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**THE EFFICACY OF LITERACY IN EMPOWERING
POOR WOMEN IN HONDURAS**

by

PATRICIA SMITH, Hon.B.A.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

Norman Paterson School of International Affairs

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario**

August 27, 1993

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The undersigned hereby recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of this thesis, submitted by PATRICIA SMITH, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Maureen Appel Molot, Director
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Professor J. O'Manique, Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that literacy training is a necessary but not sufficient component for empowering poor women in Honduras. Literacy has the potential to empower. However, empowerment that leads to positive change requires complementary social and economic systems.

In Honduras poor women find themselves without this support. The stories of the women suggest that literacy has no guarantees. Self esteem and confidence acquired from participating in literacy programs are only a first step to creating the change necessary to have their goals realized. Obstacles to their empowerment lie rooted in the neo-conservative systems that individualize and compartmentalize Honduran society. Opportunities are limited for poor women to participate as a group, keeping them illiterate and invisible.

National Union Campesinos (CNTC) programs based on Freirian concepts of conscientization are struggling within this mainstream ideology. They are seeking new ways that include the whole person and their environment. It is this practice that generates opportunities for poor women to create their own links to empowerment through literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a personal, social, contextual, transactive, gender-related and constructive process whereby we rewrite the texts that we read in the text of our lives, and keep on rewriting our lives in the light of those texts (Scholes, 1989:155).

This statement describes literacy as a transformative process whereby we have the potential to shape our lives and effect change in our world. What it does not describe, however, is the selective nature of this process whereby many, and especially poor women in Honduras are not realizing this power to change their lives. Knowledge, force and wealth and the relationships between them define power in a society (Toffler, 1991:16). Empowerment then that leads to positive change in daily living requires complementary social and economic systems. In Honduras poor women find themselves without the support of the social and economic systems and are left struggling to become empowered because literacy is not sufficient. Literacy defined by the poor women in Honduras means

the promotion of the individual and group development of women for the recovery of our dignity and identity. We live with hope and we actively participate in our community in order to stand up for our lives with dignity, justice and peace and to promote and develop the creative expression of the women (Tabora, 1992:81).

This thesis is about literacy and its relationships to patriarchy and poverty for poor women in Honduras as they struggle for empowerment to actively participate in their communities with dignity, justice, peace and creative expression. The central hypothesis of this thesis states that literacy training is a necessary but not sufficient component for empowering poor women. Empowerment¹ is used in the context of participation in and control over decision making in one's life. Literacy is a transformative process which has the potential to empower. Therefore empowerment from increased self esteem and increased self confidence is a critical first step to achieving other tangible outcomes of literacy. Although literacy stimulates more confidence and greater self esteem in women that participate in the programs, it does not appear to be enough for them to become equal social, economic and political participants in their own society. Literacy, as an empowering agent, is a long term process which includes training but goes beyond the development of skills to the development of the learner as a whole person, not just a consumer, worker or functionary (Codimca, 1992; CNTC, 1992).

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¹ As well, empowerment implies defining one's own history by means of contributing knowledge identified from within and not imposed from without. For example, "literacy may result in a higher paying job for women, that enables the family to benefit from the higher profit. To this end, there will be better comprehension of and use of new technologies adapted to their needs and possibilities. Women will then have easier access to credit facilities and cooperatives, and will be able to play a part in their management" (Chlebowska, 1990).

This thesis attempts to generate knowledge about literacy and the life situations of some poor women in Honduras. From the starting point of the women themselves an examination is made of the role of literacy as an agent of change in their lives and the lives of other poor women in Honduras.

The stories of poor women in Honduras (Chapter Two) will indicate that economic reality and the context of the society in which they live are key factors both in the efficacy of literacy training for empowerment and in the efficacy of empowerment for literacy training (Gaspar: CNTC field worker, 1992). Figure 1 (p.140) illustrates these factors and their relation to literacy and empowerment.

Literacy, to be empowering requires two parts: the development of skills (education) and the development of the person (conscientization). It is important to emphasize that both aspects of literacy are necessary for the empowerment of the learners. These two fundamental components of literacy (conscientization and education) are necessary if positive change is to occur in their everyday lives. However, even if the poor women are to achieve literacy as witnessed by their stories in Chapter Two and good literacy programs in Chapter Three, the socio-economic barriers woven throughout Honduran society are at work undermining their collective organization and building of self esteem, thus perpetuating the vicious

circle of silence for poor women.

Chapter One identifies the conceptual framework for this study and examines the theoretical underpinnings of literacy that go beyond the individual woman. The argument is made that one very important and possible way for poor women's life situations to change is through "conscientization"². The other achievements women gain through literacy programs address their real needs and strive to encourage their active participation in the programs. Unfortunately, the majority of educational opportunities for women do not attempt to involve them equally nor on this level. On this, Freire's position is clear:

education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (cited in Shaul, 1970: 15)

Conceptually this chapter establishes the framework within the Freirian notion of conscientization that identifies the political nature of literacy. The present dominant political orientation and the overall economic perspective in Honduras are rooted in neo-conservative systems that individualize,

---

²Paulo Freire (1970:19) defines "conscientization" as : "Learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality."

compartmentalize. Opportunities are therefore limited for poor women to participate as a group, keeping them illiterate and invisible.

Chapter Two is the voice of the poor women in Honduras. Their stories raise questions as to the degree of empowerment that literacy actually imparts to the women who participate in the literacy programs. To understand the whole picture it is necessary for this voice of the women themselves to be heard - their testimony of the changes and the impact of the literacy experience in their lives. It is here where the strength of this study lies.

To distinguish clearly between literacy programs and good literacy programs, the example of the National Union of Campesinos in Honduras (CNTC) is examined in Chapter Three. Based on Freire's principles of conscientization, CNTC operates literacy programs with overall goals that integrate women into society. This adds an empowering dimension to literacy. Other highly organized women's organizations are also at work in Honduras struggling for the "practice of freedom". However it is the rural focus as well as the integrative component of CNTC that offer poor women the chance to realize their goals as previously identified by Tabora. Chapter Four outlines the economic reality behind the women's stories and identifies how their poverty works to impede the

literacy process. It investigates the connections between economic poverty and literacy opportunities for poor women. Figure 1 (p.131) illustrates the two-way relationship between literacy and empowerment and the impact of poverty on the efficacy of literacy. Just as literacy is an instrument for economic survival so too is economics necessary for literacy training. "Without literacy it is impossible to survive in relation to today's economic institutions" (Bhola, 1990:10). Is it possible then, for poor women to become literate without the necessary economic supports? Even with literacy is empowerment possible?

The journey of processing information about literacy and the life experiences of poor women represents significant hope for change in the practice of freedom. However, it should be recognized that the change process for poor women in Honduras is extremely slow and dependent upon that which defines their poverty: economic conditions, political philosophy and the social character of Honduras.

METHODOLOGY

The present research grew out of curiosity to know more about the life situation of poor women in Honduras. Being the

poorest of Central American countries and surrounded by revolutionary neighbours, Honduras is seldom in the North American news. By virtue of this omission and apparent neglect I was drawn to the challenge of learning more about the people of this country, particularly the women. My goal to learn more about literacy in the lives of poor women gives this research an implicitly descriptive quality. As stated previously, appropriate literacy programs for rural women must address their perceived needs and therefore spring from a real understanding of women's lives. The research process itself then was a learning experience for me and for the Hondurans that I worked with.

There was no formal methodology of interview and data collection. This departure from the traditional interviewing methods is supported by Oakley (1981:48-49) as a way of "giving the subjective situation of women greater visibility not only in sociology, but more importantly, in society". This then is a strategy for documenting women's own accounts of their lives whereby the role of the interviewer can take on new meaning as a tool for making possible the articulated and recorded commentary of women on the very personal business of being female in a patriarchal capitalist society. Sharing Oakley's convictions I departed from the traditional methods. The primary methodology was based on informal conversations, participation in daily activities with the women, girls and

their families, and observations of the relationships and everyday experiences of living in community with poor women.

The process of information gathering in Honduras included many meetings and interviews with individuals and groups in eight communities, meetings with the Director of CODIMCA (Womens' Human Rights Organization in Honduras), the Directors of Visitacion de Padilla, the Regional Director CODIMCA Copan, Director of Comunica and PAEM (Proyecto d'Ayudar y Educativa des Mujeres), Assistant Director CUSO (a Canadian NGO working in Honduras) San Pedro Sula, CNTC (National Committee of Campesino Workers), the program coordinators for these organizations, the many volunteers who work behind the scenes to make these programs a reality, and conversations with the participants.

Interviews and conversations with many people in Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal involved in research in Latin America also contributed to the data bank of information on literacy and women in Honduras. Archival research in Ottawa prior to and upon my return from Honduras was also carried out in support of this study.

Societies, such as Honduras, characterized by serious economic and social inequalities and rigid social structures are unlikely to promote the conditions and motivations required

for real change (Hamadache and Martin, 1986 in La Prairie, 1991:11). The following chapter will now address this issue in an effort to establish a conceptual framework by which to assess the role of literacy in empowering poor women in Honduras.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL REFLECTION

1.0 Introduction

The work which studies literacy as if it were autonomous from social context displays cultural bias and ethnocentrism. Those of us who are literate may be tempted to assume that the value of literacy is self-evident, because we believe in the importance of our own literacy. But the skills and concepts that accompany literacy acquisition, in whatever form, do not stem in some automatic way from the inherent qualities of literacy, as some authors would have us believe, but are aspects of a specific ideology. Faith in the power and the qualities of literacy is itself socially learnt and is not an adequate tool with which to embark on a description of its practice (Street,1984:1 in Horsman,1990:11)

This quotation suggests that the overall ideological framework shapes the social and economic factors that impede both women's empowerment, regardless of literacy training, and literacy training, regardless of empowerment. There is a need then to study the interactive relationship between poor women and literacy within the social context in which they live. This will determine the extent to which literacy training is empowering for poor women. Kazemak (1988:23) suggests that to neglect this relationship points to a "conscious or unconscious disdain for the specific literacy needs of women within a patriarchal society". Furthermore, ideology is a

crucial analytical concept and an indispensable management tool whose importance stems from the intimate connection between ideology and economic performance (Saul, 1993: 119).

Literacy to be meaningful must be an integral part of the social practices of people's everyday lives. This chapter will reflect on the underlying ideologies that are critical to a deeper appreciation of the role of literacy in the lives poor women in Honduras. It is ideology that ultimately influences the potential of literacy to empower them to make positive changes in their lives.

The stories of the women in Chapter Two and the efforts of the CNTC in Chapter Three will suggest that literacy has tremendous potential to empower women. However the overwhelming constraints of the dominant ideology in Honduras moulds the socio-economic system within which they live. This acts as a barrier to individual as well as collective empowerment even if literacy training is acquired. Chapter Four will illustrate that their struggle is rooted in poverty perpetuated by this dominant perspective.

1.1 Rationale

Modernization-based perspectives dominate the socio-economic system of Honduras. The net impact of this domination is

negative for women--politically, economically and socially (Elson, 1991; Moser, 1989). In contrast, liberation ideology, as outlined by Paulo Freire, offers a vehicle of empowerment for poor women. This allows them to potentially break free of the modernization grip and the economic chains which currently hold them powerless.

Paulo Freire's programs began in Brazil in the early 1960's and laid the groundwork for the more recent developments in participatory education such as those of the CNTC to be outlined in Chapter Three. Freirian concepts offer an explanation as to why some women are empowered through literacy programs. At the same time Freirian concepts contradict the dominant ideology in Honduras. It is this contradiction that suggests why so many women in Honduras are not being empowered to initiate change in their lives even with literacy training. Examples of Freirian style literacy programs can be found in countries like Nicaragua, Brazil, Cuba. The success of these programs in empowering the participants appears to be related to the political will and economic support systems within the country. For example when promoted by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua overall literacy improved at all levels in society. In Brazil where the government initiatives are not as supportive the programs are not as successful in empowering the participants. In Honduras poor women, as evidenced in the stories in Chapter Two, are

struggling and resisting the dominant ideological structures. They are attempting to forge ahead within the context of their own development. Literacy will be shown to have the potential to empower poor women, individually and collectively, provided that it is supported by a complementary socio-economic system. Is this support system in place in Honduras? Does it allow literacy to equally empower both men and women? This chapter will argue that literacy has the potential to be empowering for poor women provided that the socio-economic system that allows and encourages all members of society to be active participants in creating meaning in their own environment.

1.2 Defining Literacy

Before proceeding further with the discussion it is useful to define key terms in question: literacy and illiteracy. As identified by UNESCO (1990:1) 'the search for a precise definition of what literacy means is especially troubling to those who seek a quick solution to dealing with the problem of illiteracy. A simple definition is inadequate. Since the 1950s there have been a variety of operational and philosophical definitions. However, the meaning of literacy can best be defined within each specific context and consequently will evolve with the transformations of societal and individual needs.' Similarly the term illiteracy is

relative. What skills are considered to be satisfactory in one context may be insufficient in another (UNESCO, 1990:2) both across location and time. It is this rationale that underlies the hypothesis and methodology utilized in this thesis.

Literacy, in this thesis, is defined by the poor women themselves. In Santa Barbara, Honduras the poor women conceive educativa (literacy training) to encompass more than just skills acquisition (Tabora, 1992). Their definition includes the individual and group development of dignity, identity, justice and peace as well as the development of the creative expression of women in their communities. Similarly Chlebowska (1991:14) defines a literate rural woman to be one who "possesses sufficient knowledge of reading and writing and arithmetic to guarantee an improvement in the quality of her own life and that of her family, and to facilitate her full participation in the development of the group and community".

These definitions both have two components: the first is a precursor to the second: education (skills training) and development of the whole person.

Literacy thus defined is ultimately shaped by the development theory in which it is immersed. If campesino women are to become empowered, literacy programs must not only incorporate both components (education and whole person development) but

also need to be synchronized with the overall development strategy and process (dominant ideology). It will be argued that the conceptual framework in which literacy is embedded ultimately determines to what extent literacy can be empowering for poor women in Honduras. It is the contention of this paper that literacy alone is not sufficient for the empowerment of poor women. The socio-economic development strategy and process in Honduras are not compatible with literacy programs that include women. In fact the system will be found to impede their empowerment by keeping them from becoming literate participants in society.

A common problem is that literacy training, often integrated with other practical activities, is seldom adapted to the real learning conditions of women. Programs are seldom scheduled to fit into the daily routine of the women. Thus irregular attendance, high drop-out rates and weak results are common everywhere (Lind, 1990:4). Shortcomings in the design of the literacy programs offered combined with men's resistance reflect the underlying neo-conservative systems that individualize and compartmentalize. Opportunities are therefore limited for poor women to become empowered, keeping them illiterate and invisible.

1.3 Why Modernization Strategies Impede Literacy's Potential to Empower Poor Women

(i) Introduction

Generally, initiatives such as the UNESCO Education For All (UN, 1991) regarding literacy and education rest on traditional neoclassical economic assumptions about education and development, specifically those found in human capital theory (Schultz, in Barndt, 1991). These assumptions blend throughout the discourse with moral and quasi-political considerations about equality, participation and empowerment in the developing world. In practice the substantive understanding of the goals, practices and outcomes of education correspond to the economic rationale for policy formation in education emanating from the human capital and the basic needs approaches (modernization). The result is a failure to acknowledge the inequality between class and gender within heterogenous societies.

(ii) Conservative Education

Traditional education that supports a conservative ideology preserves the status quo and dominates the capitalist system. It is characterized by the following:

- workers are trained as needed to keep the economic system running, streaming them through the educational

system so that only a few continue to manage and control;

- a class system is reproduced, based on the exploitation of a poor majority by a wealthy minority;
- values of those in control are taught through the content and methods of education (i.e., individualism, competition);
- private property consumption (even of knowledge) is emphasized;
- authoritarian, vertical, often bureaucratic programs, that do not allow students to participate in decisions;
- pretends to be ahistorical, apolitical, neutral, objective;
- separates intellectual, manual work by teaching ideas separate from productive activity. (Barndt, 1991:17)

These characteristics raise questions concerning the quality of the programs being offered. A critique of education programs for campesino women begins with the recognition that appropriate education for these women must spring from a real understanding of women's lives. Included in this understanding is the day-to-day reality as experienced by and defined by women (Zakus, 1984b:79). This, however, is not the case for most programs as outlined by the above description of traditional education. For example, one study of agricultural extension and rural development education programs in twelve

Latin American countries found that programs for rural women were "built on a limited repertoire of information (talks, demonstrations, projects..) usually of an external origin [foreign or urban]. Women's needs were not well defined. There were tendencies to develop new income-generating activities without consideration of the rural women's already numerous responsibilities in the home and family (Cebotarev, 1980:37). Further, there were tendencies to ignore women's hourly schedules of daily work when scheduling class times. Unnecessary criteria were set for eligibility which kept women from becoming active participants (Zakus, 1984b:80).

