

The Synergos Institute

BUILDING BRIDGES IN RURAL MEXICO: How NGOs can strengthen Local Government through Collaborative Leadership

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Introduction

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Mexico's Award for Local Management and Government, 2001

Last November 13th 2001, CIDE (a leading social science research center in Mexico City) was the site of an important civil society event: the occasion marked the opportunity to give an award for excellence in local government. With the support of the Ford Foundation and with the participation of different academic and social organizations, this was the first call for municipalities to nominate public programs to compete for recognition from civil society. [...]In a country with such a strong centralized culture, the study and the promotion of local government activities is very important.

The fact that Mexico is a diverse country, with very different cultural regions, a huge disparity among municipalities (i.e., in size, budget, industrial development), and low trust in government made the challenge of launching this award a considerable one. [...]Out of the 479 applications, ten programs were selected as finalists. They presented their cases publicly and in front of the evaluation jury. Finally, five were selected to receive a special prize (a diploma and 25,000 dollars each) and the other five a diploma in recognition of their efforts and achievements. [...]

AWARDED PROGRAMS 2001: Special Prize

Program: Democratic Municipal Council; Municipality: Cuquío, State: Jalisco.

The recognition granted to the municipality of Cuquío, Jalisco, for the practices of its municipal government draws powerful attention to this small rural community of roughly 20,000 inhabitants. How does one of the most marginalized communities in the state of Jalisco implement government programs that compete with those of larger cities, including the state's capital? Several elements can be identified as keys to success; however, the relationship with one particular non-governmental organization (NGO) is an important element. This NGO is *Acción Ciudadana para la Educación, la Democracia y el Desarrollo*, or ACCEDDE (Citizen Action for Education, Democracy and Development). This case study describes the relationship between ACCEDDE's and the municipality of Cuquío and how, together, they worked to build bridges leading to more equitable and just development for local residents. We seek to analyze the way this group of people has managed to build solid and collaborative or "bridging" leadership through time, and in the process, has positively affected people's lives in many rural communities in Jalisco.

The project that earned Cuquío the prize, the Democratic Municipal Council, or *Consejo Democrático Municipal* (CODEMUC), has its origin in a long educational and organizational process began more than 10 years ago by a group of "popular educators" committed to the

creation of “spaces of justice”. It was from this team of researchers and volunteers and from their acquired experience that ACCEDDE later emerged.

Background

Cuquío is a rural municipality in the state of Jalisco, some 75 kilometers north of Guadalajara, in the middle of a hard to reach canyon. It is an ancient community. Its name comes from the indigenous Tarasco language and means “place of toads”. It acquired municipality status in 1844, but the parochial archives go as far back as 1666. Today Cuquío has a population of 17,563 living in more than 100 communities. Their main economic activity is agriculture. Corn and tomato produce are the most common products; cattle are also significant. Cuquío is located in a region where two thirds of the economically active population works in agricultural activities.

Jalisco is ranked first in agricultural production in Mexico’s GNP and has one of the longest peasant traditions in the country. Due to underdevelopment in its social services, Cuquío is also one of the 30 most marginalized municipalities in the state.

Proof of this situation can be seen in its lack of basic infrastructure services: only 46.2% potable water coverage; sewage and drainage 51.2% and electricity 88.1%, all of which have a negative impact on people’s lives. Each year, less than 5,000 students enroll or attend one of the 112 learning centers (there are only three high schools with 11 teachers in all). The 1995 census revealed that 82.45% of the adult population could read and write. The average rural Mexican has 3 years of schooling, versus 7.7 of the national average.

This situation of disadvantage favors migration to the cities, and more often, to the United States. 80% of all families living in ejidos (rural communities granted land by the government) have at least one member living outside the community. In Jalisco, the money transfers made by migrant working abroad have played increasingly larger role in the diversification of the rural economy. Cuquío is no exception: the first source of income in the municipality comes from U.S. wire transfers. One Cuquío citizen put it this way:

“They are leaving the work of the land to the most veteran; young people don’t want to stay...”

