

0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Forum for Women and Development (FOKUS), in collaboration with the Feminine Group of the Norwegian Committee of Solidarity with Latin America (LAG-KU) has made grants to peasant-indigenous women of Chiapas (Maya Antsetic and women of the autonomous municipalities of the Northern Zone) since 1997. This external evaluation (2002-2006) has the following objectives: a) evaluate results, resource utilisation, management and organisation of projects; b) decide if the strategy of productive projects contributed to the empowerment and strengthening of women's organisations; and c) analyse the effectiveness of project administration, as well as the specific contribution of local associates in women's productive and organisational processes, decide if they are ideal associates, and make recommendations to strengthen them. The evaluation is based on three key questions and 12 follow-up questions. The main findings are here summarised:

- ***Do projects strengthen women's production and empowerment processes?***

Indigenous women have very practical interests and needs—to improve income—given the extreme poverty and the daily struggle to survive. To date, it has not been possible to successfully articulate and create synergies between production and empowerment activities, although contradictorily, FOKUS/LAG-KU's support has done more to empower women in concrete ways than it has to generate income. Both projects have lacked good technical support in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Women of the Northern Zone: the productive projects of the women's collectives supported by FOKUS contribute to women's empowerment given the fact that women are in charge of resource administration, decision making and work distribution. These projects also strengthen women's collective work and encourage opportunities for exchanges, learning and socialising among women; further, they strengthen women's standing since they are the only productive projects in the area and profits generated help cover the cost of bus fares for men and women authorities. In this way the women are contributing strategically to autonomy. Still, to date the projects have not contributed to a **development** process since they respond to immediate needs and activities carried out are both isolated and short-term.

Maya Antsetic: the production and sales of handcrafts have contributed to a certain form of empowerment of women, particularly of representatives and leaders who are most directly involved in collective activities with new responsibilities (chairing assemblies, consulting and taking information to members, etc.), learning new activities (from new product designs to practical experiences such as using the telephone, making bank withdrawals, travelling to distant cities and recording sales), and participate in exchanges (in Oaxaca and Chihuahua), thus widening their horizons and sharing experiences with other indigenous women. Yet, until recently, Nueva Primavera had given greater priority to technical accompaniment, to the detriment of organisational strengthening in terms of identity, values and principles of organisation, internal regulations, leadership training, etc. The modification within the team of advisors has changed this situation and now Nueva Primavera and the leadership of Maya Antsetic are making important strides to combine and give equal importance to the production/sales and organisational strengthening and empowerment aspects of women.

Further, although NP has correctly identified the need for consultancies in the production of clothing items and in seeking out new markets, to date there has not been much improvement due to a) a lack of quality technical consultancies; b) lack of systematic support (leading to isolated activities and little follow-up); c) lack of knowledge regarding markets and decentralisation of information and responsibilities to the women. MA needs to a) improve the design and quality of its products; b) keep records and basic accounting; c) draw up marketing strategies; d) encourage greater participation of members and ensure that there is constant information to and from them; and e) ensure that representatives motivate women's collective groups.

- ***Is project administration efficient, effective and does it meet international aid requirements?***

Nueva Primavera has improved the quality of its reports in the past two years and is consulting more women from Maya Antsetic before projects and reports are written. It has weakness in writing, administrating and monitoring budgets.

Enlace Civil: Projects and reports from the Northern Zone are based on women's priorities and women are actively participating by making decisions about projects (activities, line items and amounts to be requested, administration of grants, taking on responsibility for carrying out activities) and by filing reports with Enlace Civil. EC plays the role of "secretary" by writing reports that conform to the needs and requirements of FOKUS. A serious problem was detected insofar as some of the requirements stipulated in the agreement have not been implemented, particularly those dealing with filing timely reports, possibly due to the delays EC incurs in consultations previous to writing them. EC has also failed to maintain timely and regular e-mail communication and it has changed line items without previous authorisation.

Record-keeping by the MA and ZN women regarding their productive projects is inadequate (scant in the case of MA and non-standardised and insufficient information in the case of ZN), and no overall consolidated data registry exists. This situation makes it impossible to evaluate results and stimulates a micro view of projects (by community and municipality), instead of encouraging a global perspective.

- ***Is the current manner of supporting indigenous women's groups through intermediate organisations the best? What changes are necessary?***

Enlace Civil has a specific and limited mandate as "intermediary" between the women, the Good Government Councils and international aid agencies, and therefore the accompaniment that it gives the women is restricted to project administration and follow-up, searching for technical consultants and holding some training sessions. The way EC lends support has the advantage of responding directly to the priorities of women who are directly participating in the autonomy process; its disadvantage is that it tends to give greater priority to women's immediate needs, without articulating them into more mid- and long-term, holistic and strategic development processes.

Nueva Primavera is taking important steps to improve how it accompanies the women, and has recognised that it was stimulating a (two-way) dependency vis-à-vis the Maya Antsetic women. We believe a correct decision was made that will lead to Maya Antsetic becoming independent through its legal registry as a cooperative, but this must be done in a gradual, methodical way.

Main recommendations

The appendices to this evaluation report (in Spanish) contain detailed proposals to improve the effectiveness, integration and impact of the Northern Zone projects and to strengthen the organisation and sales of Maya Antsetic. The proposals can also be a guide for local associates, and we have made recommendations that associates receive consultancies in accounting and budgets, file timely and higher-quality reports (EC) and improve their e-mail communication. We recommend that LAG-KU play a more active role (with a salaried one-year position) in order to accompany and disseminate the processes of indigenous women and help seek new funding. We recommend that FOKUS continue supporting these processes.

EVALUATION REPORT

1. Introduction

Since 1997, the Forum for Women and Development (FOKUS), working through the Women's Group of the Norwegian Committee for Solidarity with Latin America (LAG-KU), has been supporting indigenous-peasant women from Chiapas (Maya Antsetic of Las Abejas in Acteal and women of the autonomous municipalities of the North Zone). An independent evaluation was commissioned in 2001 and an internal LAG evaluation was held in 2004. This outside evaluation (covering 2002-2006) was undertaken by Morna Macleod, independent consultant, and by Janette Corzo Hernández and Imelda Cruz Solís of the Jk'optik Education and Training Collective (Colectivo de Formación y Capacitación Jk'optik). It endeavours to incorporate their perspectives within a context of 10 years of support from FOKUS and LAG. The objectives of this review are a) to evaluate results, resource utilization, management and organization of projects; b) "...Study if women's organising has been strengthened as a result of the projects and if, in this regard, producers' cooperatives are a successful strategy; and c) evaluate if the manner in which associates are elected has had an impact in their advancement and orientation in areas of project organisation and management. FOKUS and LAG have asked that this evaluation make clear recommendations regarding activities and strategies for the future.

The evaluation is based on three key questions (and 12 follow-up questions):

- Have projects strengthened productive activities and have they empowered women?
- Is project management efficient, effective and does it satisfy international aid requirements?
- Is the current approach, supporting indigenous women's groups through intermediary organisations, the best? What changes should be made in the future?

This report is organised around these three key questions, yet given the complexity and the challenges arising from the "linkages between participating organisations", one chapter in its entirety focuses on analysing and evaluating them (rather than solely answering sub-question 12). As far as we could determine (since some information lacked clarity), FOKUS/LAG KU's financial support for the period under consideration can be classified as follows:

FOKUS-LAG Support to Maya Antsetic and Women of the Northern Zone in Mexican pesos

YEAR	Maya Antsetic	Comments	Northern Zone	Comments
2002	\$24,500	Training Project Agreement	\$98,323	Taken from agreement
	\$132,696	Taken from the annual report		
2003	\$85,350	Taken from agreement	\$154,775	Taken from 2003 request
2004	174,600	Taken from agreement	\$192,297	Taken from agreement
2005	\$212,646	Taken from agreement	\$287,773	Taken from agreement
2006	\$132,400	Taken from agreement	\$271,887	Taken from 2006 audit: the first figure is the amount approved according to the agreement and the second is the amount received. This variation is due to the rate of exchange
	\$278,796.46	Deposits received. Taken from the review (audit) undertaken by the Diocese.	(\$301,845)	
2007	\$328,000	Taken from the agreement	\$336,773.50	Taken from agreement

1.1 Methodology

This evaluation was undertaken during several stages from February to May 2007, due to previous commitments of the lead consultant and because LAG wanted the women of Maya Antsetic and the Northern Zone to have an early feedback before the final report was drafted in order to discuss findings internally and share them with the bases (grassroots). In the end the procedure worked only with Maya Antsetic, due to internal communication problems that prevented the women representatives of the Northern Zone, save one, from attending the evaluation workshop. The workshop was then rescheduled and it coincided with the feedback session. Further, a joint feedback workshop (with Maya Antsetic, Nueva Primavera, women of the Northern Zone and Enlace Civil) was deemed inappropriate, since it would have breached each organisation's right to discretion, especially in a context as conflictive as Chiapas.

Having reviewed available documents (terms of reference, grant applications, agreements, reports, previous evaluations, information from FOKUS and LAG), the consultants decided on work methodologies (see Appendix) for interviews and workshops. Tasks were divided among the consultants: the lead consultant drew up the questionnaires and conducted interviews with Nueva Primavera, Enlace Civil, outside organisations and persons, LAG and FOKUS; the J'koptik consultants designed the workshops, charts and questionnaires for collective evaluation among indigenous women. Notwithstanding this division of labour, the three consultants worked as a team, in a coordinated and synergetic fashion, revising and implementing methodologies, jointly analysing the results of evaluations, discussing conclusions and recommendations and reviewing drafts of this report. In addition to workshops with women from the Northern Zone and Maya Antsetic, interviews were conducted with Enlace Civil, Nueva Primavera and LAG, and via internet with FOKUS, LAG and six outside persons (see Appendix).

1.2 Limitations

Particularly in the case of Maya Antsetic, some documents relevant to this evaluation had gone missing (agreements, project write-ups, narrative and financial reports). The lack of proper records that we found in both organisations is not uncommon in indigenous-peasant organisations—generally few documents exist and there is little systematic, ongoing record-keeping. This made it difficult for the consultants to completely fulfil an objective that called for careful scrutiny of results. For example, there is no general data regarding Maya Antsetic's annual handicraft sales and available information provided by women of the Northern Zone on the collective animal-raising groups are neither mutually compatible nor do they contain all necessary data. Written records were not kept on the women's progress in organising themselves. Thus considerable time had to be spent gathering information and reconstructing processes instead of analysing results. Further, it was not always clear how responsibilities were to be shared among FOCUS, LAG, Nueva Primavera, Enlace Civil and the consultants; as a result, many logistical tasks and doing the accounts, not contemplated in the terms of reference, were borne by Jk'optik. It was particularly difficult for LAG and the consultants to struggle with the requirements of the audit without being sufficiently debriefed beforehand and given the fact that FOKUS is not legally registered nor does it have a physical presence in Mexico. This generated confusion and increased the work load. Still, in spite of these difficulties, all participants and organisations in this complicated evaluation process showed great good spirit and willingness to cooperate throughout.

2. Context

We must place the organising efforts by the women of the Northern Zone and Maya Antsetic in their respective contexts to fully understand what has been achieved. The women of the Northern Zone have been organising particularly since the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and the ensuing efforts to build autonomy. These processes have to do with women and men, indigenous peasants, historically marginalised from state services and living in extreme poverty, taking control of their lives, both individually and collectively, and struggling to achieve

empowerment, participation, development, self-government and self determination. FOKUS/LAG's support, the only grant specifically earmarked for women in the Northern Zone, has directly contributed to this process.

On the other hand, Maya Antsetic arose following the Acteal massacre (22 December 1997) in which 32 women and 13 men in the "Los Naranjos" displaced people's encampment were brutally murdered by heavily-armed men. These paramilitary forces, made up of indigenous peasants like the people they murdered, were later identified as local members of the PRI, the party then in power. Thus, while the women of the Northern Zone organised during the euphoria of the Zapatista uprising, Maya Antsetic arose in the aftermath of trauma and collective mourning, in an emergency situation in which aid was lent by many national and international organisations (e.g., the Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Centre, the Italian, Spanish and German Red Cross societies, Doctors of the World, Cáritas, etc.). As often is the case among people who have been displaced and sought refuge, the fact that they were uprooted, divorced from their original communities and traditional livelihoods, and then surrounded by aid agencies created dependency. Maya Antsetic was not exceptional in this regard. All stakeholders (national and international aid organisations, the Church, human rights organisations) were responsible to a degree for creating dependency. It was difficult not to become dependent given the outpouring of well-intentioned (though not always well targeted) aid, possibly the result of a paternalistic tendency to overprotect "vulnerable sectors". Still, dependency is only one factor, because in spite of the environment of fear and terror, these Tzotsil women showed tremendous valour throughout their ordeal, perhaps best exemplified by a photo seen around the world of Xoyep women pushing back heavily-armed soldiers; or by the courage of María Vásquez, member of Maya Antsetic's leadership who gave testimony to the United Nations' General Assembly following the murder of nine of her relatives.

