The Power of Dialogue:

Exploring women's empowerment arising from

Development Communication

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ABSTRACT

Guatemala holds one of the world's highest chronic malnutrition rates. The department of Totonicapán in the Western highlands, almost exclusively populated by indigenous people, has the most alarming chronic malnutrition rate of over 80 percent. UNICEF Guatemala launched the chronic malnutrition intervention program '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' in 2009. Through the application of the Development Communication method, information was made available in a culturally and locally adapted manner, in order to build awareness to support social change. Through an embedded single case study, community based activities of the program in the municipality of Totonicapán were studies with qualitative research carried out in four communities. The community based activities were women's groups. The purpose of this study was to explore participants' perceptions of the applied communication method in these activities, as well as women's experiences of empowerment resulting from the applied communication. The findings showed that participants perceived that Development Communication was implemented in three of the communities which had contributed to women's empowerment. The applied communication strategy in the fourth community was not perceived to follow Development Communication, and women's empowerment was found to be restricted.

Key Words: *Development Communication, Empowerment, Conscientization, Social Change, Women, Guatemala*

Word Count: 15,088

Photo 1: Totonicapán, Guatemala.
(Authors' photo.)

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Board   Board of Trustees

COCOSAN   Comisión Comunitaria de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional
Community Commission of Food and Nutritional Security

COMUSAN   Comisión Municipal de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional
Municipal Commission of Food and Nutritional Security

DC   Development Communication

NGO   Non-governmental organization

SESAN   Secretaría de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional
Food and Nutrition Security Secretariat

Sub-commission   Sub-commission of Communication

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

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CHAPTER 1 – SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 Malnutrition in Guatemala and Totonicapán

Guatemala is one of the most unequal countries in the world, which, among other things, has translated itself in chronic malnutrition[1] affecting nearly half (49.8% in 2011) of children under five[2], placing it at the world's sixth highest chronic malnutrition rate (UNICEF and ICEFI 2011:7). Malnutrition is an important national development issue as it impedes the full physical and intellectual development of children which results in losses in future educational attainment and productivity (ibid).

The high inequities and inequalities within the country affecting malnutrition rates are not only related to high poverty rates but also to the inequitable access to basic services such as education and health (ibid). The country's inequalities thus further translate themselves in the disempowerment of a large share of the population, with significant inequities between urban and rural populations, as well as indigenous and non-indigenous. Indeed, the chronic malnutrition rates are 34.3% in urban and 58.6% in rural areas. Among the indigenous population, chronic malnutrition rate is 65.9%, while the rate among the non-indigenous population is 36.2% (ibid:27). The department of Totonicapán (see image 1) finds itself in the Western highland, a rural region. Its population is 97% indigenous and holds a chronic malnutrition rate of 82.2% (in 2009) (ibid:25).

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[1] The malnutrition problem in Guatemala is one of chronic malnutrition. Chronic malnutrition results from a poor diet - an inadequate intake of nutrients or calories - during prolonged or repeated periods of time and translates itself in stunting, which is short height for age (ICEFI and UNICEF 2011; Save the Children 2012:2). Stunting is irreversible and manifests itself as particularly severe if it occurs during the first two years life during pregnancy, or conception (Save the Children 2012:2; WHO 2013:3).

[2] The chronic malnutrition rate is measured in children under five, thus all chronic malnutrition rates will refer to the under five population.

Image 1: Map of Guatemala.
(Guatemala Guides 2014, image edited by authors.)

During our internship with UNICEF Guatemala[3] it became evident that the chronic malnutrition problem is a stubborn one, which neither the government, international organizations, nor non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been able to reverse, although knowledge exists regarding the causes of malnutrition. Since 2002, the government increased its commitment to fight malnutrition. A law for food and nutritional security was passed in 2004 and a ministry

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[3] Internship took place from August to December 2013.

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created for safeguarding this law, the 'Food and Nutrition Security Secretariat', SESAN. In addition, a variety of programs targeting the most vulnerable parts of the population were launched. However, these programs did not cover sufficiently and had low financial resources (IDB 2012), thus the efforts have been unsuccessful in reducing malnutrition (ibid; GHI 2010). Indeed, in 1999, 46.4% of children were affected while by 2009 the rate had risen to 49.8% (UNICEF and ICEFI 2011). Indeed, malnutrition is a complex issue; its tackling requires work on many fronts from the bettering of child feeding, immunization, access to water and sanitation, to poverty reduction (ibid:50). In 2012 the government launched the 'Zero Hunger Pact' initiating a national movement for the eradication of hunger in the country with the aim to decrease the national chronic malnutrition rate of children by 10 percent in four years (Gobierno de Guatemala n/a:6-8). The pact is a multi-sector approach with ministries, NGOs, private institutions, etc. The SESAN is responsible for the inter-institutional coordination (Gobierno de Guatemala n/d:24-25).

Key factors have now been identified in the reduction of malnutrition in Guatemala as active community participation in development programs and women's empowerment (UNICEF and ICEFI 2011:50). With this background in mind, the following section describes people's participation depending on the communication approach and the focus on women in development programs.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Evolution of Communication in Development

This section attempts to describe the evolution of communication used in health intervention programs. Since the 1940s, health promotion interventions were carried out through traditional communication[4], which was focused on one-way information transfer, from the knowledgeable message emitter to the information receiver. In this context, education was focused on the content, and the message emitter had the power to define the message as well as how and when it would be shared (Kaplun 1985). As a result of information transfer, the message receiver was expected to adopt new attitudes and practices, as the emitter was attempting to mold receiver's

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[4] Freire refers to 'traditional communication' as 'banking education'. These expressions will be used interchangeably in this study. Another definition for the same concept is 'one-way communication' or 'top-down communication'.

behavior[5] (ibid; Mefalopulos 2008:6; UNDP 2011:7). Behavior change communication techniques were brought to Latin America in the 1960s. During this time, the fight against 'underdevelopment' in the global South was present on the international agenda and attempts to change individuals' behaviors was considered the most efficient way to solve development problems (Kaplun 1985:31). However, this approach to development started to be questioned in the 1970s (Inagaki 2007:7). In relation to health education, research shows that the dissemination of information is insufficient: knowledge can be affected without altering practices and behavior. For example, child feeding education programs for mothers at the individual and community levels have mainly increased knowledge and altered practices in the *short-term* (Guldan et al 2000). Other experiences have shown that raised knowledge and awareness as well as changed perceptions do not necessarily lead to changed practices (IDB 2013), with failures mainly being ascribed to *the lack of participation and ineffective communication* (Inagaki 2007; Mefalopulos 2008:8). Consequently, a shift in the communication paradigm took place towards considering individuals within a broader context, moving away from traditional communication to Development Communication (DC) (Mefalopulos 2008).

Paulo Freire[6] was one of the most influential theorists of DC; his reflection upon education suggests that knowledge is not something that can be transferred and deposited onto people (Freire 2000). The distinctive element of this communication method is that it attempts to stir critical thinking in individuals by giving them the instruments to think, interrelate, and draw their own conclusions through active participation in the dialogue (Kaplun 1985). The multiplicity of perspectives and knowledge is here essential and all actors are thus part of the decision-making process regarding message diffusion (Prieto 1991), with solutions to social problems deriving from within the communities. The goal of DC is for people to desire a change in their lives and take action in order to improve them (Freire 2000). As Freire's theory originates from the Latin American rural context and the oppressed class, it is suitable for our research of marginalized populations in the Guatemalan countryside and will be used as a base for the theoretical framework.

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[5] Kaplun (1985:18) makes a distinction between 'traditional communication' and 'behavior change communication'. However, as they are both fit in the exogenous model of education/communication, they will be considered as a single method.

[6] Paulo Freire was a Brazilian philosopher and pedagogue. His educational approach is grounded in modern Marxism and is centered around empowerment of the marginalized. He is most known for his successful adult literacy methods for the oppressed rural poor in Latin America and Africa, and his emphasis on political empowerment for liberation of the people (Freire 2000; Freire 1972).

1.2.2 Women's Empowerment

The World Bank (2012:36) stated that "[g]lobal action should focus on areas where gender gaps are most significant both intrinsically and in terms of their potential development payoff /…/". The placement of gender gap reductions on the international agenda resulted in women being among the primary drivers of development. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, women's empowerment has been identified as a key factor in the reduction of malnutrition (UNICEF and ICEFI 2011:50; World Bank 2012). Women have thus been placed at the centre of many strategies attempting to improve the nutrition status of a population. Indeed, educated women are more likely to have healthier children (Sen 2001:195-198; UNICEF and ICEFI 2011). Nonetheless, this instrumental view of empowerment has its fallbacks (Kabeer 1999:436).

The reduction of gender inequalities emerged from feminist research, yet as this battle has been embraced by mainstream policymakers, it now holds different meanings. Indeed, reducing the gender gap has been taken on the international development agenda for efficiency reasons rather than fight against oppression (Cornwall, Harrison, Whitehead 2007:22). This impairs feminists' goal by oversimplifying complex findings regarding the position of women (ibid:1). The notion of 'women empowerment', a complex self-transformative process of demanding change, has thus been downsized to improved access to economic resources or formal education and the effect these have on women's individual choices (ibid:7). In addition, much emphasis is now placed on its quantifying empowerment, which might be contrary to the concept itself (Kabeer 1999:436) and also takes away from understanding the underlying mechanism of such a process. To break away from this dilemma, some suggest a compromise combining work at the grassroots level while engaging with policy work in order to alter what some feminist might consider wrongful practices (Jackson and Pearson 2005:156). The following section describes the program under study, which attempts to embrace this compromise.

1.3 Program Description - '36 Months Zero Malnutrition'

In 2009, UNICEF Guatemala started a chronic malnutrition intervention program called '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' as part of the government's 'Zero Hunger Pact', concentrating their efforts in the departments of Totonicapán and Chiquimula with high prevalence of chronic

malnutrition. An analysis conducted on behalf of the government found that malnutrition in the country is not only due to food insecurity, but also highly related to the lack of knowledge and information of caregivers, i.e. inadequate eating habits (Programa Conjunto 2010; UNICEF 2012). As a result, the program's principal aim is to "[s]trengthen the capacities of families and local organizations in the seven[7] prioritized municipalities to improve knowledge, attitude, and practices for adequate nutrition of children under 36 months[8], pregnant and breastfeeding women[9]" (UNICEF and CECODE n/d:8-9). This thesis focuses on the project in the municipality of Totonicapán, which is located in the department of Totonicapán (see image 2).

Image 2: Map of the Department of Totonicapán and its Municipalities.
(Zonu 2014, image edited by authors.)

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[7] There were 17 prioritized municipalities (highest rates of malnutrition) within the departments of Totonicapán and Chiquimula in 2009, seven of which were selected for participation in the start of the program, four in Chiquimula and three in Totonicapán. More municipalities have been included in the program since, with all eight municipalities of Totonicapán partaking since June 2010 (CECODE 2010).