However these currencies also have a positive impact. While walking around downtown Cuquío, a flourishing commercial sector can be observed and gardens in the main plaza are kept in the American fashion. According to another resident,

“There are three brothers, young men that spend several months of the year doing yards in America. They take turns caring for the garden.”

When the town festivities are near, Cuquío’s sons and daughters send money to have their favorite bands hired. However, family disintegration and aging of the economically active population still remain serious effects of migration.

Having described such a situation, it could be concluded that Cuquío is just another rural municipality in Mexico; however as a finalist in the Local Government and Management Award, this “land of toads” compels us to look closer at what has been happening there for more than 10 years.

By 1985, the Jesuits had been working for some years with the people of Cuquío via Base Ecclesial Communities (BEC's). This work included community workshops and assemblies in which participants reflected upon common problems and self-diagnosed the prevailing problems that they faced. A document from such an exercise identified the following problems:

"...most lands, and those of better quality, are monopolized by landlords; in trading our products [...] we are exploited, when they buy cheap our products; [...] caciques control public office and mayors are not interested in the people's needs; government cheats, robs and harms us [...] in popular participation, few people participate and is organized, most people are conformist..."

With such a problematic scenario characterized by marginalization and uneasiness, the need for solutions, as well as the identification of potential actors to promote these solutions was essential. Cuquío needed to design a strategy that would guarantee change.

Conflict and Need in Cuquío: A Sample of Rural Mexico's Reality

The situation of political, social and economic marginalization in Cuquío, Jalisco, which was particularly severe during the eighties and nineties, was not uncommon. In Latin America, social and economic inequity is a constant that prevails all over the continent. In Mexico, almost half of its 100 million inhabitants live in extreme poverty. One factor that explains this situation, in part, is that after the 1910 Revolution, a single-party rule was instituted. From this regime, which monopolized the presidency for over 70 years and continues to carry significant weight, emerged a strained relationship between the government and the people, as characterized by state corporatism and political clientelism.

The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) built a corporatist system controlled by the state, in which the popular, agrarian and working classes were aggregated and represented in a series of hierarchic levels. Outside of this controlling structure, citizen rights could not easily be made effective. Clientelist practices, on the other hand, guaranteed that PRI candidates would win every election as they exchanged public services, infrastructure and other favors in return for votes. The leader of the nation was the President and union and agrarian leaders mediated between him and the people. State paternalism favored citizen conformism. Civil society was scarcely organized and frequently repressed. Even if the '70s saw an awakening of social movements, the government quickly stopped it before it could reach the countryside.

In economic terms, the decade of the eighties was particularly difficult, marked by the 1982 moratorium of the debt. This crisis led the Mexican government to implement adjustment policies that, among other measures, translated into a cutback to social and agrarian aid programs destined for the least favored sectors.

Since the seventies, in Cuquío "...the main demands of people had been: justice to those in need, basic services and tenure of the land." Mr. Leobardo Torres, member of city council during this administration, mentioned the same needs. He also noted usury and market monopolization as prevailing problems. This meant the incapacity to improve the quality of life of the people who did not have voice or vote in community decisions. Don Leobardo said that in the '80s, the situation became critical. After spending many years in Guadalajara

as a worker, he went back to his community and found that nothing had changed. The elementary school was still unfinished and farmers continued to suffer through hard times. Many were indebted to buy fertilizers from the local monopolists even though the interest was unfairly high. In addition, the existence of small land-owners, besides the traditional ejidos, made the joint search for collective solutions even more difficult. According to one description, this is the situation of the rural setting:

“..the impoverished peasant does not only find the market hostile and strange, but in most cases he can’t directly deal with it and is thus forced to sell his produce to monopolists and intermediaries to whom he progressively becomes indebted, and then forced to pay outrageous interest rates.”

