there has also been an increase in their access to

resources such as funding, expertise and equipment. These changes can be further divided into social, economic, political and educational changes.

### 9.2.3 Close relationships

The close relationship dimension of empowerment differs from the other two dimensions in that it fits more closely (although even so, not exclusively) into a linear relationship with them: it appears from my interview material that empowerment in close relationships does not happen until some personal empowerment has been achieved.

#### **The 'core'**

The 'core' of empowerment in this dimension is not *per se* to do with increased confidence, self-esteem and agency, although those do play a part in the 'core'. As the women described their close relationships, the 'core' of empowerment here is associated with the development of the individual woman's abilities to negotiate, communicate and defend herself and her rights (overtly or covertly), and to receive support through that process (see Figure 9.4). Without those abilities the close relationships are very unlikely to change. In order to do those things she needs to have experienced some degree of empowerment in the other dimensions, since the skills in the 'core' of empowerment in close relationships are themselves 'changes' coming out of personal and/or group empowerment, and I have therefore also included in the 'core' a sense of self in the relationship and 'dignity'.

#### **Encouraging elements**

The processes at the 'core' of empowerment in close relationships are encouraged (see Figure 9.4) by the general participation in a group and by the 'successes' of that group, and by the ending of the individual's isolation in the home. In particular, the opportunity to share problems with other women is seen as important by many of the women I interviewed. In relation to their relationships with their partners, they insist in particular that it has made a big difference to them to have a concept of 'women's rights' and a knowledge of what those rights might consist of, and a

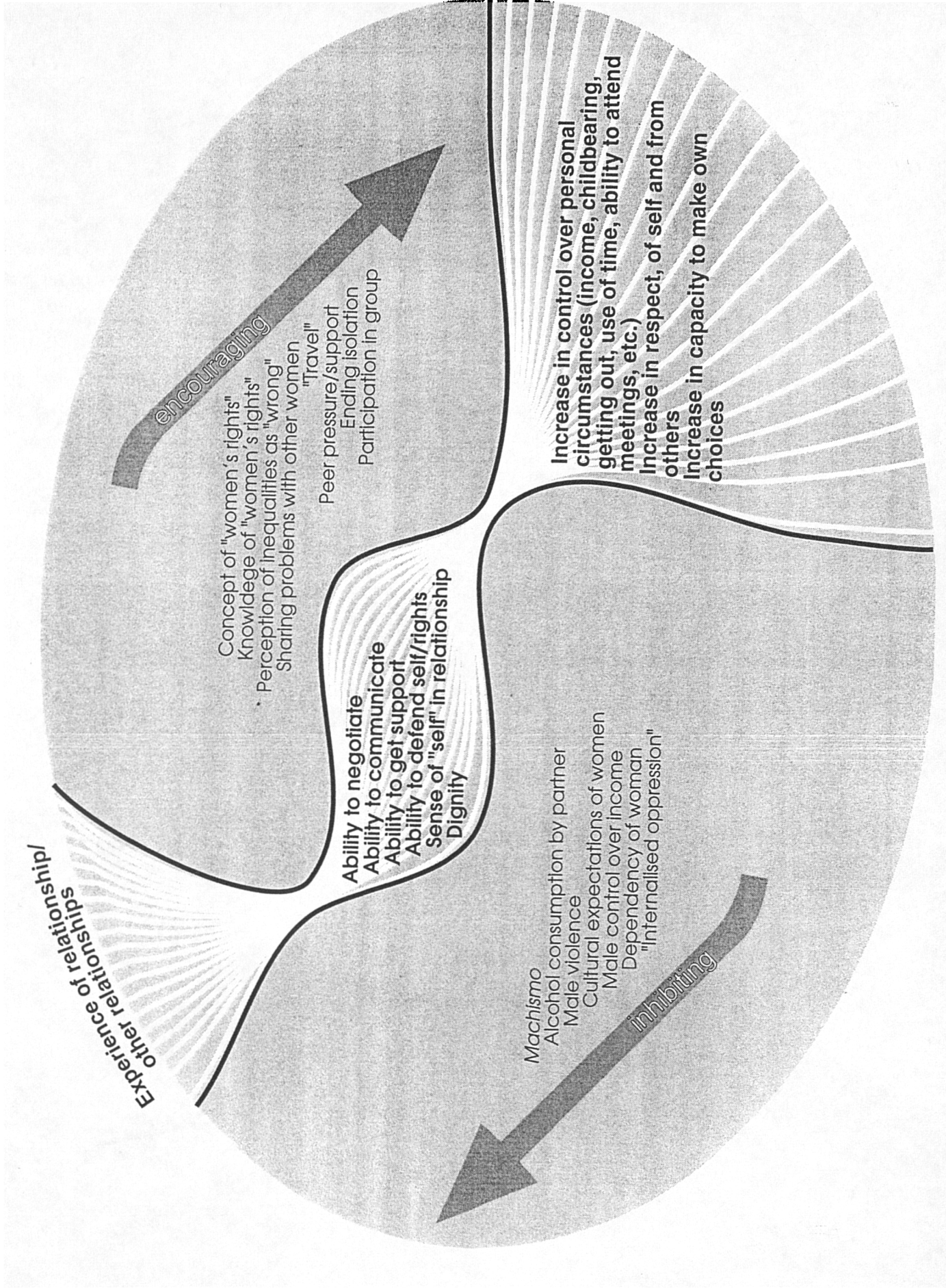


Figure 9.4: PAEM: Empowerment in Close Relationships

perception of inequalities as wrong. Peer pressure and support were also encouraging of empowerment in close relationships.

### **Obstacles**

The forces working against empowerment in close relationships, in addition to the general cultural expectations of the women and the *machismo* of the men, include male violence (physical or mental), sometimes connected to the consumption of alcohol. In addition, the position of most PAEM women is one of dependency, economically or otherwise, with men usually controlling income and other resources. 'Internalised oppression' is a major obstacle to empowerment here, reinforcing any 'actual' dependency.

### **Close Relationship Changes**

For women who have achieved change in their personal relationships, the 'changes' include an increase in control over their personal circumstances, such as income, fertility, ability to get out of the house, use of time and ability to attend meetings. They describe an increase in respect, both of themselves and from others (including their husbands) and an increased ability to make choices within the relationship.

## **9.3 Empowerment in the Urraco Health Project**

In turning now to the Urraco case study, I shall use my outline revised model of empowerment again to provide a framework for understanding the processes at work as identified through interviews and observation.

### **9.3.1 Personal Empowerment**

#### **The 'Core'**

Two elements were repeatedly referred to in the Urraco interviews that would form part of the 'core' of personal empowerment: the development of self-confidence and of self esteem. As was seen in Chapter Eight, these were seen as the main areas of change achieved by women participating in the programme. I am also including

(somewhat tentatively, and therefore bracketed, because it is not very strongly apparent) other 'core' elements, a 'sense of self in a wider context', Sense of Agency and Dignity (see Figure 9.5).

### **Encouraging aspects**

Urraco interviewees described the isolation they had experienced prior to the programme as a severe limitation on their lives. They identified a number of ways in which their activity in the health programme helped them to break that isolation (see Figure 9.5). These included getting out of the house and out of the immediate community, making friends and participating in group activities. They also talked about learning skills, the health related skills and literacy skills, as being important and contributing to the development of their confidence. Other 'encouraging' elements identified were the issuing of diplomas on completion of the two-year course, the chance to share problems and get support, and the encouragement of the U.S. volunteer and the parish priest. The programme gave them a role in the community which carries prestige, and helped them feel better about themselves. Some of the women identified the fact of the programme working only with women as a feature that helped them strengthen the 'core' aspects of self-confidence and self-esteem.

### **Obstacles**

Many of the elements inhibiting empowerment identified in Urraco are, as with PAEM, components of the cultural, social and physical conditions in which the women live and the gender roles to which they are expected to conform (Figure 9.5). These include *machismo*, with their husbands not giving permission to participate, and negative stereotypes and gossip in the wider community about women who participate. There are economic obstacles as well: the lack of employment opportunities in the area and the tendency of the men to control family income. Women lack control over fertility and have childcare obligations which make it a major challenge to participate in the programme; some feel that in order to participate actively in the programme they may have to neglect their children.

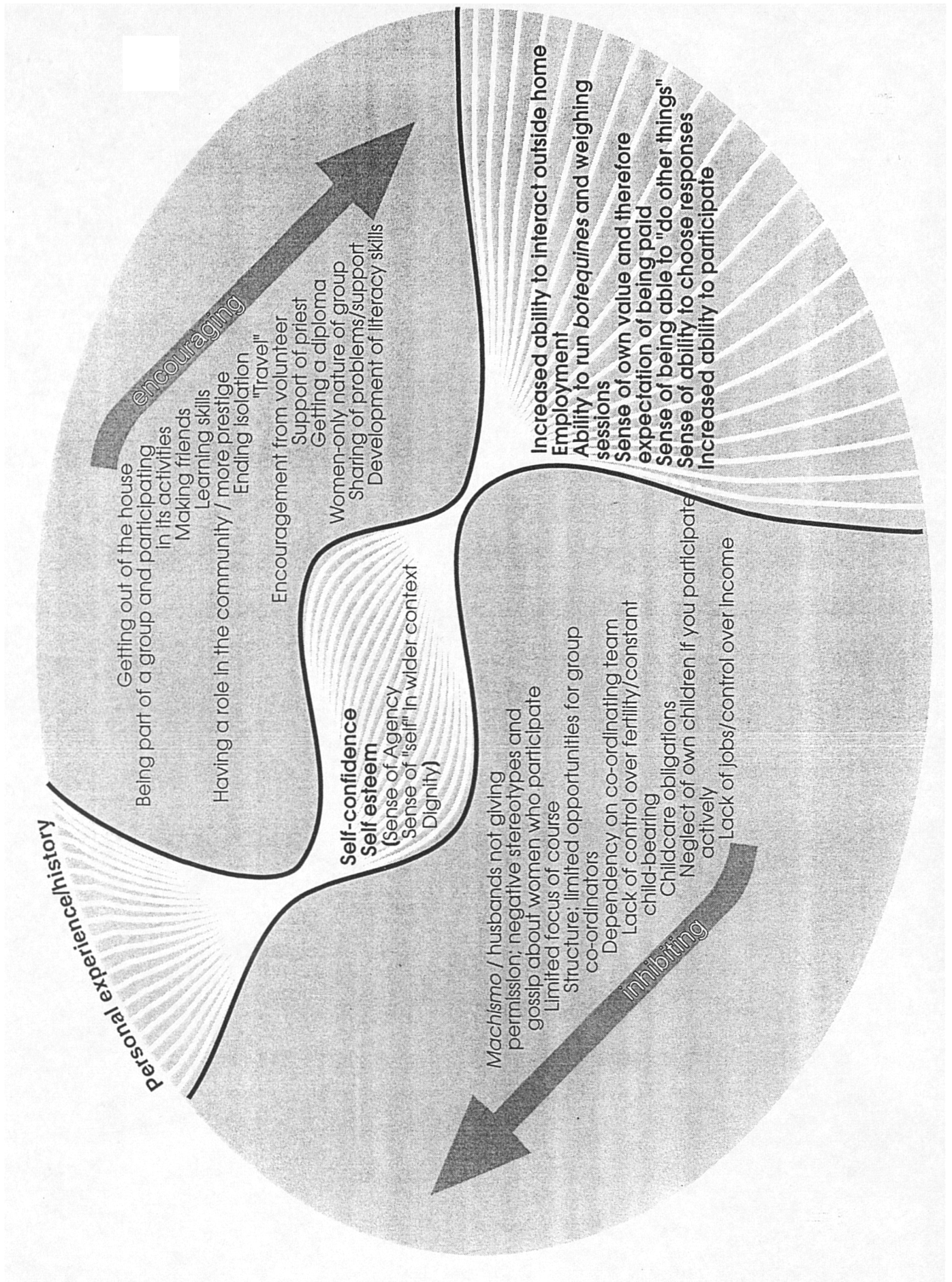


Figure 9.5: Urraco: Personal Empowerment

Other obstacles are linked to the structures of the programme itself. The limitations imposed by having a 'course' structure provide a built-in 'end' to women's involvement, and gives a rather static picture of what can and should be achieved by the programme. As a 'course' there is also a relationship constructed whereby some people have the knowledge and others do not. This places restrictions on the possibilities of individual or group initiative within the programme. In addition, the study circle co-ordinators have a limited role and there are few possibilities within the programme structure for them to develop their abilities and be encouraged. The 'course' structure also encourages dependency of the groups on members of the co-ordinating team, with an expectation that a co-ordinator will come to study circle meetings, and consequent discouragement in the study circles if they are absent.

### **Changes**

Some of the 'changes' linked with personal empowerment in Urraco (see Figure 9.5) are quite specific, including the learning of particular skills (such as those needed to run the *botiquines* and the weighing sessions); for a few women this has led to employment. Less tangible, but nonetheless evident, are an increased ability to interact outside the home, a sense of having the ability to choose responses and of being able to participate in activities that they would not have been able to do before. There is also an increased ability to participate in the small groups and in the larger sectoral meetings (including in other fora such as the church), and for some, a sense of value and therefore an expectation of being paid for their work.