(iii) Liberal Education

Some literacy programs may refer to social change or development in their description. However there is no evident rationale or social change theory in the actual programs that link them clearly with broader rural development efforts to include women as equal partners. On the contrary, they seem rather conservative, promoting unquestionably traditional feminine roles in their home economics, nutrition or community development components" (Cebotarev, 1980:35). Liberal ideology recognizes that not everyone benefits from the given structure. But the foundation or structure is not challenged.

In the last twenty years, however, women all over the world have recognized the domination of the male experience and male bias in the written word, and in the realms of codified knowledge (Spender, 1980; Elson, 1991). Women's experience is systematically left out of the vast body of knowledge which represents the beliefs and attitudes of a society. A liberal approach may apply the techniques of popular education (free school movement of the 1960s, the head start program for poor pre-school children, literacy classes for public school drop-outs, creative and participatory process in formal and non-formal programs). However, after recognizing the inadequacies of the dominant educational system, the new practices continue to remain within that system (Barndt, 1991:18). They continue to operate from the mainstream development framework. Problems are identified which focus on the learner as a consumer, worker, and functionary rather than a transformational learner allowing for development of skills and the whole person.

(iv) Constraints of Research within Modernization

Despite what appears to be a progressive discourse at the international and even the national level, views about literacy issues are frequently framed within the traditional development paradigm (Morales-Gomez, 1990:10). Unfortunately the emphasis has often been on macro aspects of educational

policy in education. Cross-national aggregate data compiled by governments may be subject to questions of pertinency, reliability and comparability. As a result, these kinds of data pay little attention to lessons learned from the traditions of more political and qualitative observations and innovation --even micro-experiences-- implemented in the developing world (Morales-Gomez, 1990:11).

Estimates of illiteracy, particularly as it affects women in Honduras, are difficult to find and often lack reliability. A 1974 Population Census in Honduras showed that illiteracy rates are higher for rural women than urban women. Statistics reveal that female illiteracy was 42% nationwide, with the majority being in the rural areas (53%). The same data indicate that overall male illiteracy was 39% with the rural component being 50% (Zuniga and Hernandez, 1989:172). Such differences in illiteracy rates are found throughout the country because rural people (campesinos) face more problems than their urban counterparts in their access to basic education and literacy classes. The relatively small difference indicated by these statistics suggests that the variance in living conditions may be in empowerment.

The importance of increasing literacy among women is emphasized in many international reports (World Bank Report, 1991; Education for All, 1991). In 1985, 63% of the world's

approximately one billion illiterate people were female compared to 60% in 1970 and 56% in 1960 (Lind, 1991:2). This rising figure indicates a deeper problem regarding literacy. Interpretation of the process of data collection reveals that these quantitative measurements fail to consider the quality of programs. This omission implies that the literacy gap is wider than officially reported.

In Honduras, although illiteracy is reported to have decreased from 40.4% in 1974 to 32% in 1988, absolute numbers of total illiterate persons has actually increased from 707,000 to 905,000 in the same period (Zuniga, 1991:17). These national statistics are deceiving in that many rural communities in fact have 70% or more of their populations not being able to read and write (CODIMCA, 1992; CNTC, 1992; PAEM 1992; Alvarado, 1987). Furthermore, statistics such as these reflect the degree of education training (skills) as measured quantitatively within the dominant ideology. They fail to capture the degree of empowerment that translates to meaningful experience for the learners.

Research has so far been largely the instrument of dominance and legitimatization of power elites, not one of reciprocity and conscious partiality (Mies, 1983:123). Thus, the task of constructing knowledge about women, knowledge in which they are neither distorted nor invisible, is a political act (Rodo

and Saball, 1987:197). "For this new knowledge does not support the old beliefs, it does not reinforce the traditional power structures (Spender, 1980:14).

Evaluations and research of literacy (popular education) by international agencies rarely measure it on its own terms. Statistical analysis has been demonstrated to be inappropriate in this context. Western academics have focused on the theoretical texts of literacy (by writers such as Freire) rather than on its practical impact in the South and its potential impact in the North (Archer and Costello, 1990:vii). With this in mind then, this chapter has the distinct purpose of creating a framework of concepts that are influenced by the impact of current ideology that dominate in Honduras as well as the holistic concepts and ideas of Freire. This framework sets the stage for the theory that will evolve from the stories of the poor women themselves as told in Chapter Two.

(v) Concluding Comments about Literacy and Modernization

Assumed to be effective for 'empowering' the marginalized people in society, literacy, within this modernization perspective, only partially provides for women becoming full social, economic and political partners in their own right. There is a particularly charged power dynamic around the issue

of literacy for women. When women are included and considered as participants or potential participants in literacy programs they are frequently deemed to 'need' literacy in relation to their roles as mothers and wives. This is especially true in third world development initiatives whereby literacy is needed to reduce population growth and improve nutrition (Alvarado, 1987; World Bank, 1991). Yet the assumption that literacy is 'neutral' points to the need to look at the 'personal' implications to understand the gendered practices which reinforce the subordination of women. Rarely are literacy programs set up with women's needs in mind.

"If education is a tool of transformation, an active concept and not a passive one, then that also defines who literacy [popular education] is for: those who are most interested in changing the situation, because it has been oppressing them" (Baetz in Barndt, 1991:18). Further analysis of this approach at the household level suggests that resultant empowerment from acquired knowledge in education is selective and impacts differentially on the individual members of the household (Cebotarev, 1991:421).

This level of analysis is important because the relations (socio-economic and cultural) within the household are linked to women's role and position in Honduran society. These factors, rooted in the dominant ideology, play a major part of

who may, in fact, access the 'tools' for empowerment. Clearly literacy by itself is not sufficient for empowering poor women within a modernization ideology. What perspective then would provide opportunities for poor women to become empowered through literacy training?

1.4 Creating a LINK Through Freire's Liberation Concepts

(i) Introduction

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationalist emphasizes the importance of the development of conscientization. He advocates literacy training as a tool in the struggle against oppression through stimulation of personal initiative leading to the liberation of the individual. Based on the Freirian conscientization principles, popular education arose in the 1960s as a Latin American response to inequalities within the modernization paradigm. It has been criticized by some theorists as being conventional, gender blind and not totally effective for empowering poor women (Cebotarev, 1991). However, the strength of popular education lies in the fact that it is not tied to any one issue. It has a holistic quality, breaking down the divisions within the community; education is integrated into health campaigns, agricultural cooperative development, and the election process (Barndt, 1991:6). Popular education in this context and literacy are therefore referred to interchangeably throughout this

discussion. It is this literacy aspect of linking knowledge, skills and values within a theory of liberation that is of pertinence for this chapter.

(ii) Liberation and Freire

Liberation perspectives probe beneath the surface and unmask the hidden value assumptions of conventional wisdom. They are replaced with a deliberate emphasis on self development as opposed to aid, foreign investment and technical assistance. Knowledge as the capacity of understanding the world in order to change it does not come from things on the surface (i.e., a book, memorizing formulae to apply it) but rather understanding what is beneath the surface. This creates links to values and skills that potentially empower individuals to make positive changes in their lives.

Freire was the most prominent educator to apply the term "conscientization" or consciousness-raising systematically to the area of education. This process gives individuals the opportunity to reflect on their situation, critically think about it, and then engage in activities to change it in accordance with more humanistic principles. "When the process of conscientization occurs, [people] discover that they are creators of culture and will take on the task of changing the structure of a society that oppresses them" (Dejene, 1980:30).

This reflection and action upon the world to change it, known as praxis, can only take place between persons who are engaged in dialogue which Freire calls the basis of true education. In this model teacher-students dialogue with student-teachers who are jointly responsible for a process of change in which all grow, and where everyone teaches each other (Zakus, 194:73).

One of the main characteristics of literacy practised by Freire is that it is not just an individual process but a collective one. Learning happens socially, not separate from everyday life but through daily work, involvement in organization, in family life and in all kinds of cultural activities (Baetz³ cited in Barndt, 1991:15). Because literacy training is tied to a view of the world, it represents an act of resistance and of social and political emancipation (Chlebowska, 1990:62). It is this focus on the symbiotic relationship between reflective action and critical theorizing, and not just praxis, that highlights Freire's notion of liberation (Freire, 1990a:viii).

From the beginning Freire's literacy programs attempt to be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with people as subjects rather than recipients (Freire, 1970:43). These literacy programs are based on dialogue which

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³Eduardo Baetz is director of Nicaragua's adult basic education program.

constitutes a horizontal relationship between persons (i.e. A with B which equals communication and inter-communication) as opposed to anti-dialogue which involves a vertical relationship between persons (i.e. A over B, where A issues communiques to B and where there is no real communication) (Freire, 1973). This horizontal and vertical reference to communication and interactive learning highlights a critical difference between education in the modernization ideology and that in liberation. Combined with women's social position vis a vis men, the hierarchial vertical structure common to education programs in Honduras do not allow for women's meaningful participation in education programs (Alvarado, 1987).

CNTC programs (Chapter Three) are examples of Freirian style literacy programs struggling within the mainstream ideology.

They seek new ways, different from the traditional education, for centring the education process in learning rather than teaching, in participation rather than imposition, in practice rather than abstract theory. In the final analysis, ways are sought that include the whole person and that person's environment rather than in facts and concepts unrelated to real life. It is this practice that generates opportunities for poor women to create their own links to empowerment through literacy. At the same time however, this potential empowerment poses a threat to the status quo in Honduras.

(iii) Constraints of Liberation Theory

Critics of development and education based on liberation theory suggest that it cannot be adequately examined due to inadequate empirical evidence. As previously mentioned, in the section on inadequacies in research, there are few studies that measure the qualitative components of literacy programs. Earlier liberation criticisms of literacy evolve from reductionist modes of measurement and quantification dominated by the conventional definition of development. To break out of this mould and recognize value in other than what is status quo, a way of viewing things that incorporates women's space⁴ is required (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:30).

Dynamic and rooted in the historical process by which the oppressed struggle, liberation is useless as a strategy unless it eradicates the violence against women, illegal land claims, and human rights abuses (Wright, 1992). Freire does not address how literacy, as a social practice, is gendered. He focuses his analysis on facts and classes but does not specifically address the issue of the oppression of women (Rockhill, 1988:114). However flawed, it is the attention given to the development of the whole person in the language

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⁴"From Learning Literacy to Regenerating Women's Space: A Story of Women's Empowerment in Nepal" by Pramod Parajuli and Elizabeth Enslin offers an example of this critical component necessary for literacy programs to empower women. *Women in Action* 1&2/90:3-7.

of the learner that is a key contribution of Freire's work. His current works do (1985,1990a,1990b) draw attention to the special oppression and human rights issues which are masked by the liberal forms of democratic freedom or civil liberty which deny individuals, particularly poor women, access to literacy as an agent of empowerment.

Discrimination against women has both social and economic roots as evidenced by the fact that almost half of the Honduran children are born out of wedlock, leaving single women to provide for families that average 8.6 children (Peckenham and Street, 1985:234). Economic pressures (Chapter Four) to bring income into the household are not the only factors limiting women's full participation in Honduran society (Smith, 1992). Social values, particularly the prevalence of machismo⁵, influence the extent and nature of their involvement. Freire's conviction is that no matter how "submerged" a person may be, if provided with the proper tools, they "can gradually perceive [their] personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of [their] own perception of that reality and deal critically with it" (Shauli, in Freire, 1970:13 cited in Zakus,

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⁵ "Machismo" consists in establishing a certain superiority of men over women, by which men feel themselves to be privileged beings, both in society and in the family. This serves to consolidate a certain 'specialization, a division of functions, attitudes, capacities, and qualities which are then attributed to one sex or the other... Both implicitly and explicitly, women have been used to the advantage of men" (Latin American Women's Collective, 1980, SLAVES OF SLAVES, London: Zed Press, p. 7).

1984b). It can also release the individual from a sense of inferiority and from dependency and subservience. This allocates a new status and potential in society. The stories of women like Nora and Esmerelda in Chapter two are evidence of this new status. Literacy also increases one's capacity as a maker of culture and a creator of knowledge and is one more step in the process of humanization and self fulfilment of the individual (Van Dam and Peter.1990).

1.5 Conclusion

Freirian style literacy programs promote the development of the whole person and can offer opportunities of empowerment to poor women. However the dominant neo-conservative ideology in Honduras supports a traditional education system. This perpetuates the imbalance between knowledge, wealth and empowerment especially for poor women. This ideology permeates the very systems that are required for literacy to be empowering for poor women. Therefore in Honduras the political will that is necessary for literacy to empower poor men and women is not present. The dominant system allows for selective empowerment of men and some women.

What is required are systemic changes whereby the learners can define their literacy level. Literacy is not easily

quantified and is therefore not a statistic to be collected by experts with pre-conceived notions and fixed measuring tapes as is the case within the modernization ideology. If it is a measurement at all, literacy is a measure of the nature of the relation between the learners and the world in which they live as espoused by Freire. Only the learners can characterize that relationship and judge the effectiveness of the techniques available to them to make their voices heard (Lloyd, 1991; Horsman, 1990). It is in this sense that the life stories of Norma, Esmerelda, Elvia Alvarado, and the women from Campo Cielo, as told in Chapter Two, fill in the methodological gaps and help make the connections to the reality of the world in which campesino women live. In this way theory evolves from the practice of the learners themselves.

The following chapters will illustrate that there are a variety of forces and factors within the dominant ideology which make it difficult for many women to acquire and/or improve their literacy skills. It is the contention within this thesis that literacy, when portrayed in the language of liberation, has the potential to be an empowering instrument. The strength of the Freirian concepts is that of facilitating an ideology allowing for meaningful connections to be made between literacy and active change in the daily experiences for and by poor women. Literacy then, will be shown to be a

critical first step towards an education process that leads to the realization of liberating economic, political and social rights for women (empowerment).

The acquisition of literacy is empowering to the individual and to society and is a political as well as socio-economic issue. How then are organization and community efforts working for women to rise above the barriers of poverty and sex discrimination? In their struggle to redefine their space, are they becoming "empowered" by discovering the strength of their voices through the literacy process or is the socio-economic rhythm too powerful to make a difference?

CHAPTER TWO

PARTICIPATION EXPERIENCE IN HONDURAS: A CAPPELLA

2.0 Introduction

A CAPPELLA is the title of a study carried out by the Canadian Teachers Association 1990 as part of a commitment to contribute to a greater understanding of the status of women and the quality of education issues by identifying the challenges and concerns facing adolescent women today (CTF, 1991). To sing a cappella is to carry a tune without instrumental accompaniment. Therefore the title of this chapter is fitting given that the task was to document the concerns and perceptions of adolescent women in their own words.

The motivation and methodology of the A Cappella study compliment what is attempted in Chapter Two of this thesis. The title appropriately defines the task of processing information in the words of the women participants. Just as singing a cappella is a high-risk musical style where it is much easier to lose pitch when the orchestra is not providing a familiar melody, so too can the women of Honduras lose their way to becoming empowered without a socio-economic framework

of support. Women in Honduras are living in 'a cappella' and for the most part their song is not being heard (Alvarado, 1987).

This chapter is a record of the voices of the women living in the margins⁶ in Honduras -- in the barrios of Comayaguela, and the rural areas of Santa Barbara and Cortes. Comayaguela is a suburb located in the hillsides surrounding Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras. It consists of approximately one million people and six barrios. In my travels I ventured into all six of the barrios and visited the homes of over 35 women in El Manchen, La Flor, and Campo Cielo. Campo Cielo is the community where I lived. The living conditions generally are extremely poor: services or facilities are few, if any, and depend totally upon the resourcefulness and organization of the members of the community. There was little evidence of government support. Once a week, at 5:00 am on Friday, water would run at the local tap. Everyone would line up with any container that they could find in order to collect water for the week. Often the water would be collected from a hillside trickle.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight briefly the stories of three women who let me have a glimpse of their reality during the months of July and August 1992. These are

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⁶Marginal women are characterized by poverty, illiteracy, a large number of children at an early age. These areas are located in the barrios, cuatarillas, colonias, and rural areas.

the stories that illustrate the up- side of literacy. Unfortunately there are many more stories that reflect the difficulties and enormity of the task at hand. These serve, however, to offer a representation of the impact of literacy in the everyday realities of women participants in Honduras.

