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Doing Development Right

Rights-Based Development and the NGO Agenda: a Case Study from Guatemala

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the new millennium the Rights-Based Approach (RBA) to development has come to influence the international development agenda, challenging the traditional charity model and the Basic Needs Approach (BNA). A large theoretical literature can be found on RBA, as well as training material and handbooks for development practitioners. Little is to be found, however, on the implications of RBA in practice. What difference does the approach make in people's lives? This is a central question for this study, which was carried out during a three month period in the municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, situated in the north-western part of Guatemala. There, the Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR) supports local organizations aiming to improve the situation for the indigenous population of Mayan heritage. The women's organization CODEIM is one of these organizations and the subject for this study, which has been carried out using a variety of qualitative methods, such as interviews and participatory observations. The aim was to discern opportunities and challenges for SOIR and CODEIM to work from a RBA and the conclusions imply that there are potentials as well as difficulties ahead and that the toughest challenges concern changing attitudes towards development cooperation, involving pedagogical tasks in Sweden as well as in Guatemala.

Keywords: Human Rights, Development, Rights-Based Approach (RBA), IM, SOIR, Guatemala, Indigenous Women's Rights

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Abbreviations

APROSAMI	Asociación de Promotores de Salud de San Miguel
BNA	Basic Needs Approach
CODEIM	Cordinación para el Desarrollo de la Mujer Miguelense
DESMI	Deshidratadora de Frutas y Plantas Medicinales de San Miguel Ixtahuacán
DEMI	Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena
DFID	UK Department for International Development
FEBIMI	Asociación para el Fortalecimiento de la Educación Bilingüe Miguelense
FUNRURAL	Fundación para el Desarrollo Rural de Guatemala
GRO	Grass-Roots Organization
HR	Human Rights
IM	Individuell Människohjälp
IMU	Instituto de Investigación, Capacitación y Desarrollo de la Mujer
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
MAGA	Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Alimentación
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RBA	Rights-Based Approach
SEPTEM	Secretaría Presidencial de la Mujer
SIDA	The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SMC	Swedish Mission Council
SMI	San Miguel Ixtahuacán
SOIR	The Swedish Organization for Individual Relief
SOSEP	Secretaría de Obras Sociales de la Esposa del Presidente
UDADIM	Unión de Asociaciones de Desarrollo Integral Miguelense
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1 Introduction

The basic purpose of development is to enlarge people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and can change over time. People often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not immediately, in income or growth figures: greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political and cultural freedoms and sense of participation in community activities. The objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives.¹

(Mahbub ul Haq, founder of the UN Human Development Program)

1.1 Introducing the subject: RBA to development

In the 1990s there was a gradual shift in the dominant international development discourse. When The Declaration on the Right to Development² was adopted by the UN in 1986 the debate on poverty alleviation took a turn. As the world witnessed, the traditional service-oriented policies and the billions of dollars being spent as foreign aid had not succeeded in eliminating poverty worldwide. Large NGOs, IGOs and governmental aid agencies began to adopt new policies. As implied in the quote above, the idea that economic growth was the key aspect of poverty relief was challenged and aspects such as human dignity and the universality of human rights were emphasized in the development agenda. Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* was very influential for this new line of thought. In Sen's publication, development is considered a process of expanding human freedoms, and according to Sen, the assessment of development has

¹UNDP, "The Human Development Concept", <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/>, Visited 10 May 2009.

²For a comprehensive discussion on the Declaration on the Right to Development, see Sengupta, Arjun, 2002, "On the Theory and Practice of the Right to Development", *Human Rights Quarterly* vol. 24, pp. 837-889: The right to development is referred to as "a process of development which leads to the realization of each human right and all of them together and which has to be carried out in a manner known as rights-based, in accordance with international human rights standards, as a participatory, non-discriminatory, accountable and transparent process with equity in decision-making and sharing of the fruits of the process." (p. 846.)

to be informed by this consideration. Measuring development in terms of GNP growth or level of industrialization is “simply not enough.”³

In the late 1990s a Rights-Based Approach (RBA) to development was slowly but surely replacing the Basic Needs Approach (BNA) in a growing number of international aid agencies and NGOs.⁴ Literature and policies on human rights and poverty alleviation were traditionally separated and for a long time human rights activists and development practitioners worked with limited exchange and interaction. According to Peter Uvin, author of *Human Rights and Development*, as a result “practitioners and policymakers have missed great potential for the clarification of mandates, mutual learning, and collaboration on the ground.”⁵ Today, human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International have given increased focus on economic, social and cultural rights and development NGOs start to phrase their efforts in terms of rights.⁶ This development has had a merging effect on the “two worlds” of human rights advocacy and development cooperation. Or, as Uvin puts it,

By the end of the 1990s, both the PowerPoint presenters and the dirty-fingernails folk had converged around some acceptance that human rights ought to play a larger role in development.⁷

1.2 Relevance of the study

Without further indulging in what Uvin implies with a “PowerPoint presenter” or a “dirty-fingernails person” I could probably be considered being both. As a student of human rights and

³ Sen, Amartya, 1999, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, p. 36.

⁴ See for example UNDP, 2000, *Human Development Report* which describes human rights as an intrinsic part of development and development as a means of realizing human rights.

⁵ Uvin, Peter, 2004, *Human Rights and Development*, Bloomfield, Kumarian Press, p. 47.

⁶ Traditionally, the distinction between a “human rights NGO” and a “development NGO” lies in that human rights NGOs mainly have been concerned with civil and political rights covered in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights while economic, social and cultural rights covered in the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights usually have been emphasized by development NGOs, although often referred to in terms of “basic needs” as opposed to rights. For a thorough discussion on different types of NGOs, see for example Krut, Riva, 1997, *Globalization and Civil Society: NGO Influence in International Decision- Making* Geneva, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

⁷ Uvin, Peter, 2007, “From the Right to Development to the Rights-Based Approach: how ‘Human Rights’ entered Development”, *Development in Practice*, vol. 17, p. 597.

active member in a Swedish development NGO, the areas of human rights and development appear to be intrinsically linked and therefore the RBA to development seems appealing as a theory. The study of NGOs has intrigued me for some time and in 2008 I conducted a paper on UN-NGO relations studying the influence of NGOs in the UN Commission on Human Rights.⁸ As I started to read more about the RBA my curiosity to explore its implications in practice grew. And when I was given the opportunity to spend three months as an “information-volunteer”⁹, with the Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR)¹⁰ and its partner organizations in San Miguel Ixtahuacán in Guatemala the idea for this research project came alive. As Maxine Molyneux and Sian Lazar argue in *Doing the Rights Thing: Rights-Based Development and Latin American NGOs*:

Despite the continuing debate and discussion that surrounds the linking of rights to development, and the extensive literature that development agencies have produced on the subject, there is still remarkably little understanding of what rights-based development means in practice.¹¹

After digesting a large amount of literature on the subject I am prone to agree with Molyneux and Lazar. I found there to be a gap between very theoretical discussions on RBA on the one hand and more “hands on” training material on the other. Besides the work by Molyneux and Lazar I found very few empirical studies attempting to explore the implications of a RBA in real life situations. Molyneux and Lazar’s book is a comprehensive and insightful study of 13 NGOs and one grass-roots organization (GRO) in Mexico, Peru, Nicaragua and Bolivia. The research was sponsored by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and was originally considered to be a pilot study which could be adapted and applied to a wider range of countries.¹² This has served as an important source of inspiration for this study and reaffirms the relevance for pursuing a similar, albeit different study in Guatemala.

⁸ Jamison Gromark, Klara, 2008, “Global Governance? A Study of the Relationship between NGOs, Human Rights and the UN”, Lund University.

⁹ Being “information volunteer” with SOIR implies visiting partner organizations and projects during three months, and then giving 35-40 talks in schools, organizations and companies in Sweden, with the end of spreading information and awaken interest for issues related to development.

¹⁰ In Swedish the name of the organization is Individuell Människohjälp (IM).

¹¹ Molyneux, Maxine, Lazar, Sian, *Doing the Rights Thing: Rights-Based Development and Latin American NGOs*, London, ITDG Publishing, 2003, p. 4.

¹² Molyneux and Lazar, 2003, p. 11.

SOIR is a Swedish aid organization founded in 1938, aiming to fight and expose poverty and exclusion in 15 countries worldwide. SOIR has always based its work supporting especially vulnerable individuals and groups but it was only recently that the organization started to characterize its efforts in terms of human rights. “I have the right to education” and “I have the right to make a living” are slogans used in recent fundraising campaigns and in 2007 the staff was introduced to the RBA through training based on *In the Right Direction*, a training material published by The Swedish NGO Foundation for Human Rights, Diakonia and The Raul Wallenberg Institute. Micael Fagerberg, head of the international department of SOIR and the one who initiated the introduction of RBA, describes it as “a new language to apply within the organization.”¹³ However, at this early stage, there does not seem to be any clear consensus about what effects this new language will have in the field. When talking to employees and volunteers in the organization, everybody seems to agree on the importance of framing their work in terms of rights but many appear to be uncertain as to how the approach can and should be implemented in practice, and what effects it will have for the people it intends to benefit. Hence, this appeared to be a highly relevant and crucial issue to investigate and my three months in Guatemala seemed to provide a golden opportunity to do this. The possibility to meet and talk to actors on different levels, both in Sweden and in Guatemala, was considered an appropriate way to explore what the introduction of a RBA within SOIR could mean in the reality and context of San Miguel Ixtahuacán.

The poverty in Guatemala is disproportionately concentrated among the indigenous majority of its population and according to Camilo Perez-Bustillo, scholarly treatment of issues of indigenous poverty in Guatemala is surprisingly small.¹⁴ The majority of the population in the municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacán is indigenous and low levels of education in combination with strong patriarchal structures and historical patterns of discrimination make the indigenous women in rural areas an especially vulnerable group. Although constitutional reforms have been made to recognize indigenous and women’s rights, and although Guatemala has ratified CEDAW and reports regularly to the committee, the situation for indigenous women in rural areas such as San Miguel Ixtahuacán is alarming. Exploring in which way a RBA could help SOIR enhance and intensify its work in this area is thus of vital importance.

¹³ Interview with Micael Fagerberg, 11 December 2008, Lund.

¹⁴ Perez-Bustillo, Camilo “Indigenous Struggles Against Poverty” in Willem van Genugten & Camilo Perez-Bustillo (eds.), 2001, *The Poverty of Rights - Human Rights and the Eradication of Poverty*, Zed Books, London and New York, p. 94.

1.3 NGO research

The area of NGO research is as ample as it is diverse. Much of the academic literature concerning NGOs can be divided into what might be called “pro and anti-literature.” Many case studies are success stories but NGOs are also being criticized for not being transparent, democratic or even legitimate and they are accused of being selective and dependent on donors, governments and markets. Northern NGOs are often seen as agents of new imperialism and when NGOs are professionalized they are blamed for losing their passion and devotion.¹⁵ In “Moving Forward Research Agendas on International NGOs: Theory, Agency and Context”, David Lewis and Paul Opoku-Mensah¹⁶ conclude that attitudes towards NGOs have grown more complex, ambiguous and controversial and argue that an important reason for this controversy is the lack of a “sound research foundation on the topic of NGOs.”¹⁷ They bring up a growing critique of NGO research mentioning an overemphasis on organizational case studies that are rich in detail but lacking in contextualization, and describe weak theorization of the NGO phenomenon.¹⁸ They suggest and present a new agenda for NGO research that does justice to the complexity and diversity of NGO forms and contexts.¹⁹ Several of the publications that they mention and applaud are studies of NGOs where anthropological methodology has been applied and general conclusions have been avoided.²⁰ According to Igoe and Kelsall, authors of an anthology of anthropological studies of African NGOs, “rather than assume that NGOs have

¹⁵ See for example Edwards, Michael and Hulme, David (eds.) 1996, *Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post-Cold War World*, Kumarian Press, Lehnardt, Rana-Lehr, 2005, “NGO Legitimacy: Reassessing Democracy, Accountability and Transparency”, Cornell Law School LL.M Papers Series, Paper 6, Fisher, William F, 1997, “Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 26, pp. 439-464 and Tvedt, Terje, 1998, *Angels of Mercy or Development Diplomats? NGOs and Foreign Aid*, Africa World Press.