[8] Children under 36 months refers in practice to children under the age of two. The time period of 36 months - commonly referred to as the first 1,000 days of life - includes (apart from the first two years) nine months of pregnancy and three months prior to conception, as the nutritional status of the mother during these months affects the nutritional status of the child when born (Save the Children 2012:2). These 36 months are a critical period for child development and damage manifesting itself through chronic malnutrition are largely irreversible (ibid).

[9] This is the program's general objective. See appendix 1 for the specific objectives.

As described in the program document (Programa Conjunto 2012), the program focuses on municipalities and works closely with the 'Municipal Commission of Food and Nutritional Security' (COMUSAN) (see figure 1), the state institution established by law ensures food security at the municipal level. The COMUSAN is composed of key municipal actors from institutions and organizations from the 'Zero Hunger Pact', which functions as a network of collaborating actors to the program. The COMUSAN's role is to holistically view the nutritional situation, identifying problems and necessities in their municipality. Through the '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' program, municipal communication groups called 'Sub-commission of Communication' (hereafter referred to as Sub-commission) were created with the aim of strengthening the communication capacity in the municipality. The groups consist of health-workers, teachers, and other state employees capacitated in DC. The Sub-commission is responsible for developing communication strategies, tools, and materials in line with DC to tackle the specific problems identified by the COMUSANs. These ideas are implemented by the Sub-commission at the municipal and communal levels (Programa Conjunto 2012). Through DC the focus is to make information available in a culturally and locally adapted and sensitive manner in order to build awareness so that conscious decisions can be taken regarding nutrition (Greiner 2012).

The activities can be implemented in a variety of ways depending on the choice of the Sub-commission. At the communal level, a 'Communal Commission of Food and Nutritional Security' (COCOSAN) can be established. COCOSANs are composed of community members (virtually all women[10]) who work with questions of food and nutritional security through group discussions. This research will focus on these communal activities. The activities are facilitated by a health-worker from the Sub-commission, referred to as 'educators' in the setting of the COCOSANs (Programa Conjunto 2012). In the municipality of Totonicapán the Sub-commission established COCOSANs in five communities. The COCOSANs' goal is to be at the heart of community activities to provide women with a space to organize. The activities are developed to go beyond dissemination of information so as to create a space for discussion, interaction, and critical thinking, and to inspire for sociopolitical action (Greiner 2012).

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[10] Although focus is on children and mothers, the aim is to involve a variety of people from the community in the COCOSAN and not only mothers of young children. However, in the visited COCOSANs only women participated, women of all ages, some with already adult children.

Depending on the structure, the groups consist between 13 to nearly 200 members, referred to as 'learners'. The COCOSANs are managed by an educator in collaboration with a 'Board of Trustees', selected from the group of learners to have more responsibilities.[11] The following section describes how the program will be under study.

National level

SESAN

Ministry created for the protection of food and nutritional security.

Municipal level

COMUSAN

Group of key municipal authority figures and ministry members in charge of identifying problems and necessities of food and nutritional security within the municipality.

Sub-commission of Communication

Health personnel from the municipality capacitated in Development Communication, working as educators in the COCOSANs.

Community level

COCOSANs communities I-V

Women groups working with food and nutritional security at the community level. A 'Board of Trustees' is democratically selected within the group in order to represent the group.

Figure 1: Map of Actors.
(Authors' construct.)

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[11] The members of the Boards of Trustees are also learners.

1.4 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

DC programs, particularly those based on community dialogue, can be complicated and costly to measure (Greiner 2012). '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' aims to decrease malnutrition rates by fostering social change from within the communities (UNICEF and CECODE n/d). Quantitative measurements of health outcomes are prioritized as they are favored by donors, yet these are less relevant for the program participants (Gumucio 2001:13-14). However, health indicators improve in the long-term thus not showing immediate return on investment. Furthermore, qualitative measurements of improved knowledge and practices are insufficient as they do not necessarily affect health outcome. Thus, measurements in place must be complemented in order to document other valuable aspects of the program in relation to its potential in terms of empowerment, which will lead to sustainable structural societal changes and contribute to the completion of the program's objectives. As a result, we have chosen to analyze the underlying mechanisms of such a process in order to attempt to asses the progress towards social change brought by the program. In addition, evaluation strategies tend to take the application of the communication method for granted. The purpose of this thesis is thus to explore implementation of DC by putting forward participants' perceptions as well as its empowerment potential, so as to portray a holistic view of the program. This will hopefully be valuable to field workers as well as learners in their efforts to better nutrition. The following research questions will be explored:

> *1. How do learners and educators perceive the implementation of the Development Communication method in the municipality of Totonicapán?*
>
> *2. What is the implication of the applied method in contributing to women's empowerment?*

The thesis will attempt to understand the potential of DC in contributing to women's empowerment in the community based activities of the program. The first question aims to explore the application of the DC method within the COCOSANs. The perspectives of educators and learners will be put forward through Freire's theory. As the first question will identify the type of communication applied, the second question will discuss if the applied communication method contributed to women's empowerment with respect to better health and nutrition. Carr's

(2003) model will be used as it will allow us to analyze empowerment as a process, encompassing the underlying dynamics of learners' conscientization. Considering empowerment as such is aimed to help in the understanding of the progress towards social change.

1.5 Thesis Outline

The first chapter briefly presented the malnutrition problem in Guatemala and the program at the center of our study as well as a literature review surrounding the main themes of our study. Chapter two, the methodological section, will describe the research strategies and tools used. Chapter three outlines the theoretical framework of DC and empowerment, followed by the empirical findings in chapter four. Lastly, chapter five will conclude the study by summarizing the findings and answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY[12]

Now that the background has been introduced, this chapter will lay out the methodological approach of the research.

2.1 Research Design

Through an embedded single case study (Yin 2009:47) we studied the community based activities (i.e. COCOSANs) in the municipality of Totonicapán of UNICEF's '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' program which uses the DC method. This design suited our study as the program, our case, was implemented on the municipal level, yet the activities studied were carried out in individual communities. The embedded units of this case were thus four COCOSANs in four communities within the municipality of Totonicapán.

As Yin (2009:71) advices, we have attempted to be flexible yet consistent during our research and analytical processes. We have taken on a deductive research approach where we have been guided by a theoretical position developed prior to entering the field, but remained open to new

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[12] Themes related to validity and reliability are discussed throughout this chapter. Yet, they will not be spoken about in those terms as they are considered contradictory to feminist ontology (Sarantakos 2012).

concept and themes (Ritchie and Lewis 2003:49). Furthermore, through our previous research experience in Totonicapán, we made assumption on what was to be encounter in the field, although qualitative studies are highly unpredictable (Silverman 2013:140). Once in the field we made a conscious effort to remain open to unexpected approaches, so as not to steer the findings according to our previous understandings of interviewees' reality (England 1994:81) or our theoretical framework (Ragin 2010). This mindset let us add concepts to our theoretical framework (Bryman 2008:11) so as to hopefully produce knowledge corresponding to a fair representation of the beneficiaries' social experiences and reality (Ragin 2010:56).

2.2 Feminist Epistemology and Ontology

Feminist epistemological 'perspectives' as explained by Ackerly, Stern, and True (2006) were embodied so as to put foreword women's perspectives and experiences, as gender relations are here considered central to how knowledge is produced. There was thus an attempt to understand individuals and their views and behaviors within their subjective meaning. Indeed, building knowledge through women's voices, particularly belonging to marginalized groups, will lead to "more robust objectivity" (ibid:26) in research, as it contributes to building a different perspective not considered in mainstream knowledge production (ibid:21-26). Furthermore, feminist ontology was embraced as realities were viewed as constructions by individuals, a dynamic process that is affected by their social surroundings such as culture and history (Freire 2000:75; Bryman 2008:19). Realities are therefore local and knowledge limited to that location, referred to as 'situated knowledge' by Haraway (1988:581, 583). This was particularly important to our case, as it was an effort to document social change through the potential empowerment process by placing women's reality in priority. This entails that the subjects' social world was interpreted through the researchers' point of view and then further interpreted through the theoretical framework. The importance of interpretation originates in our understanding that we can not fully engage in others' view as our privilege cannot be removed (Haraway 1988:586). In attempt to be objective and not 'pollute' the subjects' view of reality, there has been an ongoing active self-reflection with respect to how our personal backgrounds and values might influence choices, orientation of the research, methodology, data collection, and knowledge production (Sultana 2007; Bryman 2008). We hope that our previous individual experiences working in

Latin America with indigenous populations[13] and our time in Guatemala helped our understanding of the setting through experience (Bryman 2008:376).

2.3 Research Methods

Our data collection method was qualitative as it allowed to best capture people's perceptions and experiences (Bryman 2008:26). Desk research was undertaken prior to entering the field in order to inform the research design and to familiarize ourselves with the context, such as the program under study and surrounding health literature. The main method used during data collection was focus group discussions as it was group experiences that was of interest rather than detailed individual accounts (Ritchie and Lewis 2003:58). Focus groups seemed to provide a more accurate description of reality, as the context allowed for higher spontaneity and people could through interaction agree or contradict each other. This enabled them to build on each other's views and refine their answers, thus allowing for a richer perspective to unfold (ibid:171). Furthermore, conducting the focus groups in pair facilitated the observation of group dynamics, such as identifying non-verbal interactions (ibid:182) and allowed for inter-observer consistency (Bryman 2008:376). In addition, individual and paired in-depth interviews were undertaken on a few occasions when the situation did not allow for focus groups. These were not conducted to further explore issues and themes brought up in focus groups but were necessary in order to receive the perspective of all. 12 interviews were conducted with a total of 46 individuals. (See appendix 2 for a detailed description.)

The data collection process involved both educators and learners as these were COCOSAN participants, but also community Mayors, in order to record the spectrum of experiences surrounding the community groups. We were fortunate enough to participate during meetings between the Board of Trustees and newly appointed community Mayors[14] in three communities, where the Board presented the functions and work of the COCOSAN. This allowed us to observe the interaction between these actors which was highly valuable as this was part of the process under study. Regarding focus groups with learners we chose to interview members of the Boards separately from the rest of learners, as learners' answers could be affected by the presence of

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[13] One of us worked with indigenous communities in the Andean mountains in Peru for half a year, and the other lived in a rural village in Mexico for the same length of time.
[14] The mandates of community Mayors are annual, commencing in January.

Board members. Moreover, the interview guidelines for learners was overlooked by a Sub-commission member[15] in order to adapt the language to the interviewees.

2.4 Sampling Strategy

During our internship we conducted a separate research in relation to the program and had already established contact with several key informants. Our main gatekeepers were the educators who gave us access to the communities and the groups in which they worked. Originally all five communities with active COCOSANs in the municipality of Totonicapán were chosen as sites for the research. However, data was only collected in four communities as bad weather conditions prevented the attendance of the interviewees in the fifth community. This unexpected event allowed us to orient the research towards women's empowerment as exclusively women participated in the COCOSANs of these four communities, which was not the case of the fifth community.