Maya Antsetic was the first women's organisation within Las Abejas, a civil society organisation rooted in the pastoral of the Jesuits and the Sisters of the Devine Shepard. Although Las Abejas sympathise with the Zapatista struggle, it has always kept its distance and a certain reserve, given its pacifist vocation. Las Abejas was formed in a context of militarisation in which for years the ratio of soldiers to residents was one to ten in Chenalhó.¹ Today the Acteal area is severely split: the centre, where the massacre took place and where Las Abejas settled, and the higher areas of Acteal are inhabited by mostly Zapatista base supporters. Another area of Acteal is inhabited by PRI members, Presbyterians and paramilitaries. Although no longer the scene of severe threats and harassment, women at the evaluation workshops talked of isolated and periodic incidents. (See the Appendix on the context of Chenalhó for greater information on the region).

One trait of the Northern Zone is its ethnic diversity (with Tseltal, Tzotsil, Ch'ol and Zoque ethnic groups); another is its enormous geographic size, from Ocosingo, Palenque and Chilón, the municipality of Flores Magón, stretching into Amatán. Each area has had its own previous and distinctive organising efforts, headed by the Church (Jesuits, Franciscans and the San Cristóbal Diocese), with less influence from peasant organisations than many other Zapatista regions. In addition to its size, the area is traditionally plagued by poor roads (just recently some roads have been built). When the rainy season arrives, rivers swell, roads are cut off and telephone service is poor at best. This isolation is one of the reasons behind the reduced presence of "brothers and sisters in solidarity" from Mexico and abroad, as compared to other regions and at the "Caracoles".² DESMI is one of the

¹ A paradoxical situation arose in which women, some from Maya Antsetic, had higher incomes back when they had soldiers' clothes to wash.

² Beginning in August 2003, the Zapatistas created a third tier of government bringing together several autonomous municipalities, with the "Caracoles" as their political seats and the Good Government Councils as authorities. The latter are composed of rotating council members from the different municipalities and have become an experiment in participative grassroots democracy.

few NGOs in the region, but it works with and accompanies communities in just a few areas. (See the Appendix on the Northern Zone's context for further information on the region).

Further complicating the situation, the Northern Zone has had an especially heavy presence of paramilitaries, in particular the infamous Peace and Justice organisation (the Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Centre, among others, has fully investigated and denounced this group). Currently, there are several other organisations with paramilitary characteristics. There is a confusing array of names: Peace and Justice, Indigenous Peasant Agro-Forestry Union (better known by its initials UCIAF in Spanish, a split from Peace and Justice), the Peasant Indigenous Regional Union (URCI, also a split from Peace and Justice), and the Organisation for the Defence of Indigenous and Peasant Rights (better known as OPDDIC). These new organisations have obtained legal registry and recognition as "Civil Associations", and use a well-honed indigenous rights discourse to gain attention and confuse non-Zapatista indigenous peasants with promises of land. OPDDIC, joining together with URCI and UCIAF, is taking legal steps with the Secretary of Agrarian Reform to register new *ejidos* particularly in Zapatista lands (in spite of the fact that in 1992 former president Salinas de Gortari cancelled land distribution measures outlined in Article 27 of the Mexican constitution). Now once lands taken over by the paramilitaries have been registered as *ejidos* by the government, they can be privatised by PROCEDE, a government programme, and then sold to multinational corporations for exploitation of whatever natural resources may exist therein. Several analysts, human rights defenders and the Good Government Councils have agreed that the procedure is part of a new, double-edged governmental strategy:

Land invasions, threats of violence, shots to the air, destruction of corn fields and property, theft of crops, beatings, detentions, and kidnappings have become an everyday source of terror that affects hundreds of indigenous families in Chiapas. Even worse: according to the autonomous authorities, all of this is done with the support and complicity of the state and federal governments, the police, and the armed forces... the recent increase in activities is undoubtedly a reflection of a new government policy to evict the zapatistas from their land, give a blow to the movement, and open the way to multinational companies eager to get their hands on the natural wealth of the region: wood, water, and mining. In the process, thousands of indigenous people suffer daily threats and terror. (Alejandro Reyes, CIEPAC, Bulletin no. 352, 17/4/2007).

According to the director of the Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Centre (interviewed on 2 May 2007), the novelty behind the strategy is that it combines paramilitary elements with legal recourses. Fraught with coercion but formally legal, the strategy is used to polarise and confront people within indigenous communities, although there are many other powerful interests at play.

Use of funds earmarked for social goals in a context of conflict

The evaluation team was shocked to see government-backed development programmes and projects being used to divide communities, given that neither the Zapatista bases nor Las Abejas accept government funds. The Mexican government has historically used its funding for social welfare projects as leverage to co-opt social movements, a practice made even more blatant in the Zapatista regions and in Acteal. Previously successful women's cooperative stores in the Zapatista regions, for example at Roberto Barrios, have struggled now that competing stores, pumped full of government funds, have been established; donations of chemical fertilizers are distributed in communities where the Zapatistas are promoting ecologically-friendly farming. Public hospitals refuse to see women if they have not previously registered in the "Oportunidades" state programme. PRI members scoff at the "impoverished" Zapatista base members and boast of their access to government funds. There is constant pressure in this regard and it contributes significantly to confronting and dividing communities and luring away Zapatista bases. *They are coming to many communities to convince people to accept government funds and it's a big problem since we are left with a very difficult task of trying to convince people not to be duped, and why*

the “bad government” is funding projects. In contrast, we have our own work that we do with our own efforts, it is not done by the government (Evaluation workshop with representatives of the Northern Zone, April 2007).

Making Zapatista autonomy more visible

Unlike the uprooted Abejas who have always had a high profile, only recently has an effort been made to make the Zapatista autonomy process more visible. Between 30 December 2006 and 2 January 2007, the First Meeting of the Zapatista People with the Peoples of the World was held in the “Caracol” of Oventic. Up to then, the autonomy process had been low-keyed and even isolated which, to a degree, continues to be the case in the Northern Zone, given local political conditions and the presence of paramilitary forces. Recently there has been a change in the Zapatista strategy, best expressed by “the Other Campaign”, which seeks to open up and share the grassroots autonomy experience in health and education, the advancement of women, the procurement of justice, and the defence of Zapatista lands. At the First Meeting only authorities (e.g., those participating in councils or in commissions) of the five autonomous zones participated. But the Second Meeting, scheduled for July 2007, will lend a voice to all community residents. CIEPAC explained why the Meeting had such an impact: *“But even more important than all that was said and explained at the First Meeting between Zapatista Peoples and the People of the World, and endeavouring to shake off our viewpoints from the North (information that is practical, political, quantitative and qualitative), we should try to find the invisible connection that makes faith, energy, strength, commitment of being a Zapatista flourish. The faith in one’s self must be a constant companion of the people who have given their lives to build autonomy.”* (Chiapas Today Bulletin No. 534, CIEPAC, 26/3/2007).

Perspectives

The Northern Zone has traditionally been at the mercy of a regional mindset of confrontation and polarisation, making it difficult for men, but especially for women, to move about freely, especially when “Red Alerts” are decreed. Throughout Chiapas the possibility of confrontation has steadily increased since early 2007, given Felipe Calderón’s newly implemented “hard fist” policies, and the change in leadership under new governor Jaime Sabines as compared to his predecessor Pablo Salazar. Worried Zapatista grassroots supporters, political analysts and human rights defenders agree that *a military incursion* is an alarming possibility (Reyes, Op.Cit.).

Furthermore, the cost of a “divide to conquer” strategy is not borne by the state or federal government but by local communities as their social fabric disintegrates. Further, state strategies go hand-in-glove with the personal aspirations of leaders such as Pedro Chulín of OPDDIC, since they insidiously manipulate the interests and felt needs of indigenous peasants in order to win over followers and then confront the Zapatista grassroots or Las Abejas, or infiltrate and co-opt other organizations. The Zapatista grassroots have successfully implemented a method to counter division and confrontation: strengthening ties among “indigenous brothers and sisters” at the local level; *in my community an agreement was reached between the Zapatista supporters and members of the PRI and the PRD. This is being done in many communities.* (A women representative at the evaluation workshop, Northern Zone, April 2007).

3. DIAGNOSIS OF THE LINKS AND RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

FOKUS and LAG-KU seek to support as directly as possible women indigenous peasants and their struggles for empowerment in Chiapas. In practice this becomes a complicated process that involves several organisations, each with its own nature (identity, objectives), strengths, limitations, weaknesses and challenges. The linking in itself is neither “bad” nor “good” but obviously as the chain of organisations is lengthened, greater complexities and challenges arise, such as time constraints, communication flows, mutual understanding, shared agendas, etc. Further, these relationships among the links in the chain within Chiapas unfold in an environment of growing demands and requirements from international aid agencies (mainly FOKUS itself, involved principally in

empowering women). Donor agency demands often centre on encouraging greater professionalism in project activities and improving quality standards in the entire project cycle, including: greater quality in the projects and reports themselves, more rigour in monitoring and evaluation systems, diversification of funding sources, etc. All of these requirements bring challenges and tensions and clearly demonstrate the differences among “solidarity” movements on the one hand and the world of international development and cooperation on the other.

The consultants respect and greatly value the principles and work of international solidarity organisations, as well as the political stance and commitment (religious, political, ethical, etc.) of organisations and communities, their right to autonomy, whether it be an explicit commitment such as in the Northern Zone (e.g., women’s autonomy within the Zapatista autonomy movement), or organising efforts that aspire to become independent, such as Maya Antsetic. The consultants believe a correct choice was made in channelling aid as directly as possible to indigenous women in communities that have historically been relegated (as contradictory as it may seem, this project endeavours to do just that through these many links in a long chain of relationships). They are also aware, however, that it is not an easy task, given the many disconnects related to mutual understanding, cultural differences, and others that accrue in very “different worlds”. Further, the consultants appreciate and understand efforts aimed at professionalising work activities –both in terms of improving “outward appearances” (higher quality projects texts and reports), but also regarding strategic vision, capacity building, efficiency and efficacy, technical support, documentation and information dissemination. These are not “technocratic” requisites. They undoubtedly will help improve the living standards of indigenous-peasant women. We the consultants believe it best to make our position explicit, given that our value judgments and recommendations will be made within this frame. Expressed in a different way, the best path is to conserve the principles and ideals of solidarity while pursuing excellence in developmental work.

Due to constraints on the length this report (30 pages maximum), we have chosen to synthesise specific points rather than undertaking a detailed analysis of each organization in the chain. The following will help paint a general overview and establish the contours of the analysis to be fleshed out in ensuing chapters.

FOKUS:

- FOKUS always works through Norwegian intermediate organisations such as LAG-KU. It values and appreciates LAG’s understanding of the political, socio-economic and political-cultural situation of Chiapas, and recognises that LAG enjoys the political trust of organisations in Chiapas.
- FOKUS has increasing technical requirements regarding its funding for development activities, while LAG-KU is basically a solidarity organisation.
- FOKUS does not have a good understanding of events in Chiapas, nor of the organisations it is supporting, and so depends on LAG-KU to be an interlocutor and a “translator” of processes in Chiapas.
- FOKUS’s major concern and interest is the empowerment of women.

LAG-KU:

- Several members of LAG-KU have spent lengthy periods of time in Chiapas (some as peace observers, etc.). Their perspective and relationship with organisations in Chiapas is political and based on solidarity (e.g., not on being a source of funding). Their relationships with counterparts are horizontal and transparent, which is much appreciated by local counterparts. LAG is respected and enjoys political trust.
- As it is a solidarity group, LAG works with volunteers who are either students or earn their living elsewhere.
- This means that: a) LAG has little time to give projects detailed follow-up; b) there is no continuity, due to the considerable turnover of women in LAG-KU; c) they appear not to have a system in place to classify

and file all project information; d) FOKUS's increasing demands appear burdensome to LAG; e) LAG people do not have all information and necessary training to be able to fulfil FOKUS requirements.

- Likewise, the consultants judged that there is no systematic induction or training process for new volunteers, who now learn "on the job". Until recently, there had been no clear division of labour among volunteers. Further, no one has the "historic overview" of the entire process; each woman has knowledge of a certain part of the history of the relationship, but no one has a general overview³.
- LAG-KU is in an uncomfortable position, caught between FOKUS's demands (in terms of deadlines, quality of reports, etc.) and the mindset and priorities of counterpart organisations and indigenous-peasant women.
- LAG-KU is troubled about the uncertainty regarding project funding now that TV fund-raising campaign is coming to an end.