Literacy training can effect positive changes in the daily lives of women in Honduras. These changes are not necessarily measured quantitatively or in standard terms such as employment or income. These changes may also occur but particularly during times of economic hardship, as will be indicated in Chapter Four, measures of self esteem and levels of confidence are more important. Empowerment from increased self esteem and increased self confidence are the first steps to achieving other tangibles that are a result of literacy. However, if the orchestra of political and economic players is setting the rhythm and melody then it is very difficult for the voices of the women to be heard.

Elvia Alvarado in her book Don't be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Women Speaks from the Heart suggests that we must focus our concentration to listen to the poor women and what they have to say about their lives.

If you really want to understand what I'm saying, you'll have to go out with me and see where I work, how I get there, where I sleep, how the people I work with live. Otherwise you'll never know if I'm telling the truth (Alvarado, 1987:37).

Elvia speaks as a woman, a mother, as a peasant organizer [she is the elected CNTC financial secretary for the region of Comayagua]. "Here is a voice seldom heard, the voice of Latin Americas' majority, those who bear the burdens of society. If we are to understand Honduras, we must listen attentively to this voice. It has much to teach us. It commands the future" (E.B. Burns, in Alvarado, 1987).

2.1 Rationale

How can research skills enable people to create knowledge that will describe, explain and help change the world in which they live? "If we think of research as a form of literacy, some of the insights which have grown out of progressive literacy work become helpful in understanding research 'from the margins'", (Kirby and McKenna, 1989) generally and more specifically from the voices of the women living in the margins in Honduras.

Progressive literacy workers stress that the only valid form of literacy training is one which enables the learner to intervene in reality. Without analysis of the social context, literacy remains merely functional, enabling people to function within the status quo rather than allowing them to interact with and change society (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:16). The process and experience of research then, in itself, is of

benefit to participants even before any analysis is carried out because it is a process of conscientization.

According to Paulo Freire (1990), literacy when it includes the process of 'conscientization' facilitates a new way of learning that is not defined within the status quo. It is not easily quantified nor is it a statistic to be collected by experts with pre-conceived notions and fixed measuring tapes. There is a strong sense in which only the learners can define their literacy level. If it is a measurement at all it is a measurement of the nature of the relation between the learners and the world in which they live. Therefore only the learners can characterize that relationship and judge the effectiveness of the techniques they have for making their voices heard (Horsman, 1990). It is in this way that the daily experiences of the Honduran women as well as life stories, such as that of Elvia Alvarado, respond to fill in the methodological gaps and help make the connections to the reality of the world that poor Honduran women live in. Local knowledge or indigenous knowledge cannot easily be codified, quantified and condensed into a book on a shelf. It is the real life experiences, culminating over many years with many interrelated influences, that define knowledge and consequently who has access to it.

2.2 Methodology

Central to this thesis is a generation of fundamental knowledge of the lives of Honduran women who live in the margins of society. Appropriate education for poor women must address their perceived needs and must come from a deeper understanding of their lives and the daily realities as experienced and defined by women. In order to do this, stories and data from the women themselves must be collected. Observation of and participation with at least 35 women individually and many more in community, in the barrios of Campo Cielo, La Flor, El Manchen and the rural sites of Ocoton, San Antonio, El Rio del Rio, and Neuve Perensa form the basis of the information presented. The women represent the illiterate and literate migrants from rural to urban barrios, campesinas and coordinators of womens groups at various levels.

It is extremely difficult to walk with these women, ask them personal questions and expect them to open up their lives to a perfect stranger, one of a completely different culture. It is even under the most ideal conditions extremely difficult for women to express their emotions concerning such personal issues as family violence and family relationships. In this regard, when talking and walking and working with the women as they went about their daily routines, the spoken word was not necessarily needed to tell the story. Observation and the

sixth sense from being a woman, wife and mother myself opened the doors of knowledge about these women. My struggles with the Spanish language and the desire to efficiently communicate was similar to their struggles for literacy and the desire to learn. Openness about wanting to learn more about them and their lives was met with curiosity and genuine appreciation. It is for this reason that their stories are a critical part of this thesis. This represents only some of what they want others to know.

2.3 REALITY FOR MARGINAL WOMEN IN HONDURAS

"La solucion a lose problemas sociales ira llegando en la medida en que haya un compromiso de la comunidad, por medio del cual pa participacion sea real y efectiva en el quehacer local y nacional, lo que desembocara en la integracion necesari para fotalecer las instituciones democraticas, fundamentadas en la justicia, la libertad y la paz" (La Prensa, 1992:11)

According to the experience of the women's groups observed there is evidence to indicate that economic constraints greatly hinder the realization of literacy potential for many women. Literacy can be determined only with reference to particular needs and uses for those skills which themselves

vary and change over time and place. The stories of the women in this study identify some of these needs and skills. Chapter Four more fully explains the high maternal mortality rates, the low nutrition, and low incomes of women that are symptomatic of a society that is not allowing for the integration and creative expression of all of its members.

NORMA'S STORY

In the barrio of Campo Cielo the experience of a single mother, Norma (39 years old) provides us with a first hand example of the new status acquired as a result of becoming 'educated'. A mother of five children, the eldest being a seventeen year old mother herself, Norma struggled with night classes for five years and finally graduated with a grade four certificate. She currently has a secretarial job in Comayaguella. The respect and high regard that Norma has in her community was witnessed at a Friday evening prayer service that was held in her home. Many from the community came and shared hospitality and friendship. In conversation with the women who attended, it was evident that they were proud and at the same time envious of Norma's achievements. To go to school cost money and precious time -- both of which were scarce commodities for women in Campo Cielo.

Observation and interviews with other members of the community

indicated that Norma "was lucky that she could afford to host the activity" and that she could "read from the book". There was one woman about 28 years old, Carla, pregnant with her sixth child, who really admired Norma and her ability to read. I observed her on several occasions just watching Norma, following her every movement and hanging onto her every word, especially when she was singing the songs and reading the words from the songbook.

Following Norma's example, and with assistance from the Sisters of Notre Dame (CND)⁷ in the community, she herself began to participate in radio school classes. These classes are held every Saturday afternoon in one of the rooms at the CND house in the barrio. Carla's reasons for taking the classes include wanting to be able to read and write to help her children with their studies but also a prime motivation is to one day be able to invite neighbours into her home for a prayer service like Norma did.

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⁷ the Sisters of Notre Dame, an international religious order based in Montreal with a social justice and teaching mandate, have been working in Honduras for over 25 years. They work with the marginal communities of Tegucigalpa. Activities include church based initiatives such as youth groups, sewing classes, electrical classes, music classes, cooking classes and radio schools. Daily visits to homes and offering assistance, particularly to women, where possible are also part of the CND mandate. Of particular interest, is the establishment of many informal women's groups centred around various issues such as social justice and family planning. The interesting point to note is that these meetings are initiated and facilitated by the women themselves. They are held frequently (sometimes as often as 2-3 times per week) in the homes of volunteer women at night and last about 2 hours. Not all women attend all meetings however, and with the frequency of the meetings most get to attend at least one every two weeks. These meetings are not closed. Often the men and children attend.

ESMERELDA'S STORY

Esmerelda (34 years old) has four children aged 16,14,13, and 11 years old, although the youngest looked to be only 7 years old. She, her husband Nicolas (50 years old) and their children live in a small two room home on the edge of the fault-line in the barrio of LaFlor. This family is rare in La Flor in that Nicolas still lives with his wife and children and all of the children attend school. The school attended is second level and is located in another colonia. The cost is 9 lempiras per day just for transportation to school⁸. Samuel, the eldest, has many group projects as part of his program, and therefore requires extra travel back and forth. In order to minimize costs, he walks up the hill to the main highway to catch the city bus which is half the cost of the local fare (25L). However, the rugged condition of the road is extremely wearing on his shoes. Any money saved often goes towards new shoes.

In addition to school registration fees there are daily contributions to watch a movie in class or to pay for a new door or for paper for photocopies as textbooks are rare. The importance of an education in this family is underlined by the sacrifice and effort.

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⁸For comparison, the average income per day for a poor family in La Flor is 2-3 lempiras (Letty, CND, Campo Cielo, 1992).

Esmerelda has participated in classes at night at the local school and has achieved a grade one level. In addition to this and cleaning the house, washing the clothes, cooking the meals, she is very active in the community. She, with the help of her husband, Nicholas, began to operate a cooperative which has now expanded to include three other families. Household products such as sugar, maize and frijoles are sold at lower than mercado (market) prices. This local service, which operates from their home, is invaluable to a community where the average total household income is less than 25L per week and the distance to market necessitates spending 1L just for transportation. Costs are also measured in the time lost in travelling to market, which is usually one hour each way (provided that the buses arrive on time and are not full).

The majority of the cooperative work is done by Esmerelda as her husband leaves the house daily at 4 am to go to his job doing laundry at the hospital in Tegucigalpa. He arrives home around 2:00 in the afternoon and takes over selling items from their home. Another project that Esmerelda was instrumental in initiating was the building of a community hall where recreation programs for children, teens and adults are offered. The potential function for this hall is not yet fully realized. Opportunities for employment in the construction, maintenance and program planning benefit more than 12 residents of La Flor. The involvement of the

community including the young children in this project inspires social responsibility that translates into greater involvement in positive activities and a reduced crime rate (Luis, son of president of La Flor community association).

Esmerelda's participation and involvement in La Flor are a direct result of her awareness of the reality in La Flor and her ability to translate possible solutions into action (Esmerelda and Nicholas, 1992). The confidence and the skills that she has developed as a result of her literacy classes has enabled her to be an integral part of her community. In addition to these efforts Esmerelda takes sewing classes three times a week in Tegucigalpa and in turn teaches other women and girls in La Flor. The acquisition of literacy is empowering to the individual and to society as demonstrated by the activities of Esmerelda.

In Honduras existing formal programs do not encourage women to become empowered. Therefore literacy training for women that challenges the status quo is seen to be threatening for those currently holding onto the reigns of power. The cooperative efforts and empowerment of people like Esmerelda help to build a stronger more equitable community. Three families partnering the local cooperative are indebted to Esmerelda for initiating the cooperative project and expanding it to include them. Nicolas is extremely proud of his wife's

accomplishments and together they are providing a richer community for their children. Many women, however do not receive the support that Esmerelda has, and are prevented from attending or participating in classes or activities fearful of the repercussions once they get home. The following excerpt from Elvia's story (Alvarado, 1987:15) highlights this problem:

After I'd been living with Alberto for 15 years, I began to work with the mothers; clubs that the Catholic church was organizing. At the meetings we'd talk about our problems and try to help each other out. We also did practical things like distribute food to malnourished children, grow gardens, and to talks about food and nutrition. And we'd pray together too.

At first Alberto didn't want me going to the meetings at the church but I refused to listen. "I have every right to go out" I told him. "I'm not doing anything bad like you're doing - going out to get drunk and spending the little money we have. I'm trying to do something good". I loved going to the meetings. It became the high point of my week, because it was a chance to get together with other women and talk about the problems we had in common - like how to keep our children fed and our husbands sober. We learned that we had rights just like men did. We learned that we had to stop being so passive and start sticking up for our rights.

Alberto did not want me going to the courses. "now that you have your meetings and your courses, you're not the same woman that you used to be". I was true, I wasn't the same. Now when he came home drunk, I'd put a stink. I was more independent, too, since I had my own group of friends. And my work in the club made me feel important, it made me feel like I really had something to contribute to the community.

Every time I'd come home after being away Alberto would start fighting with me again. He would say that I wasn't really working that I was out sleeping with all the campesinos and tell me to wash before I got into bed with him.

On top of all of that there was still the drinking. If I'd call him a drunk he'd call me a communist because I

was organizing women. The worst part was that he'd come home drunk and start throwing things around and try to hit me.

WOMEN OF CAMPO CIELO

In the face of oppression, how are the poor women in margins coping with the daily struggle to survive and at the same time organizing to raise themselves out of this oppression? To what extent are the activities of women like Esmerelda, Elvia and Norma changing the reality for women in Honduras? In their struggle to redefine their space, are they becoming "empowered" by discovering the strength of their voices? Witness the situation of some women of Campo Cielo (adjacent to La Flor along same roadway).

Situated high up the hillside, life in barrios like this is not easy. Steep slopes and washed out paths make travel extremely hazardous. Environmental damage is rampant as people toss their garbage into the ravines and washed out road sides. Once the community comes together and organizes in a spirit of cooperation then garbage is burned and cleaned up as efficiently as resources allow. This is not easy when nationally only 38% of the population have access to waste disposal. This very briefly outlines the conditions in the barrio of Campo Cielo.

Campo Cielo is a relatively recent development in Comayaguela and the people have moved here within the last 5-6 years from the rural areas of Santa Barbara. Diversity, mistrust, and poverty along with little or no organization or responsible leadership are hindering any improvements in this barrio. It is difficult to mobilize under these adverse conditions. However, the women's sewing classes have produced some positive changes in that they are beginning to discuss what can be done concerning the lack of activities for the young children. A play area is now organized for the children while the young mothers attend their classes.

About 15 -20 women from Camp Cielo (population approximately 6000) meet three times a week for sewing classes in a room provided by the Sisters of Notre Dame. The classes run from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm during the least busy part of the day for the women. Olga (28 years of age), the sewing instructor, travels one hour by bus from nearby Colonia Villa Union. Because Campo Cielo is a relatively new barrio there are no literate or qualified women to teach the classes. Olga comes qualified with two years sewing experience from classes that she attended in Tegucigalpa.

During these sessions the women (age 13 years to 36 years) learn to measure, calculate size, and make their own patterns for clothing. When asked what they actually sewed, or who the

clothes were sewn for, the response was that there was no money to buy material (average cost is 8 lempiras per yard of fabric), so in fact they did not make anything. When asked why they continued to come to the classes their response was unanimous in that they enjoyed the social comradarie and the opportunity to talk with other women about issues that concerned them at home. It gave them a sense of freedom and importance that was otherwise nonexistent in their lives.

WOMEN IN EL MANCHEN

The barrio of El Manchen is in the northwest part of Comayaguela. It is a community of approximately 60,000 and consists mostly of cuartarilla's (attached one-room homes). The community has been in existence for about 25 years and is therefore relatively organized. The social responsibility and community spirit is evidenced by the gutter projects, steps, cooperatives and small mercado. Lack of water and lights continue to be the main problems.

In this community the role of the local Catholic Church is instrumental in facilitating literacy. An example of the realization of literacy potential is found in a cooking class held weekly in the basement of the Catholic church. Here the women and some men learn to read recipes, mix ingredients and

plan a nutritious meal. As part of the class they cook and eat a 'turkey' dinner. The instructor commented that this was most likely the one and only time that these people would ever have a meal like that as the types of food and the costs are beyond the means of the participants.

An electrical class held on Wednesday evenings in the same Church basement offers women and men knowledge and skills that are practical and economical. With these skills they can not only repair their own appliances (saving the expense and the inconvenience of going without) but can hire themselves out to earn a wage. Further investigation is required to more fully address the impact of literacy in each situation.

Other activities that are hosted by the Church include a music group, youth group, and women's discussion groups. These are primarily held in the evening in the homes of volunteers on a weekly basis. As in other communities these gatherings of women are open to anyone to attend and offer an informal forum for discussions.

RIO Del RIO

Venturing into the rural areas of Santa Barbara and Copan we came upon the life behind the rugged landscape hidden from

view -- not really understood, not often visited.

After travelling along a washed out dirt road in the back of an old pick up truck in the remote countryside of Santa Barbara, and hiking further as the road was no longer passable, we came to the community of Rio del Rio. This isolated farming community consisted of 11 families each with an average of four children. The head of the community was Jose who had three wives and 8 children. Sandra, his current wife and mother of three of the children, was pregnant with another child. She was 21 years old.

When we arrived, Jose and his family were busy at work making carpets of firecrackers. Even the youngest of three years was busy at work. This small economic venture was suggested by the rural advisor of CODIMCA (a women's human rights organization in Honduras). Firecrackers are made from old newspapers collected from surrounding areas and coated with gun powder imported from El Salvador. They are sold and the income supplements what is earned from the sale of the crops grown. All income in this community is shared by all of the households.

There was no school in the village, nor were any classes offered. Children assisted their mothers in the daily routines around the home while the men were all at work in the

fields. None of the people other than Jose could read or write and his level was less than grade one. Jose informed us that conditions have improved with the added income from the sale of firecrackers.

WOMEN IN COLONIA LA RAYES LUNES

This isolated colonia northeast of Tegucigalpa was founded in 1988 with aid from the International Red Cross. It consisted of 104 households. Seventy-seven of these families have joined in an association to organize activities for the community. The average age of the residents was 18 to 20 years old.

CODIMCA representatives had begun work with the women and helped to organize a sewing class which was held daily from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm in a community room. The classes consisted of sewing skills, reading, writing and sharing recipes. Each participant kept a notebook. Each participant took a turn making a snack that everyone bought for a small price. The proceeds earned went towards group activities.

