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LESSONS OF THE PRODERE EXPERIENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

By Peter Sollis and Christina M. Schultz

The Development Program for Displaced Persons, Refugees, and Returnees in Central America (PRODERE) was created in 1989 to promote and facilitate the social and economic reintegration of over 2 million people uprooted by regional conflicts of the 1980s.

The program was financed by a contribution from the Italian government of U.S. \$115 million, and was executed by the United Nations Development Programme/Office for Project Services (UNDP/OPS). In formulating and implementing the program, UNDP collaborated with other United Nations agencies, including the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization/Pan-American Health Organization (WHO/PAHO), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Initially a three-year program, PRODERE was extended two years until the end of July 1995.

PRODERE was the largest single program ever executed by UNDP/OPS. Along with the Cambodia Resettlement and Reintegration Program, the Comprehensive Plan of Action and the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), PRODERE is one of the few regional approaches the international community has pursued for integrating relief, return and rehabilitation. Significantly, PRODERE emerged from a growing international concern about the relationship between the plight of uprooted populations, as well as other marginalized groups, and the processes of peace and development following decades of civil war.

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The challenges of negotiating, maintaining and enlarging humanitarian access in Central America are similar to those in conflict situations elsewhere in the world. The PRODERE approach to humanitarian action was critical in further enlarging humanitarian space. (This concept refers to the access that must be secured and maintained if humanitarian activities are to have integrity and effectiveness. Experience suggests that humanitarian space contracts or expands depending on the actions of political or military authorities, and humanitarian actors themselves.) Lessons from the PRODERE experience, however, have not been widely disseminated within the humanitarian community.

Antecedents

The 1987 Esquipulas Agreement of the Central American Presidents, which laid the framework for regional peacemaking efforts, committed governments to provide emergency attention to civilian war victims. Within the United Nations, the impetus behind PRODERE was the 1988 decision of the General Assembly to adopt the Special Economic Cooperation Plan for Central America (PEC). PEC became the centerpiece in a process of building consensus for peace and in reestablishing the confidence of civilian populations in their governments' commitment to this process.

In 1989, an outgrowth of the Esquipulas Agreement, CIREFCA, was convened by six Central American countries and Mexico in conjunction with UNHCR. CIREFCA's Plan of Action sought to generate a coherent regional strategy based on each country's proposals for specific programs to address the problem of displacement. Within this framework, the Italian government committed the financial resources to be channeled through UNDP/OPS for PRODERE.

A 1988 identification mission defined PRODERE's principal objectives as: (1) the reinsertion of war-affected populations into national, regional and local economic and social processes; (2) the improvement of basic living conditions through greater access to basic services, (3) the promotion of productive activities and services using local resources and skills; and (4) the provision of training and credit programs in support of the previously outlined

objectives. PRODERE covered six Central American countries: three suffering from internal conflict (Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua), and three receiving refugees (Belize, Honduras, Costa Rica). Program planners assumed that effectively reinserting uprooted populations into national economic and social life required creating conditions conducive to sustainable development.

The PRODERE Approach

PRODERE was a "human development program at the local level" that concentrated on improving the living conditions of war-affected populations by promoting pacification and reconstruction. To achieve its goal of integrating uprooted populations into surrounding host communities, PRODERE's strategy focused on clearly defined geographical areas of intervention greatly affected by conflict and/or a high level of displacement.

Local communities were considered the main development actors, and households were the basic production and consumption units through which all projects operated. PRODERE understood the obstacles to the social integration of uprooted populations and did not discriminate between population types, treating displaced persons, refugees, repatriated refugees and local populations equally as beneficiaries.

Its territorial approach allowed PRODERE to address the root causes of conflict and at the same time create a basis for sustainable development. Because PRODERE operated at several levels – local, municipal and departmental – it was able to respond to the multiple needs of populations affected by conflict or refugee flows through an integrated territorial plan for micro-regional development. A functional framework for mediation and democratic participation was seen as essential to reintegration and development efforts. One of PRODERE's principal means of developing this framework was to promote the creation of institutional spaces for local *concertacion*, or consensus-building, among those caught on conflicting sides of the emergencies. As a result, a network of Local Development Committees was formed, composed of representatives of the beneficiary population, state ministries and institutions, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations. The Local

Committees, in turn, have continued to coordinate at the municipal and departmental level through Municipal Planning Committees and Departmental Planning Committees.

