

CIJR

# Experiences of local development in Latin America

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Map of Latin America and the Caribbean

# Preface

Carmen Medina

**CIIR/ICD representative in El Salvador**

This book presents contributions to a conference on local development by representatives from six countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region: El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Peru. The conference, organised by CIIR/ICD and held in San Salvador in October 2002, aimed to share experiences of the challenges facing civil society organisations in promoting and working for local development.

The ideas, concepts, and approaches discussed at the conference together provide a valuable insight into strategies for local development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The report of the conference, originally published in Spanish, aimed to show some of the successes and failures, some of the problems and some of the opportunities, and so enable organisations working for local development throughout the region to draw on and learn from each other's experience.

By publishing an edited version of this material in English, we hope also to increase understanding in Britain and Europe of the reality in our countries. This will reinforce links and dialogue between North and South, enabling the former to listen more closely to voices speaking from our experience. It will also help in focusing joint strategies between international, national

and local bodies on approaches that can have the biggest impact on tackling poverty on the ground.

The publication of this book has been made possible by funds from the 'Reinforcing local development in El Salvador' project, financed by the European Commission. The two-year project (2000-2002) involved CIIR/ICD and two partner organisations, Asociación Salvadoreña de Desarrollo Integral (ASDI – the Salvadorean Association for Integral Development) and Agencia para el Desarrollo Económico Local (ADEL – the Agency for Local Economic Development) in Chalatenango, El Salvador. Two CIIR/ICD development workers took part in the project: Ismael Ortiz, a local development specialist with ASDI, and Juan Carlos Navarrete, a specialist in alternative business management with ADEL Chalatenango.

For CIIR/ICD, giving practical support by sharing skills at the level of communities, organisations and their networks, and working for just policies at a local, national and international level, rely crucially on dialogue – between us and our partners and the people we work with; between people, organisations, governments and international bodies. We hope that publication of this book will help give voice in this dialogue to the views and agendas of our partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

# Introduction: A Latin American approach to local development

Alberto Enríquez Villacorta

**Director of Regional Local Development, Fundación Nacional de Desarrollo  
(FUNDE – the National Foundation for Development), El Salvador**

## Developing and broadening our knowledge

Local development is now a key issue on many national agendas in Latin America. That is why the Latin American Association of Private Organisations, to which FUNDE belongs, has made local development, together with decentralisation of the state, the focus of its efforts to influence public policy.

The association has set up a permanent working group on both subjects. Its purpose is to encourage not only reflection and debate but also the exchange of experiences in Latin America. It aims to create links between institutions involved in these issues and, above all, to generate proposals put forward by the relevant communities. These could help make local development and state decentralisation become factors that draw people together and increase integration at sub-regional level, in Central America and the Caribbean, and at continental level.

In 2001 we held an internet conference on local development, in which about 200 people from nearly every Latin American country took part. The conference produced what could become a complex and rich agenda for promoting local development processes in the different Latin American countries.

The common denominator between that initiative and the present conference is that both are trying to deepen and broaden the subject, so that we can reinforce and strengthen our understanding of local development. Local development can then become a route to help us read and transform the realities of our countries from a new viewpoint and with a new logic.

## Towards a Latin American concept of local development

The first necessary step is to produce a concept of local development that will enable us to speak the same language – to set up common codes to understand local development. Only by clearly establishing its main components and characteristics can it guide our practice and determine the design and implementation of policies and strategies.

Various common characteristics of local development are already becoming apparent in the work of different organisations working in different contexts, such as the Latin American Centre for Human Economy in Uruguay and FUNDE in El Salvador. With these as our starting point, we can suggest that local development:

- is a process of coordination between agents – sectors and forces – who interact in a particular area to promote common development aims
- involves the permanent, creative and responsible participation of citizens
- involves the generation of economic growth, justice, social and cultural exchange, ecological sustainability, and gender equality.

The aim of such local development is to:

- increase the quality of life for each family, each citizen living in the area
- contribute to the country's development
- adequately confront the challenges of globalisation and the changes brought about by international economics.

This implies:

- A medium and long term vision, establishing the goal and horizon that determine and make sense of short term actions, and making it possible to advance in a gradual way.
- Coordination of local agents with regional, national and international agents.
- The building of a new democratic, decentralised state.
- A new way of understanding and building the country. Regions, municipalities and communities are seen not as problems or sources of different demands but as the proponents and generators of democracy and development.
- Recognition that reality is diverse. Local development becomes a necessary instrument for the management of difference – different identities, different potentials. Regional and local processes, with all their differences, can and must become the driving force of national development.

- The municipalities (ie, areas of local government) are the originators of processes and resources which, given the appropriate conditions, can contribute to national development.

### Constructing a Latin American agenda for local development

At present in Latin America, the concept of local development is used with different meanings. We need to give the term a common political and strategic content.

There is a danger that the term 'local development' may turn out to be insufficient and too vague. Another danger is that it may serve a policy of transferring central government responsibilities to regional or local government bodies that amounts to offloading or dropping them, if they are not transferred together with the required resources and within the framework of a plan to build up local and regional capacities.

In order to avoid such dangers, local agents must give positive content to the type of development they are pursuing. This content must stress the multi-dimensionality of local development, ecological sustainability, solidarity, gender and age justice. There can be no doubt that this means identifying the basic principles of an alternative society, one that breaks with the dominant economic order and the ideology – which has been gaining a lot of ground – of everyone for themselves against everyone else.

What is needed is to initiate and develop, at local level, alternative forms and contents, both in the area of democracy and of development. The local space must be transformed into a living source of innovative economic, political, social and cultural proposals, with the potential to increase and multiply.

### The relationship between the local and the global

We enter the 21st century convinced that genuine development must connect the global and the local. Trying to abolish either of these dimensions means neutering or abandoning real development.

Despite the differences in analyses and interpretations of the phenomenon, it is indisputable that we are in the midst of a broad process of globalisation, based on the new and changing technological infrastructure, which is transforming our ways of producing, consuming, acting, informing and thinking. Globalisation is not only or mainly economic. It is also social, political and cultural. It is the transformation of time and space in our lives. Far-off events, which may or may not be economic, affect us more directly and immediately than ever, whether we live in a US city or a European or Central American country.

Thus the global does not exclude the local, but presupposes it and complements it. The local is neither alien to the global nor can it ignore it. The co-existence of a dynamic tending towards globalisation with another that emphasises differences is stronger than ever today.

Local development is neither thinkable nor possible unless it is set within the global framework of markets or the worldwide logic of technological innovation. However, neither is local development viable unless it starts from concrete local identities, which are by

definition singular. This will ensure that the development process is really inhabited by human beings, by this or that flesh-and-blood man, woman, boy, girl, old man or woman, who live their lives in a particular place.

So we have to try to build a dynamic, creative and complementary relationship between the local and the global. They are joint creators of social, economic, political and cultural reality.

### Creating a space for local development

This means that local development is not just decorative or secondary for any country trying to consolidate democracy, build sustainable development and adequately confront the globalisation process.

Our Latin American countries urgently need a project of national identity that indicates when and how they will be incorporating themselves into the globalisation process, making best use of its opportunities and creatively confronting its threats.

In this project, which must harmoniously include economic, territorial, environmental, political, social and cultural factors, and be built with the broadest participation of diverse social agents and forces, local development is fundamental.

Local development requires a clearly defined territory, a physical space that generates and connects individual agents and economic, political, social and cultural dynamics.

Hence, the question arises of what is the minimum space for local development? It would seem that local development begins where there are government and citizenry, state and citizenry, that is, the municipality. However, although that is where the local begins, it is not where it ends. It leads to the construction of micro-regions or regions, in which municipalities combine or associate.

### Local economic development

Local economic development is on its own insufficient, but nevertheless fundamental to local development. It implies, among other things:

- Activation of the local economy.
- An increase in employment and income, but breaking the vicious circle of bad jobs or bad quality jobs that spread because people are forced to accept them because the alternative is unemployment and extreme poverty.
- An increase in productivity and job quality.
- An increase in municipal funding.
- A clear definition of what municipal action can do and, consequently, cannot do.
- Institutional support, which is related to wide-ranging relationships and legitimacy.
- An understanding that economic development and social development and action are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are complementary. Therefore they should be promoted simultaneously and in a coordinated manner.
- Generating technical capacities at local level (eg, through education and training) and using them adequately.
- Building the municipality's competitiveness.

## Citizen participation

Another requirement of genuine local development is genuine participation by the population, citizens, both in building strategies for the future, and in day-to-day management and decision-making about matters that are important for the municipality or region.

The participation of civil society in local development requires the creation of spaces and mechanisms that institutionalise, ensure and promote citizen participation.

The creation of these spaces and mechanisms means, literally, the emergence of citizenship, understood as men and women taking responsibility for the building and running of their society.