¹⁶ David Lewis teaches Social Policy at the London School of Economics, where he works on international development policy and NGOs and on the politics and economics of Bangladesh. Paul Opoku-Mensah is NGO research coordinator at the Centre for Development Studies, University of Bergen, and Deputy Director of the Comparative Research Programme on NGOs (CRPN).

¹⁷ Lewis, David, Opoku-Mensah, Paul, 2006, “Moving Forward Research Agendas on International NGOs: Theory, Agency and Context”, *Journal of International Development*, vol. 18, pp. 665-675, p. 669.

¹⁸ Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, 2006, p. 669.

¹⁹ Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, 2006, p. 670.

²⁰ See for example, Hilhorst, Dorothea, 2003, *The Real World of NGOs: Discourses, Diversity and Development*, London, Zed Books, an anthropological study of a Philippine NGO, and Igoe, J, Kelsall, T (eds.) 2005, , *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: African NGOs, Donors and the State*, Carolina, Durham, NC, Academic Press. The importance of historical and socio-political context in which the NGOs studied operate have been taken into account in these publications.

universally intrinsic qualities, it is more fruitful to assume that they will reflect the socio-historical conditions of the locale in which they operate.”²¹ I am inclined to agree with them, and with Dorotea Hilhorst, author of *The Real World of NGOs: Discourses, Diversity and Development*, who asserts: “There is no single answer to the questions of what an NGO is, what it wants and what it does. NGOs are many things at the same time.”²²

I am not against general theory as such and personally I believe discussions on the universality of different types of ideas and thoughts, such as human rights, can be helpful in promoting dialogue and a sense of “common purpose” in politics as well as in the academic world. However, I do agree with sociologist C Wright Mills that the keenness to make general conclusions can lead to social science losing touch with reality:

The basic cause of grand theory is the initial choice of a level of thinking so general that its practitioners cannot logically get down to observation. They never, as grand theorists, get down from the higher generalities to problems in their historical and structural contexts. This absence of a firm sense of genuine problems, in turn, makes for the unreality so noticeable in their pages.²³

Without swearing myself free from making any general conclusions whatsoever, it has been my intention to avoid a sense of unreality throughout this study.

1.4 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this essay is twofold. On the one hand, it is an attempt to continue the development of NGO research in the direction towards more focus on theory, agency and context, as Lewis and Opuko-Mensah encourage. They urge a rethinking of the NGO research agenda and argue that research on NGOs should be more nuanced and more grounded in social and political theory. A greater focus on the socio political context in which NGOs operate is also seen as vital. This essay thus wishes to be a contribution to the “new wave of NGO literature” which Lewis and Opuko-Mensah have identified.

The second, and more empirical, aim of this study is to follow the approach presented by Molyneux and Lazar and explore the prospects for working with a RBA in another Latin

²¹ Igoe, J, Kelsall, T, 2005, p. 8.

²² Hilhorst, 2003, p. 3

²³ Mills, C. Wright, 1970, *The Sociological Imagination*, Pelican Books, p. 42.

American context. What are the implications in the field when a development NGO adopts and applies a RBA within the organization? In what way are target groups affected? What are the challenges and possibilities for development NGOs who wish to implement, develop and practice a RBA in their fieldwork?

In order to operationalize these questions, and turn them into a feasible topic for investigation, some important delimitation has been made. SOIR supports four organizations in SMI – APROSAMI, CODEIM, DESMI and FEBIMI.²⁴ In order to obtain more in depth understanding and more reliable results, only CODEIM was chosen as the main subject for investigation. This organization is the one with which my colleague and I worked the closest and had the most interaction. CODEIM also has human rights education for women as one of the components of the 2009 activities plan. Therefore it seemed particularly relevant to analyze opportunities and challenges for working from a RBA within this organization. The more specific research question of this essay is thus the following:

What opportunities and challenges for working from a Rights-Based Approach to development do SOIR and CODEIM face in San Miguel Ixtahuacán?

1.5 Structure of the paper

The following chapter is theoretical and contains a definitional discussion of the RBA and its philosophical foundations, followed by a consideration of its practical implications. The succeeding chapter on methodology discusses which methods have been applied, and considers the advantages and disadvantages of the methods chosen. Chapter 4 takes us to San Miguel Ixtahuacán and contains a brief description of the geographic, historical and political environment of the municipality where the fieldwork was carried out. An account of some important aspects of the situation for indigenous women in Guatemala is also included. As a way to organize the vast empirical material and make it easier to process, the investigative chapter has been divided in three parts - interviews, participatory observations and personal engagement. The concluding chapter discusses different possibilities and challenges for SOIR and CODEIM to work from a RBA in SMI. For clarity, the conclusions have been divided up in four sections –

²⁴ APROSAMI is a health organization, working with maternal health and child care and a hiv/AIDS prevention project, CODEIM is a women´s organization working with information campaigns and income generating projects, DESMI is a small enterprise which produces and sells dried fruit, teas and gruels and FEBIMI is an organization aiming to support and strengthen bilingual teaching in schools in SMI.

organizational aspects within SOIR, organizational aspects within CODEIM, societal and contextual aspects in SMI and indications of empowerment and agency in SMI. This last chapter also includes a discussion on implications for the NGO research area and contains some suggestions for future research. In the appendix, the questions used in the interviews can be found as well as the answers to the questionnaire carried out in the women's groups.

2 RBA to Development

2.1 Defining the approach theoretically

There is no clear cut definition of what a RBA to development entails. However, some consistent core principles can be identified. An important rhetorical difference between other models for development cooperation and a RBA is the very use of the word “rights”, as opposed to “needs.” Needs can be met by benevolence or charity, which however does not reflect a duty, or obligation.²⁵ Further, according to Offenheiser and Holcombe, by using the rhetoric of rights, “problems” can be examined as possible “violations.”²⁶ This in turn implies the identification of stakeholders and an increased focus on advocacy work. As Kirkemann and Martin at the Danish Institute for Human Rights suggest, RBA programs are holistic and often require new and unusual alliances: “Faith based development NGOs might pursue partnerships with bar associations and local women’s groups might team up with international confederations of unions or with journalists.”²⁷ According to Uvin, the change from needs to rights and from charity to duties implies an enhanced and important focus on accountability.²⁸ Perhaps the most important aspect of a RBA to development is the participation of the beneficiaries. Being participants and agents of their own development, people cease to be looked upon as passive receivers of aid. In a RBA, participation is both a necessary outcome and a necessary part of the process. Facilitating participation in societal decision-making is an objective in itself.²⁹ In the old welfare model, rather, “the poor are treated as objects of charity who must be satisfied with whatever crumbs drop their way.”³⁰ As early as in 1908, George Simmel described the perils of

²⁵ Jonsson, Urban, 2003, *Human Rights Approach to Development Programming* UNICEF, Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, p. 21.

²⁶ Offenheiser and Holcombe, 2003, “Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing a Rights-Based Approach to Development: An Oxfam America Perspective”, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 32, p. 276.

²⁷ Kirkemann Boesen, Jakob, Martin, Tomas, 2007, *Applying a Rights-Based Approach: An Inspirational Guide for Civil Society*, Copenhagen, The Danish Institute for Human Rights, p.21.

²⁸ Uvin, 2007, p. 602.

²⁹ Jonsson, 2003, p. 23.

³⁰ Offenheiser and Holcombe, 2003, p. 271.

charity in his essay "The Poor." According to Simmel, the poor are not the real end in relief operations. Rather, the end is the protection of society in general against dissidence, disgrace and contamination. By assisting the poor, society does not aim at the equalization of incomes but rather intends to reduce "the most striking anomalies." Society has in other words created a situation where poverty relief becomes a mechanism for maintaining the social system. The assistance takes place "so that the poor will not be active and dangerous enemies of society."³¹ It is thus, according to Simmel, not the condition of the sufferer which determines the action, but the interests of others.

From a RBA the beneficiaries are perceived as subjects of their own development and concepts such as empowerment and agency are key words. Both empowerment and agency are concepts used abundantly and divergently in the academic debate and a brief clarification of what they entail within a RBA is needed. I appreciate Molyneux and Lazar's understanding of the word empowerment as: "a key concept in the lexicon of rights work, signifying at once self-realization and the perception of oneself as a subject of rights, with a capacity to act on the world and change it."³² An essential aspect of empowerment is the sense of one's own self-worth, or self-respect. In the very influential *A Theory of Justice* from 1971, John Rawls ascribes two aspects to the definition of self-respect. First of all self-respect includes a person's sense of his own value, and a secure conviction that his plan of life is worth carrying out. Secondly, self-respect implies a confidence in one's intentions. Without self-respect nothing may seem worth doing: "All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism."³³ According to Rawls, an important way of gaining self-respect is by associating with others. We feel our activities in our everyday life are worthwhile when they are affirmed by other people. Associations or groups provide its members a secure basis for the sense of their own worth, and the level of excellence in which the group carries out activities is, according to Rawls, irrelevant.³⁴

Agency could basically be understood as the "capacity to act on the world." The "world" is of course made up of different levels and agency can be the capacity to act, have a say, be listened to and respected, within the family, the community and society as a whole. Sen emphasizes women's agency for social change and claims that women's movements must focus on women's

³¹ Simmel, Georg, "The Poor", (1908) , in Levine, Donald (ed.) 1971, *Georg Simmel On Individuality and Social Forms, Selected Writings*, The University of Chicago Press, p. 154.

³² Molyneux and Lazar, 2003, p. 27.

³³ Rawls, John, 1971, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, p. 92.

³⁴ Rawls, 1971, p. 442.

well being as well as their enhanced agency: “Perhaps the most immediate argument for focusing on women’s agency may be precisely the role that such an agency can play in removing the inequities that depress the well-being of women.”³⁵ He argues that the well-being of women is strongly influenced by variables such as women’s ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to have ownership rights and to be literate.³⁶

An interesting aspect of RBA worth recognizing and stressing is that, because of its focus on long-term processes and qualitative aspects, it comes to question money as the focal point of development cooperation. Uvin’s discussion on this matter is worth a lengthy quote:

In a rights-based approach to development, money is much less crucial, at least in a first run. What matters are organizational capacity, mutual influence, internal and external accountability, exchange of innovation and ideas, mechanisms of voice and control and redress, inclusive processes of decision-making, increased availability of information, improvements in policymaking and legal environments and the quality of justice, and the like. While none of these things come for free (and none comes easily or rapidly), none of them depends solely or primarily on massive injections of external funding.³⁷

To round off this section, the introduction of RBA in the development discourse is sometimes described as a paradigm shift, replacing the traditional charity model and the BNA.³⁸ Kirkemann and Martin have made a comprehensive overview in comparing the three models:

Charity Approach	Needs Approach	Rights-Based Approach
Focus on input not outcome	Focus on input and outcome	Focus on process and outcome
Emphasizes increasing charity	Emphasizes meeting needs	Emphasizes realizing rights
Recognizes moral responsibility of rich towards poor	Recognizes needs as valid claims	Recognizes individual and group rights as claims toward legal and moral duty-bearers
Individuals are seen as victims	Individuals are objects of development interventions	Individuals and groups are empowered to claim their rights
Individuals deserve assistance	Individuals deserve assistance	Individuals are entitled to assistance
Focuses on manifestation of problems	Focuses on immediate causes of problems	Focuses on structural causes and their manifestations ³⁹

³⁵ Sen, 1999, p. 191.

