DISASTERS AND COPING MECHANISMS IN CAKCHIQUEL GUATEMALA:

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

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INTERTECT

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Introduction

Where disasters occur and organizations and agencies respond to that disaster with assistance or developmental programs, the effectiveness of a program will depend to a great extent on the understanding of how the recipient cultures function and the methods that can be utilized to work within the pre-existing cultural framework. The major focus of the following paper is on identification of the coping mechanisms that are inherent in the culture systems in Guatemala from the viewpoint of their effectiveness, and how they may be used as channels for efficient and effective assistance and development projects.

The first part of the paper contains a discussion of the factors comprising disaster situations in Guatemala, the levels within the societies at which they occur, and the kind of assistance which may be given. It includes a definition of what constitutes internal -- culturally appropriate -- coping mechanisms and external -- culturally inconsistent -- coping mechanisms, and a description of the culture-specific concepts which are necessary to the understanding of the paper.

The second part consists of a discussion of the social, religious, political and economical cultural aspects of both internal and external coping mechanisms, with the consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Finally, the paper presents an evaluative discussion of the characteristics and generalizations from the aspect of: 1) internal versus external coping mechanisms; and 2) the traditional (more simple) versus modern (more complex) cultures.

General Background Information and Definitions

A. What makes a "disaster" in the Guatemalan Indian culture?

In the historic past, the rural Indians of Guatemala have had only themselves to look to for the necessities of living. The Indian has historically been self-sufficient. He has the knowledge to build his own shelter from materials which have been locally available. He grows his own corn, beans and squash, storing the harvest to last until the next crops. The women have had the knowledge of spinning the cotton which they later wove into lengths from which their clothes, and service clothes, were made. Surplus goods were sold or traded to provide for necessities or luxuries which one could not obtain or manufacture for oneself. On occasion, where the need was great, the family might sell a more expensive commodity and consume a lower grade product for its own use, thereby managing to obtain essential goods of food, clothing or medicine which they could not otherwise afford. The Indian has known a hard life in the highlands of Guatemala for many generations.

In the past few decades, an economic base has come to many areas where improved communication and transportation has brought them into the market economy. As an alternative to a multi-skilled occupational system, the latter-day Indian has found that by specializing, he may be able to purchase the necessities for living without the expenditure of time and energy which was the way of his

ancestors. The price for an easier life has been the loss of skills, and an investment in products and goods of a market economy system.

The majority of rural Indians in the Guatemalan highlands live in disperse settlements, living on or near the land they farm. With the coming of marketing systems, which depend upon systems of transport, the rural Indian has relocated in towns or on their outskirts. With the change of occupational activities and change of residence location, the Indian has adapted to many of the culture patterns of the dominant (Guatemalan-Spanish) culture. The change in tradition brought about by the change in activities and location is exemplified in the adaptation of many of the traditions of the dominant culture. Once the characteristic, visible Indian culture traits have been replaced by those of the dominant culture, the term "Ladino" is used to distinguish the "non-Indian" from the "Indian" culture.

In the Indian cultural framework, tragedies and disasters are not the unusual or rare occurrence. A man may lose his life in a bus accident, be struck by a vehicle while walking beside the road, or drown after his canoe overturns in a choppy lake; the family house may catch fire and burn with all their personal belongings inside. Children die in infancy or early childhood from dysentery, amoebas, worms or malnutrition. These types of events are not thought of as being unusual; rather they are thought of as being a common evil which, unfortunately, affects oneself or one's circle of acquaintances. An event such as an earthquake is considered an occurrence that just happened to affect many people at the same time.

In the more traditional communities, the mechanisms that operate at the family or individual level come into operation at the community level. The exceptions largely depend upon the extent to which people have been affected psychologically and the extent to which the normal assistance mechanisms have been interrupted.

B.   The "patron" in Guatemala:

The term "patron" is typically used to denote a land-owning, upper-class individual who usually employs a large number of seasonal workers and a lesser number of permanent workers.

In Guatemala, there are many "fincas" or plantations which grow one or more crops of cotton, coffee, sugar, cardemum, bananas, or tea. The owner, or patron, normally supplies housing and, at times, food for his workers. The workers may come from many areas of the country, some choosing to remain on the finca, while others are contracted for short periods (usually one month) by professional contractors who locate willing workers, sign them up and transport them to the finca. Living and working conditions vary depending upon both the patron and his profit margin. Poor conditions and low wages may result from either an insensitive, greedy patron, a low-yield finca which cannot support improvements, or both. Good conditions and good wages are a result of both a patron who desires healthy and comfortable conditions for his workers, and the income to finance them.

The term "patron" is also applied to owners of factories and commercial establishments, as well as to an individual who, through wages or gifts, supports or significantly subsidizes another individual.

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C.   Class structure in Guatemala:

The class structure in Guatemala has typically been divided into two major divisions: "Indian" and "Ladino".

The Indian speaks an Indian first language, typically wears traditional clothes, lives in traditional structures, and depends on his own farming for the major part of his subsistence. Culturally, the Indian retains the majority of the traditions and beliefs of his Indian ancestors and considers himself to be an Indian.

A Ladino is described as a "non-Indian". The term has been applied to a wide range of individuals, from the apparent Indian who speaks poor Spanish and says he is a Ladino, through the Spanish first-language poor, up to the wealthy upper-class. The upper classes who might object to the term "Ladino" may choose to call themselves "Guatemaltecos". The term "Guatemalteco", when used within the nation, refers to residents of Guatemala City. As most of the upper class live or maintain residences in or around Guatemala City, visitors of obvious wealth traveling in more remote areas are called "Guatemaltecos". The term "Indian" has often been used as an insult by the higher classes, and is understood as such by many Indians. The term "natural" is less offensive.