### **9.3.2 Collective empowerment**

#### **The 'core'**

Looking at the 'core' of collective empowerment in Urraco I found a very different picture for the Health Promoters (Figure 9.6) and for the co-ordinating team members (Figure 9.7). The Health Promoters told me that their confidence in themselves, as a group and as study circles, has increased somewhat. A few of the circles had organised other activities in addition to studying, so I have included a 'sense of collective agency' and 'self-organisation and management', also in

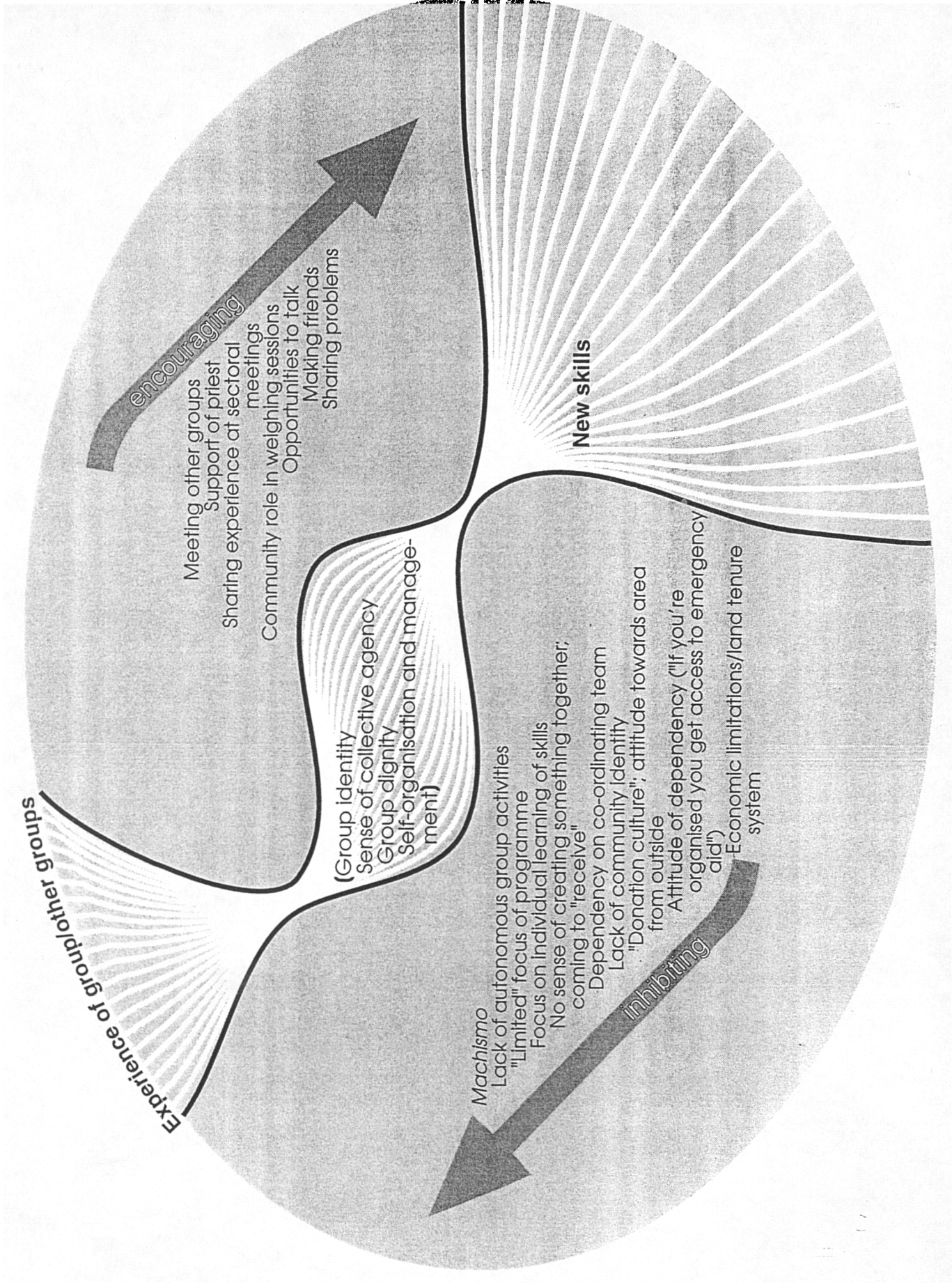


Figure 9.6: Urraco: Collective Empowerment (Health Promoters)

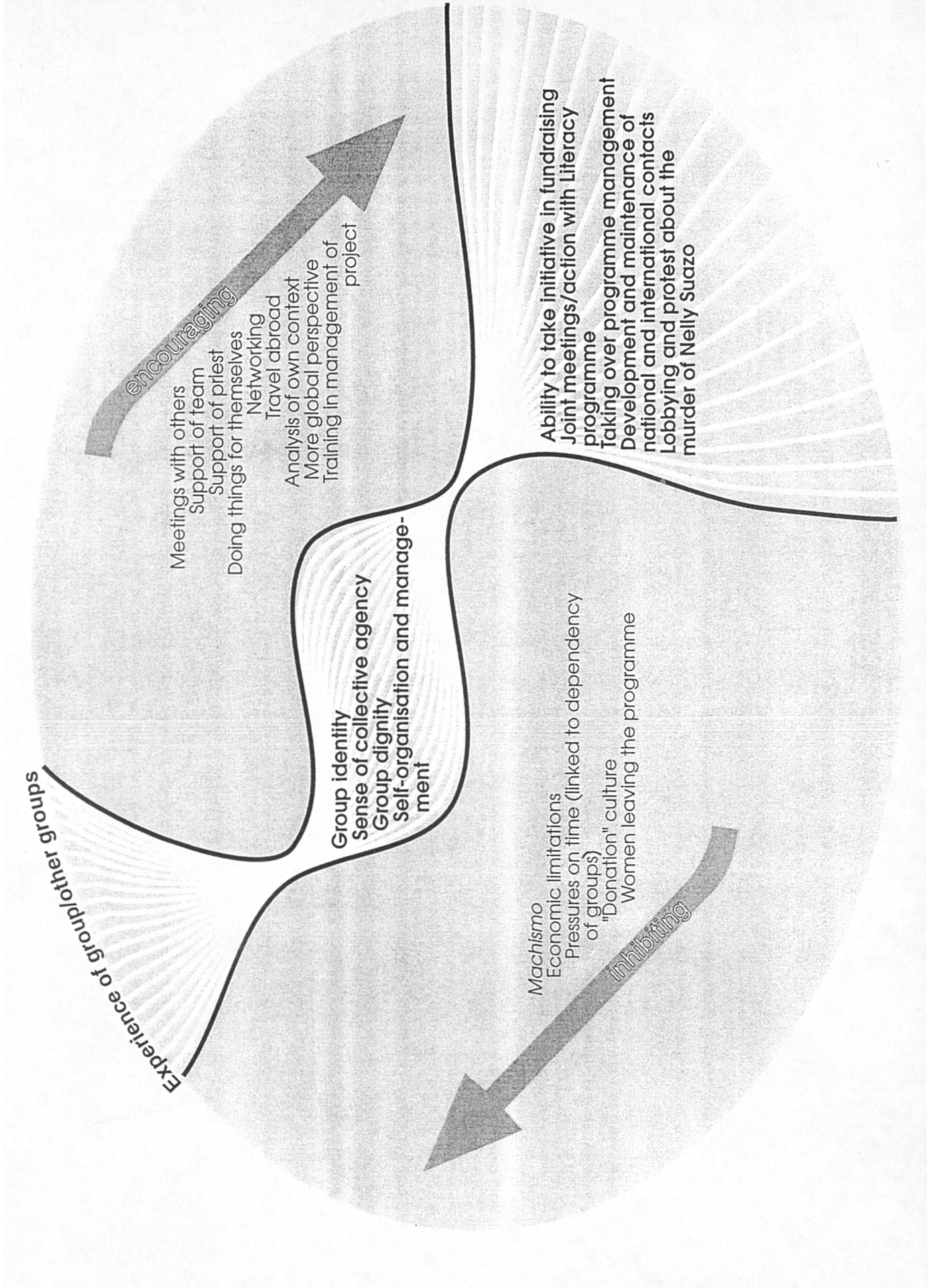


Figure 9.7: Urraco: Collective Empowerment (Co-ordinating Team)

parentheses in the 'core' for the Health Promoters. For the members of the co-ordinating team the picture of the 'core' is much more definite (see Figure 9.7). The interview material with them gave me more of an indication that they have developed a sense of identity and dignity as a team and have taken on 'ownership' of the programme to a large degree, although there was not much detail in what they told me. In order to fill out Figure 9.6 I have had to rely on my interviews with 'outsiders' such as Padre Chema, and on Monica for some of the details, which were broadly confirmed by my own observations. There is evidence of the development of a sense of agency, particularly in the way they have been responding to the impending gradual withdrawal of funding. The team have been tackling effectively the task of taking over the management of the programme, so I have included self-organisation and management in the 'core'.

### **Encouraging elements**

For the Health Promoters, the development of group confidence has been encouraged by the various ways in which they have interacted as groups, both as separate groups in the opportunities to talk, to make friends and to share problems, and in shared experiences with other groups such as the sectoral meetings and visits from or to 'outside' groups. The support of the priest has also been a positive influence. The groups' status and identity within the communities, particularly through the weighing sessions, has also helped the development of confidence.

The 'encouraging' aspects for the co-ordinating team have included opportunities to be trained in and learn about and practise the skills of managing the programme, to do things for themselves. They have also had opportunities for networking, both within the country and abroad, and the support of working in a team. As part of these activities they have had to develop an analysis and understanding of their own situation which encompasses a more global perspective, situating their work within the context of Central America and the 'third world'. For the team, the support of the priest has also been important.

## Obstacles

The 'inhibiting' features identified in relation to the Health Promoters (see Figure 9.6) include some related to the social and cultural conditions, such as *machismo*, the strong 'donation culture' and the attitude of dependency that both comes from outside (for example the regular arrival in the area of 'medical brigades' of volunteers who provide a flurry of vaccinations, medicines and so on and then go away again) and from within ('if you are "organised" that gives you access to emergency aid programmes'). Economic obstacles, particularly related to the land tenure system and the large-scale export-oriented agriculture of the area, discourage the groups from tackling collective projects. Other obstacles relate, as with the personal empowerment dimension, to the structure of the programme itself. These include the general absence of autonomous activities by the groups, the 'course' structure and the focus on individual learning of skills. The programme does not provide a sense of creating something together: individual women come to receive. The dependency on the co-ordinating team mentioned above also functions to inhibit collective empowerment, since groups as well as individual women get demoralised if team members do not come to meetings. The 'course' structure also inhibits collective empowerment by providing few opportunities for the development of an identity of being part of the programme as a whole for women in the groups who are not in the co-ordinating team. The sectoral meetings are in part an attempt to counter that difficulty, but do not succeed in removing it. Nor does the 'course' structure extend the impact of the programme beyond the group of Health Promoters (apart from the provision of a service) to empowerment of women in the wider community.

The obstacles to collective empowerment for the co-ordinating team include some of the cultural and social elements identified in other 'dimensions', such as the 'donation' culture and *machismo* (see Figure 9.7). There are also some structural elements, including the pressures on the co-ordinators' time (which is linked with the dependency of the groups on the co-ordinators' presence at meetings), and the discouraging effects of women leaving the programme. The economic limitations of

the region, because of the dominant focus on large-scale monoculture for export, also act as an obstacle to the team's sense of its ability to act.

### **Collective Empowerment Changes**

'Changes' for the Health Promoters in terms of collective empowerment are apparently limited (see Figure 9.6). The new skills learned are to an extent collectively used, but for this group there is little other evidence of collective empowerment leading to action.

'Changes' for the co-ordinating team are closely linked with the management and survival of the health programme (see Figure 9.7). From being totally separate programmes, links have been forged between the Health Programme and the Literacy Programme. The co-ordinating team have started to meet regularly with the Literacy team, to support each other and to devise a fundraising strategy. The co-ordinating team has gradually taken over all the management of the health programme, and had developed their own links with national and international networks. They were also active in organising lobbying and protest in relation to the murder of Nelly Suazo and the impunity of her killer, (see after page 176) and these activities brought the team (plus Nelly's own study circle and a few other Health Promoters who knew her well) a reinforced sense of purpose and determination.

### **9.3.3 Close Relationships**

#### **The 'core', encouraging elements, obstacles and changes**

Figure 9.8 shows the aspects identified through interviews relating to the area of empowerment and close relationships for the women in the Urraco Health Programme. The women did not talk much to me about their close relationships and there was much less consistency in their experience. This partly reflects the presence of a higher proportion of single women (whether never married, widows or separated) in the programme. The 'core' elements identified related to the women's abilities to negotiate and communicate. The presence of a supportive partner was the

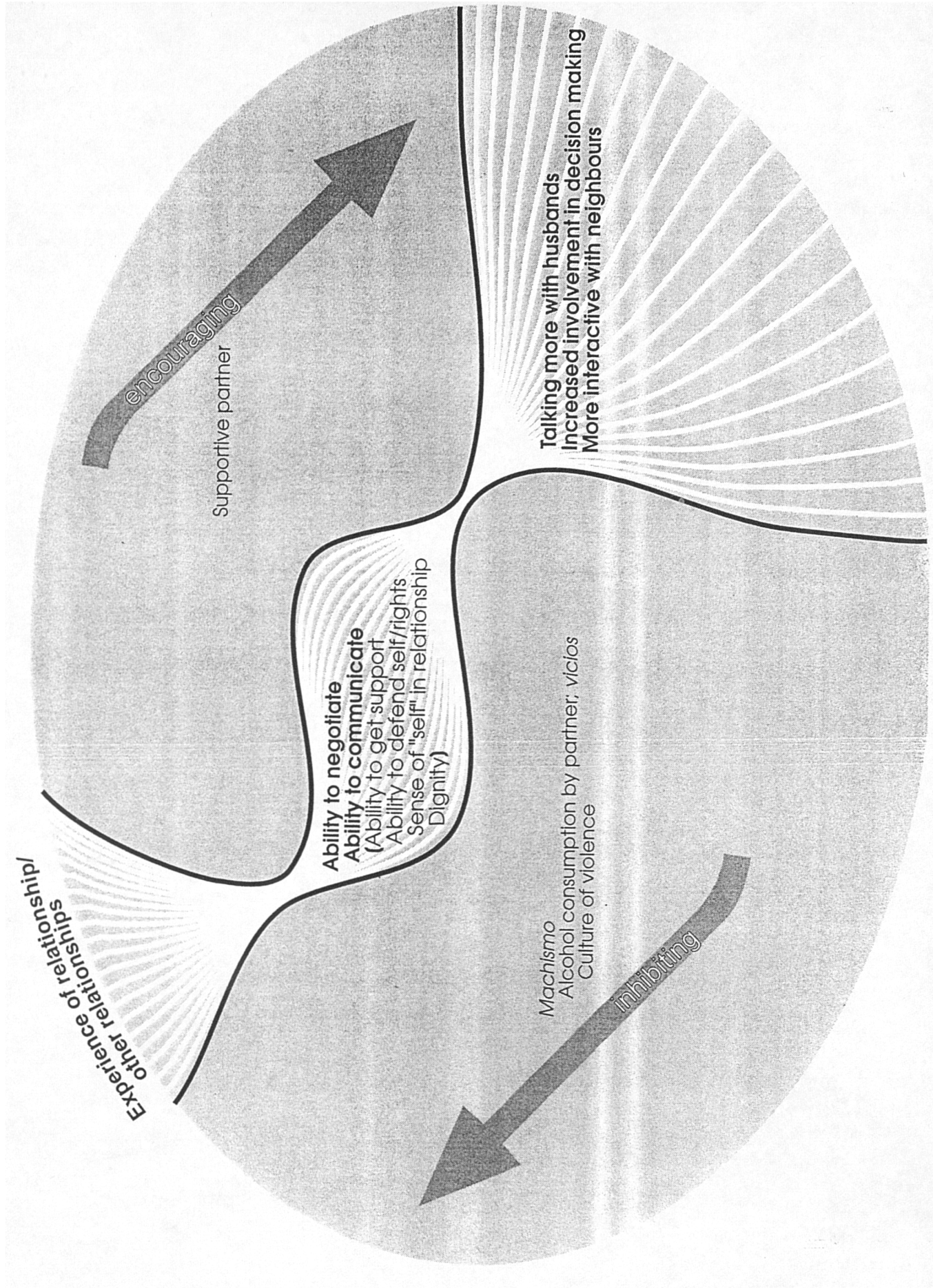


Figure 9.8: Urraco: Empowerment in Close Relationships.

feature which the women I interviewed identified as making a difference in their ability to tackle change in the relationship. The inhibiting elements were very predominantly related to the culture of *machismo*, the prevalence of alcohol consumption and other *vicios* (vices) and the strong culture of violence and were felt very strongly by the women closest to Nelly Suazo, soon after her murder. They received the message loud and clear about what can happen to a woman who pushes 'too hard' for change in her relationships with those around her and encourages and supports others to do the same. 'Changes' were not always easy to distinguish, but included more talking with husbands, an increased involvement in domestic decision making and changes in relationships with neighbours.