³⁶ Sen, 1999, p. 191.

³⁷ Uvin, 2004, p. 165.

³⁸ The Charity Approach was dominant in the 1950s and 60s and the Basic Needs Approach in the 70s and 80s.

³⁹ Kirkemann and Martin, 2007, p. 10.

2.2 Practical implications?

In “From the right to development to the rights-based approach: how human rights entered development”, Uvin offers “an intellectual genealogy of rights in development.”⁴⁰ One part of the article examines the rhetorical incorporation of rights in the prevailing development discourse. He presents one rather cynical and one more optimistic analysis of the change of discourse that began during the 1990s.

The cynical assessment suggests that the incorporation of rights in the development discourse meant little less than “old wine in new bottles.” By stating that the development work they were already doing was in fact protection and promotion of human rights, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies were merely “rhetorically repackaging” their policies.⁴¹ Uvin even suggests that there is “a real danger” in this kind of rhetorical discourse. He argues that by postulating that existing development projects by definition constitute implementations of human rights, one really just helps to protect and continue the status quo.⁴²

The more optimistic appraisal of the rights-based discourse argues that the verbal changes “constitute the first steps toward a true change of vision.”⁴³ Uvin acknowledges how many scholars believe that this new rhetoric slowly will redefine the margins of acceptable action, change incentive structures and influence expectations.⁴⁴ Also, the move from needs to rights and from charity to duties will, according to Uvin, imply an increased focus on accountability.⁴⁵ He admits that major change always starts small and defends how rhetorical gains can function as “snowballs that set in motion fresh avalanches.”⁴⁶ However, for this approach to have any real bearing in reality, and not only constitute a quest for the moral high ground, development practitioners need to know how the human-rights paradigm can constitute the basis for a different practice, not only a different discourse.⁴⁷ Uvin brings up the aspect of power and argues

⁴⁰ Uvin, 2007, p. 587.

⁴¹ Uvin, 2007, pp. 599-600.

⁴² Uvin, 2007, p. 600.

⁴³ Uvin, 2007, p. 599.

⁴⁴ Uvin, 2007, p. 599.

⁴⁵ Uvin, 2007, p. 602.

⁴⁶ Uvin, 2007, pp. 603-604.

⁴⁷ Uvin, 2007, p. 603.

how a huge range of rich-country behavior, such as over-consumption, the dumping of arms in the Third World and “the wisdom of structural adjustment”, remains immune to criticism. “No wonder so many people resent the human-rights agenda”, he concludes.⁴⁸

In *The Right Direction* handbook it is argued that “(...) certain changes will in all probability become necessary for those who want to make human rights more than just fine words in a policy”⁴⁹ and according to Uvin: “if one adopts a right-based approach to development, the nature of the job becomes an essentially political one, dealing with power and policy.”⁵⁰ However, Molyneux and Lazar argue that: “The most innovative NGOs translate human rights philosophies into practical action in the field in a number of ways and on different levels.”⁵¹ This implies that a RBA is really a way of thinking, rather than a specific method, a perception I support and wish to stress throughout the study.

⁴⁸ Uvin, 2007, p. 601.

⁴⁹ The Swedish NGO Foundation for Human Rights, 2007, *In the Right Direction: A training material on rights-based development work for non-governmental organizations*, Centrum Tryck Avesta, p. 63.

⁵⁰ Uvin, 2004, p. 135.

⁵¹ Molyneux and Lazar, 2003, p. 50.

3 Methodological discussion

3.1 Conducting fieldwork in SMI

The empirical part of this paper involved a combination of qualitative research methods, such as participatory observations, enquiries, workshops and semi structured interviews. Some important insights concerning methodology which have proved inspirational for the pursuit of this research project were found in C Wright Mills *The Sociological Imagination*. For example, the importance of multidisciplinary research within the social science is a guiding idea throughout the study. The essay is written within the subject of human rights studies at the University of Lund, which is an interdisciplinary institution combining law, history, ethics and political science. The still somewhat vague area of “NGO research” is still predominantly dominated by political scientists and sociologists. However, as Lewis and Opuko-Mensah recognize and encourage, more participatory methods are increasingly finding their way into the subject. I believe the following quote from Mills captures the essence and importance of multidisciplinary methodology:

It is now entirely possible for the individual practitioner to ignore the “accidental” developments of departments, and to choose and shape his own speciality without much hindrance of a departmental sort. As he comes to have a genuine sense of significant problems and to be passionately concerned with solving them, he is often forced to master ideas and methods that happen to have arisen within one or another of these several disciplines. To him no social science speciality will seem in any intellectually significant sense a closed world. He also comes to realize that he is in fact practicing social science, rather than any one of the social sciences, and that this is so no matter what particular area of social life he is most interested in studying.⁵²

The research process started in the fall of 2008, studying existing literature on RBA. Before leaving for Guatemala in January 2009, two interviews, one with the head of the international department of SOIR, Micael Fagerberg, and one with the desk officer for Central America Sara Fallström, were conducted. In SMI, additional interviews were carried out with Mats Lundberg, head of SOIRs field office in SMI and Pär Ivarsson, new head of SOIRs regional office starting

⁵² Mills, 1970, p. 157.

2009, and Amabilia Mérida, coordinator of the recently established Municipal Women's Office. All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. I had prepared questions beforehand but also allowed the conversation to flow somewhat freely. The questions were adapted according to the interviewee's level of experience and area of expertise. No tape recorders were used but extensive notes were taken. Directly after each interview these notes were transcribed into separate documents. The questions can be found in the appendix.

Since the fieldwork extended over a period of three months (January-April 2009) there were numerous occasions to make participatory observation. As a total, 15 community visits were made with CODEIM. The visits with CODEIM and the women's groups allowed active participation which provided valuable insights for the purpose of the essay. A supplementary inquiry was also conducted with the women's groups.⁵³ The inquiry consisted of five basic questions concerning their ideas and perceptions of rights: 1. What does the word "right" mean to you? 2. Do you have rights in your home/community/municipality? If yes, which? 3. Do children have rights? If yes, which? 4. Have you heard any information about human rights before? If yes, where and when? 5. Do you think it is important to know about your rights? If yes, why?

In addition to community visits several meetings were attended. Every Monday morning the SOIR staff and the representatives from the different partner organizations met and sometimes issues were discussed which proved important for the purpose of the study. I attended three meetings with the general assembly of CODEIM, and one with its board of directors. A one-day workshop on human rights was organized and observations and discussions from this day also provided significant information for the investigation. After returning to Sweden, I attended a RBA seminar initiated by the International Department, where staff from SOIR field offices and from different departments in Sweden attended. The seminar was held by Micael Lindgren, from the Swedish Mission Council (SMC), one of SOIR's donors. Some conclusions were reaffirmed at this seminar and some new insights were reached.

The investigative part of the paper was divided into three parts – interviews, participatory observations and personal engagement. Material was collected in many different forms: interviews, literature and statistics, notes from meetings and inquiries with participants in women's groups. In this manner, actors on many different levels have been taken into account – SOIR staff in Sweden and Guatemala, representatives from the partner organizations, local authorities and local women, the participants and beneficiaries of the projects.

⁵³ See appendix 1.

3.2 Validity and reliability

My position as a volunteer should be considered an asset for the reliability of the study. Since the people we met and worked with knew I was a volunteer our relationships became more personal than if I would have been an employee with a higher level of responsibility. Many of the UDADIM staff, Adela Mejía included, demonstrated a high level of respect, verging on shyness, towards people in superior positions. Since I worked with Mejía on a daily basis and because my position as a volunteer allowed professionalism to mix with friendship, I believe I could achieve information otherwise difficult to gain. Yet, it would be wrong not to recognize that being a westerner, and a representative for the organization which provides CODEIM with funding, had implications. Many women were very shy towards me and it is possible that they sometimes gave answers they thought I wanted to hear. However, the enormous variety in the answers I got suggests that the women actually tried to be honest. Cross cultural communication can be complicated and although there were language barriers, being fluent in Spanish was an asset.

The prime advantage with this type of method is the ability to come in contact with the actual recipients of aid, talking about issues that concern them and giving them a voice. The variety of methods allowed me to attain in depth knowledge and extensive primary material. I think it is important to recognize the risk of being overwhelmed by too much material, making it difficult to separate findings that are relevant for the purpose of the study from less applicable information. This has required careful reflection throughout the research process. Of course the interpretation of my primary material is entirely mine, which is common to all qualitative research.

With hindsight, the questions of the inquiry could have been formulated differently. Some women had no understanding of the word “right” and therefore had difficulties answering the questions. Many of the participants speak very limited Spanish⁵⁴ and their understanding of some words can very well be different from mine. However, the more groups that were visited, the deeper and more detailed understanding for the women and their situation’s I was able to obtain. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to ask the women about their level of education, since it is my assumption that awareness of rights issues is correlated with the level of education.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The dominant mother tongue in the region is the Mayan language Mam.

⁵⁵ Other aspects such as age and literacy would also have been interesting to take into consideration. However, the purpose of the inquiry was not to produce quantitative results but rather to give the women a voice and for me to achieve a deeper understanding for their situation and for the society as a whole.

4 Placing the study in a context

Guatemala has a long history of exclusion and conflict and the 36 year long civil war (1960-1996) reached genocidal proportions in the 1980s. More than 200 000 people were killed or disappeared and another million were displaced. Over 600 villages were completely destroyed and their population, predominantly Mayan, was massacred.⁵⁶ The 1996 Peace Accords involved an important official acknowledgment of the identity and rights of the indigenous population.⁵⁷ SMI is situated in the department of San Marcos in the north western part of the country, which is one of the poorest regions of Guatemala. Mam is one of the largest of the 22 Mayan languages in Guatemala and is spoken by the large majority of the population in SMI. The department of San Marcos was not as affected by the war as other areas, for example neighboring Quiché. Some argue that therefore there is little political and organizational culture in SMI.⁵⁸ The municipality has a population of almost 30.000, divided up in 58 small communities.

4.1 About SOIR and CODEIM

SOIR has worked in Guatemala since the mid 90s with the aim to improve the quality of life of the Mayas and to strengthen their position in society. SOIR works together with UDADIM (Unión de Asociaciones de Desarrollo Integral Miguelense) which is an umbrella organization for the four local partner organizations that SOIR supports in SMI. The majority of the population in San Miguel is of Mayan heritage and the organizations primarily work by supporting communities within the municipality. As mentioned above, CODEIM was chosen as subject for this study.

CODEIM was established in 2001 and has some 450 members in 18 communities. Since 2004 the organization is coordinated by Adela Corina Mejia. Each community has a women´s group and a group leader. The group leaders make out the general assembly which meets on a monthly basis. A smaller number of group leaders make up the board of directors. CODEIM

⁵⁶ World Bank , 2004, Country Study, Poverty in Guatemala, p. 64.

