

NCA and indigenous people in Guatemala
A report with recommendations on future strategy

Final version

Christian Schøien, January 2009

CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND.....	3
2. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN GUATEMALA – SHORT CONTEXT DESCRIPTION	4
3. NCA AND IPS IN GUATEMALA	4
4. MY VISIT	6
5. FIELD VISIT	6
5.1 UKUXBE.....	7
5.2 CIEDEG	8
5.3 MADRE SELVA	9
6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	10
7. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	11
APPENDIX 1:	
TERMS OF REFERENCE	14
APPENDIX 2:	
LIST OF MEETINGS DURING THE VISIT	16

1. BACKGROUND

The background for my visit to Guatemala in August 2008, was a request made by NCA's Regional Office late 2007, seeking advisory and input to a process of strengthening NCA's work towards indigenous peoples of Guatemala. A significant part of the current NCA partners in the country run projects where indigenous peoples are highly represented among the rights holders. However, NCA does not have any strategy defining specific objectives related to the improvement of indigenous peoples' situation in Guatemala.

The purpose of my visit was first and foremost to get an insight in the current work towards indigenous peoples in the country, and on the basis of meetings and conversations with selected partners, NCA staff and right holders in the projects, to provide recommendations regarding a strengthening of and a more conscious approach to the work with indigenous peoples in the country from 2009. There was also a wish from the office to get contributions on the inclusion of the IP issue on a longer term, that is for the planning of a new 5-year NCA global strategy document for the period 2011-2015.

The impression one gets of the work and activities in a complex context as the Guatemalan - during a one week visit - is surely quite limited. Nevertheless, I did get a good overview of today's situation, the challenges and opportunities with the current portfolio, and the relation between NCA and our partners. I hope that this report will represent a valuable contribution to the ongoing process of strengthening the work towards indigenous peoples in Guatemala by the NCA office.

2. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN GUATEMALA – SHORT CONTEXT DESCRIPTION

There are 23 indigenous peoples in Guatemala, totalling approximately 6 million individuals, and constituting more than half of the country's total population. Of these 23 peoples, 21 belongs to the Maya people, forming one of the most numerous peoples in the Americas (the other two peoples being *Garifuna* and *Xinca*). They are descended from the classic civilization that inhabited the lowlands of Meso-America, and also from Mexican migrations. Despite clearly sharing the same cultural roots across Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, their demands as a people date only from the 1990s however. The indigenous peoples inhabit all over the country, although the highest population is found in the west and north.

In relation to Guatemalan society as a whole, indigenous peoples present lower human development indicators. 87% of the poor are indigenous and 24% live in extreme poverty; infant mortality is 49 per thousand among the indigenous people and 40 per thousand among the non-indigenous; Child malnutrition is 34% among the indigenous and 11% among the non-indigenous; average primary school education is 3,38 years among the indigenous and 5,47 among the non-indigenous; illiteracy affects 41,7% of the indigenous population and only 17,7 of the non-indigenous.

Although there is no government policy of discrimination regarding the promotion of indigenous cultural rights, the free expression of indigenous religion and language has been limited by a shortage of resources and a lack of political will to enforce laws and implement the 1996 peace accords. Despite some progress, indigenous peoples continue to suffer the worst living conditions - a result of historic processes of exclusion and marginalisation that have characterised Guatemalan society, manifested primarily in racism towards and discrimination of indigenous peoples. Still, indigenous groups in the country maintain a strong identity.

3. NCA AND IPS IN GUATEMALA

NCA has a long history of working with the most impoverished and marginalized groups in Guatemala, and consequently the Maya population has been a considerable part of the target groups to which NCA's work has been directed. However, there has not been explicitly expressed in the country strategies an intention to treat the issue of indigenous people's rights as a specific priority.