### **Summary**

Looking at the overall picture that the completed diagrams give of the Urraco Health Programme, I am confirmed in my conclusion that the programme has achieved a measure of empowerment with the Health Promoters, in the form of personal empowerment, which has opened up their horizons and given them access to social interactions and, for some, to economic possibilities that were not available to them before. Some of them have used personal empowerment to make changes in their relationships with their families and friends. The programme has had a more marked impact on the women who make up the co-ordinating team, in terms of personal empowerment, in some of their close relationships, and collectively in their ability to act to make changes in the world around them.

### **9.4 PAEM and Urraco compared.**

I am interested now to see if the revised model of empowerment can help me understand better the areas of difference between the two case studies, and to see if that comparison will help me strengthen the model not just in terms of its structure, but in its content, which could then be tested in other contexts.

#### 9.4.1. Personal empowerment

Looking at the 'core' of personal empowerment for each case, the common elements revolve around the development of individual self-confidence and self-esteem, coupled with a sense of self in a wider context (though I would say that this latter is on the whole less developed in the Urraco women). In PAEM, there is also the development of a sense of individual agency and 'dignity'. Turning to the 'encouraging' features, many are broadly similar between the two groups, though the Urraco list is longer. Some of those extra elements (the women-only nature of the group, the sense of having a role in the community, and the support of the priest) were also present in PAEM (in the case of support of the priest, at least initially) even though they were not specifically identified as such in interviews. The 'encouraging' features are therefore broadly similar, although in PAEM spirituality is specifically identified whereas in Urraco it is not. Likewise with the inhibiting features: there is broad similarity, with some elements identified in one case that appear to apply in the other even if not identified as such by the women. The main area of difference relates to the two programmes' structural features. In Urraco these are identified as contributing to the inhibition of empowerment, whereas in PAEM the structural features identified are 'encouraging'.

It is in the 'changes' that a marked difference becomes apparent between the two cases in terms of personal empowerment. In PAEM, the 'changes' could be seen, for the most part, as the result of the development of a set of general communication and analytical skills. These are the kind of skills necessary for interaction with wider society as an active participant. They are not changes particularly suited to increasing the individual's access to and ability to use 'power over', but they are strongly related to the possibilities of using 'power to', generative power, the power in building, creating and participating in new forms of activity. They are also the kinds of skills that can be used for resistance (see page 21). These individual 'changes' feed into the empowerment process in the other dimensions: with more ability to formulate and express opinions, a woman can take a more active role in group and economic activity and in her interactions with other members of the community; with more control over her use of time she can participate more actively

and on revised terms in group activities or in other activities in the family or the community, and so on. There is also 'feedback' within the personal dimension, in that use of the new skills reinforces the processes of development of self-confidence, self esteem, and the other 'core' aspects of empowerment.

Women in Urraco were noticeably less articulate about changes they had experienced as a result of their involvement with the programme. The changes are much more limited than those of PAEM in their scope and in their 'widening of options' or 'ability to take/create/wield power' through developing analysis and taking action. Although the co-ordinating team members were no more forthcoming in interviews about changes than were the women in the circles, my own observations of the co-ordinating team would suggest that they had tended to develop more of the 'changes' as identified in Figure 9.2 than they were perhaps consciously aware of. The Urraco 'changes' are more oriented to specific skills, which open some possibilities but are far less flexible than those of PAEM, related as they are to access to power within a limited sphere.

So why the difference? Two areas of explanation are suggested by differences in the 'core'. One is that the 'core' elements of agency and *dignidad* may be crucial aspects of empowerment, and that without them the overall effect is weakened. The other is that the structural differences between the two programmes encouraged different processes to take place. The PAEM structure encouraged women to practise the skills of analysis, for example, where the Health Promoter programme shared knowledge based on pre-existing analysis by outsiders. These two areas of explanation are closely linked to each other, and confirm my inclusion of agency and *dignidad* in the 'core'.

#### 9.4.2 Collective empowerment

Looking at collective empowerment, the 'core' of the empowerment process looks very different for the Health Promoters in Urraco than it does for the co-ordinating team or for the PAEM women. In relation to the 'core' of collective empowerment of the Health Promoters/study circles, I found that my interview material gives some

sense of their development of self-confidence as groups, and of the role of the group in supporting the personal empowerment process, (see Figure 9.6), but in relation to the development of a sense of group agency it gave me very little help. Some of this is no doubt due to the interviewing difficulties already referred to in Chapter Seven. However, drawing on the interview material I obtained, plus my own observations, it would appear that the paucity of apparent 'changes' in this dimension for the Health Promoters reflects a reality that a sense of agency has not developed in any significant way within the study groups. It is clear to me that, as far as the Health Promoters are concerned, the programme has not been oriented towards collective empowerment. The Health Promoters identified a number of features of the programme that might be seen as encouraging the group empowerment process (see Figure 9.6), but it is not a long list and overlaps significantly with the equivalent list for personal empowerment. The aspects seen as inhibiting, however, make a much longer list, some of which are cultural and social conditions, but many of which are directly linked with the structure of the programme itself. The inhibiting elements for the Health Promoters seem to heavily outweigh the encouraging ones, and the learning of new skills and development of friendships and support networks are not enough to compensate. This encourages me to reiterate my comments made on page 167 about the structure of the programme as a course and the limitations that imposes on the empowerment process. Using the revised model, this can be seen in particular to concern the dimension of collective empowerment as it applies to the Health Promoters.

The Urraco co-ordinating team and the PAEM women share the same 'core' elements for collective empowerment, ie. group identity, a sense of collective agency, group dignity and self-organisation and management. As with personal empowerment, I would say from my own observations of both groups that these 'core' elements are more developed in the PAEM women, although they are present in both. For example, the Urraco team were managing their programme, but maintaining it within the form and scope that had been developed previously, whereas the PAEM women were managing a constantly changing agenda and adapting to new possibilities as they arose. The 'encouraging' elements have some

similarities, but also contain differences: the PAEM elements have greater emphasis on deliberate development of leadership capacity, and include the identification of own needs, autonomy, discussion of sexuality and the organisation of activities by and at the level of the local groups. Some of the activities of PAEM, such as the methodology emphasising the development of analysis and understanding of their own context and the form of leadership, encouraging women from within the groups to lead, were developed deliberately to counter the influence of particular inhibiting elements; notably, the 'internalised oppression'. Other elements were less deliberate but nonetheless had the same effect, such as the way in which the organisation handled the 'conflict' with the new priest and his supporters. In Urraco the elements encouraging collective empowerment for the co-ordinating team were not structurally embedded in the programme and were more dependent on circumstances.

In PAEM, the 'changes' connected with collective empowerment (see Figure 9.3) have a similar effect to that described earlier in relation to the changes related to personal empowerment, in that they reinforce the development of the 'core' aspects as well as resulting from them. These 'changes' also reflect an increase in 'power to', both in terms of the activities that become possible and in terms of the influence that can be wielded. For example, the fact that half the groups left PAEM in the face of the 'conflict' indicates an absence of power in the face of apparent pressure from the 'conservative' forces within the church, but paradoxically, 'power to' can be seen in the survival of half the PAEM groups despite the 'conflict', since they were able to generate the determination and the strategy to maintain the members' commitment and to survive. 'Power to' can also be seen in the setting up of a network of *campesina* women's organisations at a national level. In beginning to have a relationship of respect with government and other national (and international) bodies, PAEM has also apparently gained access to at least some 'power over'. This can be seen, for example, in the assignment of the disused grain warehouse to PAEM in the face of strong opposition from the local *grupos campesinos* and the CNTC. In the 'changes' related to collective empowerment, then, the PAEM women have developed a set of skills that have wider possibilities and have set their own goals outside of the original framework of the programme.

In contrast, the Urraco women have taken power in relation to their own programme but have stayed broadly within the pre-defined framework. There is no doubt that they see it as their job to seek and find the funding they need, and that there is determination to achieve self-sufficiency, although I am personally doubtful that the activities they were planning will succeed in raising adequate funds locally<sup>258</sup>. These plans were focused around keeping the programme functioning, but there was no indication that the women were thinking about any role the organisation might have in tackling other issues and broadening their range of influence.

Self-organisation and management are features that make PAEM in particular stand out from many other women's 'projects'. The PAEM groups vary somewhat in their development of the 'core' of collective empowerment. In some of the groups in El Pital, for example, the core aspects are well developed. In Quitasueño they are less so. The organisation as a whole has achieved a strong identity and sense of agency, with the organisation and management of PAEM activities in the hands of a team of members from the various groups. María Esther Ruiz is strongly committed to ensuring that the women are able to maintain the programme whether or not she is involved and I found evidence of such independence and potential independence in meetings I attended.

#### **9.4.3 Close relationships**

Looking at empowerment in close relationships, the 'core' in the two cases overlap on two aspects: negotiation and communication abilities. In Urraco the 'core' is confined to these two aspects; in PAEM, these are made far more effective by support systems, a sense of self in the relationships and the ability to defend self and rights. The PAEM women were clear that their concept of and knowledge of 'women's rights' fed directly into the nature of their personal relationships, and that they had the support of their peers. In other words, they had a sense that inequalities and domination in their relationships are 'wrong', and that they are not alone in that

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<sup>258</sup> See Eade & Williams (1995), Chapter on Financing Health Care.

view. For them, the 'encouragement' of empowerment is not only helped by the partner himself but also by others. In Urraco, although women had talked to me about women's rights in other contexts, they did not identify their knowledge of the subject as relevant in relation to their intimate relationships.

Looking at the 'inhibiting' elements, in PAEM the women considered that men's control over income, and women's consequent dependency, was getting in their way - an understanding that the Urraco women did not spell out at all. The 'changes' in the PAEM case reflect the more active and self-defending attitude, with, for at least some of the women, a marked change in their control over their circumstances and their ability to make choices. In Urraco these changes are scarcely detectable. I think it is significant that, whereas PAEM had involved the partners of women in some of its activities, and had sought active support from the men around the conflict issue, this was not happening regularly in Urraco (although Monica and the coordinating team had identified the need, and a very small number of men had come to a few meetings). I had very little success in interviewing husbands of the women I interviewed in Urraco, in order to get their perspective, whereas in El Pital, and somewhat less so in Quitasueño, the men were very happy to be interviewed and to share their thinking on what had been achieved by the women.

Empowerment in close relationships does not appear from my data to be an inevitable consequence of personal or collective empowerment. In many respects it appears to be the hardest area of change for women. Some of the individual women who are playing the most active roles in PAEM, as animators and as members of the *consejo*, have major difficulties in their relationships with their partners and some perceive those relationships as something they will never be able to do anything about. This is probably because when tackling the personal empowerment process, a woman often has access to support and encouragement from others (including, often, her partner). But in tackling change in the relationship with her partner she is much more isolated (at least in Latin American cultures). In a group one woman can be carried along with others. On her own, she has to use her own resources. It is also the case that close relationships tend to carry great ambiguity. They can be

the location of support and caring as well as struggle and disempowerment. In taking risks to challenge the latter, the former are also put in jeopardy. Empowerment in this dimension not only involves changes in the woman's own expectations and behaviour, but also changes in the expectations and behaviour of her partner and/or close family members. Where the women have succeeded in making changes in their close relationships, the 'changes' are ones that can have a marked impact on other aspects of their lives as well (see Figure 9.4). Some women have achieved major transformations in their close relationships; others have made smaller changes that nonetheless enable them to participate more freely in the group or to make a few more choices of their own.

#### **9.4.4 Summary of comparison**

It would appear that the structure of the PAEM programme has equipped the women there with a wider range of options, particularly in the area of collective empowerment. In comparison with the PAEM programme, the impact of the Urraco programme has been patchy, largely perhaps because the only specific focus on empowerment came from the individual U.S. volunteer. The programme was not conceived and designed deliberately to empower women, in terms of either the structure and methodology, or of the philosophy behind it. The focus has been strongly aimed at delivering a particular service through developing the necessary skills, rather than at a more general development of broad abilities and capacities which would leave women better placed to develop and tackle their own agendas.

I see the three dimensions of empowerment put forward here as crucially linked: it is not enough to take the 'core' in any one dimension and say 'this is what empowerment consists of', since, for example, having more self confidence and dignity (see below) on their own do not lead to changes in how power is accessed/used. It is when there is some sort of 'action' that comes from the 'core' that changes happen - even if such 'action' is very 'small' or 'intimate'. In other words, 'empowerment' cannot simply be equated, in this example, with self-confidence and dignity; it has also to encompass what happens as a result of having

self-confidence and dignity. The model is a dynamic one, with 'changes' in one dimension feeding into the development of the 'core', either in the same dimension or in another, and into the reinforcement of the 'encouraging aspects' or the mitigation of the inhibiting aspects or obstacles in the same or another dimension.

Any organisation, project or programme will have its own unique circumstances: this model provides a structure and some useful pointers for thinking about the empowerment process(es) without converting them into a static analysis. A thorough testing and refinement of the model would require fresh research, but I want to consider how the model compares to issues that have been raised by others in order to check that I have not developed an overly culture-bound tool for analysis.

### **9.5 The model situated in the context of recent work on empowerment**

Three important analyses of empowerment in the context of 'third world development' have been published since I began my fieldwork. All three are significant contributions to the empowerment debate, and two provide more detailed exploration of the subject than any of the empowerment/development literature considered in Chapter Two. In the rest of this chapter I shall consider this recent work in relation to my own research and the model outlined above, in order to situate my own work and to identify any areas of similarity and difference.

In considering the potential of my model, I shall first compare it with a rather different model of empowerment recently developed by Harold through workshops with women's organisations in the Caribbean<sup>259</sup>. Rather than working with 'retrospective' case studies as I have done here, Harold developed her 'Caribbean Women's Empowerment Wheel' ('CariWheel') model through a series of workshops with four organisations, where the object was for the participants to construct their own understanding of empowerment and then apply that to an analysis of the

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<sup>259</sup> See Harold (1991) and (1993 a&b).

achievements and nature of their own organisations, identifying strengths and weaknesses. The model, based on a notion of concentric 'wheels', was produced through an interactive process undertaken in a series of day workshops by women in the four organisations, of generation and clustering of concepts followed by analysis in relation to those clusters. (see Figure 9.9).