The identification of focus group participants was realized via purposive snowball sampling (Ritchie and Lewis 2003:78,94) with the educators as our main gatekeepers. With respect to the selection of participants in learners' focus groups, members of the Boards acted as our gatekeepers. In order to mitigate the risk of a skewed sample from having the Boards identifying the participants, we used a pre-determined selection criteria (Ritchie and Lewis 2003:94) with diversity of age and education level. As Creswell (2012:155) suggests, when using a phenomenology approach, the sample should be heterogeneous in order to receive a variety of perspectives and confirm the theoretical model chosen. Furthermore, we emphasized that participants must have been involved for some time in the COCOSAN and have been active participants in the group meetings. These elements were of importance as interviewees must have experienced the process to be able to discuss it. We further attempted to involve people that were likely to be participative in the discussion and reflective in order to receive adequate data (ibid).

2.5 Data Analysis

The analytical process begun during field data collection, which took place from the 15th to the

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[15] The Sub-commission member was a local with a great understanding of the communities' culture and language.

24th of January 2014. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed[16] the same day. While transcribing we added field notes and observations, discussed and reflected upon the data referring back to our theoretical framework, making initial interpretation to allow us to make better sense of the data at a later stage (Krathwohl 1998:308-313). Through this process we identified research areas not covered in our interview guidelines, and specific topics of interest that surfaced were taken into consideration during the focus groups in the following communities, so as to be consistent in the themes treated. Consequently, adaptations to the theoretical framework were made. Later, the coding process was carried out through the theoretical framework allowing us to see data in a holistic manner, comparing across interviews, categories, and sub-categories, thereby identifying similarities, differences, and patterns across all the data (Creswell 2012:183-185; Miles and Huberman 1994:56-57).

2.6 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

People with whom we conducted research were historically marginalized indigenous groups in communities where poverty and malnutrition were omnipresent. In the communities, we exclusively interviewed women and hoped to do justice to the words we shared with them. Therefore, reflexivity and issues of positionality have been of importance to consider throughout the research process in order to not reproduce the patterns of neo-colonialism and domination (Sultana 2007). Furthermore, our position in terms of gender, privileged socio-economic background and surrounding symbolism were important elements possibly influencing interviewees' answers (Rose 1997:307; Sultana 2007). Being aware of the underlying power relation between the interviewees and ourselves was the first step to understand how to adapt in order to minimize them (England 1994:85). During the entire process we attempted to build a relationship of equality with women interviewed (Ackerly, Stern, True 2006:27). For example, the formulation of the interview questions contributed to a non-hierarchical relationship, establishing that women were the specialists on the studied topics, thus clarifying our dependency on their knowledge (Rose 1997:310). The writing process was thus rather 'with' participants than 'about' them (Ackerly, Stern, True 2006:27-28; Sultana 2007:375, 382). However, considering that interviewees were automatically associated with a status of 'powerless', as part of a development program, it was important for us to keep in mind the

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[16] Transcriptions were made in the language of the interviews, i.e. Spanish.

shaping of our theoretical framework and corresponding question so as to reflect upon how it affected our production of knowledge (Ackerly, Stern, True 2006:64): we were wary not to assume the situation of interviewees and acknowledge their individual opinions and experiences (ibid:66). Additionally, interviews consistently took place where women could freely and comfortably express themselves. Moreover, both of us are fluent in Spanish and the communities visited all spoke Spanish, thus, the use of an interpreter was not necessary, ensuring that information was not lost in the communication through a third party. Interviewees were all informed of the purpose of the research and gave their oral consent to participate and to be voice recorded. The anonymity of all interviewees has been preserved through occulting the name of the communities visited and of interviewed women. Moreover, gender neutral pseudonyms were used for the interviewed educators and the female pronoun exclusively used in order to further protect their identity.

During field data collection we introduced ourselves as independent researchers, yet the fact that we had previously conducted research for UNICEF in the same communities[17] and had a UNICEF car and driver made it difficult for us to distinguish ourselves from the organization. Our belonging to UNICEF was associated with the hope that we would have an influence on the program's future funding, which possibly influenced some interviewees' answers. Furthermore, this potentially reinforced the unbalanced power relation. This might have inclined participants to portray a positive view of the project. Thus, we were constantly aware of the possibility of answers being partial due to these circumstances (Sultana 2007:382).

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CHAPTER 3 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the theoretical framework which will be used for carrying out the analysis of the empirical data. The framework is based on Freire's educational theory of which the DC method originates[18]. Other authors, including Preito (1991) and Kaplun (1985),[19] have

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[17] Previous research had been conducted in three of the four communities.
[18] Freire originally called Development Communication 'problem-posing education', and Carr refers to it as 'consciousness raising'. However, hereafter it will be referred to as 'Development Communication'.
[19] Prieto and Kaplun's work was previously discussed in chapter 1.2.

contributed to the development of the method and are also referred to throughout this chapter.

The DC method will be explored in the first part of this chapter, which uses communication as the key to learning.[20] The elements explored in this part are interrelated yet were separated for analytical purposes. The second part of the chapter discusses Carr's (2003) theory of the empowerment process which complements Freire's work.[21] Her theory is based on Freire's concept of consciousness to describe the empowerment process and combines it with perspectives from empowerment feminist literature. This is of importance as Freire's theory does not explicitly emphasize the gender aspect of empowerment through education. Furthermore, Carr's model focuses on the underlying mechanisms of the empowerment process. Other feminist theorists, such as the widely cited Naila Kabeer (1999), focus on measuring empowerment through the individual and structural changes necessary to allow change, without exploring deeper mechanisms or pedagogical aspects of empowerment. Freire (2000) and Carr (2003) were thus chosen as our analytical base for their emphasis on the transformative and empowering properties of education and the profound reflection regarding the links between education, consciousness, empowerment, action and social change. This is suitable to our study as we are looking at the potential of empowerment for social change of a health education program.

3.1 Development Communication Method

This section presents the elements of importance for a successful implementation of the DC method. (See figure 2.)

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[20] This will be useful when looking at the method implementation and answering research question one.
[21] Her perspective will be useful for the analysis on women's experiences of empowerment, corresponding to research question two.
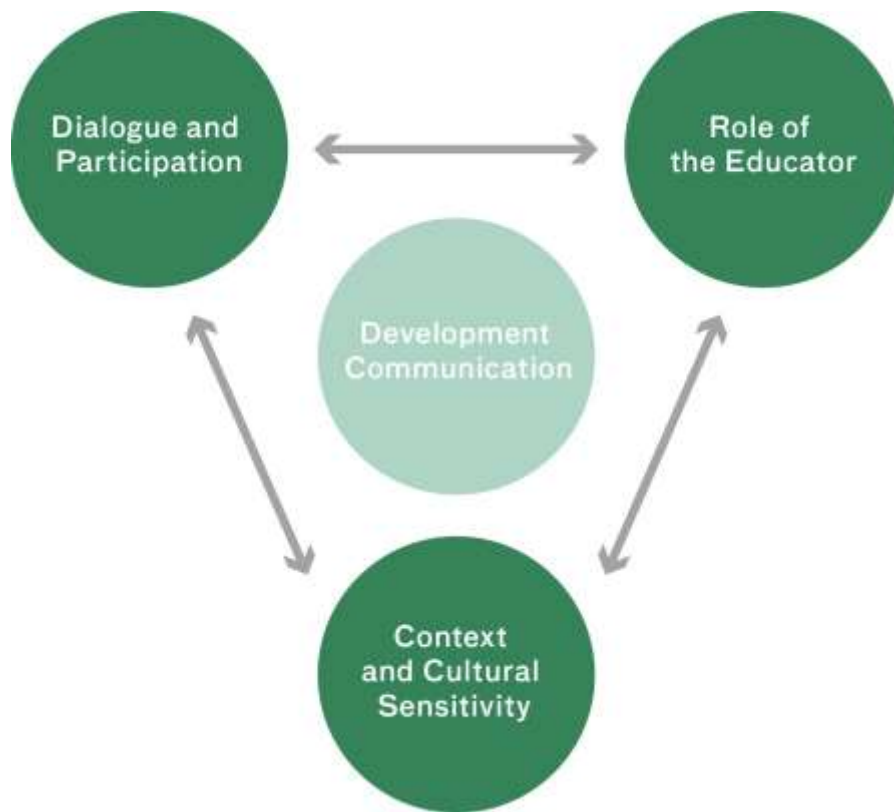
Figure 2: Development Communication.
(Authors' construct.)

3.1.1 Dialogue and Participation

As described in chapter one, DC is a new development paradigm, contrasting traditional communication, which Freire calls 'banking education'. Freire criticizes 'banking education' where students are to mindlessly retain information transferred by the educator. These informations are creations of knowledge from the educator's reality without attachment to learners' lived and perceived realities (Freire 2000:71, 155-156). This relationship identifies the educator as 'knowledgeable' and the learners as 'ignorant', requiring learners to adapt to the knowledge deposited on to them. Learners' context, prior experiences, and knowledge are considered irrelevant in this pedagogy, where they dedicate themselves to the act of memorizing, impeding their creativity and transformation (ibid:72). Learners thus become passive beings in a reality deposited on to them, oppressed by the decisions of the educator and hindered from interpreting the world through their own eyes. Freire thus sees 'banking education' as an "exercise of domination" (ibid:78), reflecting an oppressive society.

In response to 'banking education' Freire suggests the DC method (ibid:79) where the goal is for learners to discover their own reality in order to be capable of taking action to transform their situation. This approach to education requires the educator to view learners as conscious beings capable of becoming conscious of the world: educators pose problems derived from learners' own lives in relation to social and political issues (ibid), thus creating a context they can relate to. This allows learners to critically think about subjects, their society, and the world, unveiling their reality and becoming critically aware of their limited situation (ibid:194). This pedagogical approach creates a true communication of dialogue between educator and learners, thus being highly participatory in nature.

In DC, learners and educator express their own thoughts of a subject and re-consider their views with the knowledge expressed by the other (ibid:81). Freire (1976:37) calls dialogue "the seal of the act of knowing" as it will lead to the common production of knowledge: learners and the educator will share their partial knowledge and build knowledge together (Freire 2000:128). The role of the educator is to establish conditions for the creation of true knowledge through group dialogue, to enable learners to critically reflect on and analyze the root causes of their problems. Sharing of experiences between learners is essential to gain a critical view of reality (Freire 1976:33; Carr 2003:16). The ultimate goal is for learners to take action so as to move away from their position of powerlessness. If true dialogue is taking place, the educator will no longer be the only holder of knowledge but will learn from the students through constant dialogue. These new roles allow both parties to teach each other (Freire 2000:80). Furthermore, as dialogue is impossible without a dynamic relationship of "love, humility, hope, faith, and trust" (Freire 1973:46), learners must be comfortable sharing their experiences, views, and opinions. Feedback and critique are seen as positive and necessary, and are essential parts of true dialogue, as it is these very elements that allows growth (Kaplun 1985; Prieto 1991; Freire 2000). In addition, feedback allows learners to appropriate the knowledge through constant negotiation with the educator (Kaplun 1985; Prieto 1991).