The current Country plan 2005-2010 for Guatemala provides a contextual analysis of the Guatemalan society making it clear that the indigenous population, which is the majority in the country, is the one suffering the harshest oppression and discrimination. However, in the defined objectives in this same plan, indigenous people are not mentioned at all. In 2005, a lot of work was put into elaborating a specific strategy for the work towards indigenous people, foreseen to be implemented from 2006. But in the end this plan was never put into practice. In short, there has for a long time been a will and a consciousness at NCA Guatemala office of the need to address this issue in more systematic ways, but this has not yet resulted in concrete actions visible in the country strategies.

The Norad evaluation of the support to Norwegian NGOs in Guatemala, carried out in the end of 2007, also points at weaknesses in the NCA work towards indigenous peoples, mainly when it comes to the lack of coherence between the definition of indigenous peoples as a main target group and the weight this is given in the NCA strategy and also in the partner's strategies.

In 2008, concrete steps have been taken to change this. NCA in Guatemala has decided to prioritise this issue, requesting advisory from HO on future strategy, and identifying two new indigenous partners – Ukuxbe and Pop Noj – as an effort to “get things started”. This report is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing process.

As a comment, it is stated in the NCA Global strategic Plan for 2005-2010, that the mobilization of indigenous peoples as rights holders is a concern where NCA will place a particular emphasis. Looking at the Guatemalan context, where, in contrast to most other countries with indigenous populations, IPs are actually the clear majority and undoubtedly the most marginalized, there should be no reason to question that this is an issue that should be defined as a major concern for NCA Guatemala.

However, although emphasised as a main group of rights holders in the current GSP, NCA lacks an official policy on indigenous peoples. Also there is no overall strategy on the work with indigenous peoples, nor any instruments or guidelines for dealing with the issue on a programme level. My impression from the time with the NCA staff in Guatemala, and also from NCA representations in other regions, is that there is a need for a more elaborate position or strategy from NCA on the issue. The increased emphasis on environment and climate change in NCA's programmatic work, makes a more conscious approach to indigenous people's issues even more relevant. If NCA is to continue its commitment towards indigenous peoples on a global level, these are challenges that need to be addressed in the near future. In the ongoing process of developing a new 5-year global strategy, it is important to guarantee that inputs from Guatemala and other relevant regions are taken into account. A dialogue with NCA representations working with indigenous people is crucial to see at which point we are standing, and also what should be our ambitions on the issue of indigenous peoples in our new strategy.

4. MY VISIT

The agenda for my visit focused mainly on three issues:

- Getting knowledge about the current partners working closest with the indigenous population (UKUXBE, Pop Noj, Ciedeg and Madre Selva)
- Talking to right holders in three of these organisations (UKUXBE, Ciedeg and Madre Selva)
- Conversations with NCA regional representative and programme officers responsible for the follow up of these organisations

In addition, I had meetings/conversations with two resource persons on indigenous peoples in Latin America: Gustavo ???, (Peruvian researcher, currently living in Guatemala) and Miguel Palacín Qispe (Coordinator of the network of Andean Indigenous Organisations, from Peru on a short visit to Guatemala). I also had conversations with Luisa Cabrera, the external consultant conducting an assessment for NCA in August/September. Lastly, we had a meeting with the Norwegian embassy, mainly to get information on their upcoming programme on indigenous people, supported through the UN.

The several initiatives from the Norwegian embassy to establish a relation with NCA should be followed up by NCA's regional office. In its current face of establishing a programme on indigenous people, it might be of value for both sides to maintain a close dialogue. With the thematic priorities of the Embassy's programme in many ways matching the potential issues to be prioritized by NCA, there might be opportunities to explore regarding information exchange, carrying out of thematic seminars, partner meetings etc.

In the partner meeting with Ukuxbe, Pop Noj, Madre Selva and Ciedeg, the issue of partnership relations was put on the agenda for discussion. The role of international agencies and partnership relations involving financial support is a topic that is currently much discussed not only by the NCA partners, but also by the indigenous movement in a broader scale. Many are the cases in which actions and activities are felt as imposed by agencies to fit with their own agenda – no matter how good intentions – without corresponding to the real concerns of the indigenous movement/organisations. It seemed clear to me that NCA is not considered as such an agency by the partners, but the issue should in any case be permanently on the agenda, seeking a balance between reaching NCA's defined objectives and providing a support based on partners' real concerns. Thus, when defining NCA's objectives in Guatemala, indigenous people's concerns should be considered and reflected.

