



Workshop on Global Development and Religion in Guatemala

On September 28-29, 2015 World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) and the Berkley Center for Religion Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University convened a workshop in Washington, DC to discuss objectives and potential research avenues for their planned research program in Guatemala (supported by the Henry R. Luce Foundation)¹. The consultation brought together a group of 13 scholars and development practitioners who have experience or interests in issues at the intersection of religion and international development in Guatemala. The diverse perspectives and expertise encouraged a broad exploration of issues facing contemporary Guatemala and situated the future research focus on religious dimensions of development within the context of those challenges. Discussions also helped to sharpen the definition of priority areas for research and to explore the important, but often obscured, religious dimensions of development topics. The workshop discussion built on and added important context and content to prior desk research.

This note provides a short summary of this discussion, organized by the central development issues on which we plan to focus future research. The consultation affirmed the core project objective, namely the conviction that Guatemala's diverse contemporary religious landscape, the direct and often changing role of religious institutions in development, and religious dimensions of social and political conflict are not well studied and are rarely integrated in policy discussions. There was particular emphasis on the need to focus on Guatemala's indigenous people, vulnerable women and children, and failures as well as successes of specific development projects and approaches. A complex current challenge is to situate the roles of religious institutions and leaders in Guatemala's dynamic political landscape. Workshop participants agreed to continue their participation as an informal advisory group, offering feedback and direction to Berkley Center/WFDD's Guatemala work.

Current political crisis and social transformation

Guatemala has experienced profound sociopolitical challenges in the six months prior to the consultation, which, some argue, could represent a fundamental shift in direction (though it is early to say for sure). Discussion of these phenomena colored the conversations throughout and particularly framed the analysis of the roles of development actors in the country (and indeed, who they are). Months of peaceful demonstrations against government corruption led to the resignation and subsequent arrest of the president, the vice-president, and a small number of lower-level government officials, all charged as participants in a corruption scheme. The situation was unprecedented in a country with some of the highest levels of social disparities and corruption in the

¹More information at <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/subprojects/country-mapping-guatemala>

hemisphere, where the judicial system has been historically rendered weak and vulnerable to manipulation and subservient to political power.²

Several participants asserted that Guatemala is now a transformed country. Long-standing perceptions that corruption is rife at the highest levels were revealed to be a stark reality and a new measure of transparency has allowed citizens to see the internal workings of the state and its links to corruption and to crime syndicates. Guatemalan civil society now faces the challenge of working to ensure that real changes take place in the next administration (presidential elections are taking place in October 2015). The first six months of the next administration, it was argued, will be key to determining Guatemala's future course. The next president will need to seize the opportunity to solidify changes that civil society demands very quickly. The agenda for the new administration will be complex and demanding: to fight organized crime, address Guatemala's healthcare crisis, and clean up corruption in a country where a variety of criminal organizations have colluded, and been protected, by all preceding administrations.

In this context, religious leaders can potentially play significant roles in the new landscape of citizen activism in Guatemala. The Catholic leadership has made public statements in favor of the social activism that has taken place during 2015, but the evangelical leadership (Pentecostalism is the second largest religious affiliation in the country) has been largely absent in the social movement. Several participants argued that the evangelical church was unlikely to be able to maintain this distance from socio-political debates because the new generation of evangelicals are more active in social activism. The social movement has thus far been, to a significant extent, leaderless (perhaps by design as was the case for the Occupy Movement in the US) and it is driven by young people in urban areas. Religious leaders may take more prominent leadership roles in the future, similar to Catholic Church roles in the past. The Pentecostal focus on social justice is changing; a new sense of Christian citizenship appears to be emerging, with some among evangelical leadership slowly responding to the desire of young church members to engage more actively in social issues. In short, the religious/political landscape may well see significant shifts in the months ahead that will have important implications for many aspects of the development agenda.

Youth and Education.

One clear area for future research, the group advised, should be the role of religion (in the various complex dimensions that implies) in education. The Guatemalan education sector faces various challenges: at the most fundamental level, the Guatemalan school system is highly stratified in favor of the upper classes; racism and classism are pervasive social ills across the country, even though the 1996 peace accords defined Guatemala as a plural, multilingual, and multicultural society. Even Guatemalan primary education involves a stratified system; no matter how gifted, students in the public system face enormous challenges to reach secondary education, much less obtain a university education. Strained economic resources are an obvious constraint. Even successful students emerge from the public schools with credentials that have markedly less value (than private schools) as they

² Ahmed, Asam; Malkin, Melissa. "Otto Pérez Molina of Guatemala Is Jailed Hours After Resigning Presidency." The New York Times. Sept. 3, 2015.

enter the job market or attempt to pursue a university education. Indigenous youth face particular challenges. Bilingual education, theoretically available, is highly limited and colors approaches to education in a country where the dominant culture is that of the elite upper class, historically of European descent and Spanish speaking. Education for indigenous children is often interrupted by their labor obligations in the agricultural sector and the informal economy. The fact that Guatemala has the highest levels of malnutrition in the hemisphere also plays roles in success and failure in the education system.