By the 1980’s, however, there had been some progress in the peasant association, apart from the structures that further perpetuated marginalization. The nucleus of this organization were the BECs, run by the Jesuits, where reflection was promoted in order to encourage positive change to end poverty and injustice. It was hard work, with the end purpose not only to raise critical awareness of the peasants’ reality, but ultimately to create a shared vision of the problem so as to trigger larger support of the problem-solving processes.

The challenge was huge. For starters, the people were unaccustomed to exercising their civil rights, while at the same time, local authorities saw many of their interests in jeopardy. People were afraid to come together and the Church’s role was not that of a popular movement organizer. The people of Cuquío desperately needed a catalyst: an outside agent that would be able to accompany this process.

ACCEDDE: A Profile

Acción Ciudadana para la Educación, la Democracia y el Desarrollo, A.C. was formally born in November 1995, by an interdisciplinary team of professionals with a vocation for service. Their mission statement reads as follows:

“To promote and support proposals that strengthen the integral development of rural society, so that starting from the reality of the impoverished and excluded sectors, we can contribute to shape active subjects of their self-development with a humanist perspective”

As of today, more than 45 people work full time for this organization, and since 1995, they have implemented more than 43 different projects in 33 municipalities in the state of Jalisco. The organization operates around three objectives:

- *Financial Area: ACCEDDE supports and mediates financing for producer organizations. They also administer micro credit programs and operate as an authorized agent for a federal program that finances the agricultural sector. They think of themselves as “project translators” that help small producers become eligible for credit.*
- *Training and technical assistance for rural development*
- *Local development and public policies: ACCEDDE sees the community as a place that empowers socioeconomic development. ACCEDDE works with government and civil society to develop capacities in both citizens and public officers and their respective organizations. Among other*

services, they offer assistance, workshops and seminars and help design special projects to encourage citizen participation, municipal development and public administration.

ACCEDDE perceives itself as a professional initiative working for social justice and a shared vision that today's society requires the establishment of positive collaboration among different sectors. To date, ACCEDDE has been able to achieve synergistic relations with local governments, financial institutions, state and federal government agencies, international organizations, and other NGO's and academic institutions. However, when analyzing the key to ACCEDDE's success, we must examine its origins and growth process. How did ACCEDDE grow into an organization that today serves more than 10,000 peasant families in Jalisco? How did they manage, among other things, to become financial mediators for one of Banco de México's key programs? ACCEDDE has been able to accomplish a lot in such a short period of time. Though officially founded in 1995, ACCEDDE's history goes back to when an enthusiastic group of popular educators arrived in Cuquío, Jalisco to support the development of a peasant organization.

As an institution, ACCEDDE credits its ability to exercise "bridging" leadership to the following factors:

- Its capacity to evolve and continue to offer pertinent support to its beneficiaries, based on an on-going diagnosis of reality as well as a permanent reflection regarding its acquired knowledge and experience. This has led the initial group of popular educators, operating in a very limited context, to become an NGO that operates in a much wider scope.
- Its commitment to promoting a self-managed development processes in which the beneficiaries are also the main actors and decision-makers.

In order to fully understand the philosophy that underlies ACCEDDE's leadership, as well as the reasons that, in this particular case, make individual or personal leadership hard to identify, one must recognize that this organization has its roots in a popular education project.

Popular education promotes the creation of collective conscience by means of the acknowledgment of situations of economic, political or social disadvantage with the ultimate goal of self-attained transformation. As a matter of fact, one of the basic starting points of popular education is that popular sectors are the subjects of their own change, instead of mere passive objects. Empowerment through awareness could be the motto of this approach to development.

ACCEDDE's aim was to help Jalisco without creating dependence on the NGO. Ricardo de la Torre, ACCEDDE's director explains that this has always been an objective:

"In creating identity around the rural community...what matters here is that people become the owners of the processes from which they are benefiting...processes are designed not to have ACCEDDE in them"

Rocío Bernal, also a founding member, states that it is important to note that the people of Jalisco did not only design projects, but they were also promoters of self-diagnoses that later give birth to solutions:

“If we arrived and told them what we thought their needs were, people would not be willing to work towards their solution...”