PRODERE promoted the creation of other local institutions that remain in place after the closure of the program to provide services in previously marginalized regions covering such areas as production, employment and income, education, health, promotion of human rights, support of local and indigenous culture, and infrastructure and communications. These mechanisms, called local systems, are integrated through their participation in the Local Planning Committees.

Structure of the Program

PRODERE operated as six national sub-programs and three regional sub-programs. The six country sub-programs - Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica - had either two or three areas of intervention per country. The size and budget of national sub-programs varied, depending upon national characteristics. Greatest priority was assigned to refugee-producing countries preparing for long-term reinsertion programs. Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua were each allocated \$23 million over the duration of the program, Costa Rica was allocated \$7 million, Honduras, \$5 million and Belize, \$3 million. At its height in 1992, PRODERE's annual budget reached over \$35 million, with over 500 employees, including international staff, local experts, U.N. volunteers, administrative support staff and drivers. The cost per beneficiary was approximately \$200 (an average of \$40 per year per beneficiary).

In each country program, a National Coordinator was responsible for overall management in conjunction with the UNDP Resident Representative and a government counterpart. At the local level, Area Coordinators were responsible for field implementation of the program.

The three regional sub-programs were Regional Coordination, Regional Technical Support and the Sub-program for Training, Information and Community Documentation (EDINFODOC). The Regional Coordination sub-program, headquartered in El Salvador, oversaw and coordinated the various

activities of U.N. agencies and technical teams, and supervised all PRODERE activities to ensure that the national sub-programs operated efficiently and in accordance with regionally agreed approaches and methodologies. The Regional Coordinator was also responsible for the exchange of information between country sub-programs. The sub-program had an operating budget of \$12.5 million.

The Regional Technical Support sub-program provided PRODERE with assistance in implementing activities carried out by participating U.N. agencies. A team of eight specialists supported the Regional Coordinator and advised the national sub-programs. In addition to a UNHCR advisor on refugees and returnees, an ILO labor and employment advisor, and a WHO/PAHO health and sanitation advisor, the team included experts in community development, social economics, appropriate technology and marketing, agricultural economics, and project management. The National Coordinator supervised a national technical team of experts and Area Coordinators in the specific zones of intervention. The Area Coordinators, in turn, supervised the Area Technical Team and liaised with government counterparts, local NGOs and beneficiary communities. Of the \$2.5 million earmarked for essential technical assistance, training and advisory services to support PRODERE, \$1.5 million was assigned to UNHCR, \$500,000 to WHO/PAHO, and \$500,000 to ILO.

The third regional sub-program, EDINFODOC, was responsible for information, research and documentation. EDINFODOC documented the technical and methodological experiences of PRODERE and disseminated information worldwide. Its liaison office in Rome, Italy was responsible for updating the donors on PRODERE's activities. EDINFODOC had an operating budget of nearly \$8 million. The remainder of PRODERE's budget represented a reserve fund for emergencies and other activities.

Phases of the Program

PRODERE had several distinct phases. In its preparatory phase, from late 1989 to 1991, PRODERE concentrated on providing emergency assistance and establishing national sub-programs. PRODERE identified over 440,000 beneficiaries (approximately

73,000 families), of which more than 145,000 uprooted people were considered direct beneficiaries, and 295,000 local residents were identified as indirect beneficiaries

PRODERE focused on 13 urban and rural areas, identified as priority refugee host communities, conflict-affected areas expelling refugees and displaced persons, areas of extreme poverty, or areas with two or more of these characteristics. By undertaking immediate impact activities and quickly creating mechanisms for participation, PRODERE hoped to build credibility and the capacity to operate in conflict zones

PRODERE's second phase, which was initiated during 1992, concentrated on consolidating local program and project execution capacities. PRODERE's strategy was to support the peace process by building capacities for community-based project implementation. During this phase, improvements were made in project design and content, and the agreement among participating U.N. agencies was revised to make better use of their comparative advantage

The third phase started in 1993 when PRODERE concentrated on six former conflict areas in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua and six former refugee reception areas in Belize, Honduras and Costa Rica. Also during 1993, PRODERE's focus shifted from the municipal to the departmental level. The intention was to strengthen mechanisms for community participation. This was conceived as the last stage of the "pilot" PRODERE program, before its incorporation into national strategies for sustainable development.