NCA should continue to strive for horizontal relations with partners based on openness, confidence and dialogue.

5. FIELD VISIT

Three days of my stay were reserved for project visits. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was unable to visit any activity of Pop Noj, since their projects are mainly carried out in areas far from the relative geographic concentration of the projects of Ciedeg (Sololá), Ukuxbe (Chichicastenango) and Madre Selva (Quetzaltenango) that we visited.

The visits were short, but gave interesting insights in examples of very different approaches to the issue of strengthening the situation of indigenous people.

5.1 UKUXBE

In Chichicastenango we were present at a session of the youth leadership project, organised by Ukuxbe. According to Ukuxbe, the group in this project consists of about 25 youngsters, girls and boys from at least three different departments and linguistic groups, of which about ten were present on our visit.

The content of the session had a clear rights based approach, and was also clearly focusing on the challenges for indigenous peoples in a context of seeing the Maya population as a whole, a unit with common interests.

Another positive factor is their involvement in and promotion of participation of the project's participants in conferences for indigenous youth, both on regional, national and Latin-American level, all of them to be carried out 2nd semester 2008.

I am not in a position to judge or give an analysis of the current situation of Maya leadership or the Maya movement(s). However, the impression I have from my conversations during the visit and the literature I have read on the issue is of a somewhat fragmented leadership, unable to address the major general concerns of the Maya population in a constructive and united way, and in many cases lacking a true connection/relation to the grassroots.

In conversation with some of the youth participants in this session about future leadership for the Maya movement, it seemed to me that they have a perspective that differs from the above description of the current Maya leaders. Talking to only a small number of boys and girls participating in such a project, this is not necessarily a representative view of a whole generation. Nevertheless, I had an impression of young people that still bear the indigenous identity with pride, and through new communication technology (mobile phones, internet) are more open-minded towards a more horizontal mobilization, regardless of cultural or linguistic group.

If there is discontent with the current leadership within the Maya movement, the strategy should focus not on confrontation with this, but rather of a parallel work to build new, constructive alternatives. In this respect, a focus on young boys and girls is highly relevant approach.

An issue to follow up further is how the project intends to disseminate the knowledge gained by the participants of the project. An assessment of how the participants can work as local multipliers, in their schools, communities etc. should be made. For instance, in the school we visited after the session, only

five pupils were able to attend the project, but many of the youngsters as well as teachers seemed to want to work more intensively with the issues of indigenous rights raised in the project. Maybe this could be an additional strategy for a greater impact of the project – to provide space/time in the schools and communities of the participants to spread the knowledge.

Lastly, Ukuxbe leaves an impression of having a more progressive approach to gender issues and women's rights in the indigenous communities, than what I usually meet. There is no doubt that in many indigenous communities, traditional rituals and habits are practiced that from a human rights perspective are prejudicing the women's rights. How to approach these issues is a difficult and delicate issue, and actions towards the communities in this regard needs to be well fundamented. Nevertheless, I see the partnership with Ukuxbe as a great opportunity for starting a discussion on the issue.

5.2 CIEDEG

The visit was limited to a two-hour meeting with the women's group in the Santa Maria de Visitación community, in the Sololá department. Unfortunately, it was not possible to visit the communities to see more of Ciedegs activities, as intended.

The women's dialogue group was a relatively recent initiative, and valued by the women as a new possibility of getting organised and talk about problems and common issues. This meant a strengthening of the women's situation and participation in the community, according to some of the women.

The group focused on the needs of the female population, and in what ways they could improve their livings with small means. An example of this was through embroidery, which for other women was not possible due to reduced sight ability, thus discussing the possibility of starting new activities, as for instance chicken raising.

From my point of view, the indigenous identity issue seemed rather weak, with little importance for the group members when asked – and also not being a much promoted issue by Ciedeg in the meetings.