ENLACE CIVIL

Enlace Civil A.C., founded in 1996, is the is an organisation which relates to and communicates with

- the Good Government Councils (JBG in Spanish).
- For purposes of this report, EC's mission is to link the women, the JBG and organisations such as LAG-KU.
- Its members are "secretaries" at the service of the communities; they neither give opinions, or orient the communities, but rather receive and respect their decisions and, specifically in this case, that of the women.
- This is the most direct channel to the women (with the exception of support channelled directly to the JBG.
- Administrative expenses are minimal.
- The EC team is very small; apart from project follow-up, they have other responsibilities.
- They are not specialists in development; rather, their role is primarily administrative.
- They are not experts in project management, but do competently fulfil donor requirements.
- Their delays in sending narrative and financial reports are a serious problem for LAG-KU and FOKUS, as is their lack of follow-up to e-mails.
- Their transparency and honesty are exemplary.
- Enlace Civil has not sought to widen its funding sources since it is satisfied with the support and orientation of FOKUS/LAG-KU.

THE WOMEN OF THE NORTHERN ZONE

- There are some 317 communities in the Northern Zone; some communities have no collective organisations, while others have two. Some 500 women are organised and work collectively in four different areas: a) animal husbandry; b) bread making; c) community stores and d) handicraft. The vast majority of these collective enterprises are exclusively for women; women can participate in more than one (for example, tending to sheep and making bread). There are from 5 to 40 women⁴ in each collective group.

³ Personnel changes at Enlace Civil and FOKUS have weakened possibilities of reconstructing a complete history. On the other hand, in spite of comings and goings, Nueva Primavera's historic memory is significantly more complete. Most indigenous women have participated for 10 years, but often they are forgetful regarding past events, and approach a comprehension of the historic process in a much different way (see the report from the Maya Antsetic workshop). If we accept that the support of FOKUS/LAG-KU is for processes and not isolated projects, then the importance of the historic memory becomes clear. The written word (and oral, when available) is a good way to pass on historic memory.

⁴ There is one collective group with two women because there are only 2 Zapatista families in the community and so the women made their own group.

- These productive projects are the result of women's basic felt needs and respond to their own decisions and their priorities; it is the representatives who decide on the use, amounts and recipients of the funds.⁵
- The project strengthened collective work and the organisation of women, as well as their decision-making processes.
- Projects have changed little over the past ten years; they are not part of an overall perspective nor a more strategic developmental process.
- Women make the most important decisions with regards to the project components, although LAG-KU has recently been able to point out the need to fund the training of women.
- Another formal procedure taken out of respect to Zapatista autonomy was to inform the Good Government Council of all matters. Enlace Civil turns over funds to the JBG which then channels them to the women who administer them. The women's collective groups are valued and respected even more highly for the courtesy of channelling funds through the JBG (e.g., women are contributing to autonomy through funds raised for much needed productive projects).
- The women's producer collectives are contributing to improving women's status and standing in the community insofar as they are the only source of non-sporadic funding earmarked for production in the Northern Zone, and because profits are used primarily to cover travel expenses for both men and women authorities.
- Given the size of the area (geographic size and the number of women in the collectives), the amounts distributed to the collectives are very low and some collectives have received support from LAG/FOKUS only once in the past ten years.
- For the same reasons mentioned above (small amounts of money distributed over a wide area with a high population and the use of earnings for the travel of authorities), benefits related to nutrition and improved material conditions for women and their families are indeed minimal.
- The women of the Northern Zone know and appreciate LAG-KU, but know little of FOKUS.

NUEVA PRIMAVERA

- The nuns of the Divine Shepard congregation have been working in Chenalhó for over 50 years mostly on the pastoral promotion of social processes in the region, together with the Jesuits.
- Over the years, Maya Antsetic has had many advisors (both nuns and lay people), but they were never experts in handicraft, trade or markets and this is a disadvantage for the women.
- NP had no previous experience in project administration; rather their work centred on solidarity and the social pastoral (for example, in 2002 sister Chavelita "handed out" funds in the initial project to the women of Maya Antsetic, who then opted to purchase young animals. They had no understanding of the need to fulfil the terms of written agreements and project texts). The situation is now much improved and written reports show considerable progress.
- For a time advisors had serious internal conflicts, yet the consultants found it difficult to ascertain whether they had much negative impact on Maya Antsetic. Apparently not, since MA kept itself at arm's length. From what the consultants were able to surmise, current relations between Nueva Primavera and Maya Antsetic are good.
- Currently four women act as advisors. They lack clearly defined guidelines as advisors and all must share their time on other activities (accompaniment of other organisational processes, and other duties).

⁵ Given the enormous size of the Northern Zone and the number of women's collective groups, they take turns receiving funds depending on criteria—also subject to change—decided by women (see the appendix on the Enlace Civil interview).

- Within NP and MA there are differences in culture, behavioural codes and approaches that often cause friction. Still, the advisors are aware of the problem and often discuss how to surmount the challenges of inter-cultural relationships. A point in their favour is that several speak Tzotzil, as is the fact that one of them is a Tzotzil indigenous woman. Yet in the consultants' opinion, her role has not been as strong as it might be, since it seems to be limited to translating at the assemblies, rather than in the accompaniment of the women.
- NP has historically shown paternalism (maternalism) towards the women of Maya Antsetic which has created dependency and limited their growth. NP's current team is also aware of this problem and is trying to change. Yet certain unconscious attitudes continue to surface. An example might be the scolding or the (over)protection of young women students, etc., since it is difficult to change attitudes that are so assimilated that they seem natural.
- Nueva Primavera has an overarching approach (practical need and strategic interests) to organising women; members are analytical and practice self-criticism, and are open to dialogue and to the need for evaluation.
- NP has carefully reviewed legal options for registering Maya Antsetic and has settled on the cooperative form of organisation.
- We believe that it is very positive that the team of advisors sees the need for and is encouraging the autonomy of Maya Antsetic. Quite clearly greater autonomy must be a gradual and planned exercise with clearly defined deadlines for the advisors and women of Maya Antsetic.

MAYA ANTSETIC

- Some 200 women from 14 communities participate in Maya Antsetic. Some groups are more active than others; others are languishing due to weak sales of their handicraft, according to members. Other communities are very isolated.
- The initial priority of Maya Antsetic is to obtain a market for the women's products. This is difficult for several reasons: a) abundant supply and a lack of markets (true for all handicraft cooperatives); low quality and poor technical advice for clothing designs; c) rudimentary knowledge of administration; and d) lack of understanding of market strategies.
- Obtaining legal registration as a cooperative will not be a magic solution to the problems of weak handicraft sales.
- In spite of these difficulties in which high expectations meet adverse market conditions, Maya Antsetic continues to be a path for organising Tzotzil women who are exploring new horizons, learning, undertaking new activities and are beginning to question their traditional roles.
- Maya Antsetic is also an important initiative since it was the first group of organised women (no longer the only one) within Las Abejas, in a predominantly male environment which has historically been closed to women working in an organised, independent manner. This is beginning to change, thanks in part to Maya Antsetic.
- Some representatives and members of the directorate—among them relatives of the victims of Acteal massacre—have developed important leadership skills and with greater training will fulfil their potential as leaders.
- Representatives decide the use, amounts and recipients of funds and handle the bank account.

Evaluation matters

- ✓ We found perceivable tension—or at least a contradiction—between FOKUS's desire to increase involvement of indigenous women in writing up project texts and reports, and their expectations in terms of quality and complexity of information, and the level of analysis therein. Another contradiction exists

between the consultation process and pace of work in communities and the deadlines and dynamics of international aid agencies.

- ✓ Indigenous women have very practical interests and needs—e.g. higher incomes—given their extreme poverty and the daily struggle for survival. Yet the rest of the organisations in the chain tend to emphasise women’s political empowerment. To date it has not been possible to satisfactorily unite and create synergies between the productive aspects and the more political side of empowerment. Strangely enough, the projects undertaken have increased women’s empowerment more than they have increased their incomes.
- ✓ The greatest challenge is to begin from the women’s most felt needs and concerns and advance towards their strategic interests, both in terms of empowerment and also general development. This has yet to be achieved in the Northern Zone and within Maya Antsetic. Still, there are strengths and great potential for encouraging more wide-reaching endeavours.
- ✓ Doubt exists regarding whether project funding will continue beyond 2008 (when funding from the television campaign is due to cease), given NORAD’s decreasing support for Latin America and the fact that Mexico is not a priority country for NORAD.

4. Strengthening production and empowering women (sub-questions 1-5⁶)

We begin this chapter by contextualising the matter of gender among the women of the Northern Zone and Maya Antsetic. Responses to sub-questions 2, 4 and 1 follow, and the chapter concludes with an analysis of the relevance of the projects for FOKUS’ strategy.

4.1 Gender and local conditions: Projects take place in specific local gendered environments. The promulgation of the Revolutionary Law of Women (known as a “revolution within the revolution”) on 8 March 1993, a bit less than one year before the Zapatista uprising was a touchstone in ongoing revolutionary processes in Latin America and especially among indigenous people and women. Its 10 articles include the right to participate in public life and hold public office, to decide whom to marry and how many children to have, to be free of violence and mistreatment (with severe penalties for rape), the right to work and obtain a just salary, etc. Although this is clearly a document that outlines gender relations as they should be, it sets into motion a **process** in which people with greater sensitivity and political will to change attitudes and ingrained behaviour become part of local enabling conditions for the empowerment of women. Similarly to the Central American revolutionary movements, except Guatemala’s, one third of the EZLN are women. But in contrast to what occurred in Central America, gender demands have been clearly and publicly articulated (via the aforementioned Law) and many women are in leadership positions within the military structure. In contrast, the fact that few women hold “positions of authority” within the civilian grassroots structures (such as those supported by FOKUS/LAG-KU) has generated analysis and internal criticism⁷ but changes are being encouraged. Today half of the leadership within the JBG are women, but often they are very young and therefore at a disadvantage (20 years old in some cases next to men with perhaps

⁶ Although reference is made to question 3 (women’s premises), the matter is given further attention in the following chapter.

⁷ One of the errors or “shortcomings” of Sub-Commander Marcos at the start of The Other Campaign was the lack of representation of women within the Good Government Councils and Autonomous Councils that at times hardly reached 1% (women have already had a greater participation, between 33%-40% in the Clandestine Indigenous Committees). “Radio Insurgent has begun a campaign that calls for women to be respected and achieve equality, and within the assemblies it is a daily topic of discussion.” See “La autonomía zapatista”, <http://mediochiapas.wiki.mailxmail.com>.

20 years' experience⁸). Regardless, there are significant improvements and political will exists, at least among many people, including authorities, to encourage changes in gender relations. There is, however, an undercurrent of fear that tackling gender inequality may bring on conflict or that women's exercise of self-determination may run counter to collective values.

In Maya Antsetic's case, the struggle for recognition, participation and affirmation of women's rights has found less fertile local conditions, as exemplified by the fact that Las Abejas has had exclusively male leadership. Efforts have been made in the past two years to change this situation and women have been brought into leadership positions, thanks to MA, CODIMUJ and Nueva Primavera itself. Further, in the Tzotzil area of Los Altos, there is a tradition of women remaining within the home that is stronger than in areas of migration and bonded labour such as La Selva (where there are problems of a different nature, among them a greater loss of indigenous culture and ancestral knowledge regarding crops, local remedies, etc.). The women of both the Northern Zone and Maya Antsetic work within mixed gender environments and organisations, and share with men territorial demands, for the recognition of indigenous peoples, for improvements of living standards and for the advancement of autonomy and self-determination in which both men and women are the protagonists. These women also share the oppression and asymmetries of power relationships with women throughout the world, with both communalities and differences. The most pressing problems discussed in the evaluation workshops are: gossip⁹; the fear and shame of speaking publicly¹⁰—quite noticeable among indigenous women who historically have had no voice, and although the opportunity for them to speak now exists, it is often very difficult for them to do so; the fact that women must seek “permission”¹¹ from husbands or parents to participate, or to go to Acteal or to the Caracol, or to spend the night outside the community; the lack of time for married women with children (e.g., the heavy workload); and illiteracy. Perhaps because we were strangers (they had not known us long), the women avoided almost all references to issues such as violence and mistreatment. Quite remarkably, one of the most pressing problems that the MA and ZN women repeatedly mentioned was **discouragement** when, for example, their animals would die or sales of clothing would languish, or due to gossip, or because of the “unfair” competition from government handouts of money and supplies, or from the lack of funds for bus fares to travel to training sessions or meetings. Women with bouts of dejection run the risk of returning home and declining to participate.¹²

4.2 Women of the Northern Zone

The evaluation team became familiar with three levels of organisation: a) the collective at the community level (Santa Cruz); b) a group of women representatives at the municipal level (Vicente Guerrero) which we used as a

⁸ In our meeting with the JBG of the Northern Zone there was no such gap; although the man (a young man at that) spoke the most to us, the two women (also young) were clearly in command of the situation with him and he repeatedly consulted them.