If democracy is a regime that guarantees the inclusion of citizens in the political, economic, social and cultural process, then local development processes are probably the best, most accessible, way for citizens or civil society to begin their participation in the building not only of their municipality or region but their country. A key feature of local development is therefore the existence of a local space, whether municipal or micro-regional, as the privileged place for the citizenry to participate in the development process.

## Coordination and alliances

There are many local development agents, but some are indispensable. It cannot happen without local government, central government, civil society and private enterprise.

In other words, we cannot speak of a process of local development as long as there exists no coordination – however slight – between these four agents. The political implications of this fact are enormous in a continent that has been marked by intolerance, exclusion and confrontation.

## Participative strategic planning

This is a vital tool in the process of building the locality's future in an uncertain and turbulent environment. In order to grasp its meaning fully, it must be seen as both product and process.

As a process – which must contain a high pedagogic content – it enables the agents involved to acquire a growing ability to understand their immediate reality and the environment in which this is set. Then they will be able to manage flexibly the lack of certainty and continual disturbances, and coordinate the many voices, views and different dreams of the future into a future that is possible and therefore viable.

In our countries, coordination is as fundamental as it is difficult. It requires a process of openness and transformation of old ways of thinking and planning, both of government and civil organisations. It means overcoming and abandoning the culture of intolerance, exclusion and confrontation.

Strategic planning is an instrument which strengthens local identity. It gives agents the opportunity to know better what they are and what they want to be as a territory. It gives them a vision and a mission. It enables them to coordinate criteria, interests, and focuses in order to move forward in one single direction.

Local governments, as part of the state, will necessarily play a key role in leading and carrying out local development processes and hence, the strategic planning of them. However, this in no way underestimates the vital role of civil society, which on many occasions realises more quickly the need to promote development initiatives in their local contexts – perhaps because they feel the effects more directly on their daily lives.

## Building development regions

In most, if not all Latin American countries, the basic unit for local development is the municipality. It is the territorial unit where state, society, government and citizenry meet for the first time.

However, most municipalities, regardless of their size, do not have the scope to generate sustainable development. Hence the association of communities arises, as a way of transcending municipal frontiers without destroying municipal identity.

There are other arguments for this, as Pierre Malé noted at the internet conference on decentralisation and local development in 2001: 'The local, enclosed upon itself, is terribly dangerous, because it can generate all sorts of deviations of local egoism, particularism or lack of solidarity. Therefore, local development will have no legitimacy unless it can put into practice elements of supra-municipal and supra-local solidarity in an effective and workable way.'

Local development processes should therefore contribute to building a supra-local framework, within which they can express and protect themselves.

Building or rebuilding our societies from below means harmonising local strategies, so that they combine to become strategies with a broader scope for a larger area. These strategies must be planned in relation to a vision of the national, continental and global situation, not just the local situation.

The grave territorial inequalities throughout Latin America and each of its countries cannot be significantly reduced, except through local development processes that are linked to national development processes and enable countries to cope better with globalisation.

## Reform and decentralisation of the state

We may therefore conclude that a key factor for promoting local development is the decentralisation of the state. But it must be a decentralisation of the state which is an orderly and progressive process of transferring powers, responsibilities, decision-making and resources from the central government to sub-national state bodies, as well as opening up the latter to the active participation of civil society.

Essentially, the decentralisation of the state consists of bringing the management of public affairs closer to the citizenry. The validity of decentralisation policies in the world at present is sustained by the need to strengthen democratic government, through the establishment of a more direct, participative and transparent relationship between the citizenry and its representatives.

It is also hoped that decentralisation will contribute to making the state more efficient, cutting the unnecessary

expenditure that is generated by excessive bureaucracy.

Thus decentralisation means a democratic reform of the state, directed towards overcoming the traditional concentration of power, and moving towards a complex system of inter-related bodies that cooperate and complement each other.

In a decentralised system, the power, responsibilities and resources that go with each of its bodies are distributed in such a way that public decisions and actions are taken in a place which makes possible a more direct and transparent relationship with the citizenry.

### Sharing successful experiences of local development

As became clear from the 2001 internet conference, experiences of local development, including both the successful and the unsuccessful, have been multiplying throughout the length and breadth of the continent.

Some fertile areas for sharing experience are:

- Responses to the challenges generated by globalisation and its associated mega-processes.
- The impact of organisational and economic shortages in local development processes.
- The agents, their nature and their roles: Who brought them together? Who decided they should be included in the process and how was this done? How was this inclusion handled? What role was played by each agent?
- The criteria and methodologies whereby the area in which to promote a local development process was defined.
- Institutional political relationships, which may be decentralised (political decentralisation and promotion of citizen participation or decentralisation of the management of social conflict), centralised, or mixed and in the process of transformation.
- Results of ongoing processes and experiences. How much and how has the population's quality of life changed in the area in question, with special reference to improvement in the indicators of social inclusion? What are the new institutional bodies and present relationships? How and how far has territorial identity been consolidated?

### The role of international bodies

For international bodies, local development presents a vast and challenging field in Latin America. They must channel their contribution towards the generation of democratic conditions and the bases for sustainable development.

But this is only possible within an adequate conception of development. That is:

- International cooperation is a complementary activity that strengthens national and local capacities and is never a substitute for them.
- International agencies are partners in this enterprise, whether their partners are communities, local development committees, municipal governments or civil institutions.
- Being partners means taking on responsibility beyond the merely financial to include: technical cooperation,

professional cooperation, links between municipalities and the exchange of experiences, and links between countries.

- Citizens of municipalities in both North and South have a responsibility to put pressure on global and international processes, so that these offer better opportunities for local development as a means towards building a country.

This means that, in its broadest context, local development involves cooperation on a worldwide scale, between bodies and institutions who are trying, each under their own particular conditions, to advance in this way.

This cooperation must combine exchanging experiences and building wider alternatives – meaning that cooperation has a 'political' rather than a 'charitable' character. We also have to plan, experiment and develop progressively, because we have many distorted experiences of international involvement in development.

What we have learned, and continue to learn in local development, can be a good school to teach us how to behave in the area of international cooperation too. It has taught us a way of functioning based on horizontal, interactive models and working as a network, rather than on North-South relationships that are loaded with paternalism, albeit often covert and in many subtle and sophisticated forms.

The more authentic local development is, the more it will come into conflict with present policies, authorities and structures which impose a violent international order and promote a one-dimensional economic globalisation, seeking to favour exclusively or give priority to big multinational businesses. This means that we who promote local development in the local, national and international field need to contribute towards shaping and making possible an alternative society. That will not happen without far-reaching change in international structures and mechanisms.

### Learning and moving forward

An exchange of ideas has meaning and will be productive only if we are really concerned to share our whole wealth of experiences. It is not a competition to decide on the 'winner' or the one who has had the most success with the fewest problems. We must share not only our successes and advances but also our difficulties and deficiencies. Listening to the experiences from other countries can become a true apprenticeship if it gives us new impetus to:

- reinforce the vision of local development as a space and a field for democratic transformation and a seedbed for sustainable development
- seek and establish strategic Latin American and international alliances as a permanent factor of innovation in local development
- seriously support this direction and keep to it in a systematic, determined and creative way
- broaden and strengthen our links, deepening what should be the basis of the relationship between our countries: respect, and the sense of justice and solidarity.

# Experience in El Salvador

Gladys Melara

Executive Director, Asociación Salvadoreña de Desarrollo Integral

(ASDI – the Salvadorean Association for Integral Development), El Salvador

## ASDI's approach to local development

Our approach to local development focuses on:

- efficient public management, focusing on services for the poorest sections of society
- protection, recovery and organisation of environmental resources
- sustainability of economic growth, by linking organisations, communities, governments and the local private sector in production
- reclaiming and promoting local cultural, ethnic and historical values.

In order to understand and work within the social, economic, cultural and historical processes of a particular area, we aim to:

- ascertain the social, political and economic characteristics of the local population in the given area
- respect, enable or contribute to raising levels of organisation in the population in the given area
- ensure that strategic development plans are participative, so that the local population prioritises and shares in the elements of the plan
- ensure that the main agents of development make use of specific local capacities
- ensure that the main agents of development respect and protect the environment.

Our approach relies on:

- Economic, environmental and social sustainability. Sustainability, in its broadest sense, means integrating economic, social and environmental aspects to guarantee that development benefits future generations without damaging natural resources.
- Participation. Some mechanisms are: consultations by sector, council meetings, communal assemblies, information campaigns, political lobbying, coordination and linking of different agents in common plans or agendas.
- Gender justice, through a process of making men and women aware of the need to allow women effective participation in access to and control of resources and decision-making, through consultations and women's involvement in community organisations.

