

*Translated from Spanish*

## **Restoring social services/identifying priorities**

### **Fifty-fifth Conference of the Rxiin Tnamet DPI/NGO/UN Health Association**

**Guatemala, 10 September 2002**

#### **1. Guatemala and its context**

**Socio-economic, political and demographic context:** Guatemala, capital Guatemala City, is located in Central America. It has a population of 13 million and a total area of 108,890 square kilometres.

Guatemala is a country of contrasts and ethnic diversity with a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual population:

- 60 per cent of the population lives in rural areas
- 50 per cent is indigenous
- 75 per cent lives in poverty
- 42 per cent is illiterate

The four ethnic groups are: Mestizo, Maya, Garifuna and Xinca (21 linguistic communities). The centralization of the different services in urban areas and the scarcity of culturally and linguistically trained personnel to respond to the needs of the mostly indigenous rural population hamper educational and health-care efforts.

**Political background:** The first rebel movement to protest and demand changes began in the 1960s; the struggle is against a socio-economic system which results in the accumulation of wealth, land and power in the hands of a few. [Over the years, men and women, students, professionals, professors, intellectuals, artists, workers, peasants and even members of the church joined in, and because they could find no other alternative for making] the changes that the country needed, they chose to take up arms, to take power by a popular uprising.

In 1986, the succession of five generals who consecutively became President and Head of State was ended and a civilian came to power. The road to peace began during this period. Ten years later, on 29 December 1996, in the presence of various Heads of State, authorities and leaders, the final document of the firm and lasting peace treaty was signed in Guatemala City.

Five years after the signing of the peace agreements, this hope and dream of all Guatemalans has still not materialized and the reasons for the armed conflict persist.

#### **2. The delivery of health services**

**Government participation:** The Government must recognize the importance of these services as a fundamental right of every human being, without any discrimination, and develop health-care initiatives through its institutions.

**Social participation:** Groups in the community, organizations and institutions, sectors, all the social actors at all levels within a geographical area should participate on a voluntary basis in resolving social problems and unite to design practical solutions.

**Community participation:** This is empowering and educating people to become active participants in and monitors of their own development in order to create and maintain a stable democratic environment to promote the sustainability of projects.

Example:

Project: Improving the health of the Tzutujile people

Active participants:

Government:	Municipalities, health centre
International agencies:	Inter-American Foundation
Organizations:	Groups of women, midwives, women folk healers
Institutions:	Rxiin Tnamet

### 3. Making the best use of limited human resources

**Identifying and satisfying the community's principal needs,** through qualitative and quantitative research on the different community and social groups that exist in the region. Community participation is the key element for implementing programmes for the most vulnerable groups.

**Coordinating and entering into partnerships with different organizations:** There should be voluntary coordination with local social organizations to ensure that programmes, initiatives and activities stretch resources. This coordination should be carried out at the local, departmental and national levels with the various organizations and community groups.

**Integrating social services:** This refers to all the basic needs of the community; in this case health-care needs are an indicator of the welfare conditions that justify social services.

Example: Joint project with Friendship Bridge (microcredit project)

Illiterate women's group health project

### 4. How organizations can operate effectively

**Avoiding corruption and doing what is needed.** Corruption is a vice that impoverishes a country and a political practice related to special interests: an evil that prevents a country from advancing towards development. Health is a result of social justice: less justice, less health, more justice, more health for all.

**Respect for communities and community participation.** Democratic civil participation, without discrimination, in the different stages of a programme (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) should be encouraged, with respect for beliefs and customs, strengthening full civil participation in harmonious and peaceful coexistence.

**Implementation of culturally appropriate programmes.** Communities should participate in the entire programme process, to ensure that they assume ownership of programmes.

**Sustainability.** Sustainability with three focuses: financial (financing), programme (strategic plan), and social (social participation).

#### **5. Services to those affected by political violence**

**Integral health:** body, soul and spirit, particularly physical and psychological ailments.

**Formal education:** Through primary schools and diversified education [because many people dropped out], particularly children of widows, owing to the economic situation which resulted in low incomes.

**Safety:** To integrate into the community and for the community to receive their new compatriots. Occupational services for safety and integration into the community and the family.

**Sources of work:** Technical training programmes that are appropriate to each geographical area and that respect the customs and practices of each community should be designed, particularly for returnees.

**Housing:** Social projects that provide minimum housing, because many lost their land and their homes when they returned to their communities.

**Family projects:** Particularly for the most affected groups such as widows and orphans.

Thank you for your attention.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Matthew, 5:9.

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