⁹ Gossip, a form of social control, has an enormous importance in the indigenous communities of Chiapas. Although gossip leaves no one untouched, women suffer its most deleterious effects (see the interesting analysis in the NP interview).

¹⁰ This is an important point as demonstrated by the following quote and comment from the consultant in the MA evaluation workshop: *This is the first time I have been a representative and, the truth be known, I'm very afraid of speaking, I'm greatly ashamed when I speak.* (Her body language betrays her nervous state, she shields her face with her shawl, it's evident she's very nervous, she feels pressured and is under great stress for having to speak, it's painful to watch her).

¹¹ Feminists find it odd that others must grant “permission” or “leave” since they believe women should be autonomous and control their own bodies and lives. This requires a deeper analysis of the meaning and use of these words and the concept and practice of respect, which goes beyond the possibilities of this evaluation. The way women and men express themselves has been preserved and respected herein.

¹² It was nuclear to us whether the women's emphasis on external problems—and not those specifically related to gender—is because the former affect their daily lives more, or because they avoided sharing intimate problems (“permission”, work loads, violence, etc.) with strangers, or because gender oppression was so “natural” that they do not conceive of it as a problem, but rather as “a fact of life”.

sample to study animal husbandry groups; and c) the municipal representatives at the zone level (the workshop at Roberto Barrios). We were thus able to gain a local, municipal and overall zone perspective.

4.2.1 Changes in the women and their gender relationships:

Due to a lack of space, we outline the changes the women experienced, leaving the reader to explore the rewarding and expressive quotations from the women in the appendix “Cambio en las Vidas de las Mujeres”).

- ✓ Representatives travel to all the communities in their municipalities where collectives exist, thus breaking out of their confinement, strengthening women’s organisations and collective work and exercising their leadership skills.
- ✓ Many of the women have lost their fear of participating and speaking in public.
- ✓ There are women in positions of authority, others are health and education promoters, who encourage and set an example for other women.
- ✓ Many women have learned to read and write (others have not and still others think they are too old but that their daughters will learn).
- ✓ Women know—many of them for the first time—that they have rights; the commanders, both male and female, have participated in and supported this process.
- ✓ Many of the women have “permission” and “freedom” to participate, others have problems doing so because their husbands or parents will not grant “permission”, and still others have chosen not to participate.
- ✓ These women are setting a different example and projecting a different image to their daughters and sons (e.g., women are participating, developing new skills, exercising positions of authority, instead of simply recreating the image of a woman in charge of her home).
- ✓ In some cases husbands are taking on chores at home, such as washing dishes and taking care of the children.
- ✓ There is less mistreatment and physical abuse of women by their husbands as a result of the women’s participation in the organisation and in talks and workshops regarding gender.

The following quote illustrates how productive projects supported by FOKUS have had an impact: *I like to participate. We participated in a workshop, in a training course; we learn something of what they have come to share with us. When I was not participating in this organisation, I knew nothing. Before, I never used to go out anywhere. Previously I had a disorganised life, now they [projects] give me that freedom. There are workshops on how to get along with men. Now I have the freedom to be in a position of authority. Before, my husband would say to me, “you’re going to get skills so that later you can dominate me”; but now I’m participating and setting a good example for my kids. That’s the change I’ve seen in the past three years. (Representative of Felipe Ángel municipality).*

4.2.2 Project components and improvements in living conditions

It is worthwhile to compare the size of FOKUS/LAG-KU’s aid with the geographic size of the Northern Zone and the number of women working collectively (some 500). Some collectives have received just one donation (especially if the collectives are relatively new, e.g., 3 years old). These are small donations: 9,625 pesos for the entire Felipe Ángel municipality, 5,000 pesos for Santa Cruz community in the “El Trabajo” municipality. Nonetheless, **they are the only productive projects receiving outside aid in the entire area** and therefore are much valued and appreciated. The women make inordinate attempts not only to stretch funds as far as possible, but also to support other collective groups. *Profits are only for our bus fares. If there are no profits, all of us have to chip in for the fares. We have to contribute 10 pesos every month, because there are still no profits to show for our work. We are going to gather a bit of money and give it to the groups that don’t have any so that they can get to work. (Elvira)* Further, the women are starting other collective groups without outside aid, e.g. *the cooperative*

store and the bread collective are the results of “our own efforts” as women. (San Cruz) We should not forget, however, that women continue to carry out on their own time-honoured survival strategies for family subsistence: vegetable garden and barnyard animals, sometimes making handicrafts, etc.

As a sample, in the Vicente Guerrero municipality, there are 145 women in 16 husbandry collectives. Over a four year period (2003-2006) they received 76,430 Mexican pesos (US\$6,948 at a rate of exchange of US\$1 = 11) from FOKUS/LAG-KU. They generated profits of 57,266.50 pesos (US\$5,206) for a total of 133,696.50 pesos (US\$12,154). This means that there was a total investment over a four year period of 527 pesos (US\$8) per woman. Profits per woman were 395 pesos (US\$36) for a total of US\$84, which, divided by 4 years, means that there was an average investment of US\$21 per woman per year, even though some women’s collectives received funds once over the period. Of the 16 groups, 4 returned the seed capital to benefit other women’s groups. (See the appendix: “Ejemplo de registro de información, Zona Norte”). Although we are talking about very low amounts per women, the total of 12,000 dollars is a considerable sum for the municipality, given the levels of poverty.

Use of profits: The profits of the women’s collectives are used first to cover bus fares (transport) of authorities and women representatives; they are also used for “supports”. Some of the collective groups reinvest profits in other collectives (bread making, small supply stores), but others keep some for savings and use it as needed, e.g., money is not reinvested. Few animals are consumed to improve family nutrition.

One major weakness has been the lack of good veterinary advice and training¹³, even though this line item has been included in project budgets almost every year. Animals have been dying off repeatedly, particularly the hens, which not only cuts into profits but, more importantly, **discourages** the women since they do a lot of work and see no results. *We bought 100 hens...the first two times we sold them. But then some 40 to 50 chickens got sick and died of cough even though we had medicated them. Much was lost on that occasion. And now we’re not interested in beginning again, “we’ll stop there” (Santa Cruz).* For this reason and because training in animal care is the women’s most felt need, we recommend that the 2007 work plan place emphasis on courses to train “veterinary” promoters, to be combined with a more holistic follow-up proposal (see the appendix “Propuesta de intervención Zona Norte”). Whether we like it or not, cattle-raising is the most profitable venture (see the appendix and also Chapter 4). The most successful collectives have raised cattle, even though more land has to be rented; next in profitability are the small stores and then pigs if corn is grown locally. Revolving funds also work well.

4.2.3 Evaluation (completion of objectives):

Productive projects give women the opportunity to organise themselves, administer funds, decide on priorities, work together, increase confidence and experience, learn new things, shake off “fear” and “shame”, and socialise with other women. These very positive aspects contribute to women’s empowerment, participation and decision making in a process of building autonomy. The women are also admired for managing the only productive projects with outside funding. By contributing to the bus fares of men and women authorities, the women improve their position or status by helping to put autonomy into practice.

Still, these productive projects have generated very few material and nutritional improvements for the women and their families. In this sense some of the project objectives are too ambitious and almost impossible to fulfil. Taking into account the amounts donated by FOKUS, the size of the area and number of women (some 500), the funds could hardly have been expected to create an impact in the nutrition of the women and their families. If, however, the projects were to be conceived within a more global and far-reaching strategy, their impact would be improved. An underlying weakness of the productive projects is, in our opinion as consultants, the lack of a linkage to

¹³ Good veterinary advice is hard to come by in Chiapas, according to several NGOs.

development processes. Rather, they respond to immediate needs and are isolated and short-term activities, since they are de-linked from longer-term autonomy strategies having to do with agro-ecology, production, education or health. For this reason their impact—in terms of development, not of empowerment—is minimal. The projects' immediacy and short-term nature is palpable by the fact that they have not varied much over the past ten years, leading outside observers to wonder whether they might continue unchanged for the next 30 years. In other words, where are they heading? what is their objective?, where is the strategy?¹⁴

4.3 Maya Antsetic:

4.3.1. Changes in the women and their gender relationships:

To understand what has changed and how, plus the dimension, significance and nature of the changes, we must remember how things were before. The quote regarding shame and fear of speaking (footnote on page 10) illustrates how Tzotzil women were confined, how little contact they had with the “outside world”, since they spoke no Spanish, did not read and write, did not venture beyond their communities, participated little in public fora, rarely spoke to outsiders, could not use the telephone or carry out administrative duties in San Cristóbal. These characteristics are still present in Maya Antsetic women, but progress has been made and significantly so in some cases (see the appendix with women's interesting contributions and quotes). Thus, for most representatives, to participate in Maya Antsetic has brought changes such as: beginning to speak out, analyse as a group and make decisions (for example, what materials to purchase, how best to distribute project funds among the groups), exercise authority and take responsibility for the groups of members in the communities, in an effort to make them grow, bring awareness to the members and take back their decisions to the MA assemblies in Acteal. For many women these steps are their initiation to the political life of Las Abejas: *Now the men in the organisation take us into account, they call us to coordination meetings so that we can learn how things are resolved and how work is organised.* It also is about learning new things, seeing wider horizons. And it is also about negotiating with husbands and parents in order to journey away from home, go to training sessions, encounters, exchanges and, among the (few) representatives with children, arrange for someone to take care of them (husband, mother-in-law, sister, etc.) when they are away.

The following quote is revealing about the majority of the representatives: *We feel strong when we enter into the organisation and begin to make our handicrafts. Shame is left at the door and we can begin to speak. Now we know our rights to learn and to carry on with our own work.* Without pretence of being representative, the following quote illustrates what can be done and what some of the women on the board are still lacking: *What I learned: before, the advisors would come to the meetings to gather the clothes, but not any longer, we make them, and we make the list. This is very gratifying, to learn, I put all my heart into it because I want to learn. I've already gone to Mexico City to sell; I've taken the underground, taxis and public transport. The people in Mexico City say “I don't have time to drop you off”, but the way they say it, I don't get mad, just the opposite, I'm pleased because I'm learning. I did spend quite a bit of money on taxis. I also spoke by phone, even though I don't speak Spanish. In Mexico City also, I go alone and move about alone, the problem here (in Acteal) is that there is no telephone and to make a call I have to go to San Cristóbal, I spend a whole day to go to San Cris to call Mexico City and place an order. What I can't do yet is the funding requests and project accounting, that's the difficult part; I think it's very hard. But I can account for the handicrafts, how much was sold, how much was not sold. I'm very anxious to learn that part, to learn computing, write the funding request and project reports.*

¹⁴ Although projects are presented with a 3-year time frame, they are in practice rewritten every year (given the changes in budgets and activities), and thus contribute to short-term horizons which coincide with the women's immediate interests and needs instead of more far-reaching triennial projects. EC's Enrique says he does not remember ever seeing a three-year project (see the appendix with the Enlace Civil interview).

Still, dependency on the advisors has been significant: *They always used to help us. They helped us to sell our products, since they were already helping us. We were like little girls that still needed to breast feed.* Another woman points out: *we feel that we cannot continue alone yet, we still feel like infants.* Yet the women of MA—though a process of reflection with NP¹⁵--now understand the importance of growth and independence: *we know we have to learn to do the work ourselves and that it should be bit by bit, because when we learn we'll be able to do the work ourselves.*

4.3.2 Project components and improvements in living standards

The women make short and long-sleeved blouses, napkins, hair bands, bookmarks, shirts, shoulder bags, skirts, trousers, pillows, tablecloths, blouses with straps. Men's shirts sell well, yet the women do not make them due to the difficulty involved. They have learned to make many of the items in design and clothing workshops supported by FOKUS/LAG-KU. Yet quality is uneven. This was evident when we compared the beautiful items on display at NP's office and those in the Acteal store in terms of quality, variety and design. Training in design and making clothes has not been systematic nor has there been follow-up for the women who took the courses nor have the courses been reproduced in communities (supposedly the women should teach other women what they have learned), and so there is no refinement in newly-learned skills which are then often forgotten.

The search for new markets has been done haphazardly, mostly through suggestions from friends or contacts. For example, handicrafts are sold on a university esplanade, or a person takes some items in solidarity to be sold in her home country. The idea of selling through a web site was unsuccessful since there was no marketing plan.

Therefore, quite frankly, each woman sells **very little** in a year (in surveys we did in communities, the women reported total sales of between 200 to 350 pesos, with profits of 30 pesos, less than US\$3). Total sales and profits may possibly be greater, but even so, they are microscopic (further, they are subsidised because the project covers some input costs). One woman pointed out: *if you do an analysis of, for example, what it costs us to make a dress, we end up with 5 or 10 pesos or end up with a loss.* (Given the lack of space, the matter is taken up in depth in the appendix on proposals for Maya Antsetic).