The agents participating in the process are:

- the population and its existing community organisations
- municipal governments
- the local private sector

- non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the area
- autonomous government bodies that are decentralised from the national government and based in the area
- external agencies, eg international agencies.

## Citizen participation

Once we have identified the existing levels of local community organisation, we have to devise strategies which:

- strengthen or legalise community organisation
- link and coordinate with the local or regional public and private sector
- encourage inter-community alliances for management and political lobbying of public and private bodies, to promote common agendas for the improvement of living conditions
- promote participation in consultations, open meetings and community assemblies, and thereby in community and municipal plans
- raise awareness so that local people taking part can visualise the interests of all those involved.

## The role of the state

The municipality is the state body nearest to the population in a particular area, with responsibility for:

- planning of municipal or micro-regional development
- management and organisation of the area
- drawing up regulations to govern the use of the territory, resources, etc.

However, municipalities are financially dependent on the central state, and if they are unable to generate sufficient income may not be able to fulfil their responsibilities. In such cases, ASDI aims to strengthen their capacity, for example through:

- training and technical assistance in administrative processes, to improve mechanisms for attending to the population's demands
- awareness raising within local governments, so that they play their part as agents and coordinators of development and not just as administrative bodies.

At present, municipalities are in a transition stage of being administrators and suppliers of services to the population – services that are currently deficient and inadequate. The challenge facing them is to assume a proactive role in changing the area from a place where people want to leave to a place where people want to live. One crucial

element in this is to promote local economic initiatives, for example by supporting the economic infrastructure – roads, markets (including second-hand markets and street stalls), bus termini, tourist centres, etc.

### The role of international agencies

Despite a number of positive contributions, there has been a tendency to abandon medium to long term processes in order to react to emergencies. These are always going to occur as long as there is no change in the present situation of the population we are working with – those who are most excluded and impoverished in society.

The present view of El Salvador as a macro-economically stable country has disguised the real situation of the rural communities with whom we work. Cooperation by agencies with these sectors has decreased and there has been a move away from donations to forms of multilateral and bilateral support, where in many cases the funds are repayable.

### El Triangulo micro-region

A lot depends on the level of interest and awareness among the various agents taking part. An example of this is the micro-region El Triangulo in Sonsonate. Here there is a high level of participation and coordination between the three municipal governments, local development committees, water management committees, women's

groups, NGOs and international agencies.

Of the population of just over 50,000, 80 per cent of those who are economically active are engaged in agriculture and farming. But the large livestock farmers, coffee producers and allotment holders have not participated in the first stage of planning and organising joint actions in the micro-region. It is of vital importance for this micro-region's future that these key agents should participate.

The problems are many: poor transport infrastructure, lack of community health clinics, lack of housing, lack of school for higher grades, environmental degradation (high level of contamination of rivers and streams by sewage and solid waste, deforestation through growing urbanisation, lack of environmental regulations and environmental education), and low economic productivity (due to lack of credit for traditional and non-traditional production, lack of training for work, lack of technical assistance for businesses).

Yet the region has considerable potential, with its environmental diversity providing natural resources for tourism, good quality land with access to water for agriculture, and the potential for trade and services (for example, through craftwork traditions in clay and wood). Most of all, there is institutional potential: municipal councils open to new ideas, and communities with leaders wanting change. The challenge now for all concerned is to begin to deliver that change.

# A local development project in El Salvador

Samuel Novoa

Executive Director, Agencia para el Desarrollo Económico Local (ADEL – the Agency for Local Economic Development), Chalatenango, El Salvador

## A development organisation

ADEL Chalatenango is a private non-profit organisation, whose aim is to contribute to raising the quality of life, primarily of the poor population of the department of Chalatenango. Its particular sphere is stimulating economic development. The economic development promoted by ADEL has an entrepreneurial spirit, summed up in its mission statement: 'To promote human development, with a gender perspective and in harmony with the environment, through the creation and reinforcement of sustainable, self-managing businesses, run by the population, mainly those with lower incomes in the department of Chalatenango.'

The agency is made up of 20 organisations coming from the following sectors: private enterprise, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), producers' guilds and communal fishing associations.

ADEL functions at two levels: micro-economic and macro-economic. The micro-economic level is concerned with the creation and development of businesses in any sector of the Chalatenango economy. This is done by offering support services to business people, such as credit services, consultancy, training and technical assistance in both production and business management.

The macro-economic level involves actions to create an economic, social and institutional environment favourable to the competitiveness and efficiency of the businesses. These actions include: area coordination and planning, management of requests for technical and financial cooperation, administration of economic development programmes, and institutional reinforcement of members and other key local agents.

## An example of local development

A concrete example of local development is a project to develop fishing activity in the Cerrón Grande dam area, in which the main agents were the four communal fishing associations which are members of ADEL. It can be described as an integral development project, as its components embrace all the various elements throughout the chain of activities, from production of young fish to the trading of fish on the market.

Other components linked to local development of the

riverside areas are reforestation, management of access to fluctuating lands, and investment to lighten the burden of domestic work for women. The first of these involves combating riverside soil erosion through reforestation, in order to halt the dissolution of the aquiferous base of the dam. The second refers to the lands that arise from the base of the dam when the waters are lying at a low level, which could be used productively by the fishermen, thus giving them access to an alternative survival resource when fishing production is low. The third involves offering women economic resources for the home and/or time to attend technical education programmes.

The project has the following components:

- setting up a fish nursery
- setting up a credit fund to serve the fishermen's needs for finance
- setting up plant nurseries and reforestation of riverside areas at the dam
- investment to relieve the burden of domestic work
- promoting a bill to give access to fluctuating lands in the Cerrón Grande dam area
- setting up an ice factory
- setting up a fish marketing business.

Several other agents in addition to ADEL are involved in the project, including:

- The Centre for Fishing Development (CFD) – the governing body for the fishing sector. It offers technical assistance for the productive management of the fish nurseries and sustainable techniques for catching fish. It gives out fishing permits and also grants fish export permits.
- The National Civil Police, which implements decisions taken by the CFD for the conservation of resources in the dam area.
- Ministry of Education. This body gives access to premises for meetings of those taking part in the project. It sends groups of students to work both in the nurseries and the reforested areas.
- Legislative Assembly. Departmental assembly members (deputies) are putting forward a bill in the assembly for access by fishermen to fluctuating lands.
- The departmental governor has also supported and promoted the bill for access to the fluctuating lands.
- The armed forces, which deploys detachments of

- soldiers to support the reforestation activities and other measures to protect the environment.
- The municipal mayors' offices, which have been involved most in the 'fluctuating lands' component, via their attendance at meetings, as well as lobbying members of the national assembly to promote the bill for access to fluctuating lands.
  - International agencies, which have provided economic and technical support and training. This support has been of key importance, because the sectors benefiting from the project have never had the necessary resources to back their development efforts.

### **Achieving sustainability**

Some key elements in achieving sustainability are:

- Only intervene in those problems where the range of possible solutions is well identified.
- Local development efforts should be compatible with government intervention plans on the problems in question. This avoids possible obstacles and offers the opportunity to benefit from resources made available by the government.
- Real interest of those involved in finding a solution to the problems in question.
- Only those agents whose participation is necessary to the project should be involved.
- As far as possible local development efforts should lead to financially self-sustaining results.
- There should be a coordinating body, preferably a local NGO, to coordinate intervention and be responsible for administering the products obtained.

The general level of support for the project has been high. All those involved, without political or institutional distinction, have systematically supported various intervention activities in the problems of the Chalatenango fishing communities. This gives an idea of the positive will to make these communities' local development efforts succeed.

In the case of this project, neither the party political nor the institutional interests of those involved led them to become protagonists. They merely wanted to support an effort which had high possibilities of success. There were two local agencies (one non-governmental and the other municipal) not involved in the project who at any given moment could have deflected the attention of certain government bodies. However, to date the project continues advancing in a definite and coordinated direction.

### **Gender focus**

ADEL Chalatenango deals mainly with the informal sector of the economy, which is mainly made up of women. ADEL strives to ensure that all its efforts and services take into account the participation of women as direct beneficiaries. This has happened through the offer of micro-credits and the inclusion of women in business training, as well as through projects to relieve the burden of domestic work, affording women an income or time to do business training.

During a second stage of the fishing project, it is planned to set up family ponds for the production of fresh-water shrimps, which will mainly be used and looked after by women.

# Experience in Nicaragua

Luis Antonio Sarantes

**Mayor of El Jícaro and member of Asociación de Municipios de Nueva Segovia (AMUNSE – the Association of Municipalities of Nueva Segovia), Nicaragua**

## Climbing out of poverty

Our country has been engaged in a battle for development since the 1980s, when Nicaragua went through a terrible and bloody period. Since then we have been undergoing an apprenticeship in social co-existence and overcoming political sectarianism. We are learning every day, so that the country is slowly consolidating itself towards better times.