⁵⁷ Gobierno de Guatemala, 1996, Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, Naciones Unidas, Acuerdo de Paz firme y duradera, Guatemala, 29 Diciembre.

⁵⁸ Interview with Sara Fallström, Lund, Sweden, 9 December 2008.

works with information campaigns concerning family hygiene, family planning and since the beginning of 2009 women's rights. The groups also work together in different projects, such as crafts work and tree planting. Additionally, the organization runs a small restaurant in the centre of San Miguel, employing one woman.

Human rights education for women in SMI is part of SOIR's Education Program in Central America. As a part of the component "Capacity building and education for financially challenged adults in El Salvador and Guatemala" human rights education for women has a specific objective in "increased knowledge about rights and obligations within civil society."⁵⁹ The follow up of this objective include qualitative indicators: "the raised self esteem among all participants after passing courses and successfully carried out projects, as well as improved domestic situations for marginalized families, when parents and children have learned about their respective rights and obligations."⁶⁰ In 2008, four representatives from CODEIM's general assembly attended a two day capacity building session on indigenous Women's Rights in the town of Quetzaltenango. Mejía did not attend and there has been no real follow up of the capacity building.

4.2 Indigenous Women's Rights in Guatemala

In Guatemala, structural discrimination of the indigenous population has created a society with deep social clashes, between rich and poor and between "ladinos" and the indigenous people. Exclusion from land, labor and education has been historically evident for the indigenous populations as a whole and for indigenous women in particular. The 1996 Peace Accords acknowledges that the historical reality of Guatemala has denied the full exercise of the political and economic rights of the indigenous population and that the recognition and promotion of indigenous rights is crucial for building a strong and sustainable peace.⁶¹ Despite such proclamations in this document exclusion still remains one of the main problems in Guatemala. As SIDA, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency argues, indigenous women are the most vulnerable group in the Guatemalan society. According to statistics presented by SIDA, 79% of indigenous women have to ask their husbands for permission to

⁵⁹ SOIR, 2008, Education Programme Application for Central America, p. 10.

⁶⁰ SOIR, 2008, p. 12.

⁶¹ Gobierno de Guatemala, 1996, § 5.

leave the house.⁶² Illiteracy in Guatemala is among the highest in Latin America and among indigenous women it is as high as 62%⁶³ Only 18% of the girls in San Miguel Ixtahuacán reach the sixth grade, and the progress in education is biased against the poor.⁶⁴ In 1999, DEMI, the national defensor for indigenous women's rights, was established. Their work aims to strengthen the indigenous woman in Guatemala through educational programs and through the provision of legal counseling and assistance. Legal protection for Indigenous Women can be found in the 1996 Peace Accords, the country's constitution, CEDAW, and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 169 (1989).

According to the World Bank, "Girls and women face cumulative disadvantages in Guatemala, reflecting historically exclusionary policies (e.g., in land and education) and a general culture of machismo."⁶⁵ What is meant by "a general culture of machismo" should be clarified. Basically, women are heavily discriminated on different levels in society, starting in the family, due to dominant patriarchal structures and power relations. Just as the statistics presented by SIDA suggests, many women we met told us they were afraid to do anything against the will of their husbands, and many men forbade their wives to leave the house to attend meetings. Violence against women is a huge problem in Guatemala and numerous cases of murders of women due to gender-specific causes is being described as "femicide." In CEDAW's concluding observations on Guatemala's efforts to follow the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in February 2009, it is stated that "The Committee notes with satisfaction the State party's efforts to implement the Convention, welcoming in particular the entry into force of the Act on Femicide and Other Forms of Violence against Women (Decree 22-2008)."⁶⁶ However, it is also declared that the Committee is concerned about the "precarious situation of indigenous women and the lack of information provided by the State party on Maya, Xinca and Garifuna women, who experience multiple and intersectoral discrimination based on their sex, ethnic origin and social status."⁶⁷ According to UNDP figures, Guatemala's GDI

⁶² SIDA, Ombudsman for Indigenous Rights in Guatemala,

http://www.sida.org/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=1313&a=21180&language=en_US , Visited 30 April 2009.

⁶³ World Bank, 2004, p. 95.

⁶⁴ SOIR, 2008, p. 6.

⁶⁵ World Bank, 2004, p. 219.

⁶⁶ CEDAW, 2009, Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Guatemala, CEDAW/C/GUA/CO/7, § 4.

⁶⁷ CEDAW, 2009, § 41.

(Gender Development Index value), 0.675 should be compared to its HDI (Human Development Index) value of 0.689. Its GDI value is 98.0% of its HDI value. Out of the 156 countries with both HDI and GDI values, 119 countries have a better ratio than Guatemala.

5 Investigation

5.1 Interviews

Before leaving for Guatemala I interviewed the head of the international department at SOIR, Micael Fagerberg, and SOIR's Desk officer for Central America, Sara Fallström, with the aim to discern their perceptions of RBA and its implications for their work. I met with Fallström first, over lunch in Lund. She had not come in contact with RBA before it was introduced in SOIR. When Fallström visited SMI in October 2008, a workshop on human rights was held with representatives from the different partner organizations. Fallström says everybody was engaged and seemed to enjoy the workshop. Above all, Fallström observed that the representatives enjoyed being able to put their work into perspective, and feel that they are part of a bigger context, working with rights that are universal. This in turn functions as motivation and inspiration in the everyday work. Many of the representatives have only a few years of education and all types of seminars and workshops are welcome. Fallström does however not think that the representatives apply the rights approach in their daily work and does not believe that the target groups are effected: "RBA is a method among a million methods, which so far has not had any effects in the field, or for the target groups."⁶⁸ She believes it would be good to continue to have workshops and to stress the importance of the rights perspective. However, she thinks there is a long way to go before it will have an impact in practice. According to Fallström, RBA is part of the concept "capacity building", something which is quite new in SMI, as are method seminars. Fallström believes the prospects for agency are small in San Miguel because of lack of education, illiteracy and weak political culture.⁶⁹ However, after returning to Sweden my volunteer colleague and I met with Fallström again to share some of our impressions and experiences from SMI. We told her numerous examples of agency and activity that we had witnessed and Fallström was positively surprised to hear about them. It became clear that the reports Fallström receives from

⁶⁸ Interview with Sara Fallström, Lund, Sweden, 9 December 2008.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

SOIR in SMI, based on information provided from Mejía, coordinator of CODEIM, provide Fallström with a somewhat incomplete picture of CODEIM's work.

A couple of days after my lunch with Fallström I met with Fagerberg, head of the international department at SOIR, who says RBA is "a new language to apply within the organization which involves a high level of flexibility."⁷⁰ "RBA is about changing our attitude", he argues. Fagerberg has worked at SOIR since October 2005, and became in charge of the international department in April 2006. When he joined SOIR he felt a need to alter the traditional basic needs approach that seemed to dominate the organization. Therefore he contacted the Swedish NGO Foundation for Human Rights and asked them to give a seminar. The seminar was held twice, once for the personnel in Sweden and once for the personnel from the field offices. Fagerberg observed a high level of pre knowledge, which however needed to be developed, within the Swedish personnel. He says that the introduction of RBA within SOIR comes in three steps: 1. Raise level of knowledge on rights issues. 2. Introduce RBA in program planning and relate the objectives of a project to human rights. Relate human rights both to the work and the analysis of the work done. 3. Introduce advocacy work more systematically in the countries where SOIR operates.⁷¹

Often advocacy work is associated with the "watchdog" syndrome, being critical and pointing out wrongdoings. Fagerberg admits a certain fear that if one presses the rights discussion further, it might damage well established relations. Therefore SOIR has its focus only on economic, social and cultural rights and wants to stay neutral in party politics. According to Fagerberg, working with RBA is practical and pragmatic work. He brings up the importance of learning from other organizations, and cooperating. Especially in the area of advocacy work, he believes SOIR has a lot to learn from others, especially human rights organizations, who have another level of professionalism in advocacy work and campaigning. In turn he believes that human rights organizations can learn from SOIR and other development NGOs how to work preventively and how to turn visions into practice. According to Fagerberg, SOIR has a pedagogical task in supplying the people with knowledge on rights. "Knowledge is power, and it is important to be aware of one's rights. When one raises the level of knowledge one promotes agents of change."⁷² Fagerberg also argues that the rights perspective adds an important dimension to the work SOIR does, and makes it more legitimate. RBA makes it easier to identify

⁷⁰ Interview with Micael Fagerberg, Lund, Sweden, 11 December 2008.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

the people in power. When there are several and parallel structures of power, as in the case of Guatemala, Fagerberg repeats the importance of working close to the target groups, and grassroots. All SOIR's work is related to individual commitment, based on the idea on social movements. "We don't want to hit people over the head with human rights conventions" he says. At the same time, all SOIR's projects have a clear connection to human rights. Fagerberg addresses the importance of working holistically and on many levels. "Everybody - businesses, individuals, NGO's and governments need to work together to promote change and development."⁷³ Hence, Fagerberg describes development as a multidimensional task and appears to be open towards new alliances and partnerships, something which both Uvin and Kirkemann and Martin at the Danish Institute for Human Rights describe as prerequisites for rights-based development cooperation.

At about the middle of my stay in Guatemala I interviewed Mats Lundberg, head of the field office in SMI since 2006. Lundberg argues that: "SOIR, SIDA and SMC talk about implementing a RBA within the organizations, but at the same time they demand concrete results for every project on a regular basis and show no interest in the processes. It is contradictory."⁷⁴ Lundberg is an anthropologist and has worked 20 years with development cooperation. He has worked a lot with the "participatory approach" and argues that RBA must be complemented with such an approach. There is no RBA handbook in the office and Lundberg could not participate at the RBA seminar in Lund. He admits that he has not paid much attention to the introduction of RBA: "Every year there is a new catchword, a new abbreviation which must be used in program applications in order to receive money. One almost becomes a little cynical and I have not looked much into it"⁷⁵, he says. Yet, during the interview it became obvious that Lundberg very much approves of RBA as an approach. He argues that SOIR always has worked from a rights perspective: "Everybody has a right to education and therefore we have built schools, everybody has a right to be healthy, therefore we work with AIDS prevention."⁷⁶ Lundberg wishes to downplay the significance of RBA as a new work method: "RBA is not a method, it is nothing advanced, it is a way of thinking, something we should have in the head", he says. According to Lundberg, there is a tendency within the development enterprise to turn things into

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interview with Mats Lundberg, SMI, Guatemala, 13 March, 2009.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

abbreviations or methods when they really should not be treated that way.⁷⁷ Lundberg's reasoning reminds me a lot of the "rhetorical repackaging" critique as discussed by Uvin. However, Lundberg seems to be very much in accordance with the philosophical foundations of the RBA.