Reconciliation and Peace-building

In the highly politicized and divided societies of Central America, PRODERE focused on former conflict areas characterized by deep political polarization, social disintegration and violent resolution of disputes. PRODERE's greatest contribution to the welfare of the population in these areas was its support for the peace-building process. The program was a civilizing force in areas of weak civil institutions and a strong, pervasive military. It strengthened civil society by establishing humanitarian spaces that allowed for consensus-building and reconciliation. By advancing the peace process in former conflict areas, PRODERE promoted the normalization of social and political relations at the broader national level in each of the

countries where it operated. Thus, uprooted populations residing both in PRODERE's areas and outside benefited from the social peace it nurtured.

PRODERE's achievements were built on its policy of neutrality and evenhandedness in dealing with all civilian actors in areas affected by conflict. At the same time that PRODERE eschewed involvement with the civic action programs of the armed forces, it sought to strengthen established relationships with government counterparts. The program also forged working relationships with community groups, NGOs and representative bodies of the populations that supported armed opposition movements. Often accused by opposition forces of acting as a counterinsurgency agent for the government and simultaneously denounced by armed forces for aiding armed opposition forces, PRODERE nevertheless managed to retain a nonpartisan posture and to maintain open communication with all sides. In a complex regional context, however, PRODERE's impact on peace-building and reconciliation processes varied between Central American countries.

One of PRODERE's most significant contributions to reconciliation and consensus-building was in El Salvador, particularly in Morazan and Chalatenango provinces. In El Salvador, PRODERE provided momentum for the peace accords by stabilizing social, economic and political conditions. Community-level discussions on development priorities were initiated with PRODERE's support, which subsequently set in motion a series of political processes. These processes permitted populations historically excluded from the broad political process to have a voice in identifying community needs and deciding community priorities. Many organizations, representing the interests of popular sectors, were legitimized as a consequence, and their full legalization was achieved with PRODERE's backing, further strengthening local-level capacities.

Support for the creation of new development-related institutions expanded opportunities for political participation in El Salvador. Historically polarized groups, which only three years previously were waging war against one another, now openly negotiate and cooperate in local systems for health, education, income-generating activities and Planning Committees. Differences between political parties have been put aside in these fora to discuss issues of common interest and to improve the welfare and development of the people of Chalatenango and Morazan. Educating local

authorities about their obligations to the entire population in their municipalities, including former combatants, uprooted populations and local residents, helped to establish an atmosphere of tolerance. A new stability is emerging in which mayors from the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party are beginning to grant legal recognition as a matter of course to organizations that represent the interests of populations previously associated with the armed opposition.

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PRODERE also actively supported the ongoing peace negotiations in Guatemala. Its actions sustained those sectors of the population promoting dialogue while undermining the positions of more recalcitrant sectors opposed to a negotiated end to Guatemala's thirty-year conflict. Its contributions were indispensable both in the local context and at the national level.

PRODERE's activities served not only to encourage dialogue among former combatants but also to transform the relationship between civil society and the state. In regions once characterized by military repression, civil authorities are now working hand in hand with uprooted populations to improve basic services. For example, PRODERE's support for the accreditation of popular teachers trained in the refugee camps led to their incorporation into the public education systems in Guatemala and El Salvador. While their absorption provides confirmation for the refugees that efforts during their exile were not in vain, the use of local teachers has also strengthened a deficient education system that was incapable of attracting competent professional staff to isolated regions.

In addition, PRODERE's territorial planning approach promoted relationships between civil society and government. Grassroots and community-based representative and development organizations were

legitimized because of their participation in municipal and local development committees. Furthermore, the discourse on development at the local government and community levels was expanded with the introduction of a human rights component. Local mayors in the Ixil Triangle and Ixcán in Guatemala, where some of the most egregious human rights violations took place in the 1980s, now dutifully address human rights issues.

In its dealings with the national government, PRODERE helped to transform the debate on refugees and displaced persons. As a result of the substantial amount of funds PRODERE had at its disposal, treatment of the internally displaced dramatically improved. For example, no longer an internal matter subject to the discretion of the Guatemalan government, the treatment of Guatemala's uprooted populations became a benchmark for the international community to monitor the progress towards greater democratization.

Particularly noteworthy was the creation by the Guatemalan government of the National Peace Fund (FONAPAZ). Its overall objectives, policies and priority intervention areas are also modeled on the standards of PRODERE. FONAPAZ's success to date is its slowly increasing acceptance by uprooted populations, historically wary of cooperation with government. If PRODERE's work in supporting the reinsertion of displaced and refugee communities in Guatemala is to continue, FONAPAZ will be a key resource.