Based on the activities I saw, and from what I understand, Ciedeg deserves great recognition for the work they carry out in a large number of indigenous communities. Increased food production, water catchment technologies, improved nutrition are some of the areas in which Ciedeg provides an important contribution. However, when working with 90% indigenous populations, this is an aspect that should deserve specific attention.

Although not being explicitly expressed in project strategies, when asked about the issue, Ciedegs staff members expressed an intention to approach the issue in a more conscious way. Another observation, however, was that although giving important contributions as mentioned above, sometimes with innovative technologies, the perspective of working in a stronger degree towards the authorities in order to guarantee the rights, this seemed distant from their strategy – it just did not seem like much of an issue.

With strong partners now, both within the areas of specific rights for indigenous rights for indigenous people (Ukuxbe and Pop Noj) and on advocating for rights to natural resources within the indigenous territories (Madre Selva), there should be initiated a dialogue with Ciedeg on possible ways to strengthen their ability to promote a rights based work in the indigenous communities – while at the same time recognizing the importance of their current activities.

Depending on how such a process turns out, with its access to and central position in the Christian networks of Guatemala, one might also, on a longer term, consider the possibility of Ciedeg acting in a more progressive way to promote the rights of indigenous people within these networks.

5.3 MADRE SELVA

We were present at a debate promoted by Madre Selva, in Quetzaltenango. The topic of discussion was the authorization of the National Forest Institute (INAB) to deforest a considerable part of the Totonicapán forest, which will have significant consequences for the access to water sources for the Communities living in and around this area.

Madre Selva is seen by many as a quite confrontative organisation. This may be right, but I would like to add to this a 'constructive confrontation' – constructive in the sense that they are actually able to address the duty bearers in a direct way. This has resulted in the realisation of several consultation processes of indigenous communities in controversial cases of natural resource management as mining, hydroelectric plants and deforestation. Although none of these have yet resulted in victory for the involved communities, the fact that it has come to consultation processes is a partial victory in itself – considering the difficulties of implementing the ILO Convention 169 in Guatemala, although ratified by the country.

Another positive impression was the ability of the collective to engage the local communities in the mobilisations against such projects. Talking to indigenous leaders and participants in the mobilisation, there was no doubt that Madre Selva was appreciated as a driving force in defining strategies, documenting the abuses etc.

As a national reference on the consultancy processes with populations living in areas threatened by environmental degradation caused by expanding extractive industries, dam constructions and deforestation, Madre Selva is a key partner for NCA, and might play an important role in the future. Both on disseminating its' experiences and knowledge about political processes and mechanisms within the current plan, but also when it comes to developing a new strategy with a possible stronger definition of management of natural resources by indigenous communities as a central issue in the new country plan.

One should also consider supporting Madre Selva in activities of network building with other Guatemalan/international organisations that work specifically to promote the full implementation of the ILO convention 169. Many Latin American countries have ratified this convention, but in most countries there are

severe obstacles when it comes to implementation. A stronger collective mobilization from civil society is important to make progress in this matter, and an exchange of experiences with other national and Latin American organisations might be a strategic step.

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As already expressed, the Maya population is to be considered a “cross cutting” target group in the NCA project portfolio. In a short time perspective, the main challenge should be to make a systematic effort on strengthening the consciousness of the rights and issues for the indigenous rights holders in the diversity of thematic areas that the projects are into.

Considering the forthcoming planning of a new country plan for Guatemala, this will be an occasion to decide whether one wishes to keep it at this level – as a cross cutting issue, with a conscious indigenous rights based approach – or if, in addition to this, one wishes to develop a more dedicated work with indigenous people on one or more specific issues.

An important consideration in this context must be to consider thoroughly how big ambitions one can have with the limited financial resources that NCA provides. An eventual decision on making Indigenous People a thematic priority – within the areas “right to natural resources within the indigenous territories” and “participation and leadership promotion”, which currently seems to me as the most evident and relevant areas for NCA – should be based on such a discussion.