When Pär Ivarsson, who is SOIR's new head of the regional office for Central America, came to visit SMI I got a chance to interview him too. Ivarsson has worked in Latin America for many years, and carries a rights perspective with him from working with Save the Children. In line with Fagerberg, Ivarsson says RBA "is about identifying stakeholders on different levels and working more with advocacy work."⁷⁸ Ivarsson reasons that the practice of charity stems from the Christian missionary tradition where it has always been important to be able to show practical results, and show evidence that the donations have had a positive effect. It is obviously easier to count the number of schools built than to measure increased levels of awareness or empowerment. Ivarsson identifies three "classic" deficiencies within development work, as challenges for working from RBA: 1. Not enough base line studies are conducted, identifying the current situation before a project is initiated. This makes evaluation difficult. 2. The ability to measure qualitative processes is weak: "We must become better in measuring and showing results from qualitative processes, it is possible and methods exist", he says. 3. The pedagogical ability is weak. He argues that if one explains qualitative processes for donors in a pedagogical, reasonable and intelligent manner, they would understand, and not only demand figures and quantitative outcomes.⁷⁹ According to Ivarsson, working from a rights perspective involves changing attitudes towards development cooperation. "People are not vulnerable, situations are", Ivarsson reasons, and says development cooperation is about changing structures and involves long term commitments. He argues that the idea of "helping the poor" still dominates donor attitudes and that this is a challenge for development practitioners.⁸⁰ The fact that Ivarsson expresses this critique towards the common victimization of poor people shows that he is very much in tune with the RBA.

Interviewing the coordinator for the recently established Women's Office in the Municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Amabilia Mérida, proved to be eye opening. With the new government, run by President Álvaro Colom, elected in 2008, several new institutions have

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Interview with Pär Ivarsson, SMI, Guatemala, 11 March 2009.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

been established on a national, regional and local level. By law, each municipality in the country is now obliged to have a Women's Office. In San Miguel, the Women's Office opened in May 2008, and is run by Mérida alone. The idea is that each office should be staffed by one coordinator and one secretary and in SMI the process of employing a secretary, specialized in computer skills, is in progress. The Office cooperates with several different organizations in the region; DEMI, Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena (Defensory for Indigenous Women), SOSEP, The First Lady's Secretary for Community Services a branch of the national governmental program "Mi Familia Progresá", FUNRURAL, run by the president's wife Sandra Colon and MAGA, a branch of the ministry for agriculture, providing seeds and capacity building in agricultural techniques. Mérida says the idea is to legalize women's groups in all of SMI's 58 communities, encourage and give training in income generating projects, giving the women a possibility to grow and prosper outside the family and for the groups to become self sustaining.⁸¹ Important tasks during 2009 are fundraising and exploring markets for the women to commercialize their products, be it handicraft or vegetables. According to Mérida, there is no overall coordination of the women's groups in the area, and so far CODEIM has had no interaction with the Office. During the interview I found out that another local NGO exists in SMI, also working with women's groups, having 1400 members. The lack of cooperation and coordination was perceived as a shortcoming by the coordinator and she expressed much willingness to work on this issue. When I asked her what she found to be the most challenging she says "Machismo is the largest obstacle for our work."⁸² She exemplifies by telling about one community where the women are not allowed to gather on their own, and where practically every single woman has to ask for her husband's permission to leave the house. This in combination with the low or non-existent education levels implies very low levels of self esteem amongst the women, who often do not believe they have equal rights.⁸³

5.2 Participatory observations

CODEIM works with women's groups in 18 communities in SMI and my colleague and I got the chance to visit 12 of them. We would leave early in the morning together with Mejía and go by bus, on the back of a pick up or by foot to reach the communities. The meetings are most often

⁸¹ Interview with Amabilia Mérida, SMI, Guatemala, 20 March 2009.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

held in the group leader's home, and plastic chairs are put out in front of the house. We were served breakfast when we arrived and while we were eating, the women in the group would arrive one after one, sitting down outside the house. During breakfast, Mejía, the group leader and sometimes other women living in the household would catch up on the latest gossip and discuss how the community projects were developing. I was amazed by the fact that Mejía always knew everybody's name and had such close and personal contact with all the group leaders. After breakfast the meeting would commence with the group leader welcoming the group, Mejía and us. Then Mejía would present the meeting's agenda before leaving my colleague and me to introduce ourselves. The level of shyness differed between communities and was often connected to the level of Spanish the women had. When asked to introduce themselves some women were even too shy to say their name in front of the group.

The activities differed somewhat between the visits. We followed the activity plan which Mejía, with support from SOIR Staff, has elaborated for the year. The first month was dedicated to personal and family hygiene. CODEIM has worked in the area of family and personal hygiene for several years, so for most women the information given was nothing new. However, in many communities the practice has still not changed and children get sick from drinking water which has not been boiled enough or by being let to play with the animals and then eat with their hands without being washed adequately. Mejía was quite passionate about these issues and would repeat the words "being poor does not mean being dirty." She would urge the women to take control of their situation and to take good care of themselves and of their children. It became clear to me that poverty affected the women and communities in different ways. In some communities there was an atmosphere of hopelessness and in these communities the children were often covered with dirt and the expression in many women's faces was unresponsive and lifeless. In some communities like that, we were sometimes asked for money or asked if the organization could give more funds to each family. In other communities, you could tell that the women felt in control of their lives, their eyes were vibrant and they had another kind of energy about themselves. Their children were also cleaner, and cried less. It seemed the more organized and united the group was, often depending on the commitment of the group leader, the more well developed projects they would have. Some groups proudly showed us their community vegetable gardens, tree plantations or handicraft projects. Mejía would always emphasize the importance of participation and stress the need of working together in order to achieve change and progress. Mejía talked repeatedly about the importance of self esteem and many women's lack of it: "you might not know how to read, but you are all able to think and talk", she said with emphasis in

practically every community we visited. She would use the word "rights" when speaking to the women and repeat the importance of having knowledge about them. Mejía thus applied a rights language as a way to empower and motivate the groups she coordinates. This can be viewed as the "snowball-effect" which Uvin describes as a part of the optimistic appraisal of the rights-based discourse.

On one occasion, Mejía's boyfriend accompanied us to a women's group and gave a talk on nutrition and the importance of eating a varied diet. He has experience from other organizations and has supported CODEIM by accompanying Mejía in the past, giving talks also on themes like family planning. Before commencing his talk on nutrition, he explained to the group about the new law in Guatemala regulating violence against women. "If your husband beats you, make a charge against him, and he will go to jail for 5 or 6 years! It is your legal right as women. Why am I telling you this? Because I am a man who does not support the attitudes or actions by men who mistreat their wives."⁸⁴ This young man's contribution to CODEIM's work is extremely valuable in my eyes, by setting a good example and supporting the women's movement. In the community of Mulebac, where this talk was held, the group leader's husband was also attending the meeting. He seemed very proud of his wife and her group with around 40 members, and was pleased to accompany us and the group to the vegetable gardens that the women grow in the area. There were cauliflower, carrots, cabbage and herbs and as soon as we reached the gardens all the women kneeled down and started to pick weeds. The group leader's husband told me: "This is formally my land, but I happily give it up for my wife and her group. Everyone has the right to grow the land, and men who say otherwise are manipulative."⁸⁵

On another occasion we accompanied Patricia Domingo, employed by the health organization APROSAMI, to the radio station in SMI where she once a week gives a program on hiv/AIDS prevention. It was encouraging to witness how she, as an indigenous woman, was given the opportunity and space to address these delicate issues on the local radio. Domingo is also group leader for the women's group in her community and is a great resource as such for both CODEIM and APROSAMI. In the community of Colmito, she told the women's group: "18 years ago I was too shy to say my name in front of a group. Look at me now, I won't stop talking! It is extremely important that we seize opportunities to grow and develop."⁸⁶ Domingo is a living example of the connection between agency and well-being as described by Sen, and the

⁸⁴ Nelson Domingo, community visit in Mulebac, SMI, Guatemala, 17 February, 2009.

⁸⁵ Roberto Lopez, community visit in Mulebac, SMI, Guatemala, 17 February, 2009.

⁸⁶ Patricia Domingo, community visit in Colmito, SMI, Guatemala, 20 January, 2009.

fact that she sets an example for other women can be very important for mobilizing self-esteem on both an individual and collective level.

In the community of Legual, Andrea Garcia, a woman in her forties and mother of ten told me how she learned how to knit in the women's group and how she has started to sell her products and now has her own sewing machine. When her aunt convinced her to join a women's group, in the beginning she would sneak out, hoping that her husband would not notice. If he did, every time there would be a fight, sometimes with violence, sometimes with threats. After some months, she started to learn how to do craftwork in the group, and she started to produce table cloths, bags and fajas⁸⁷ in her free time. Eventually she started to sell her products within the community, and with the money she made she was able to buy a sewing machine and some utensils for her kitchen. This in turn made her husband realize that her participation in the women's groups was beneficial for the family, and the domestic fighting stopped. By showing this practical result of participation, she won the respect of her husband and perhaps most importantly, she feels proud of herself and has enhanced her self esteem. Garcia's story is very much a real life example of right-based development cooperation in action. The women's group implies a social space in society, and provides tools for development at a subjective, personal level. It also exemplifies how the process is as important as the actual result. Had Garcia received the sewing machine as a donation it would probably not have had the same life changing effect. The group provided the tools for empowerment - "the capacity to act on the world and change it" - Garcia became her own agent for change and in turn experienced a raised level of self-respect.

I met the mayor of SMI, Joel Domingo, on a couple of occasions together with SOIR and UDADIM staff and got the impression that he has progressive ideas for the region. He clearly expressed the need for the establishment of higher education in SMI and showed willingness to work with such aspects as capacity building and education. With the new government elected in 2008 several new institutions have been established, among them SEPREM, Secretaría Presidencial de la Mujer, the presidential secretary for women, encouraging emphasis on women's rights work on the national, regional and local levels. Domingo seems positive to this development and he was happy when he heard I was going to interview Amabilia Mérida at the Women's Office: "We need all the help we can get concerning these issues", he let me know with a smile on his face.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ A faja is a belt the indigenous women use to hold up their corte, the traditional Mayan skirt.

⁸⁸ Joel Domingo, Visit at the Mayor's office, SMI, Guatemala, 20 March, 2009.

5.3 Personal engagement

In the activity plan for 2009 CODEIM has capacity building in human rights programmed for January, February, March, April, July and August. According to the plan, didactic material on human rights was to be produced in January and February. There was, however, no systematic plan for how to live up to the objectives of human rights work within the organizations. Since it turned out that I have extensive knowledge on human rights it was sort of “a happy surprise” both for SOIR and CODEIM. At the very first meeting with the coordinator of CODEIM I was asked to arrange a seminar on women’s rights the following week. I was also asked to repeat the seminar at community visits and to produce information material on the subject. This was formally not part of the volunteer contract, and it became clear that no methodology about how to introduce human rights in the work of CODEIM had been developed before making it a part of the program plan for 2009. I held the seminar on rights with CODEIM’s general assembly and the women showed a lot of interest. However, it felt a bit awkward for me to address these issues without a clear methodology or long term plan. The level of knowledge on rights issues seemed to vary considerably between the women.

Mejia often complained about the lack of information material and was still using handmade posters which the two Swedish volunteers in 2007 had elaborated for the information campaigns in the women’s groups. We were asked to give the talks, and at the first few visits we used the posters and stood in front of the group. My colleague and I did however not feel entirely comfortable giving information this way. We felt an urge to make the group meetings more interactive and dynamic. We therefore put together an information material in a smaller size which we let circulate in the group and function as a basis for discussion and comments. With hindsight, in this situation my colleague and I applied a RBA in our every day work. Had we perceived the women as a “target group”, and objects for the development cooperation, standing in front of the group with posters would probably not have been experienced as awkward. However, applying a RBA, the women are looked upon as rights-bearers and as subjects of their own development. In consequence, their participation becomes the very essence of the development cooperation.