Now that we have gotten a glimpse of ACCEDDE’s way of thinking and acting, we are prepared to approach their process of internal growth, as well as of the institutionalization of their experience-based knowledge. Guillermo Díaz Muñoz, founding member of ACCEDDE, points out that ACCEDDE has a sort of marriage with Cuquío; their stories and evolution are closely intertwined. Thus, to understand the dynamics of how ACCEDDE’s leadership was exercised in the community, we must understand how it has evolved as an organization, as well as the evolutionary story of democratization and development in the municipality of Cuquío itself.

First Phase: The Popular Educators as Agents of Change

As noted above, the story of ACCEDDE is tightly linked to Cuquío. Although ACCEDDE was formally founded in 1995, its history can really be traced back ten years earlier. In 1985, the ITESO, a Jesuit University in Guadalajara, established, by means of its Center for Agricultural Coordination and Promotion (CECOPA) collaboration with the BEC’s in Cuquío. Their goal was to advise and accompany the organizational process that had begun to take form in rural areas. It was in the ITESO that the townspeople of Cuquío found their catalyst.

It was an inexperienced, though enthusiastic, team consisting of three full-time researchers from ITESO—three Jesuit scholars dedicated two full days a week to this activity--and several students doing community volunteering. The idea was to exercise the University’s social commitment working with Cuquío’s least favored families, but at the same time, to be part of a more transcendent project. “The idea was not to be snipers, but to have concrete referents”, says Guillermo Díaz. Cuquío’s case had the advantage that the pastoral agents had already made initial contact and completed a situation analysis.

Their main role was that of popular educators. Francisco Vío Grossi indicates that there are three approaches to rural development: asistencialism, technocratic and popular education. Popular education is most significant since it assumes a unique commitment from the involved agents: “...the point of view of the people who are afflicted is chosen, the people being the set of social sectors that are oppressed, exploited, or otherwise put aside.” Education and research become a committed practice.

From this perspective, the methodological question of the approach was clear from the beginning. The participatory research methods worked hand-in-hand with a commitment to change the situation, after the initial acknowledgment of reality. Approaching people to help them evaluate their own situation was already being done by the BECs, but the task still had to be completed. As Vío Grossi notes:

“People didn’t believe collective action could be achieved. They had been through failures with the cattle dealer’s association, or in ejidos...the conditions were not positive because there was not anyone

to coordinate this job. The first step was to raise consciousness in people to be enthusiastic about association.”

In this sense, Rocío Bernal, comments that one of the keys to success in Cuquío in that first moment, was that they never had any intentions to impose anything on anyone. Their proposal has been to walk beside Cuquío’s people, to accompany them in their self-reflection and diagnosis.

“It’s about a process of discernment they have to come to appropriate...”

Once this self assessment was made and appropriated, the next step was to begin to organize a farmers’ association. Their first attempt was to participate in an alliance of ejidos, with the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), within the state’s corporate structure. This attempt to pursue a democratic transformation from the inside out failed and it was not until 1987 that, with support from CECOPA, the Independent Peasant Organization (OCIJ) was born. Today, the OCIJ gathers about 2,000 producers and 35 rural production societies; it commercializes 30,000 annual tons of corn and has storage buildings to protect the harvests.

The OCIJ addresses was founded with the following basic objectives:

- To obtain better priced input goods
- To obtain better corn commercialization
- To make financing and credit available and reachable to small producers

The OCIJ proved that positive change could be achieved by working collectively; trust was built and a bridge was completed. Cuquío producers now had a direct link with the market and thus better opportunities to solve their economic needs. Nonetheless, consolidation was hard. At first, the movement was confronted by opposition. Demonstrations and pacific marches were organized in Mexico City. Don Leobardo remembers that not everyone wanted to participate. Some did not share the promoters’ ideas and even called some of the team’s members “reds”, but Cuquío, being a very catholic society, the Church played an important role during that time and the local priests supported the organizing efforts.