We must not forget that our country is the second poorest in Latin America and comes high among the poor countries of the world. Our foreign debt exceeds \$6,412 million. At birth every Nicaraguan owes \$1,225.

Forty-three per cent of the economically active population is sub-employed. Coffee prices are 53 per cent lower than those obtained in 1999, with no improvement in sight. Our trade deficit is \$1,072 million dollars. Our exports amount only to \$605 million.

We have a fixed annual devaluation of six per cent, added to inflation of around three per cent a quarter. The minimum wage for agricultural work is \$41 per month plus food; for other workers it is \$72 per month. Nearly half of all Nicaraguans live on less than a dollar a day.

## Citizen participation

The population is generally not organised, or only incipiently organised. We lack strong base organisations to lead the necessary processes for development. The population needs constant offers of assistance from international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Even in the big urban municipalities there is apathy among private investors about contributing to and participating in municipal development plans.

Nicaragua's municipal law requires municipal councils to set up municipal development committees and that citizens participate in public management. Although there exists no strong popular organisation, the communities in the municipalities organise around specific local needs. This gives rise to community leaders, who sit on these committees.

The municipal mayor is the president by law of the municipal development committee. Mayor's offices promote citizen participation and lead the process of strategic planning by calling meetings, providing resources for events, inviting key people and making premises available for meetings.

Additionally, mayors have power to nominate

auxiliaries in particular areas. They nominate 'mini-mayors'. These usually have a party-political character, and are typically rejected by the community or disliked because they are not considered representative.

Representation of women is still precarious, although there have been some advances in this area, such as the women of the municipality of Dipilto, who engage vigorously with the local government, with municipal help.

Local governments are making efforts to ensure all sectors of the population participate and thus are represented in local processes. For local development to work we need to build a culture of men and women who are not just voters at election time but are aware of and exercise their rights and obligations

## Decentralisation and privatisation

With international agreements, the regulatory role historically belonging to the state has receded. This means that privatised companies control the prices of public services. The municipality is the base unit of territorial and political organisation in Nicaragua, according to the constitution. Yet the division of powers between the state and the municipalities no longer makes sense since the privatisation of public services. The public services that the state was traditionally obliged to offer its population are now run as a business by these private companies.

Consultation is taking place on a decentralisation policy by which municipalities lose autonomy, as power is transferred to intermediate collegiate bodies (which are not provided for in the constitution). This is more like administrative reorganisation than real decentralisation, in which resources and capacities are transferred as well as responsibilities.

A number of state institutions have specific functions to fulfil in the municipalities. There is a regulatory body to promote municipal development, but in practice its function is more often policing than promoting. It is a bureaucratic body and because it is so inefficient the municipal associations like AMUNSE have to do its job, spending their own technical, economic and human resources, even though it is the government body that gets the budget. Other state institutions boost their revenue with the natural and human resources belonging to the municipalities but do not repay them by fulfilling their responsibilities to develop the municipality.

### Economic factors

The national state has transferred responsibilities to the municipalities without the necessary resources to fulfil them. Funding for municipalities is only 1.4 per cent of the national budget (the universities are assigned six per cent, according to the constitution). As a result the municipalities are undergoing a severe economic and social crisis, exacerbated by:

- the drop in international coffee prices, one of the country's most important exports
- the loss of harvests through drought and the El Niño/ La Niña phenomena
- environmental disasters
- territorial marginalities in rural municipalities: there are no communication routes and some municipalities have only one telephone, which is privately owned.

Local development, which should be based on local resources, has been focused more on public investment than on generating proper development plans that make use of the municipalities' natural resources.

AMUNSE thinks that if a municipality has animal farming as a resource, its development should be horizontal in this area. If another municipality only has clay, its development should be on the basis of this resource, that is, encouraging the best potters, producing the best pottery, the best tiles, the best materials for making things with clay (bricks, terrazo flooring, etc).

### The role of NGOs

Many NGOs, working in the areas of education, health, food security, formal and informal training, the environment and gender and age justice, have taken over the role abandoned by the state, particularly in remote rural municipalities.

These NGOs provide temporary relief for the population's many difficulties. However, because they depend on foreign cooperation, their work is temporary. Their main function is the project. When the project ends, the NGO retires – although there are valuable, but unfortunately isolated contributions, when the NGO becomes involved in facilitating and promoting municipal development processes. In general, the efforts of civil society (NGOs) in contributing to the formulation of strategic plans is sometimes praiseworthy but generally insufficient.

### The role of international agencies

These have a very important role in accompanying municipal development, but because of lack of coordination, many projects are not carried out in accordance with strategic municipal development plans. This means that many organisations are doing the same thing in one area, and few or none in other municipalities, who perhaps have greater need.

International agencies adapt their activity to their own interests and not necessarily to the interests of the population and the area. This means that the projects are not sustainable over time, because they are not adopted as their own by the target groups. The assignation of resources is decided by what is in fashion. Today this is gender, tomorrow vulnerability, another day it could be

environment, masculinity, building of citizenship. This means that the resources are likewise temporary and their impact is diluted.

There is a need to reduce bilateral cooperation between governments and assign more resources to decentralised cooperation with the municipalities, because the latter manage the resources more efficiently, as well as knowing close at hand the needs and priorities of the communities and municipalities.

In Nueva Segovia AMUNSE is working to coordinate the contribution of international agencies, some of which have already joined in the coordinated work on the strategic plans for municipal development.

### Key elements for sustainable local development

In the long term:

- Encourage citizens to be aware and think strategically, and to adopt, participate in, promote and lead processes that are also strategic.
- Realise that development does not necessarily mean having big hotels, beaches, buildings and new technologies. Initially, development must enable people to live with dignity, improve their quality of life and generate opportunities for all the inhabitants of the municipalities. The reason for development must be the human person, treated as a participant and not just as an object generating an infrastructure which often cannot be used (eg, hospitals without medicines, schools without pupils).
- Redefine development processes based on local resources.
- Rethink development, adapting it to our realities, abandoning models imposed by external agencies.
- Work for the political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation of the municipalities, so that they are strongly autonomous.

In the medium term:

- Lobby for fiscal reform, so that municipalities have financial autonomy, acquiring resources by autonomously imposing their own taxes.
- Reverse the net payment of funds by the municipality to the central state, rather than from the state to the municipalities.

Immediately:

- Set up a broad network of agents interested in contributing their skills, incorporating community leaders, who can present agreed proposals and increase the capacity to lobby and negotiate for actions to generate development.
- Reinforce existing municipal bodies such as municipal development committees and local associations of municipalities.
- Continue with the processes of strategic planning, trying to incorporate the private ethical investment sector to contribute to development.
- Coordinate the work of the NGOs, so that their projects are framed within the needs of local development and the population.
- Identify local resources and local potential – drawing where possible on studies already done by consultants.
- Promote a new kind of cooperation with international

- agencies, where resources are budgeted for the long term and the 'project' culture is adapted accordingly.
- Make use of legal mechanisms to avoid the abuses of socially unacceptable investments ('maquilas' or sweat-shops).
  - Lobby the authorities through the municipal development committees for a greater transfer of resources from central government to the municipalities.
  - Generate a broad social movement which leads to moral negotiation on the foreign debt.

### The desire for change

Evidence exists that all the agents are interested in coordination:

- The population wants coordination and to overcome political divisions. However, this desire is linked more to the satisfaction of people's immediate needs than to their civic awareness.
- The municipal movement is clear about the need for coordination. It negotiates flexibly and has overcome political sectarianism.

- So-called civil society, which generally represents non-traditional or leftist positions, takes part in coordination efforts with the other agents of development at national level. However, centralism is prevalent in its actions and results.

- International agencies, mainly European, are aware that their model has not been effective and are seeking to incorporate other elements that will have more impact.

The political parties still continue with an incoherent discourse and practice. The centralisation of the state is reflected in the activity of the political parties. Thus party political decisions about local development find little or no echo in the communities themselves. At local level people do not react in party political terms, meaning that the significance of political parties in the local sphere is minimal. However, political activity during election periods politicises the local population and hinders the building of strategic plans for municipal development.

We must understand that development is a long process, and that we who work for it can do no more than contribute to the long term aims. In doing so, however, we will not lose our peace and our hope.

# Experience in Honduras

Suyapa Lopez

**Member of Asociación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ASONOG – the Association of Non-Governmental Organisations), Honduras**

## Developing people

ASONOG's starting point is the premise that people themselves are the principal agents of their own development. Based on an awareness of the causes of poverty, every citizen must accept the unavoidable responsibility of becoming involved in the process of changing society. Therefore, our approach is centred on building citizens' capacities and skills, in order to build a fighting citizenry, capable of constructing their own development.

