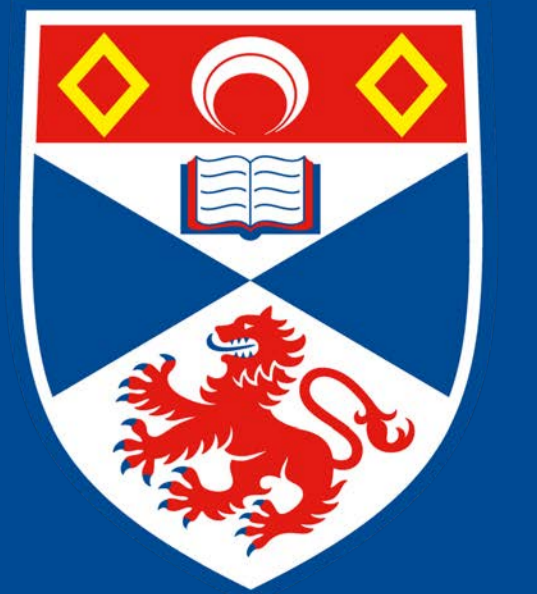


The role of NGOs in promoting adaptation to climate change in developing countries: a case study of Guatemala.



University of St Andrews

Author: Laoise Rogers (lr208@st-andrews.ac.uk) Supervisor: Professor Ali Watson (amsw@st-andrews.ac.uk)
School of International Relations

1. Aims and Background

An expanding portion of Guatemala is situated in a region of Central America which is very vulnerable to climate change: the 'dry corridor.' A climate justice lens highlights the interrelation of environmental and social justice issues there.^[1]

Climate change interacts with existing environmental and social challenges in Guatemala^{[2],[3],[4]}. For example:

- The El Niño Southern Oscillation, which can cause drought
- Frequency of natural disasters, i.e. volcanic eruptions
- Stark social and economic inequality, with high levels of hunger and malnutrition
- Discriminatory land distribution
- Degradation of natural resources

The significant inequality in Guatemala contributes to disparity between the experiences of climate change of well-off people living in cities, and the poor, often Indigenous people, in rural areas. Thus, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a significant role in promoting climate change adaptation (CCA), at the local level in vulnerable communities. It is important that they interact with local communities and approach their work in an ethical, sustainable way. This research will discuss:

- How non-profit NGOs design and implement CCA-focused projects
- How they create sustainable, positive impact
- Contextual constraints that such organisations face in Guatemala

(a): How the NGOs design and implement CCA projects

Theme 1: Collaboration with local organisations

I asked the NGO officials how they design projects in a community-led way and a common theme across all five interviews was that partnering with local organisations is a key part of their approaches in working with different Guatemalan communities. Partnering with local organisations is an important step to ensure that NGOs begin their work in communities in a way that strengthens existing needs, rather than imposing their own views. Development organisations and projects which are often top-down have a history of missing the mark and imposing beliefs on vulnerable communities. Partnering with other organisations in the same area and complementing their efforts is also key to maximizing the effectiveness of the CCA projects.

Theme 2: Community led approach/philosophy

The organisations interviewed all seemed passionate that the way in which they design and implement their projects should be centred around a participatory methodology. The ways in which they do this include working with community members who have reached out or already shown willingness to adopt sustainable agricultural practices, and training these members to be able to pass on the knowledge themselves to other members of their community.

'An outside organisation shouldn't be the ones telling communities and farmers, this is what you should be doing.' - Jesse Festa

'Local people really know what is best for them, and it's as easy as that.' - Gemara Gifford



Figure 4: Connection between people and environment



Figure 1: Map of Guatemala

(b): How the organisations create sustainable, positive impact

Theme 1: Strengthening of infrastructure – social and physical

A common theme across the interviews regarding the organisations' approaches was that strengthening infrastructure is key to ensuring long lasting impact. Social infrastructure such as support networks and relationships, whether those are between similar members of the community or between small producers and the private sector, create the possibility for long-lasting change and collaboration after the NGOs are no longer involved.

Physical infrastructure such as equipment for sustaining adaptive agricultural practices, e.g. cold rooms to store fruit and non-industrial greenhouses, ensures that communities have the resources to continue their new practices. Providing communities with skills and training also empowers them to be able to continue.