PRODERE's intellectual leadership in shaping the content of the agreement on uprooted populations between the Guatemalan government and the National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala also helped to ensure the success of the reinsertion process. The interplay between humanitarianism and politics is clearly evident in the agreement, which establishes linkages between processes of democratization and the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the return of uprooted populations to their communities of origin. By committing both sides to supporting the reintegration of uprooted populations within a framework of social justice, democratization, and sustainable and equitable national development, international standards have been firmly established in Guatemala.

Despite the fact that the conflict in Nicaragua ended in 1989, it is in Nicaragua where PRODERE's contribution to peace appears most controversial.

Several factors have made it difficult to create humanitarian spaces adaptable for use in consensus-building and reconciliation.

The poorly defined ending to the Nicaraguan conflict meant that a framework for integrating humanitarian programs was absent. Although it was in Nicaragua where decision-making mechanisms based on consensus were first applied at the local and municipal levels in the early years of the program, the principle of *integralidad*, or integrated programs, did not take hold in the immediate post-conflict period. On the contrary, discriminatory programs shaped the operating environment. Even as the Cold War was ending, U.S. funds, channeled through the International Support and Verification Commission of the Organization of American States (CIAV/OEA) made former National Resistance fighters the sole beneficiaries, while UNHCR focused only on repatriated refugees through its Quick Impact Projects. Targeting beneficiaries according to political beliefs and association undermined the work of programs trying to reunite war-torn communities. In this highly politicized context, PRODERE was not immediately able to establish a nonpartisan profile. The program was viewed as pro-Sandinista because of a perception that it employed local experts with Sandinista credentials. Failing to gain instant acceptance by the former National Resistance fighters and their families, PRODERE was distanced from a group notoriously distrustful of all authority.

Failing prudently to distance itself enough from the Nicaraguan government, PRODERE was blamed for the government's inability to deliver on its promises to the former Resistance fighters. Only since the creation in 1993 of the Ministry of Social Action, the branch of government responsible for the coordination of assistance programs, has the government's presence been augmented in former conflict zones and been accorded its share of approbation. At the same time, PRODERE modified its own functions by withdrawing from project execution to support the creation of municipal- and departmental-wide planning frameworks.

PRODERE was able to incorporate the lessons learned from these experiences, expand humanitarian spaces to include previously excluded groups and work with other agencies in promoting reconciliation. For example, municipal technical committees formed under the auspices of PRODERE in Nicaragua were instrumental in coordinating Contras, Sandinistas,

government officials and NGOs under the mayor's chairmanship to discuss development plans for the municipality, and to decide on the best use of PRODERE resources. These committees were also a powerful tool for reconciliation, and helped to avoid the recurrence of conflict in northern Nicaragua. One clear case of this success was the transformation of the Estancia Cora military base into a PRODERE agricultural training center at the joint request of the Contras and the Sandinista army.

Most other PRODERE consensus-building mechanisms were inspired by the Nicaraguan experience. Former National Resistance fighters and the *Recompas* became beneficiaries of many PRODERE projects. There was programmatic cooperation between UNHCR and PRODERE in continuing technical and financial assistance to the Quick Impact Projects, and collaboration between CIAV/OEA and PRODERE, who worked together with the demobilization and reintegration of former Contra fighters. In all these cases, PRODERE demonstrated a commitment to the participation of its beneficiaries in the decision-making process as part of its strategy of promoting peace and reconciliation.

The pattern emerging throughout the region was thus one of significant linkage between PRODERE's humanitarian action benefiting uprooted populations and the overall peace process. In each of the three conflict-ridden countries, these linkages took different forms, reflecting the interplay between PRODERE's humanitarian goals and various political forces.

Addressing the Needs of the Uprooted

When internal conflicts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua were at their height, governments defined uprooted people as a national security problem. The needs of uprooted populations were addressed within a counterinsurgency framework, rather than as a humanitarian problem. Military authorities controlled population settlement policy, including access to and resettlement of civilian communities considered supportive of armed oppositions. While civilian authorities used political means and administrative controls to limit the humanitarian activities of non-state actors, military authorities employed direct repression.

These humanitarian actors struggled to secure and maintain access to civilians and the humanitarian space maintained for assistance and protection varied. As a new actor with substantial amounts of money and apparently close contacts with governments, PRODERE was greeted with skepticism by humanitarians bloodied by the struggles of the 1980s. Their concern was that rather than create additional opportunities to provide assistance, PRODERE would assume existing tasks, and thereby displace other actors.

By supporting the demands of uprooted populations to return home to demilitarized communities, PRODERE helped to redefine the content and shape of official policies. The program was instrumental in tipping the balance of power away from military towards civilian authorities throughout the region. In Nicaragua and El Salvador, PRODERE was able to accelerate the shift of control over population settlement policy.