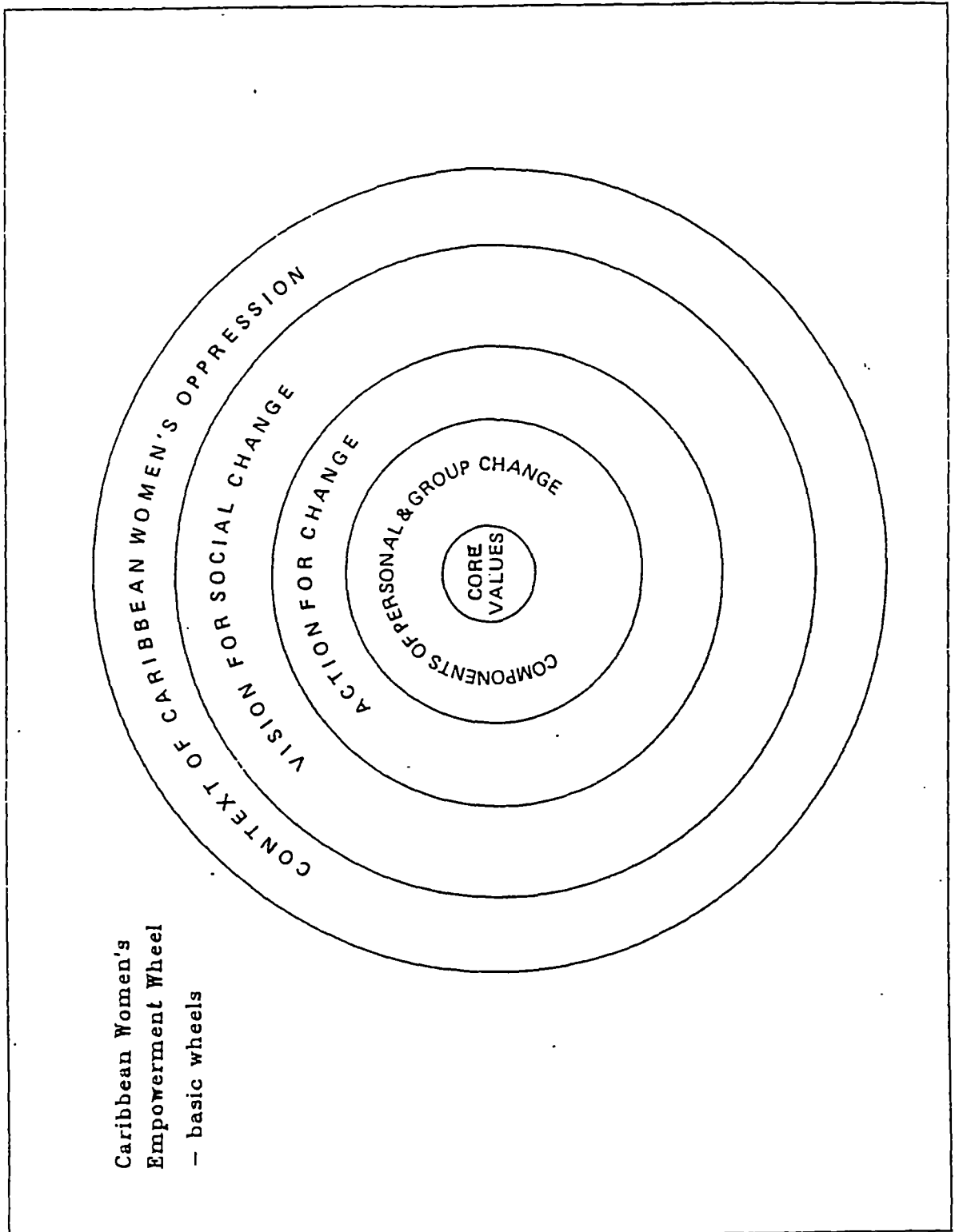
The headings shown in Figure 9.9 represent a composite of the findings of all the organisations in Harold's study. The detailed issues raised within the 'components of personal and group change' wheel by the four groups that participated in the research process are familiar to me from interviews for my own research. For example, understanding of self/others, travel, support from others, friendship, own decision-making, ability to identify needs, development of skills, self-confidence. The 'action for change' wheel describes the immediate actions coming out of the inner wheel. The 'vision for social change' wheel represents the women's sense of what they are trying to achieve, as expressed through the workshops. Finally, the 'context' wheel represents some of the specific social conditions within which women in the Caribbean live, which "join together to discourage the operation of empowerment"<sup>260</sup>. Her 'components of personal and group change' and 'action for change' wheels broadly correspond with my own 'core' and 'changes' categories in terms of the general nature of their content, although they do not seek to explore the processes at work, for instance how different elements interact.

One significant difference from my own findings is the emphasis on spirituality and sexuality, placed together at the centre of the model as the base on which the wheels rest. Women in my case studies identified the relevance of both of these areas, leading to their inclusion in my own model, but I have located them as encouraging aspects rather than as part of the 'core', since both spirituality and sexuality are culturally embedded and as such are part of the context within which empowerment processes take place<sup>261</sup>. What is not clear as yet, from the work of Harold or from

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid. p. 183.

<sup>261</sup> See Figures 9.2 & 9.3



**Basic Wheel titles** ( read from inner wheel outwards):

Core Values

Components of Personal and Group Change

Action for Change

Vision for Social Change

Context of Caribbean Women's Oppression

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Figure 9.9 Harold's 'Cariwheel' Model of Empowerment

my own, is whether spirituality and sexuality are themselves necessary components of empowerment processes, or whether the salient issue is that they provide a framework upon which some of the component aspects can be 'hung' or through which they can be developed - such as a sense of self worth, or a sense of purpose, for example. This is a debatable area which would need further research to establish. In my model I have tended to the latter view, seeing them as 'encouraging' elements rather than as a part of the 'core'; having said that, it could be argued that the concept of *dignidad*, which I have placed in the 'core' does incorporate a spiritual dimension.

Harold's CariWheel provides a useful model, combined with her workshop methodology, for considering where a given group perceives itself to be in relation to its own processes of empowerment; the methodology appears to have great potential for use in/with a wide variety of groups<sup>262</sup>. As a tool for self-analysis, Harold's model, as described in the evaluative comments of women who worked with it, is successful as an aid to systematisation and analysis. She has avoided, as have I, a linear model, using the idea of wheels which can rotate to portray relationships between many combinations of elements, to communicate movement and dynamism within the model. Nonetheless, it falls short of pinpointing the *processes* of empowerment, focussing, instead, on perceptions of degrees of empowerment and visions of what might be possible. By comparison with my model and case studies, in focussing predominantly on the collective dimension, the CariWheel does not succeed in making transparent the intimate connection between personal and collective empowerment and the dynamic, even dialectic relationship between the two<sup>263</sup>. Empowerment in close relationships is hidden within the model. It is therefore somewhat vulnerable to generalisation in areas where, to provide an effective analytical or planning tool, specifics are needed. In effect, the

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<sup>262</sup> Harold (1991) spells out in detail the workshop methodology on which her model is based and from the use of which the content of the CariWheel was developed. As well as the creation of categories and clusters, the workshop included a process of self-grading in relation to the categories the group chose as most significant, on a scale of 1-5, producing a polygonal 'map' of its self-perception.

<sup>263</sup> I have no wish to imply that the collective empowerment 'whole' is straightforwardly the sum of the individual empowerment 'parts'.

model enables a detailed discussion of the ‘What?’ - the possible ingredients of empowerment - but is limited in its facilitation of discussion of the ‘Why?’ (why this response rather than that one?, or why empowerment here or in relation to this, and not there or in relation to that?) and does not actively prompt the ‘How?’ (how was it or could it be achieved?). This may not be such a serious problem for a group using the model to assist its own internal processes, since these will be in the context of the group’s other activities and planning processes. As a model for assisting the design of supportive interventions by an outside body, however, the model is of more limited use.

Another dynamic account of empowerment to appear since I undertook my fieldwork, is that of Kabeer<sup>264</sup>. Her work, appearing as it does in as part of a book which examines critically and incisively many aspects of development through a gender lens, places empowerment firmly on the agenda as a concept with theoretical and practical potential that merits being more than an empty slogan. As I did, she found it necessary to deconstruct the notion of power in order to consider empowerment, reasoning as a result that

The multidimensional nature of power suggests that empowerment strategies for women must build on ‘the power within’ as a necessary adjunct to improving their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and make decisions<sup>265</sup>.

Kabeer does not attempt to develop a model, but uses examples of NGOs and grassroots organisations in South Asia to explore ways in which attempts have been made to promote empowerment. She highlights a number of issues which resonate with my own findings. In relation to the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, and SEWA and SUTRA in India, she discusses the importance of creating a space for women’s voices to be heard, with emphasis on participatory processes of needs identification

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<sup>264</sup> Kabeer (1994b).

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. p. 229.

and organisational practices which encourage participation in the shaping of the 'decisionable agenda'. She highlights the

interdependency between different categories of needs, particularly in the lives of women. ... (W)hat occurs in any one arena will have implications for all other arenas, sometimes to the extent of negating the intended effects of an intervention<sup>266</sup>.

She suggests that the 'bottom-up' identification of needs conveys a positioning of women as "competent, but socially constrained actors who are capable of making choices, articulating priorities and taking responsibility"<sup>267</sup>. Innovative NGOs have sought to work with women "as agents and participants in the development effort rather than as clients and recipients. This has entailed an emphasis on building a sense of ownership and responsibility among poor women in relation to the organisation's activities"<sup>268</sup>.

The South Asian context is a long way, spatially and culturally, from the Central American one, yet Kabeer's account confirms my analysis of the importance of such elements as self-respect, *dignidad* and the development of a sense of agency to empowerment processes. Other features of my analysis are present in Kabeer's account, including the importance of organisational capacity and the building of organisations through conscious process, development of analytical abilities, building up and strengthening networks, and a sense of not being alone. She also identifies the expansion of women's mobility as an important feature, as well as leadership and the support of the leadership development process. There is a strong focus on the collective dimension as an adjunct to personal empowerment:

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid. p. 234.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. p. 235.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. p. 236-7.

From a state of powerlessness that manifests itself in a feeling of 'I cannot', empowerment contains an element of collective self-confidence that results in a feeling of 'we can'<sup>269</sup>.

She emphasises, as well, the need to move beyond project participation into the realm of policy making, concluding that:

the longer-term sustainability of empowerment strategies will depend on the extent to which they envision women struggling within a given set of policy priorities and the extent to which they empower them to challenge and reverse these priorities. It is only when the participation of poorer women goes beyond participation at the project level to intervening in the broader policy making agenda that their strategic interests can become an enduring influence on the course of development<sup>270</sup>.

This would imply that, although my case study organisations were not actively identifying aspects of state policy as inhibiting elements, external policy impeding the empowerment of women, or of particular groups of women, could usefully be included in my model. It also seems likely that if successful challenge of such policy were to appear in the 'changes', the 'knock-on' effect on the 'core' aspects of empowerment would be strong.

Kabeer confines her analysis predominantly to grassroots NGOs, and does not enter into the micro-level analysis of empowerment for the individual woman; her account therefore misses the intricate interactions between personal, collective and close relationships dimensions of empowerment. She does, however, confirm much of the analysis of significant issues relating to empowerment that I reached through my Honduran case studies, which opens up the possibility that my findings are not overly culture-bound or culture-specific. For example, she considers power, in its various forms, to be central to empowerment, concentrating much of her account around 'power-to' and 'power from within'. Power from within needs "experiential

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<sup>269</sup> Dighe & Jain (1989) 'Women's Development Programme: Some Insights into Participatory Evaluation', *Prashanika* Vol. 18 Nos. 1-4 pp77-98 quoted in Kabeer (1993) p. 262.

<sup>270</sup> Kabeer (1993) p. 262.

recognition and analysis" of issues to do with women's own subordination and how it is maintained. "Such power cannot be given; it has to be self-generated"<sup>271</sup>. "Empowerment strategies for women must build on 'the power within' as a necessary adjunct to improving their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and to make decisions"<sup>272</sup>. Like me, Kabeer emphasises the importance of methodology and the need to focus on organisational processes and priorities, in order to build and strengthen the capacities of poor women to pressurise and make claims on public institutions. She agrees, too, on the importance of analysis and reflection: "New forms of consciousness arise out of women's newly acquired access to the intangible resources of analytical skills, social networks, organisational strength, solidarity and sense of not being alone"<sup>273</sup>. Some of the specific details Kabeer identifies also can be seen in my case studies. For example, the expansion of women's ability to move around and travel: "Such travel plays an important role in breaking down the sense of isolation and powerlessness that women are often trapped in"<sup>274</sup>.

A comprehensive account of empowerment to appear recently is that of Batliwala<sup>275</sup>. Her work is dense and substantial and I cannot possibly do it justice here. It comes out of a workshop on empowerment organised jointly by the FAO's Freedom From Hunger Campaign/Action for Development in India and the Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, in 1993. This brought together thirty-two people, mostly women, from NGOs, women's organisations, academic institutions and government departments in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, to discuss issues of women's empowerment. Batliwala takes empowerment to mean, in part, the "exercise of *informed choice* within an expanding framework

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid. p. 229.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 245-6.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid. p. 251.

<sup>275</sup> Batliwala (1993). My eternal thanks go to Viji Srinivasan of Adithi in Bihar, India, for bringing me a copy of the paper.

of information, knowledge and analysis"; "a process which must enable women to discover new possibilities, new options....a growing repertoire of choices"<sup>276</sup>. Batliwala identifies, as I do, a distinction between personal and collective empowerment (although she does not identify a 'close relationships' dimension); she describes the process of empowerment as a spiral (as opposed to a cycle), which affects all the people involved in that change, including any change agent: "Empowerment is thus not merely a change of mind-set, but a visible demonstration of ... change which the world around is forced to acknowledge, respond to, and accommodate as best it may"<sup>277</sup>. As with my model, therefore, empowerment has to include the action element as well as the changes of awareness and self-image in the 'core'. She points out that empowerment is a process that involves a redistribution of power, particularly within the household. She highlights "the widespread fear that women's empowerment is against men"<sup>278</sup>, and argues that

women's empowerment, if it is a real success, *does mean the loss of men's traditional power and control over the women in their households*: control of her body and her physical mobility; the right to abdicate from all responsibility for housework and the care of children; the right to physically abuse or violate her; the right to spend family income on personal pleasures (and vices); the right to abandon her or take other wives; the right to take unilateral decisions which affect the whole family; and the countless other ways in which poor men - and indeed men of every class - have unjustly confined women<sup>279</sup>.