Career aspirations for youth are stymied by the lack of work available to them upon completion of secondary or tertiary degrees. A university education is prohibitively expensive for most young people, a situation aggravated by the weak social justice orientation of public and private universities.

The central challenge for education (and a place where roles of religious actors is relevant) is to reach those living at the margins. A number of religiously affiliated groups have long worked to support or complement the public school system and address its manifold deficiencies. Participants highlighted the contributions religious organizations bring especially to the rural areas, where state services, especially for education, are especially weak. Churches are also well positioned to fight racism, which is still pervasive in the country. Christian theology is inherently a theology of inclusion, and there are precedents for church-run schools that actively welcome students irrespective of their religious or ethnic backgrounds.

A focus on women

Guatemalan women of indigenous or impoverished backgrounds have historically suffered myriad forms of discrimination. Middle or upper class women have historically been relegated to the domestic sphere in a highly patriarchal society. Among the current, gender-based challenges women face are wide and stubborn socio-economic gaps that disproportionately affect women. One participant argued that women are *the key* to any development effort; women show remarkable personal development when given the right opportunities, and these improvements are reflected broadly through family and community due to their central roles in society. Participants urged probing analysis (across the board in the research) of how religious actors engaging with women can integrate a focus on women's rights as indigenous persons or as human beings, acknowledging the realities of gender differences and how such differences bear upon the condition of women. Women's participation and presence in development programs will not, however, suffice to address gender-based challenges. The research should seek to identify bolder ideas that look at issues for women's equality beyond simple participation and attendance statistics.

Several participants pointed out that women's situations in Guatemala have seen remarkable improvements in the last 30 years. Women have more power and are more vocal. Even so, given the high rate of illiteracy among indigenous women, language and bilingual education demand attention. Change for women has been slow and erratic; for example programs to support widowed women after the war provided significant support to them, but women were met with envy and jealousy for the funding they received. Though women are more vocal in denouncing their

marginalization, many still suffer war-related trauma and are reluctant to come forward to contest the widespread problem of domestic violence, which spans the spectrum from verbal violence to teenage rape to femicide.

Another suggested research focus is the divide between secular and religious women, including feminists. In some instances, secular women are reluctant to collaborate with religious groups and women, and vice versa. It is important to understand the different kinds of feminist politics in the country. Gender is among the most sensitive issues in evangelical churches where fear of a radical feminist movement is a reality, although women predominate in membership in many congregations.

A focus on indigenous people

Issues for indigenous people were a recurring theme, suggesting various topics that demand careful attention. Guatemala has one of the highest indigenous population percentage in Latin America. Any effort to ameliorate the condition of the indigenous population must take into account the history of oppression and marginalization suffered by this population; indigenous people simply feel excluded as members of the Guatemalan polity and have a disproportionate low presence inside government institutions. Development practitioners need to evaluate carefully the mechanisms through which programs treat indigenous people (in every respect) as true citizens of the country.

The complexity of religious beliefs and practices among indigenous communities was highlighted. Spiritual practices as well as practices of Christian churches are impacted by indigenous spiritual traditions, which are a significant stream of religious affiliation. Also important is natural traditional medicine. This goes beyond *curanderos* to encompass knowledge of the complex array of remedies and practices—which are sometimes the only option available to particular segments of the population given the exorbitant prices of medicines in Guatemala. Public health and development communities need to bear in mind how far millions of Guatemalans see health and healing as directly connected to spirituality and spiritual forces. But these are not timeless, unchanging traditions; they are highly syncretic. People of all backgrounds take part in the new, popular “healing crusades” offered by evangelicals, for example. Ignorance or dismissive attitudes to such healing and medicine by development actors run the risk of demeaning traditional approaches—which connects spirituality and sickness—valued by Guatemalans.