In recent years, the Guatemalan Indian has received more respect for his traditional lifestyle, especially from the educated younger generation who are in general friendlier, more respectful, and more considerate than their ancestors who treated the Indians as children.

Rural Indians who must travel outside their town area will often change from their everyday traditional dress to the "long pants", shirt and shoes of the Ladino to avoid the double standards in treatment and service in the larger urban towns.

D.   Mechanisms for coping with disaster situations:

If we assume for the moment that the largest same-culture unit which is effective in assistance is that of the town, then the existing mechanisms to cope with disaster situations may be classified as being internal or external to the immediate culture group, i.e., the town. Internal mechanisms would be those that are on-going and established within the geographical and cultural limitations of the town. External mechanisms are those which have their foundation in sources external to the community. These mechanisms are controlled principally by individuals external to the recipient community.

External mechanisms themselves may be divided into two categories. The first category is that of mechanisms which are external to the community but basically internal to the general culture area, thereby implying that the cultural background of the recipient and assistant units, if not generally the same, are generally known to one another. The second category is that of the outsider/alien assistance unit. This foreign assistance unit is characterized by a cultural disjunction between itself and the recipient unit. The most moderate level might be instanced between two Latin American cultures; the extreme situation would be found between assistance-recipient units which have few basic cultural similarities.

The classification of assistance units may be further defined by the length of existence of the unit -- i.e., those which were functioning prior to the cause for which assistance is being given, and those which were created primarily as a result of a specific circumstance.

E.   The size of effective assistance units:

In any assistance program, the ultimate recipient is the individual. There may be intermediary units between the assistance source and the recipient; for example, the individual will benefit from the food given to his family or from a house constructed for the family unit. It would not make sense to give shelter on an individual basis. Other assistance efforts refer to groups of individuals; the town may be the recipient of a new market, official buildings, a school or a water system.

The less familiar the assistance agent is with the people who are receiving the assistance, the more likely they are to classify the people into a larger social unit. The American citizen may donate money or goods to help people in Guatemala. The voluntary agency may concentrate efforts in the highlands. The temporary assistance teams will work in areas (Chimaltenango area, or the department of Chimaltenango) or in towns (San Martin Jilotepeque, Santa Apolonia). From the viewpoint of the assisting groups which are not directly involved in the transfer of assistance, or who work in primary or secondary assistance efforts (immediate or short-term assistance), the lowest conceptual unit is generally that of the town.

From the aspect of those receiving assistance, they relate to social groups in the opposite direction, from the smaller social unit (the family) up to that of the town. In the discussion of internal and external assistance mechanisms, it is the town which separates the two categories. When assistance organizations wish to work in an area such as temporary shelter, they need permission from the social units larger than and including the town. From the level of the town and below, they need acceptance. Large towns may function more as the lowest level of the impersonal social units. When the size of the town makes it function as a socio-political unit dealing more with formalities, then there will be a smaller social unit which will take its place as the interface between the external and the internal assistance mechanisms.

Internal assistance mechanisms, by definition, must operate within the scope of the town. External mechanisms may operate anywhere from the first to the third level of assistance. As the individual is the ultimate recipient, and as the assistance program must work within a specific socio-cultural system, the town is the largest unit within which the assistance program may hope to achieve success. That does not mean that a "highland Guatemala" house construction project should not be undertaken; it does mean that whenever a project is to extend in an area consisting of more than one township, each town within the area will have to be treated as if it and it alone were the unit to which assistance is to be given.

In the separate treatment of towns in regard to assistance projects, the program can be fitted to the culture and the ecology. What may work for one town may not work for the neighboring town because of the socio-cultural system or because of differences in geography, accessibility to major transportation and communication systems, etc.

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The size of workable and efficient assistance units depends upon:

1. the extent of the disaster -- how large a unit has been affected; and

2. the size and type of assisting agency.

The lowest or primary level involves assistance on a personal level between people who are well acquainted -- family, neighbors, and friends. The second level of assistance units is on the group/community level, where the recipient may not be known personally by the assisting unit, but whose culture (both explicit and implicit) is understood by the assisting unit. This involves assistance between individuals, between a group and individuals, or between groups. The third level of assistance is on the level of town to recipients. Here again the cultural patterns, explicitly and implicitly, are largely understood by the assisting unit. Assistance from units which are further removed than the town level must work through one of the three primary levels if the assistance is to be efficient and well-received within the cultural framework.

Towns which are comprised of more than one culture group would indicate an assistance unit level of the cultural background of the recipients to be the most efficient. The greater the actual and perceived differences between cultural heritages, the less effective the assistance program will be.

As a general rule, the town is the dividing point between internal and external assistance mechanisms and the smallest social unit within which an assistance project may hope to effectively work. Once assistance has been successfully carried out within the smaller social units, then there exists the possibility of establishing a cooperating inter-unit organization. Where a regional organization exists, other units may be added to that organization, but must be done on a town-by-town basis where the choice, organization, and local control is all handled within the area of the town.

F. The classification of assistance:

Assistance to a community which has been affected by a disaster may be classified as:

1. primary or immediate assistance -- those needs which are immediately necessary for the continuation of life, e.g. medical attention, prepared foods, and emergency shelter;

2. secondary assistance -- those needs which are not imperative to life but without which the recipient will not be able to function at or near the level he maintained before the disaster, e.g. food supplementation, temporary shelter;

3. tertiary assistance -- combining both long-term and permanent assistance in the form of housing and development, both economical and technological.