The crucial act of dialogue in education thus entail high participation of learners, as knowledge building requires the participation of both parties. The content of education is built in this mutual dialogue where themes of interest emerge (Freire 2000:93). Furthermore, in the dialogic act,

learners and educator learn how they can apply their common knowledge to the problematized situation (Freire 1973), commonly elaborating a response. The dialogic approach thus includes learners throughout the decision-making process, where educator and learners jointly identify the problem, analyze the root causes and thereby identify needs in the community, and identify how to solve the problem (Prieto 1991:55-58). Learners are thereby the masters of their own change, taking action on their own ideas formed from their own perceived realities. Participation thus translates into participation in the dialogic act and participation in the decision-making process.

3.1.2 Role of the Educator

According to Freire's work, the role of educators is decisive in the acts of dialogue and participation. In traditional communication the educator is at the center of the communication as she has the authority to define the message that will be transmitted. The dialogue emerging from DC, on the other hand, creates a relationship of equality between the educator and learners (Freire 1973:46). Here, the educator is to let go of the authority that traditional education has granted her (Prieto 1991; Freire 2000). However, the educator can still be the one initiating the communication process with the intention to share her knowledge with the learners, without monopolizing the message (Prieto 1991:52-57). The educator is then simply playing the role of problematizing issues and leaving room for participation in the dialogic act. However, educators might not want to accept a change in communication strategy as it threatens their dominant status and decision-making power (Freire 1973:14; Freire 2000:52). As traditional communication has been institutionalized and ingrained in many professional educators, its practice might be unintentional and could take time to alter (ibid:75).

In order for a successful implementation of DC, educators, who are in a position of power, have to be reflective throughout the process. They must be committed to the common goal of change and transfer their power to learners (ibid:126). In addition, educators should embrace their new position as equal to the learners, as true dialogue can not take place if learners are considered 'ignorant' (Freire 2000:134). Hence, the educator's role is to provide the space and the necessary tools for learners to critically think in order for them to "arrive at an increasingly critical view of their reality" (Freire 1976:36) and wish to act upon it. Thus, the educator should see herself as a facilitator of the process rather than a leader, inspiring and motivating group members to

participate and act. It is, however, crucial that the educator does not impose this reflection process on learners: the latter need to have the freedom to reach this conclusion on their own for it to be authentic (Freire 2000:67). Throughout this process, it is the educator's responsibility to build a relationship of trust with learners, and ensure unity among learners in order to create favorable conditions for them to engage in the dialogue (Freire 1973:38). Thus, one of educators' main responsibilities is to ensure context and cultural sensitivity of the practiced communication, which is discussed in the following section.

3.1.3 Context and Cultural Sensitivity

Traditional communication manipulates learners so as to convince them of the educator's viewpoint (Freire 1973:113-116). Freire (2000:152-153, 180) refers to this as a 'cultural invasion', where educators' impose their view of the world from their own values and ideology on the learners. Learners consequently adapt to the educators' standards, which violates their space to see their own reality. Contrary to traditional communication, DC respects learners' world and educators' curiosity to learn about it. As previously seen, the program content emerges from true dialogue between learners and educator, consequently considering learners' knowledge, traditions, culture, and social norms, as their views of reality is present in the design of the education program. Accordingly, the thorough understanding of learners' situation shall also lead the educator to adapt her language to communicate effectively (ibid:96). Furthermore, the educator should take on the rhetoric of comrade, a language of equality and solidarity, away from discourses of superiority (ibid:132).

3.2 Empowerment as a Process

Now that DC has been discussed, the empowerment process arising from this communication method will be described. Indeed, the DC method advocates for learners' empowerment by encouraging them to gain control over their lives. Carr (2003:9) conceptualizes empowerment as the psychological and sociopolitical transformation within individuals and groups through DC, while considering their environment and peer relations. She embraces Zimmerman's definition of empowerment as "a series of experiences in which individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, gain greater access to

and control over resources and where people, organizations, and communities gain mastery of their lives" (Zimmerman 1995:583, cited in Carr 2003:10). Empowerment is accomplished through education, reflection, and subsequent action, when individuals become conscious of the world around them and aware of their capacity to take action against a social problem in their community (Kaplun 1985; Freire 2000).

Based on Freire's theory and in particular his concept of conscientization, Carr (2003:10-11) has developed a model (see figure 3) explaining the process of empowerment in relation to the link between conscientization and social change. Empowerment is considered as an ongoing circular process rather than a linear outcome. The model breaks down the empowerment process into several sub-stages: position; conscientization (a process itself composed of multiple elements); sociopolitical action; and social change. Although the empowerment process is presented as a cyclical model, Carr (2003:11) emphasizes that the stages are highly interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and consequently do not necessarily take place in a particular fashion.
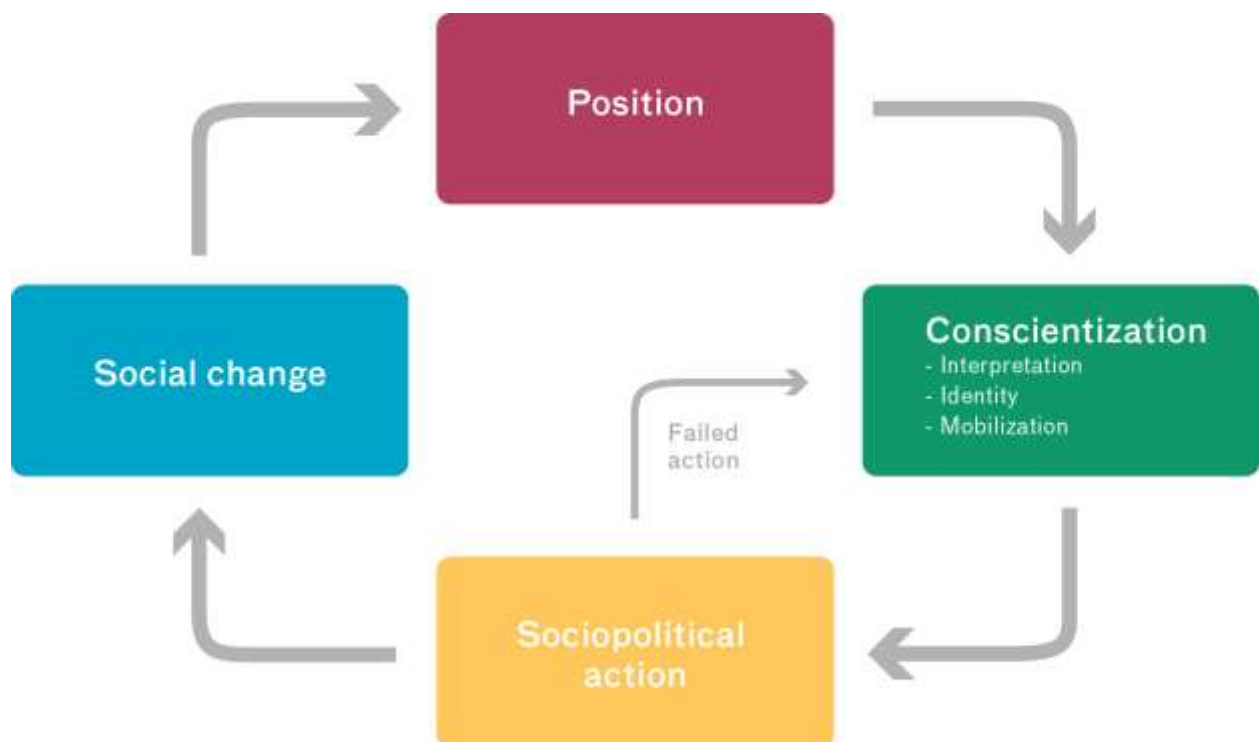

Figure 3: The Process of Empowerment.
(Re-creation of Carr's model found in Carr 2003:14.)

3.2.1 Position

Although circular, the model considers the empowerment process to commence at a point of origin, being the situation of people themselves (Freire 2000:85), referred to as 'position' in the model. It is often the case that this position is one of oppression or powerlessness, rooted in socioeconomic and political factors, which are "reproduced by inequitable power relations" (Carr 2003:14), limiting people's power to affect their situation. This institutionalized situation is referred to as 'learned helplessness' by Freire (1972), where the powerless have accepted the social and political order, participating in the social structure without trying to overcome oppression. Freire (1976) links this phenomenon in Latin American countries to their history of domination, creating a 'culture of silence'; he argues that people's inability to speak up for themselves is a consequence of the established and maintained power relations from colonization, where the elite use their power to dominate the majority. Thus, participation has been hindered in sociopolitical dialogue and resulted in an inexperienced majority on the political scene, dependent on the powerful elite (Freire 1972:67). Consequently, the oppressed do not take part in defining their own historical and cultural reality. Their understanding of themselves and of the world has thus been affected by the dominant's definitions of reality, creating a skewed understanding of reality (Freire 1976:10-14).

An advancement in the position of powerlessness towards empowerment can be sparked by DC, which helps learners to problematize their own situation. With time, they will gain a deepened consciousness of their situation through the process of conscientization, in order to engage in actions against the oppressive elements of society.

3.2.2 Conscientization

Conscientization refers to the process of deepened critical consciousness through reflection with respect to people's experiences of powerlessness in terms of political, social, economic, and historical aspects. The purpose of education is to guide learners in this process of critical reflection by exposing the oppressive reality of which the social structures originate (Freire 1976:15). People are then 'helped to help themselves' through being enrolled in critical thinking of their problems (Freire 1973:13-16, 33). Carr (2003) describes conscientization as a process encompassing three elements: interpretation, identity, and mobilization.

Interpretation "of one's position in relation to society" (Carr 2003:15) is to bring to light one's reality through small group dialogue (ibid:18). Learners then become conscious of 'the world' by sharing individual experiences of powerlessness and oppression with each other, comparing and analyzing their reality so as to uncover and understand the political and social roots of their problems (ibid:15-16). They thus create a new understanding of the social order in relation to themselves and their environment. *Identity* refers to the self-definition of the group with respect to its historical and cultural context. In other words, identity is built as the group get to know themselves as an entity through understanding the collective aspect of the situation and what they can accomplished together, realizing the group's strength, voice, and corresponding agency.

Through interpretation and identity the group re-interprets their position in society and discover other positions they can move to, changing their perception of themselves as having the ability to transform their situation. As the group becomes aware of the potentials to transform the social order they will be inspired for mobilization for change. *Mobilization* is the last element in the conscientization process and is the catalytic ingredient for action. Mobilization translates itself in the reflection of possible and concrete options and plans for actions, and the collective effort necessary to accomplish action (ibid:15-18).