A practical suggestion for including the perspective of indigenous people and their unique contexts is to ensure a focus at community levels, reflecting the voices of individuals at local level as well as national level aggregates. This is particularly important for indigenous communities. Notions of “intercultural democracy” have wide application and in need further research.

Migration, internal displacement, and the diaspora

Guatemala’s present migration crisis has deep historical roots. There have been successive waves of migration to North America, though it was the recent crisis of unaccompanied migrant children that has brought the issue to the attention of the international press.

Remittances sent by Guatemalans, especially those living in the US, have become the nation's second largest source of income. It was argued that remittances are the most effective aid at the local level—they meet real and urgent needs – for example, housing and water. People themselves (on sending and receiving ends) choose how to spend remittances, which translates into a sense of ownership as well as tangible, visible results. It would be very useful to learn more about remittances and how they are linked to religious ties, and to identify best (as well as worst) practices. The Salesians, for example, have a program where local communities choose to invest in local chapels that become active community centers. The Catholic Church has supported and directed social investment approaches to remittance spending to avoid frivolous use of resources.

The Catholic Church in Guatemala, Mexico, and the US has been active on several issues regarding migration and the refugee crisis. Catholics operate a network of shelters in Guatemala and Mexico, along the extremely dangerous migratory route to the US. Church members provide humanitarian aid to refugees as they arrive in the US and attempt to link refugee children in the US to their sending communities in Guatemala. Church groups have also actively argued in favor of comprehensive immigration reform in the US. Many church groups have actively advocated for an end to deportations. The Catholic church has been critical of the proposed US government's Alliance for Prosperity program (an aid initiative targeted at Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras), arguing that the amount of money pledged will not come close to offsetting the loss of remittances due to deportations.

In relation to migration, a recommendation that emerged was that BC/WFDD research should address the ways in which local faith and development actors work together on various dimensions of remittance flows. Further, understanding better the religious dimensions of migration should be a priority. Vantage points to reflect are factors that trigger departures from Guatemala, humanitarian challenges (and responses to them) along the route to the US, and church responses.

Environment challenges

It emerged clearly that both in public consciousness and in practical effects environmental issues for Guatemala are intricately related to many parts of the development agenda and thus engage religious actors in many ways. At the time of the consultation Guatemala faced a drought that stymied agricultural production, triggering a food crisis especially in rural areas.³ Longer-term effects of global climate change and local environmental degradation are likely to be increasingly relevant in the years ahead. Among relevant operational issues is coordination on disaster preparedness.

The endemic corrupt practices that are a feature of governance in Guatemala are linked in significant ways to environmental degradation. Corruption has progressively eroded the institutional framework, weakening regulatory mechanisms, for example related to forest protection. Weak

³ "Major crop losses in Central America due to El Niño." Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 14 Sept 2015.

policies affecting extractive industries and specifically mines are a glaring example. Mining companies take advantage of the fragile legal framework and lax regulations, enjoying what were termed outrageous tax benefits (foreign mining companies pay little or no tax for the first seven years of operations, and only a very small percentage of the profits goes into the national coffers). Citizens have no decent information about the mining operations, as foreign mining companies do not disclose earnings and related financial statements. Lack of regulation, oversight, and a spirit of “savage capitalism” in which foreign companies and local cronies operate purely for profit, contributes to current clashes with local populations. The Environment Ministry has a minimal budget allocation.

Land is another important issue. The conservative political climate has stifled debate about much needed land reform to address the centuries-old high concentration of agricultural land in a few hands; private property is a ruling dogma for the Guatemalan political class.

The sharp focus that Pope Francis has directed to the environment is likely to resonate in Guatemala. Pope Francis links environmental degradation to poverty and the suffering of the dispossessed; Guatemala epitomizes this triad. At the same time the Pope’s urgent call for action on environmental degradation may offer the opportunity for religious groups across the spectrum to engage more openly and perhaps in harmony in the fight against climate change. Given the opening in social activism against corruption in recent months, the push by young evangelicals to see their church leadership engage more directly in social issues, and the ongoing social work of the Catholic Church, more engagement of religious groups in environmental work in the near future is a possibility to keep in mind. This might offer a rich area of research.