Mejia had a documentary movie made by IMU, one of SOIR’s partners in El Salvador. IMU is a well developed women’s organization supporting local women’s groups in many parts of the country. My colleague and I arranged to show the documentary for CODEIM’s general assembly. The documentary provoked an intense discussion on the importance of strengthening the rights of women in society and showed that many of the group leaders within CODEIM are

aware of their rights and the importance of strengthening them. The following quotes from the meeting indicate this: “To strengthen our position in society, we must be aware of our rights and obligations, and spread our knowledge about them.”⁸⁹ “We must start to value ourselves higher and believe in our strength and capacity as women.”⁹⁰ The very fact that there are written documents stipulating their rights, and that these documents are laws, seems to empower the women and give them more confidence towards their husbands. One woman told the group: “This is the first general assembly meeting I attend. If my husband were at home, I couldn’t have come. I am like a slave for him, always inside. I heard that we also have the right to participate in organizations and that’s why I came here today.”⁹¹ The secretary of CODEIM added: “Years ago I was afraid of talking back to my husband or attending meetings against his will. Today my fear is gone. My mother in law motivated me to join the groups.”⁹² The quotes from this meeting clearly show us what an empowering effect the use of a rights language has had on the women in this group. It is also an example of the value of associating with others in order to mobilize self-respect.

One of CODEIM’s group leaders, who just turned 54, described how she learned to read and write only four years ago in a literacy project. She told the other women that it’s never too late to learn and spoke of the importance of an education: “Before one didn’t send the girls to school because they had to work in the house. But now we know that girls and boys have the equal right to education, so we must not act like that. We must let both our daughters and sons go to school.”⁹³ Another woman added: “In order to create a better future we must talk to our daughters about all this and enhance their and our self esteem.”⁹⁴ Mejía ended the meeting with the following words: “The time has come. We women of San Miguel must open our eyes and wake up. We can’t continue to live as we always have. We all have the same rights to participate in society. It’s about time we take advantage of them and get rid of our fear.”⁹⁵ In this way, Mejía effectively used the rhetoric of rights in order to mobilize self-esteem amongst the women and

⁸⁹ Carmen Gonzalez, group leader in Colmito, meeting with CODEIM’s general assembly 4 February 2009.

⁹⁰ Angela Garcia, group leader in La Pena, meeting with CODEIM’s general assembly 4 February 2009.

⁹¹ Candelaria Mejia, group leader in Siete Platos, meeting with CODEIM’s general assembly 4 February 2009.

⁹² Adriana Hernandez, secretary of CODEIM, meeting with CODEIM’s general assembly 4 February 2009.

⁹³ Julia Perez, group leader in Legual, meeting with CODEIM’s general assembly 4 February 2009.

⁹⁴ Angela Garcia, group leader in La Pena, meeting with CODEIM’s general assembly 4 February 2009.

⁹⁵ Adela Corina Mejia, coordinator of CODEIM, meeting with CODEIM’s general assembly 4 February 2009.

what took place in that meeting room could maybe be described as the beginning of a “true change of vision”, redefining the margins of acceptable action, to use Uvin’s words.

Because the documentary proved to be an effective tool for inspiring the women to work with rights issues, on Mejía’s initiative we started to bring a lap top and projector out to the communities to show the movie in the women’s groups. Many women had never seen anything on a wide screen, nor had they seen a lap top and the project was well received. After watching the movie we would do an interactive exercise to get a discussion going. These were always moments when laughter would mix with thoughtfulness and sometimes the shyest women in the group would surprise us all by making a strong statement about women and men’s equal worth. It became clear that framed in a discussion about women’s rights, it became easier for the women to reflect over their own life situation, and make statements in front of the group. Once again, the use of a rights language seemed to have an empowering effect on the women. Also, the importance of associating with other people in order to enhance one’s self-esteem, as discussed by Rawls, was highlighted through these situations.

In a total of 6 communities I interviewed 52 women, of ages ranging from 16 to 70, on their perceptions on rights using a basic questionnaire. There was great variation between the answers. Some women had a rather grounded understanding of their rights, and could give concrete examples, others seemed to have an intuitive appreciation for the concept but could not concretize their knowledge and some would simply answer “I don’t know” to almost all the questions. A number of women said they had the right to go to meetings, and to defend themselves. Concerning children’s rights fewer women displayed familiarity, although the majority said that children have the right to go to school. 23 of the 52 women said they had heard about human rights before, some of them in the women’s group and others at sermons in the Catholic Church. Only five said they did not think it was important to learn about their rights.⁹⁶ Interviewing the 52 women gave me a deeper understanding for their situations, and perhaps most importantly it gave the members of CODEIM a voice. I noticed that it was easier to interview women in groups we visited for the second time, as their shyness was reduced considerably from just having met me once before. I always made an effort to play down the seriousness of the interview situation in order to make the women feel comfortable. Yet, it was obvious that the situation was perceived as awkward for many women, not being used to people asking them about their opinions or ideas about things.

⁹⁶ For more details, all the answers can be found in the appendix.

6 Conclusions

As put forward in the initial part of this paper, the purpose of the study has been twofold. On the one hand I aimed to contribute to the NGO research agenda as a paper taking into consideration theory, agency and context, and on the other I wished to discern the prospects for SOIR and CODEIM to work from a RBA in SMI. In relation to consideration of theory, several situations and empirical findings in Guatemala have served as real life examples of what I beforehand had read about on a more abstract or theoretical level in books. The experience of empirical research blending with theory, and understanding how the two help to enrich each other is in my eyes what social science is all about. Witnessing how theoretical concepts such as empowerment, agency and participation translate into the expression in a woman's face or come alive through a personal story told on a bus is very satisfying. Mills argues that a scientist must never be mastered by "theory" or "method" but rather master them, in order to avoid what he calls "methodological inhibition" or "fetishism of the Concept."⁹⁷ At this stage, it is for me suffice to say that theoretical concepts make genuine sense when they are experienced in real life situations and real life situations can be improved when we turn theoretical discussions into good practice.

Concerning the second purpose, and the research question posed, the concluding discussion has been divided up into four categories below. Subsequently, implications for the NGO research agenda and ideas for future research conclude the paper.

6.1 Organizational aspects within SOIR

From talking to Fallström, Fagerberg, Lundberg and Ivarsson, and from attending the RBA seminar held in April some important insights have been reached. First of all, I believe RBA has been introduced in SOIR as a new method as opposed to an approach, which has created confusion about the concept. The fact that Fallström describes the RBA as a "method among a million methods" and the cynicism Lundberg describes in relation to abbreviations and methods very much indicates this. As some of the participants at the RBA seminar in April implied RBA was introduced soon after the introduction of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and somehow it seems RBA in some aspects became "just another abbreviation." However, nobody I

⁹⁷ Mills, 1970, p.60.

have talked to seems to oppose RBA as an approach, in fact, the underlying philosophical assumptions of RBA very much seem to be shared by all. Within the development enterprise, working with “methods” is common, and although I am not critical of that as such, I do believe it has to some extent stalled the introduction of RBA within the organization. Therefore, the first, and perhaps most important, challenge is to establish a common understanding of RBA within SOIR. In many respects, RBA is nothing new in the organization. This however does not imply that there is nothing to learn from a deeper understanding of the approach.

In terms of participation and local agency, SOIR already applies a RBA in its work and has done so for many years. Concepts such as participation, cooperation and mutual respect very much capture the essence of SOIR’s work in SMI. This is important to bear in mind. I believe there are two main areas which SOIR should emphasize more in SMI. One is actor analysis, to identify which actors and stakeholders exist in the region that could be of help and have more cooperation with actors on different levels. The other is to develop methods to evaluate qualitative processes. As both Ivarsson and Lundberg argue, methods for measuring qualitative processes exist, such as in depth interviews, and SOIR staff just has to get better in developing and using them.

It should be acknowledged that SOIR is working within a bureaucracy with a long tradition of more emphasis on outcome than process. SOIR faces a pedagogical task, convincing board members and donors that development cooperation is not solely a financial matter, where the result is easily measured in a quantitative way. Having the number of women attending capacity-building workshops as an indicator says nothing about what they learned and which effects they have had in their daily lives. As to the pedagogical task of spreading the understanding of rights based development cooperation to members and donors, I believe SOIR’s 30 annual information-volunteers should be considered an valuable workforce. Each information-volunteer give 30-40 talks after returning to Sweden reaching out to thousands of people all over the country. I believe it would be a great opportunity to include RBA training in the volunteer’s three day preparatory course and encourage them to include the essence of RBA in their talks.

6.2 Organizational aspects within CODEIM

It was observed already at an early stage that Adela Mejia’s job entails responsibilities she is not capable of handling on her own. The recent introduction of program planning within SOIR, as opposed to project form has heavily increased the level of bureaucracy, demanding more long

term planning and more evaluation. The fact that Mejía only has a nine year education and very limited computer skills makes these administrative tasks difficult for her. It is my opinion that Mejía and CODEIM as a whole would benefit from an additional person with administrative capabilities and planning skills. It is clearly not enough to include objectives on human rights in a program plan, without a comprehensive step by step plan on how to live up to the objectives. No baseline study was conducted before introducing human rights work in the organization and no clear plan on how to proceed was developed. Working closely together with the coordinator for CODEIM and the women's groups during January, February and March, the follow up of the activity plan could be easily followed. No material was produced during January and February and the capacity building on human rights was held by us, the volunteers. The coordinator of CODEIM has very limited knowledge on human rights, and no methodology of how to work with these questions in the communities has been developed or followed. Mejía has great communicative talents and clear leadership qualities but lacks administrative skills. This implies that there is an acute need to elaborate the activity plans more realistically.

Furthermore, a great interest and willingness to learn and grow within UDADIM as a whole was observed and according to the new head of the regional office, more emphasis will be put on advocacy work and capacity building. A genuine interest for rights issues within CODEIM could be observed already at an early stage. Taking advantage of IMU in El Salvador could prove to be a great possibility for enhancing the rights perspective within CODEIM, and in IMU SOIR has a great resource for capacity building in work with women's rights close by. In relation to agency and empowerment, shyness can easily be mistaken for lack of commitment. Some women have worked voluntarily with the groups for over 15 years. In SMI, to attend meetings is agency. To learn a handicraft and start selling the products you make is empowerment. Many women within CODEIM should definitely be considered agents of their own development. I believe a lot could be done to support and enhance this agency, among other things by offering CODEIM group leaders more capacity building and arranging study visits to different organizations in the region.

6.3 Societal and contextual aspects in SMI

Several favorable societal and contextual aspects for working from a RBA were observed in SMI. Among them was the positive relation SOIR has with the mayor and other local authorities. Another positive aspect is the fact that new institutions are being established on the national,

regional and local levels. This implies that working with women's and indigenous rights is not officially controversial and that, if taken advantage of, there exist a range of organizations and institutions which could provide important support on different levels. The signs of progressiveness demonstrated by the new government should be considered as favorable for an enhanced emphasis on advocacy work.

A tradition of suspicion towards authorities was observed, probably due to the historical structural discrimination of both women and indigenous people. Although various institutions exist today in Guatemala, aiming to empower indigenous women, it is difficult to reach the women living in rural areas, and even harder to get the women to actively take part in the organizations. Here, the geographic location of SMI plays an important role, being situated in a highly isolated place. The limited computer skills and low network capacities add to the difficulties.