4.3.3. Evaluation (fulfilment of objectives)

We should underscore that the situation described above **is not unique** to Maya Antsetic due to the over supply of handicrafts on the market, their low price in comparison to the work and inputs that go into each piece; those who are successful have a quality product, understand demand and know their market and how to carve out a niche. We are worried in this regard because the Maya Antsetic women believe that their problems will be solved and markets will be available once they are legally registered as a cooperative. There are no easy or magical solutions to the enormous problems of selling handicrafts.

The objectives laid out in Maya Antsetic projects are indeed ambitious and therefore impossible to fulfil. But even more modest goals would be difficult to accomplish if systematic and professional work (e.g., quality and steadfastness) in technical advice, in production and handicrafts sale is not available. However, there has been progress in empowerment, thanks to the projects and NP's accompaniment, although this is only now becoming more holistic (see chapter 6).

4.4 Relevance of the projects for FOKUS' strategy

¹⁵ The women had the following to say regarding the conflict among the NP advisors: *there were problems among the advisors, but we asked that Ana María remain and now there are no problems.*

As a network bringing together 72 Norwegian women's organisations, FOKUS is a centre for resources, for improvement and coordination of women throughout the world and, therefore, is quite more than an aid agency. Yet since FOKUS' principal backfunder is NORAD (the Norwegian government's aid office), it must adhere to the norms and best practices of international aid cooperation and, in turn, must request compliance from its members and counterparts. FOKUS has a set of criteria for supporting projects:

- Projects encourage women's empowerment
- Projects strengthen women's organising and women's organisations
- Women are in charge of the projects
- Women are the target group
- A project should encourage cooperation between a Norwegian women's organisation and a local women's organisation
- A project financed by FOKUS should be about development, not charity
- Men can participate in the projects only if by so doing they better understand women's lives and their presence reduces inequality between men and women.

Projects supported by FOKUS in Chiapas fulfil some criteria, but not all. One main difference or characteristic is that both the women of the Northern Zone and of Maya Antsetic are a part of wider mixed organisational processes, the former having to do with autonomy and land issues, the latter with the Las Abejas civil movement, whose leadership is controlled mainly by men. Nonetheless, Maya Antsetic is solely a women's organisation and the Zapatistas are encouraging women's participation and rights (Revolutionary Law of Women) and women's right to hold positions of authority. These initiatives are encouraging the **organising** of women far beyond women's organisations (the latter being understood as part of the feminist movement, notwithstanding the fact that indigenous women continue to have contact and coordinate with women's organisations and movements). Similarly, most indigenous women's organisations in Latin America join with men in more inclusive settings such as indigenous movements, e.g., Moloj, or mixed alliances of repression victims such in the case of Conavigua (both located in Guatemala and supported by FOKUS), but which maintain specific demands on behalf of indigenous women. This too occurs with the women of Maya Antsetic and the Northern Zone who seek to change "bad traditions" that harm women, but who at the same time are reaffirming, and even redefining, positive indigenous traditions and culture. They are also demanding that women themselves be the ones to define what traditions need changing.¹⁶

We believe that both initiatives are contributing to the empowerment of women, to awareness of and the exercise of their rights as indigenous people, and both projects have women as the main target group. The women of the Northern Zone are in charge of the projects, and even though the local association Enlace Civil is not a women's organisation, several of its members come from women's organisations such as K'injal Antzetik or have strong sensibility and commitment to gender equality. Several representatives of Maya Antsetic (and Nueva Primavera) participate in CODIMUJ, a pioneer and seminal organisation for the promotion and participation of indigenous women in Chiapas (see the article by Hernández in *Dissident Women*). Notwithstanding the weakness and challenges facing both projects, they can assuredly be classified as development projects and definitely not as charity projects. Lastly, no men participate in the Maya Antsetic project. In the Northern Zone, men have not taken over, nor do they seek to control the women's project, even though they do help out in specific areas, such as building corrals for animals or with the cattle. This is perceived as natural—women do not see this as an imposition by the men. Men sometimes attend training sessions or meetings as observers. This is customary in

¹⁶ See Commander Esther speech before Congress in April 2001 (transcribed in *Dissident Women*).

indigenous women's activities throughout Latin America and tends to be accepted and even encouraged, so that men will understand that the women are not "up to anything bad".

In our opinion as consultants, both projects satisfy most of FOKUS' criteria and do, or should, fit within the project portfolio supported by FOKUS (e.g. they are not exceptions, with the caveat that Enlace Civil is not a women's organisation), since both are based on the premise of equal conditions and opportunities for women, of symmetrical power relationships between men and women (even though clearly this is an unfinished process), and of full exercise of their rights not only as women but also through the affirmation of collective rights of indigenous people (as long as the latter do not work against the advancement of women). Further, we believe that it would be quite useful for FOKUS to widen its contact and relationship with the indigenous women of the Northern Zone and Maya Antsetic by, for example, encouraging exchanges with the two indigenous women's organisations of the Sami or Norway that are a part of FOKUS, as well as by encouraging their participation in international women's events.

5 Administration

- **Is project administration efficient, effective and does it comply with the requirements of international aid?** (Sub-questions 3 and 6-9 of the Terms of Reference)

"Project administration" is understood to mean the management of the entire "life" cycle of a project (in itself a stage or component within a larger and wider organisational process).¹⁷ The life of the project includes consulting and fashioning various ideas into a project text, putting them into practice, monitoring or follow-up and, later, evaluating the project and writing up narrative and financial reports. FOKUS was especially interested in understanding to what degree indigenous women actively participate in the different stages of the project cycle; how much funding gets to them and how much is used for administrative expenses (e.g., intermediate organisations and salaries in particular). A common criterion within the international aid world is 10% for administration. Yet we consider this figure to be relative: if an intermediate organisation is providing close and good-quality accompaniment, if funding is being focused on capacity building and empowerment of indigenous women, a higher percentage for salaries can be justified.

LAG has participated in writing projects that conform to FOKUS requirements. We could not determine, however, whether the projects approved by FOKUS, written in Norwegian, contain points that are absent in the original project texts which should be raised with EC and NP.

5.1. Enlace Civil/Women of the Northern Zone

Before the creation of the Caracoles and the Good Government Councils, Enlace Civil had a greater role in deciding development strategies and project activities; objections were raised that the arrangement meant too much input from support personnel crafting projects "from a desk". So the GGC started having direct relations with all organizations and the role of the EC became one of liaison. This in turn brought up issues regarding project write-ups. The process was slowed considerably since currently not only are women representatives' opinions included but also those of base communities: *Before, Enlace Civil had more to do with the project. But now women participate more, the process is extremely slow [since] they consult with their base communities. Before the representatives would decide but now they ask within the communities, see what's happening within each collective group.* Project reports are still written by EC based on the short financial reports turned in by the women

¹⁷ In other words, the consultants do not view projects as an end in themselves but as a means to nurture processes within a context of building autonomy in the Zona Norte and within Las Abejas' social organisation.

(see, for example, the Registry of Collectives, Nueva Babilonia, in the appendix). Enlace Civil's role is basically to follow up during the entire process. Meetings between women representatives and Enlace Civil are held every two months: *at the meetings we go over how the collective groups are working: everyone reports what she is doing, if she visited communities, how they are, what problems exist.* When the women want training courses they ask EC to look for the right people.

Thus indigenous women do indeed have a great deal of participation and influence in the consultations that go on before a project is written, making decisions on activities and amounts for each line item (see in the appendix Interview with Enlace Civil, question 12). The advantage of working this way, in addition to complying with the Good Government Council's request, is that the women are truly in charge of the process. Disadvantages include: a) the slowness inherent in the method, and the fact that available information and analysis falls short of meeting FOKUS's needs and requirements; b) projects reflect the women's immediate needs but are not articulated within a long-range development strategy (already alluded to in the previous chapter). And, depending on who is responding, the fact that c) Enlace Civil does not engage in a systematic process of close accompaniment (reviewed in the chapter on Organisation), can be seen as an advantage or disadvantage.

When the lead consultant congratulated him for the significant improvement in the latest project text, Enrique of EC answered: *But I don't like writing the projects, because it's what I see. It should be the women or at least the Council who does them. It's difficult to explain everything requested by the project application, and that's why Enlace Civil does them. Sometimes it's necessary to do the translation. The women can influence you, but in the end it's your interpretation. It's difficult to be objective, because only what they say should be written down (so no mistakes are made), but you can't do analysis.* The problem is, however, that indigenous women from rural communities are hardly verbose, their statements are to the point (how pigs were purchased, how many died, how many they sold), and are not given to abstraction or analysis (e.g., how did the pigs contribute to the empowerment of the women?, which is one of FOKUS' main queries). FOKUS believes that the greater the number of women running the process the better, but at the same time FOKUS has objective needs for information and must understand the **process** beyond what raw data can transmit. In this regard FOKUS should ponder which is of greater importance: increase women's participation in project administration or rely on intermediaries who can "translate", interpret, analyse and communicate, with the risk, as Enrique points out, of mistakes being made. What the issue needs is an in-depth discussion between FOKUS, LAG-KU, EC and the women of the Northern Zone to reach some sort of an agreement.

In a different matter, Enlace Civil's staff receives no salary, since the organisation is deemed to be **at the service of**¹⁸ the autonomous municipalities and areas. The project's 10% administrative charge in part covers rent, telephone, paper supplies, petrol, bookkeeper's fees, etc. Therefore, all EC staff must seek a way to make a living. In practice this means that little is spent on administrative expenses, e.g., an average of 9.4% of the budget between 2002 and 2007 (a maximum of 10% in 2006 and a minimum of 8.8% in 2005, see the appendix).

A problem arose in 2006 because a change was made in a line item to purchase cattle, without previous authorisation from LAG-KU/FOKUS.¹⁹ FOKUS' concerns²⁰ went beyond the formal matter of a change in line items, e.g., was animal husbandry the best option for achieving women's empowerment and did the matter merit an evaluation before introducing other species? Doubts were also raised regarding the quality of the technical

¹⁸ This decision to forego salaries or "subsidies" applies to everyone, even the "autonomous skilled" personnel within the communities who participate in projects supported by international aid organisations.

¹⁹ EC did write for authorisation but did not await a reply which, when it arrived, was negative.

²⁰ We interpret LAG-KU's position in the matter to be that of an intermediary caught between the criteria and interests of the two parties.

support given the high animal death rate and whether cattle-raising was not really a “front” for a project run by and responding to men’s interests. LAG-KU wrote up an explanatory and analytical report²¹ and the change was later approved. EC explained (see question 13, EC interview) that doubts regarding cattle (mostly ecological and whether it was the most rational use of land) were much discussed in the area. Still, a short-term view prevailed—the tremendous value that cattle have as “piggy banks” or “savings schemes”, the reduced investment in time and the high profits they generate—which, said in passing, are hardly unimportant advantages for women. The matter is crucial because we repeatedly found different viewpoints regarding priorities and strategies and each generates diverse reactions: a) given the priority to survive, women give greater emphasis to immediate solutions and tangible results; b) Enlace Civil respects this viewpoint—after all, it is **their** process—even though EC’s opinions might differ; c) FOKUS accepts this but concerns continue to exist. But perhaps the most important debate—whether to respect the women’s priorities above all or begin dialoguing and negotiating with them—has yet to be held.

A reaction to the incident was to introduce more rigid criteria into the definition and administration of line items: *there is a tendency for them to be very concise...funds must be further broken down, much more detail given.* (EC interview). EC understood the tendency to be the response stemming from LAG-KU’s displeasure at a perceived abuse of confidence: *they were angry at what they considered an abuse of confidence when the agreement was not followed. Many women don’t even recall the agreement. At this end there was confusion.* The consultants believe that making line items stricter is not the best option. Quite the contrary, greater flexibility should be shown (for example, a line item might read “70 thousand pesos for raising animals, exact species still to be decided”). What is worrying, however, is that *women don’t even recall the agreement.* A strength in other similar experiences is that generally awareness exists of the importance of adhering strictly to line items and agreements with donors. Thus, creating enhanced awareness among the women, a task still pending, would be much more important and effective than making the line items more rigid. This would not simply be a matter of informing the women and looking at it as a formal or bureaucratic step, but rather having them understand the importance of respecting an agreement negotiated among organisations.

Enlace Civil tries to fulfil donors’ financial and accounting requirements (see interview, question 27). This evaluation did not go further into detail since it was a matter more relevant to an external audit. But the impression we have is that the financial and accounting system is rather precarious and informal (little slips of paper are tossed into a drawer until they are handed over to the bookkeeper²²), but the system is largely transparent. We asked why the bank account was registered in a person’s name given that EC has legal standing as a Civil Association, and received satisfactory explanations (the Treasury Department’s requirements are difficult to fulfil for small projects, for example, no invoices are given for purchases of local animals; there has been political harassment via bank accounts, a matter given ample coverage in internet). Still, the person whose name is on the account does not sign cheques which is positive. Our worry is that **only one person**, the EC coordinator, signs the cheques. Our recommendation is that cheques be signed by at least two people. This recommendation is not made from any sense of suspicion. Quite the contrary, we believe EC to be fully accountable; this is simply a matter of best practice, a preventative measure to guarantee full accountability by means of clear rules. Furthermore, to maintain the transparency normally found in the autonomous regions (as opposed to regrettable occurrences in Central America), more efficient and stricter accounting and auditing can only help to guarantee transparency.