For the sake of simplicity, we can treat secondary and tertiary aid as belonging to two general categories: "money" and "time". Assistance in the form of "money" is that which is given into the hands of the recipient either as cash or as goods. If goods are given, it assumes that the goods will either financially benefit the individual as an alternative to spending his own money on necessities,

or that the individual could convert the goods into money by sale or by trade. Assistance in the form of "time" consists of actions, either by conversion of money into action before the assistance reaches the recipient, or by the presence or actions of people involved in assistance. Examples of "money" assistance would be outright monetary gifts; loans of money by banks or cooperatives; gifts of clothing, food or building materials; and the subsidizing of prices on essential life support commodities. Examples of "time" assistance include the transport of goods; services by professional personnel or consultants; planning and educating for more efficient and effective living.

Indirect assistance can be classified as opportunity. Active opportunity, or monetary opportunity, is the offering of means by which the individual can earn money or goods. Passive opportunity comes under the heading of "time" assistance, and relates to the education or training of an individual in skills or techniques which will better enable him to earn money on his own for his family, or to acquire a job.

Existing Mechanisms for Coping with Disaster Situations

In most societies, and in all of the "complex" societies, aspects of the culture or the characteristics of a people can be categorized into familiar and general headings. Usually, but not always, these distinctions are also made within the culture itself. For the present discussion, four aspects of culture will be used to describe the "coping" mechanisms which may be found in the culture, or which may be used to facilitate assistance to the culture. The four cultural aspects which will be used are social, religious, political, and economic.

Both internal and external coping mechanisms will be discussed in relation to these four aspects. The discussion will include for each mechanism by aspect: 1) a definition of the mechanism; 2) the extent to which the mechanism might be expected to be found within the Guatemalan culture; 3) how effective the mechanism might be upon its own; and 4) the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing that mechanism as an assistance channel.

A.   Internal mechanisms:

1.   Social internal mechanisms: The most basic of social units, and that which is the best defined, is that of the family. In its simplest form, the nuclear family consists of a man and a woman living together as a social unit and the children of that relationship. Extended families consist of more than one nuclear family which are related by kinship, share a common residence, and are joined together in economic activities with an authoritative or ceremonial "head" of the family. In Guatemalan society, the historical Indian family was extended, mormally centered around a father, his unmarried offspring, his married sons, and their families. The cultural system of the highland rural Indian is that of extended families whose members actively support the group and who have a male family head. In the past, the sons of the family would remain under the authority of the father until his death, and then divide up the land between the male offspring. In modern times, the nuclear family is becoming the more

important family unit, and women may also expect to inherit from their fathers. Traditionally, as long as members of the family share the family "kitchen", the members are expected to contribute their time and earnings to the family head.

Kinship is a strong bond, and even when members of a family unit set up independent households and economies, there is a strong association and obligation to one's parents. Typically in the highland Indian culture, the offspring are expected to "give tortillas" -- to provide for in the form of food and necessities -- to their parents when they can no longer work for their own support. In time of need, one may look to his Indian family for help if there remains a strong economic tie. Where separate households have both suffered, the obligation is first to one's own family. The attitude that one must "look out for oneself" conveys the feeling that help is not to be expected from outside the family unit.

In the Guatemalan Ladino household, there is usually a nuclear family with a parent who can no longer maintain his own household, or perhaps a cousin, niece or nephew who joins the family during a period of education or work. At the end of the period of education, or when the individual marries, they are expected to leave the guest household. The family ties among the Ladino community are more relaxed on the proximity level but appear to be stronger on the level of obligation. A child may be sent to school in a town because there is a brother who is living in that town. A widow may turn over her home to a child or sell the home, and then may expect to live with a grown, married child or to spend several months a year in rotation between the households of her married children. Siblings can be relied upon to look after property or children in time of need.

In general, the use of the social unit as a means for assistance is advantageous in the respect that it is one of the strongest interpersonal ties, and that the obligation to one's kin group is stronger than are self-centered or self-supported activities. That is, in regard to honesty and sharing, one is less likely to hoard or cheat on his kin group than on other groups or individuals. Heads of households are commonly used as social divisions to partition communities to facilitate the taking of censuses and surveys. After the earthquake in San Bartolomé Milpas Altas, a survey was taken by heads of households to determine the need for housing reconstruction. It is interesting to note that in many of the statistics concerning housing, the terms "viviendo" and "hogar" were both used, the former term referring to a house structure, and the latter to the number of families. There were more families ("hogares") listed as homeless than there were "viviendos" or houses destroyed.

The disadvantages to the use of internal social mechanisms such as the family are found in the more traditional societies. If a youth wishes to adopt a new method or purchase a more efficient machine, he may not be able to do so because of the opposition of the authority figure (and hence, holder of the money) in the family. Insistence upon lateral assistance may cause a disruption of the family unit as a result of a breaking with tradition. Social traditions and customs are one of the slowest aspects of culture to change. Forced change without supporting mechanisms may in the long run be detrimental to the development of the social group or community.

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2. Religious internal mechanisms: The resistance of religion to change
    is very similar to that of social organization. In the simpler society,
    religion may be less technical and much more emotional. For instance,
    in a society where religion is highly structured and ritualistic, with
    an acceptable time and place to participate, the acceptance of reli-
    gious doctrine may be less strong than in societies where religion is
    practiced on a daily or a need basis. In the Guatemalan highlands,
    the Indian religious practices are of two major types. The first is
    a combination of pre-Conquest beliefs blended with Spanish Catholicism
    dating from the time of the Conquest. The other is in the form of
    Evangelico or Protestant tradition.

    The highland Indians subscribe to the more traditional form of religion
    in the less accessible areas. The Evangelico movement is highly asso-
    ciated with modernity. And a town may often be partitioned upon reli-
    gious lines, with the more traditional, less likely to change in one
    group, and the more "modern" accepting of new ideas and procedures in
    the other.