In this context, to make the NCA contribution have a greater impact than the financial resources should indicate, it is important that the office be updated on the work of other organisations, including the Embassy, and thus seeks to find opportunities for synergetic effects and a complementary contribution on specific issues. One should therefore analyse in what area(s) NCA and partners have the ability and capacity to make real contribution, and be very careful not to grasp too much. This analysis should also seek to identify the areas in which NCA can support and contribute together with other organisations.

What did not become very clear to me during my trip was how the partners work to channel the rights holders’ knowledge into concrete actions of demanding rights. Preparation of the rights holders on how to access the public spaces and to negotiate and demand the full exercise of their rights in the society is an important part of working with a rights based approach. To make right holders achieve real changes, the promotion of knowledge must go hand in hand with an effort to analyse political opportunities and facilitate access to the public sphere. This is valid for all the projects and should be a general concern for NCA to follow up.

A positive factor that also contributes to a belief in the potential of a good development is the NCA staff itself and their commitment, competence and interest in carrying out a process for a more consistent work related to indigenous peoples.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are my main recommendations for the process ahead:

i) NCA should strengthen the indigenous rights perspective as a cross-cutting issue in the current portfolio

A great number of the projects in the current portfolio - within diverse areas as gender, HIV/AIDS, sustainable agriculture - have indigenous people, more specifically Mayas, as target groups and rights holders. However, rights issues related to indigenous people are in several cases at the present not being handled with any specific attention.

It should be an overall ambition for NCA to guarantee that capacity building of partners on indigenous rights related to the different projects will be carried out.

ii) Use of certain partners as a resource for other partners

The potential of using certain partner's expertise in order to strengthen the work of others should be explored. For instance, are the new partners UKUXBE and Pop Noj willing to, and qualified to, contributing to a strengthening of the indigenous rights perspective towards the partners working with HIV/AIDS? Gender? And is CIEDEG willing to make an effort to develop it's work into a more rights based approach - with input both on indigenous rights in general, and more specifically on the water issue?

iii) Capacity building of NCA staff

- NCA should consider inviting partners to capacitate own staff at the Guatemala office. Although the consciousness about indigenous issues and specific rights among the staff seems to be fairly high, it would be convenient to invite partners to capacitate staff on specific issues. Also external resource persons could be used for this purpose.
- As part of a process of strengthening the work on indigenous peoples, an issue of great importance is the language. Although partner organisations communicate in Spanish, a great part of the right holders in many of the projects only speak their indigenous language. Having one of the programme officers at the office speaking Quiché (or eventually another main Maya language) should be an ambition for NCA Guatemala.

Together, this would contribute to an improvement in NCA's ability to conduct a project follow up of high quality, and also make them more prepared for future planning of strategies towards indigenous people in their work. It would also be a signal from NCA that the partners' knowledge is acknowledged, and would contribute to a more balanced partnership.

iv) NCA should act as a facilitator of spaces for discussions and network building

Without defining the agenda for the indigenous organisations or movement, NCA should seek to facilitate spaces for discussions and sharing of information on indigenous issues, both for indigenous organisations and for other organisations working with indigenous people as rights holders. Promotion of seminars, meetings and other events for discussion and sharing of information are valuable in themselves, but might as well have a function of building or strengthening networks of organisations working with indigenous issues.

Regarding the contents of such events, there should be openness from the office towards the partners on what are their major concerns, assuring dialogue with and participation from partners in the planning of these events.

It might as well be relevant for NCA to promote such spaces in collaboration with other development agencies or for instance the Embassy, thus also including Guatemalan organisations from outside the NCA portfolio.

v) Access to public sphere for the rights holders

NCA should on a broader basis, together with partners, see to what extent the projects are empowering rights holders not only to *know* their rights but also to actually become *agents of transformation*, able to enter public spaces and processes of negotiations and advocating.