She goes on to say, "the point that is often missed, however, is that *the process of women's empowerment will also liberate men ... They will be relieved of gender stereotyping, just like women*"<sup>280</sup>.

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, p. 7, (emphasis in original) & p.11 (ellipsis in original).

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, p 10.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p.9. Emphasis in original.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., p.9. Emphasis in original.

Batliwala has devised lists of strategies and essential learning processes that contribute to empowerment processes. Strategies include creating "a separate 'time and space' for ... women to be together *as women*, rather than as beneficiaries or recipients of welfare or development programs", "(b)eginning with the women's own experiences and realities promote self-recognition and positive self image, stimulate critical thinking (and) deepen understanding of the structures of power, including gender", enabling women "to identify and prioritise issues for action, based on expanding awareness (including new information, knowledge) critical analysis and informed decision making" and encouraging women "to *independently* struggle for changes in their material conditions of existence, their personal lives and their treatment in the 'public' sphere"<sup>281</sup>. These, as with the 'essential learning processes' (see Figure 9.10) have much in common with the 'core' and 'encouraging aspects' in my own model of empowerment, and in the kind of 'changes' seen in my case studies, and recognise the importance of psychological as well as material processes.

Batliwala's account focusses on strategies and methods of programme delivery. She draws on the wealth of experience of the various organisations involved in the workshop, to analyse three broad approaches used towards women's empowerment by the various agencies, outlining the strategies involved and the possible indicators of empowerment and discussing the dilemmas and limitations of each approach. 'Empowerment through Integrated Rural Development' is seen as a functional approach, not differing much except in terminology from conventional IRD approaches. 'Empowerment through economic interventions' are seen to assume that women's powerlessness arises from their weak position economically, and that that is the only factor; solutions using this approach often merely add to women's work burden. 'Empowerment through awareness-building and organising women' is the approach that most directly equates with the model of empowerment developed from the Honduran case studies here. The strategies identified for this approach revolve

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

### 'Essential Learning Processes'

- The capacity to question and develop critical thinking.
- Looking at oneself and one's environment in new ways.
- Developing a positive self-image and recognising one's strength, including valuing one's existing knowledge and skills.
- Exploding myths and misconceptions about women in society.
- Critically analysing structures of oppression and isolation.
- Becoming aware of one's rights as an equal citizen.
- Defining and sharing one's strengths and weaknesses with other women.
- Building strong collectives through which individual and collective problems are identified and prioritised.
- Learning to function as a collective, including collective decision making, action, critical reflection, accountability.
- Changing one's attitudes and practice with one's own sons and daughters, including giving daughters opportunities for learning
- Seeking access to new kinds of information and knowledge, relevant to critical issues of one's life, as well as for understanding the world beyond our horizons.
- Understanding and questioning prevailing notions of "development", examining its gender biases, and evolving alternative agendas.
- Learning to collectively struggle for change by developing new strategies and methods, including forming strategic alliances with other groups of exploited and oppressed people's.
- Studying the resources available, physical, human, financial, including government/non-government services and schemes.
- Learning to access information independently, including by becoming literate and numerate.
- Learning to access resources and public services/schemes independently, demanding accountability, and lobbying for changes in schemes and programmes which are inaccessible/ inappropriate.
- Learning to negotiate with public institutions and systems (banks, government departments etc), independently.
- Learning to set up and collectively manage one's own services and programs whenever needed.
- Understanding political structures and systems of governance and how to participate in these and demand accountability.
- Organise and build networks at local, regional, national and global levels. through which poor women can become a social, economic and political force; and
- Learning other empowering skills, eg. vocational, managerial, literacy, basic data collection skills for conducting their own surveys etc.- which enable poor women to become a force to reckon with in society.

**Figure 9.10** 'Essential Learning Processes'

Source: Batliwala (1993).

around the training of change agents (from within or outside the community), building women's collectives/groups, developing critical consciousness through dialogues, discussion and analysis, about structures of inequality and issues/problems raised by women, and enabling women to access new information/knowledge and skills. They also include supporting women to act to meet their own needs, through schemes to generate income, provide credit etc, and supporting the creation of women's organisations and the networking of such organisations.

Tackling the limitations of this last approach to empowerment, Batliwala highlights an issue that makes it less attractive to agencies working with women: it can be slow, taking longer than other approaches to have visible results; there do not tend to be rapid changes for example in women's economic position or health status. It is also therefore vulnerable to the participants becoming discouraged. Batliwala points out that, to tackle these difficulties, women using the approach

feel that some judicious mix of both the 'concrete' and 'abstract' elements of empowerment is necessary to make a broader impact on poor women's life situation<sup>282</sup>.

and that

the *design* of these interventions has to be very different from that used in the developmental approach: i.e. be it an income generation program, alternate health service, or functional literacy class, it must be conceived, planned and operationalised under women's - not NGO - control. For genuine empowerment to occur, women should not become passive recipients or beneficiaries, but, over time, the 'owners' of the program, so that they can eventually run it without the support of any outside agency<sup>283</sup>.

In terms of my own model of empowerment, these issues, and how to tackle them, can be inferred from a consideration of the dynamic relationship between the 'core' and the 'changes', and from the way the specific combination of 'encouraging' and 'inhibiting' elements operates. 'Core' elements such as increased self-confidence and

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. p. 36. Emphasis in original.

a sense of agency do not result from passive participation, but from action. Whether that action is going to a group to discuss self-image, the decision to question something or digging a field alongside other women, it is action. The nature of the kind of action(s) ("the judicious mix" referred to above) that will be necessary to feed processes of empowerment, will depend on the nature and interaction of encouraging and inhibiting/constraining elements in the situation. Batliwala reports a criticism of non-directive, open-ended approaches, such as 'empowerment through awareness building and organising women', that they are strong on 'soft' issues and weak on 'hard' issues. This confirms my emphasis on the inclusion of development of a sense of agency in the 'core', since women, individually or in groups, who experience themselves as active beings able to act are more likely to tackle 'hard' issues. But the criticism itself reveals an unwillingness to trust that women, through processes of empowerment, become setters of their own priorities which, as some of the women I interviewed indicated, may not be the priorities that others would want or expect them to have.

Shetty, in an exploration, from the literature, of the assessment of empowerment in development projects, concludes that "no single definition for the term can do it justice"<sup>284</sup>. He<sup>285</sup> proposes an analytical framework that includes the notion of empowerment as process, as a holistic approach that does not fit within a conventional project cycle, and that is context-specific. He sees it as being chiefly related to 'strategic' aspects<sup>286</sup> with an emphasis on democratisation and sustainability. He highlights the psychological element of empowerment. In considering the assessment of empowerment, Shetty makes a distinction between empowerment at the 'group level', where he distinguishes between internal and external empowerment, and the 'individual/household level'. I would contest the conflation of individual and household in the second category, as my model shows,

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<sup>284</sup> Shetty (1992) p. 8.

<sup>285</sup> I confess to not knowing if Salil Shetty is male or female. I hope I will be forgiven if I have made the wrong guess.

<sup>286</sup> After Molyneux, M. (1981) Women's Emancipation Under Socialism: A Model for the Third World Brighton, IDS Publications.

although I would agree they are linked. In identifying 'indicators' of empowerment, Shetty lists many items that can be found in similar terms in my model as applied to PAEM and Urraco under 'encouraging elements' and 'changes', such as problem identification and analysis, actions initiated by the group, intra-group support system, networking with larger social movements and decision making within the household. Shetty succeeds in capturing many relevant aspects of empowerment, but his account leaves the question of power untouched. He proposes the use of many participatory methods in the assessment of empowerment, but although he is critical of the 'instrumentalist' approach of many projects, he fails to tackle the power relationships inherent in the project-oriented approach.

Yuval-Davis takes a more openly critical stance of notions of empowerment than others have done<sup>287</sup>. She emphasises the point that one group of people's empowerment might easily be another group's disempowerment, particularly if categories such as 'community' or 'woman' are used in a way that does not allow for the existence of power relationships within such categories as well as between them and other categories. There may be serious conflicts of interest to be overcome. Empowerment cannot, therefore, be assumed to be non-problematic. She also argues that "Empowerment of the oppressed, whether one fights for one's own - individual or group - sake, or that of others, cannot by itself be the goal for feminist and other anti-oppression politics", giving the example of the brutality and violence that was so common within the U.S. Black Panther movement<sup>288</sup>. She is cautious of constructions which

assume a specific 'identity politics' which homogenizes and naturalizes social categories and groupings, denying shifting boundaries and internal power differences and conflicts of interest<sup>289</sup>.

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<sup>287</sup> Yuval-Davis (1994).

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.* p. 193.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.* p. 194.

Any notion of ‘the empowerment of women’ should therefore be approached critically. Yuval-Davis cautions against allowing subjective feelings of empowerment to become the full criterion for evaluating a particular situation, citing the example of women who become involved in fundamentalist movements and gain a sense of empowerment from them, despite the way in which fundamentalist politics have made women their primary victims<sup>290</sup>.

Reconsidering my model of empowerment in the light of such cautions, the importance of the fluid, dynamic nature of the model is highlighted. Most aspects of the model are adaptable to account for the specific circumstances of a particular individual or group; even the ‘core’, which I have presented as representing a broadly applicable set of elements, is malleable to the specific case. The situation becomes more complex where a group assumed to be uniform is made up of sub-groups with different situations: conflicts of interest, or simply different priorities, can and do occur. Such cases do not preclude the use of this model of empowerment, as I have shown in the Urraco case study, where I found I needed to differentiate between the Health Promoters and the co-ordinating team in my analysis. In that case, I simply used the model separately for each sub-group where appropriate. McWhirter included ‘support the empowerment of others’ in her definition of empowerment (see page 26). Perhaps ‘sense of respect for ‘others’ ’ might be included in the ‘core’, if empowerment is taken as relating to ‘power to’<sup>291</sup>, though it should be remembered that an increase in one person’s ‘power-to’ does not have to reduce the ‘power-to’ of anyone else. Yuval-Davis’ arguments are particularly relevant to the nature of the use to which the model is put. It could be used as a tool for opening up discussions of similarity and difference and for negotiation/debate, or it could be used to obscure areas of difference.

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid. p. 186.

<sup>291</sup> In relation to ‘power over’, perhaps an additional ‘core’ element of ‘willingness to disempower others’ would be necessary!

Young is another author to focus on empowerment recently, albeit in less detail than the three writers mentioned above<sup>292</sup>. She puts particular emphasis on the importance of seeing empowerment as a collective undertaking, involving "both individual change and collective action". She observes that the mainstream development theory/practice use of the word empowerment focuses on "entrepreneurial self-reliance" in a very individualistic approach, whereas the approach of collective empowerment based on co-operation will require changes in the power dynamics between men and women:

Just as women must organise together to gain the sense of self-worth and understanding of the wider context of their lives that empower and make long-term co-operation possible, so must men undergo a process of reflection and transformation which makes it possible for them to recognise the ways in which power is a double-edged sword. It structures their relations with other men in competition and conflict, and makes co-operation and building on advances highly problematic.

She concludes, "both women and men need to change if future society is to be more harmonious than in the past". Young's account does not identify the nature of power involved in the various approaches to empowerment, but she is clear that by solely focusing on individual empowerment, mainstream emphasis on empowerment cannot be effective in prompting significant changes in women's access to power. Her emphasis on collective processes of empowerment seems to me entirely correct, although in my model I have not privileged the collective dimension over the other personal and close relationships dimensions, since, as I have shown, I see them as being closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

#### **9.5.1 Power within the empowerment process**

At this point, it is appropriate to reflect on what kinds of power are being generated in the change processes I have described. Does the model throw any light on the

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<sup>292</sup> Young (1993) pp. 157-159.

nature of power being exercised in the empowerment of the case study groups? In the 'core', increases in self-esteem and self-confidence open up possibilities and change the nature of the interaction between the individual/group and the environment; an increased sense of agency increases the possibility of acting in the world, of making changes. Having a sense of 'self' in a wider context than before broadens the field within which 'action' is likely to happen. It seems, therefore, that the 'core' mostly represents qualities necessary for the exercise of 'power-to' or 'power-with'. 'Power-from-within' is also present in the 'core', in the form of dignity, which rests on an inner strength which conditions the individual or group's interaction with others. There is no evidence of a sense of agency being used in order to wield 'power-over' in the two case study organisations. However, in so far as a sense of agency is needed to exercise 'power-over', it is potentially present in the 'core' as well, at least to some minimal degree.

It is in the 'changes' seen in the two organisations that the operation of power becomes more visible, particularly where women move into new activities or new positions within the community. Most of the 'changes' seen in PAEM and Urraco are further examples of 'power-to' and 'power with', for instance the ability to respond collectively to events outside the group (PAEM, collective dimension), or lobbying and protest (Urraco, co-ordinating team, collective dimension). It is possible, also, for 'power-over' to be exercised through the empowerment processes shown in the model. For example, an increased ability to learn, analyse and act could easily be used to move into a position of domination, say by one person pushing for a group to work to their individual agenda. Where these abilities are developed in an atmosphere that prioritises 'power-with', however, especially in the collective dimension, 'power-to' is more likely to produce significant changes. So, for example, in PAEM, it was as a group, rather than one individual woman, that the women could bid to operate the grain warehouse.

'Power-to' and 'power-with' can be seen also in the elements encouraging the empowerment process. Some of these focus on the acquisition of knowledge, and the expansion of possibilities and opportunities. Others, such as support from a priest

or external development agency, are examples of the use of power to/with by others, in supporting and encouraging. 'Power-with' is also present in the various ways of bringing women together to share and explore. 'Power-over' is perhaps most visible in the inhibiting elements, such as *machismo*, male violence, and women's lack of control over their fertility or over land; it is therefore mostly present as power that obstructs women's empowerment.

The analysis of power and its exercise *within* processes of empowerment could be taken much further than this simple outline; I cannot do so here because of restrictions of space, but it suggests a fruitful line of further enquiry, within which the debate over 'means and ends' would have to appear. It is an analysis that raises further questions: Is it possible to decide what kind of power any key person involved in the empowerment of an individual or group should use to promote a particular kind of empowerment? Does it vary depending on who they are? For example, María Esther in PAEM and Monica in Urraco both had the role of encouraging and supporting groups of women; did their different situations (María Esther as a local *campesina* and Monica as a woman from the United States, with all that implies in relation to Honduras) mean that they had a different range of possible forms of power available to them, and did they use power differently in their work with the groups? Or, as a further example, the three priests mentioned in the two case studies were all significant actors in relation to the processes at work. What kinds of power did they each use in relation to the case study organisations? Did that make a difference to the different impacts that they had on the groups? In the PAEM case, both priests were members of the same Passionist order; both were men from peninsular Spain. One was very supportive, the other was not. How significant was it, for instance, that Jesús María was from the Basque country? Did that influence his exercise of power in relation to the groups?

