

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: “From Victims – to Survivors – to Agents for Change: Research for Empowering Women to Address Impunity and Reparation for Gender-Based Violence during the Guatemalan Conflict.”

Executing Institution:

Equipo de estudios comunitarios y acción psicosocial (ECAP), Guatemala

Participating Institution:

Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas (UNAMG)

Overview of project:

Women in Guatemala, particularly the very poor and marginalized, suffered varying forms of gender-based violence during the armed conflict that affected this Central America Country for more than 36 years. Until very recently, sexual violence during conflict has tended to be invisible and Guatemala is no exception. Guatemala is similar to other post-conflict countries in that the aftermath of war has brought impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence. At the local and national level, domestic law and practice for the criminal or civil prosecution and redress of sexual violence has been weak and discriminatory; the debilitated state of criminal justice greatly reduces women’s possibilities of securing for justice through the courts. Survivors not only live with the severe physical or mental health consequences of the abuses suffered, but in the aftermath now fear on-going non-conflict related sexual violence, largely perpetrated with impunity. Alarming increases in murder involving female victims have been well-documented by the Special Rapporteurs of both the UN and the OAS, over the past two years.

This project will examine the challenges of redressing sexual violence against women, including justice through the courts and prospects for material and non-material reparation. While policymakers and civil society are coming to understand that men and women experience political violence differently, in Guatemala the vast array of public policies being designed to redress the consequences of violence and facilitate democratic transition continue to be largely gender-blind. Although Guatemala’s May 2003 National Reparations Program recognizes sexual violence as a human rights violation that deserves redress, incipient conversations between human rights organizations and members of the commission responsible for overseeing the Program are only now beginning to contemplate future directions of the program vis-à-vis reparation for women survivors.

Under the overall leadership of the Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP), the proposed research will be undertaken by a consortium of Guatemalan women’s organizations and women’s rights activists. The project aims to generate improved social, psychological, political and legal conditions for indigenous women in poor communities to gain access to mechanisms for retributive and restorative justice

(challenging impunity) and to influence reparations plans with respect to sexual violence in the context of the armed conflict. The proposed research will document the consortium's ongoing field activities under an existing project being funded by multiple donors. These include psycho-social, legal and peer support for women survivors; national and international exchanges and capacity-building; multidisciplinary team-work (including mental health support) to protect women from stigmatization and further abuse; local and national public education campaigns; and workshops and technical assistance to grassroots organizations of affected women.

The research methodology is action-based and feminist in its orientation. It is designed to work in concert with the consortium's activities at the community level, taking advantage of existing relationships and spaces for communication while being cognizant of the need to proceed in a non-invasive manner so as to avoid re-victimization. A multidisciplinary research team consisting of a psychologist, a political scientist, a public administration expert and a criminal lawyer will combine a series of research techniques including the documenting of life stories of victims, structured and semi-structured interviews with organizations working in women's and human rights and mental health; State officials working in ministries and offices for women and the National Reparation Program; and judicial operators (office of the ombudsman, public prosecutor, public defense, etc.). Focus groups will also be organized for victims in the communities in which the consortium is working.

IDRC, through its Evaluation Unit, will also offer training in Outcome Mapping to the research team within the first months of the project's start-up.

The project is expected to produce a book documenting the experiences of the Consortium and an article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal of recognized standing. Public presentations will be made to women and human rights organizations in Guatemala, in addition to the National Commission for Reparations, the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office and the Presidential Office for Human Rights. At the international level, two of the researchers will participate along with Colombian researchers in an IDRC-facilitated panel on "Women's Experiences in War and the Construction of Citizenship Rights" at the Latin American Studies Association Meeting scheduled for April 2006 in San Juan de Puerto Rico.