    Besides the differences in religious belief, religion can play an im-
    portant role in the acceptance or rejection of innovations. A case in
    point occurred in 1973 in Santiago Atitlán. A Peace Corps volunteer
    came to the town with the idea of introducing gill-net fishing to the
    fishermen as a means of catching fish with less expenditure of time.
    The idea was accepted by one group of townsmen, who soon were enjoying
    the benefit of a day's catch with an hour's expenditure of time. The
    acceptable manner of fishing at the time of introduction of gill nets
    was that of using a hook and line. The hook-and-liners took exception
    to the use of gill nets, saying that they were depleting the supply
    of fish (a study had shown this not to be true). The gill nets which
    were normally placed and harvested every 24 hours suddenly began to
    disappear, or had their floats cut, with the nets sinking to a depth
    from which they could not be retrieved. A study of the participants
    in the two fishing methods showed that the Peace Corps volunteer had
    been working with a group of Evangelicos who were, by the nature of
    their religious shift, already predisposed to the acceptance of non-
    traditional ideas. If the volunteer had investigated the housing
    styles of his two groups, he would have found that more of the "hook-
    and-line" fishermen lived in traditional houses, and more of the "gill-
    net" fishermen lived in more modern-style houses. As with the social
    aspect of a culture, the religious groups and the associated acceptance
    of innovation reflected in them should be taken into consideration.

    In the Guatemalan Ladino tradition, Catholicism is widely practiced
    and is of a highly ritualized form. The structure of the Catholic
    Church in many rural areas is one of a central paroquia or diocese
    with duties and obligations in smaller surrounding towns and villages.
    For example, the town of San Andrés Samajtebaj depends upon priests
    from a town 8 miles away to come to perform masses. It is not unusual
    to have duties an hour or more away from the responsible paroquia, nor
    to have churches where priests only occasionally visit to perform the
    mass. When religious obligations between towns are regularly maintained,
    the occasional religious function then becomes an internal religious
    mechanism for the dependent town, with a strong external connection.

The paroquia of San Lucas Toliman (Dept. Solola) was highly effective in reaching the highland lake communities with primary and secondary assistance after the earthquake, in the form of food, medicines, and availability of building materials which would otherwise have been difficult for many communities to obtain. The diocese of Solola, apart from the work being done by San Lucas, collected and delivered food-stuffs immediately after the quake, and also obtained and gave two sheets of lamina to families who had no roofing materials.

In Guatemala City, many families whose homes were destroyed placed temporary shelters on the patios of city churches.

One advantage to utilizing existing internal religious mechanisms as the vehicle of assistance is apparent in communities where religious organization is committed to the entire community and is not there-fore a fractional group. The residents of a town might look upon the religious organization as an institutionalized kin group. As stated earlier, the religious organization is, on the traditional level, second only to that of the social organizations of a culture group.

Disadvantages to the use of religious-based assistance delivery are seen in the extremes of the advantages. Where tradition has a detri-mental effect upon development, the religious institution may act as a force which maintains or intensifies adherence to traditional traits. Paternalism -- the treating of individuals or groups as children not mature enough to know what is best for them and thereby justifying a directed, no-choice policy -- if present in the religious institution, may be enhanced by the direction of assistance through its structure. Yet another disadvantage can be found in communities already fractured along religious lines. The use of one religious institution without an equal input among the other religious groups will cause an intensi-fication of existing cleavages.

3. Political internal mechanisms: The political structure in Guatemala is basically divided on the national and the city level. The depart-ments are seen to be extensions of the national government. Within the towns or pueblos, there is a mayor (alcalde) with an assistant (sindico) and a political hierarchy of officers. The majority of towns consider themselves to be apart from the national government and act in their own interests, utilizing national law or policy as fits their needs. The local judicial system falls under the auspices of the elected officers where the police (national police) are asso-ciated with the infraction of national laws. Police are normally career individuals, whereas the local politicians are elected for one term only. Another means by which the duality of town versus national government is continued is that the towns may vote one party into office while the national government will be of another party. There is usually a lack of cooperation between opposition parties.

Local government is found in all municipios and in the aldeas (town-dependent villages), there is an official representative of the govern-ment. The area of a town is partitioned into contiguous communities or cantones which have official representatives responsible to the town government.

In general, the local government is as good as the man at its head. The swaying of elections is not unknown to even remote areas, and resembles the manner of elections during the early part of the century in developed countries, where for small remuneration, votes could be bought and where favorable voters were given free transportation to the voting place. In the sense that the most influential townspeople are behind the selection and election of officers, it ensures to some extent the cooperation between politicians and influential citizens. As with other areas, there are local governments which are better one year and worse another.

In many areas, real achievements have been made in community development under the office of a mayor who had the confidence of the townspeople and the knowledge of (or sought advice for) change. It should be mentioned that, although the town mayor is an elected office which changes (now) every four years, the town secretary is an appointed office, generally of an apolitical, career type. In the most rural of Indian villages, the town secretary is a Spanish-speaking Ladino who is appointed from the town or, in the event that there is no one qualified within the town, he is sent to the town. His major function is to record, write and witness the paperwork required by the actions of the mayor's office. In many communities, the secretary has been in his position for many years and is an excellent source of information as to the past activities in the town, and as to the best method for getting a job done.

The advantages of working within the existing political mechanisms are great when the town mayor is supportive. The mayor can set up semi-official channels for assistance program operations, and can enforce the cooperation and honesty of the people involved in the program. With the aid of a knowledgeable and well-liked mayor, assistance to the township will be more efficient and hence more effective. As the secretary of the township usually has important statistical (demographic) data, the efforts to acquire census and survey data can be minimized and other data verified through the records of the municipalidad.