## 9.6 Conclusion

The model of empowerment as developed in this chapter offers a simple and flexible 'picture' of empowerment that has the potential to be used with a considerable degree of sophistication, as a tool for both analysis and planning. It invites detailed consideration of past and present circumstances, locally and further afield and, importantly, encourages consideration of how various elements interact and with what effect. The comparison of empowerment, as I have presented it, with two accounts, by Harold and Kabeer, of empowerment in very different contexts, was encouraging. There were many points of convergence, leading me to be optimistic that I have developed a valid model that will stand up to testing in a variety of environments. It will therefore be of practical use, providing that it is used in a considered way, with awareness of the great variety of human experience, so that "(d)ialogue, rather than fixity of location becomes the basis of empowered knowledge"<sup>293</sup>. The analysis of power and its exercise *within* processes of empowerment adds a further dimension of complexity to the empowerment debate: the debate is thus nowhere near exhausted. In the next, final, chapter I shall summarise the ground I have covered in this thesis, draw conclusions about the nature of empowerment, its implications for methodology, and the role of the supporting organisation, and suggest areas of further research that would continue to further the 'empowerment' debate.

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<sup>293</sup> Patricia Hill Collins quoted in Yuval-Davis (1994) p. 192.

## **Chapter Ten: Using the Model: Empowerment, Gender and Development**

I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly as yet; so it gives us a breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means. I will continue using it until I am sure it does *not* describe what we are doing<sup>293</sup>.

### **10.1 Empowerment as Process**

At the beginning of this thesis I set myself the task of defining empowerment with a view to considering whether the concept has useful meaning in the gender and development debate and the practice arising from that debate. 'Empowerment' is used by a wide range of people and agencies across a range of disciplines. In order to understand the variety of meanings given to the word, I undertook an analysis of the models of 'power' which underpin the various usages of empowerment. I showed, in Chapter Two, that power can be constructed as 'power-over', as in the more traditional, zero-sum models, or as 'power-to' or power-within', where power is seen as generative, fluid and relational. 'Empowerment', therefore, can have a range of meanings according to the intentions, explicit or implicit, of the user. This range of meanings can be seen in the ways in which 'empowerment' has been used in relation to 'development' and, in particular, to 'development' interventions with women. For some, empowerment is about opening up existing formal areas of power and control to women - treating power as lying in a particular location; for others it is about generating power within and among women in ways which make it possible for them to make their own choices and decisions (which may or may not include occupying formal areas of power). I concluded that the analysis of empowerment based on a generative view of power - 'power-to' and 'power-with' - had great potential to provide a useful tool in terms of organising and planning around 'development' issues in a way that ensures that the (various) needs of women are met. It is, however, evident that, despite recent contributions to the debate,

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<sup>293</sup>Unidentified NGO activist quoted in Batliwala (1993) p. 49. Emphasis in original.

empowerment has been (and continues to be) often referred to with little explicit definition, making it difficult to use in a meaningful way<sup>294</sup>.

In the research on which this thesis is based, therefore, I set out to examine the meaning of empowerment through two case studies of organisations in Honduras working with 'grassroots' rural women (see Chapters Five to Eight). One was PAEM, an educational programme for women in north-western Honduras, set up by a local *campesina* woman, which focused on devising and following a methodology of self-reflection and analysis, including a deliberate focus on women's lives. The programme had 15 groups meeting regularly, working with the methodology and also organising their own additional activities. The programme was co-ordinated by a *consejo* of women elected from the groups, and there were regular events where the groups met together to consider themes relevant to the programme. Women in the programme described significant changes in their behaviour and levels of self-confidence because of the programme, although a conflict with the local priest had led to many women leaving it. The women that stayed, however, had reached a point of taking on an ambitious project locally to ensure security of grain supplies through development of a grain warehouse. The second case study was of a Health Promoters Training Programme in Urraco, in the banana growing area of northern Honduras. This was a programme initiated by an external agency in response to high levels of malnutrition and the general lack of health provision in the area. Women volunteers were trained as health promoters, in a course lasting two years. They were trained in basic health care skills, and learned to diagnose and treat a limited range of common ailments, making basic medicines available at cost price to the

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<sup>294</sup> Though, to be fair, there is some sign of more thoughtful use, such as in the Programme of Action for the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September 1994: "The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. ... The power relations that impede women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives operate at many levels in society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving change requires policy and programme actions that will improve women's access to secure livelihoods and economic resources, alleviate their extreme responsibilities with regard to housework, remove legal impediments to their participation in public life and raise social awareness through effective programmes of education and mass communication. In addition, improving the status of women also enhances their decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life, especially in the area of sexuality and reproduction. This, in turn, is essential for the long-term success of population programmes".

local communities. They learned in study circles, and also participated in larger meetings where the groups met together to look at wider topics such as women's rights and spirituality.

I have argued that empowerment, in the context of gender and development, is most usefully defined as a *process* which reflects a definition of power that is generative and productive. Through my analysis of the achievements of each of the case study organisations, drawing on material gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews, life histories and participant observation, I was able to construct a model of empowerment (see Chapter Nine, and Figure 9.1 after page 174). I have shown that empowerment is not a fixed entity, but is made up of elements according to context and to the specifics of the situation in which any given woman or group of women finds herself/itself. For the individual woman (or group) an empowerment process will take a form which arises out of her particular cultural, ethnic, historical, economic, geographic, political and social location; out of her place in the life cycle, her specific life experience and out of the interaction of all the above with the gender relations that prevail around her. Despite such variety, my case study material, supported by the literature, has led me to conclude that there is a 'core' to the empowerment process that seems to be common to different situations, and that shows a degree of consistency across the dimensions of scale. This 'core', in terms of individual and collective empowerment, consists of increases in self-confidence and self esteem, the development of a sense of agency as an individual or group, a sense of 'self' in a wider context, and a sense of '*dignidad*' (see page 126). If the core aspects of empowerment for the individual or group, are encouraged and developed, women's self-perception will change and 'internalised oppression' (see page 18) will be challenged, contributing to increased access to 'power-to' and 'power from within'. There will be 'changes' which may take a range of forms and which may feed back into the ongoing process, with the individual or group better placed to make her/its own decisions and choices and better able to identify and act in her/its own interests. The extent to which the 'core' of empowerment is developed depends on the complex interactions of the many elements which tend to encourage or inhibit the process. This model of

empowerment is consistent with other very recent work on empowerment in a 'development' context, such as that of Harold, Kabeer, Batliwala, Shetty and Young (see Chapter Nine), though it goes beyond them in terms of providing a framework for both micro- and meso- level analysis<sup>295</sup> and by distinguishing three dimensions of empowerment - personal, close relationships and collective - which are distinct yet inter-related.

When empowerment is defined more precisely, both in terms of the issue of what constitutes power, and of the specifics of the process, the notion of an 'empowerment approach' to development for women becomes more useful as a tool for analysis and planning, whether in relations to the 'closest in' scale of personal empowerment, the 'furthest out' scale of international relations, or intermediate points. With a definition of 'empowerment', it becomes possible to think more precisely about the process(es) within a given context (whether from the position of 'insider' or 'outsider'). A set of questions could be devised which could be used to identify areas for action that would enhance the empowerment process in a particular place. For example: In what aspects of our/their lives is there self-confidence? Where is it lacking? Why? What are the elements of the situation which, through their presence or absence, encourage or inhibit self-confidence? Where do we/they have a sense of being able to act, to cause things to happen? Where not? Why? How do we/they perceive our/themselves? Do we/they have a sense of being worthy of the respect of others or our/them selves? Do we/they relate to a wider context? What? Where is it limited? Why? Then, in terms of planning and designing programmes, projects or activities: How could we/they set about tackling the issues identified by the earlier questions? What activities are needed? What existing or new structures will be needed? What support or encouragement would make a difference? From whom? What might get in the way? How could that be mitigated? What might encourage the process? How could that be strengthened? What 'changes' might we/they look for? What methodology can be used that would be consistent with the

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<sup>295</sup> 'meso' referring to a community/local institutional level that tends to be obscured the usual micro/macro dichotomy.

process? How do we incorporate an appropriate notion of time, or is this rendered irrelevant? What are our power relationships with the group (for outsiders) and what forms of power do we have available to draw on in this work?<sup>296</sup>

## 10.2 Empowerment as a Gender Issue

In the course of my discussion of empowerment and in examining the case studies, I have become certain that 'empowerment' of women is a *gender* issue and not simply a women's issue<sup>297</sup>; it is about transforming human and social relations. In order to tackle personal empowerment in its most basic form, the women in both my case studies had to confront gender conditioning and gendered power relations in the decision to move outwards from the home into involvement in the group and the organisation to which they belong. Sometimes this literally meant obtaining their husband's permission to do so. For empowerment to happen within the women's close relationships with men, a re-negotiation of decision-making and resource-use patterns was needed, as well as a change of attitude on the part of the men. Empowerment of women is for women to experience; it does, however, require the gendered behaviour of men to change, and this is perhaps illustrated most starkly in the re-negotiation of one to one intimate relationships between women and men. In the case studies, this was where women experienced the greatest difficulty. Perhaps because that is where each is most bluntly confronted with her 'internalised oppression' (whereas in a group it is possible to 'ride with the tide' of empowerment of other group members) and because this is an area where she experiences power-over in a very immediate way (such as violence or lack of money). A woman may become personally empowered in many ways, including becoming able to earn her own living. However, if she continues to carry the full responsibility for domestic duties, including childcare, at the same time, her 'empowerment' has increased her

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<sup>296</sup>See page 219 for a discussion of the issue of power *within* the empowerment process.

<sup>297</sup> I am not saying it is *exclusively* a gender issue; it is also a class issue, a race issue and so on, according to the various and changing identities women have.

burden<sup>298</sup>. It is also often the case that one woman will resolve the difficulty of increased responsibility by devolving some of it onto another woman. 'Empowering' women to earn a living whilst continuing to carry the burden of domestic reproduction is perhaps consistent with the meaning of empowerment that comes from an understanding of power as power-over, since is likely to give her some stake in economic decision making, though even that is not assured. In terms of empowerment using a 'power to' or generative understanding of power, however, that is not enough.

If empowerment of women is a gender issue, there is a need not only to take on the process with women that will move us/them in the ways we/they need to move, but also to tackle the corresponding task with men that will contribute to reducing the 'obstacle' of *machismo*<sup>299</sup> and an opening up of the possibilities of change in gender relations from 'the other end'. This is not work that has had much recognition to date, and is very rare in the design of 'development' programmes.

### 10.3 Empowerment as a 'Development' Issue

The PAEM case study showed, with the organisation taking on the ambitious project of grain warehousing, that women who become empowered to act to meet their own needs can potentially contribute to development not just of themselves but of the wider society. It has become widely agreed that women who receive education, one part of the empowerment process for many women, have fewer children. As well as lightening the individual burden of domestic responsibilities, this leaves more possibilities open to women. Empowered women, especially in some sort of organisation where collective empowerment can become possible, are more likely to act to exert political pressure for change, and to contribute to the formation of

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<sup>298</sup> Elson (1991) makes a similar point, adding that it may also lead to men further withdrawing their responsibility to their children (p205).

<sup>299</sup> Used here not as a phenomenon specific to Honduran or Latin American society.

political will in favour of essential development needs. This might be in terms of economic needs, but may also include other kinds of 'development needs', such as pressure for a state justice system to be made more effective so that women can in reality call on the protections that may exist in law. In the Urraco case study there was an example of this, with some pressure being exerted by the Health Promotion team in the local community and nationally for the murderer of Nelly Suazo to be brought to justice.

How, then, might the concept of empowerment and an 'empowerment approach' fit into practical action? Is it useful 'in the field' or in gender planning? The model I have devised, and the case studies from which it was drawn, have a number of implications. I shall consider here three crucial, linked aspects: methodology, organisational structure and the role of the 'change agent'. These are relevant not only to the grassroots organisation but also to the outside agency looking to support empowerment processes, and I shall also consider some specific possible implications for the 'supporting organisation'.

#### **10.4 Methodological Implications**

According to my model, if an empowerment approach is to be effective, it needs to foster the development of the 'core' aspects. It therefore requires a methodology that will not in itself impede any increase in self-esteem, confidence and so on, irrespective of the actual 'content' of activities, and that will, if possible, in and of itself contribute to their increase. This implies a number of underlying attitudes or assumptions. The methodology needs to be based on an attitude of complete respect for the women involved, communicating to women and to men that they are taken seriously. The PAEM case illustrated this attitude clearly. It also illustrated an assumption that was useful in building the 'core' elements: an assumption that the women had the capacity to achieve 'great things', including to take charge of their own empowerment processes. It is also important that the methodology in no way colludes with the 'internalised oppression' that the women carry. For example, a

methodology that relies on some sort of 'promoter' to plan group activities without actively involving women in the planning process could easily collude with an internalised self-image that does not perceive the self as capable of planning or taking any kind of leadership. Likewise, a methodology that unquestioningly accepts ideas put forward by women for activities, without building in any process for questioning women's assumptions of what they are capable of or for generating any understanding of how women's lives become limited, can reinforce and collude with the internalised oppression<sup>300</sup>. An empowering methodology is important in order to ensure that local women are acting from their own analysis and priorities and are not being manipulated by outsiders or working to a foreign agenda yet without allowing the restricted set of possibilities presented by the oppression to limit women's options and access to power. If possible, rather than simply attempting to avoid such reinforcement and collusion, it seems to me desirable to attempt to design a methodology that will help women to perceive the limitations that they place on themselves as a result of the internalised oppression they carry. The booklet *Conociéndome a mí Misma* illustrates an attempt to build that process into the heart of PAEM's methodology. It contrasts strongly with the Urraco teaching materials, which provide 'facts' to be learnt, with little process for understanding context, for self-analysis or even for identifying subjects of importance.

An analysis of the 'encouraging' elements and 'obstacles' facing the women will also have implications for methodology. In the both of the case studies, for example, the personal empowerment 'encouraging' elements include "travel". If an analysis of the situation for women in a particular group or community implies that "travel" would contribute to the building of the 'core' elements of empowerment, then "travel" can be built in to the methodological approach, for example a visit to meet women with

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<sup>300</sup> This argument is important in the context of debates about cultural imperialism. There have been arguments made that strongly question the right of any 'outsider' to suggest a course of action that would directly challenge or change an existing cultural form, even where that form includes blatantly oppressive behaviours, on the grounds that it is an interference with cultural integrity. See, for example, Mohanty (1991a&b) and Ong (1988). This sort of argument has been frequently used by some as an argument against feminist organising around such practices as clitoridectomy and dowry. An analysis of 'internalised oppression' provides an explanation for the active role of women in maintaining and defending 'cultural' traditions which perpetuate the subordination and mistreatment of women.

similar issues elsewhere in the country. Similarly, using an example from the collective dimension for both case study organisations, the building of links with other organisations or communities and opportunities for networking can be planned in. Likewise with any 'obstacles': for example, if there is a culture of *caudillismo*, the methodology could be designed expressly to minimise the possibility of reproducing that culture within the group, and ways of raising awareness about how *caudillismo* operates within the culture could be built into the programme content. Thus the use of this model for methodological planning within a self-conscious empowerment approach can provide a structure for analysis to help identify features that are likely to contribute to an effective process of empowerment.