In Guatemala, where conflict continues, PRODERE gave broad support to the needs of uprooted populations during their safe return home. PRODERE's decision to focus on remote regions of the Quiché Department was critical to opening up areas that were tightly controlled by the military. Prior to the program's arrival in Ixcán, there were no major humanitarian actors. As a decentralized program, it had to resolve logistic and human resource problems associated with operations in remote regions. Maintaining access in these regions, which was expensive in peacetime, became more so under conflict conditions.

Because of its presence in conflict areas, PRODERE had to confront the military in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. In Guatemala, for example, by advocating policies of safe voluntary return of all uprooted populations, including the Communities of Popular Resistance (CPRs), the formation of unarmed civilian patrols and the absence of military accompaniment, PRODERE faced a head-on confrontation with Guatemalan military authorities. The most contentious issue was the status of the CPRs, a population considered by military authorities to be a guerrilla force. By documenting the CPRs and supporting their right to be considered a civilian population, PRODERE facilitated the return of these communities. During the final two years of the program, PRODERE took advantage of the new

administration's more favorable position towards non-militarized returns in order to push for the removal of civil patrols from communities where it operated.

PRODERE's territorial approach was also an alternative to military strategy. With the creation of micro-regions, the designation of micro-regional centers and the formation of Planning Committees, new criteria, not related to national security policy, were introduced to determine development policies. As a result, investments in both social and physical infrastructure and in the productive sector are no longer made according to counterinsurgency criteria, but in terms of economic efficiency, efficacy and ease of access.

PRODERE's intervention made it a major actor in Central America. The amount of resources at its disposal and its unquestioned capacity to execute projects gave it unparalleled weight. At times its overall institutional presence in remote areas overshadowed that of governments. PRODERE's interventionist role shaped a population's vision about what can be expected from the international community and its own government.

The Human Rights Component

PRODERE was the first major multilateral development program to include human rights as a central component. This was a significant change in approach for both the United Nations and for the Italian government, which had previously only funded human rights work through NGOs. The promotion and protection of human rights were ultimately viewed as essential to a stable peace process and a smooth transition from emergency relief to development. The Italian government and UNDP/OPS recognized that the program "must grant the highest priority to the promotion of human rights, as an indispensable component of the development, peace and democracy process in Central America, which must establish links with other similar initiatives in the region." [Joint Declaration on PRODERE by the Italian government Delegation and UNDP, Guatemala City, 19 November 1991]

PRODERE not only strengthened national human rights institutions but also created grassroots human rights activities. Because human rights are a

matter of life and death for activists in Central America, this was an ambitious undertaking. The evolution of the human rights component eased PRODERE into more delicate and finely tuned activities. Considered initially as a documentation and legalization program, this component became a broad-based human rights initiative, whose focus shifted from displacement to one of general "human development."

PRODERE activities helped change the local human rights culture. Discussing human rights is no longer tantamount to subversion. PRODERE's human rights strategy was to support multidimensional activities that are both mutually supportive and reinforcing. The availability of substantial resources and a determination to push ahead despite resistance were the key factors in successful program execution. Massive dissemination of human rights information in Spanish and indigenous languages throughout the Guatemalan *altiplano* paved the way for human rights workshops in places previously notorious for violations. Human rights institutions received financial support to expand operations into remote rural areas. For example, Human Rights Ombudsmen in Guatemala and El Salvador now have national coverage, not just a capital city presence. Additional human rights institutions were created such as Casas de Cultura in Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal in the Ixil Triangle of Guatemala and Casas de Derecho in Chalatenango and San Francisco de Gotera in El Salvador. In Nicaragua, the creation of Casas de Justicia promoted respect for human rights while strengthening the basis for social participation. Throughout the areas of PRODERE's intervention, local human rights systems were also created to bring together government, police, NGOs and communities.

PRODERE provided training and technical assistance for human rights monitors. In Nicaragua, for example, 55 voluntary human rights promoters in 46 communities in the municipality of Quilali were trained to deal with human rights violations. Their function as promoters is to pass on what they have learned to others in their communities and to work with the judicial system and persons who allege their rights have been violated.