3.2.3 Sociopolitical Action and Social Change

The process of conscientization will drive collective sociopolitical action to achieve change regarding a shared community concern. An action is an informed decision to act, resulting from critical thinking based on a specific agenda (Freire 2000). It is part of the empowerment process as it allows people to attempt to overcome cultural, social, political, or historical barriers and transform reality, breaking free from a situation of oppression. If the action fails, there will be a return to conscientization in order to understand why the action was unsuccessful[22]. Once the situation has been collectively analyzed with respect to the context and the group itself, coupled with a new understanding of the structures and systems addressed, further strategies for taking action will be developed and implemented. However, if the action is successful it will result in personal and social change, affecting group and individual's positions in relation to society (Carr

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[22] See figure 3.

2003:18). This gained access to power liberates them from oppression and increases their agency in personal and societal spheres (Carr 2003). Thus, individuals come to a new improved position allowing them to better fight their cause. Since empowerment is considered an ongoing cyclical process this position will be the new point of departure for the continuing of the empowerment process. In her work, Carr (2003) is abstract in her definition of social change and does not consider it with respect to wider politics of health or Freire's revolutionary concept (Freire 1972; Freire 2000). Within the nutrition program studied, changes at the micro level will be considered as contributing to social change at the community level affecting health and nutrition (CECODE and UNICEF n/d:7). Furthermore, although there is a difference between mobilization and social change in theory, the distinction is less clear in reality, which will transcribe in our analysis.

This theoretical framework attempts to draw the link between the DC method and social change through learners' empowerment. Indeed, the application of Freire's theory, centered around dialogue and learners' reflection, should lead to their conscientization. The latter should inevitably be followed by empowerment and sociopolitical actions, which if successful, will contribute to social change. This will serve as a basis for the analytical chapter so as to answer our research questions.

CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS

In this chapter the empirical data is analyzed through the theoretical framework presented in chapter three, in order to answer the research questions. The first part sets out to examine the implementation of the DC method from the viewpoint of learners and educators. The second part looks at the contribution of the implemented communication in women's empowerment. Apart from following the structure of the theoretical framework, we have chosen to separate the presentation and analysis of the experience of community IV, which will be presented at the end in both sections.[23] Indeed, the experience in community IV differentiates from the other three. Moreover, as the theoretical concepts are intertwined, the discussion slightly overlaps across the

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[23] An exception is the analytical discussion of 'position' (4.2.1) where the experience of community IV is included as this discussion is applicable to all four communities.

analytical section.

4.1 Method Implementation

This part of the analysis aims to explore the first research question:

How do learners and educators perceive the implementation of the
Development Communication method in the municipality of Totonicapán?

4.1.1 Dialogue and Participation

During interviews with educators and learners we realized that participation was two-fold: participation in dialogue and participation in the decision-making process. This section will be divided as such.

Participation in Dialogue

The DC method had, prior to the start of the program in 2009, never been used by health-workers[24] in the municipality of Totonicapán. In order to strengthen their communication skills, a group of community health-workers received extensive training in DC to become COCOSAN educators. During the focus group with the educators they expressed that this training had been very valuable to them. They explained that the communication strategy they used to work with was very monotone, centered around the transfer of knowledge through informative speeches, comparable to what Freire calls 'banking education'. On the other hand, the new communication techniques were interactive and dynamic, ranging from theater to communication games[25]. (See photo 2.) These were developed not only to educate learners but to raise awareness, making women reflect on themes of interest. They said that it was no longer about telling people *how* to do things from their own understandings, but rather about explaining *why* things occurred. They were, in other words, moving away from 'banking education' where the viewpoint of the educator was prevalent, which would have prevented learners from interpreting the nutrition knowledge that was attempted to be communicated to them (Freire 2000). In contrast, the educators felt that the DC method helped women truly understand the nutrition problem in their

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[24] Referring to health-workers in general, not specifically health-workers capacitated in DC.
[25] The communication games were developed by the Sub-commission and range from lottery to memory and much more, always with nutrition as the main theme.

communities and identify needs in order to improve their situation of malnutrition. Indeed, the educators all agreed that the communication games were very helpful to raise discussions within the groups, encouraging women to interact and truly participate. Ariel, an educator, expressed: "The objective of the communication games is to achieve horizontal communication, not just stand up and talk while [they] fall asleep." Rosario, another educator, agreed: "/…/ [women] spontaneously say what they think and feel." (Interview 2.) Educators felt that through DC they were capable of promoting women's capacities to express themselves and engage in dialogue. They all agreed that there was a greater interest in attending the meetings since they had changed their communication strategy and that women were more motivated to participate and learn.

Photo 2: The Nutrition Lottery, a communication game developed by the Sub-commission.
(Authors' photo.)

Learners in communities I, II, and III enthusiastically discussed the differences in communication techniques between educators and other health personnel, confirming educators'

perception. Women explained that educators not only informed but also demonstrated how to do things. Women in these three communities agreed that this was preferable as they were tired of just sitting down and listening. In addition, they all agreed that health-workers[26] shared knowledge with them without necessarily giving much explanation or worrying if they understood. Educators, on the other hand, were described as much more open and honest in their communication. Learners in communities II and III illustrated by saying that they had received information at the health center various times concerning the Papanicolaou test[27]. However, no one had paid much attention to this information until the educators explained the importance of taking the test and how they would benefit from it, explaining that it would not do them any harm. A learner in community II said: "[Name of educator] explains in a way that people understand /…/ she explains the motive, the why." (Board member, interview 6.) They then discussed the issue within the group, asking questions, sharing experiences, and giving their own opinions, which are elements of great importance in DC. It resulted in most women from the two COCOSANs, regardless of age, taking the test. This demonstrated that they could discuss their problems, needs, and desires as women, knowing that they would be taken serious and be listened to.

It was noted that the dialogue was not always a smooth process. In two of the communities there had been disagreements with the educators concerning how they had handled the distribution of foodstuffs, and women consequently raised the issue with the educators. When reflecting back on the conflict, women mentioned that it was important to discuss differences in opinion in order to understand each other's viewpoint, so as to continue the work as a group and achieve new things, thus allowing for growth within the group. This indicated that the educators of these communities welcomed critique and feedback, like suggested in DC. A good communication had been established within the groups through a relationship of equality, and where problems were solved through group dialogue.

The experiences of learners and educators in communities I, II, and III reflected that true dialogue was taking place through high participation of learners, while allowing feedback and critique. This opened the door to learners and educators uniting roles and responsibilities (Freire

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[26] Referring to health-workers not trained in Development Communication.
[27] A cancer test of the female reproductive system.

2000). However, a concern prior to conducting the focus groups related to the high number of participants with as many as 180 women in one group. While Freire (2000) and Carr (2003) emphasizes small-group discussions for true participation in the dialogue, this was not of concern to learners or educators.

Participation in the Decision-making process
Educators explained that the selection of participating communities was done through analysis of 'health diagnostics', identifying the communities with high rates of malnutrition. The initiation of communication regarding nutrition was slightly different in each community due to distinct local circumstances, yet it followed a similar pattern. In each community, an educator organized a workshop on nutrition where the 'health diagnostic' was presented. The idea to work with malnutrition and related health issues through a community health committee (the COCOSAN) were also introduced. The specific nutrition and health problems of the community were then discussed in relation to the four pillars of food and nutritional security[28], which facilitated the discussion and identification of root causes of malnutrition. This process allowed the identification of the specific needs of the community to improve the situation. Through dialogue with the educator they discussed different options of how to address these needs, defining what they as a group wanted to achieve. This resulted in an annual operational plan of what the group wanted to learn about and which activities to carry out.

During interviews with women in these communities, they expressed that they had defined their needs and corresponding solutions, with the educators functioning as support to this process. The educators guided women's thought processes through sharing knowledge and ideas; through this exchange they agreed on how to best respond to the situation, as suggested in DC (Freire 2000). A learner in community II expressed: "No one had done that before, ask about the needs of our community" (Board member, interview 6.), thus expressing appreciation for this opportunity. The inclusion of learners in the decision-making process did not cease with the annual operational plan but was continued throughout meetings and activities. Women agreed that they could give their opinion to the educator concerning what themes to discuss and learn more about.

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[28] The four pillars of food and nutritional security were discussed: availability, access, consumption, and biological utilization of food (Programa Conjunto 2012:13).

An agreement was then made between all of them and the educator prepared the next meeting according to their wishes, resulting in learners feeling included in the decision. A woman in community II highlighted how central participation in decision-making was within their group: "We always discuss how to do things, there is not just one way." (Learner, interview 7.) Learners and educators thus perceived the implementation of DC as being in line with the description of participation in the decision-making process in our theoretical framework.

4.1.2 Role of the Educator

It became evident through the focus groups in communities I, II, and III that these groups were very strong and united with a high motivation to work together to achieve a change concerning health and nutrition within their communities. A friendly atmosphere had been created where everyone was equal; everyone's opinion was of importance; and no one felt intimidated to speak their mind. The importance of the educators' role in establishing this positive atmosphere was evident. In communities II and III women expressed how much they appreciated their educators' characteristics: "[She] is very friendly /.../, greets everyone and does not leave anyone aside" (learner, interview 7), meaning that educators treated them all the same. During educators' focus group, they also agreed to their personal characteristics being of great importance in their work: "We are known to be funny and dynamic, that we give everything." (Cruz, interview 2.) They said that a friendly atmosphere was important to make women truly participate in discussions, and the success was confirmed by women: "If you have any sorrows you come here for a little while to forget and have fun /.../." (Learner, interview 6.) The COCOSAN was a place where they could enjoy themselves and relax, and forget about their daily concerns and stress, as friendships were made and they found support in each other.

Educators underlined the importance of building trust with women in order to work together as a unit. Through different stories told during focus groups, we came to understand that women truly trusted the educators to genuinely care about them. This was mirrored in the interview with educators: "There is affection and trust from the people so oneself feels part of the problems of the community, which empowers [oneself] to see what doors to knock on in order to solve a personal problem." (Rosario, interview 2). This showed a close and trusting relationship of mutual respect, as recommended by DC. We found that learners and educators recognized the

importance of creating a favorable atmosphere for learners to engage in dialogue, by fostering unity among learners and a relationship of trust and equality between learners and the educator, as described in the theoretical chapter. Hence, the educators created such an atmosphere in these communities, particularly in communities II and III, enabling the implementation of DC.

Educators' enthusiasm and sacrifice of privileged position was linked to their commitment for change. This was exemplified by them being fully committed to their work: "We give so much time to our work, more than required, and of our own money, and we take away time from our own families." (Rosario, interview 2.) Although educators recognized that they had the necessary knowledge to support learners to resolve the malnutrition problem, they did not consider themselves in a position to make decisions: "The leader[29] has to understand that he or she is not in charge, and be noble." (Cruz, interview 2.) This showed that educators saw themselves as facilitators of change rather than leaders, which was confirmed by women interviewed in communities II and III. They realized that they could accomplish many things on their own but that the educators motivated them and brought them forward. As theory emphasizes, educators were perceived to be reflexive and have faith in learners' ability to lead the change that they desired.