Pitfalls of short-term development work

Social action on many fronts to respond to Guatemala’s many challenges engages the wide range of religious actors and communities. However, the pattern of numerous short-term missions, which are a significant part of the religious landscape, has pros and cons that were discussed at length. Many come from the US and they are almost entirely uncoordinated, on either sending or receiving ends. While intentions are good, shortsighted focus or lack of listening to local communities can have negative consequences. However, there are significant upsides, and not only for the missionaries themselves. Many focus on vulnerable populations, where there is great need. Focusing on this mission work specifically was recommended, as there are important unknowns as well as some obvious issues (sustainability, impact on local communities, to cite just two examples). Ideally there would be a full survey of hours of labor and outputs of the efforts to better understand their impact on local communities. Local communities need to be actively involved in such assessments. Research should focus on the motives, actions, reactions, and expectations of local communities when hosting short-term mission groups to better understand the points of tension and agreement between local and foreign groups.

Religious proselytism is a highly contentious issue in Guatemala, both involving domestic actors and those from abroad. In a development context proselytism cannot escape from issues of imbalances of power, as local populations are vulnerable and the risk of any form of quid pro quo is not negligible, most dramatically during times of disaster when missions arrive to provide aid, too often with strings attached. There is a tacit understanding that faith-inspired humanitarian actors should not proselytize while providing disaster relief, but the rules are not entirely clear and the situation is muddier still when longer term development is at issue: standards and codes of conduct here are not clearly established, so each organization develops its own criteria for conduct on the ground. It was suggested that aid practitioners need to reflect more carefully on appropriate practices and boundaries.

A Critique of Development

The topic of understandings of development was raised in several contexts, including suggestions of basic critiques of what were seen as mainstream models and practice. The BC/WFDD team needs to be alert to differing perceptions about best and worst practice and explore ways to engage constructively on the issues. Specific to the Guatemalan context, development organizations, including faith-inspired organizations (FIOs), have filled the vacuum that the state's weak institutional capacity creates. The attendant risk is that the state, by virtue of active FIO activity, is absolved of responsibility for action. The fear was voiced that development projects can in practice perpetuate government inaction, even helping to sustain an atrophied state.

Faith actors are actively engaged with Guatemala's education and health systems, and thus share in the responsibility for what many agree is a challenge demanding profound change. State coordination, oversight, and policy, are vitally needed. Churches are not always the best partner, it was argued. The example of HIV/AIDS programs was cited, because of complexities around addressing sexuality. In such cases, there are clear roles for the state, as the guarantor of secular health nationally. Ultimately, if the development community continues to design, deploy, and operate programs in a fragmented, uncoordinated fashion, without involvement of the state, effectiveness will only be piecemeal and never systematic. Thus religious engagement must be seen as part of the broader community of partners, Guatemalan and international, working for true human development.

ANNEX 1: CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

Kelsey Alford-Jones

Kelsey Alford-Jones is the Executive Director of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission (GHRC). Ms. Alford-Jones has been at GHRC for the last 7 years, working with organizations and activists across Guatemala, and has led over a dozen international delegations and fact-finding missions to investigate a broad range of issues including women's rights, indigenous land rights; access to justice, militarization; and the impacts of US policy. She regularly provides analysis and policy recommendations on these issues U.S. and Guatemalan government offices, civil society organizations, and U.S. activists and media outlets. She provides affidavits and expert testimony in asylum cases to support Guatemalan women and other at-risk individuals. Ms. Alford-Jones has a B.A. in History and Spanish from Grinnell College and a certificate from American University's Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law.

Patricia Biermayr-Jenzano

Patricia Biermayr-Jenzano is a social scientist and gender specialist who works to develop research approaches and gender analysis to the feminization of agriculture. Her research has deep roots in Participatory Action Research (PAR) theory and practice while she has been deeply involved on mainstreaming gender in agriculture and conservation-related efforts. Dr. Biermayr-Jenzano is a visiting scholar at the Center for Latin America Studies at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on gender and sustainable development, sustainable agriculture, and research methods with emphasis in participatory action research and qualitative data analysis. She holds a Ph.D. in Agricultural Extension and Social Anthropology from Cornell University, NY and a degree in Agricultural Engineering in Plant Science from Argentina.

Robert Brenneman

Robert Brenneman is an assistant professor of sociology at Saint Michael's College in Vermont. Professor Brenneman's research focuses on the impact of violence and violent social structures on human flourishing. Mr. Brenneman's book, *Homies and Hermanos: God and Gangs in Central America* (Oxford University Press 2011), takes a close-up look at the lives of 63 former gang members, many of whom joined an evangelical congregation as part of their attempt to extricate themselves from gang violence. Currently, Brenneman advises a team of Guatemalan researchers studying the impact of Pentecostal and Catholic Charismatic movements on civic participation and social capital in Guatemala City. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Notre Dame and his B.A. from Eastern Mennonite University.