The progress made in protecting human rights is not, however, irreversible. Human Rights Ombudsman offices are still weak institutionally and financially. The extent to which PRODERE's human

rights work is sustainable depends on the willingness of communities traumatized by decades of abuses to emerge as strong and committed supporters of local human rights institutions, as well as the willingness of the government to respect and defend human rights and to provide access to a fair judicial system. Advances in human rights protection created by one organization are not automatically available to others. Opportunities to consolidate and strengthen human rights have often been missed. In Nicaragua, cooperation between CIAV/OEA and PRODERE on human rights work was not coordinated nationally. The interaction that did develop at the operational level was a result of geography and personality rather than an institutional strategy. A similar situation existed in El Salvador.

In El Salvador, there was a sense of separation between the ongoing work of other U.N. organizations and the short-term, more political and visible undertakings of the United Nations Observer Group in El Salvador (ONUSAL). This sense of separation impeded the development of a synergy that might have accelerated human rights work. Only as PRODERE and ONUSAL began to wind down their activities did cooperation begin. The Nicaraguan and Salvadoran experiences indicate that human rights protection could have been widely institutionalized if U.N. agencies had worked more closely with each other. The international community should therefore encourage PRODERE to improve the coordination of its efforts as it addresses an even more dismal human rights situation in Guatemala. Institutional actors, working jointly to confront formidable obstacles, can mount multifaceted action supporting peace processes and the protection and promotion of human rights.

U.N. & Donor Institutional Collaboration

PRODERE was a significant experience for the U.N. system in terms of inter-U.N. agency collaboration. It was the first time that four agencies (UNDP, UNHCR, WHO, and ILO) participated in the same program, a condition insisted upon by the donor, the government of Italy. The choice of UNDP as the lead agency was determined by its close links to governments and the accumulated experience of OPS, its operating arm. By order of the Secretary-General of the U.N., OPS became the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), a separate U.N. agency, on

January 1, 1995. This allowed the program to have greater flexibility and coordination in its relations with both host governments and other institutions.

Prior to the creation of PRODERE, interagency collaboration was weak, often nonexistent, and focused on short-term projects. U.N. agencies came into PRODERE with neither a clear consensus of what they could bring, nor a clear idea of what they would gain from their participation. For example, UNHCR was reluctant to assume anything beyond a symbolic presence within PRODERE, while the Italian government sought its active participation.

The process of learning to work together took place over the course of two often frustrating years. One casualty of this adjustment period was the Regional Technical Support Program, which, for a period in 1993, was left without UNHCR and WHO/PAHO representatives. However, an agreement was eventually reached on a joint approach to the problem of the uprooted, and administrative and managerial reforms were put in place to facilitate decentralized collaboration. Equally important, mutual respect was established between each agency for its area of comparative advantage.

The collaborative experience between UNHCR and UNDP is particularly noteworthy. After previous attempts at working together elsewhere in the world, relations had deteriorated between the two agencies such that misgivings existed regarding collaboration in Central America. Progress toward UNDP/UNHCR cooperation was also delayed by personality clashes and institutional turf battles over which agency could better perform in the areas prioritized by PRODERE. A joint UNDP/UNHCR working group, created partly as a result of the PRODERE experience, was an important development. It played a significant role in defining key issues and policy recommendations. However, the working group was not given adequate power and authority to reconcile the different approaches of the agencies.

The PRODERE experience highlights the need for better strategies to deal with inter-U.N. agency differences and put aside institutional competition before humanitarian actions are undertaken. PRODERE was a critical learning experience for U.N. agencies which had little knowledge about the operations of their counterparts. The lessons learned by each agency through PRODERE are now being used

to build a better understanding of each agency's respective roles, mandates, objectives and funding bases within the U.N. system.

Also noteworthy is the financial contribution made by the government of Italy. The Italian government saw itself as a peace-builder in Central America. This perception, coupled with the government's admiration of a model ILO program in Chalatenango, was instrumental in its decision to invest in PRODERE's community-based program. By insisting on a multi-agency approach and making an initial three-year commitment, the government of Italy acknowledged what other donors have often failed to recognize, namely that reconciliation and reconstruction are not achieved in a short time. Despite the fact that even these timelines proved too short to guarantee against backsliding in the development process and assure sustained peace, their financial support of \$115 million allowed for an ambitious program that may not have been possible through other donor arrangements.

The PRODERE experience also shows that a well-defined partnership between different U.N. agencies and the donor government is essential to the U.N.'s ability to promote durable, feasible and sustainable solutions to complex emergencies affecting uprooted populations. PRODERE illustrates how interagency collaboration may vary along the relief to development continuum. At the relief end, the PRODERE experience underscored the need for close and genuine UNDP/UNHCR collaboration. At the development end, it was equally apparent that UNDP and ILO, two agencies with very different mandates, can effectively cooperate on economic development programs.