Disadvantages of working through the official political system within a town are greatest where corruption and dishonesty are coupled with an unpopular official who is a figurehead without effectiveness. Other problems can stem from the bi-culturality of a town, where the mayor is Ladino and is not representative of nor sensitive to the Indian population. In these situations, policies and procedures will pivot around what is best for the Ladino community and ignore the Indian constituency, or even be at the expense of the Indian population. If positive assistance does reach the indigenous population, it is as an unplanned consequence. At the other extreme, where there is an Indian mayor in an Indian/Ladino community, similar problems arise. If he is not respected by both culture groups, he may speak only for the Indian population, and may not act in a manner representative of the total community.

4.   Economic internal mechanisms: Within the community framework, there
     are several possible economic mechanisms which may be operable. At
     the lowest level of economic organization is the self-sufficient family,
     which produces for its own consumption, not needing to supplement from
     outside sources nor to release surplus goods into the economy in ex-
     change for other goods or services. In the event of disaster, not only
     may there be an economic loss of material goods to a family, but the
     normal methods for converting goods and services into capital may be
     disrupted or minimized.

     There are basically three methods through which internal economic
     mechanisms can assist in time of disaster: individual loans, aid from
     a "patron", and cooperatives. In the small highland villages, loans
     may be made to an individual by a member of his kin group at no interest.
     In the event of a serious disaster, each individual family may not have
     enough for itself, let alone sufficient monies to loan to others.
     Typically, in any community there are a few individuals who have suffi-
     cient capital that they can afford to loan out money. This ability
     usually has a price for the person wishing to borrow. The usual
     interest rate is at or about 5% per month, paid monthly. Understanding
     that it is usually a bi-cultural system with Ladinos lending money to
     Indians, makes the reason for the high interest rate clearer. Typically,
     Indians in rural communities have not had alternatives for borrowing
     money. The Ladinos themselves have a means of support which is not
     normally dependent upon seasonal income; when, however, it is seasonally
     dependent, they have sufficient collateral to borrow money at lower
     year-rates from outside sources or from family members. The Indian
     has no choice -- either he does not borrow, or he borrows at the high
     interest rate.

     The "patron" in rural communities may be a person who employs a large
     number of local workers. It therefore behooves the patron to keep his
     workers in the area, see that they are quickly brought back to normal
     after the disaster, and keep up his production. In the long run,
     the patron is typically taking care of himself. As a consequence of
     this motive, community members may benefit from his actions. Aid
     from a patron may be in the form of time or money assistance, but pro-
     bably not of an "opportunity" other than what the individual had known
     before.

     Cooperatives are becoming very prevalent in the Guatemalan campo. Co-
     operatives are of a type formed within the community itself or in
     association with a cooperative system on a regional or national level.
     The greatest number of cooperatives are agricultural in nature. This
     includes the sale of agricultural needs and construction products at
     a considerable saving; the rent or loan of agricultural equipment; the
     combining of agricultural products to sell at wholesale; loans to indi-
     viduals to improve efficiency or production of crops; and the operation
     of plants such as sawmills, grain mills, etc. Typically, to be able to
     utilize the services of a cooperative, one must become an associate,
     which is accomplished by the investment of a set sum of money into the
     system, normally around $5.00. Sometimes this sum can be saved in the
     first purchase. For example, in remote areas of the country, the price
     of cement rose to $4.00 per quintal (hundred pounds) after the earth-
     quake. This high cost was not because of the higher wholesale cost;

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cement could still be purchased in the city for $1.75 as the Government had set price controls on reconstruction materials. The reason for the higher cost in rural areas was either the lack of availability or the high cost of transportation, or both. Where the supply of the cheaper Guatemalan cement was limited, cement imported from Mexico was available at a cost of around $3.00. Transportation of a hundred-pound bag of cement doubled or tripled from the pre-earthquake price. Assistance projects had the first chance to purchase the lower-cost cement, but had to pay higher transportation rates because of the disruption to the transportation service and the roads in areas heavily affected by the earthquake. Towns which were not affected by the earthquake had their usual method of transportation, but they could not purchase Guatemalan cement and had to obtain the higher-priced imported cement.

Members of agricultural cooperatives could purchase the cement for $2.00 per quintal, a savings of $2.00 each. Lamina cost rural members about $3.00 per 10-foot length -- about $1.00 less than the price in the city where cost of transportation was not included.

With the exception of high interest personal loans, the internal economic mechanisms are highly effective. The patron assistance has a tendency to return to the pre-disaster status with perhaps a newer (although not necessarily better) house and a continuation of the seasonal or permanent job. The local cooperatives of an agricultural nature have the effect of "money" assistance. The members get more for their money and can thereby do more faster. Also, they are often offered "time" in the form of technical assistance or information, and "opportunity" in the form of educational information and training. Other forms of cooperatives, such as cottage industry cooperatives, may not be able to help to a large degree because of the dependence upon external conditions and transportation. Then too, the agricultural cooperatives are often subsidized by governmental or international aid. And where cooperatives are part of a large system of cooperatives, they have much more ability to be flexible within areas because of the exchange between them and the large purchasing power which, in turn, influences the wholesale vendor.

The advantages to the use of economic mechanisms vary greatly. The high interest rate loan of the local money lender is typically obtainable with little collateral and with a short waiting period, if any. The patron system has the effect of not breaking up communities which he serves. The cooperatives offer an excellent means for providing low-cost materials and technical information to members.

Disadvantages to the high interest rate loans are found in the general trap behind "loan shark" operations. The individual may be directing all his efforts to meeting the monthly interest payment and not be able to afford the payments on the principal loan.

The patron system has a tendency to continue with a paternalistic relationship between patron and worker with little chance for the worker to escape the pattern into which he has fallen.