On a national political level, the first federal election where the opposition gained force took place in 1988. This is particularly true for Jalisco: the federal elections of 1988 represented a landmark change in the state. In electoral terms, a new political geography was born. According to the official results, bipartisanship ended and three new political forces were consolidated, although each carried different weight among the populous. In Jalisco, the leftist *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN) took one quarter of the votes, adding a new player to the political landscape dominated by the traditional PRI and the more conservative PAN.

Under these circumstances, the OCIJ, which had slowly but surely been gaining ground in the municipality, as well as citizen recognition, took a chance and participated in the municipal election. The decision was not easy. Local caciques had begun to react to this more legitimate political offer. On the other hand, neither CECOPA nor the OCIJ had had any real experience in elections, only the desire to change things. The resources available were insignificant compared to those of the state sponsored candidates. Though Fidel Mora, OCIJ’s candidate, lost the election, he did manage to come in second and won a seat on the

city council. But because people had developed high expectations on the election, the final results came as a total defeat. It seemed as if the movement was losing momentum and that political participation was not viable after all.

On another level, in 1988, a process of self-assessment began to take place at CECOPA's sponsoring university regarding community outreach activities. The idea was to articulate the work that was being done in favor of the most in need with university life. The objectives were to link community service with knowledge acquisition, personal formation and research. By then, CECOPA had been mainly doing direct promotion that had little impact on campus life resulting in an incompatibility with the new politics.

CECOPA's team now encountered a dilemma: How could they work out such an arrangement if Cuquió's project demanded full-time attention? How could they positively and effectively articulate both visions? On one hand, there was the "debt with the peasant process" they felt they had acquired, and on the other, loyalty to the institution that had started and supported the project.

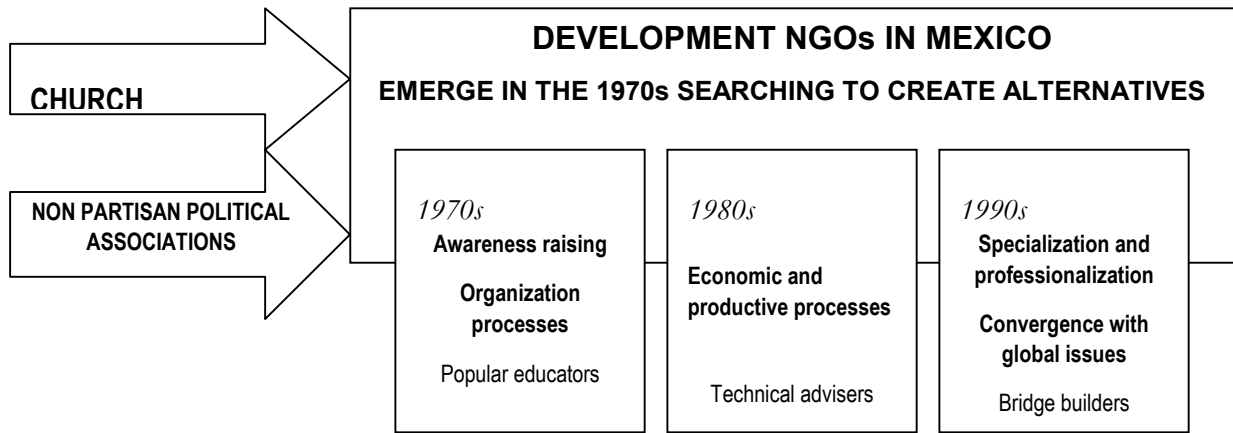
Interlude: Building Collaboration through Popular Movements

In 1989, with the purpose of furthering the work in Cuquió, some of CECOPA's members started an NGO. The *Center for Support of Popular Movements of the Occident* (CAMPO) was born with a very low profile and only four members. This new project intended to separate from the University and find alternative financing. The only thing they had for sure was tremendous faith in their working capacity, a willingness to serve, and the conviction that popular movements could make a difference; international financing seemed like an option. The group was formally an NGO that we can classify as development focused.