Figure 2: Turmeric farming



Figure 3: Agricultural training taking place at the SERES Finca

Conclusions and Recommendations

The organisations represented in my research interviews have different missions and work in different regions of Guatemala, with varying subsets of communities. However, each organisation strives for more just and sustainable lives for those in Guatemala. The commonality of CCA-focused projects across the different organisations can be explained by the normative ethical framework of climate justice. This lens highlights that environmental challenges are intertwined with social and economic inequalities, and so tackling the effects of climate change is relevant to many aspects of social justice and development. The present study contributes to this sector of research, as well as that of local CCA. Further research could discuss more of the impact that NGOs have and analyse further the design of their projects. Valuable complementary research could also analyse the role of governmental actors and policy in Guatemala, in regards to mitigating and adapting to climate change, or the specific relationship between Indigenous peoples' rights and climate change.

2. Research Design and Methods

When designing my research I was considerate of my positionality. It was important that I focused my research around speaking with people in Guatemala, as opposed to contributing to research that omits the voices of those being studied. It was also important to avoid conducting solely extractive research, and so I will share all outputs with the interviewees and continue to find ways to collaborate with them.

I conducted online, qualitative interviews with officials from organisations who have projects in Guatemala with a focus on CCA. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between thirty and fifty minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded with the full consent of the participant, and transcribed verbatim. I then conducted thematic content analysis. I read the transcripts without a pre-determined framework and uncovered themes in the responses from the interviewees, to the objectives of my research.

Interviewees

- Jesse Festa – Resilient Central America (ResCA) Coordinator for Latin America
- Jorge Cardona – Coordinator of ResCA Guatemala
- Sara Hurtarte – Co-executive Director of SERES
- Gemara Gifford – International Director of Trees, Water and People (TWP)
- Emilio Bulux – Programme Coordinator at Helvetas Guatemala

(c): Constraints faced by the organisations in Guatemala

Theme 1: Political changes

Political turnover and change was a challenge that was apparent across the interviews. National government changes every 4 years and mayors were said to often change as well, thus there are similar challenges in this regard at the municipal and national level. Changeovers are a challenge for ensuring the permanence of the NGOs' impacts and maintaining relationships with different ministries and civil authorities. Ways to mitigate this were mentioned in the interviews and include training and building relationships with more junior staff who are less tied to a political party, and having official contracts that formalise their relationships and collaborations.

Theme 2: Gender inequality

Gender inequality is prevalent in Guatemala and was a clear theme across the interviews. Many Guatemalan women have to ask men for money and permission for their activities, which is a barrier to their involvement with NGOs' projects. It was mentioned several times that men's roles in women empowerment must be recognised in order to combat this. For females working in the NGOs' projects in Guatemala, sexism also creates a barrier for communication and building relationships with men who often hold key leadership roles.

Theme 3: Social inequality

It was mentioned that racism against Indigenous peoples in Guatemala is extremely pervasive, and this contributes to their experiences not being paid adequate attention by government. Several interviewees agreed that well-off people in the cities in Guatemala live very different lives to those in rural areas, many of whom are subsistence farmers. The people who hold the most political power live lives that are much less affected by climate change, thus creating a significant social divide and the continuation of extremely poor living conditions for many in rural areas, which NGOs aim to improve.



Figure 5: SERES leadership training

I am extremely grateful to all of the interviewees who gave up their time to collaborate with me in this project and shared with me their experiences and insight: Jesse Festa of ResCA/TNC; Jorge Cardona of ResCA/TNC; Gemara Gifford of Trees, Water & People; Sara Hurtarte of SERES and Emilio Bulux of Helvetas Guatemala. I would also like to sincerely thank Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw Foundation for the generous funding of this research project and the Laidlaw team from St Andrew's for their support; as well as my supervisor Professor Ali Watson for her support and advice.

- References: [1] Puauschunder, Julia. 2020. *Governance and climate justice: Global South and Developing Nations*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
[2] Rivera, Paris. 2020. *Drought, Canicula and Climate Change in Guatemala*. Entremundos. Accessed September 10, <http://www.entremundos.org/revista/environment/drought-canicula-and-climate-change-in-guatemala/?lang=en>.
[3] Castellanos, Edwin. 2020. *Climate Change in Guatemala*. EntreMundos. Accessed September 10, <http://www.entremundos.org/revista/environment/climate-change/climate-change-in-guatemala/?lang=en>.

Figure 1: Photograph by Shaundd, distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License; Figure 2: Photograph by Valentina de Rooy of SERES; Figure 3: Photograph by Red Agroforestal para el Desarrollo Sostenible; Figure 4: Photograph by Daniel Jeremiah; Figure 5: Photograph by SERES.



The University of St Andrew's is a charity registered in Scotland, No: SC013532.