A key element is therefore awareness raising and training. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have contributed to local skills training for community leaders, municipal mayors and departmental managers, for example on the legal framework, from the constitution to the laws at present in force, with emphasis on municipal law; and in political lobbying, which reinforces management capabilities.

NGOs have also offered direct support for the people in their communities through technical assistance in agriculture, forestry, etc. This is backed up by training in the drafting of consultation documents, and in the consequent process of designing, managing, carrying out, evaluating and following up programmes and projects. Community management teams, trained and assisted by NGOs, today manage community projects with higher total funding than those managed by the NGOs themselves.

We also aim to promote women's participation in decision-making processes, mainly in structures of civil society. However, when we speak of work with a gender focus, we go beyond men and women. We also consider it important to promote inter-generational participation, of children, young people, adults and older people in all our development processes, and also in local and national affairs.

## Building organisational capacity

NGOs have given advice at a municipal level on building inter-municipal councils, which can manage infrastructure and regional resources more efficiently. They have offered technical support, such as in the protection of hydrographic basins and micro-basins.

They have contributed to increasing municipal and inter-municipal capacity for strategic planning. In the last two years they have succeeded in linking their organisational work in the communities with the

municipality, and incorporating the theme of citizen participation and municipal reinforcement into their training programmes at a municipal level. These now include technical training, land registry, local taxation, and citizen participation and its mechanisms (open council meetings, consultation meetings, plebiscites, etc).

The state continues to be centralist, inefficient and more interested in satisfying the demands of political cronies. Its relation with the municipalities is weak, despite recent decentralisation efforts in which the focus is essentially on decentralising services in order to privatise them (such as water and sewage services, community schools, health services).

One of the great weaknesses of local development programmes is the lack of money. In Honduras, four million people are considered to be poor, of whom three million are considered to be extremely poor.

Therefore the possibility of local development programmes generating their own resources is slight. Resources come mainly from payments by central government, which must by law assign five per cent of the general budget of the Republic to municipalities. However, in the year up to December 2001, they only received 1.8 per cent.

## Promoting coordination

One of the greatest problems is in state investment, where up till now there has been a total lack of coordination and every secretariat of state does as it sees fit, without taking the actions of the others into account. The same thing has happened with private non-government investment, especially from politically and economically strong organisations, who either consciously or unconsciously appear to believe they are self-sufficient.

Development organisations and the government too often carry out programmes and projects without considering how these might be coordinated to ensure a positive impact for the poor population. There are even many cases, especially with macro-projects (more than \$10 million), where, instead of reinforcing existing projects, they ride roughshod over them and make them unsustainable (such as through the application of 'incentive' policies – payment for attending meetings, food for work, etc).

A number of international agencies maintain policies of humanitarian aid with a 'charitable' focus.

Increasingly, in the context of the extreme poverty of our communities, this is going to become more attractive than our focus on generating capacities, on developing *being* as well as *having*.

The fact is, families need to eat today and eating today is their priority. Some international agencies are concerned mainly with material support projects, food security, housing, and communal infrastructure, combining this with gifts of food and other household needs.

An example is the approach of organisations, mainly from southern Europe, that have become involved in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. These organisations arrive and directly set up programmes and projects, usually with a 'charitable' focus (food security, emergency relief), even though there is no need for such projects. In fact, they become an obstacle to local production, as they are a disincentive to the production of basic cereals and other foods, because local producers cannot compete with the donated food.

Without coordination of these various programmes, it will be very difficult to combat poverty at a local level. However, the new government claims it is trying to generate a municipal coordination process. To do this, it is setting up a protocol for community intervention,

which aims to organise municipal investment, coordinating all the agents involved in the area of the municipality.

### **Transcending political interests**

Political interests have historically been very harmful to the success of local development, because political sectarianism has damaged society, and given rise to individualism, divisionism and irrational investment.

However, this situation has been changing and these scourges seem to be diminishing. It would appear that there is a stream of political young people who are trying to do politics in a different way.

Thus there are deputies, ministers, mayors who over the last five years have shown relative impartiality in taking decisions, especially in the allocation of resources. A practical example of this is the massive achievement of inter-municipal associations or councils, where different mayors belonging to different political parties (mainly nationalists and liberals) have come together and achieved a real unity. Today they plan together, manage and even carry out joint programmes and projects. It gives a taste of what can be achieved if local development is coordinated, mutually supportive, and aims to meet people's rather than organisations' needs.

# Experience in Ecuador

Juan Pablo Martínez

**Director, Servicios para un Desarrollo Alternativo del Sur (SENDAS – Services for Alternative Development of the South), Ecuador**

## A conceptual framework

The debate on local development and participation must be set within the reality of globalisation. The influence of globalisation filters downwards, from the state and its institutions, to local areas. Despite the fact that globalisation aims to homogenise and consolidate one approach, it actually generates and increases inequalities and exclusions. In addressing these inequalities and exclusions, people must react by drawing on their own diversity, their own strengths, to find solutions to their problems. Tackling the negative impacts of globalisation, in other words, requires that people place their emphasis on the small, the micro and the local.

Whenever we use the term 'local', we immediately give it a geographical and territorial connotation. In fact, 'locality' is a conjunction of a geographical area with the range of relationships or social dynamics – economic, cultural, political – that define a society at a given moment. We must not fall into the trap of restricting ourselves to a merely geographical analysis, or omitting key aspects or characteristics when we are defining strategies. We have to define not just where, but how, why, and who (the agents).

When we speak of the 'local', neither should we forget that this notion will always be connected with other spatial levels, which may be regional, national, international, or global. We must not forget to consider the external dynamics that also influence and form the local panorama.

Before incorporating the notion of locality or local into the notion of development, we need to point out the factors or guidelines that define development. The most relevant are:

- the resources and potentialities available to the region or locality – not only the tangible and material but also all the cultural resources
- the nature of the institutions, their strength, legitimacy and efficiency
- the local culture
- the human resources.

Development is also a cultural process, which must take into account the socialisation mechanisms of individuals and groups.

Thus local development could be understood, in the words of Barrera and Unda, as 'a sustained process of socio-economic, political and cultural change; a process that is territorially localised, and whose ultimate aim is

the progress of the local region, the regional or local community and, of course, every person belonging to it. This means: economic growth, wealth distribution, improvement of living conditions, gender justice, and care and management of the environment or environmental resources. It also means the appropriation of the local space and its development possibilities, involving the development of political and institutional conditions to facilitate social participation in different areas of local life, democratisation of government bodies, and reinforcement of the social fabric and the cultures living there.' (Barrera A and Unda M, *'Participación y sociedad en el Ecuador'* in *Participación, Descentralización y Gestión Municipal: Elementos para una reforma democrática*, Centro de Investigaciones Ciudad, Quito, 1998, p6.)

In short, a local development process can only take shape and become a reality when it is thought out in terms of the locality, as a socially constructed process, that must unfold via the available technical, political and also human resources. Additionally, we have the idea of integrality or wholeness – that is to say, the process must embrace all the dimensions of everyday life and its inter-relationships – and the idea of continuity, meaning a process in a permanent state of construction and change, as well as itself being a historical continuum.

## An approach to development

Thus our approach to development must cover the following dimensions of reality:

- **Economic:** ensure sustained economic growth, developing the capacity and potential for local production, and procuring the integration of sub-sectors of the local economy within the region, the country and the world.
- **Political:** enable processes of local democratisation, developing appropriate forms and mechanisms that guarantee the processes' sustainability.
- **Social:** improve the population's living conditions (access to basic services, health, education), incorporating criteria for gender, ethnic and generational justice; and reinforce the social fabric and contribute to the building of active citizenship.
- **Environmental:** ensure management (conservation and reproduction, appropriation, distribution, regulation) of environmental resources (natural resources, ecosystems, environmental services).

- **Cultural:** build and/or strengthen collective identities, the sense of belonging, creative cultures, and establish inter-cultural dialogue.

### The agents of local processes

When we speak of agents, we usually mention all the people or institutions that carry out a particular action. However, we also need to consider the relationships – usually power relationships – between the agents, and their logic and mechanisms for action.

The logic of agents or protagonists has a diverse and autonomous character. Despite this, it is constituted through social networks, involving some degree of interaction. On the one hand, there are vertical networks, that reproduce hierarchical patterns of social behaviour, which is a way of maintaining the existing powers and unequal social order. On the other hand, there are horizontal social networks.

Agents, defined by their history, their logic, their identity and their own reality, are multiple entities, complex and often contradictory in their actions. Likewise their inter-relations with other agents develop in scenarios that are equally complex and characterised by conflicts and power relationships. Nevertheless, however complicated the panorama, no action or activity seeking to improve the living conditions of a particular group or to generate development in a particular region, can do so without the management and participation of these agents. So now the question is: how to channel the energies and potentialities of the agents to build a common project? One answer is the coordination of forces to achieve a more equitable development.