According to the Mutual Support Forum (FAM), which promotes discussion and reflection around social issues, development NGOs are those that

"Systematically work with popular sectors. Their intention is not purely nor mainly assistencial, but of promotion...they seek active participation of popular sectors in the solution of their problems."

In fact, Rubén Aguilar, a representative of FAM, proposes a schema for the evolution of this type of NGO in Mexico from the seventies on. This model is interesting in that it reflects how ACCEDDE's leadership was built. The following graph shows a general synthesis of Aguilar's assertion:



This illustration allows us to illustrate the evolution of CECOPA’s growth into CAMPO and then, through the 1990’s and ACCEDDE’s founding. It is worthwhile mentioning that even if the evolutionary logic corresponds with that of ACCEDDE, the temporal variable can have a one decade delay.

Significant Changes in Cuquío’s Politics

As the OCIJ grew in the aftermath of its first electoral competition, the needs of Cuquío’s people also changed. The emerging Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) relieves OCIJ from its role as opposition and permits it to focus on economic and technical issues. CAMPO starts to manage micro-finance programs and to advise productive processes, primarily still through the OCIJ. Eventually, citizen demand is begins to be channeled through the CODEMUC (Democratic Municipal Council) in 1993, which is made possible by the political change in government.

Thus, the most important transformation for Cuquío comes in 1992, when it becomes the first municipality in Jalisco to elect a mayor from the PRD. Héctor Manuel Figueroa, a candidate supported by OCIJ—and mayor again for the 2001-2003 administration—received 2696 votes, versus 1772 for the PRI candidate. Real political democratization becomes a reality in Mexico.

As noted above, participating in political life in Mexico prior to this time was difficult, if not impossible, due to the prevalence of an exclusionary system built upon corporatist and clientelist structures. Change was imperative for democracy to really start working. The peak point of political change in Mexico came in 2000 when the opposition PAN party—and Vicente Fox as its candidate—defeated the PRI for the first time ever in a presidential election. This was a transformation that was built from the bottom. In fact, it might be argued that the process of the country’s democratic transformation had its starting point in municipal democratization, for it is at this level that society and government first meet.

The CODEMUC Era: An Opportunity for Collaboration and Change

ACCEDDE was able to build on the organizing and democratization work of CECOPA and CAMPO to respond to local needs. Actually, this is one of ACCEDDE’s core values even today. As one internal documents states:

“The strengthening of civil society through popular education and citizen awareness is the best catalyst of change”.

After the 1992 election, a process of implementing citizen participation in government starts to take root. This is the project for which Cuquío received the Local Administration and Government Award. The Democratic Municipal Council of Cuquío (CODEMUC) is a mechanism of local participative democracy, and it constitutes an excellent example of the way ACCEDDE successfully builds bridges. Several reasons can be outlined to illustrate why CODEMUC is the result of a bridging process.

First of all, it was born from the acknowledgment that citizens’ demands are many and varied and that the only way to solve them quickly and effectively is through collaboration among sectors. As one local farmer noted,

“There is a widespread notion that ‘everyone has their own parcel of land, but this is not so; we have to work together to nurture the soil, to prepare it so it produces...”

It is also important to note that several of ACCEDDE’s members agreed that the time factor was crucial, that specific situations have specific timing and they have learned that slowing down the implementation of solutions often meets with disappointment and impatience. CODEMUC was planned and implemented in a relatively short period of time because of this.

On the other hand, CODEMUC is the result of an overnight diagnosis that was not conducted from the outside, but is the result of reflection made by the citizens, who in finding shared problems, began to think of themselves as partners in solving these issues. Whenever there are common problems, ACCEDDE believes there are opportunities for collaboration. Sometimes, they say, it is a matter of providing a space to meet and establish partnerships, and this is exactly what they have done. They have facilitated places for discussion, dialogue and joint solutions.