4.1.3 Context and Cultural Sensitivity

A communication technique both educators and women mentioned to highly value was the communication games, developed by the educators with a great understanding of the local context. As a result, the games were said to be compatible with the cultural identity of the communities, sensitive to learners' knowledge, traditions, culture, and social norms. Educators said that the games helped them communicate knowledge in a way that was adapted to and understood by women. An older woman in community II expressed: "I have never gone to school so it is hard for me to understand /…/ but through play I do learn. For me this has been very pleasant." (Learner, interview 7.) The games were thus suited to people with no previous or little formal education. Educators explained that they adapted their language to learners', carefully choosing words for everyone to understand. In the three communities women did not mention any communication issues. Another reason for educators to be careful in the

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[29] Referring to the educator.

communication was that Spanish was not the first language of some older women. However, many of the women were not fluent in Quiché[30] so its use was not an alternative, and the use of Spanish was not seen as a problem by older women. We thus found that learners and educators perceived communication to be well adapted.

Women felt that their culture and traditions were fully respected by the educators, who did not try to change the way they did things. In community III women said that their educator always asked them how they did things, such as prepare a certain vegetable or care for a sick child, and the educator taught them alternative ways of doing things. Educators explained that traditional beliefs were omnipresent in the communities, shaping their practices, and that it was important not to treat traditional beliefs as myths so as not to undermine their knowledge, culture, and traditions. Instead they took local knowledge and practices into consideration in the dialogue with learners, respecting learners by not imposing a different way of thinking and doing, which is of great importance in DC. It became clear that both educators and learners perceived the communication to be based on a great respect for learners' world.

4.1.4 Community IV's Experience of the Communication Method

While the DC strategy was embraced by the educators of the COCOSANs in communities I, II, and III, the educator's communication approach in community IV was different. The formation of the group did not follow the same structure as in the other communities. Instead of one uniform group of learners, the COCOSAN was composed of two distinct groups: one involving 200 women given informative talks and another group consisting of 13 'guiding mothers' who participated in more hands-on education[31]. Within this community the process of problem-, needs-, and solution-identification was undertaken, where community members identified the root causes of the nutrition problem in their community as access to food and the need to grow their own vegetables. The educator thus decided that the 'guiding mothers' were to receive education on planting techniques from an agricultural technician, and the 'guiding mothers' started a collective garden[32] and individual family gardens. The educator did not participate in those activities, which did not facilitate the dialogue. Furthermore, the educator expected the

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[30] Quiché is the local Mayan language.
[31] Compared to the other COCOSANs where informative talks and activities were carried out within one uniform group.
[32] For 'guiding mothers', not for other community members.

'guiding mothers' to pass on their new knowledge to the women involved in the informative talks. This group division and the set-up of the activities did not favor the implementation of DC.

Throughout the interview with Guadalupe, the educator of community IV, it became evident that she had a strong voice in the decision-making process regarding the themes of the informative talks and the activities of the 'guiding mothers'. The educator left little space for women to make their voices heard in the decision-making process following the establishment of the annual operational plan, compared to the other COCOSANs where the themselves identified which themes to include in the informative talk meetings. She was very determined on what, according to her, was of importance for the women to learn about. Indeed, Guadalupe mentioned that her work was a continuous struggle to have women genuinely care about what she was trying to teach them, yet she insisted on educating them: "One must be persistent, that's it." (Guadalupe, interview 3.) She explained that they had become more accepting with time but that women still resisted to make use of what she taught them. In other words, she was trying to convince them of what they needed to do and learn in order to improve the health and nutrition of their families. Guadalupe's point of view and knowledge was thus put forward rather than learners'. Her communication style imposed information on learners, which impeded their interpretation or critical thinking surrounding the nutrition themes brought up, as described in theory. The passive role that learners were given might explain their lack of interest.

A big difference was noted between the other educators and Guadalupe with respect to how she positioned herself as an educator. During Guadalupe's interview, it became clear that she saw herself as the sole expert of the group. She said "/…/ we are trying to have them behave in a more human way." (Guadalupe, interview 3.) This strong language indicated that she not only saw herself as more knowledgeable, but also that she perceived the women as 'ignorant' beings. Although during the interview she explicitly expressed that she did not intend on changing traditional and cultural practices and beliefs, her quote indicates that her respect for learners' knowledge, traditions, culture, and social norms was limited. As such, the local knowledge was not considered valuable to the dialogue and the learners were expected to adapt to the educator's view. Her unwillingness to let go of her authority translated into the establishment of an unequal power relation, unfavorable to true dialogue.

Guadalupe's concept of 'dialogue' differed from the other educators'. 'Dialogue' in her talks with the larger group was the responses given by the women when she asked them questions to check that they had retained the information she had given them. She tested their knowledge rather than letting them discuss the information and reflect upon it, hence not creating a platform for discussion. Consequently, she took away learners' right to interpret the problem within their own reality, imposing her reality onto them. Rather than stimulating critical thinking and participation in the dialogue, Guadalupe monopolized the creation of knowledge. With respect to the 'guiding mothers', a platform for discussion was also not created as she was not present in the activities. During the focus group with learners we observed that they were not used to dialogue as they were not very opinionated during the interview. Furthermore, it became evident that Guadalupe was authoritarian as an educator and had not been able to create a relationship of trust and mutual respect. We noticed that enthusiasm to work together to create a change in the community among the women was not as present as in the other COCOSANs. They did not express, as the other groups had done, that the meetings were a place where they could go to have fun with each other and develop friendships. They simply said that they attended the meetings in order to learn.

It was evident that Guadalupe was very concerned about the nutritional status in community IV and committed for a change to take place. Yet, through her communication style, she saw herself as the catalyst for change rather than the change coming from within the group. She underestimated women's ability to change their own environment, as she did not believe in their capacity for reflection and critical thinking concerning the nutrition problem. Furthermore, local context was not respected, establishing an unbalanced power relation. As a result, she did not create a platform for discussion, thus impeding action. The communication method applied by Guadalupe's was identified as closely linked to 'banking education'. However, we realize that adaptation to DC can be a long-term process as traditional communication has been institutionalized within Totonicapán's health system.

4.2 Women's Experiences of the Empowerment Process

With the previous section in mind discussing the communication used in the COCOSANs, this part of the analysis aims to explore the second research question:

What is the implication of the applied method
in contributing to women's empowerment?

4.2.1 Position

The position women in the municipality of Totonicapán[33] found themselves in prior to the start of the program needs to be analyzed in order to determine women's point of origin in the communities with an established COCOSAN, when commencing the empowerment process (Carr 2003:13).

Guatemala's colonial legacy and recent civil war have resulted in denying access to economic opportunities, adequate infrastructure, as well as health and social services to a large share of the population (UNICEF and CECODE n/d: 3). Indeed, Guatemala[34] is one of the most unequal countries in the world (UNICEF and ICEFI 2011:7) as the elite has monopolized the country's resources, neglecting the majority (UNICEF and CECODE n/d:3). Freire has pinpointed this phenomenon in Latin American countries as being the root of the majority's powerlessness (Freire 1976).

Indigenous people, and notably women, living in rural areas were particularly vulnerable (World Bank 2014). In the municipality of Totonicapán[35], the 'critical' socioeconomic situation speaks for the level of powerlessness of its inhabitants (Programa Conjunto 2010:119-123). Furthermore, this translated in terms of dramatic malnutrition rates: 65.2% of children under five in the municipality of Totonicapán were chronically malnourished in 2009, including 44.1% of severe cases (Programa Conjunto 2010:123).

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[33] The discussion on women's position is applicable to all four communities. The experience of community IV is thus included in this section.
[34] See appendix 3.
[35] See appendix 3.

The lack of knowledge regarding the importance of hygiene and nutrition, and the lack of access to necessary public services, were identified as the root problems of high malnutrition rates by UNICEF during the assessment of the situation in Totonicapán, prior to the project implementation (UNICEF and CECODE n/d:6). Women participating in our data collection openly shared their position of disadvantage regarding access to health and social services, education levels, food insecurity, knowledge of nutrition and childcare, low economic resources, and lack of economic opportunities. This showed that women recognized their alienation from political and social spheres. As a result, the population in the municipality had been unable to interpret or reflect on their position of powerlessness, consequently people could not recognize malnutrition as a problem (Freire 2000; UNICEF and CECODE n/d). They thus accepted the reality without attempting to change it, as described by Freire's (1972) expression of 'learned helplessness'. The COCOSANs were seen as an attempt implementation of DC, allowing the empowerment process to unroll, thus overcoming oppression (Carr 2003:13). Since learners described their position during focus groups, some had already gone through a primary process of conscientization, which will be described in detail in the following section.

4.2.2 Conscientization

Conscientization is the process of deepened reflection leading to the exposure of one's position in society through the understanding of social structures at the origin of oppression. It is crucial to the empowerment of women and entails three elements: interpretation, identity and mobilization (Carr 2003). The educators widely acknowledged that the process of conscientization was present among women in the COCOSANs. They confirmed our conceptual lens stating that through DC, educators had been able to lead learners through the conscientization process, so that they understood needed changes to better children's nutritional status. Indeed, during the focus group discussions it became evident that conscientization was present in three of the four communities visited: communities I, II, and III.[36]

Interpretation

Interpretation is fulfilled through group dialogue so as to understand the political and social roots of the malnutrition problem (Carr 2003). According to educators, the COCOSANs were the only

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[36] The fourth community underwent a different process, which will be presented at the end of the section.

groups working with issues related to health and nutrition at the community level. Educators and learners explained that in previous women groups information transfer had taken place only through traditional, top-down communication.

As seen previously, the COCOSANs of communities I, II, and III were spaces for dialogue where women shared experiences and knowledge with each other. Along the same lines, in communities II and III, the ongoing dialogue between members was mentioned as contributing to the wellbeing of the communities and increasing their understanding of their situation. A learner in community III illustrated this by saying: "We talk about things between ourselves, which has been good for the community. We are realizing how we are in the community. We talk and exchange experiences, for example of what [remedies] to give a sick child." (Learner, interview 9.) Based on Carr's (2003) theory, learners' eagerness to become more knowledgeable concerning nutrition through group dialogue was the element allowing deep reflection about their position as marginalized women. Exemplifying their reflection skills, several interviewees in these communities explained that some mothers in their communities were unable to properly nourish their children, either because of lack of economic resources or nutrition knowledge. Furthermore, a deepened understanding of the political root of the nutrition problem was noted in learners' discussions during focus groups, pointing to the importance of the local Mayors' support of their cause. This will be examined as advocacy in the mobilization section. The ability to understand the community's reality as well as social and political roots of the nutrition problem was thus present among women interviewed. Educators declared that motivation to attend meetings and learn as well as ability to interpret reality were new phenomena among women of the communities.