²¹ Actually, this was the only document we read that attempted to explain the reality of women in the Northern Zone. This type of report would greatly help to document the process and help FOKUS understand the process.

²² In a different part of the interview one person stated that bookkeeping records were done on a computer, so our impression of it being an informal affair may be unwarranted.

Finally, to date EC has not sought project funding from other sources. This is not an easy task given the ongoing decrease in international funding aid earmarked for Mexico. Also, not many agencies support the autonomous communities, and even fewer agencies enjoy the GGC's vote of confidence.

5.2 Evaluation: The effectiveness of project administration with the women of the Northern Zone depends on the parameters. It is **effective** if we use criteria related to women's participation in the creation and implementation of projects according to their own premises; but project administration is inefficient when FOKUS's needs and requirements are taken into account, in no small measure due to the fact that reports have little information and even less analysis, and tend to arrive well after stipulated deadlines. In other words, the main weakness is in project **reporting**, and not in administration. Enlace Civil believes that benefits would accrue if LAG-KU helped project reporting by sending on its narrative reports of their visits and meetings with the women. Viewed from a cost-benefit rationale, in general funds are well used and are stretched as far as possible (in terms of geographic coverage, number of women and collectives, but also in terms of concrete line items, such as with animals), and administrative expenses are low. One line item present in almost all projects but which appears to have had little or no impact is veterinary advice and training, since there has not been a significant decrease in animal mortality. So, from a "micro" perspective, funds are well utilised and each penny is counted. Yet projects are not supporting mid and long-term sustainable processes, insofar as they are not inserted in well-oriented enabling environments with clear developmental strategies.

5.3 Nueva Primavera/ Maya Antsetic Maya Antsetic projects and reports²³ suffer from an "original sin" now recognised and critiqued by the team of advisors: to an inordinate degree they are based on the advisors' own ideas, without having sufficiently involved the Maya Antsetic women.²⁴ Although the situation is changing, it was not clear the extent to which Maya Antsetic was in agreement with, for example, the amount earmarked for the house in San Cristóbal and the scholarships for Tzotzil students (which in fact is not in the 2006 project but is mentioned in the narrative report). According to NP: *The idea is theirs (from a MA assembly) and is in the new Maya Antsetic plan. They dream of having an office and store in San Cristóbal. Only the store is missing. Yet in the MA evaluation workshop, the women rightly pointed out: It's good that women learn and get to know places, that they learn new things, because they are part of Maya Antsetic...It's happened in other organisations, they [young students] leave to study elsewhere, but once they've prepared themselves, they take other paths, and no longer return to the organisation. It's great if they return to support the organisation, because they can help with new ideas. But I wouldn't want to support them through the organisation and then have them leave.* In other words, even though the idea did originate with the women, it was not sufficiently discussed because a) what interests the women most is the store; yet the office-house, located on the outskirts of San Cristóbal, is ill suited for store sales, in addition to problems stemming from changes in the cooperative laws; and b) criteria have not been established nor have explicit commitments been made with the students (NP pointed out that people from Las Abejas who leave to study "always return"); but unless students have signed explicit agreements, they have a right to refrain from returning to Maya Antsetic.

²³ The consultants did not have access to all of Maya Antsetic's documents since some were only available in Norwegian, some electronic documents were lost and no printed back-up copies exist, or they could not be found and sent to the consultants. LAG-KU made a tremendous effort to help the consultants acquire needed documents, but there is an inherent weakness in the nature of volunteer work in areas such as centralisation, classification and back-up of documents.

²⁴ In fact, in order to avoid losing a funding opportunity, LAG-KU wrote up the 2003 project. This is surprising since in a covering letter LAG-KU complains about the way funds were distributed for the purchase of young animals and about contract breaches.

Yet, as we shall see in the chapter on Organisation, it is not simply a matter of doing solely what the women want, since Nueva Primavera is trying—rightly in our opinion—to encourage a more holistic organisational process and not just a cooperative bent on selling handicrafts. True, a funding request for the purchase of a vehicle disconcerted donors, since it would have benefited NP more than MA, even if used for project activities (unless, of course, the MA women learned to drive and got their driver's licence). The challenge ahead, then, is to encourage a two-way process of discussion and negotiation among the Maya Antsetic women and their advisors regarding priorities, activities and line items to be funded.

Still, and especially at the outset, advisors wrote narrative reports in a mechanical, almost bureaucratic way, perhaps due to their lack of experience in project administration. This is clearly evident, for example, by the fact that the 2003 and 2005 reports are almost identical (we were unsuccessful in finding the 2004 report). For example, in "Results and Risks": *work undertaken with women has a direct impact in their communities and families, since their roles are re-valued and women are more taken into account, they have an opportunity to speak their minds and be respected.* Yet no evidence is presented to back these types of statements and the fact that the text says almost the same thing in 2003 means that the goal was to fill out the form and not reflect on the women's process. This has changed significantly. The current NP director not only has submitted more informative and analytical reports²⁵ but she also has sent additional materials that help tell MA's story.

In terms of the project's administration and bookkeeping, initially expense receipts were turned over to the bookkeeper at AMYRILAC (the Jesuits' legal registry in Chenalhó municipality). After the bookkeeper left, one of the advisors tried to do the books. Now, a new bookkeeper José Luis and his helper Minerva are in charge. *What Ana María does is to put away all receipts and she takes them to the bookkeeper. His helper does the accounts in Excel, compares them to bank statements and asks questions and the bookkeeper goes over accounts every year.* Although this seems to be working more or less well, there is a lack of understanding on how to **monitor** budget expenses (budgets are only reviewed with the women every six months). This means that in 2006 some 65 thousand pesos in unspent funds had to be returned to FOKUS, which caused displeasure among MA women. Three people (two from MA and one from NP) are authorised to sign cheques, yet they require only one signature. The team of advisors was receptive to the suggestion that best practice would be for the account to require co-signers thus avoiding possible problems in the future.

Funds spent on administrative expenses over the past six years have varied between 20.2% and 32.7%, averaging 28% of the annual budget.²⁶ Although this a considerable percentage, it is not outlandish, if the team of advisors is fulfilling needed requirements.

Nueva Primavera has not sought to widen its funding sources for Maya Antsetic: *"What we want is to be able to live with FOKUS as long as possible. I rather doubt we are prepared to do reports for other organisations, we lack time and training...Perhaps I'm a bit old-fashioned, but why do we need more money?"*

Evaluation: Although there have been noticeable problems with NP regarding effective project administration, some have been solved (such as the quality of reports). Others are in a process of being improved (such as including MA women in consultations before projects are written and a doing more in-depth studies on their organising), or which could be improved if they had access to technical training, such as in budgeting, monitoring

²⁵ *These are done orally by asking the women questions. Then we the advisors ask questions based on evaluations (Interview with Nueva Primavera).*

²⁶ 2002: 20.2; 2003: 32.3%; 2004: 29.2%; 2005: 25.7%, 2006: 27.6% y 2007: 32.7% (see in the Appendix: amount approved for MA)

expenses and accounting systems. The quality of the technical advice and accompaniment of the Maya Antsetic organising process will be analysed below.

6 Organisation

- **Is the current method of supporting indigenous women's groups through intermediate organisations the best? What changes need to be made?** (and derived sub-questions 10-12)

In section 3 we analysed the “chain of organisations”. Here we shall delve into greater detail regarding the type of accompaniment lent by “local associations” (intermediates), how these are selected; we shall offer suggestions to mitigate the effects and risks of local conditions (the context in which work occurs). Suggestions for strengthening these associations are found in the conclusions and detailed proposals are in the appendices.

6.1 Women of the Northern Zone/Enlace Civil²⁷

As mentioned previously, the JBG gave Enlace Civil a mandate to work in development and intermediate between the Zapatista communities and donors. In other words EC is an official channel and currently the most direct, apart from the JBG themselves for supporting autonomy processes, and specifically women therein. Asked “What is EC's specific contribution?”, the response was *EC contributes very little, and that is its merit. EC was created by the communities themselves. The goal is to disappear.* Enlace Civil would actually prefer that the JBG receive all support directly, that the JBG and LAG-KU sign agreements directly, and that the JBG and the women write all projects and reports, since this would constitute *yet another step towards autonomy.* After surveying various stakeholders, the consultants found this option to be unviable for FOKUS/LAG-KU. Currently EC has serious problems meeting deadlines for reports, answering e-mails promptly, and undertaking other tasks related to the dissemination of needed information. Assigning these tasks to a more remote and poorer region (with basic problems of electricity, roads, etc.) and to the Good Government Councils and/or women who are hardly familiar with projects, reports and e-mail, would generate greater difficulties. The consultants were able to determine in interviews with the JBG²⁸ that although there is an eager willingness to contribute, two days transpired before the consultants could obtain an interview with the JBG and then answers were very brief. This is understandable: they did not know us, no trust had been established, the JBG was not involved either before or during the evaluation—something that should be discussed during the debriefing—and perhaps some of the questions were too “elevated” in tone to be readily understood. In any event, what this suggests is that **necessary conditions still have not been created** to satisfy the needs and requirements of international aid agencies. The evaluation team fully agrees with the principle that the main stakeholders should be in charge of their autonomy processes and development; another issue is whether FOKUS, given its funding from NORAD, would be able to establish direct contact. Nonetheless, if FOKUS were indeed interested in having the JBG be the sole interlocutors with international aid organisations, a systematic procedure is required to equip and train JBG representatives in project management, speedy communications through e-mail to give them necessary tools for satisfactorily complying with the demands of a direct relationship with the international aid community. If this step were omitted, the interest would be reduced to solely a political one (e.g., a political recognition of the JBG), without the necessary mutually favourable negotiation that would have to transpire for international aid organisations to accept that they were not just unconditionally accepting the autonomous movement on its own terms.

²⁷The fact that it is a man within Enlace Civil who is in contact with the women of the Northern Zone might give rise to doubts. It is merely a coincidence (he is the one assigned to projects in the Northern Zone) but, also, he is very sensitive and committed to gender equality; therefore we believe that this is not a problem (see the EC interview regarding this topic).

²⁸ One man and two women participated with us directly, the other men sat behind, listening.

Another possibility would be for FOKUS/LAG-KU to support development projects through an NGO. The advantage would be a higher level and quality of accompaniment (if it were an experienced NGO with a long track-record). The disadvantages would include a very understandable reluctance of any NGO to interfere with another's work (e.g., Enlace Civil's). Also, the NGOs that are supporting the autonomous municipalities do not have a presence in all areas, and have differing strategic plans and work methods, and might not wish to take on a project designed to include other characteristics and demands.

A more complex topic taken up in previous chapters has to do with the nature and characteristics of accompaniment. What is accompaniment in a context of autonomy in which indigenous men and women from rural communities are in charge of their own development? What should be the role of professionals, technical people, intellectuals, etc? The current autonomous municipalities' (women, JBG, etc.) strategy is "*they come up against a wall, they hit another wall, but they keep going until they find a way around*". In other words, EC is asked to perform only certain tasks: find veterinary advice, seek advice on gender, or someone to teach computing. This is quite different than what other NGOs, such as DESMI, have to offer, which is generally a systematic accompaniment in strengthening skills (through workshops, for example, in agro-ecology, current-events analysis, economy of solidarity, etc.) in a holistic process, linked to mid-term and long term development and community-empowerment strategies.²⁹

We can sympathise with the general antipathy towards professionals and intellectuals who take over and try to steer events themselves, taking away from communities and indigenous people the legitimate right to be in charge of decision-making within organisational processes. We also concur that it is women and men from rural communities who best know their needs and interests, and understand what will work and what is not relevant for their lives. Obviously every process must be based on trial and error since there are no recipes, nor "guiding lights". There is, however, accumulated experience, technical expertise, lessons learned, etc. that can be put at the service of the communities, of women, of the JBG, if done with respect, without imposition; rather, advice can be given 'from the rear' since "accompaniment" is not the same as "leading". "Hitting walls" in a context of historic relegation, of little access to information and opportunities for capacity building, hardly seems the most propitious way of getting ahead, except under specific circumstances.³⁰ Further, as we can see from the following request, the JBG does indeed have an attitude of openness and a desire to be accompanied beyond the general funding request: *We would like to request that the sisters (referring to LAG-KU) who are helping us in our work hold workshops with the women, if they would like to help them. We need these workshops because we have many doubts, we need to learn much, so brothers and sisters from other countries can come to share (their knowledge).*

These are deep, internal political-philosophical discussions within the Caracoles and autonomous regions themselves that only later may bring Enlace Civil, FOKUS and LAG-KU into the debate. Obviously it is the women's (in this project) and the JBG's prerogative to be in charge of their own decisions and decision-making processes, this is, quite rightly, non-negotiable and not open to debate.