The cooperative system, if it is of the cottage industry type, may not be able to do much for its members as it is essentially a "surplus time" or secondary source for necessities and therefore one of the first to be interrupted in the event of a disaster. After the Guatemalan earthquake, the tourist trade -- which had supported many rural artisans and had been a source of additional income to family weavers -- fell off sharply, causing many shop owners to sell goods at a loss in order to be able to continue purchasing primary necessities.

In some areas, the agricultural/construction cooperatives felt an obligation to minister first to the needs of their members. This meant that non-members were discriminated against where the cooperative had a policy of first supplying goods to its members, thereby depleting or decimating the materials available for distribution to non-members. Even where cooperatives are used to administering general assistance programs, members may expect to be given preference in many instances.

B.   External mechanisms:

1.   Social external mechanisms: As with the internal mechanisms, the social external mechanisms include the largest number of small interest groups. In this category fall the "good-will" groups from within the country of Guatemala. Groups may have a branch within a disaster area, thus working through a direct channel to an internal mechanism. Assistance sources in this group include fraternal clubs such as the Lions, Rotary, Masons; interest clubs such as a ham radio club, flying club, Scouts, etc.

Small interest and social groups are primarily active in emergency relief with minor involvement in temporary housing. For example, the Girl Scouts of Guatemala built temporary houses of wood boards (plywood when lumber was scarce) and lamina, with the cost of each dwelling under $100.00. Larger organizations with international funding became involved in third stage relief. The Masonic Order initiated a reconstruction/development program in which men were trained in construction skills, and built houses of a value in excess of $1,500.00.

The effectiveness of external social mechanisms depends largely upon the ability of the assisting organization to understand the cultural constraints within the recipient society, the outlook towards development in that society, and the ability to communicate between the assisting and receiving groups. Where roads have made rural towns easily accessible, there is a greater likelihood that the inhabitants have become involved in the market economy with exposure to modern technology, and have developed a less rigid attitude to customs which differ from their own. Under such circumstances, adapting safer housing construction along lines associated with urban or more modern styles is more likely to occur.

The advantages of utilizing external social mechanisms depend mainly upon the ease of entrance and acceptance within the recipient society

and the understanding of the fundamental culture of that society. Where there is an on-going local social group, the assisting group may find ready acceptance by their affiliates but difficulty in reaching out to others.

The disadvantages revolve around insensitivity and paternalism. One or both may alienate the external mechanism from the potential recipients.

2. Religious external mechanisms: As with the external social groups, the extent to which a religious organization has affiliations within the town governs the manner in which the townspeople will receive them. A religious organization working within a community which is not familiar with the religious beliefs of that group would be treated as a social interest group rather than as a religious group. With the addition of proselytizing, the organization reverts to a special interest religious group.

Religious organizations which have an on-going and active counterpart within the community become an external support for the internal mechanism, and will function much like the internal mechanism. After the Guatemalan earthquake, CARITAS was active in the distribution of primary assistance immediately following the first quake, and has become involved in reconstruction activities in more than five locations.

The advantages of external groups which have internal channels into the community are greater where the relationship is one of obligation and interaction is of a frequent nature. Concerning those religious assistance groups without internal connections, the major advantages are to be found in dedication to the assistance project. Typically, assistance personnel in this category are committed and active workers -- two traits which will win approval from traditional cultures. As long as cultural codes are not violated, the assistance group can expect to draw minimum to active community involvement.

The disadvantages far outweigh the advantages in regard to the extreme. Religious groups with the "only way" attitude, expressing their beliefs to the to-be-enlightened society, may not only be ineffective, but also may be detrimental to more passive assistance groups. Fortunately, such examples are infrequently encountered.

3. Political external mechanisms: The political external mechanism is, for Guatemala, the national Government, and at times departmental. As the most influential group, it has more money and material and man-power to draw upon than any other group. Immediately after the earthquake, the Guatemalan Army became involved in reconnaissance and emergency relief. Government authorities ordered roads cleared and rubble removed. During the emergency phase, the Army distributed temporary shelter (tents), foodstuffs (dry and canned goods), and medicines which had been donated to the National Committee of Reconstruction. Second phase relief included distribution of lamina purchased by the National Committee of Reconstruction (CNE). The Army was also involved in

reaching isolated villages, transporting relief assistance, maintaining temporary water tanks in rural areas, clearing roads, and removing the rubble in towns.

Many donations were given to the Guatemalan Government in money and in kind. The Government had the sources and the personnel to affect many communities by working directly through internal mechanisms, or by supporting the work of external mechanisms. Overall reconstruction and recovery policy in Guatemala is overseen by the National Committee of Reconstruction (CNE) which has the power to approve and reject external assistance projects.

The advantages of utilizing the external political mechanisms are largely dependent upon the political atmosphere between the national and the local government, and upon the relative honesty of politicians and administrators. In the first instance, the ultimate source of support both financially (in terms of money allotments) and materially (in terms of goods) is the national government. As in other countries with multi-party systems, support for local projects is significantly influenced by the amount of cooperation the party presently in power believes it may secure by giving such support. The result is that local governments may expect to receive greater support if they have the same political affiliation as the present party in the national offices.

The second characteristic which supports or inhibits the external political assistance mechanism is that of political incentive. This incentive, as characterized by power and prestige, has taken precedence over humanitarian efforts (assistance for altruistic reasons) through-out history in all but a few isolated societies, and is likely to con-tinue to do so in the foreseeable future. In terms of governments in the developing countries, there are those in public or military offices who reason that a portion of finances allocated or designated for a specific project may be better suited to alternative projects or be converted into private resources. The result of either is to diminish the funds available for proposed projects, often to the extent that a project cannot be completely financed, or that the completed project may not be of a quality that will support success.