During one of these classes it was suggested that the women take time to discuss some of the problems that they were each dealing with. This lead to an extension and organization of

the existing program. At the organizational meeting there were 12 women present (aged 13 years to 25 years) and approximately 15 children (they wandered in and out at random). A president, secretary, treasurer and coordinator were elected by the women. It was agreed that in unity and solidarity they could achieve greater peace and better relationships with their spouses.

One of the most pressing concerns faced by the women of this community is domestic violence. From the women's discussions it was identified that most violence occurs at night between 8 and 9:00 pm. They also pointed out that this was a result of the use of alcohol and drugs. Because there were no consequences to them, the men continued to be abusive. Women clearly stated that they wanted to have sex with their husbands but they did not want the violence that went with it.

From these meetings the women shared their stories and came to realize that they were not alone in their pain. Not only were they learning to read, write, sew and cook they were realizing greater peace in their homes. From the numbers identified it is evident that the majority of women in the community were not present at this meeting. Some were shopping but most were not allowed to attend because their husbands forbade it. Unfortunately the realities for these women have not changed.

2.4 CNTC in the field

One of the main characteristics of literacy is that it is not just an individual process but a collective one. Learning happens socially, not separate from everyday life but through daily work, involvement in organization, in family life and in all kinds of cultural activities (Baetz cited in Barndt, 1991:15). CNTC promotion and organization of the ideas of the base groups set in the process of dialogue with horizontal relationships has been central to the development and expansion of women's programmes which the campesinas feel to be their very own. This does not come easily in Honduras and the CNTC has many hurdles before many women will be able to fully realize their potential. Observation of field work in practice suggests that the CNTC extension workers are well respected and liked within the communities where they work. The field team that I accompanied to Grupo #2 Nueva Perensa, a rural community in Cortes, consisted of Francisco (CNTC extension worker), Aida (CUSO expert: accounting, credit), and two elected CNTC technical representatives from the local area (Gaspar and Arrida). The response by the men of the community was encouraging as were the results of their work. A rancho had been constructed specifically as a meeting place and this is where the men held their monthly meetings with the CNTC extension workers. Aida taught a one hour class going over

the books that they kept of their crops, harvests, seeds, materials purchased and so on. All transactions were recorded. All attending the meeting participated in the analysis of procedures and results.

The discussion lasted for about two hours ending on a positive note and with directions for future projects. Meetings for the women were much less formal, however, attendance is taken at all meetings. The women's group was not as enthusiastic. Arriving late to the meeting, with babies and young children in tow, about 12 women (age 13 years to 35 years) were hesitant to commit to any project work. Most of the women were in their teens and early twenties and the influence of Lena, the eldest and hostess of the meeting, was evident. In contrast to the rancho where the men held their meetings, the women gathered outside the home of Lena. It was not secluded and quiet allowing for easy discussion but central to the community and adjacent to the road and path way to other homes.

Items of discussion included household management such as cooking, food, water and sanitation. Efforts were made by Arida to discuss the possibility of growing crops such as beans, pepinas, tomatoes to supplement their domestic needs and also to sell the surplus at market using the profits to buy other items for the home. Even though there was initial

reluctance, a decision was made to go ahead with the project with the CNTC providing the technical assistance.

Lena's hesitation and resistance to the project ideas, suggested by the CNTC field worker and the other women, appeared to stem from fatigue and overwork. After having eight children of her own, and helping to raise four grandchildren all in one household, Lena appeared older than her 35 years. Domestic duties and responsibilities and managing scarce resources have left her, for the most part, tired, listless and frustrated. Nevertheless, in private conversation with her after the meeting dispersed, she appeared more open and receptive. She expressed frustration that there was no school near enough for the children to attend. It was her concern that her children become involved with the project that finally altered her attitude and stimulated her to want to participate. According to CNTC field workers, Lena is characteristic of many campesinas in their inability to relate in large groups and their reluctance to get involved particularly if it is perceived to mean a greater work load.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The stories of the women highlight the social constraints, economic burden, and the organizational hurdles that must be overcome if poor women are to become empowered by literacy training. Even if they do become literate, empowerment requires that women need to get organized in order to reap benefits of a collective voice in their community. In a society where women are excluded by men and by economic institutions, good programs and organization such as is in the CNTC can help women find a voice and the strength to rise out of 'silence'. Literacy training alone cannot effect this change. Promotion of the individual and group development through organization and programs for equal integration of women in their communities, with an agenda that addresses their needs (the recovery of their dignity, identity and justice), is a necessary factor if the potential that literacy holds for empowering poor women is to be realized. This does not come easily as identified by problems encountered by CNTC field workers (Programa, 1992):

1. High dependency and marginalization of women.
2. Problems of financing the women's programs.
3. The high cost of living which has increased by 200%.
4. Economic limitations and mobilization of the representatives and monitors.
5. Lack of appropriate methods that motivate women to participate.
6. Lack of a room where women can meet.
7. Lack of development and conscious organization of the community farm women.

8. Lack of clarity in the different requests for the importance of working with women.
9. The disintegration in some communities of women's groups.
10. Time constraints due to the burden of domestic chores and the responsibility of large numbers of young children.

Literacy needs the participants to become empowered and empowerment requires that literacy be achieved. This vicious cycle can be altered to effect positive change for women. Chapter Three will examine the organizational component in this cycle and demonstrate that at the national level the CNTC is finding some success in addressing the literacy issue for women. However, the overall constraints of their poverty, particularly campesina women, is an obstacle that is tied up in the political and economic perspectives of the Honduran system.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERACY and PEASANT ORGANIZATION: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CNTC

3.0 Introduction

Is literacy training empowering poor women in Honduras? Problems facing women's groups identified by the CNTC field workers in Chapter Two suggest that literacy is not sufficient for poor women to become empowered. Reflection of the theoretical dimension of literacy and empowerment for women suggests that efficacy goes beyond the stories of the individual and is embedded in the broader ideological perspectives of Honduras. This chapter will examine the struggle of the CNTC to organize and deliver its literacy programs. The focus of the chapter is the achievement of collective organization and process that facilitate participation for poor women through the vehicle of good literacy programs. How is literacy made available to women in groups and individually? To what extent are these literacy skills providing opportunities for them to participate in their communities with dignity, justice and peace?

The chapter is divided into three parts. Part One will

outline briefly the land reform struggle in order to put into context the evolution and development of the CNTC within the political-economic framework of Honduras. The second part will examine the CNTC itself: its goals and methodologies. Included here will be an account of how widespread the literacy program is and the degree to which this program incorporates women. Part three will speculate on future prospects for the CNTC and its agenda of literacy and empowerment given the current economic constraints in Honduras.

3.1 Rationale

Understanding the historical connections between the Honduran economy, its class structure, and land recovery⁹ is essential to understanding how CNTC formulated their approach and set their goals. The contemporary situation results from Honduras' long experience as a divided nation controlled by foreign interests, whose hegemony is challenged increasingly by a variety of popular forces (Weiss, 1988:47).

Participation requires a critical understanding of the country's revolutionary transition; in turn critical

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⁹Land recovery is the process whereby campesinos are occupying land that is owned by large land owners (predominantly foreign owned). In Honduras this is usually United Fruit Co. or Standard Fruit Co.

understanding is itself generated by participation, and deepened by the practice of reflecting on action (Freire, 1990a:28). Critical and creative participation by the people in the process of reinventing their society occurs at many different levels and with many obstacles as witnessed by the land struggle of the campesinos in the Honduran countryside. "Literacy and the reclamation of land are inseparable. Neither would really be effective without the other" (Carlos, a CNTC cooperative member: in Archer and Costello, 1990:72).

The intention is to illustrate some of the political and socio-economic issues and problems facing campesinos in their struggle for agrarian reform and to show that despite these obstacles, empowerment for poor women has the potential to be realized. Because literacy and land reform are seen to be inseparable, it is suggested that the impediments to achieving one also impede the achievement of the other. The strength of the CNTC lies in the recognition of this fact.

The goals, practices and outcomes of agrarian reform respond to the economic rationale for policy formation resulting from the human capital and the basic needs approaches. However, CNTC respect for and responsiveness to the ideas of the base groups has been central to the development of effective materials and the creation of a programme which the campesinos

feel to be their very own¹⁰ .

It must be pointed out that there are numerous women's organizations in Honduras. However, CNTC is unique in that it incorporates men and women together in a common struggle. Women do not want a separate participation but an integrated effort in bringing about positive change in their community. This social conscientization has been identified in the previous chapter by the women themselves. This is the reason that CNTC is being studied rather than other women's organizations¹¹.

3.2 BRIEF HISTORY: CAMPESENO ORGANIZATION and STRUGGLE

(i) Popular Militancy

Popular militancy in Honduras is rooted in the labour unions and campesino movements as signalled by the Banana Strike of

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¹⁰ For further evidence of the dominant perspective and the degree of permeation see Mario Ponce, 1986, Honduras: Agricultural Policy and Perspectives; Ubodoro Arriaga, 1986, Recent Evolution of Honduran Agrarian Policy in M. Rosenberg and P. Shepherd (eds) 1986, Honduras Confronts Its Future, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publ.Inc.

¹¹ See appendix for description of three specific women's groups at work in Honduras.

1954 which mobilized 50,000 workers against the fruit companies. Workers turned peasants, in August 1962, founded the first campesino union with 15,000 members (Central Community of Peasant Unity: FENACH) primarily to mobilize peasants seeking redress against land grabs by the United Fruit Company (Acker, 1988:90). The struggle to control mass organizations extended to the countryside given that one month later, the government of President Ramon Villeda formed the National Association of Honduran Campesinos (ANACH)¹². As a pro-US anticommunist association it came under the tutelage of ORIT-AFL¹³. The more militant FENACH leaders were isolated: some left the group, others joined ANACH to work from within against its policies of neutralizing the militancy of the rural workers.

(ii) Origin of peasant groups

Origins of other major peasant groups are quite different. Concentrated in the southern part of the country, Valle and Choluteca, representing the lowest of human, economic and production development (UNICEF, 1991), peasant communities

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¹² Initially membership in ANACH was 5,000 but deserters from FENACH added another 8,000. ANACH, with institutional material and support from the government and ORIT soon became the largest campesino union, with its greatest support on the northern coast. It is the most pro-US of the campesino unions (Alvarado, 1987:159).

¹³ ORIT is the Interamerican Regional Organization of Workers. AIFLD is the American Institute for Free Labour Development (Alvarado, 1987:159). Divide and conquer tactics were employed by these US affiliated leaders who controlled the ANACH vis a vis financial assistance and advisors (Kincaid, 1985:137).

organized to form ACASCH (The Social-Christian Peasant Association of Honduras). ACASCH was a direct product of the pastoral work of the Catholic Church, which during the 1950s had established a series of community development programmes, such as radio schools, consumer cooperatives, women's and youth clubs and local public work projects, many of which were taken over by the Christian Democrats. From 1965 onwards, ACASCH turned its attention to recovering lost land and demanding more access to land, a change in orientation which brought it into increasing conflict with local farmers (Acker, 1988:96).

Spurred by the expansion of ANACH into the south, peasant organizations including ASASCH, joined to become the UNC (National Union of Peasants) which offered a powerful alternative to ANACH. The UNC was the most progressive of the rural organizations in Honduras spearheading land recoveries, marches and hunger strikes. Competition from UNC combined with pressure from base groups forced ANACH into more aggressive land reform, despite the conservative orientation of its leaders (Kincaid, 1985:139).

The real engine behind agrarian reform has been the peasant organizations¹⁴. As quoted by one peasant union leader "The

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¹⁴ Other motivations behind agrarian reform are identified with US fear of communism after the Cuban Revolution with President Kennedy pushing for social and agrarian reform as an alternative to revolution (Acker, 1988:91).

government gives away nothing. In Honduras, we are the agrarian reform" (Kincaid, 1985:138). The price paid, however, for seeking redistributive justice includes disappearances, detentions, and murder (Alvarado, 1987).

(iii) Efficacy of Land Reform -Empowerment and Resistance

Pressure for land continues to intensify. Continuing US demands for sugar and beef encourage the large landowners to expand their operations. In combination with this demand are the rising population growth rates in Honduras and increased numbers of refugees. For example in 1969, Salvadoreans refugees represented about 20% of the Honduran population. (Acker, 1988; Lapper, 1986; Kincaid, 1985). Tenancy and share cropping rights are revoked, peasants are driven off their own or public land to make way for the increase in land given over to pasture. But the peasant unions are gaining strength and increasing their resistance as verified by this testimony of Marcial Caballero (UNC leader:1985)

What they didn't understand is that their efforts only made us more determined. We took over the land again, but this time we held onto it. And I went to work for the UNC, so I could help other poor people fight for their rights (in Lapper, 1986:59).

The militancy of the UNC and its predecessors reflects

campesino dissatisfaction with the agrarian reform process. Although severely limited in their achievements the reforms of 1962, 1972, and 1975 allowed the Honduran governments to offset some of the peasants' demands and prevent a major social explosion (Lapper, 1986:48). This is one of the primary distinctions between Honduras and its neighbours. The ability of the Honduran governments to absorb some of the peasant unrest at the same time as avoiding antagonizing the landed oligarchy is due to the large tracts of public or ejido land¹⁵.

In compliance with US tied aid conditionality, the Morales government (1957-1963) created the National Agrarian Institute (INA) charged with drafting and implementing agrarian reform. It called for the expropriation, with full compensation, of all farmland not fulfilling its 'social function'. But it did not set a maximum amount of land that could be owned. Opposition from the landowners resulted in the amendment making it almost impossible to expropriate privately owned land (Kincaid, 1985:138).

Ineffectiveness of agrarian reform in its early stages is

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¹⁵ As late as 1952 only 48% of the national territory was held as private property, while 52% was either nationally-owned or ejido land. This meant that the governments could distribute state-owned land and not have to look to privately-owned land. By 1980, of the 200,000 hectares distributed to peasants only one-fifth was privately owned, that had been expropriated or bought, whereas 81% was national land (Lapper, 1986:49).

reflected in INA statistics. Between 1962-66, only 453 families (of 12 peasant groups) received on the average 2.3 hectares of cultivable ejido land (Acker, 1988:92), while the colonization projects were collapsing due to lack of technical assistance and credit (Lapper, 1986:56). However, a change in the content of the reform program under the reform-minded military president, Oswaldo Lopez Arellano, restructured INA.

Under Sandoval (a Chilean agronomist) rather than promote individual plots, service cooperatives were encouraged and began to prosper¹⁶. In exchange for technical and financial assistance the cooperatives began to produce export crops, while the multinationals maintained control over marketing and distribution. Fruit companies, who were able to transfer costs and risks of production onto small peasant cooperatives, also benefitted (Lapper, 1986:49). Land security was not guaranteed however, as the process of land recovery was time-consuming, technical and often co-opted. With the majority (55%) of campesinos being illiterate (Ponce, 1986:133), the few who could manage the paperwork were easily bribed resulting in few claims.

Trouble stemmed not just from the slow process but the lack of technical support, credit and market access for new peasants

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¹⁶ The Guanchias cooperative provided the model for this program. It was formed in 1965 by ex-banana workers on lands turned over to INA by United Fruit. Its success subsequently led to cooperative training and assistance being the cornerstone of the agrarian reform program (Kincaid, 1985:139).

(Acker, 1988). The Agrarian Reform Law is supposed to be an integral law, meaning that "when the campesino gets land, they are also supposed to get credit and technical assistance. It's supposed to be the whole package". However, in practice there is always something missing. As Elvia Alvarado points out "if you get the land, you don't get the technical assistance. And if you get the technical assistance then you don't get the credit. What good is the land without money to make it produce?" (Alvarado, 1987:77). Not only is there the struggle for credit and technical assistance but the continuing struggle for water, schools, clinics and other services as well as the perpetual battle with the landowners (Alvarado, 1987:78).

By 1974 independent cooperatives came under direct attack by conservatives and the military. Honduran cattlemen with the aid of the Honduran military, forced a number of these coops to disband through harassment and murder as evidenced by the destruction of Isletas¹⁷. Despite these setbacks, many small rural organizations evolved into fairly democratic entities with the assistance of progressive elements within the

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¹⁷ Isletas cooperative had been set up with 900 associates on land from Standard Fruit. Supported by INA and later by the Honduran Banana Corporation, Isletas was very successful. The decision to sell its bananas through the Union of Banana Exporting Countries rather than through Standard Fruit resulted in Standard arranging to elect a new assembly at the same time as calling in the military (Lt. Col. Alvarez, was on Standard's payroll). With the board members imprisoned, the new management "milked" the cooperative dry forcing it to cease operation in 1981 (Acker, 1988:94). This incident is reflective of the degree of military collusion in the process of agrarian reform.