²⁹ This is rather more a task of the autonomous municipalities; the problem is that currently projects approved by FOKUS/LAG-KU are not part of more long-term strategies.

³⁰ One positive example occurred in the area of gender equity, often misunderstood or viewed as an "imposition by funding agencies". It was not until it became a felt need within the Northern Zone that a request was made for advice on gender; obviously when something becomes a necessity, there is openness and agency (especially important among men), instead of resistance and possible rejection. Still, placement of women's productive projects within a wider development strategy, instead of keeping them isolated, should not, in our opinion, wait for the need to be felt or for holistic constructs over the mid to long term to develop. Indeed, the holistic vision could very well strengthen the projects.

Rather, the debate centres on the role, level and type of accompaniment that intermediate organisations might or could lend, whether it should be of a technical and “one-off” nature, or whether it should encourage wider perspectives, promote access to information for making well-informed decisions and strengthening both technical and analytical skills.

Given the real risks of local conditions (red alerts, the need to defend land given the presence of paramilitary groups OPDDIC, URCI, and others), we believe that a “contingency plan” must be drawn up to be carried out within a specified period, in order for the representative in charge to send needed information (aggregate data from all municipalities) by e-mail from the Caracoles to Enlace Civil, (and that representatives take on the responsibility of handing the municipal-level reports to people who can travel between municipalities and hand them over to the person in charge); to ensure that reports are sent on time to LAG-KU/FOKUS. Both the women and Enlace Civil must urgently learn and respect the importance of meeting deadlines and assume responsibility for sending reports at specified intervals.

6.2 Maya Antsetic/Nueva Primavera³¹

Close accompaniment has characterised relationships between Nueva Primavera and Maya Antsetic even before MA was founded. The nature of the relationship has changed, however, giving rise to interesting internal reflections. In what follows we shall explore, reproducing the advisors’ own words, the distinct stages and reflective critiques that were made over time and have led to today’s NP/MA relationship, which now recognises that Maya Antsetic must become autonomous and independent (requiring a well thought-out and implemented process).

Maya Antsetic must be understood within a much longer history of the Sisters of the Divine Shepard in the municipality of Chenalhó. Sister Ana María points out: *I began in 1985 by accompanying my sisters in the women’s process of growth. They used to bring barely a kilo of beans and 4 tortillas to share with 30 women.*³² *We would spend a week with the women, working with the Word of God, in solidarity; we used to call them collective experiences: the vegetable gardens, making bread, all together. We would talk about soybeans, nutrition with the women, that was the nature of our work. We would walk 4 hours then ride a horse another 2 hours; vehicles couldn’t reach the place like now. **This was work done from the people at the grassroots and little by little the organisation was being built.** After the massacre, Maya Antsetic was founded, but in very changed circumstances and Nueva Primavera’s accompaniment was limited to Maya Antsetic (and Maya Winik too, a men’s cooperative, in addition to a programme of women leaders run by the Diocese (CODIMUJ) and others). The nature of the accompaniment has varied over time, depending on who is in charge. For example, following the example set by Sister Isabel, Paola Calixto’s accompaniment consisted of: *report writing, meeting with LAG, doing what was required for social service, dissemination activities (the web page, labels). In more recent times, it was marketing and accompanying the women in their processes, going to communities. It was a step-by-step process, a learning experience. Marketing had to do with going to the communities, asking for clothing items for a certain date, picking them up, labelling them, and transporting them. We opened a locale in Guadalajara with Manos Unidas. We tried to open markets with friends in Spain, in Germany (interview, Paola Calixto).**

³¹ The rather amorphous term “Nueva Primavera” refers to the physical space and facilities that the sisters of the Divine Shepard have at their disposal. This is neither a legal registry nor a concrete organization. It remains unclear whether advisors such as Paola Calixto or some of the current team of advisors are/were part of Nueva Primavera. Nonetheless, given that the sisters have ultimate responsibility for the project, we continue to use the term “Nueva Primavera”.

³² Ana María remembers this period with nostalgia, because there was no dependency as is currently the case, arising as it did after the massacre and displacement. The women all shared—with tortillas, beans and their time—in a true show of self-sustainability.

Thus, previously tasks tended to “be done for the women”; instead of giving them the necessary tools (training, contacts, information) so that they themselves could learn to do them.³³ Or sometimes the women would make decisions but without all facts at their disposal so they could ponder the best choice.³⁴ *“We respected their decision, even if it was contradictory.”* We were troubled to read in the 2003 and 2005 reports: *“if economic and professional support were to be withdrawn at this moment, the project would be paralysed or would unfortunately disappear.”* An organisational process that can only be maintained through the constant injection of outside funds cannot inspire much confidence. Still, NP’s current team of advisors recognises that MA has a dependency problem, but more importantly recognises its own role in creating the problem and is seeking ways to solve it. We have therefore identified dependency as the main risk from the overall local conditions, created by displacement, the massacre and paternalism, but steps are being taken to overcome the problem.

Furthermore, accompaniment at that point centred mainly on finding markets (more empirically than professionally) and less on organising the women: *Not so much organisation, more emphasis on sales. In order to correct this, we saw what our weakness was. They [the women] suggested it, it dawned on them. Before there were no specific topics, now we are talking about topics in our meetings. [Now we can lend] holistic accompaniment, since the April 2006 proposal which changed the whole dynamic of things. The Plan for 2006 was based on an analysis and questionnaires sent to the communities...We haven’t hit the mark yet, but we want it to be a holistic accompaniment, both individually and collectively. It’s been much more individual (family problems, etc.), interpersonal dialogue, than having to do with the organisation, which has been much more difficult...we have shed tears, these are personal human growth processes, knowing how to work as a team, knowing how to plan joint activities with people who are different from ourselves. I’m not excluding myself; we have learned how to walk together, each at her own pace, on her own time, for the women time doesn’t exist. When there is a conflict, we’ve got to get to the bottom of it, listen patiently. All processes go through their ups and downs, one step forward, one step back. Processes can’t be compared one to the other. All collective work should have a purpose that goes beyond profit, which has to do with fraternal solidarity. We of the team of advisors do not possess the absolute truth, we can have beautiful ideas, but they should not emanate from behind a desk, but from working together with the women and by knowing how to wait. Everyone must assume her role, and ours is to accompany.* (Ana María, Nueva Primavera interview).

Due to a lack of space, what follow highlights the strengths of current accompaniment and areas that could be improved:

- ✓ The team of advisors is analytical, undertakes self-critiques and is open to suggestions for improvements in their work.
- ✓ NP has a holistic view of accompaniment and now included topics to be analysed at meetings
- ✓ NP encourages exchanges with MA (Chihuahua, solidarity with Oaxaca, a MA initiative)

³³ Sometimes certain tasks were taught, for example, making a bank withdrawal, but the women were always accompanied and thus never gained sufficient confidence to do those things alone. It was interesting to see how the women from MA doubted their ability to arrange the logistics of the evaluation workshop, they wanted the presence of NP to make sure that everything worked out well; yet they did everything perfectly and were surely much more confident after proving to themselves that they could carry it off.

³⁴ For example, the women decided that they were not going to pay for the dressmaking classes of the Tzotzil handicrafts teacher, because it was “cheaper” to hire young women who were doing their university social service and thus worked *ad honorem* (except for transportation). Nonetheless, the cultural divide and the life experiences of “well-to-do” young women from cities in the centre of the country can sometimes backfire (for example, there was one unpleasant experience with a nutritionist who scolded the women for not eating more meat and fish, and a dress designer who wanted the women to work as if they were in an assembly line: some cutting sleeves, others sewing random parts of the clothing!). NP is very aware of these problems and thus has drawn up a profile to filter candidates from social services (but a description of tasks, acquired commitments, expected results, e.g., a formal agreement, is still missing).

- ✓ It has clear understanding, conviction and commitment to gender equality.
- ✓ NP really does want MA to become independent (even though there is no plan or strategy for this to occur).
- NP does not accompany the members of the collective groups, only their representatives, a fact that may generate undemocratic processes, power struggles among women leaders and estrangement from the base.
- It has been difficult to eliminate paternalism and establish a new style of relationships (both for NP and MA).
- Since NP has many diverse activities and commitments, their support of MA is not totally systematic.
- NP has no overall expertise in the more technical aspects of production and marketing and thus depends of the choice and knowledge of short-term consultants (not always the best).

Given that Maya Antsetic gives greater emphasis to productive activities and to the search for markets than organisation, NP plays an important role in raising awareness of the advantages of belonging to an organisation, of the values and principles that an organisation should have (and problems of individualism and a lack of loyalty to the group, if they sell individually). The hope is that Maya Antsetic will grow strong enough to become an independent cooperative (which would not preclude having short-term consultants or accompaniment from NP in specific areas). Therefore we believe that it is not totally to the point to question (as the terms of reference stipulated) whether NP is the best local organisation; rather a more positive endeavour would be to support them (NP) in deciding how a gradual, planned and structured process might be implemented in order for Maya Antsetic to become an independent cooperative. Therefore we have included in the appendix a proposal with two primary objectives: a) strengthen Maya Antsetic as a dynamic and independent organisation through collective analysis leading to a plan of action (and preliminary steps); b) offer concrete suggestions for greater improvement (marketing plan and basic accounting), and continuation of the legal steps and administration of the cooperative.

7. Conclusions

7.1. General conclusion

7.1.1. We consider LAG-KU/FOKUS' support for indigenous women's organising processes in Chiapas to be a correct decision. These processes are neither spectacular nor exemplary, given their complex nature and the context (see chapter 2 and 4) in which indigenous women are advancing "against the grain", to become empowered (MA) and/or to improve their living standards (ZN and MA). These are therefore important projects, but they face serious challenges. In addition, given the advances and specific contributions that indigenous women in struggle, particularly Zapatista women in Chiapas, have given to women's movements throughout the world, support for these processes has opened a two-way learning opportunity (FOKUS/LAG-KU and indigenous women), that can strengthen alliances among women based on respect for cultural diversity.

7.2. The chain of organisations

7.2.1. Although initially it may appear paradoxical, the "chain of organisations" (FOKUS, LAG-KU, Enlace Civil/Northern Zone and Nueva Primavera/Maya Antsetic) is indeed the most direct manner to support indigenous women, with, admittedly, its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include: EC and NP were given a mandate by the indigenous women to be their accompanying interlocutors, and are also part of wider organisational processes. As local organisations, EC and NP are well acquainted with the women and the political and organisational context in which they live. LAG-KU, for its part, is greatly respected by all organisations and enjoys wide political acceptance in Chiapas. The main disadvantage

centres on the fact that, given their nature, LAG-KU, EC and NP do not have much development work experience. Precisely because the women place greatest emphasis on productive projects, these organisations have not been able to fully respond with high level technical expertise required by the projects, nor have they been able to interweave the projects into wider processes of organisation and empowerment (in MA/NP's case), or wider development strategies (ZN/EC's case). Some stakeholders are aware of this and solutions are being sought.

7.2.2 Serious problems have surfaced having to do with meeting deadlines for project reports of acceptable quality, maintaining consistent e-mail communication and providing sufficient information and analysis so that FOKUS understands ongoing processes. Similarly, the indigenous women have not received sufficient information about FOKUS or LAG-KU. To date, signed agreements seem to be more ritual protocol than serious commitments among stakeholders. As an intermediary, LAG-KU often finds itself in an uncomfortable position: insufficiently backed by local organisations, LAG-KU's is sometimes unable to meet FOKUS' requirements.

7.3. Project objectives and indigenous women

Indigenous women have very practical interests and needs—to increase income—given the extreme poverty and the daily struggle to survive. Yet the rest of the organisations in the chain tend to place greater emphasis on women's political empowerment. To date, efforts to create synergy between productive and empowerment activities have not been entirely successful and, paradoxically, FOKUS/LAG-KU's support has increased women's empowerment more than their income. In both projects, technical support has been weak in quality and consistency. As a result many animals have died in the Northern Zone and sales of Maya Antsetic's handicrafts have not been significant.

NZ/EC: the productive projects of women's collectives supported by FOKUS contribute to women's empowerment given that the women are in charge of administering funds, making decisions and organising work assignments. Further, these projects have strengthened the women's collective work and encouraged opportunities for the women to meet, learn and socialise. They have also strengthened the women's social standing thanks to their participation in the only productive projects in the area whose profits have covered the bus fares of both men and women authorities. In so doing, the women are contributing strategically to the exercise of autonomy. Nonetheless, the projects are not currently contributing to a **development** process. Rather, they respond to immediate needs and finance isolated, short-term activities that are decoupled from longer-term autonomic strategies in agro-ecology, production, education and health. Therefore their impact on development is minimal.