This might as well be a topic for the whole portfolio, not only that regarding indigenous people.

vi) Review of partners' relevance in the portfolio

In the light of the process on new global strategy and new Country plan 2011-2015, it is also of great importance that the current portfolio is reviewed simultaneously. For instance, as I see it, the two new partners fall slightly outside the current strategy on Guatemala, but on the other hand are "justified" by the recent attempt to strengthen the work towards indigenous peoples. In this case, their future partnership with NCA must be considered in the light of the forthcoming discussions on a new global strategy/Country plan for Guatemala, and the relevance of their projects (and expertise) for this new strategy. The same goes for CIEDEG, which clearly needs to review their strategy into a more rights based approach.

NCA should in this context seek to be oriented on the diversity of indigenous organisations, and also be open to eventually identify new resource partners if considered needed, in line with the definition of a new strategy.

vii) On a longer term

Considering the forthcoming process on elaborating a new global strategy for the period 2011-2015, it is important to reflect on how to guarantee a stronger effort on the promotion of indigenous rights within a new Country plan for

Guatemala, and maybe as well for the Regional plan for Central America, referring to the same period.

- One of the biggest challenges currently related to indigenous rights in the region, as in many other parts of the world, is the management of natural resources in the indigenous territories, connected to the exploration of these by both public and private actors/institutions. This in many cases happens at the cost of the indigenous population's interests, and in extreme cases it is threatening the livelihood of the indigenous population. A possible approach to this challenge for NCA could be to build upon the experiences on working with the right to water. Both because NCA itself already defines this area as a thematic priority, and also because NCA Guatemala has a very strong partner on the issue: Madre Selva, which works specifically with this issue.

Even if the discussions on a new global strategy officially haven't started yet, it seems probable that the issues of environment/climate change and poor peoples' access to and management of natural resources will be central in the forthcoming strategy process. These are issues that are central in several countries and regions where NCA is working with indigenous and traditional people, and a stronger focus on efforts done within this field would contribute to create a greater common momentum for this thematic related to indigenous peoples on a general level.

- Through the inclusion of the two new partners Ukuxbe and Pop Noj, the issue of participation and leadership stands out as a major issue in the current work towards indigenous peoples. These are highly relevant issues when seeking strategies to improve the situation of the country's indigenous population. Although relatively small, these two organisations also seem able to carry out an important work within this field.

But again, it is important that the office thoroughly discuss how broad ambitions one should have with the limited resources available and how one best can use the resources to provide a support which might have a real impact on indigenous people's situation in the country.

viii) Plan of action

As a complement to the already submitted 2009 activity plan for NCA's Guatemala Office, the office should elaborate a separate document on how it intends to follow up the recommendations from this report

APPENDIX 1:

TERMS OF REFERENCE

for Christian Schøien's assessment in Guatemala August 2008

Definitions on main contributions from Thematic Advisor:

- 1) Proposal for a new strategy on NCA Guatemala's work with Indigenous Peoples
 - Should IP be a separate programme or a cross cutting issue? Or something in between?
 - What are the issues within an indigenous context that should be prioritized? (environment, land, education, culture, advocacy etc)
 - Is there a need for new resource partner on IP?
 - Is there a potential for collaboration with other international development organizations/embassy?
- 2) Mapping of learning potential through exchange with Brazilian partners - definition of common and relevant issues/partners for such an exchange
- 3) Input to Guatemala Regional Office on NCA's work on IPs
 - History
 - Present portfolio – NCA's work with IPs in other countries
 - NCA's commitment towards IPs and (lack of) NCA policy on IP
 - Discussions with RO/partners: mapping of challenges, problems, needs related to IP programmatic work (likewise important for the NCA to get this kind of information)

Product

- Report containing impressions from trips to Guatemala and Brazil, and a separate part with recommendations and proposal for future engagement/strategy

Programme for Guatemala visit:

Meeting at RO: introduction from RO on GTM portfolio, brief history and the present work, with focus on indigenous issues.

Meetings with most relevant partners in IP context (CIEDEG, Madre Selva, UKUXBE and Pop Noj)

Meeting with Norwegian Embassy if possible.

Discussion with RO on agenda and objectives and participants for the Brazil visit.

Project visits/conversations with right holders/target groups in the projects are important to get an impression on how the partners are working in the field

APPENDIX 2:

LIST OF MEETINGS DURING THE VISIT