4. Economic external mechanisms: Second only to political motive, and closely associated with it, is the economic motive. External mechanisms on a national level are numerous. They include all sources of money that flows into an area from without. Among these sources are banks, lending organizations such as cooperatives, national agencies involved in developmental projects, etc. The end result of such programs is to stimulate the economy by increased production and increased spending.

Much of the urban assistance has come through external economic mech-anisms. Where the rural areas have been selected for assistance efforts by external socio-religious groups, the urban inhabitants have had to rely largely upon economic assistance in the form of loans and self-help activities.

External economic mechanisms are among the most influential in urban areas but are less effective in rural areas, depending heavily upon internal connections either as shelter agencies or as an introduction into the community. The organization of local cooperatives with affiliations in other communities has become one of the most important forces in development and change in rural areas. Another strong influence has been that of tourism.

In the ideal situation, the external economic assistance programs should cross-cut the disaster area, being effective in all areas and on all levels. Unfortunately, those who do not have land or agricultural production as collateral are generally refused loans on the basis of not being able to repay them. As such, the loans have a tendency to further stratify the economic partitions of a society. Special loans for lower-income applicants were made available after the earthquake, but still necessitated collateral and ability to pay on the part of the applicant. Individuals who were above a maximum income level, or whose homes in urban areas were severely damaged, could not receive loans or, if qualified, could not borrow enough to repair the damage.

Where external assistance is offered in areas generally under the supervision/responsibility of a patron, there exists the possibility that the patron may postpone becoming involved in a reconstruction program of his own. By waiting, the patron may hope to have the external assistance mechanism finance completely or in part the reconstruction or improvement of housing.

Discussion

A.   Innovation and Technological Change:

In all disaster assistance situations, working within the pre-existing cultural framework and being guided by the attitudes and desires of the community will ensure the most favorable environment for early and effective acceptance of assistance and innovation.

"Innovation" refers to any new idea, material good or action which is introduced into a society. Culture change occurs in a society when an innovation becomes utilized within the society and incorporated into the cultural tradition of that society.

Technological change or development refers to the acceptance of innovations which increase or advance the technological inventory of a culture. The technological inventory of a culture group consists of both methods and materials. Hence, technological change may be the introduction of new methods for building existing house structures in an aseismic manner, or the introduction of technologies for the manufacture or utilization of building materials which were not previously used.

Innovations may replace an existing part of a culture system with effectively little disruption to the system; or they may cause wide-ranging and extensive changes in the culture system.

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B.   Cultural Complexity and the Family Unit as the Coping Mechanism:

At the lowest level, disaster situations affect only a family or a member of a family. Coping is usually performed exclusively within the family group. In more complex cultures where personal or family-level disasters occur, longer periods are needed to recover, and greater financial hardships are incurred; then the community is more likely to act as a coping mechanism.

Where disaster occurs at the community or at a higher demographic level, the family is still the basic and initial mechanism for coping. Other coping mechanisms employed on a community level or above will eventually lead to the family unit. In all disasters, the family functions as an internal coping mechanism.

In more developed cultures, the ability to cope entirely on the family level is diminished with the increased technological complexity of the culture. While a rural Guatemalan Indian may be able to rebuild his fallen house by himself using materials obtainable from his immediate environment, the city dweller with a more complex house normally must depend upon specialists to construct his house, using materials which are transported from outlying areas, manufactured, or custom-made.

The more complex the technology, the more necessary will be the utilization of higher-level internal coping mechanisms, or of external coping mechanisms.

C.   Traditional Cultures and Rates of Acceptance:

The overall effect of a disaster on a community will depend largely upon the disposition of that community at the time of the disaster.

The culture which has already begun to accept technological change and outside assistance may move forward at an accelerated rate because of the disaster. That does not necessarily mean that there will not be a disruption of the normal pace of growth and change, but that ideology and acceptance of innovation may be positively affected.

Cultures which have been exposed to, but not yet touched by, technological development may begin to make the move to acceptance of new ideas. An insensitive project at this point in time may seriously deter the acceptance of new technologies and materials for many years.

Traditional cultures which have not been exposed to technological change may be better served by being left alone after the primary assistance phase has passed. They have been coping with life's problems in their own way, on their own, for generations, and may well feel more comfortable without external interference.

D.   Advantages of Internal Coping Mechanisms Within Traditional Cultures:

Traditional cultures, normally indicated by rural settings and less complex technologies, are better able to cope using only internal mechanisms, and have a shorter self-help recovery time. The rural setting has stronger and more

functional internal mechanisms. The social organizations are less complex and are understood by the majority of the members of the society. The technological inventory is simpler than for the more complex cultures and is shared by more people. That is, in the more traditional cultures the technologies necessary to that culture are less sophisticated and most members of the culture understand the technologies necessary to their own survival, including subsistence activities, construction of houses, and the necessary household goods. As a consequence, the average traditional man is more self-sufficient than his modern counterpart.

Because of the technological knowledge of individuals, and the use of available materials in the manufacture of goods, the traditional man is more able to rebuild his own house, and the return to a normal existence will take much less time. As the technological knowledge is shared by most members of the group and each is not dependent upon specialists to construct the house structures, it is less likely that new methods will be accepted. In societies where specialists are utilized, then by the introduction of new methods and materials to the sub-group -- the specialists -- there will be a change in the society as a whole.