Identity
The identity component of conscientization translates itself into self-definition of the group within its context and the agency it brings (Carr 2003). Throughout the focus groups, women defined the COCOSAN as a beneficial entity for their community. In addition, two of the communities were well aware of their collective agency vis-à-vis authorities and institutions susceptible of providing support to their cause.

The function of the COCOSAN was to serve the nutritional status of children at the community level. The COCOSAN's purpose was considered relevant by all interviewees as they understood that nutrition was a community problem. In addition, the knowledge produced during the meetings was considered useful by learners, on personal and community levels. Demonstrating the value attached to the COCOSAN, a learner in community III shared her experience as a single mother willing to lose half a day of work in order to attend the meetings as she valued what she learned there. Another woman in community II said: "It has been good for the community that they talk to us about hygiene and all of this, it is beneficial to the entire community because we communicate it to other people and they do the same thing. That way we change and it helps the community because us, and our families, we are the community." (Learner, interview 7.) She was referring to the benefits the COCOSAN brought to the entire community, showing a capacity to see the collective aspect of the malnutrition problem.

Moreover, women recognized during focus groups in communities I and II that being part of the COCOSAN gave them a stronger voice in front of institutions and authorities to which they requested cooperation in the accomplishment of their cause. A particularly insightful learner in community II said:

> *"Being in the group has helped us to ask for help in other places, because by oneself it is very difficult to be listened to. In a group, we are able to accomplish more things. In this group we have learned many new things and through this group we also were able to ask the municipality for other projects[37], small helps /.../ Since [we are] in the group, we are better organized, this way we can better manage the projects. Now that we are in a group, the institutions pay more attention to us and we have more of a voice."*
> *(Learner, interview 7.)*

This represented well learners' reflection surrounding 'identity' taking place in these communities. Moreover, learners felt that united they had more power to change the situation of malnutrition as they were considered experts and had decision-making power regarding the situation in their community: "Now we took [matter] in our own hands /.../ to put together projects that the community is in need of" (Board member, interview 4), claimed a learner in community I, appreciating this new agency. In addition, the high interest to become a member in

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[37] Material, economic, or technical support through sociopolitical action.

the COCOSANs[38] and the high demand for the establishment of new COCOSANs in other communities, showed that their work was considered important within the municipality.

Mobilization

Conscientization was visible in the three communities in terms of mobilization. Mobilization is brought by learners' understanding that they had the power to improve their lives with respect to their position of powerlessness through reflection and dialogue, which led to a demand for change (Carr 2003). In the concerned communities, mobilization translated into the desire to bring about social change through concrete small-scale solutions to better the nutritional and health status in their communities, achievable by means of sociopolitical actions.

According to educators, mobilization was rooted in dialogue, motivation for participation in the meetings, and motivation for change. During the focus groups it became apparent that many learners had, through dialogue, acquired an outstanding ability to reflect upon the nutritional situation in their communities and overall situation of powerlessness. In parallel, the collective understanding that nutrition was a community concern and the groups' self-definition as a legitimate entity working to improve nutrition in their community, contributed to the perspective that their position of powerlessness was not irrevocable and that an improvement was possible through sociopolitical actions. As explained in Carr's (2003) model, mobilization stems from the interpretation and identity components of conscientization and leads to a demand for change. The demand for change was well expressed by a learner in community I: "Before, there was no opportunity to ask for what we needed. /…/ Now, we just have to take the step." (Learner, interview 4.) This reflected their newly acquired power they were granted through the COCOSAN, and their desire to take action to transform their situation.

The reflection surrounding the improvement of their situation developed in a wide range of ideas for possible actions to alter their position of powerlessness. This capability was present in communities I and III, and was particularly developed in community II: "There is a lot to do in the community to better it /.../ Seeing these necessities gives us ideas." (Board member, interview 6.) In the three communities it became clear that the Board members distinguished

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[38] In communities II and III, the groups had become so large that they considered dividing them in two.

themselves as particularly active actors of mobilization: it was their responsibility to conduct collective efforts necessary to accomplish sociopolitical actions. An educator emphasized the importance of their work in the accomplishment of actions by saying: "/…/ [the Board] is the head that makes the body move /…/" (Cruz, interview 2). We found one of the Boards' greatest mobilization efforts to be their advocacy exercises. Both educators and learners recognized advocacy as an important step to create and sustain social change. Within the COCOSANs, advocacy consisted of seeking the support of the highest local authority, namely the community Mayor[39] and his or her committee, to recognize the malnutrition problem and formally agree to support their cause to facilitated future political actions. As our data collection took place in the middle of January, when the new mandate of the community Mayors commenced, we had the opportunity to attend the meetings in communities I, III, and IV[40], where the Boards put in practice their advocacy skills, presenting the group and their work to the new Mayors. In all the meetings we noted a lack of organization, structure, and clarity: indeed, none of the groups presented the necessary documents proving the legitimacy of the COCOSAN (such as a list of participants, people who previously benefited from their work, or a 2014 operational plan), which was a concern to all Mayors. Furthermore, the description of the COCOSAN's work and purpose was fairly chaotic. We identified these shortcomings as possible hindrances to successful advocacy, potentially presenting barriers to successful future actions. However, in all three communities the meetings were successful as they resulted in the Mayors expressing their commitment to support the groups. The experiences in communities I and III were similar, where the women initiated the meetings, took the matter into their own hands, and acted independently from the educators, thus had full ownership of the meetings and articulated their own messages. As a result, this process constituted an important step in the empowerment process as it showed actions taken due to conscientization, as described by Freire (2000) and Carr's (2003).

4.2.4 Sociopolitical Action and Social Change

Conscientization is the main driver leading to collective sociopolitical actions in the hope to accomplish social change according to the communities' specific agendas (Carr 2003). This section describes the sociopolitical actions which attempt to control the factors that determine the

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[39] Alternatively the municipal Mayor was approached when support was not given by the community Mayor.
[40] The experience from community IV will be further discussed in section 4.2.5.

nutritional status of children. In this research we have focused on the sociopolitical actions that were perceived as successful by the women themselves. The accomplishment of social change will also be discussed as it represents the completion of the empowerment cycle. In our study women identified social change as a result of their gained access to power within their communities. Indeed, they described how their increased voice in identifying solutions to the nutrition problem through the annual operational plan, as well as their newly gained ability to make demands in front of institutions and authorities, resulted in stronger agency on the community level in their fight to improve nutrition. In addition, the increased knowledge and skills, as well as access to material resources, were considered of great importance to meet household needs. Furthermore, they identified the implemented communal social support system as enabling an overall favorable environment to better nutrition at the community level.

In communities I, II, and III the groups conducted actions consisting of petitioning assistance to communal or municipal Mayors and public institutions to provide group members with economic or material support and technical assistance. These actions were primarily taken by the Board members in accordance with the learners, and was facilitated when a relationship with Mayors had been established through advocacy efforts. However, the petitioning could also be conducted through the educator facilitating the communication between the group and the institutions[41], always based on the groups' conscious decision to act. Successful petitions resulted in the acquisition of the following support: vegetable seeds and plants, technical training on how to grow a vegetable garden and make organic fertilizer, egg-laying chickens, food aid, nutrition supplements, communal garbage bins, water filters, free medical assistance, etc. These resources, which were distributed among learners, were perceived as infinitely valuable to women due to the economic hardship and high food insecurity they faced on a daily basis, thus tackling the economic factors to malnutrition and ill-health, creating social change at the household level. They were thus in a better position to fight their cause. Indeed, the groups' capacity to develop strategies for action and their newly gained collective skills and competence to take actions contributed to a supporting environment for their cause. Their increased power to influence the allocation of resources from political institutions showed their capacity as a group to tackle the political roots of malnutrition and health problems in their communities. Indeed, the political

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[41] The inter-institutional approach of the program and the established connections the educators had with the participating public institutions facilitated the communication between the group and these institutions.

sphere had historically neglected the right to good nutrition in the communities yet the women had gained some power to influence political priorities. This newly gained power was perceived by women as an important success in their fight against malnutrition.

The Boards of communities II and III organized individual 'vigilance systems' in their communities in order to support and sustain the change.[42] As its Latin root expresses, 'vigilance' is linked to watchfulness (Online Etymology Dictionary 2014), this system was thus one of peer-to-peer support where Board members were responsible for supporting women through individual and collective changes, resulting from the conscientization process. Through home visits, the Board members observed the application of knowledge and skills produced during COCOSAN meetings, and gave recommendations and guidance if necessary. For example, in community II, the Board mentioned following up after a seed donation had been distributed to insure that the vegetable gardens had been set up according to the instructions of the technician, that the seeds had been planted, vegetables were growing, and families consuming them. Through the 'vigilance system' they supported and motivated each other, making sure that learns stayed engaged so that children were well cared for. The role of the peer support system was thus to extend the dialogue taking place in the COCOSAN through sharing advice and providing emotional, social, and technical support. The Board thus filled the gap between educator and learners with regards to applying health and nutrition knowledge. The peer support system created a favorable environment to make use of their newly gained knowledge and skills, where women felt responsible for each other to improve nutrition in the entire community.

Although successful and contributing to the completion of the COCOSAN's goal, the 'vigilance system' might create a power imbalance between Board members and the other learners, contrary to DC. Indeed, Board members could detect suspect cases of malnutrition in their communities and report them to educators who could give further support. Educator Ariel expressed: "They are like our ears and our eyes" (interview 2), when talking about the identification of malnutrition cases. As a result, the Board could be perceived as an authority figure, which is not in line with the conscientization process. Learners explained that there had been resistance to the home visits during the startup of the 'vigilance system' but that mentalities

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[42] Community I was planning on putting in place a similar system.

had changed and that they were now all accepting of them.[43] Indeed, learners in both community II and III understood the value of such a system: "/…/ it is good that they have the vigilance system. Sometimes, there are mothers that do not feed their children or that do not change them [their clothes]. So they tell them how to do things /…/" (Learner, interview 7.) An older women in community II explained that she wished that such a system had exited when she was a young mother: "When I had my children, no one ever visited me to support me /…/ It so good that people dedicate themselves to go check-up on babies." (Learner, interview 7.)

The newly acquired power to influence decision-making of local politics and the peer support system were excellent representations of a successful empowerment process. Furthermore, the desire for social change translated through high mobilization in order to organize sociopolitical actions and the 'vigilance system'. The closer relationship with decision-makers and the peer support system changed the way the communities were organized, thus created an enabling environment for change. Learners thus found themselves in a better position to improve the nutritional status of their communities. However, since empowerment is not considered a linear achievement but a circular process (Carr 2003), the fight against malnutrition through re-positioning themselves continues. Furthermore, the lack of funds were consistently mentioned by educator and learners as a hindrance to carry out activities, thus at time impeding the empowerment process.