Among the less favorable societal and contextual aspects observed are the patriarchal structures. The fact that so many women we met expressed fear of their husbands and did not seem to believe they have equal rights, implies that there is a need to work with men and men's attitudes in addition to the women's groups. Perhaps SOIR, in accordance with the Women's Office, could help CODEIM arrange a seminar where both men and women are invited. To have men who oppose "machista" attitudes and values, such as Mejías boyfriend, to talk at seminars would be very valuable. Perhaps it would even be possible to get the mayor to officially and openly take a stand in these issues. In addition to the obstacles concerned with men's resistance to women getting organized, another impediment was perceived. It is perhaps best described as a form of "tradition of suffering", due to historical patterns of structural discrimination, leading to suspicion towards authorities and different types of organizations. This can be related to Rawls discussion on self-esteem and how people lacking in self-respect easily fall into apathy and cynicism.

A main observation I made was that there are numerous organizations, both nongovernmental and governmental and several possibilities for both funding and exchange of ideas and capacities that are being overlooked by CODEIM. From a RBA, SOIR has a crucial role to play here, to encourage and facilitate communication and collaboration among existing institutions. This of course requires pursuing an actor analysis and identification of stakeholders as a first step. Which organizations work with women's rights in the area? Where do they get funding? What possibilities are there for interaction and exchange of ideas and know how? As discussed in the theoretical part of this paper, being open to new alliances and establish

innovative partnerships, as a way to share and exchange capacities and ideas, is a crucial aspect when involving in rights-based development cooperation.

6.4 Indications of empowerment and agency in SMI

The fact that the majority of the women in SMI have to ask their husbands for permission to leave the house makes every group meeting an important act of agency. For many women the women's group was the only source of social interaction they had outside the family. In addition, for many women learning a handicraft in the group was important for their self-esteem. For some it also implied an extra income for the family. Relating this to Rawls reasoning on self-esteem as a primary good and the importance of associations, it is obvious that CODEIM is invaluable for hundreds of women in SMI. Also, the linkage between agency and well-being, as discussed by Sen, became obvious at several occasions. In communities where the group leader did not seem as committed, and where the women did not share common projects, the children and homes were dirtier and an ambience of apathy was sensed. This reaffirms how important it is to encourage and create forms and spaces for agency in order to enhance women's sense of self worth and augment their and their family's well being.

The example of Andrea García, who won the respect of her husband by becoming an agent of her own development, illustrates the connection between agency and well being and describes a personal, subjective process, difficult or perhaps impossible to measure in quantitative terms. For one woman such a change might take five months, for another five years, for someone else the change might never come. As long as our development institutions demand results in financial terms and quantitative measurements the real effects of a RBA will be difficult to identify. As Ivarsson also suggested when I interviewed him, this is perhaps the greatest challenge facing organizations that want to apply RBA in the field. Patricia Domingo, who talks on the local radio on a weekly basis, is a great source of inspiration for women in SMI and another important agent for change in the region.

No real patterns could be discerned from the 52 women's answers to the inquiry. The level of knowledge was extremely diverse and it did not seem to depend on age or in which community they lived. Some women showed no awareness whatsoever whereas others disclosed a remarkable understanding of rights issues. However, what was clearly perceived, especially at the meetings with CODEIM's general assembly, was that having knowledge about their rights directly implied a feeling of empowerment amongst the women. I believe it is extremely

important to develop, perhaps together with the Women's Office and IMU in El Salvador, a human rights education program for illiterate women, adapted to the reality and situation of the women in SMI.

6.5 Implications for the NGO research area and ideas for future research

Through the pursuit of this study, it has shown itself very important to interview and take into consideration actors on as many levels as possible - head of offices, project coordinators, rights bearers as well as other actors in the societal context in which the organization operates. This provides a more holistic view of the situation. Giving the rights bearers a voice is absolutely crucial. This takes time and requires good communication skills, especially when there are important cross-cultural and idiomatic barriers to take into consideration. Shyness can easily be misinterpreted for lack of interest, and lack of agency. There are thus important responsibilities on behalf of the researcher when conducting participatory observations or interviews.

Taking context into account cannot be emphasized enough. Even between communities within the same municipality important differences were observed concerning level of education, self esteem, knowledge of Spanish, organizational skills etc. It is impossible to evaluate an NGO's work without meeting, talking to and observing the participants and beneficiaries. Quantitative results say very little about the effects that projects have had or not had in people's lives. On paper, and from a cost efficiency perspective, CODEIM is an organization with few results in relation to the money invested. Yet, by listening to participating women's stories, the work done by CODEIM has had a life changing impact for hundreds of women and their families in San Miguel Ixtahuacán. Therefore, I believe the NGO research agenda needs more of the type of studies Lewis and Opuko-Mensah push for - field studies that take into account the local context but that at the same are grounded in social and political theory. Had this study been pursued in another country, or even in another part of Guatemala, the results as to the opportunities and challenges for working from a RBA would most probably have differed to a large extent.

More research should be done on how the RBA to development is implemented in real life situations. Molyneux and Lazar identify four principal ways in which the NGOs that they studied applied a RBA in their practical work: encouraging people to assume their rights on a personal, subjective level, strengthening popular organizations so that people can make their own demands,

working directly with agents of the state to create and/or strengthen legal mechanisms, and applying political pressure through lobbying and campaigning.⁹⁸ The initial standpoint that a RBA is primarily a way of thinking, allows openness in an investigation and using the words “practical implications” is in my eyes not entirely accurate. Rather, one should speak of the RBA’s connection to reality and people’s lives. It is my firm belief that social science is the study of people, and of interaction amongst people. Whether we study organizations, communities, firms or families, we are studying entities made up of human beings. Hence, instead of phrasing the research in terms of what implications RBA might have in practice, it should be expressed as in what ways a RBA could improve people’s lives. This allows taking more emotional aspects into account, aspects such as self esteem, feelings of agency, participation and empowerment. These are all aspects concerned with human processes and as mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper, working from a RBA, as opposed to the Charity Model or a Basic Needs Approach, emphasis and focus should be on the process as well as the outcome.

As mentioned, taking into account the local context has proven crucial in this study. For example, having good relations with the local authorities, such as the mayor, implies being able to design projects in terms of rights and capacity building. SMI is a very isolated municipality, which makes it difficult for the local organizations to take contact with other organizations which could benefit their work in terms of connections, inspiration and exchange of ideas. Therefore, the importance of enhancing the computer and communication skills of the employees is essential. To follow this development and evaluate its progress continuously would be an interesting aspect to investigate further.

Another interesting area for future research could be development work with less focus on money. How can we empower existing institutions and establish connections between organizations? Perhaps more NGOs and more money is not what the development cooperation world needs, but rather the interchange of capacities and ideas between not only NGOs but also governmental institutions and companies. In order to change structures and institutions, NGOs can only do so much, and work must be done and responsibility taken within governmental and private institutions as well. As Sen argues in *Development as Freedom*:

A variety of social institutions- related to the operation of markets, administrations, legislatures, political parties, nongovernmental organizations, the judiciary, the media and the community in general- contribute to the process of development precisely through their effects on enhancing and sustaining individual freedoms. Analysis of development calls for

⁹⁸ Molyneux and Lazar, 2003, p. 50.

an integrated understanding of the respective roles of these different institutions and their interaction.⁹⁹

Only the future can tell if the introduction of RBA in the development agenda will imply a beginning of a “true change of vision” and help create a more equal world. Yet, what is certain today is that “doing development right” is a subject well worth exploring, studying and analyzing further within the social sciences. This will require blending theoretical and empirical research as I have tried to do in this study. Enabling people to make choices in their lives, providing tools for their own subjective development - be it through technical assistance, provision of micro credits, advocacy work or simply by raising awareness on rights issues - that is rights-based development cooperation. A RBA to development means an important step away from the victimization of poor people and entails a change of attitude towards our motives behind development cooperation. From a RBA you don't involve in development cooperation because you feel sorry for anyone or to sooth a guilty conscience. You involve in development cooperation because you genuinely believe in the universality of human rights and in the dignity of every human being. For me, pursuing the study has not made the RBA any less appealing in theory, and as for its potential to change real life situations to the better I am rather optimistic.

⁹⁹ Sen, 1999, p. 297.

7 Appendix

7.1 Interview questions

Sara Fallström, 9 December 2008, Lund Sweden:

What is your knowledge on RBA?

Have you worked with RBA in another organization?

In what way does SOIR's work strengthen and protect people's rights in SMI?

RBA is very much about letting the rights bearers to be their own agents of development. What are the prospects for this in SMI according to you?

How much contact do you have with governmental authorities in Guatemala?

Many individuals and organizations that work with human rights in Guatemala have been attacked and threatened. What is your view on this?

Micael Fagerberg 11 December 2008, Lund, Sweden:

Have you worked with RBA in another organization?

How was RBA introduced in SOIR's work?

On who's initiative were the RBA seminars arranged?

What level of knowledge of human rights did the staff have before the seminars?
Is there any follow up planned?

How has the RBA been received by the staff?

In what way is RBA implemented in the field work?

To what extent are human rights talked about at the board of directives?
Are human rights political to you?

Is there a fear within SOIR to be perceived as political?

To what extent are you willing to work with advocacy work within SOIR?

What positive effect could a deepened rights perspective have for SOIR's target groups?

Mats Lundberg 13 March 2009, SMI, Guatemala:

Did you attend the RBA seminar in Lund? What did you think about it?

Had you heard about RBA before, or worked with RBA in another organization?

How would you define RBA? What is your perception of RBA?

Have you read "In the Right Direction"? Do you have it at the field office?

Did you attend Fallström's workshop in October?

Have you continued to work with the method? Why/why not?

How would you describe the conditions for agency in SMI?

In what way could SOIR work more from a RBA in SMI?

Pär Ivarsson, 11 March 2009, SMI, Guatemala:

To what extent was RBA mentioned in your employment process?

Had you heard about RBA before, worked with RBA in another organization?

How would you define RBA? What is your perception of RBA?

Have you read "In the Right Direction"? Do you have it at the field office?

How do you think SOIR could implement RBA in SMI?

Which difficulties/possibilities do you think RBA could involve?

From a RBA focus is on processes as well as on results. How can that be combined with cost efficiency?

Can qualitative processes be measured quantitatively?

What are your plans for CODEIM in the near future?

Amabilia Mérida, 20 March 2009, SMI, Guatemala:

When did the Women's office open in SMI? Why did it open, on who's initiative?

How long have you worked here? Where have you worked before?

Why is it important to work with women's rights?

What is the plan for your work?

Which are the biggest challenges for your work?

Which are the possibilities?

What do you know about CODEIM?

How could CODEIM collaborate with the Women's Office?

From where do you receive funding? How do you collaborate with other municipalities?

7.2 Answers to questionnaire

1. What does the word "right" mean to you?
2. Do you have rights in your home/community/municipality? If yes, which?
3. Do children have rights? If yes, which?
4. Have you heard any information about human rights before? If yes, where and when?
5. Do you think it is important to know about your rights? If yes, why?