MA/NP: Although NP has correctly identified the need for consultancies to improve the quality of the handicrafts and penetrate new markets, so far there has been little progress due to a) low-quality technical support (relevant professional knowledge), leading to poor quality clothing; b) lack of continuous support (isolated activities, lack of follow-up); c) lack of knowledge regarding markets and deficient transfer of information and responsibilities to the women. Further, it is only recently that participants have seen the importance of woman's **organising** processes (and not just production and sales) their values, identity, activities This is now more difficult, as certain vices which have surfaced need to be addressed (individualism, disloyalty to the group, selling on one's own and a certain tendency toward hierarchies—due to a concentration of power in representatives—and insufficient work at the social base). Nonetheless, currently there are favourable opportunities and perspectives for Maya Antsetic's development, given the desire and joint efforts of NP/MA to become independent and strengthen MA when its legal standing as a cooperative is officially recognised. For this to occur, MA needs to a) improve the design and quality of its products; b) keep basic records and accounting; c) draw up marketing strategies; d)

encourage greater participation of members and improve two-way communication flows with them; and e) encourage representatives to play a greater role in motivating the women's collective groups.

Maya Antsetic: in and of themselves, production and marketing of handcrafts have contributed to a certain type of women's empowerment, above all for the representatives and leaders, since they are the most dynamic in collective activities and enjoy new responsibilities (chairing assemblies, consulting members and taking information to them, etc.), learn new things (new designs for their products and practical skills such as using the telephone, making bank withdrawals, going to distant cities to make sales, keeping sales records), and participating in exchanges (in Oaxaca and Chihuahua), thus widening their horizons and sharing their experiences with other indigenous women. Yet, until recently, Nueva Primavera gave greater priority to technical accompaniment and let organising languish in terms of identity, values and principles of organisation, internal regulations, leadership strengthening, etc. Now that the team of advisors has changed, this situation is shifting and Nueva Primavera and Maya Antsetic's leaders are making bold strides to combine and place equal emphasis on both production/sales and the organisational strengthening and empowerment of women.

7.4. Administration

- 7.4.1 In the past two years, Nueva Primavera has significantly improved its reporting and now consults Maya Antsetic women more extensively before writing up projects and reports. It still has weaknesses in writing, handling and monitoring budgets.
- 7.4.2 The projects and reports from the Northern Zone are based on the women's priorities; the women actively participate by making decisions on projects (activities, line items and amounts requested, administration of funds, taking responsibility for the organisation and carrying out activities) and by turning in reports to Enlace Civil. EC fulfils a needed role as "secretary" by filling out reports in accordance to FOKUS' criteria and requirements. Fulfilling the commitments stipulated in the agreement has been a serious problem, particularly in meeting deadlines and filing reports, due to the consultations that go on beforehand. EC has also been remiss in following up e-mail communications in a timely manner and has changed line items without prior authorisation.
- 7.4.3 Record keeping by the women for the MA and NZ production projects is insufficient (scant in the case of MA and registries which are not comparable from one municipality to another, and which lack certain important information (such as dates) in the case of NZ), nor is there a record of overall consolidated data. This makes evaluating results impossible and encourages a micro view of the projects (by community or municipality), rather than providing an overall picture.
- 7.4.4 EC and NP have been satisfied with FOKUS/LAG-KU's support and do not wish to widen their funding sources, or at least without first assuring their capacity to spend (NP/MA). International sources for funding have been withdrawing support for Mexico and the very nature of organisational processes in the Northern Zone makes it difficult to expand funding opportunities. For these reasons, we believe that FOKUS/LAG-KU was correct in deciding to place their confidence in these women's organisations that are working to strengthen, dignify and empower rural indigenous women, often neglected and forgotten.

7.5 Organisation

- 7.5.1 Enlace Civil has a clearly delimited and specific mandate to be a "link" between the women, the Good Government Councils and international aid. Therefore EC's accompaniment with the women is restricted to project administration and follow-up, searching for technical advice and doing some training. This manner of working is positive insofar as it responds directly to the priorities of women directly involved in building autonomy; its disadvantage is that it tends to emphasise the women's immediate needs without linking them to more holistic and strategic mid to long-term development strategies.

7.5.2 Nueva Primavera has made important improvements in its method of accompaniment since recognising that it was creating a (two-way) dependency among the Maya Antsetic women. We believe that NP and MA made a wise decision when they jointly agreed to seek independence for Maya Antsetic as a legally-registered cooperative, to be done gradually and according to a pre-established plan to ensure that knowledge is transferred and abilities are strengthened. Quite possibly NP will continue to have a role to play in the mid-term (e.g., going over projects and reports written by MA to assure fulfilment of FOKUS' requirements), and to help MA to consolidate its organisational process from a more "external" position or viewpoint, and strengthen ties with other organisational processes.

8 Recommendations

8.1 General Recommendation

8.1.1 In spite of the fact that Mexico is no longer a priority country for international aid agencies, the socio-economic conditions in Chiapas are similar to those in Central America (which are countries supported by aid agencies). Indigenous women's organisational processes in Chiapas are both new and in the vanguard; as such they give both international aid agencies and women's organisations interesting opportunities to improve cultural diversity and empowerment of women who traditionally have been discriminated and oppressed because they are poor, indigenous and women. For these reasons we recommend that FOKUS/LAG-KU continue its timely and needed support to these processes.

8.2. Chain of organisations

8.2.1. We recommend that the **agreement** between participating parties be turned into a tool to increase the women's knowledge of the matters being discussed therein; local organisations and indigenous women must come to realise the importance of **respecting, taking into account and assimilating the agreement as their own**. Agreements should stipulate matters such as follow-up and accompaniment, progress and goals to be achieved in a year's time in terms of process (separate from the project itself); for example, turning reports in on time, filing reports in Spanish on visits by LAG-KU or project administration activities that the women are expected to handle (which previously they did not). These types of changes would have to be agreed through an evaluation of all stakeholders' interests and needs, not just those of the aid organisations (e.g., including what organisations in Chiapas need or want from LAG-KU/FOKUS) in matters of accompaniment, institutional strengthening, etc.

8.2.2. We recommend that LAG-KU and FOKUS undertake a thorough discussion with the women of the Northern Zone and Enlace Civil to analyse structural matters such as a) their view of territorial development; b) the role of accompaniment; c) empowerment of indigenous women in the reality and context of cultural diversity. Doing so would enable all parties to better acquaint themselves with each other, deepen and enrich the debate and identify areas of possible mutual support.

8.2.3. Given the nature of the organisations and the complexities of Chiapas, we believe that LAG-KU should play a greater intermediary role between Norway and Chiapas, e.g., between FOKUS and counterpart organisations and the indigenous women. LAG-KU could increase its participation by a) analysing, writing and communicating on the organisational processes; b) ensuring FOKUS' requirements are fulfilled; c) accompanying and supporting women's training sessions; d) helping to diversify funding opportunities and obtaining grants. To do this, LAG-KU would need to a) be trained by FOKUS in project administration to subsequently share this training with EC and the women in ZN, NP and MA ; b) improve its information storage and retrieval systems and induct new volunteers and disseminate project histories; c) delve more

deeply into the world of development (reading literature on the subject, participating in opportunities to share experiences and researching possible donors); d) LAG-KU would need funding to do this, since all of its members are volunteers. We recommend that FOKUS support LAG-KU with one year's funding for a salary and transport costs in order to help strengthen local counterparts directly and search for possible future funders.

8.3. Objectives of the project and indigenous women

- 8.3.1.** NZ: The detailed proposal outlined in the appendix (in Spanish) will mean a qualitative leap for the productive projects of the women of the Northern Zone. It includes the women's most felt needs—veterinary training and advice—while endeavouring to tie together both the diverse components of the 2007 project and link it to the development and autonomous processes in the Northern Zone.
- 8.3.2.** NZ: Given the enormous size of the Northern Zone and the need to strengthen the multiplier effect, it would be advisable that the project begin to train trainers, rather than just provide training to women (for example, in animal husbandry). We recommend that women promoters not only take charge of the project supported by FOKUS but also link this feed into other processes (education, agro-ecology, etc.) in order to improve its impact and women's status in the area.
- 8.3.3.** MA: In order for Maya Antsetic to organise its activities as a legally-registered cooperative and become independent from Nueva Primavera, we recommend that strategic plans and action plans be written for a) organisation; b) administration; c) production and d) marketing, to include goals, deadlines, tasks, responsibilities, activities, etc.). Two proposals are included as appendices (in Spanish): a marketing and basic accounting plan, and a plan for consolidating the organisation, as well as a cooperative registration and administration guide, to help Maya Antsetic (and Nueva Primavera) consolidate their organisation and administration. We also recommend that consultancies and training once again be given in clothes making to improve their quality and produce more sales. In Maya Antsetic's organisational consolidation plan, in addition more systematic planning of current activities, we recommend that the abilities, tasks and responsibilities to be assigned to the Maya Antsetic women be identified and training be given in each area to improve implementation.

8.4. Administration

- 8.4.1.** We recommend that Nueva Primavera and Enlace Civil receive consultancies or training in accounting (including exercises in budgeting, and managing and monitoring budgets). Doing so would improve their quality and would allow participants to gain greater control of their accounting systems (handled by outside accountants), be better prepared to help indigenous women in administration (of their collectives and projects) and allow these organisations to deepen their understanding of these matters, improve their financial reports and better fulfil LAG-KU/FOKUS requirements. We recommend that FOKUS support consultancies/training, with clear terms of reference, to be done by an auditor following a diagnosis of each organisation.
- 8.4.2.** Best practice suggests that cheques be signed by at least two people as a preventative to avoid any problem or suspicion. Further, we recommend in the case of MA/NP the immediate involvement of the board of in writing and sending periodic financial reports (both oral and written) to both members and representatives, in an effort to increase participation and accountability to the base and to gradually transfer financial responsibilities to MA.

- 8.4.3. NZ/EC should find a way to guarantee constant e-mail communication and send reports in a timely manner, in order to fulfil deadlines that are specified in the agreements and to avoid risking future grants or the wider support given by FOKUS/LAG-KU to organisations in Chiapas.
- 8.4.4. Should FOKUS/LAG-KU decide against continuing their support for these projects (due to NORAD's shifting priorities, or for other reasons), and given the fact that the organisations have not yet diversified their sources of funding, difficult to do in any case, we recommend a gradual and planned withdrawal, with plenty of advance notice. We also recommend that FOKUS and LAG-KU help the counterpart organisations to seek alternative funding sources.

8.5. Organisation

- 8.5.1 EC: Although this report discusses several alternatives or mechanisms for support, we recommend in principle—given the criteria of supporting women in the autonomous zones as closely as possible—that grants continue to be channelled to the women in the Northern Zone through Enlace Civil, as long as EC improves its handling of FOKUS' needs (project reporting deadlines, higher quality information and analysis, more opportune and timely e-mail communication, etc.), and with the hope that a) an internal analysis will be carried out in the area regarding the linking of the women's collective projects to mid and long-term territorial development strategies, and that b) the women, JBG and Enlace Civil will decide on the best way to potentialise accompaniment and technical consultancies so as to benefit the women in capacity strengthening and sustainable economic activities in productive and empowerment projects.
- 8.5.2 MA/NP: To avoid frustrations and ensure that Maya Antsetic's scholarship support for the students in the San Cristóbal house/office, we recommend: a) writing and signing an agreement between Maya Antsetic, Nueva Primavera and the students, stipulating the commitments of each party during and after the scholarship period; b) a procedure for selecting students be established; c) a programme of accompaniment for the students be drafted so that what they learn benefits specifically the cooperative and, in general, Las Abejas; d) signing formal agreements for the use of the house/office (and what benefits are to accrue to MA); and e) defining stakeholders' commitments to improve the sale of handicrafts in San Cristóbal.
- 8.5.3 We recommend a) defining a clear division of labour among the team of advisors; b) incorporating María Bolom, a Tzotzil woman, to accompany MA more directly; and c) ensuring that the team of advisors dedicate greater attention to strategic actions (search and transfer of contacts, possible consultants, trainers) with MA, and less time to personalised accompaniment. We also recommend that NP include the members of MA, and not just the representatives, in its meetings, reflections, courses and training, in order to promote organisational consolidation and internal democracy in MA. Finally, we recommend that exchanges be continued (NP has already begun them) as a way of widening horizons and stimulating mutual learning. We recommend organising exchanges with other successful indigenous women's handicrafts cooperatives and with organisations of refugee/ returned Mayan Guatemalan women (given their common experience of displacement and the significant organising and empowerment they achieved).