National Agrarian Institute (INA) and the 1975 agrarian Reform Law which limited the maximum size of individual landholdings to 350 hectares and gave campesinos the right to claim unused lands¹¹.

Suazo's presidential campaign in 1981 called for a revitalized agrarian reform and on the surface the pace of reform quickened. INA with its US-funded titling program was harshly criticized by campesino leaders as ineffectual and noncommittal (Kincaid, 1985:144) particularly in light of the macro-economic emphasis and US-supported military buildup (Lapper, 1986). The land titling practice made it easier to control and dominate the campesino groups as it depoliticized the peasantry (Shepherd, 1985:161).

These reforms looked better on the books than they did in practice (Alvarado, 1987). For example, the 1975 land reform aimed at distributing 600,000 hectares to 120,000 campesino families within five years. A 1980 study found that at that rate the land was actually being distributed, it would take 103 years (Benjamin, 1987:xvii). In 1982, only 40,334 acres had been distributed compared to the 289,000 acres at the

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¹¹ Decree No.8, was the interim measure, introduced to stabilize the countryside until the new reform law could be passed. It gave peasants the temporary right to occupy national and communal lands owned by INA, as well as the right to claim unused private lands. During December 1972-January 1975 over 21,000 families organized in 608 peasant groups obtained access to nearly 94,000 hectares (four times more than the ten years before) (Kincaid, 1985:140).

height of the reform in 1975 (Peckenham and Street, 1985:161).

The fact that Honduras has so far avoided violent, social upheavals as characterized by its neighbours, is often attributed to, among others, its agrarian reform. Government policies to redistribute and colonize unused farmland (private or ejido) has altered rural society since the 1950s (Kincaid, 1985:135). "By the end of 1982, about 55,000 peasant families had been granted legal occupation of some 245,000 hectares under a variety of reform measures", representing only about 10% of the population, 85% of whom live off the land, and only about 9% of the total farmland (Kincaid, 1985:135).

Selective repression and a combination of bribery and intimidation was used instead of massive police or military actions against the rank and file. However as left-wing popular movements gained considerable strength the result has been an increased intensity and specificity of violence, targeting of their leaders by death squads and right-wing groups (Alvarado, 1987; Acker, 1988; Peckenham and Street, 1985).

(iv) Recognizing the need for and the power of Literacy

More threatening however, was the language of the new antiterrorist legislation (Decree No. 33) and penal code reforms (5-25 year sentences) which converted peasant land

invasions into terrorist acts. This virtually legalized the repression of peasant organizations. Hardest hit by this practice was the UNC, which saw 334 of its members jailed at one time or another over a fifteen month (Honduran Update, 1985). Several of the local leaders went into hiding after receiving death threats leaving the level of tension in the countryside extremely high (Kincaid, 1985:144).

During the height of the repression, 1982-84, which peaked with US militarization in Honduras, peasant reactions were constrained not only by repression but by the continuing dissention among the various organizations. Ideology and corruption combined with partisan politics resulted in at least fifteen splinter groups, none of which had a national presence (Peckenham and Street, 1985). Resistance organized by the campesinos thus far has been effective only to a degree in effecting change. It was apparent that the traditional representation of the people was not enough to combat government inertia, repression and manipulation (external and internal). What was required was collective cooperation at a national level that would be able to fight, not only physically, but with the power of words. Organizing around the strength of literacy, autonomous from the government, CNTC was formed in 1985. It is the belief of the CNTC that through the literacy process values of solidarity instead of individualism with work based on mutual help, creativity and

social responsibility will be developed".

3.3 PEASANT RESISTANCE: COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT: CNTC

(i) Characteristics of CNTC

Pressure for land reform increased with the formation in 1985 of a new, independent peasant organization, the National Congress of Rural Workers (CNTC)¹¹. CNTC is the most progressive and the most cohesive of the popular groups, claiming 614 groups in 14 of 18 country departments and a membership of over 24,000 (Archer and Costello, 1990:159). By 1987 CNTC claimed 24,000 members and was spearheading the land invasions (Alvarado, 1987). The 1975 Agrarian Reform Law is still in effect today and given that these reforms were the official law of the land the relationship between the government and the campesinos is drastically altered. "Rather than fighting to overthrow the government, as was happening in

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¹¹For a list of the goals and objectives of the CNTC consult Appendix A.

¹² The four campesino organizations are ANACH, FECORAH, UNC, CNTC. FECORAH- Federacion de Cooperativos de la Reforma Agraria- was created by the government in 1970 with groups that broke away from ANACH. UNC- Union Nacional de Campesinos-(1969) is the second largest union, and was the first campesino group to organize land recoveries on a national scale. Since receiving official government recognition in 1984 it has been shifting towards the right. As a result some campesinos, particularly women, switched to CNTC. (Alvarado, 1987). Of the four major peasant organizations it does not have government funding. It does receive some assistance externally from groups like Oxfam Canada and CIDA-CUSO [Prodeagro Project], it is primarily self-sufficient (Wright, 1992).

neighbouring countries, the poor of Honduras were fighting to force their government to uphold its own laws. They had a stake in the system; their struggle was to make that system work in their favour" (Benjamin, 1987:xvii). This is evident in this statement by Elvia Alvarado:

There are still a lot of people in Honduras who, like me, are determined to make changes through peaceful means. We know we have to first organize among ourselves, the workers and campesinos, and then try to make changes at the national level. I suppose that's why the government tries so hard to divide us. They know that once we have an organized people, an educated people, than we can start thinking about political parties and how to get a government in power that cares about the poor (Alvarado, 1987:137)

An experimental literacy program was initiated in the province of Cortes and has been expanding ever since. In 1986, 1987 CNTC worked with 25 groups which grew to over 260 groups with over 3000 participants and 400 qualified monitors by 1988 (CNTC report, 1991). Another importance aspect that justifies this program of literacy is that is it not only growing quantitatively but also qualitatively in the education programs based on the true reality of the peasant. It is necessary to point out that the CNTC believes that the state in fact, does not have a real capacity to attend to the educative demands of the peasant sector of the population while the CNTC four-phase program does have this potential.

(ii) Literacy Program Structure

CNTC recognized from the beginning that the major obstacle to the empowerment of its local groups was that fact that 75% of its members were illiterate, making it difficult for them to participate in union business (Wright, 1992; Archer and Costello, 1990:64). Strategies employed by other campesino groups had proved to be unsustainable given the Honduran political and economic environment. What was lacking in these groups was the collective conscientization translating into action from the inside out, from the bottom, rather than from an inspired bureaucracy. What was needed was a popular organization with practical goals and dynamic structures that appealed to the practical people of Honduras (Acker, 1988:100). Luciano Barreiro ²¹ was appointed to co-ordinate the planning of a suitable literacy programme. Based on the model of radio school networks, first set up by the Honduran Catholic church in 1961, CNTC used the literacy programme to strengthen the local groups as well as to generate new local, regional and national leaders.

The program begins with level one literacy, advances to a post literacy level two and then proceeds to a third level which

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²¹ Luciano himself remained illiterate until 1972 when he joined a campesino group that joined the radio school literacy programme. As elected Secretary General of the CNTC he was able to ensure that literacy was made the central plank of CNTC work (Archer and Costello, 1990:65).

belongs to the Popular Basic Education for Peasant People. In the 1992 report CNTC states that they are satisfied with the results thus far in that participants have not only achieved skills in reading, writing, and simple mathematics but also have acquired skills in how to know and analyze the reality about their communities and country. More importantly participants are beginning to "take action in order to change that reality" (CNTC, 1992). Building from the base upwards rather than being leader-centred CNTC organized around eradicating all forms of unjust land ownership, getting land, credit and technical assistance for campesinos Rather than struggle with existing land reform law²², the laws themselves were to be challenged.

A national technical team was set up to develop a literacy programme with corresponding ideals to CNTC. Although the union itself is dominated by men (of 14 national coordinating members only one is a woman), the four coordinators of the technical team are all women. Doris Hernandez, head of the technical team addresses this situation in her statement:

We face a paradox. At times it seems we must start by educating the men so that the women are allowed more space, and yet we are adamant that it should not be up to the men to decide whether the women participate (in Archer and Costello, 1990:74)

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²²Campesinos were largely illiterate with no chance of coping with large quantity of paperwork involved in land reclamation. The few who were literate could be easily bribed and coopted.

(iii) Literacy Materials developed by CNTC

Relevant materials which keep up with the learners' interest are essential. CNTC has consequently produced high quality educational materials for four levels in general, three levels in mathematics and two manuals for monitors. "Nuestra Realidad Campesina" was produced in 1988 in response to critical reflections by the campesinos participating in a workshop by the monitors del Programa de Alfabetizacion de la CNTC. The content of this book is directed specifically to the situation of women.

"We Struggle for Our Health" was produced for the second level and focuses on health issues precisely adapted to the Honduran Campesino reality (with particular emphasis on women's situation). It deals with everything from the prevention of diarrhoea to the personal diagnosis of breast cancer, and details how to obtain, prepare and take both traditional and modern remedies (Luchemos por Nuestra Salud, 1987:119). "Organized and United We Strengthen the CNTC" provides a history of the campesino movement, CNTC, statutes and a general guide to building and running an organization from the grass-roots upwards. Level three has two further books: "Our Campesino Reality" which studies and compares different regions of the country from the viewpoint of the campesinos who live there. It builds from the geography to an analysis

of the socio-economic problems that campesinos face and the solutions that they have found. "The Rural Adviser" analyses the agricultural situation of Honduras and details methodologies and techniques. In order to compliment "Nuestra Realidad Campesina" for the fourth level, "Despertar Campesino: Libro de Realidad Nacional" was produced. This book explores the history, exploitation and dependency, environmental degradation, public versus private land ownership, and the agrarian politics that shape the country (Despertar Campesino, 1990).

Aware of the difficulties faced by women who do participate, the technical team was "cautious about producing materials just for women or about encouraging women-only classes, wanting to avoid accusations of separatism which might antagonize relations with men". This could potentially further marginalize the women who do get involved (Archer and Costello, 1990:74). There are still many women who do not want to get involved (Lloyd, 1991:35). But when they are organized and especially when they become literate (conscientization occurs) they acquire a reputation for speaking out as demonstrated by the case of Elvia Alvarado.

(iv) Integration of Women in CNTC -- Literacy Programs

A major objective within CNTC is to organize women first and out of that organization projects will emerge. Elvia (1987: 37) as an active CNTC member, states that "our organizing principles are very clear: they say women must be integrated into the agrarian reform process. So no matter how difficult, all union leaders -both men and women- must work to organize women".

Rather than producing pre-packaged materials, as was done in Nicaragua or Cuba (Molyneux, 1989; MacDonald, 1985) extensive investigations with campesino base groups decided which themes to include in the primer. Powerful photographs and generative words such as family, women, work, school, campesino, meeting... prompted discussion, reflection and exchange of ideas. These images are good examples of the codification that Freire refers to. They embody problems or contradictions of campesino reality, which requires analysis and reflection to de-code.

This transition from words to reality is witnessed by the activity in San Antonio de Jura. Many of the people from San Antonio de Jura were not members of the cooperative, but joined the CNTC literacy programme. Support for the programme expanded beyond the village, so that another cooperative was

formed in Buena Vista (one hour's walk away). In the literacy classes the discussions and generative words focused on the theme of land as many of the members were landless and had spent up to five years in negotiations with the INA trying to get to rights to 150 manzanas (about 66 hectares)²³. "As history taught them the land had only ever been secured as a result of direct actions, discussions in the literacy classes became increasingly explicit" (Archer and Costello, 1990:71).

The codification achieves a level of discussion of issues facing campesinos in their daily struggles by maintaining a necessary distance between the campesinos and their actions.

It is easier to generate discussion and openness about a photograph rather than personal situations. People are reluctant and guarded when discussing their personal situations. Herein lies the contradiction for many women as men may openly discuss women's roles and their exploitation in class but are reluctant to address these same issues in daily practice.

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²³ "The land had originally been abandoned by Salvadoreans following the Football War in 1969. One of the lakeside landowners (who already had 750 manzanas) claimed the land, having no intention of working it himself, but rather hiring it out to local campesinos. The land was left idle, as no campesino could afford the rent. The polite and formal requests to be allowed to take over the land and farm it for themselves was making little impact on the INA" (Archer and Costello, 1990:71).

(v) Problems of Becoming Equal Partners

Reflecting on her personal experience Doris Mejia notes:

My husband does not understand my struggle; he is very macho. He says that when a women gets involved in struggles like the labour movement she abandons her husband, her home, her children and a whole number of other things.

He is the type of man that doesn't let his wife get involved in things. He understands that the struggle is important, but doesn't agree that I should be part of it. This is the tremendous barrier that prevents so many women from getting involved in struggles...In this country, when a woman joins the struggle, she does it at whatever cost (Peckenham and Street, 1985:234).

Men who are now CNTC third level learners still refuse to let their wives or daughters join, "entrenched in their beliefs about roles or fear of wives doing better" (CODIMCA, 1992; Archer and Costello, 1990:74). Deprived of education the women have little chance to become involved in community affairs. It is difficult for women to get credit because not only do they have to be wives of men who own legal title to the land, they also have to be able to read and write (Alvarado, 1987:78). The struggle goes beyond the land because once land is acquired, there is still the struggle for water, schools, clinics..etc. which is often left for women to organize. Although cooperative and local councils tend to be dominated by males, the women who have participated in the literacy programs have started to challenge their roles "some

be treated as objects any longer" (Archer and Costello, 1990:74). This action reflects tangible outcomes that can result from literacy training of poor women who want to be empowered.

Only one women's-only group has been set up to date (in Comayagua). With 60 women enrolled it is the largest local in the country, demonstrating that women can generate momentum and challenge machismo effectively, thus enabling them to participate. According to Alvarado (1987:86) although not many are organizers, about half of the total CNTC membership is women.

(vi) Possible Solutions to Integrating Women

CNTC respect for and responsiveness to the ideas of the base groups set in the Freirian methodology of dialogue with horizontal relationships, has been central to the development of effective materials and the creation of a programme which the campesinos feel to be their very own. Herein lies the window of strength for women's empowerment at all levels. There are still many obstacles before women's liberation is fully realized. However, the CNTC provides the opportunity for campesina women to identify their agenda in the knowledge that the world no longer has to be an imposed static reality.

Since 1988 the CNTC has introduced a special program aimed at the consolidation and strengthening of existing women's agrarian groups. Programa de Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer Campesina CNTC 1990 ²⁴ outlines the specific objectives of the CNTC women's programme including organizing additional women's groups, training more women community leaders, follow-up and evaluation of existing programs and new programs. CNTC continues to challenge laws and reforms which further marginalize women in rural sectors. For details of implementation consult Appendix A.

3.4 FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR CNTC

INA, as in the past, retarded the reform process at every step, seeking to play off the unions against each other. However, the cohesive strength of the CNTC based in conscientization began to take root. Collective action of land seizure was organized en masse. Having followed all of the INA procedures, claims were made, fences erected and symbolic crops planted. Simultaneously, regional and national offices of the INA were occupied by 20,000 campesinos demanding land (Alvarado, 1987:91). Demands were made to

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²⁴ Central American Programme Document 1991-92 reports that an allocation of \$30,000 by Oxfam Canada was given in support of this program.

remove the INA director, release political prisoners, and revise the systems of credit for campesinos. Confusion was the order of the day. Traditional divide and rule tactics by the government did not work as all organizations held together (except the now right-wing UNC). With international publicity and US cries for democracy, the government called for a commission to investigate the claims (Archer and Costello, 1990:72).

In Buena Vista, members took their chance and occupied their claim apart of the national protest. Literacy classes became a key forum for discussing policy and developing skills necessary to develop the land. However, final results were not favourable. After arrests, threats and five murders, the campesinos were forcibly removed from the land. Consequently, some literacy classes were abandoned. Since this time, "CNTC has come under increasing pressure, with the literacy programs a particular target", especially those near the US army bases (Archer and Costello, 1990:73). CNTC success is evident in the very nature of the threat that it poses to the status quo which is aimed at disintegrating the collective conscientization of poor campesinos that occurs through the literacy process.

Response to threats against its literacy workers has been for CNTC to go public and to seek official recognition for its

work. "In 1988, it initiated a network of all non-governmental groups who work on literacy in Honduras" (Archer and Costello, 1990). It then applied to the Ministry of Education who agreed to issue identification cards which offer some degree of protection against accusations of subversion. The strength of the CNTC lies in its collective support and commitment to the struggle of the workers: both men and women.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Critical and creative participation by the people in the process of reinventing their society occurs in many diverse sectors and at many different levels. However the obstacles to literacy training and empowerment for campesinas as illustrated in Figure 2 (p.126) continue to plague the CNTC, particularly in view of the dominant ideology that continues to shape Honduran policy. Change is possible and is happening, as witnessed by this CNTC participant:

In the past we always thought that education came from outside, brought by other people. When we started with the CNTC, I didn't think it was real education, because it was about things I already know about. But now I can see my own life in a different way and I can do things with my life that I never thought were possible (Archer and Costello, 1990:75).