The Relief to Development Continuum

PRODERE was both a humanitarian assistance and a development program. At first, PRODERE's execution strategy was shaped by the appraisal methodology used by an identification mission in 1988. That mission assisted government authorities in identifying priority zones and activities for resettlement and integration. Although intensive consultations were held with government departments, beneficiary populations were seldom consulted. Consequently, PRODERE's menu of interventions, addressing the

emergency conditions surrounding resettlement, were initially deemed as appropriate without prior broadly-based community discussions. The application of these supply-side "top-down" interventions produced mixed results.

Unlike conventional supply-side development programs, PRODERE was able to evolve into a demand-sensitive program for two key reasons. The first was the decision to decentralize operations to field offices located in the intervention areas. Through a decentralized presence PRODERE was able to interact creatively with beneficiary communities and to operate with more flexibility. Program adjustments allowed for re-prioritization of infrastructure repairs and regional differentiation with respect to needs for agricultural production. With decentralization, PRODERE was able to relate to ongoing parallel activities such as vaccination campaigns and health promoter training with the protection of human rights. For example, with a significantly large field staff in the northern part of the Quiche department in Guatemala, PRODERE challenged army authority and was able to ready communities for the return of refugees, recreate grassroots organizations, and promote the introduction of a human rights discourse.

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The second factor in PRODERE's evolution into a demand-sensitive program was the creation of planning counterparts at the local level. The development of a "bottom-up" planning capacity was a gradual process that had to accommodate the constraints imposed by the extreme poverty, fragile social structures and weak state institutions characterizing the areas of intervention. With 800 local planning committees in place, PRODERE's project interventions were later able to address priorities identified by participatory decision-making approaches involving beneficiary communities.

PRODERE displayed dexterity in taking advantage of the opportunities political changes presented. Critical to PRODERE's flexibility were the

financial and management changes which increased the discretionary powers of local program managers to respond to community-based demands. Accumulated subtle transitions resulted in a substantial shift in program perspective. For example, when PRODERE was conceived as a program to address the needs of uprooted populations, it was expected to complement, but not overlap, the conflict resolution efforts started under the auspices of the Esquipulas Agreements. By the end of the program's third year, the nature of PRODERE's engagement with the peace process had radically altered. With an end to the fighting in Nicaragua, the signing of the Peace Accords in El Salvador, and the start of peace negotiations in Guatemala, support for peace-building processes was incorporated into PRODERE's objectives.

Most refugees and displaced people are poor, mainly peasant populations, whose voices are rarely heard. Humanitarian assistance that focuses on poor people's priorities by increasing their participation in program formulation and implementation challenges not only the view that the poor are passive, irresponsible and inept, but also its political corollary that the poor should be planned for. PRODERE recognized the importance of local participation and consensus in the decision-making process.

Although in many ways PRODERE did evolve into a successful development-oriented program, it did have some shortcomings, particularly in its ability to provide development opportunities to women. Because refugee and displaced populations are largely comprised of women and children, the way in which the international community addresses humanitarian relief and development assistance requires attention to gender-specific capacities and needs. Although in some cases the opportunity has been taken to use refugee camp situations to support women's empowerment, refugee reinsertion projects and reconstruction policies do not always address the inequalities - political, social, economic as well as gender - which together were the causes of the humanitarian emergencies in Central America.

PRODERE's 1988 identification mission emphasized the needs of uprooted populations but did not specifically differentiate between the situation of uprooted men and women. Women's participation in PRODERE projects, therefore, largely focused on their reproductive and community-managing roles. As a result, in a country such as El Salvador, where families uprooted by conflict were frequently headed by

women, women were unable to gain access to the types of resources required for long-term stability.

PRODERE also took longer than program planners anticipated to move from the emergency relief stage to sustainable development. The program was originally approved for a three year period with the expectation that the emergency relief stage could be completed within PRODERE's first year, and the second two years would be dedicated to launching sustainable human development programs at the local level. However, the three-year plan was a political rather than a realistic time frame. PRODERE was approved by Central American governments and the international community for three years as part of PEC; its duration was not based on technical calculations of what the projects required for sustainability. In addition, the institutional weakness of government ministries was not fully acknowledged. It was also anticipated that local institutional capacity could be established more quickly than was the case.