### Examples of coordination

Local development processes are not carried out exclusively by a single agent, but through the interaction of various protagonists and agents.

At a local level, there are various agents working for local development – that is, projects attempting to generate development programmes. These include municipalities, parish councils, local civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These interrelate in various ways: the Centre for Development Education, for example, has an explicit strategy to reinforce agents through education, exchange of experiences, accompaniment of leaders, coordination with other bodies and the generation of proposals. There is also participation in regional development plans, which are normally led by local governments. The equal opportunities plan for men and women, for example, at present is led by the Cuenca deputy mayor's office. This arose from social movements, particularly the women's movement, and was supported by SENDAS (the deputy mayor was formerly director of SENDAS).

At regional level – in the provinces of Azuay and Cañar – the Cántaro network is a network of regional NGOs which exchange development experiences, and aim to influence regional opinion on development matters. Cántaro acts through working groups on communication; citizen participation and local development; and environmental management and agro-ecology.

The Regional Water Forum is also a space for exchanging experiences, generating proposals and exercising regional influence over the management of water resources. Involved are NGOs, universities, water boards, representatives of local governments (provincial councils, municipalities), and state representatives (regional development organisations, water agencies).

At national level, seven NGOs have joined in the Democracy and Local Development Group with three areas of work:

- Support for the coordination of alternative governments. A total of 30 municipalities and five prefectures have set up this coordination, with the aim of exchanging experiences, reflecting on the implementation of proposals and influencing the national public agenda through suggestions and concrete demands.
- A national system of training local agents, with the aim of supporting activity by civil society. We are carrying out a training process in 10 provinces out of the country total of 22. These are closely linked to concrete processes of local management and reinforcing existing social movements. The Centre for Development Training is involved in this national initiative.
- Investigation and lobbying on various issues: decentralisation, reform of the state, citizen participation processes.

Another recent initiative is the National Forum for Water Resources, in which representatives from NGOs, national peasant organisations, universities, and local governments seek a broad, permanent democratic space to work together to analyse problems, make proposals and engage in national and regional political debate about water. The national arena is fed into by the regional and/or provincial forums and at present there are 10 active working groups.

### Citizen participation

Cunill and González (quoted in Barrera A and Unda M, as above, pp42-44) pose four types of participation:

- **Community participation** means those actions carried out collectively by citizens in the search for solutions to the needs of daily life.
- **Social participation** is the process of individuals grouping together in different organisations of civil society to defend and represent their respective interests. Through this a social fabric can be progressively woven, which could become the instrument for the development of other forms of participation, especially in the public sphere.
- **Citizen participation** gathers citizens together to intervene in the public sphere in matters concerning their particular social interests.
- **Political participation** is the involvement of citizens in politics as voters or activists.

These types of participation are densely interwoven, because the exercise of participation is an active and dynamic process and must be directed towards influencing decision-making in matters concerning our daily lives. This also means that the role of participation

should also be to question the power relations and forms of domination that repress citizens' means of expression. Participation should enable all social sectors to be actively involved in the legal, political, cultural, economic, social and environmental life of the country. This requires the building up of democracy and citizenship.

However, the meaning of participation can vary according to the viewpoint – whether that of the people or agents who participate, or that of the institutions, organisations or projects in which they participate. In general terms, the definition proposed by supra-national organisations, the dominant political classes, state institutions, the economic rulers and their circles of influence, will not be the same as that proposed by social groups at the base, communities, popular organisations, who focus on participation from the point of view of social pressures and demands.

Two concepts are combined in citizen participation: participation and citizenship. Citizenship may include features such as formal equality of rights and obligations, membership of a political community, the guarantee of citizens' rights, the existence of a more or less developed public space (Vargas V, 'Ciudadanía', Lima, 1997; document taken from the internet). But because of the different socio-economic contexts and characteristics where it is developed, it may also contain features of inclusion and exclusion. Then, although participation is increasingly aimed at acquiring the former features, in fact a gap still exists between discourse and practice.

We should not forget that participation is a type of power relationship, in which certain agents will finally succeed in imposing their rationale on others.

One of the ways in which participation can become a reality is in the carrying out of projects. However, this instrument – the project – may be subject to questioning and difference of opinion and can acquire different meanings and interpretations. The project in itself has its own rationality and is often proposed by agents who are not those living in the locality where the project's beneficiaries live. Nevertheless, for the project to succeed over time and really benefit the locality, it is vital that local agents are involved and want to continue it. This is one of the greatest challenges.

### Local development plans

Local municipalities have the task of planning local development through the decentralisation and de-concentration of responsibilities that the state is promoting.

In general, we could say that most of these development plans are seen as a sort of end in themselves, because while they are being worked out, spaces are created for interaction between citizens and the municipality: there are coordination meetings, regional assemblies, development committees. But once the plan has been determined, it 'deactivates' itself, or else activity dies down considerably.

This shows the present limits of the acting parties. Municipalities, especially rural ones, have limited capacity for political and technical leadership to manage

development in this new context. Likewise, it shows the limitations of social agents' capacity to assume greater responsibilities in this re-definition of local relationships.

Nevertheless, development plans provide a debating area in which to work out possibilities for participation and the building up or reinforcement of active citizens. In some cases, there has been an attempt to establish a more permanent dynamic, such as using bylaws to set up recognised local bodies, such as development committees or regional assemblies. Where the political will exists, these are spaces to discuss and put together proposals or to implement development plans.

In other cases, after the plans have been drawn up, the particular issue groups or committees are the ones that continue to function. Here they are activated by NGOs, in agreement with interested local organisations, and focus on particular issues and/or the need to reinforce active participants.

None of these participative processes, from the minimal to the most advanced, are exempt from conflicts. Agents change and evolve, and so do contexts. However, one of the ways in which these processes can be consolidated is by learning to overcome confrontational positions, which means coming to agreements, discussing them, fulfilling them and watching over them. Likewise, institutionalisation of the spaces created, by means of legal frameworks that guarantee and legitimise them, is important. This requires the existence or building of a local fabric that is sufficiently creative, active and responsible. It requires a local government that thinks of itself as a political manager of its locality and not merely an administrator of services – one that gives clear indications that it is working for the democratisation of local relationships.

### The equal opportunities plan

This initiative arose out of the women's movement with NGO support, and has since been promoted by local government. Its aim is to become a public policy initiative that works to have an impact on the inequalities and exclusions suffered by women at local level.

The initiative has meant gaining spaces for diagnosis, political dialogue and drafting of the plan itself. Now some of the plan's proposed activities are beginning to be implemented (training for women, training of municipal officers).

At its different stages, coordination, reaching agreement and consolidating political will have been great challenges. Consolidating the plan as public policy makes different demands on women's groups, on the institutions supporting them and on the local municipality. During this, there have been conflicts of interest. The plan's future level of consolidation and institutionalisation will be a good measure of how far the relationship between local government and a sector of civil society has been modified.

Ultimately, like the plans for local development, the equal opportunities plan's chances of consolidation will depend on the way conflicts are managed and the extent to which this initiative really becomes institutionalised.

It will also depend on how actively the social fabric participates, and the extent to which local government is prepared to give a clear signal to go ahead with the democratising of local relationships.

### **Decentralisation and the role of the state**

Ecuador began the process of constitutional reform in the mid-1990s. In 1996 the 15 per cent law was passed, which increased the transfer of central government funding to sectional organisations. In 1997 the law of state decentralisation and social participation was passed. This law favours administrative decentralisation and the delegation of state functions and responsibilities to autonomous sectional authorities, especially education, health and housing. Lately, there has also been a transfer of authority over the environment towards the municipalities and of irrigation and agriculture to provincial councils.

The decentralisation process has two facets. As a fundamental component of the reform of the state (reducing its size, disinvestment, reorganisation of the provision of services), what is being decentralised is fundamentally the functioning of services (the neoliberal agenda). An alternative meaning of decentralisation is connected with the demand for social democratisation, the search for justice and the reversal of processes that not only seek centralisation but above all concentration of economic and political power. This is a process of bringing the state and civil society closer together (the democratic agenda).

In practice the debate on these two positions does not go very far. The state, as such, has not contributed to the creation of a pragmatic or rational public debate on specific aspects of decentralisation. It has approached the problem by appealing in general terms to principles, that operate in any process of state reform: de-bureaucratisation, fiscal austerity, administrative efficiency.

For their part, municipalities and provincial councils pursue the funds owed to them to consolidate their existing budgets. To do this they make decentralisation demands. Likewise, various social and political agents use it as a mechanism to support and defend their own particular interests.