Literacy, defined as a critical tool for empowerment, is the

first step in the process of social change that leads to empowerment. Women's liberation cannot be separated from the liberation of society and there can be no liberation for a social group constituting only half of humankind. CNTC is taking as a starting point the interrelationship between literacy and society, working in the field in which the basic principle of education is no longer a 'deposit' of knowledge (the so-called banking system), but the real life situation of the participants (men and women). The link that is being developed between the contents of what and who is being taught (by whom) and the concrete (social, economic and political) situation in society, is the process of conscientization at work within the CNTC. Literacy is being achieved and to some degree empowerment is realized as suggested by the comments of the CNTC members (CNTC, 1992). "Indeed, the key to success is simply to continue doing it" (Archer and Costello, 1990:67).

The position taken by the CNTC starts from the empowerment of the learners in which literacy is seen as their ability to express their own needs and desires using whatever techniques are most relevant. The development of critical consciousness (conscientization) can thus harness techniques in order to be able to actualize itself. Practically this has a number of implications (Archer and Costello, 1990). First, it means that in different concrete circumstances, the techniques most relevant to empowerment will be different. The songs and

stories, and the reading and writing of television, video and radio, can be more relevant than the alphabet in societies where communication is less dependent on the written word. Second, and most critical for Honduras, it leaves literacy teaching secure from the charge of ideological manipulation, since it is the learners themselves who set the political agenda for dialogue based on their own experience rather than on any theoretical ideological position. Institutions and structures of most governments represent the dominant ideology and do not allow for significant conscientization. As soon as awareness and organization become effective in empowering people then co-optation and repression is most likely. Third, and perhaps more important, if literacy is to enable learners to express their needs effectively, it must in practice be linked to organizational structures that will give those demands a collective voice. CNTC, by the very nature of its structure and operation (which are unique to Honduran popular movements though its purpose may be similar) provides campesinos the opportunity to turn hopes into reality.

There is definitely a need for more detailed investigations to be situated in the experiences and histories of the people of Honduras living in the margins. Of the campesino groups, the CNTC is the only one really pushing to challenge the laws and implement agrarian reform (Alvarado, 1987:86). This challenge stems from knowledge. Knowledge as the capacity of

understanding the world in order to change it does not come from things on the surface but rather understanding what is beneath the surface. One of the main characteristics of the CNTC and its literacy program is that it is not just an individual process but a collective one. As illustrated by the words of Elvia in her story, "I know the campesinos will continue the struggle, others will follow in my path. This makes me stronger than they are" (Alvarado, 1987:138).

However strong, economic reality looms over future prospects for the CNTC as international agencies reduce and withdraw their financial assistance. Without this support CNTC organizers ponder how long they can sustain their programs in the current political climate of Honduras. It is this barrier of economic reality that limits the potential empowerment that the CNTC literacy programs offer. A more detailed investigation of the economic reality in Honduras will be made in Chapter Four to better understand the limited nature of literacy in effecting positive change in the lives of poor women in Honduras.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

CHAPTER FOUR

ECONOMIC OBSTACLES TO LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will examine the socio-economic conditioning factors (recession and adjustment policies) that condition the living conditions of poor women in Honduras. It is suggested here that the impact of these factors increases women's participation in the informal sectors, reduces real incomes, causes a worsening in diet, an increase in the incidence of illness and malnutrition, family tensions and violence, family breakdown and abandonment, and reduces access to health service, sanitation, education and other social services. As well, the growing burden of domestic tasks, physical and psychological exhaustion results in a failure to adapt, insecurity and a lack of identity for women in their various roles (as daughters, wives, mothers, housewives, heads of households, workers, providers of services). How can women living in poverty and poor health hope to be empowered to change their lives? As suggested in Chapter Three the CNTC literacy programs are a window of opportunity for poor women to effect change. However, as outlined in Chapter One (theoretical reflection) and illustrated in Figure 2 (p.140), economic factors are embedded in the overall ideological

framework and stand as an obstacle both to women's empowerment regardless of literacy training and to literacy training regardless of empowerment. Individual as well as collective empowerment is conditioned by the economic reality and acts as a barrier to literacy programs.

The stories in Chapter Two and the efforts of the CNTC in Chapter Three suggest that literacy has tremendous potential to empower women especially when women organize collectively. However even if they are successful in acquiring literacy training the constraints of their poverty are overwhelming.

4.1 Rationale

The desperate poverty of large sections of the rural poor (predominantly women) in present day Honduras must be understood within the context of the ruling elite's treatment of the campesino. As discussed in Chapter One (Theoretical Reflection) the social and economic character of Honduran society is embedded in its modernization [political] orientation which does not adequately respond to the marginalized poor majority of its population. The stories of the women in Campo Cielo and Raynes de Lunes in Chapter Two suggest that in order to understand how poor women can break

free of the oppression of the vicious circle (Figure 1, p.140) and become integrated and dignified participants, the obstacles in their path to effecting this change process must be examined.

Their poverty, which is compounded by the problem of 'machismo', must be connected to the greater economic reality in Honduras. This is not a discussion of the relative merits of adjustment programmes (SAPs) or alternatives to solving the debt problem, but rather an exploratory examination of the economic and social effects of debt and adjustment as it falls on a society where inequality between men and women is a fact. The basic premise is that the impact has been differential for men and women and that "economically-driven adjustment often occurs at the expense of human welfare and the rights of the politically weak and disadvantaged - especially the women and children in the poorest countries" (Canadian House of Commons Report, *Securing Our Global Future*, 1990: 20). It is this economic barrier that works to keep poor women from becoming literate. Esmerelda, in Chapter One, identifies the high cost of transportation to and from school for each child, the expensive school supplies, and the low incomes as factors in preventing literacy acquisition. In the rural areas the women, from Porte Cortes (CNTC program), point out that the lack of affordable transportation and distance to schools are major reasons why children do not attend classes. In

addition, the pressure to earn income to pay for rising costs of food as well as increasing responsibilities for children keep women too busy to attend literacy classes.

It is argued that women who were marginal beneficiaries in the best of times are anything but marginal sufferers from today's debt repayments (Engendering Adjustment, 1990; Vickers, 1991). It is also recognized that problems of poverty in Honduras pre-date SAPs and are not limited to women. However, there is sufficient evidence that illustrates an acceleration of the deterioration for women since the implementation of the SAPs and that the ideological gender bias inherent in policy-making suggests that the situation for women will continue to deteriorate at a faster rate than for men. This is evidenced in the statistics that illustrate rising numbers of women who are illiterate.

Women who entered the adjustment process on an unequal basis have been adversely affected by the economic crisis and the adjustments, both as potential beneficiaries of development and in their role as contributors to development. Adjustment and transformation is a normal process that all economies undergo in the face of changing conditions, but the current situation in Honduras has been characterized by adjustments that have been initiated by the international financial institutions without reflecting the potential of all

Hondurans, men and women, in the process. The issue is not the necessity of adjustment, but rather the time frame, the terms and costs incurred (economic and social) and by whom and the type of adjustment. Poor women are being denied their role as equal participants in society as the impact of economic constraints erode opportunities for them to acquire literacy training.

4.2 Why Economic Reality Impedes Literacy Training for Women in Honduras

The 1980s have seen not just low rates of growth, but absolute declines in many of the key indicators of economic well-being globally and more specifically in Latin America (ECLAC, 1991; Europa, 1988; Elson: 1989:67). Development in the 1980s therefore, has become synonymous with Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) which have centred around adjusting national economies to the changing international economic situation through the restoration of balance-of-payment equilibrium, increasing exports and restoring growth rates.

(i) Research and data collection

Analyses of the implications of global economic deterioration for women need to be incorporated into the policy-making that

cope with this deterioration. To date there are very few studies that specifically examine the implication of SAPs for women, therefore much of what is done is speculative and inferential. The United Nations Interregional Seminar on Women and the Economic Crisis, in Vienna 1988, attempted to evaluate the effects of the crisis and suggested that what is needed is a new approach that is more scientific in nature to convince policy makers of the specific effects on women (World Survey, 1989; Vickers, 1991). One of the drawbacks is that there is little or no data on social indicators in Honduras prior to SAPs. Also, the lack of reliable statistics on gender specific activities as well as many aspects of the crisis cannot be measured or quantified (UNICEF, 1989; World Survey, 1989).

Elson (1989) points out that to date there are no large scale, systematic, internationally comparative studies desegregating the impact of structural adjustment within households with a focus specifically on women. Therefore the task at hand is a very difficult one. The Commonwealth Secretariat 'Engendering Adjustment' and UNICEF 'Invisible Adjustment' are currently in the process of this kind of research. Up to now reliance has been on inferences from non-gender-specific data on 'vulnerable groups' from such studies as Adjustment with a Human Face (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1989).

(ii) Shortcomings of Statistics for Women

Statistics fail to capture the psychological dimension of what is happening in Honduras. The process and dynamics of the change that is occurring and the relations are not being addressed by the statistics and policies to date. Women's triple role is continuing to be overlooked and ignored in 'development plans' leaving them to cope with everyday realities of poverty, starvation and disease (Kandiyoti, 1990:16) and leaving them little time or energy to participate in literacy training. There is an economic, social and cultural need for recognition of the value of women, their work, their role in society and development and by excluding the explicit consideration of the work done by women (caring for children, gathering of fuel and water, processing food, preparing meals, keeping the house clean, nursing the sick, managing the household) and of the schedule and resources it requires, macro-economic analysis and policy has a built-in conceptual bias against women. It is this bias that has important practical consequences when attempting to make the connections between SAPs (policy), literacy acquisition and women in Honduras.

Given these shortcomings in the data, the explorations in this paper are tentative but, I would argue that there is sufficient evidence to link the increased stress on women in Honduras to the inappropriateness of SAPs in effecting any positive change with regard to literacy acquisition for women.

4.3 Impact of SAPS on Living Conditions

Facing a combined unemployment and underemployment of 64% the Honduran government accepted an Emergency Economic Plan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1981. After a year of austerity measures²⁵ the economy remained stagnant, while political and social tensions rose (Barry et al, 1982:167). Despite this lack of success "Honduras, which has the lowest per capita income of any country in Central America", underwent the development of an adjustment programme aimed at reducing the fiscal and balance-of-payments deficits, signed another agreement with the IMF in November 1982 (ECLAC, 1983:413). Generally, the programme included the following measures: a wage freeze, not filling posts as they became vacant, reduction in the government purchase of non-personal goods and services, continuing only with projects already started, limiting projects to those of top priority (usually military, Lapper, 1985), cutting back current and capital transfers to the public sector, privatization of companies, increase in prices and increase in user fees for public services.

Further examination of the package reveals: measures to cut

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²⁵For example, 3000 public employees were fired under the 1981 austerity program (Barry et al, 1982: 167).

public spending by 10%; cut the budgets of health, education, agricultural reform, transportation, and public works; end price controls for staples like milk, bread, medicine eggs; increase consumer and income taxes, and encourage foreign tax exemptions (Lapper, 1985:100). The injection of \$424.4m (US) in 1982 alone from the IMF, World Bank and IADB, was to keep Honduras solvent and allow for a shift out of Economic Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) to export-led industrialization.

Structural adjustment policies rely on the assumptions of classical economic theory whereby "output, employment and prices (including wages, interest rates and exchange rates) are best determined by the free play of market prices, and that prices are the most effective instruments for the efficient allocation of resources" (ECLAC, 1989:18). By design the SAPs are supposed to bring about short-term improvement in balance of payments to allow for servicing of the international debt.

President Suazo publicly admitted that the SAP strategy was not working (Lapper, 1985). In examining the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is the most common measure of economic production, it is found that it did not rise as expected in response to the SAPs. As an indicator of economic welfare, GDP is deficient in that it does not account for women's

unpaid work and does not reflect the well-being of society. Because GDP fails to account for distributional considerations, women's economic situation is actually worse than reflected in poor GDP performance (World's Women, 1991:95).

(i) Linking Economic Policies to the Household

It is widely recognized that the debt crisis and recession experienced over the past decade, as well as the resulting stabilization and economic structural adjustment policies (SAPs) have had differential implications for the various social and economic groups in both rural and urban areas (Cornia et al, 1989; Elson, 1990; UNICEF, 1989; ICF, 1991; World Development Report 1991, Human Development Report 1990). But only recently has it also been recognized that within households SAPs often have a differential impact on men and women, because of gender bias in macro-economic policy formulated to reallocate resources (Elson, 1989; Elson, 1990, Moser, 1989a, Beulink, 1989). These policies implicitly assume that the process of reproduction and maintenance of human resources (carried out by unpaid women) will continue regardless of the way in which resources are reallocated. This aspect of policy is referred to as an adjustment variable (UNICEF, 1989). It is also assumed that changes in income, food prices and public expenditure accompanying stabilization

and SAPs affect all members of the household in the same way because of equal intra-household distribution of resources (Moser:1989a:75). These changes, in fact, do not affect households or household members in the same way; some will lose and some will gain.

The intra household distribution of resources has to be taken into account as well as the inter household distribution of resources. This action is directly related to both the intra-household struggle and to changes in the broader political economy. It must be identified that the household, while always a site of 'tension and conflict as well as of cooperation', of 'inequality as well as neutrality' (Elson, 1990:11) is seldom homogenous with respect to production, consumption and accumulation. This is the crucial point to argue to those who do not see why there should be particular emphasis on women, and propose to consider the impact on particular socio-economic groupings, or percentiles of households.

Women's situation in Honduras, as in other countries, is influenced by the level and growth of economic output. Total production and government policies determine the level of income available and its use for consumption, savings, investment and ultimately economic welfare (World's Women: 1991:94) but this is only half of the whole sustainable

development picture. Adjustment processes as they directly affect households will be examined vis a vis changes in:

- incomes through alterations in wages and level of employment, product price changes and product demand changes.
- prices of essential items such as food and relative purchasing power
- levels and composition of public expenditure (social sector) including possible user fees
- working conditions, through changes in hours of work, intensity of work, job security, fringe benefits and legal status, (paid and unpaid work).

When households have to reduce food consumption because of rising prices and falling incomes, available evidence from household surveys carried out in Tegucigalpa suggests it is very likely that the consumption of women and girls will be reduced by more than men or boys (Zuniga and Hernandez, 1989) implying that women and girls will suffer from poorer health and nutrition. Attempts to compensate for reductions in purchased resources by increases in unpaid labour (eg. cheaper food requiring more preparation time) are usually paid for by the increased burden falling on women. This increased time constraint often results in reduced opportunities for women and girls to participate in any type of formal or non-formal school programs. An example of this is found in the story of

Carla, a ten year old girl living in Campo Cielo, whom I met on several occasions riding the bus to the mercado in Comayaguela. She was tiny and thin and did not look to be more than seven or eight years old. Every morning at 6:00am she would take a basket of tortillas, that her mother had spent the last two hours making, to market to be sold on a street corner. Her daily earnings for ten hours work and about one thousand tortillas totalled about US\$1.50. Working seven days a week this amounts to about \$12.00 per week and about \$50.00 per month. Carla has never attended school and does not know how to read or write. Her mother needs her to sell the tortillas to help with the family income.

Although sufficient data for Honduras, let alone a gender breakdown of data, are limited or not available, it is possible to indicate some of the outcomes. Generally, critics have argued that the principal aim of SAP is to establish a new pattern of accumulation. The cuts in State spending, as evidenced by the elimination of subsidies, retrenchment of civil servants, imposition of taxation on social demands (ie health, education, water...) (Weiss, 1988; ICEF, 1991:3) coupled with price and wage policies have promoted a regressive distribution of income for workers. These policies have led to a drastic rise in unemployment, increase in self employment and an increase in the number of hours worked in order to meet basic needs. Because of the sexual division of

labour , these transformations are experienced differentially by different social groups and by men and women within these social groups" (Alvarado, 1987; Acker, 1988; Vickers, 1991:56). With regards to literacy, opportunities to participate in programs are more severely limited for women than for men because of time constraints and lack of energy (Wright, 1992). In Campo Cielo and La Flor many men attend night classes while the women attend to the children. According to the women of these communities the only time that would allow them to attend class would be in the afternoon between two o'clock and four o'clock. There are no classes available at these times for women.