CODEMUC: Its Origins and Scope

CODEMUC was born from the early activities of the newly elected local government in 1992. Central to these activities was a participatory diagnosis carried out throughout the municipality. In addition, several NGOs with experience in municipal government were invited (such as Jalisco’s IMDEC) to a planning workshop. One of the priority lines that emerged from this exercise was that it was imperative to reduce the gap between government and citizens. During three days, local officers, elected authorities and recognized community leaders gathered in a Guadalajara hotel to discuss Cuquío’s issues and alternatives for positive change. Finally, they came up with the proposal to form CODEMUC.

Generally speaking, CODEMUC is an inclusive citizen association whose main goal is “to guarantee the inhabitants of Cuquío greater participation and attention to their economic, social and cultural needs by means of joint collaboration between authorities and citizens to achieve integral development”. To achieve that goal, Cuquío is divided into 10 geographical zones, each one composed of about 10 small communities. Each community is then encouraged to reflect about what they have and what they need:

“...it is very important to know first what it is that we have: water, school, street, financial aid from the government...otherwise we do not appreciate it”.

Each member then gives an opinion about his or her needs. Listening in solidarity is a must, says Don Leobardo Torres, who coordinated CODEMUC. He says something they have learned from the team and the experience in CODEMUC is,

“...that everyone has something to say...sometimes we think that what the others say is not so important, but each has their own needs, and for them, they are important, if from the beginning we don't listen to them, they won't participate afterwards...”

From these community assemblies, a list of issues is generated and they democratically elect a counselor; he or she will participate in monthly meetings at the zone level. Each zone has in turn a secretary, elected by the counselors. Direct vote is not needed at this level, as counselors provide legitimate representation. Besides, “...people would get tired of this, if at every step they found consultations being made, they would not participate”. That is why trust and involvement from the beginning are so vital. In the zone meetings, a prioritization of needs is made. The process of prioritization follows several principles:

- Equality of opportunity: The most disadvantaged communities get attention first (e.g.: everyone should have water).
- Organized communities get more benefits: CODEMUC does not just listen and take note of needs, but there has to be willingness to work towards them, and if there are communities that are already working in joint projects, there is a better chance to get support for their requests.
- Joint efforts leads to good results: Government resources for each project have some kind of community participation, so more projects get done. It also means getting people more involved and encouraging positive appreciation of the results: “...before, when government gave us something, people didn't care if things deteriorated, since they hadn't paid for it...”
- The community participates, chooses and proposes: Everyone has a voice and is taken into account.

CODEMUC was formed by all 10 zone secretaries, plus counselors from other grassroots organizations: OCIJ, Organization of Peasant Women, youth organizations, etc. Don Leobardo says that one challenge they now face is getting more interests and organizations involved, however, “...there is still the habit to go on one's own”.

CODEMUC holds plenary meetings every two months; counselors have transportation fees covered by local government and receives its facilities on special lease for 99 years. Each year, a Citizen Act is written, with the municipal prioritization of development needs. José Almedia of ACCEDDE says that this document captures “the spirit of solidarity, will and community consensus expressed in a list of the community's demands with the conviction that the satisfaction of these needs involves shared commitment [between citizens and government]...” About 60% of public spending corresponds to the order set by the Act.

CODEMUC's also plays the role of liaison between community and government. CODEMUC's coordinator participates in every local council meeting. He or she has a voice but not a vote. In this way, CODEMUC represents a bridge with the government where citizens participate in the designing of policies and have direct representation in every decision made. CODEMUC emerged, true, from a government initiative, with NGO support, but it works because it starts off from people's real concerns, needs and demands. Willingness to make it work together with other sectors furthers makes it a success.

ACCEDDE's Role in Building Local Bridges

In 1995, while CODEMUC was taking its first steps and the election was coming closer, internal differences in CAMPO arose. "Diverging styles of leadership" caused a division from which ACCEDDE was eventually born. Even though CAMPO still exists and works in Cuquío (specializing in gender issues), both organizations have made a pact on behalf of the people, to avoid internal differences.