The lesson of PRODERE is that peace-building cannot be achieved overnight. PRODERE shows that integrating development into humanitarian relief situations requires more than a fusion of two traditions. The donor community and implementing agencies will have to rethink their commitments when entering into PRODERE-type programs. In addition, the international community will have to expect to be involved for a decade, or more, before there are clear indicators that peace is irreversible and that a sustainable local development process is underway

Conclusions

The evolution of PRODERE as a human development program at the grassroots level holds important lessons. Its initial conceptualization was shaped by the interaction between outside experts with a vision that peace processes could be linked to broader development goals through creative insertion programs for war-affected populations and governments eager to gain access to substantial grant funds. Though the "people centered" approach was an important innovation, the uprooted populations themselves remained absent from the initial planning process. Their minimal participation in program design was a reflection of both the political moment and technical biases. It was only later, almost at the end of the process initiated by CIREFCA, that representative

organizations of uprooted civilians were ascribed a legitimacy that permitted their participation as equal actors in the search for durable solutions. In preparing for its insertion into a complex, politically charged context, PRODERE should have been more mindful of the views of non-governmental and community-based organizations. Much of the skepticism, distrust and suspicion might have been avoided if more open channels of communication had been established from the start.

The lesson is that "real" participation can only take root at a program's design stage. A participatory planning exercise may be costly, more time-consuming and politically sensitive, but benefits accrue later. The haste with which PRODERE entered the humanitarian fray did not allow the necessary detailed reconnaissance of a highly politicized terrain. Without the links to the beneficiary populations that other agencies had designed, PRODERE's engagement with resettlement processes was unnecessarily welfare-oriented and dependency-creating. Nevertheless, PRODERE's integrated territorial approach has intrinsic value. By encompassing a wide array of activities, including the provision of emergency food, medicine and shelter; the necessary documentation for uprooted people; non-discriminatory concern for uprooted populations, local residents and former combatants in the intervention areas; mental health programs; institution building for national, regional and local institutions; and the promotion and protection of human rights, PRODERE was able to address the root causes of vulnerability as much as the root causes of poverty. With its focus on attacking vulnerability, PRODERE laid the basis for stability in populations unfamiliar with peace and security

By rebuilding institutions of civil society, the program created a political safety net to cushion civilian populations against state excesses. PRODERE therefore shows that development in the context of post-war reconstruction and peace-building cannot be a simple question of rebuilding physical infrastructure, supporting the growth of productive capacity and generating new wealth.

PRODERE highlights the fact that humanitarian programs must deal with the hidden scars of warfare through policies and projects that support the reconstitution of community ties and through institutions that create the social networks critical for recovery

PRODERE has shown that, however politicized the international or national contexts, the humanitarian community can respond to human needs in a nonpartisan fashion. Through its work with political authorities, whether recognized governments or armed opposition forces, PRODERE encouraged and expected them to meet their obligations under international humanitarian law. PRODERE also recognized that developing credibility is a time-consuming and politically sensitive labor. The careful groundwork laid for the 1994 Guatemala agreement on uprooted populations, for example, was crucial to that agreement's success.

By decentralizing administrative, financial and decision-making responsibilities and authorities, a traditional weakness of UNDP/OPS operations was transformed into an asset. PRODERE's legitimacy was also enhanced by the flow of information from the field, as this exchange permitted staff in the capital cities to appreciate regional and sub-regional differences. When operational decisions are made near the beneficiaries, a program is less likely to be tied to politically-motivated policy makers. When beneficiaries are closer to decision-makers the principle of transparency is likely to be enhanced, providing an earlier opportunity to anticipate possible suspicion and distrust that could otherwise discredit the legitimacy of humanitarian action.

There are over twenty-five humanitarian emergencies in the world today. Many are the results of conflict that have been smoldering for more than thirty years and are a legacy of Cold War superpower rivalry. The number of civilian victims of conflict continues to rise as wars are fought increasingly against unarmed populations rather than armed opposition forces. With faint prospects in most situations for long-term asylum in host countries, the favored durable solution to the problem of war-affected populations is their eventual return home. The international community should therefore demand greater cooperation to assist the processes of reconciliation, consensus creation and peace-building through programs designed to reinsert uprooted populations. For these reasons, the PRODERE model has relevance far beyond Central America.

As a first attempt to engage a multi-dimensional emergency and development situation, the PRODERE model should serve as a point of departure for future programs. However, if it is to be replicated, the PRODERE model, particularly its territorial, nondiscriminatory and neutral approach, must be finely tuned to the specific country or region. The role of PRODERE in the peace processes of Central America should serve as an example for other regions which are seeking to make the transition from war to peace, reconciliation and reconstruction.■