(ii) Managing the Shrinking Household Budget

Given that women are generally associated with the collective responsibilities for household consumption, as household incomes fall and prices rise, it is they who must "stretch the dollar" and devise survival strategies (Elson, 1989:70). Survival strategies are based on a re-defining of domestic roles and a response to critical situations within the family (Zuniga and Hernandez, 1989:196). The Study of Incomes and Expenses on Low-Income Sectors carried out by Zuniga et al, 1982, showed that per capita income of the largest families are lower than those of smaller families, "but this does not seem to be because of the size of the family as such, but is

rather the result of a strategy which involves bringing together large numbers of people as a form of mutual defence and to allow survival" (Zuniga et al, 1989: 197).

Accounts by interviewers and personal observations of the researchers in their study indicate that these strategies depend on the existence of women, as mothers, who organize and coordinate family resources making them the cornerstone of family survival. (Zuniga and Hernandez, 1989:197). Therefore household incomes are not family incomes but rather family funds made up of voluntary contributions of all members with the woman as chief executive officer. Suyapa's family is a case in point. Suyapa is just fifteen years old and is a new mother of a newborn baby girl, Karen. They live with Suyapa's two brothers (aged nine and eleven), her mother, Rosa (twenty nine years old) and her grandmother, Anita (forty-eight years old). Anita makes tortillas everyday and Rosa takes them to their customers in Los Ricos. The boys attend the local school. Suyapa had been attending school for the past year but is not continuing now that she is a new mother. Her boyfriend, Juan, is sixteen years old and works as a courier on his motorcycle. Juan is moving in with Suyapa and her family. The combined income for the working members of this household is just over twenty lempiras per week. With milk at the local pulperia selling for eleven lempiras per quart, the weekly income does not go very far. Esmerelda's cooperative

efforts (outlined in Chapter two) supply basic foods such as maize, beans, milk powder, sugar at prices more in line with the low incomes of the community. Milk powder, as an example, can be purchased for the equivalent of two lempiras per quart.

Efforts to 'get the prices right' in order to generate production often focus on tradeables (international) rather than non-tradeables (food crops) which are more significant internally (Elson, 1990:6). For example, milk in Camp Cielo is selling in August 1992 for eleven lempiras a quart, an increase of five lempiras from 1986 (Esmerelda, 1992). Basic medical supplies such as vitamins and cough syrup are either not available or extremely expensive. One weeks supply of multiple vitamins cost forty lempiras or the equivalent of one month's wages (Lorena, CND, 1992).

Just as many businesses are going under during recession so too are the household units, particularly if there are no supports. The situation seems to be worse when one examines the increasing number of young people (under 15 years old) in the workforce, the rising homelessness, and the rising number of female heads of households (single or married) (Peckenham and Street, 1985; ICEF, 1991; CODIMCA, 1992). These factors contribute to rising difficulty in managing and maintaining the family.

Widespread poverty and paternal irresponsibility are placing heavy demands on women to bring some income into the household. "Some men don't accept that women can struggle alongside them. Women do not want to displace men, but to help them in their struggle" (Esmerelda, 1992). Their inability to provide for their families in a situation of high unemployment finds men abandoning them, leaving the women to provide for their children. In some of the marginalized urban and rural areas the percentage of households headed by females reaches eighty percent (CODIMCA, 1992).

In an effort to recover their dignity and identity and to participate creatively in society women are organizing to empower themselves through literacy programs. From this organization they develop a sense of individual worth and solidarity as well as practical solutions to the everyday workload (Interviews with women, 1992). The participants of the sewing classes in Campo Cielo and La Raynes De Lunes, who told their stories in Chapter two, testify to this development in their lives. Even with cooperative efforts of organizing on a higher level (CNTC), as outlined in Chapter Three, economic constraints limit their activities.

(iii) Poverty and Environment Hinder Potential

Other factors working to aggravate the ability to satisfy

basic needs include the environmental damage created by the economic crisis and the militarization of Honduras by the US in the 1980s (McLean, 1985). Further investigation is required to more deeply understand the impact of these factors as related to the daily lives of women in Honduras. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with these specifically. The following brief account serves as a backdrop for the conditions of poverty that exacerbate efforts to eradicate illiteracy especially for poor women.

4.4 How saps decrease the opportunities available for women to become empowered

The failure of adjustment policies and the depth of the impact are witnessed in the rising percentage of women who are illiterate. According to Peckanham and Street (1985:233) illiteracy nationwide stands at 50% with the figure for women even higher. Approximately 40% of the women in Honduras have no education at all. Alvarado, in her role as secretary for the CNTC Women's Program in Comayagua, estimates that the illiteracy rate for rural women is more like 80%.

(i) Changes in income and employment

With stabilization and adjustment processes relying heavily on

cuts in government spending, women have been disproportionately squeezed out of public sector employment (World's Women, 1991:95). In a country where women represent only 1.7% of the agricultural sector, with little opportunity to expand this representation, the focus of employment is service and urban. Cuts in the service sector where the majority of women find employment combined with worsening conditions in the countryside where the majority of Hondurans live resulted in rapid urban migration. The World Development Reports show a rise in urban population from 36% in 1980 to 42% in 1988 (World Development Reports, 1982,1990). Zuniga and Hernandez (1989 :178) found that the big change in the urban work force was the number of women which rose from 13% in 1974 to 22.8% in 1983. This increase represents a changing situation for women, suggesting that as women's income is needed for family survival, the double burden of work outside the home is being added to the daily burden of domestic work, resulting in deteriorating opportunities for literacy training.

A major connection between the implementation of programs that are designed to bring things under control and the plight of women within an already marginalized class is the reality of the rapidly rising number of female heads of households in search of work (25% in 1974 to 33% in 1982, Zuniga, 1989:178). Tresierra (cited in Zuniga and Hernandez, 1989) found that in Tegucigalpa, 53% of the women employed were heads of

households and 65% had greater than four dependents. The Human Development Report (1990:132) draws attention to this rising dependency ratio (persons from age 0-15 and over 65 years): from 90.3 in 1960 to 98.5 in 1985.

To many men, however, their inability to provide for their families in a situation of high unemployment means that they simply abandon their families, leaving women to provide for their children. This is particularly true in the poor and marginalized areas, rural and urban with some areas having up to 80% female headed households (Peckenham and Street, 1985). As a result of the economic recession, economic adjustment measures, male unemployment and inflation, large numbers of women and children have entered the formal and informal labour markets²⁶. Rising urbanization and the impact of SAPs on the urban economy have not only caused disruptions in family life but result in a significant increase in the number of street children (ICEF, 1991:4). Undereducated and undervalued, women have the most difficulty finding employment (Peckenham and Street, 1985). SAPs have disproportionately squeezed women out of and limited their access to public sector jobs. With rising unemployment rates more men migrate leaving a rising number female headed households (22% - World Trends, 1990). With high male unemployment, urban jobs are quickly taken by men. Forced to earn cash some younger girls leave the rural

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²⁶ Human Development Report 1990:132 shows that women represented 18.3% of the total labour force in 1988. The labour force itself was only 30.3%.

areas and migrate to the cities in search of employment. Limited by their lack of education and being undervalued many young girls are tricked into prostitution which is legal in Honduras (Komisar, 1986). Numbers are rising as evidenced by the over 3000 prostitutes in Comayagua near the US Palmerola base, representing one sixth the total number of prostitutes for the entire country (Lapper, 1985).

The contradiction between the rising numbers of women responsible for rising numbers of children within society and the percentage of employment that they have draws attention to a connection that is not being addressed by policy makers. While more women are being forced to work outside the home, the amount they earn is less while the demands on their time and income increases. Prior to 1981 an average monthly salary was 200 lempiras(lp). The cost of a minimum basket of food for each individual (urban) required about 46.76 lp. Therefore the cost is 233.8 lp for a 5 member family (Zuniga and Hernandez, 1989). It is this connection and the re-defining of the public and private spheres of women's work that link the effects of SAPs as well as the economic deterioration generally, directly to the daily operation and struggle within the household thereby keeping poor women from becoming literate. This is a complex process that does not occur in isolation.

(ii) Changes in Prices of Consumer Goods

Increased food prices for consumers are major features of adjustment programmes. Where food imports are high, devaluation, which increases the price of imports, will have a substantial impact on food prices (ECLAC, 1989); Elson, 1989:70). National food security in basic grains (corn, beans and rice) (Table 5) has also been declining so that Honduras, a country which exported these crops in the 1970s, is now importing high volumes in 1990 (ICEF, 1991:3) which translates into higher consumer prices.

Removal of food subsidies as a contribution to reducing public expenditure is also a major feature of SAPs. The terms imposed by the SAPs in 1982 forced the Honduran government to cut over forty subsidies on basic goods, which sharply increased their cost to the poor (Weiss, 1988:54). Between 1984-1990, the price of essential products increased dramatically (fuel costs, for example increased fourfold), while there was a devaluation of the local currency (ICEF, 1991:3). With inflation hovering around 50% there was consequently a proportional rise in the cost of living which resulted in the further deterioration of the living conditions for the most vulnerable sectors of society, whose minimum wages remained unchanged (Weiss, 1988:54).

It is important to draw attention to the fact that these statistics are for urban areas only. There do not appear to be any records of such data for rural Honduras. It can be inferred however, that the condition is much worse in the rural areas where employment opportunities are fewer and illiteracy is higher, particularly among women (Acker, 1988; Alvarado, 1987; Tabora, 1992). In addition, distance and isolation keep women from literacy training as they cannot afford the transportation or the time away from their domestic responsibilities (Lena, CNTC, 1992).

Consumer prices are continuing to rise and, combined with a wage freeze, have seriously reduced the purchasing power and consumption levels (ECLAC, 1983:415) with real incomes falling. Annual per capita income remains below \$900 (World Development Report 1991:204). While costs of living are going up, government support programs are being withdrawn as a measure of the SAP. Elimination of food subsidies, falling wages and rising prices act to decrease the spending power of women as food providers. There are constraints on the extent to which total household expenditure can be reallocated in response to rises in food prices. Tough decisions are forced to be made in order to satisfy family hunger, travelling farther to cheaper shops and markets, paying higher transportation fees, preparing cheaper food and often eating less.

(iii) Declining nutrition and poor health

UNICEF studies reveal a widespread deterioration in the nutritional status of children and pregnant and lactating mothers in both rural and urban areas in countries with IMF stabilization and World Bank structural adjustment programmes (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1987).

The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) as reported in World Development Report (1991:266) was 82 per 100,000 in 1980. Given that the MMR is now estimated at 230 per 100,000 live births (ICEF, 1991:3) and maternal health is seriously affected by malnutrition, inference can be made that government cuts to social service spending, in particular health care services, has had a definite negative impact on women. With the average number of children per woman as 8.6, declining health conditions for women continue with each child born. Further to this is evidence that 20% of all babies suffer from low birth weight (ICEF, 1991:3; Alvarado, 1987).

A survey done by ICEF 1991 reports that the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is estimated to be 66 per 1000 live births, while under five mortality (U5MR) is 103 per 1000 live births, the highest in Central America. However, The World Development Report (1990:232) shows that U5MR has dropped from 145 in

1960 to 88 in 1980 and again to 68 in 1988. Data from The World Development Report 1991 (p. 266) indicates that U5MR was 73 for females and 87 for males in 1989. It is interesting to note the discrepancy in data from the ICF and World Development Reports. Variations in methodologies to collect data may account for some of this variation but there are many questions left unanswered. Regardless of the numbers these mortality rates are high. These deaths are attributed to the chronic diarrhoeal-related illnesses (38%), acute respiratory infections (ARI- 18%) perinatal illnesses (19%) and vaccine preventable diseases (6%) while malnutrition is associated with 60% of all child deaths (CNTC, 1989, ICF, 1991:3). All of these are treatable, preventable and in a reverse progression as mothers have less access to health care and proper nutrition.

Traditionally women have the responsibility of ensuring that meals are prepared each day for their families, but they do not have a say in the allocation of household expenditure (Alvarado, 1987). When prices rise this involves ingenuity to make ends meet. In order to get an increase in household allowance tense conjugal negotiation is required. "Female headed households do not face this kind of constraint in expenditure re-allocation but they are generally worse off in the terms of total income because of the poor earning power of most women" (Beulink, 1989; Elson, 1989: 71).

"Mothers are unable to buy enough food of the right type to feed the whole family, and in many cases priority in feeding is given to adult males" (Elson, 1989:71; Zuniga and Hernandez, 1989; Alvarado, 1987). Young children are suffering additional nutritional problems when not fed by their mothers. Elder daughters are forced into reproductive roles at a younger age and are themselves suffering from reduced parental guidance and care. Increased work for this age group leaves less time for education which continues the cycle of illiteracy and poverty. Less parental guidance results in many teenage sons getting involved in drugs, crime and dropping out of school. Increases in prices has led directly to domestic violence. The evidence suggests that a clear causal linkage can be drawn between changes in consumption patterns and increased domestic violence within the household (Alvarado, 1987; Peckenham and Street, 1985; Moser, 1989:80).

Because of the rise in consumer prices, one can assume that nutrition throughout Honduras has not improved. During August 1992 over 100,000 people in the Santa Barbara area suffered from cholera. At the time the epidemic was spreading most quickly the government announced that it would spend US\$1 million to stop the spread of the disease. Reported on the same day was the announcement of the opening of a new military research hospital (US\$93 million) which would centre on

research for malaria and aids (El Tiempo, 1992:6). This would appear to be a positive step. However this facility has restricted military access. The general public and the most in need of treatment are denied any benefit (Ronaldo, 1992).

Paralysis of private investment and high unemployment (up over 41% in 1986) draws attention to the fact that at the time when social services are most critical to cushion the impact of the economic crunch, the military and the government are eating up the social expenditure budget²⁷. The massive military presence and the Contras have produced a sordid by-product: shoeshine boys, young prostitutes, and homeless street children are now more numerous in Honduran towns, while drugs, and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS²⁸ have become a serious concern (DeStefano, 1986; Weiss, 1988:55).

Although many of the elements of the poverty cycle were in

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²⁷ Since 1980 the US has built 11 airstrips, 2 radar stations, base camps, training facilities, helicopter refuelling pads, and a logistics centre at Palmerola Air Base. US military aid has increased 16fold from 1980-1986 from 3.9m to 77.4m (1984) and cut back to 61m in 1986. Coinciding with this build up are increases in human rights abuses [1981-84: 218 political assassinations, 110 disappearances, 1947 illegal detentions (CODEH)] which further erode the quality of life for Hondurans, especially women who are mothers, wives and daughters (Alvarado, 1987; Acker, 19 ; Lapper, 1985).

²⁸ Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) has reached alarming numbers in Honduras since 1984 when only 2 cases were reported to 210 in 1990 with a total of 932 to date in 1991. ICEF reports that Honduran cases represent over half of all recorded cases in Central America (ICEF, 1991:4).

place prior to the Structural Adjustment Programmes, the major impact of the SAPs has been the restrictions on consumption which has a direct impact on women as the providers of household basic needs. In the absence of government support and based on current trends, the well-being of Honduran women, particularly their health, threatens to continue to deteriorate. In 1984, 210 of the country's 362 rural health centres shut down for lack of staff, equipment and supplies. Thirty percent of the 1985 national budget was allocated to security and defense, and only 7% to health and education (Weiss, 1989:55). According to the Human Development Report (1990: 162) the ratio of military expenditure to health and education in 1986 was 78. Over the 1986-87 period social service expenditures declined from \$130m to \$97 (Alvarado, 1987:19). The pressure to earn an income is also making it increasingly important for women to control their fertility further eroding their personal health. Yet the methods imposed by the government (sponsored by USAID) are resulting in more cases of cancer and related illnesses in women leaving them less able to carry out their tasks (Alvarado, 1987). The community managing role of women which used to be dominant has deteriorated with more women in wage earning jobs. With decreasing government services, the role of NGOs has become crucial to the delivery systems of education and health programmes. Women are forced to make the time to negotiate and make the links to ensure that the NGO network continues to

operate. (Moser, 1989:81).

(iv) Declining education

Concerning education and literacy, services are again being cut as austerity measures dominate government process. Statistics indicate that the number of children in school is rising (World Development Reports 1990, 1991, EDENH 11:1985).

Enrolment numbers do not explain the rising illiteracy in all sectors, particularly rural Honduras. Over 40% of the population is illiterate and only one quarter of all children complete the six years of primary education (Alvarado, 1987; Peckenham and Street, 1985:112. According to EDENH 11 (Second National Demographic Survey, EDENH 11-1985 cited in Zuniga and Hernandez (1989:192) the illiteracy rate had declined from 40 to 23 percent. Variations in methodology may account for the discrepancy in that EDENH 11 asked the question of whether a person had any schooling²⁹ to determine the literacy data. This supports the initial argument that literacy alone is not empowering. The dominant ideology permeates the system from the methodology to the solution.