In the consideration of complex versus simple house types, the following characteristics will hold for the groups or sub-groups which have the more complex house types. A larger technological inventory is necessary; more complex tools are needed; individuals are apt to have the knowledge of a part but not all of the skills necessary to build their house. Construction therefore is dependent not only upon the individual or the family unit, but upon other specialists who may not be readily available. More processed materials are needed, often of a custom-built class, limiting the construction to the availability of materials which is out of the control of the individual. The more complex the house-type, the longer will be the time necessary to complete it, and the greater will be the total costs in materials and labor. Where the money necessary to build is not available from private funds, the family must depend upon outside sources for financial assistance. In general, families who have enjoyed a more complex house-style are more dependent upon others for the construction of houses. The greater the number of outsiders who are necessary for the processing of materials, for the special areas of construction, and for the obtaining of financial assistance, the greater the likelihood that there will be a delay in the time to rebuild; and hence a longer recovery time is probable.

The basic advantages of using internal coping mechanisms in temporary housing or other disaster assistance projects are:

1. The organizational and operational channels are pre-established;

2. The mechanism has been established within the cultural framework, and supports and reinforces the traditional culture;

3. The mechanism operates within an expected system where individuals know what their appropriate roles and actions are.

With the exception of "class conflict" between traditions in bi-cultural communities, there is nothing that a cooperation between teaching technologist and internal institution cannot do better for the cultural system as a whole, than could be done by an external agency.

E.   The Size of Area in which External Mechanisms are Effective:

The area that an external mechanism can affect depends upon: 1) the cultural consistencies within the area; 2) the use of pre-established town-centered organizations for administration and/or implementation of assistance; and 3) the limitations as to staff and material support necessary to handle problems and questions, and to maintain the supply of material goods.

When an external mechanism enters an area with assistance programs, it will be effective to the extent that it is able to fit into the existing social organizations and is appropriate to the culture. As culture areas differ, the type of assistance which each area will accept, and the manner in which it is offered, will differ. To establish a blanket program to be used in areas of varying levels of modernization, is to guarantee failure in some of them. What is appropriate for a traditional culture may not be sophisticated enough for a more complex culture; conversely, the approach taken in a more modern or more developed community will be inappropriate for the more traditional area, mainly because the assumptions upon which the program is based will not be valid in the traditional setting.

F.   Disruption of Traditional Cultures by Assistance Groups:

The consequences of a disruption or breakup of existing cultural mechanisms may cause long-lasting and wide-reaching effects on the culture. Where tradi- tional cultures are not permitted to continue in a manner they feel to be the right, if not the only reasonable, alternative, they may as a result of the removal of traditional supports seek to relocate, thereby breaking many of the underlying psychological supports needed to maintain a pride in oneself and in one's work which the community gave to its members.

Disasters disrupt much of the normal way of life for a period of time; and the less cultural disruption from external assistance mechanisms which are not related to internal structures, the shorter the time necessary for psychological and emotional readjustment after the disaster. Where people feel secure and confident, they can continue doing for themselves and are more likely to con- sider alternatives. Well-meaning individuals who enter traditional communities with the idea of "making life better" may only further disrupt the community, compounding the psychological effects of the disaster.

With the additional conflict of external assistance groups also being foreign to the host country, the cultural problems are greatly compounded. Many cultural traditions which are shared or accepted between culture groups within one country will be a detriment to foreign assistance personnel who are not aware of their existence, when they are in conflict with their own cultural system. The work by Edward T. Hall has demonstrated how much a cultural system is carried on "out-of-awareness" even to the members of the culture. Utilizing in-country assistance will minimize much of the conflict between foreign cultures.

When assistance groups attempt to change one part of the existing culture, they may be causing extensive changes in other parts of the culture. A culture is a system whose interrelated parts have a reinforcing effect upon each other. When one part of the system is changed, it may cause the removal of support for

another part of the culture, which in turn affects other culture aspects and supports. Changes are constantly occurring within any culture at any given time. Where changes are slow and evolve around existing cultural institutions, the cultural system is usually able to adapt to the changes. Where change is rapid and forceful, the system may be drastically affected, removing the cultural controls and supports which keep families together and society stable.

Giving people the opportunity to learn, the freedom to choose, and the technological support to make desired changes on their own, will keep the cultural supports around the community and minimize the disruptive nature of rapid aculturation.

G.   Generalizations Regarding Coping Mechanisms and Culture Complexity:

The following generalizations may be made from the above discussion:

1.   In any coping situation, that which is the most familiar will enhance the coping mechanism.

2.   The family is the most basic and the simplest coping mechanism, and the most important in less complex societies and wherever alternative mechanisms are not available.

3.   The family is likely to be operating as a coping mechanism in most, if not all, situations.

4.   The less complex rural cultures have shorter recovery periods, and are more able to cope at the lower internal mechanism levels.

5.   In more complex situations, alternatives at the internal level are diminished; conversely, external mechanisms are more applicable to the urban setting.

6.   In the rural community setting, external mechanisms will be more efficient and effective if they operate through a pre-existing internal channel.

7.   The more the previous contact between traditional culture and modern culture, the greater will be the acceptance of assistance in regard to both the interpersonal contact between external and internal coping mechanisms and to the perceived value of acceptance of innovations.

8.   Strong external influence may act to break up internal mechanisms.

9.   Unsatisfactory or insensitive external intervention is likely to deter the effect of subsequent assistance or development programs.

10.   The area in which an external mechanism is effective is dependent upon the traditionality of the recipient society and the flexibility of the assisting mechanism.

H.   The Need for Further Study and Evaluation:

        The above are working hypotheses which need empirical casework for verifi-
cation, both as to the direction and the degree of the underlying assumptions.
Such casework would not only tell us how well internal coping mechanisms function
in disasters and developmental situations, but also how we might be better able
to rapidly identify the existence and the effectiveness of internal coping
mechanisms in societies where disasters create the need for assistance in coun-
tries and cultures which might not have developed channels for receiving such
aid.

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