ACCEDDE is thus the result of internal debate and the enduring commitment to the struggle for citizen's rights and justice. As ACCEDDE began working with other municipalities who had seen or heard of its work, more bridges were built. Recognition and positive results helped them get grants from the Inter-American Foundation and certification from FIRA, a federal program for rural financing micro-credit programs. Diversification and expansion has led to specialization. Three members are currently in the process of earning a master's degree in public policy and management and they have accountants, agricultural engineers and other professionals on staff.

From the original team, three people still work full time in ACCEDDE: Ricardo de la Torre, Director; Ignacio González, Local Development Coordinator and Rocío Bernal. Other members have taken different paths but remain close advisers and counselors. There are, in fact, two kinds of members: operational and advisory.

It is interesting to note that ACCEDDE has an institutional profile in which personal or individual leadership fades in favor of organizational leadership and team effort. This is a theme voiced repeatedly by every member of the staff. In Rocío's words:

"I think that with people in Cuquío, if I go to them, I am Rocío Bernal, of course, with a history of many years of work, of growing and sharing, but also, if today some new member approaches the town on ACCEDDE's behalf, there has been some recognition won towards the organization".

This does not, of course, mean that there are not any important personalities, but that the key is:

"...to acknowledge each one's scope [of influence and work], to respect and include, and of course, to recognize personal particularities, and above all, to exercise a shared leadership of respect, both internally, between members, and with the different actors they interact with: government, grassroots organizations, and the private sector."

On the other hand, ACCEDDE's evolution and that of its members, as well as the recognition it has gained, has a lot to do with the internal mystique or values, which Guillermo Díaz has said is,

“...to reunite what is possible with what is wishable...to negotiate what is possible with reality and ideology...”

This is the vision that has kept them from stalling and led them to learn from experience to be flexible. However, they make it clear that

“...in the synergistic processes we establish, neither democracy nor people’s appropriation of the projects are negotiable.”

Relationships are also important at all different levels. Rocío Bernal says,

“We do not see ourselves as mere external actors, in the sense that we do not just get paid to do some project”.

Ignacio adds: *“we propose, guide and help, but the ultimate decision to make this work happen is the beneficiaries.”*

They recall experiences with local governments who just want them to design a program as consultants, but don’t want to get involved in the process; this is not how ACCEDDE works. Collaboration is the name of the game.

Finally, there is also the religious background ACCEDDE’s members share. Coming from the Jesuit experience of both the University and the collaboration with the BEC’s, there is a strong belief in the transcendence of faith. The linkage between faith and action and the commitment with positive change in society remain core values of the work being done in ACCEDDE. However, transmitting this ideal to the new generations is a big challenge. As the ACCEDDE has grown in the last year, many people have joined the organization for various reasons. Rocío Bernal thinks this is a major challenge ahead *“...if we are not able to pass on these values to the newcomers, we might risk becoming a very nice consulting office and nothing more...”*

Conclusion

Persistence, spirit of service, self-learning, as well as faith in popular processes are some of the elements that make ACCEDDE an NGO that stands out and makes a difference. Their evolution illustrates an on-going process of learning and adapting to change and speaks of an enduring commitment to the most disadvantaged. Today, ACCEDDE has cooperative partnerships and alliances with many sectors and it also has plans to open regional offices in other parts of Jalisco; they have recently begun working with a local government in the neighboring state of Nayarit.

ACCEDDE, at first glance, is a development NGO with activities in political, technical and economic areas that points people towards community solidarity well-being. Theirs is a story of bridging leadership: collective effort to build an organization capable of responding to the growing demands of the communities in which they work. Their capacity to learn, evolve and grow has multiplied their impact and allowed them to become experts in their field, and expand their scope of action, benefiting more communities each day.

Key Questions

Do you agree with the author that this case is an example of “bridging” leadership? Why or why not?

Who are the key actors in this case and how would you describe their interests?

How would you describe the strategies used by ACCEDDE to encourage collaboration?