4.2.5 Community IV's Experience of the Empowerment Process

Many similarities have been noted between 'banking education' and the educator's communication approach in community IV. This might be an explanation to the different findings encountered in this community compared to the other visited communities. The conscientization of learners in community IV seemed limited, possibly as a result of lack of dialogue during the COCOSAN meetings. Indeed, interviewed women showed little ability to reflect on the individual or collective nutritional situation of their community and the roots of such a position. Although women did say to appreciate the knowledge provided through the COCOSAN, they did not seem to view the group as particularly valuable or legitimate to their

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[43] This was unfortunately not further inquired although it would have been an interesting element of the empowerment process to look further into.

community's context. In addition, the educator gave the 'guiding mothers' the task to become communicators of the technical knowledge received during their activities to other women of the group. During the focus group learners thus mentioned complying with this duty. Nevertheless, learners' inability to link the knowledge acquired to the roots of the nutrition problem meant that the dialogue taking place was not a result of the conscientization process, but rather identified as an attempt from the educator to impose conscientization on learners. This is contradictory to the DC method. Furthermore, the conscientization shortfall resulted in limited understanding of how their situation could be improved, and thus low motivation to take action, as explained by Carr's (2003) model. This can be explained due to the lack of interpretation and identity taking place within the COCOSAN (Carr 2003). With respect to the mobilization aspect of conscientization, interviewed women showed limited desire for social change or capacity to foresee future possible actions to better their powerless position. For example, the educator was the initiator and organizer of the presentation meeting with the new community Mayor, speaking in the name of the Board. Hence, the initiative to gain the Mayor's support was not a result of learners' own realization of the importance of establishing this relationship for future political actions, but rather the educator once more imposing the conscientization process onto them. There was thus no mobilization through collective efforts as the women did not have the opportunity to be masters of their own change (Freire 2000).

In terms of sociopolitical actions, the educator was the one in charge of requesting assistance. The group's only activity was linked to gardening, and Guadalupe petitioned on her own the technical and material assistance necessary for the activities, leaving no space for women to take on their own actions. We observed in other communities that giving the space for women to lead their own actions created reflection and an ability to see further needs of their communities, which was not the case in this community. The fact that learners did not have the possibility to lead their own actions hindered their group agency and conscientization. We further observed that they had accomplished so much less than other groups although being established for a number of years. The lack of conscientization among learners obstructed the possibility for social change (Carr 2003). Through the experience of community IV, it became evident that the shortcomings in terms of application of DC, had a negative incidence on women's experience of empowerment.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on UNICEF Guatemala's nutrition program '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' and the activities implemented at the community level in the municipality of Totonicapán, where women's groups for nutrition and food security were formed, called COCOSANs. We have attempted to explore learners' and educators' perceptions of the communication strategy implemented in these activities, as well as women's experiences of the empowerment process resulting from the applied communication strategy.

In the first part of the analysis we looked at three aspects of importance for the implementation of DC, derived from Freire's (2000) educational theory of which DC originates: dialogue and participation, role of the educator, and context and cultural sensitivity. We found that learners and educators in three of the four communities perceived that the communication strategy implemented in the activities within their groups took into consideration these elements, thus being in line with DC. Indeed, both learners and educators in these communities highly valued the communication strategy. They perceived a high participation of learners in the decision-making of the development of the program and corresponding activities. Furthermore, we understood that educators were perceived to embrace their role in the groups as equal to learner, creating a favorable environment for dialogue. The COCOSANs thus became platforms for discussion, where sharing of experiences and ideas, feedback, criticism, and everyone's opinion were welcomed, and where knowledge was built from this dialogic act. The educators' commitment to learners inevitably led to the sacrifice of their authority and respect for learners' culture, tradition, local knowledge, and a belief in the group's capabilities, which allowed learners to be the leaders of their own change.

In the fourth community the implemented communication strategy was not perceived to be in line with the DC method. The educator had trouble adapting to DC with respect to the ongoing inclusion of learners in the decision-making process or dialogue during meetings. In other words, she resisted to let go of her authority as she did not truly believe in learners' ability to critically think for themselves. She thereby saw herself as the sole expert of the group, creating unequal

power relations, and as a result imposed her 'world view' on learners and was unsuccessful at creating a relationship of trust and affection favorable to dialogue. This translated itself in learners being uninterested in the knowledge transferred to them - as the need of this knowledge had been imposed on them rather than as a result of them problematizing and becoming aware of their own limited situation - and their lesser interest and motivation to participate in the group meetings. The applied communication strategy was thus identified as similar to traditional communication. The differences in the communication approach had an incidence on women's empowerment process, as DC was the catalytic element to conscientization.

In the second part of the analysis, we explored women's experiences of the empowerment process as a result of the applied communication strategy by employing Carr's (2003) model of the empowerment process. In the three communities where DC was applied, it had contributed to women's empowerment, and was present through conscientization in terms of interpretation, identity, and mobilization, as well as sociopolitical actions and social change. The implementation of the method through group dialogue, experience sharing, and deep reflection allowed learners to better understand and interpret their situation in terms of political, social, and economic roots of the nutrition problems. Through this process group identity was built, realizing the collective aspect of the nutrition problem and seeing the value in the benefit it brought to the whole community. In addition, group identity was further reinforced by their stronger sense of agency as they had the collective power to make demands to public institutions and local authorities, thus realizing their strength as a group. This process led the groups to foresee the possibilities for actions in order to move away from their position of powerlessness and transform the situation of malnutrition in their communities.

A change to control the social, economic, and political factors that determine the nutritional status was achievable through sociopolitical actions, demanding support from public institutions and local authorities. The fact that learners were the leaders of their own change as a result of DC allowed for social change at the community level to unfold. Social change was the shift in power in favor of the women. The groups were able to gain access to material aid through political action in front of authorities and institutions, of importance to meet households' needs. In addition, this interaction with authority figures gave them the opportunity to attempt to create

a closer relationship with these institution in order to increase their commitment to fight malnutrition at the community level, influencing political priorities. Lastly, as result of the knowledge they gained during the meetings and newly acquired conscientization, they put in place a 'vigilance system' at the community level, fostering a supportive environment to empowerment and change in the whole community.

In the fourth community, where DC was not implemented, conscientization of women was restricted. Women had a limited ability to interpret their reality and understand the sociopolitical roots of the nutrition problem. Thus, they did not see the COCOSAN as particularly valuable to the community and had limited motivation to transform their situation. As the educator of this community did not leave learners the space to be the leaders of their own change, they did not have the opportunity to reflect on their own needs or collectively organize for social change. They thus accomplished less than the other COCOSANs.

The application of DC thus had great potential in terms of contributing to women's empowerment while the communication strategy applied in the fourth community did not show success in the empowerment process. Indeed, DC proved to be a method worth pursuing in terms of effective communication with the potential to reduce malnutrition through women's empowerment. Yet, as discussed in the literature review, instrumentalizing empowerment for efficiency reasons has downfalls. Indeed, such phenomenon should not be reduced to quantitative measures and should not be depoliticized. The '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' program attempts to not limit empowerment to solely knowledge transfer through the DC method, as empowerment here is still linked to demands on the political front. We have demonstrated these strengths by looking at underlying mechanisms of the empowerment process rather than orthodox quantitative measurements. This research focused solely on successful actions as the underlying mechanism of empowerment were studied. However, future research concentrated on failed political action could greatly complement the knowledge built in this thesis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: '36 Months Zero Malnutrition' – Program Objectives

General Objective

Strengthen the capacities of families and local organizations in the seven prioritized municipalities to improve knowledge, attitude, and practices for adequate nutrition of children under 36 months, pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Specific Objectives

1. Strengthen the communication structures in the prioritized communities, in order to propose and implement actions to improve attitudes and practices for adequate nutrition in families of the communities.

2. Improve access to necessary information in order for families to improve attitudes and practices surrounding nutrition of children under 36 months, pregnant and breastfeeding women.

3. Enhance the exchange and promote opportunities and spaces for communication between parents and others in charge of children under 36 months, as well as between pregnant and breastfeeding women, which can help them strengthen their attitudes and practices among themselves.

(Source: UNICEF and CECODE n/d:8-9)

Appendix 2: Record of Informants

Interview number	Actors	Methodological tool	Title	Pseudonym in text	Date	Number of participants	Observations
	Implementers						
1	UNICEF Guatemala staff	Individual interview	Development Communication Specialist		14/01/2014	1	Pilot interview, not refered to in text.
2	Sub-commission	Focus group	Educators	Rosario, Cruz, and Ariel	15/01/2014	4	One of the participants was not an educator and was not refered to in the text, thus does not have a pseudonym.
3	Sub-commission	Individual interview	Educator	Guadalupe	23/01/2014	1	Guadalupe did not have to possibility to attend to the focus group with the Sub-commission, which is the reason for conducting an individual interview.
	Community I						Only Board members were interviewed in this community due to technicalities.
4	COCOSAN members	Focus group	Board of Trustees	Learners or Board members	21/01/2014	10	Board members are also learners.
5	Local authorities	Individual interview	Community Mayor		24/01/2014	1	
	Board of Trustee and local authorities	Observation	Introduction/presentation meeting		24/01/2015		COCOSAN Board members introducing their work to the community Mayor.
	Community II						The mayor was not interviewed as we were unable to schedule a meeting with him
6	COCOSAN members	Focus group	Board of Trustees	Learners or Board members	16/01/2014	4	Board members are also learners.
7	COCOSAN members	Focus group	Learners not part of the Board	Learners	23/01/2014	10	
	Community III						
8	COCOSAN members	Focus group	Board of Trustees	Learners or Board members	20/01/2014	3	Board members are also learners.
9	COCOSAN members	Focus group	Learners not part of the Board	Learners	20/01/2014	5	
10	Local authorities	Paired interview	Community Mayor and Vice Mayor		22/01/2014	2	
	Board of Trustee and local authorities	Observation	Introduction/presentation meeting		22/01/2014		COCOSAN Board members introducing their work to the community Mayor.
	Community IV						Only Board members were interviewed in this community due to technicalities.
11	COCOSAN members	Focus group	Board of Trustees	Learners or Board members	23/01/2014	5	Board members are also learners.
12	Local authorities	Individual interview	Community Mayor		23/01/2015	1	
	Board of Trustee and local authorities	Observation	Introduction/presentation meeting		23/01/2016		COCOSAN Board members introducing their work to the community Mayor.

Appendix 3: Quick Facts

Republic of Guatemala	Total	Urban	Rural	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
Population (2014)	14,647,083	49%	51%		
Ethnicities and languages	23				
Poverty rate	51%	30%	70%	36.20%	75.70%
Literacy rate	75.90%				
Chronic malnutrition rate	49.80%	34.30%	58.60%	36.20%	65.90%

Source: CIA Factbook (n/d); World Bank (2009)

Municipality of Totonicapán	Total				
Population	127,191				
Indigenous population	97.20%				
Languages	Spanish and Maya Quiché				
Quality of life	Low				
Analphabetism	33.60%				
Food insecurity	Very high				
Chronic malnutrition rate	65.20%				
Water and sanitation conditions	Very poor				

Source: Programa Conjunto (2010)