Education is a necessary but not sufficient condition for literacy and literacy is a necessary but not sufficient

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²⁹ Schooling in this context refers to enrolment in formal education programs (Tabora, 1992)

component for empowerment. Zuniga and Hernandez (1987) conclude that the overall economic trends indicate that access to education is more egalitarian reflected in more equal literacy rates between men and women. This may be true. However statistics and data collected in Honduras need to be analyzed with caution as they may represent skewed government priorities and/or unavailable resources to adequately collect the data. Nor do these statistics reflect the degree of empowerment that may result from this newly acquired literacy.

Cost recovery in education and health has been at the expense of more drop outs (57%) especially young girls who leave school to help their mothers with domestic duties. Apart from poverty and the need for children's help at home and at work, the main reason for the debilitating drop out rate is the poor quality of the education provided. The relevance and the standard of education suffered is poor. UNESCO (1992:38) reports that "parents and pupils have no other rational choice than to vote with their feet". Declining access to education results in fewer opportunities for employment. This perpetuates the poverty cycle which impedes empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

For poor women in Honduras, literacy does not appear to be sufficient to empower them to create the necessary changes to improve their lives. Literacy, as defined by the women themselves, should provide for transformation where women can be equal and active partners in their society with dignity, peace and justice. Literacy as an agent in the process of change for women (illustrated specifically in Chapter Two) is shown to have potential to empower given that the relationship between knowledge, force and wealth is balanced in society. Through the example of the CNTC (highlighted in Chapter Three) literacy is shown to have empowering potential not only in the process but also in the quality of change and empowerment for poor women provided that the organization can operate in freedom. Control of the process and the direction of these changes at present (who shapes it and how) as examined in Chapter Four supports the argument that ideology shapes the economic conditions which impedes the potential of literacy to empower poor women in Honduras.

Poor women need to achieve a more equal position in society with men, and a more just and equal position according to the power and economic structures that govern their situation within Honduran society. The factors which were explored in Chapter One (the underlying conservative ideology) and Chapter

Four (the constraints of their poverty), as influencing the empowering potential of literacy need to be altered. At the same time, the vital role that these poor women play in society must be recognized and given value by all members of society.

Literacy training is a critical first step in the empowerment of poor women. If the goal is to work in the "practice of freedom" in a process of conscientization then poor women must have the necessary tools in order to address the social and political injustices with which they struggle. To understand this and to have the ability to act upon the new knowledge, poor women need to be empowered.

Within the present economic framework, is it possible for poor women to effectively be empowered to empower themselves to participate in their society? Is it possible to solve the problems of poverty, excessive inequality, unemployment, underdevelopment, and gender bias that characterize the Honduran economy and society and that act as barriers to the empowerment that is potentially a part of literacy? Thus far, the evidence is not promising.

Problems of Poverty

For many women, adjustment programmes adopted by the

government, have increased their hours of work, both paid and unpaid. Maintaining a household on reduced resources takes more time - hunting for bargains, setting up informal exchange networks with neighbours and kin, making and mending at home rather than buying, increasingly agricultural output takes more time, collecting water and fuel takes more time due to the deteriorating environmental conditions (estimate of up to 6 hours/day are spent in water and fuelwood collection: Acker, 1988).

Making a living in the informal sector in conditions of falling demand takes more time (Esmerelda, 1992). The casualization of the work of urban women frequently translates to loss of security, loss of fringe benefits such as sick pay, pensions, maternity leave, increasing intensity of work (Street, 1985). "This casualization of work is occurring in developed as well as developing countries and was the focus of discussion at the workshop on Economic Crisis: Household Survival Strategies and Women's Work at Cornell University 1988: (Elson, 1989:72).

The pressure to earn an income is also making it increasingly important for women to control their fertility, further eroding their personal health. Important for many reasons yet the methods imposed by the government sponsored by foreign AID agencies are resulting in more cases of cancer and related

illness in women leaving them less able to carry out their tasks (Alvarado, 1987).

The present system of structural adjustment has been unable to generate the internal and external savings needed to kick-start a self reliant development. Underlying economic and political problems in Honduras require in-depth study and analysis that is not within the scope of this thesis as there are critical concerns within the present Honduran system that need refocussing. The structural adjustment programmes of the early eighties did not have the intended outcomes and in fact exacerbated the problems of literacy training, particularly for poor women. It is difficult to separate the negative consequences of the SAP from the broader socio-economic and geopolitical situation of Honduras.

Economic burdens to bring income into the household are not the only factors limiting women's full participation in Honduran society. Social values, particularly the prevalence of machismo³⁰, also influence their role.

Attempts to resolve the economic problem without regard for

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³⁰ "Machismo" consists in establishing a certain superiority of men over women, by which men feel themselves to be privileged beings, both in society and in the family. This serves to consolidate a certain 'specialization, a division of functions, attitudes, capacities, and qualities which are then attributed to one sex or the other... Both implicitly and explicitly, women have been used to the advantage of men" (Latin American Women's Collective, 1980, SLAVES OF SLAVES, London: Zed Press, p. 7).

Attempts to resolve the economic problem without regard for all members of the society will continue to incur social costs. Economic, political and social factors in Honduras make it extremely doubtful that such high social costs can continue to be paid. "Not all women can cope under crisis and it is necessary to stop romanticizing about their infinite capacity to do so" (Moser, 1989:81). Women are under pressure trying to balance their three roles and making choices depending on the composition of the household and the extent to which the other members of the household can provide income. Forced to work, using up future resources in order to survive today, sons are sent out to work, and daughters are required to take over domestic responsibilities usurping their potential future contribution to society. Globally about 55% of women are visibly at risk, just 'hanging on' (Moser, 1989:81).

Ideology and Gender Bias

It is difficult to address the real issues of power and powerlessness for campesino women, and to examine the "root causes of overt sexism, agricultural displacement, and the marginalization of women in society" (Anand, 1982:24). It is

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implicitly and explicitly, women have been used to the advantage of men" (Latin American Women's Collective, 1980, SLAVES OF SLAVES, London: Zed Press, p. 7).

much easier to promote reformist measures dealing with income generation, health, job skills, education and so on. The position taken by the CNTC starts with the empowerment of the learners in which literacy is seen as their ability to express their own needs and desires using whatever techniques are most relevant. Persistence and patience are the keys to incorporating women because for so long oppression and silence has not allowed them to express their needs and wants. The development of a critical consciousness (conscientization) can harness techniques that contribute to empowerment. Practically this has a number of implications. First, it means that in different concrete circumstances, the techniques most relevant to empowerment will be different. The songs and stories, and the reading and writing of television, video, and radio, can be more relevant than the alphabet in societies where communication is less dependent on the written word. Second, and most critical for Honduras, it leaves literacy teaching secure from the charge of ideological manipulation, since it is the learners themselves who set the political agenda for dialogue based on their own experience rather than on any theoretical ideological position. Institutions and structures of most governments represent the dominant ideology and do not allow for significant conscientization. As soon as awareness and organization become effective in empowering

people then co-optation is most likely³¹. Third, and perhaps more important, if literacy is to enable learners to express their needs effectively, it must in practice be linked to organizational structures that will give those demands a collective voice. CNTC, in its structure, its purpose, and its operation, provides campesinos the opportunity to turn hopes into reality as illustrated by this statement by Elvia:

There are still a lot of people in Honduras who, like me, are determined to make changes through peaceful means. We know we have to first organize among ourselves, the workers and campesinos, and then try to make changes at the national level. I suppose that's why the government tries so hard to divide us. They know that once we have an organized people, an educated people, then we can start thinking about political parties and how to get a government in power that cares about the poor (Alvarado, 1987:137)

Researching (data collection) and literacy programming from the margins (frontiers) is crucial to allow poor women their space in society.

CNTC and the Process of Change

The CNTC program in Honduras illustrates how literacy can further organizational aims in struggles for social justice.

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³¹"The struggle to control mass organizations extended to the countryside. FENACH (National Federation of Honduran Campesinos) was founded in 1962 to mobilize peasants seeking redress against land grabs by the United Fruit Company. One month later, ANACH (National Association of Honduran Workers) was formed by the President as a pro-US, anti-communist association. The more militant FENACH members were isolated in order to neutralize from within the militancy of the rural workers" (Weiss, 1988:53).

States that have achieved success in literacy campaigns have had the political commitment, motivation and power to be able to organize an effective mobilization of all available human, institutional and material resources needed (MacDonald, 1985).

In Honduras the nature of the government regime makes this impossible.

CNTC's success stems from its independence and self reliance. The lack of national unity in Honduras has historically been paralleled by a lack of unity in the campesino union movements. The continuous evaluations by CNTC members and field workers give Honduran campesinos their first possible taste of empowerment and the ability to transform their lives.

One of the important points in conscientization is to provoke recognition of the world, not as a 'given' world, but as a world dynamically 'in the making' (Freire, 1985).

Given that educational systems mirror society, a reassessment from the bottom up would in fact shore-up the present system and add depth and sustainability. The strength of the CNTC in Honduras has been its determination to remain autonomous from the government and attempts at cooptation from powers that do not represent the majority of the population. This does not however, protect it from the influence and power of "machismo" which perpetuates this Latin society. CNTC struggles with

literacy programs to integrate and empower women identifying obstacles such as women's reluctance to speak out in a group, to participate in programs, to do anything that might appear to separate them from the men for fear of violent repercussions at home.

Literacy because of its political nature does not operate within the educational systems, institutions and practices that mirror the society in which it is embedded. How then do literacy programs survive that address the educational and literacy needs and values of the marginalized majority of society, of which women constitute 50%? This is the big question that CNTC is grappling with at present.

CNTC has survived since 1986 without government support and consequently has remained in control of its own agenda unlike other popular groups in Honduras³². In order to empower poor women vis a vis literacy programs there needs to be external financing of programs like CNTC, CODIMCA, Radio Schools and PAEM, that effectively reach marginalized people especially poor women without conditionality and/or hidden agendas.

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³² Honduras has a history of cooptation within its popular movements. Many authors (Peckenham and Street, Archer and Costello, Wright) agree that this has been a factor in postponing any revolutionary action by the masses as the government has defused many activities that threaten the status quo.

Recommendations

If society is to be a functioning whole, then it would seem that all components (race, class, gender) must be integrated equally and genuinely as contributing parts. This implies that literacy skills be gender accessible and that opportunities exist that allow these skills to be utilized. It is not an exaggeration that in the developing world (Honduran case study) that many more boys become literate than girls, that twice as many boys are brought to health centres for treatment, and that employment rights, social security rights, property rights, civil and political liberties are chromosome dependent. The practical costs of this bias are that the effectiveness and competitiveness of society as a whole are greatly reduced.

UNESCO identifies that the biggest mistake of all is the discrimination against girls in the matter of educational opportunities (UNESCO, 1992:57).

The severity and scale of this injustice has not yet been widely accepted. "The abhorrence with which the whole world has rightly regarded apartheid is an abhorrence born of the simple moral proposition that a peoples' rights and opportunities- where they can live, what education and health care they will receive, what job they can do, what income they can earn, what legal standing they will have- should not depend on whether they are born black or white. Yet it seems that the world is prepared to accept, with none of the depth and breadth of opposition that has been seen during the apartheid years, that all of these things can depend upon the accident of being born male or female.

Education of women has been shown to be associated with the confidence to adopt new ways, the propensity to make greater use of social services, the ability to earn higher incomes, the improvement of child care and nutrition, the reduction of child deaths, the acceptance of family planning, the reduction of average family size, and the literacy of the succeeding generations (World Bank Annual Report 1991:49). How can this rhetoric be translated into action and empowerment for poor women? UNESCO and World Bank identify the issues about the exclusion of women from education programs. However attempts to make the connections between gender and the greater issues surrounding literacy are seen to challenge the status quo. This leaves a gap between literacy and empowerment for poor women.

In summary then, in order for literacy to generate positive change in daily lives of marginalized women, the connections must be made between the knowledge (literacy) and action (empowerment), between the learner and environment. Knowledge as the capacity of understanding the world in order to change it comes from the ability to understanding what is beneath the surface and to make meaning of it in your own life. Questions need to be addressed such as who indeed, is defining the knowledge and skill that is being taught to the poor women in Honduras. Finally it must be stressed that education is only one part of the total literacy issue and to consider reshaping

education, as illustrated in the section on liberal education in Chapter One, excluding the broader aspects of literacy will result in nonsustainable programs and perpetuation of the current problems, most poignantly the gender bias. Failure to make these connections renders useless any attempts to alter the literacy imbalance and condemns marginalized women to the margins indefinitely.

Within the present framework, is it possible for marginalized women in Honduras to achieve effective empowerment from literacy training? Is it possible to eradicate the factors that impede the efficacy of literacy and empowerment: problems of poverty, excessive inequality, unemployment, underemployment, and gender bias that characterize the Honduran society? Assumed to be effective for empowering the marginalized women literacy only partially provides for women becoming full social, economic and political actors in their own right. Nonetheless, the challenge that is being met by the efforts of women like Esmerelda and programs of such organizations as the CNTC is offering light and hope for a growing number of campesinas. Literacy does have the potential to empower poor women "to stand up for [their] lives with dignity, justice and peace and to promote and develop the creative expression of the women" (Tabora, 1992:18). Unfortunately for the majority of poor women in Honduras literacy by itself is not sufficient to empower them to make

these changes.

New Directions

Clearly a new strategy is needed if women are to access the potential of literacy and become truly empowered. Literacy alone is not enough. Transformation would require the current monetarist, neo-liberal political system and economic social organization to be refocussed with a "human face" and without a "gender bias". But, this system is male dominated/masculine. Therefore, there is a real urgency for women to participate in the dialogue about modifying the adjustment process. Caution is required, however, if not to focus on women as victims and the detrimental impact of adjustment on women but rather, to adjust the attention towards the positive contribution that women can make to effective change in Honduras. The desperate poverty of large numbers of rural poor must be comprehended within the desperate need for land and agrarian reform. Literacy is, to a degree, empowering the poor men and women through the organization building of the CNTC literacy programs. The extent to which this empowerment process for women is sustainable depends upon the (economic) decisions that are yet to be made in Honduras.

Campesino voices are being heard, and they are beginning to

see that it is possible to change the world, that illnesses can be reduced, that land can be occupied and used. They are witnessing the power of their actions: not only individually but of whole communities. Conscientization cannot just be personal; it is the awakening of a whole community, women and men, inseparable from organization. Conceived and executed in this way, literacy can be the basis for changing whole nations (Archer and Costello, 1990:76). The efforts of the CNTC, recognizing this and the related obstacles, represent the real beginnings of this reality for both men and women in Honduras.

Freirian concepts of literacy identify the political nature of these processes which cannot be ignored when analyzing literacy data. Therefore education (training) is necessary but not sufficient for literacy. And literacy is necessary but not sufficient for empowerment.

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Figure 1. Literacy - Gender - Power Model

- illustration of the efficacy of literacy in empowering poor women in Honduras.

Figure 2. Efficacy of CNTC

----- Weak links

Adjustments made by CNTC to empower women.
 However broader economic conditions limit efficacy.

APPENDIX A

Programma De Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer Campesina CNTC 1990

Objectives:

- 1.to organize additional women's groups and integrate more women into the CNTC**
- 2.strengthen existing women's groups through support and follow-up which will increase the level of participation and mobilization of women**
- 3.form more women leaders in the areas of organizational development, technical support and administration, and production**
- 4.provide follow-up to the education programme through the formation of women educators at the community level and the creation of study circles**
- 5.give higher priority and profile to women's demands within the rural sector in order to challenge laws and reforms which further marginalize women with the rural sector**
- 6.strengthen the productive capacity of women's groups through small production projects which improve the incomes of members**

Implementation process is outlined as follows:

- 1.organize 144 new women's groups with an average of 12 members in each group for a total of 1728 associates**
- 2.provide organizational and educational assistance to 115 listing groups with a total of 1420 members**
- 3.improve the participation of 260 women who are members of mixed NCTC local groups**
- 4.develop 5 small business enterprises with mixed groups**
- 5.implement 6 training workshops with the participation of 80 women during a period of 2 years**
- 6.develop 48 regional workshops to train 1440 women promoters**
- 7.organize 120 study circles at a community level as part of a permanent training programme for women**
- 8.organize 96 meetings with 240 women from 120 different groups**
- 9.implement 6 technical, administrative and productive workshops for 80 women**
- 10.develop 3 study guides on the situation of rural women for use in the study circles**
- 11.develop 100 small productive projects in 100 rural communities**
- 12.organize 12 regional conferences of peasant women**
- 13.organize a first national conference of women in 1992**
- 14.implement 14 evaluation days during the implementation of the project**

END

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