In short, the relation between the state and local governments revolves around this type of administrative decentralisation. However, the municipalities' capacity to respond differs widely. Small rural municipalities have the least capacity for decentralised management, whereas large municipalities like Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca – the country's three largest cities – are the ones that cope best with the central state in this process.

The issue of finance for local development processes and initiatives also limits the actions that municipalities can undertake beyond providing services or infrastructure. Because of their financial dependence on the state and their limited capacity to generate their own resources, clearly the resources available to them will be limited. This is complicated by management weaknesses, which make them less able to seek stronger cooperation with development bodies, such as international agencies, NGOs, and other state bodies.

### **Political will for change**

Local development and participation are not simply methodological problems, but refer to a political proposal seeking to democratise the relation between the state and society, transferring more power to civil society. This requires the explicit political will of the local authorities, social organisations and the citizenry in general to sustain a process of this kind.

Local governments view local development and participation primarily in an administrative and functional way, whereby instruments (such as development plans) and mechanisms (such as council meetings) reflect agreements between different agents. What they can actually achieve depends on the quality of the mechanisms that have been set up and on their capacity to make decisions. It also depends on the usefulness of development plans as an instrument guiding annual planning by municipalities, irrespective of electoral political vicissitudes.

For civil society, however, local development processes provide an important coordination of the social fabric, through discussion-spaces for different local agents seeking consensus. Making it work requires a serious capacity to make proposals and the explicit will to turn the plans into action.

# Experience in Peru

Lucio Quiñonez

Director, Guamán Poma de Ayala Centre for Education and Communication, Peru

## The democratisation of society

We work, together with other agents, for change towards the democratisation of society. By democratisation, we mean a process that eliminates extreme inequalities and different forms of political, economic, cultural and gender exclusion. Our aims can be summarised as:

- personal development and empowerment of human capacities
- improvement of living standards
- recovery, conservation and boosting the potential of natural, technological and cultural resources
- reinforcement of social organisations (groups structured around particular interests, such as neighbourhood, community, economic/productive, cultural, educational, sporting) and local institutions
- democratisation and citizen participation.

Our approach is to facilitate coordination between different agents and participants; help to formulate integral development plans; and help to carry these plans out in strategic projects, whose ultimate aim is to improve people's living standards.

By coordinating the interests of all the agents – public institutions, private enterprise, community organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – we hope to make local development sustainable. Concentrating the capacities and resources of the various agents through support and cooperation leads to more efficient and effective management and a greater possibility of success. The participation of all the agents should also improve continuity of local development plans in possibly adverse political situations.

## Criteria for local development

The principles or criteria implicit in our approach are those that have proved successful in urban management in different places around the world. These include:

- **Participation of civil society:** All the inhabitants of a town should feel responsible for and committed to providing a healthy habitat and an environment that can offer good quality of life for all. So the participation of all the citizens' institutions and organisations is necessary to gain this human development we all aspire to.
- **Reinforcement of local institutions:** We rely on institutions for the technical, legal and executive framework for urban management. Institutions in turn rely on qualified staff, therefore training of human resources becomes a key element in our activity.
- **Interactive participation:** This is a key element in

improving the decision-making process in urban management. It is a process of people talking and frothing between, or engaging with, each other at different levels.

- **Whole vision:** All the city's inhabitants are concerned with its whole space. Changes in one area of city life will have an effect on other aspects, and therefore on the improvement or worsening of the citizens' overall quality of life. So in our intervention strategies, we must never lose sight of the criterion of wholeness or integral vision. For efficient urban management, there must be entry points that are acceptable to people and their representatives, but these must not be isolated from the overall perspective.
- **Use of appropriate technologies:** Technology to generate infrastructure and basic services should be based on: affordability and ease of use (a balance between technologies that require abundant labour and those that require abundant capital); ease of operation and maintenance; methods that respond to demand; methods that provide opportunities for skill development.
- **Sustainability:** Any activity, project or action carried out for the benefit of citizens must foresee from the start how it can be maintained. Sustainability must be guaranteed at the social, economic, ecological and institutional level.
- **Justice:** Our work will always seek justice and equality of opportunities for all agents, and pay special attention to agents who have had no voice for many centuries. For example, local development should meet the practical needs of women (water, drains, housing, education) and their strategic needs (elimination of institutionalised forms of discrimination, measures to tackle domestic violence, quotas for access to public office). Recognising and giving positive value to women's contributions leads to the breakdown of prejudices and paradigms, and gives women greater interest in becoming involved in the public sphere.

The above criteria are to create better conditions of life for people.

## The coordination process in the South Valley

Since 1996 the Guamán Poma Centre has assumed the commitment (at the invitation of the mayors) to facilitate and advise on the coordination and citizen participation process for local development in the South Valley – the name used by the population to refer to the

four districts in the southern Cusco valley (San Jerónimo and Saylla districts in the province of Cusco, and Oropesa and Lucre districts in the province of Quispicanchi).

Although this organisation arose through the political will of the municipal authorities as part of the state, today civil society plays the role of protagonist in the bodies which were later set up at district and inter-district level to take forward the local development plan. Chief among these is the Inter-District Coordination Committee for Development (ICCD) whose mission is to achieve the harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the districts covered in order to improve the citizens' quality of life.

The committee's role is to analyse and tackle the problems and solutions common to the four districts in a coordinated way, and to set up a pilot model for management of local development and democratic citizen participation in the context of weakened local institutions and break-up of the social fabric.

This involves devising an integral plan for strategic and sustainable development. This planning process has attempted to be participative by seeking to mobilise and involve the population through gathering their opinions, wishes and resources. It is not simply the drafting of a plan document, but is in itself a method for engaging with and involving the citizens.

### **Principal agents in development planning**

The principal agents who have become involved in this process are:

- Administrative political agents or public institutions: these include the municipality as the local government elected by the citizens, health services, education, governors, national police, among others.
- Economic agents: some national and regional private businesses, small and micro local businesses.
- Social agents from the whole network of organisations comprising civil society: peasant communities, human settlements or popular urban districts, women's organisations, cultural organisations, producers' and traders' organisations, the political parties, among others.
- Other institutional agents such as the university, church, NGOs, etc.

As organised groups, these agents can represent and express the capacities, needs, interests and expectations of their members or constituents. As such they seek and contribute to citizen participation.

### **Citizen participation**

Local government can play a key role in leading the process. The ICCD, for example, was set up and is led by the mayors of the four districts, who have been popularly elected to represent the people. At the same time, local

government can facilitate legal and operational mechanisms directed towards promoting citizen participation – for example, by providing spaces for education and training, such as municipal training schools and other spaces aimed at developing competence, skills and ideas.

A number of places have been set up where citizens can democratically express their needs. These places include inter-district forums, where different bodies present plans, projects and proposals. However, there still remains the need to promote more democratic practices as part of the vision for the future. A key element in ensuring the sustainability of local development processes is the institutionalisation of places for citizen coordination and participation.

NGOs also contribute to developing capacities through the training of leaders to sustain the process. Indeed, as part of civil society, they fulfil the role of engaging on behalf of civil society with the state. Their activity is frequently directed towards a vision of the future expressed by the population.

It is hoped, through education, training and opportunities to participate, that a citizen will become a person capable of acting freely, with democratic attitudes that are inclusive and not exclusive, and with the capacity for leadership and generating proposals.

### **Strategic projects**

In principle, strategies used to promote the local development process imply very significant costs. For local development to be sustained, the municipalities and the population must be prepared to take on the costs of the process.

By adding together resources from the state, the municipalities' own funds and funds from international agencies, the ICCD has been able to invest in strategic projects and actions to keep the local development process going. In these strategic projects, the different agents participate in a coordinated way and make a collective contribution.

International agencies can be partners to promote local development processes. They contribute to thinking about these processes, together with economic support for institutional reinforcement. They also contribute to whole projects, given priority by the population within the framework of local development plans. They help make these plans come to life and the population see its needs fulfilled.

Such tangible achievements are crucial to the sustainability of the process: to gain the continued support and participation of citizens, local development processes must strive not just to set up frameworks for enabling development, but also to begin to satisfy citizens' most pressing needs.

# Experience in the Dominican Republic

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## A 'political' process

Our concept or vision of local development is a response to the global economic, cultural and political processes that frame our lives. For us, local development starts from a political view of the living conditions of many of the inhabitants of our country.

From our standpoint as an organisation working with excluded groups and supporting citizen participation, local development is seen as a methodological focus for our work. For us it is an organising process in the areas in which we work to obtain a better quality of life and human development for the community. As such it has various dimensions:

- social and political growth and development of leaders
- spiritual: building of history and identity
- material: economic growth, better wealth distribution and better services.