Community	Name	Age	1	2	3	4	5
Legual 12/3	Juana González	42	To defend one's right	Yes, to defend oneself, and talk amongst men	When they grow older they will, now they are too young	No	Yes, to be able to defend yourself
Legual 12/3	Andrea García	38	The right to attend meetings, work, attend capacitybuildi ng	Yes, the right to attend meetings	Yes, the right to go to school	Yes, I listened to a talk on women's rights in the Catholic Church two years ago	Yes, for us women

Legal 12/3	Adela Cinto	29	To defend one's right	Yes, to defend my rights, if I get home late and my husband asks why I can give an explanation	Yes, to do their chores	Yes, like when you come	Yes, to be able to analyse it
Legal 12/3	Clara Díaz	19	Not let men hit you, have liberty and the same rights as men	In the house to do the chores, in the community to do what I want. What everybody else does, I can do too.	Yes, the right to go to school, play, everything	Yes, in the Catholic church, we always go to sessions and they talk about rights	Yes, because when you know, you can defend yourself and not let people take advantage of you
Legal 12/3	Lucrecia Pérez	16	I don't know	Yes, at home, be able to be with my parents	Yes, they have the right to play	No	Yes, to listen
Legal 12/3	Marta Pérez	23	I don't know	Only at home, to work, cook, knit. Not in the community	I don't think so, they don't know how to work yet	No, nothing	I don't think so
Legal 12/3	Tomasa Mejía	70	I only have the right to my house	We work at home	No, they are under age	No	I don't know because we are ignorant to these things and I don't know what it is
Legal 12/3	Rosaria Mejía	59	We always need this group. We are poor and we want to get out a little, in the group we learn things	Yes, I know how to do things in the kitchen	Yes, my two boys work in the fields	You hear about it from people	Important is to work
Legal 12/3	Amalia Domingo	37	That men can't beat you. We have the same rights as men, even if they say we don't.	Not in the community, at the house I only prepare food for my children	Yes, they have the right to not be beaten too much, you should not give them a bad life	No	Sure, to know what it is. People ask us questions and we don't know what to answer.
Mulebac 17/2	Felipa Pérez	20	For example the right to talk, have an education, work in the fields.	Yes, women also have rights, not only men, we have the right to do things and to take care of the house and family	Yes, they do, and the mother should tell the children what they are so they learn	This is the first time I attend a meeting. I go to church but I haven't heard a talk on rights.	Yes, it is important to know in which way you can do things

Mulebac 17/2	Catalina Díaz	44	For example, as a woman I have the right to defend myself	Yes, I have the right to take care of my family, in the community we have the same rights as the men to work and support the community	Yes, today they have rights. For example to not get hit.	No	Yes, it's important to know which rights one has.
Mulebac 17/2	Felipa Gerónimo	42	It means value to me. Women's value.	I have the responsibility to be good in the community. I have the right to advise my children	Yes, they have rights, but I don't know which	No	Yes, it is important for us to be united
Mulebac 17/2	Florinda Aguilar	33	It means being able to ask your husband for permission to leave the house	Yes, I have the right to tell my children to wash their hands, it tell them well, I don't mistreat them	Yes, The right to ask for money to buy fruit	No	Yes, I think it is important to know what one is able to do
Mulebac 17/2	Audilia Mejía	23	I can't explain it	Yes, i think so, for example to go to church, to work	Yes, they have the right to work	No	Yes, because there are women who need to know their rights
Mulebac 17/2	Lucila Castañón	26	For example, the right in the group. My husband tells me I have the right to go out	When there are meetings I have the right to attend, to listen what they say in the community, but only if my husband is not home	Yes, for example when they are small they have the right to play. I have the right to tell them to fetch me firewood	No	Yes, it's important. One gets to know what the rights are
Mulebac 17/2	Timotea Díaz	30	I don't know	Yes, to leave my home	I don't know	No	Yes, I would like to learn
Mulebac 17/2	Fransisca Castañón	53	I have an idea	Yes, we have right at home, the right to express ourselves	Yes, they have the right to work	I heard something once but now I don't remember	Yes, it is very important, I want to learn more
Mulebac 17/2	Felipa Hernández	26	No, I heard about it once but it did not stick	I have the right to leave the house	Yes they do	No	Yes

7 Platos 18/2	Inocenta Domingo	29	I don't know	Yes, like the work we do in the women's group	Yes, to be taken care off, to have medicine when they are sick	No	Yes, to know what one can do in the house
7 Platos 18/2	Candelaria Mejía	35	It means I have the right to be healthy	According to me, I have rights in my home and in the community but I don't know exactly which	Yes, they have rights. According to me, they have the right to participate in their father's work	No, not at all	Yes, it's important, because we are blind to this
7 Platos 18/2	Sonia Pérez	32	It means that one is not afraid to leave the house and travel	Yes, one can attend meetings and talk	Yes, the right to study so that they learn	No	Yes, in that way nobody can trick us and we can defend ourselves. There are rights so that we can defend ourselves.
7 Platos 18/2	Margarita Ruiz	46	I don't know	Yes, but I don't know which	Yes, everybody does. One should tell their children what to do	No	Yes, but I don't know why
7 Platos 18/2	Anamaria Ruiz	33	We have the right to organize ourselves and do things, like we are doing no.	Yes, the right to do our chores, and in the community like what we are doing now	Yes, the right to eat, drink, have clean clothes	Yes, we had a meeting in San José Ixcanichel three years ago with the women's group, it was a talk about rights	Yes, we women have rights, as well as children
7 Platos 18/2	Ediberta Ruiz	17	To me, it means having the right to life and responsibility	Yes, rights to defend ourselves	Yes, the right to life, babies still in the mother's stomach have rights too	No	Yes, because it's good for you
7 Platos 18/2	Amanda Hernández	19	I don't know	I don't know	I don't know, maybe, to play for example	No	I don't know really, maybe it is important
7 Platos 18/2	Margarita de León	37	I don't know	Yes, in my house maybe	Yes, they have the right to everything	Yes, when we started with the group six months ago. A young lady from town came and gave a talk	Yes, because we want to learn about everything

7 Platos 18/2	Andrea Cinto	33	We have the right to talk, to ask for projects	Yes, I have the right to do my chores	Yes, the right to have clothes, food, all they need	Yes, someone came from San Miguel to talk about this in the group	Yes, it's important, because you learn something and that's good for you
7 Platos 18/2	Marta López	41	Working with the women's groups	Yes, my children go to school	Yes, they have the right to study	Yes, someone came here to talk about rights with the group, but we didn't ask where they came from	Yes, because the children study so that they later can find work
Ixcail 19/2	Gregoria López (m)	60	I don't know	Yes, I have rights. Sometimes men don't let women go out and mistreat them	Yes, the right to not be hit	Yes, with the general assembly of CODEIM, when we watched the IMU documentary with you	Yes, it's important because we have the same rights as men
Ixcail 19/2	Medarda López	43	Have the same rights as men	Yes, the right to talk, in my house and in the community	Yes, the right to talk, to help out	No, not yet	Yes, to be able to talk
Ixcail 19/2	Hilda Aguilar	24	Talk to families	Yes, but I don't know which	Yes, they have rights	No	Yes, it's important to know about
Ixcail 19/2	Mariana Díaz	38	I don't know	Yes, the right to participate, work, express my ideas	Yes, they have the right to not be hit, to be well treated, to study	Yes, you can talk about everywhere, people come here physically and spiritually to talk about it	Yes, because before we didn't have rights, only the men did, but today we have rights as well
Ixcail 19/2	Olivia Mejía	19	It means that everybody has the same rights, both women and men	Yes, in my house I have the right to talk to my family, and in the community I have the right to defend myself	Yes, something like that	No	Yes, it's important to know our rights because maybe we are ignorant to our rights
Ixcail 19/2	Elena González	57	Women's rights	Yes, the right to be in the group, to leave the house	Yes, the right to not be mistreated	Yes, in the group we hear about these things	Yes, it sounds beautiful to listen to
Ixcail 19/2	Desideria Mejía	38	Women's rights	Yes, everybody in the family has rights	Yes, to not be hit	No	Yes, because it's good

Ixcaíl 19/2	Juliana Mejía	25	To talk	Yes, to take part in the group, to defend myself and talk amongst men	Yes, to talk and to defend themselves if they are beaten	Yes, they came to the group to talk about this a couple of years ago	Yes, because we have to defend ourselves
Chisnán 24/2	Sandra Velásquez	16	I don't know	Yes, I have the right to defend myself, to value myself	Yes, you should not hit them, you should treat them well	No	Yes, because we are human
Chisnán 24/2	Bertha Sánchez	22	Right to me means the right to take care of my house, and to talk to diferent people	In the community I have the right to talk to the women to see what information they might give	Yes, the right to study, to get out	No, I just know it exists	Yes, to know what goes on in life
Chisnán 24/2	Nicolasa Aguilar	58	I have the right to work in the fields, to cook and take care of my children	I have the right to attend community meetings	Yes, my children are thiking about where they will work, they are in secondary chool	No	Yes, it's important
Chisnán 24/2	Crysanta Domingo	26	I don't know	Yes, the right to attend meetings and participate	Yes, the right to go to school and learn a lot	Yes, we hear about it in the group and sometimes we go to other meetings	Yes, before there were no rights for women, but now there are, just as for men
Chisnán 24/2	Irina Domingo	58	One year ago I joined the group, when my husband died. He didn't want me to attend	The right to leave the house, and attend groups and meetings. It's a person's right	Yes, the right to go to school	No, because I'm new in the group	Yes, it's important, now whenever there are meetings with the group I come
Sícabe 19/3	Concepción Díaz	53	The right to defend yourself	Yes, to take care of my house and work in the fields	Yes, of course. To defend their rights when they are mistreated	Yes, here in the women's group. I don't go to church	Yes, to at least have the right to defend oneself
Sícabe 19/3	Yanira López	14	To have rights in our lives	I have the right to study	Yes, the right to study, to not be mistreated by their parents	Yes, in school, a teacher talked about it in 2006	Yes, to be able to remember it

Sícabe 19/3	Elsa Castellón	29	Before we didn't have any rights, now we do	Yes, in my house but not in the community	Yes, at home, and the right to go to school	Yes, when you came the other day, and in the Catholic Church	Yes, because before this didn't exist and now it does
Sícabe 19/3	Juana Castellón	43	We have rights now	The right to work	Yes, to go to school	Yes, when you came, and in the Catholic Church	Yes, because we have rights now
Sícabe 19/3	Huberta Aguilar	53	I don't know	Yes, but I don't know which	Yes, but I don't know which	Yes, in the women's group	Yes, it's important to listen
Sícabe 19/3	Rosaría López	46	The right to work	Yes, the right to work	Yes, the right to study, to work	Yes, here in the group	Yes, to learn
Sícabe 19/3	María Ajpop	22	To have the right to life, and to an education	Yes the right to participate in the community and to give talks	Yes, the right to health, food and education	Yes, in several places, but normally in the Catholic Church at special dates	Yes, because when you don't know, you are discriminated
Sícabe 19/3	Santa Aguilar	39	Women's rights are present today, maybe they existed before too but we were ignorant	Yes, to work, to cook, to leave the house and participate in the community	Yes, the right to study, they are free, and they are the most important for the future	Yes, in the group and in Church	Yes, because imagine if one wouldn't know, it would be like being sleeping. Now I leave my house because I know I have the right to talk
Sícabe 19/3	Francisca Juárez	50	The right to ask	Yes, I ask, I talk	Yes, when they need something or want to say something	No	Since I haven't heard about it I don't know
Sícabe 19/3	Fidelia Bámaca	47	To listen to what we are able to do	Yes, but I don't know which	I don't know	No	Yes
Sícabe 19/3	Rodrigo López	62	The right to defend yourself as a woman	I don't participate in the community, only in my home	I don't know	Yes, in the Evangelical Church they say that women have rights	Yes, laws can get us down, but now we have rights, just as men do

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