Kevin Carvajal

Kevin Carvajal is the Gifts-in-Kind Officer for Salesian Missions Inc. Prior to working with Salesian Missions Inc., Mr. Carvajal worked as a Logistics Coordinator and an Inventory and Costs Assistant in Quito, Ecuador. His current role in the Salesian Missions Office of International Programs (the global development branch of Salesian Missions Inc.) is to enhance and promote best practices in stewardship through partnering and procuring generous assistance from the US government and

private sector--ensuring synchronization of the giving chain with technology, products, expertise, service and networks used to support youth livelihoods and stimulate financial and social inclusion in their communities. He received his Master's Degree in Integrated Logistics from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain.

Lydia Dibos

Lydia Dibos is the senior advisor for Hispanic outreach for Catholic Relief Services (CRS). In this position she implements a comprehensive strategy for increasing the awareness, support and engagement of Hispanic Catholics in the United States. Dibos previously worked with CRS in response to Hurricane Mitch and served as the senior program manager in Guatemala. She holds degrees in International Relations from Johns Hopkins University and Latin American Studies from Georgetown University.

Virginia Garrard-Burnett

Virginia Garrard-Burnett is a professor in the Department of religious Studies, at the University of Texas, Austin. Professor Garrard-Burnett is currently co-editing the three-volume Cambridge History of Religion in Latin America. Garrard-Burnett is the author of *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983* (Oxford, 2010); *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem* (University of Texas Press, 1998). She is also co-author, with Peter Henderson and Bryan McCann, of the forthcoming *History of Modern Latin America* (Oxford University Press). Professor Garrard-Burnett received her Ph.D. in History from Tulane University and has been on the faculty at the University of Texas since 1990.

Desha Girod

Desha Girod specializes in the international and comparative political economy of developing countries. Specifically, she focuses on foreign aid and the political economy of natural resources. Her most recent book is an analysis of post-conflict reconstruction efforts around the world. She is a faculty affiliate of Georgetown's African Studies Program and a member of the Executive Committee of Georgetown's Center for Latin American Studies. Professor Girod received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford. She also held a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law.

Fernando Paredes

Fernando Paredes is an operations officer for the World Bank's Guatemala office. He has worked as resource manager for the World Bank's offices in Guatemala, Jamaica, and Panama. He has worked in the Guatemalan public sector as a lead analyst in the Secretariat of Planning, and as the national director of UNDP's Land Fund project. He has extensive experience in the energy, mining, and agricultural sectors in Guatemala. He holds an undergraduate degree in economics from the San Carlos University in Guatemala and an M.A. in social appraisal of projects from the Pontificia University in Chile.

Bishop Alvaro Ramazzini

Father Alvaro Ramazzini is a bishop of the Catholic Church in Guatemala. He has served as the fourth bishop of the Diocese of San Marcos 1988-2012. On 2012 he became the bishop of the Diocese of Huehuetenango in western Guatemala. Bishop Ramazzini has empowered the poor and marginalized and fostered civil courage to fight against the injustices they experience. In 2005 he was elected as the President of the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala. In 2011 he received the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award, in honor of his social justice work. He has held many positions in the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala and as of 2013 chaired the Commission for Social Communications and the Commission for Prison Ministry.

Mathews Samson

Mathews Samson is a sociocultural anthropologist interested in indigenous culture and religious change in Latin America, particularly among the Maya in Guatemala, as well as in environmental sustainability and development, humanistic anthropology, and issues of social justice and human rights. Most of his academic research has been conducted in Guatemala and the wider cultural region of Mesoamerica on issues of Maya identity and evangelical religion. Professor. Samson is affiliated with the departments of Latin American Studies and Environmental Studies at Davidson. He has conducted research related to environmental issues in Guatemala. Professor Samson holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from University at Albany, State University of New York.

Pablo Villeda

Pablo Villeda serves as the Vice President of Regional Operations for Latin America for International Justice Mission (IJM). Mr. Villeda oversees IJM's work to bring rescue and restoration to children who have been victimized by sexual violence and to secure justice against rapists and traffickers. Mr. Villeda joined IJM in 2007 as the Guatemala's Field Office Director, where he led his team to achieve significant convictions against perpetrators of sexual violence and pioneered new ways of combating child sexual assault by equipping officials within the Guatemalan justice system. Before joining IJM, Mr. Villeda worked as a visiting professor at the Universidad Rafael Landivar in Guatemala, where he received his J.D.