### **10.5 The Significance of Organisational Structure**

The two case studies illustrate the way in which organisational structure can influence the empowerment process in important ways. Some of these relate to the ability of the organisation and its programme directly to permit and encourage the development of the 'core' aspects of the empowerment process. In Urraco, the design of the programme around a two year course introduced structural limitations to the programme's capacity to encourage the 'core' of empowerment; there was some scope for each aspect, but they could only go 'so far', as was shown in Chapter Nine. The role that the co-ordinating team played in the functioning of the study circles also restricted empowerment, by fostering, however unintentionally, a sense of dependence. This had the effect of diluting the useful purpose of the monthly sectoral meetings as a meeting place for women from the various circles. In contrast, the PAEM structure, with animators chosen by the groups from among their own members, with flexibility for various women to fill the role at different times, and with an open-ended programme that gave scope for activities to develop in a very flexible way at the womens' own pace. The existence of the *consejo* provided a forum where animators could find support, encouragement and opportunities to think and learn about their leadership role and to plan and develop strategy. The zone meetings and annual assembly provided fora for women from the

groups to meet each other, compare notes, travel out of their communities and develop a sense of themselves as agents in a wider context.

Structural features can also serve either to put in place or strengthen 'encouraging' aspects, such as leadership development, autonomy and the identification of own needs. In Urraco, there was some scope for developing leaders from the groups, in the appointment of circle co-ordinators. In one case a co-ordinating team member moved from being a circle co-ordinator to being in the overall co-ordinating team. The structure, however, did not very actively encourage the development of leadership skills by either circle co-ordinators or circle members, and there were very limited opportunities for 'new' women to move into leadership roles. In relation to autonomy, there was structurally little scope for this, as the programme was firmly associated with the Catholic church's *promoción femenina*. Also the programme's existence was as a result of a need identified by 'outsiders' and structured to 'outsiders' specifications. Again, in contrast, the PAEM programme structure served to amplify the impact of many of the 'encouraging' aspects, by building leadership development into the programme in an explicit way, by being set up with autonomy and self-management in mind from the outset, and by building the identification of needs, analysis and understanding of the context directly into the materials and methodology.

### **10.6 Empowerment and The Change Agent**

The role of the change agent in programmes intended to promote empowerment with women is potentially a pivotal one. Change agents are usually (though not always) 'outsiders'; they are often extension workers, 'experts' in some form. The attitudes they bring to their work, and the form their work takes can have an immense impact, positively or negatively, on the people they work with. With empowerment in mind, there are a number of attitudes and skills which can be derived from the foregoing discussion of empowerment and the model I have constructed as essential for the change agent to have. The attitudes are those necessary for working with

women on developing self-confidence, self-esteem and a sense of themselves as able to act in a wider sphere. They include complete respect for each individual and for the group; humility and a willingness (or even, perhaps, eagerness) for learning to be mutual; commitment to the empowerment process. The skills of the change agent need to be consistent with the open-ended nature of the process: facilitation skills, active listening skills, non-directive questioning skills<sup>301</sup>. The role of the change agent is essentially one of catalyst - except that unlike a chemical catalyst, the change agent is unlikely to emerge unchanged at the other end. All human beings are the product of their particular life history and culture; it is vital for the change agent to have self-awareness in terms of their own biases priorities and areas of similarity/difference in relation to the women they are working with.

In view of the above, the training of change agents becomes an important issue. The skills and attitudes outlined above are not quickly acquired and require much practice and constant monitoring. How this might be achieved is the subject for a thesis in itself and I shall not attempt to go into detail here<sup>302</sup>, except to say that I suspect that such training needs to be ongoing and to contain many opportunities for self-reflection and self-evaluation. That may imply formal training, or may be an informal process. For example, in the PAEM case study, María Esther filled the role of change agent with the organisation; her training had been a mixture of some formal training and a lot of 'on-the-job' informal training, with constant analysis of the process, and appropriate support to combat isolation.

### **10.7 Implications for the Supporting Organisation**

Organisations which want to support processes of empowerment in grassroots groups or within local or national NGOs (which I am here referring to as 'supporting

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<sup>301</sup> It did not surprise me, for example, to find a section on 'listening skills' in the Oxfam Gender Training Manual (Williams, 1985).

<sup>302</sup> See, for example Araki (1991) . See also Williams (1995).

organisations') cannot do so by imposition, since that would defeat the purpose. The role of the supporting organisation is a delicate one if the purpose is to be achieved. It cannot, by definition, be a directing role. In some ways it is a role of solidarity - except that, to me, solidarity can be passive. I have found it useful to think in terms of building alliances. An ally is not only supportive and in solidarity with you, but will also put their weight behind you in places where you need it, whilst leaving you in charge. An ally is interested in you meeting your goals, because in some fundamental way that enables them to meet their goals as well<sup>303</sup>.

Supporting organisations as allies to groups or organisations in the empowerment process face some interesting challenges. One is that of holding onto the empowerment aim whilst complying with the requirements of their own accountability processes. These do not always appear to be compatible. Depending on the source of funding, there will be reporting cycles and criteria of success or failure that provide pressures that work against many of the requirements of an empowerment approach. For example, funding tied to short-term 'projects' brings pressure for quick, clearly visible results which are quantifiable. Yet we have seen here that processes of empowerment can be long-term and may require an open-ended approach with unpredictable and inconclusive outcomes. Empowerment is not some kind of race or competition - people are not worth less because it takes them longer to get from A to B, yet within a 'project' perspective, not having reached certain objectives within a fixed length of time can be perceived as 'failure'<sup>304</sup>. Talk of 'empowerment projects' may be a contradiction in terms, since the 'project' is generally seen as a short, (usually three to five years), specific activity with pre-determined objectives and targets. With an empowerment approach women themselves need to set the agenda and manage the pace of change. For supporting organisations working within British Charity Law, there is another challenge: that of remaining 'non-political' in their activities in order to maintain charitable status

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<sup>303</sup> The idea of the supporting organisation as ally is, as far as I have been able to ascertain, a new one. For a debate around alliance building, see the various contributions that make up Albrecht & Brewer (1990).

<sup>304</sup> My thanks to Deborah Eade for this point.

and the tax advantages that go with that<sup>305</sup>. Yet we have seen that empowerment is about nothing if it is not about power - and therefore is a fiercely political issue, albeit within a definition of 'political' that is wider than that usually employed in the British context. A challenge faced by organisations reliant on charitable giving is one of image (including self-image). The images that have encouraged charitable giving in the past have been the antithesis of empowerment images, or have been tangible images such as new water systems or immunisation programmes. Empowerment programmes are unlikely to generate the kind of pitiful images that have been used traditionally to raise funds. This implies a major re-education of donors to respond to more positive, perhaps less tangible images - a challenge which some organisations are tackling with some effect.

An additional challenge faced by supporting organisations is that of working alongside 'project partners' who may not themselves have any particular interest in empowerment of women. Grassroots organisations, local and national NGOs and popular organisations are products of the culture within which they are situated, and, unless they are feminist women's organisations, are unlikely to have developed an approach which prioritises the empowerment needs of women. There is a challenge, then, of 'undoing' structures which at best ignore women's empowerment and at worst, actively disempower women, yet avoiding the imposition of an outside agenda. In addition, organisations looking for funds are quick to identify trends in funding criteria, and will strategically, or even cynically, include in funding applications the wordings necessary to obtain funding approval. This was freely admitted to by several organisations I spoke with in the course of my research. 'Empowerment of women' has become one such trend.

The model of empowerment I have presented in this thesis gives some assistance in facing these challenges without losing sight of effective empowerment. Planning has a tendency to simplify and the complexity of women's lives and the inter-relatedness of the many issues that touch them can easily be lost in the planning process. Any

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<sup>305</sup> Indeed, some organisations, such as the World Development Movement, have foregone charitable status in order to retain full flexibility in their work.

model of empowerment is itself a simplification of 'reality', and mine is no exception, but I have attempted to construct a model that is flexible and can be adapted to differing circumstances. The central issue is one of *process*. The 'core' of empowerment as identified here can be supported in myriad ways, some of which fall happily within other development approaches and many of which can be linked with tangible changes. You can build a well in a way that supports the empowerment of women by encouraging them to do the necessary analysis and decision making and to take control over their lives. You can teach women to read in a way which generates debate and analysis and which supports them to become more confident and more able to act. Any of these kinds of activities can be planned *with* people rather than *for* people. This process focus is consistent with Batliwala's account of empowerment through awareness-building and organising women. As Wieringa observes,

Any project concerned with women can potentially entail a transformative element. Sewing courses, literacy programmes, cooking lessons can be given in a way that allows for discussion of the gender division of labour, of women's control over their finances, of sexual violence<sup>306</sup>.

In a sense, what the supporting organisation needs to look for is a leverage point. Taking an empowerment approach to work with women does, however, require the exploration of 'new' approaches as well as a revision of the way in which 'old' approaches are used. For example, networking, and the maintenance and strengthening of women's organisations, are not activities which have generally attracted funding. Within an empowerment approach, they take on a significance that other approaches did not recognise. There may also be an appropriate lobbying role for the supporting organisation, though while maintaining an assumption that women can and will lobby on their own behalf if supported to do so. It is also worth pointing out, here, that the resources that supporting organisations bring to the empowerment process are not simply financial. There are many non-financial resources that can make a significant impact. For example, in the PAEM case, we

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<sup>306</sup> Wieringa (1994) p. 843.

saw that personal support at key moments was essential for the individual setting up the organisation; that contacts with relevant individuals and organisations were provided, helping the networking process, and so on. There is a role for the supporting organisation in relation to mixed organisations, not just to women-only organisations, in applying the analytical questions suggested earlier. In this case, any 'change agents' will have to develop the capacity to focus on the empowerment of women as a gender issue (see page 227) and be skilled enough to keep the process moving without getting 'hi-jacked' by the existing power dynamics.

There are implications of an empowerment approach for the supporting organisation in terms of the evaluation of its activity. In order to 'capture' the degree of effectiveness of the approach, 'performance indicators' of empowerment need to be developed. The fact that the well was built or that the women learned to read will not communicate the process through which that was achieved. Qualitative indicators will be an essential, significant part of evaluation<sup>307</sup>. I would argue also that the process of evaluation itself is methodologically important and that the women themselves have to be actively involved in the evaluation of their empowerment - which in itself would add to the ongoing empowerment process<sup>308</sup>.

One more implication of an empowerment approach to work with women for supporting organisations is related to its own organisational culture. It is not easy to make a commitment to processes of women's empowerment when there are so many social, political and cultural pressures working against it. It is even harder if your

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<sup>307</sup> See, for example, Feuerstein (1986).

<sup>308</sup> Womankind Worldwide has established appraisal, monitoring and evaluation criteria with empowerment as a main focus. Indicators include, to illustrate (women as change agents):

- \* Introduction of new ways of doing things - in childcare, in household, in livelihood, in local political arrangements
- \* Women refusing to continue old practices (eg genital mutilation, child marriage, taking daughters out of school, privileging sons etc.)
- \* Appearance of women leaders at all levels
- \* Women becoming advocates of change within the community
- \* Women influencing other groups
- \* Women setting up their own self-help groups." Womankind (1994, internal draft document).

own organisational culture is not one which encourages women's empowerment. Several women I have talked with who work for development agencies as gender specialists have communicated to me that their organisations systematically marginalize the work of the gender specialists while ostensibly having a commitment to women's development and even specifically to women's empowerment<sup>309</sup>. This can result in tokenism and ineffective work. Given the demands made on change agents outlined above, and the concomitant demands made on the organisation itself, the effectiveness of any work to support empowerment processes outside the organisation will be adversely affected by an organisational culture that works against the empowerment of women.

### **10.8 Suggestions for Future Research**

Within the confines of this thesis, I have not been able to explore the specific applicability of the model I have generated of empowerment in Honduras to other contexts, although, in reading the literature on women's organisations in other contexts there is some indication that the central aspects of the model may well prove relevant. It would be very interesting and useful to test this model against other contexts and cultures. Does the model I have constructed provide a useful framework for thinking about empowerment more widely within Latin America, or outside it? Or is empowerment in, say, Africa or Asia so different that a different framework is needed? (though my reading of Kabeer and Batliwala suggest otherwise). Would the model hold true for empowerment of women in urban areas? Would it hold within 'industrialised' countries, say with poor women in West Yorkshire, where I live, or for middle class women working in the City of London? A cross-cultural study would be invaluable in developing understanding of 'the empowerment approach'. Cross-cultural work is full of pitfalls, but also holds many possibilities, as, for example, current collaboration between SEWA and the West

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<sup>309</sup> Personal communications; they asked not to be identified.

Yorkshire Low Pay Unit on issues of homeworking show<sup>310</sup>. I have also focused here on case studies of grassroots organisations at a similar scale of activity; it would be interesting and useful to see if a similar framework for thinking about empowerment processes can be used for larger scale organisations or networks.

In this thesis I have also not been able to test the model of empowerment I have developed in practice in a 'live' planning/analysis/evaluative setting. My work here has been through necessity of circumstance 'retrospective'. In order to develop further the analysis and model I have presented here, it would be useful to use the model in collaboration with an NGO or grassroots, or preferably both, as they work through a process of programme design, implementation and evaluation.

I have touched briefly on the issue of evaluating work within the empowerment approach. This is another area that would be very useful in moving the analysis of empowerment further than I have been able to do here. For development agencies to prioritise an empowerment approach in their work and survive the challenges outlined earlier, and to work towards knowing how to play an effective supporting role, learning from experience, it will be essential for them to be able to monitor and evaluate their work in an appropriate manner.

As I indicated in Chapter Nine, the work I have done here has not been able to address in sufficient detail the issue of the workings of power (of the various types) *within* processes of empowerment. This is an area of analysis which would make it possible to take the discussion of the role of the supporting organisation still further. It would also enable a discussion of the relationship between bilateral and multilateral aid agencies and processes of empowerment of women - an area which I did not attempt here. Such a discussion would be a valuable contribution to the empowerment debate.

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<sup>310</sup> These two organisations are currently collaborating on an international networking and lobbying project.