The main agent of this process must be the community itself. Participation is an integral part of the process. The organised community is involved in diagnosis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation: in other words, as a social protagonist of initiatives and change, with the power and ability to make contributions. Non-organised citizens – including those sectors of the population living in extreme poverty – are involved through information and awareness-raising. Participation must become an ongoing educational process, in which the community transforms its environment at the same time as transforming itself.

Outside the community, non-governmental organisations have a technical role (providing expertise) and a political role in supporting the community in the negotiation processes. This might involve carrying out investigations of neighbourhood problems, mediating among different community opinions about where to begin, facilitating the joint drafting of plans and formulation of proposals, identifying sources of funding, and assisting with management of projects.

## The role of the state

In our country there is still a centralising state and barely 4.5 per cent of the national budget is managed by town halls (local governments).

Our local governments have little real connection with the population and its organisations. They are technically weak in the management of social processes and have a political culture that limits a permanent, sincere relationship with other civil sectors.

In the Dominican Republic, many of the advances in citizen participation and local development processes have been driven and promoted more by civil society than by the political parties. These adopt many of the proposals as political rhetoric, but in concrete initiatives their political will is relegated to a spectator-role or involvement merely to obtain some party political benefit.

In the case of the Neighbourhood Development Agendas (NDAs), which are being carried out in five marginal neighbourhoods in the capital, political will has materialised in the provision of resources, but not in involvement in the process. Nevertheless, these NDAs may become an apprenticeship of sorts, leading to new kinds of relationships between the state and the population and its organisations.

## Aims of the local development process

The local development process should contribute to:

- building a collective identity, which stimulates potential for initiatives
- institutional reinforcement of the participating community organisations and their networks
- changing the political culture: more democracy, more solidarity.

The outcome will be social protagonists with more capacity to formulate proposals, more social awareness, and better negotiation and management skills.

# Conclusion: Challenges and opportunities

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## A broad front

Local development processes are necessarily set within the context of each single country. There are common elements, such as poverty, social exclusion, territorial imbalances and high levels of state centralism. But each country also has its own particular characteristics. Every country also operates under the impacts and challenges of globalisation. This requires ongoing diagnosis, which must be carried out by local development agents.

Local development is a battle on a broad front. It is not just an effort by municipalities but by countries. It must be fought from below and from above, simultaneously. It includes neighbourhoods and communities, but it is coordinated at the level of municipalities and micro-regions and must then link with national and international processes. Thus local development confers a new dimension and value on municipal spaces, because this is where society meets the state, citizen meets government for the first time.

The local development processes in the six countries covered in this report are emergent, new and therefore still fragile. But they are gathering strength and becoming factors for change for all those who are involved in them.

Contributing to the local development process requires preparation. Although they are fundamental, good will and commitment are not enough. It is necessary to have capacities, knowledge and skills to contribute.

Local development must continue to deepen its concept and focus. These are dynamic processes and still under construction. They are enriched through practice and debate. Therefore, they must be continually revised, on the basis of practice and experience. The debates must be broadened: local, national, international. This requires greater levels of reflection, analysis, debate and exchange.

Local development is a political and technical affair. On the one hand, it involves political interests and wills, and on the other, it requires knowledge, capacities and skills.

A very important factor is the construction of adequate methodologies, based on a clear idea and the concrete reality of the local, national and international environment.

## Collective and coordinated

All the contributors to this report agree that leadership of local development must be collective and coordinated. Some differentiate between actors and agents, others between passive and active agents. What must be stressed is that being an agent of local development means shaking off passivity and becoming consciously involved. As long as there is no coordinated action, there is no genuine local development process.

Although there is agreement about who are the fundamental agents in local development, more work needs to be done on the role of each one of these. It is crucial for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to identify these local agents in the area, to understand their weight and power. The power map can be a useful tool for this.

The contributors also agree that in promoting the inclusion of all the agents (both male and female), it is necessary explicitly to favour those who are disadvantaged. This gives rise to the question of how to improve the condition of those who are disadvantaged.

In the six experiences, the external agents (national and international) play a complementary and important role in local development processes. Therefore it is necessary to reinforce their participation. But it must always be remembered that these should not take over the role of the fundamental agents.

## Principal agents of change

There can be no doubt that in the experiences presented, two agents have priority, and see themselves as the principal agents of change. This is where efforts must be concentrated: they are the citizenry or civil society and the municipal governments.

We must deepen the concept of citizen participation, through methodologies, spaces and mechanisms to make it effective. This means promoting citizenship-building based on a vision of duties and rights. It means reinforcing communities and social sectors through organisation, education and training. This could contribute to a new broad social movement that participates fully – with proposals and actual implementation – in local development processes.

We must also recognise the key role that local governments play. It is important that they move on from being administrators of services to becoming managers of local development. They have to lead the local development process. In order to do this well, they have to go through a process of transformation.

Therefore it is crucial to contribute to the reinforcement of municipalities, through awareness-raising and support for institutional transformation processes, including the financial autonomy of municipalities. In this context there is a need to review the responsibilities of local and national government.

The decentralisation of the state is necessary to promote local development. All the countries have centralised states and weak municipalities. Decentralisation is crucial to bring about a redistribution of power from central government to the local governments and citizenry.

### Tools for local development

Education and training is crucial for local development. But it must be appropriate, pertinent, opportune and high quality.

Participative planning emerges as a very important tool. Participative planning processes require an effort to build institutions to carry through the plans, processes and agreements in a participative way. Here local governments and civil society work together, as well as other actors.

The funding of local development is another key theme which emerges to a greater or lesser degree in the different experiences. This involves working on aspects such as tax, the transfer of central government funds to local governments, and the generation of conditions that make public and private investment possible.

Local economic development involves the creation of wealth, employment and income. It involves identifying the competitive potentialities of municipalities and regions. Competitiveness is something that is being built up (for example, fishing in Chalatenango) but strategies are also needed to reach new levels of competitiveness.

Local development must include a focus on justice (ethnic, gender, age and disadvantaged groups). This requires great creativity, so that it is not just paying lip service. Such inclusion must operate in the processes themselves, among all the agents, both male and female: governors, citizens, business people.

Lobbying from the local level over national decisions requires that local agents are organised, informed and motivated. They should be seeking political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation, lobbying for harmonisation of laws governing municipal activity, and pressing for new legal frameworks for local development.

Local development leads to new ways of doing politics. It introduces civil society into the area of public policy, but from a citizen's perspective – a perspective that challenges the political parties. Agents for local development can push for the transformation of political parties and their role in countries and governments.

Encouraging and setting up inter-municipal associations and development micro-regions and regions

can also assist local development. In the same way, international agencies can provide a positive contribution from beyond municipal frontiers. A good relationship will ensure a balance between aid for emergencies and long term local development processes, and promote a new kind of international cooperation for local development: one that is long term and not confined to single projects.

### The challenge for civil society

The exchange of these six experiences presents local development as a route towards alternative development, which demands and contributes to a broad, deep democracy and requires the transformation of the agents who want to participate actively in it.

Local development challenges civil society to play a new part in development policies and processes, and therefore in the building of democracy. All NGOs who described part of their experience noted that they themselves are also 'changing'. This change obliges them to:

- Define or re-define their nature, mission and role with a long term vision as agents of transformation or change.
- Situate themselves correctly within a system of agents: they are not a social organisation or a political party. They are civil institutions, that must reinforce their non-profit character (solidarity) and their professional capacity.
- Concentrate their role and efforts on reinforcing the fundamental actors, to facilitate and support local development processes.
- Prioritise work with disadvantaged groups, but do not confine themselves to these. Local development requires them to build a relationship with all those involved in it.
- Play a part in facilitating coordination: links and bridges.
- Build indicators to show whether and how much they are contributing to local development.
- Leave behind the logic of projects and adopt the logic of processes. This must be reflected in all areas of work.
- Seek participation – with clear institutional criteria – in spaces, networks, alliances for local development at local, national and international level. This enriches the theory and practice of local development.
- Assume that their legitimacy as institutions will come from the quality of their work and their efficient and transparent management of resources.

Given all the above, the results of the exchange of experiences described in this report can be summed up in two final thoughts:

- Local development is a new route to building democratic countries, with solid bases to promote sustainable development. Hence it is a worthwhile commitment, that challenges and summons all our institutional and personal, political and technical capabilities.
- Given the complexity, exchanging experiences is an element or factor that can contribute to the reinforcement of institutional work and of the processes of local development themselves.



# Experiences of local development in Latin America

Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are taking a lead in exploring new ways of promoting development that meets local needs and involves local people. This report, based on contributions to a conference on local development held in El Salvador in October 2002, features experiences from six countries – El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Peru. It shows some of the challenges facing organisations working for local development, and describes some of the strategies and approaches that have been used in the region. Together, the contributions from the six countries demonstrate a Latin American approach to local development that offers the potential for real improvements in the lives of local people and local communities.



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