### **10.9 By Way of an Ending, a Final Requirement**

I have shown in this thesis that 'empowerment' is a concept with much potential for being used in meaningless ways in relation to women and processes of development. This arises from the contested nature of its underlying concept, power, which has a variety of meanings. Through the case studies presented here I have, however, demonstrated that 'empowerment', where it is used deliberately and with clarity about the underlying concept of power, also has the potential to be used creatively and effectively - both analytically and in practice - to facilitate women's development. This is particularly the case if empowerment is seen as a process, located in the changing and complex 'realities' of women's lives in a gendered world.

I would say, then, that anyone or any organisation seriously working towards women's empowerment should use the concept of empowerment awarely, deliberately and thoughtfully, using their power in ways which actively encourage empowerment, knowing they would be delighted for women to have more power, in its various forms; knowing that this may take some time, that they cannot control the process and that in some cases it may mean men having less power in some of its forms. And to do so fully aware of, and prepared to work with, the conflicts that such processes of change will throw up.

**Appendix One: Profile of interviewees**  
(most names are changed)

**1. PAEM**

El Pital	Age	Status	Births	Died	Educ.	Land	Migr	Ani
Sonia	34	UL	6	0	0	R	y	y
Alicia	31	C	3	0		GC	n	n
Elsa	22	UL	3	0	2	R2mz	n	n
Margarita	36	C	8	0	0	GC+ 8mza	n	n
Teresa	50	C	12	1	0	GC	n	y
Lucía	56	C	10	0	1	-	n	y
Ana María	42	C	8	1	0	20mz	n	y
Miriam	42	UL	6	1	0	0	y	n
Guadalupe	44	C	6	0	3	2mz	y	n

Quitásueño	Age	Status	Births	Died	Educ	Land	Migr	Ani
Concepción	42	UL	11	6	3	GC 1mz	y	n
Esperanza	47	C	9	4	2	GC 2mz	y	y
Alicia	41	C	10	0	3	GC 3mz	y	n
Luz María	35	C	6	0	4	R1mz	y	y
Cristina	56	C	11	4	3	GC	y	n
Eugenia	42	C	5	3	0	GC 1.5m	y	n
Alba	59	S	6	1	0	(father GC)	y	n

María Esther Ruiz	41	C	1	0	6	GC; 10mz	n	n/a
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Key: Status: UL= free union; C= married; S= single. Births: total live births. Died: Deaths aged 0-5. Education: grades completed. Land: R = rented; GC = husband in land reform co-operative. 1 manzana = 0.705 hectares. Migration: moved into village from elsewhere. Animator: of a PAEM group.

## 2.Urraco

Group members	Age	Status	Births	Died	Educ	Land	Migr	Ani
Rosa	18	S	0	0	6	0	y	y
Mercedes	27	C	2	0	6	1.25 mz	y	n
Laura	38	C	4	0	3	GC 2mz	y	n

Co-ordinating team	Age	Status	Births	Died	Educ	Land	Migr
Dolores	28	S	0	0	12	2mz GC	y
Eva María	33	UL	5	0	3	2mz GC	y
Juana	37	S	1	0	9	0	y
Luisa	37	C	4	0	0	0	y
Reina	31	S	3	0	6	0	y
Marcela	40	C	11	2	0	0	y

Key: Status: UL= free union; C= married; S= single. Births: total live births. Died: Deaths aged 0-5. Education: grades completed. Land: R = rented; GC = land reform co-operative. 1 manzana = 0.705 hectares. Migration: moved into village from elsewhere. Ani: animator of a study circle.

## Appendix Two: Interview guides

These lists of questions were compiled as a guide to the subject areas I planned to cover in each interviews; the actual order and questions asked varied, following the flow of the interviewees responses.

### 1. Group interviews

When did it start?

How did it start; how many people?

How is it organised? Official leadership?

What does it do/aim to do?

How often does it meet; for how long? Who participates? Who talks most?

What has it achieved?

What difficulties has it faced?

What changes have there been?

Has it had any support/help from outside? What? Who?

[Is it important to meet as women on your own? Why?]

Is the group involved in the wider community in any way?

What does the wider community think of the group?

Do you talk about personal things, problems? Is that useful?

If the group needs money, where does it come from?

Do you have any links with other groups? or national organisations/networks? Why? Which?

Do you have any training? How/Who?

Do you have any plans/ things you want to achieve in the future?

What might get in the way of that?

Is there anything else you'd like me to know?

### 2. Individual Depth Interviews

About the group/participation

How long in group

Why joined: what hoped for

What does the group do? (activities, discussion, problem-solving); what are it's goals/aims?

What are the advantages of being in it  
(if identifies more confident, who with, how)

What are the disadvantages

Is being in the group important to you? Why?

Has anything changed since you got involved? (activity; relationships;)

Has anything got in the way/made it difficult for you to participate in the group?

What does your spouse/family think of you being in the group? Has your relationship changed in any way? Do you ever get any help with the *quehaceres* in order to participate? Are you able to discuss/negotiate about any of this? Or other things?

Are any other family members in the group? Who joined first? Did you have friends in group before you joined?

Has anything made it difficult for the group to function?

Is there anything preventing the group from achieving its goals?

Do you ever share strong emotions in the group? Over what? Is it helpful or not?

Do you have fiestas?

Are you any more confident now than you were before? How did that happen? What do you do now that you didn't before?

What about the other women in the group? What are they like? What ages? Have they changed at all? Are there any key people? Who? What is it about them? What would happen if they weren't there? [Would you be able to do their role? Why?]  
What can you tell me about women who aren't in the group?  
Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the group?

### Her, her family and the community

What is life like for women in your community? Is that how it should be? Why?  
Do women participate in any community organisations? Or in activities with any other kind of organisation?  
Do women have any choice about how many children they have or when they have them? Are any methods of preventing pregnancy used? (Contraception, sterilisation, abortion) What about you? (Would you if you could?)  
What are the other problems they face? (Violence? Alcoholism? Health?) What about you? Is there anything that could be done about them?  
What are the things women do in order to have money? Who makes decisions about how to spend it? What about you?  
If a woman here wanted to do something and needed money for it, could she borrow money? Who/where from?  
If she needed land, how could she get it?  
Do you see your daughter's life being different from your own? Why? Will she have any more/less choice/control over reproduction? money? etc.  
Are there any things you don't do that you know you could if you only had the chance or the resources? (income generation; participation; activities; etc)  
If you could change one thing about the way your life has been, what would it be?  
What do you think are women's rights? duties?  
Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your life or your family or the community?

### 3. Life History Interviews

When and where born; where raised  
Family background.  
Young childhood.  
Adolescence.  
Identifying as female: what did it mean then?  
Motherhood: care/advice boys, girls.  
Expectations.  
Education.  
Major events.  
Activity outside the home.  
Relationships with men.  
Relationship with husband; any changes?  
Relationships with women; friends; chance to talk about things.  
Relationships with in-laws, parents.  
Money; decision making; economic activity, work.  
Experience in organisations; participation.  
Leadership.  
Self image; esteem; what is being female now?  
Travel.  
Key individuals.  
The future: (once the children go); what is possible? What if widowed?

**Appendix Three. Sample of coding table: PAEM**

Aspect of Empowerment	1 <sup>1</sup>	2 <sup>2</sup>	3	4	5	6	7	8
Meeting others	✓		2			1		
Meeting women			2			2		2
Organisation	✓							
Learning	✓							
Conscientization	✓			2		2		
Women's Rights	✓		2	3	3	2		3
Women's problems			2	3	3	2	2	3
Economic Situation			2	3		2		
Activity outside the home	✓		2					
Sharing problems			3			3		
Awareness of sex roles	✓							
Time for self	✓				3			
Change in <i>pareja</i> relations	✓	1	3	2	3		2	1
Support from men	✓		2					
Talking about personal problems & solutions in group	✓	3	3		3	3		
Autonomy of organisation	✓							
Increased self-confidence		3	3	3	3	3	2	
Getting out of the house	✓		2	3	3		3	
Participation in meetings		3		3	3			
Identity as women			2					
Economic activities	✓		3	3	3		1	
Development of leadership		3	1			3		
Sense of purpose				2		3		
Sense of being able to do things			2			3		
Friendships		3						

✓: Item identified in interview (no particular weighting because of conditions of group interview)

1: Identified in interview but not emphasised

2: Identified in interview and given moderate emphasis

3: Identified in interview and strongly emphasised

<sup>1</sup> 1: PAEM group interview responses

<sup>2</sup> 2-8: individual interviews with group members in El Pital

## Appendix Four: Comparative Contents of Empowerment model

The following are tabulated versions of Figures 9.2, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7, and 9.8 from Chapter Nine, with the model contents for PAEM and the Urraco Health Promoters Programme put together to ease comparison.

N.B. Elements in (bold brackets) indicate that the element was present but not very strong.

### 1. Personal Empowerment (Figures 9.2 & 9.5)

<b>Urraco</b>	<b>PAEM</b>
<b>Core</b>	
Self-confidence	Self-Confidence
Self esteem	Self esteem
(Sense of agency)	Sense of agency
(Sense of "self" in wider context)	Sense of "self" in wider context
(Dignity)	Dignity

Urraco	PAEM
<b>Inhibiting factors</b>	
Machismo	Machismo
Husband's not giving permission	Active opposition by partner
Lack of jobs/control over income	Male control over income
Lack of control over fertility/constant childbearing	Lack of control over fertility/constant child bearing
Childcare obligations. Neglect of own children if participate actively.	Childcare obligations
Dependency on co-ordinating team  Limited focus of the course  Structure: Limited opportunities for group co-ordinators.  Negative stereotypes and gossip about women who participate.	Dependency  Fatalism  "Poverty"  Health Problems  Lack of control over use of time
<b>Encouraging factors</b>	
Getting out of the house	Activity outside the house
Being part of a group and participating in its activities	Being part of a group and participating in its activities
Sharing of problems/support	Sharing of problems/support
Making friends	Wider friendships
Ending isolation	Ending isolation
"Travel"	"Travel"
Development of literacy skills	Development of literacy skills
Having a role in the community /more prestige  Learning skills  Getting a diploma  Encouragement from volunteer  Support of priest  Women only nature of the group	Time for "self"  Spiritual base of programme  Emotional release

Urraco	PAEM
<b>Changes</b>	
Increased ability to interact outside home	Increased ability to interact outside the home
<p>Sense of being able to "do other things"</p> <p>Sense of ability to choose responses</p> <p>Increased ability to participate</p> <p>Ability to run <i>botequines</i> and weighing sessions</p> <p>Sense of own value and therefore expectation of being paid</p> <p>Employment</p>	<p>Increased ability to formulate ideas and express opinions</p> <p>Increased ability to participate in and influence new spaces</p> <p>Increased ability to learn, analyse and act</p> <p>Increased sense that things are possible</p> <p>Increased ability to organise own time</p> <p>Increased ability to obtain/control resources</p>

2. **Collective Empowerment** (Figures 9.3, 9.6 & 9.7)

Urraco (Figs. 9.6 & 9.7)	PAEM
<b>Core</b>	
Group identity <sup>1</sup>	Group identity
Sense of collective agency <sup>1</sup>	Sense of collective agency
Group Dignity <sup>1</sup>	Group dignity
Self organisation and management <sup>1</sup>	Self-organisation and management

<sup>1</sup> These items are (bracketed) for the Health Promoters

N.B.:Elements underlined were only identified in relation to the Co-ordinating Team.

Elements in *italics* were only identified in relation to the Health Promoters.

Urraco (Figs. 9.6 & 9.7)	PAEM
<b>Inhibiting factors</b>	
Machismo	Machismo
<i>Lack of community identity</i>	Incohesive local community
Economic limitations/land tenure system	Lack of control over land
<i>Dependency on co-ordinating team</i>	Dependency on "key" individuals
"Donation culture"; <i>attitude towards area from outside</i>	Culture of <i>Caudillismo</i>
<u>Pressures of time (linked to dependency of groups)</u> <u>Women leaving the programme</u> <i>Lack of autonomous group activities</i> <i>"Limited" focus of programme</i> <i>Focus of individual learning of skills</i> <i>No sense of creating something together, coming to "receive"</i> <i>Attitude of dependency ("If you get organised you get access to emergency aid")</i>	Lack of appropriate technical support "Internalised Oppression" reinforced from outside Active opposition Unstable local politics "Conservative" forces within the church
<b>Encouraging factors</b>	
Support of priest	Support at start from priest
<u>Analysis of own context</u>	Analysis of own context
<i>Sharing problems</i> <u>Support of team</u> Sharing experiences at sectorial meetings <i>Opportunities to talk</i> <i>Making friends</i>	Sharing of problems/support

<u>Training in management of the project</u>	Development of leadership  Organising small income generating activities  Training
<u>Networking</u>  <i>Meeting other groups/Meetings with others</i>	Links/networking with other organisations
<u>Doing things for themselves</u>	"Autonomy"
<i>Community Role in weighing sessions</i>  <u>Travel Abroad</u>  <u>More global perspective</u>	Identification of own needs  Animators from within groups  Initial leadership from committed and competent local woman  Non-prescriptive support from agency  Spiritual base; Philosophy/Liberation Theology  Methodology: respect  Tackling the "conflict"  Discussion of Sexuality

Urraco (Figs. 9.6 & 9.7)	PAEM
<b>Changes</b>	
<u>Ability to take the initiative in fundraising</u>	Recognition by outsiders. ability to generate external support
<u>Lobbying and protest about the murder of Nelly Suazo</u>	Ability to respond collectively to events outside the group
<p><i>New skills</i></p> <p><u>Joint meetings/action with literacy programme</u></p> <p><u>Taking over programme management</u></p> <p><u>Development and maintenance of national and international contacts</u></p>	<p>Ability to negotiate with other organisations including official bodies</p> <p>Ability to organise around own needs</p> <p>Increased access to resources</p> <p>Ability to join/start networks of organisations</p>

### 3. Empowerment in Close Relationships

Urraco	PAEM
<b>Core</b>	
Ability to negotiate	Ability to negotiate
Ability to communicate	Ability to communicate
(Ability to get support)	Ability to get support
(Ability to defend self/rights)	Ability to defend self/rights
(Sense of "self" in relationship)	Sense of "self" in relationship
(Dignity)	Dignity

Urraco	PAEM
<b>Inhibiting factors</b>	
Machismo	Machismo
Alcohol consumption by partner	Alcohol consumption by partner
Culture of violence	Male Violence Cultural expectations of women Male control over income Dependency of woman "Internalised Oppression"
<b>Encouraging factors</b>	
Supportive partner	Concept of "women's rights" Knowledge of "women's rights" Perception of inequalities as "wrong" Sharing problems with other women "Travel" Peer pressure/support Ending isolation Participation in group

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