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Alternative Income Generating Opportunities: A Case Study in Mezquital, Mexico

Kristen Mattila

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**ALTERNATIVE INCOME GENERATING OPPORTUNITIES:
A CASE STUDY IN MEZQUITAL, MEXICO.**

by

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THESIS

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Requirements for the Degree of

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Dedication Page

I would like to thank to my family for their continual support throughout my three years in graduate school and for always encouraging me to maintain my focus on what is ultimately most important. I would also like to thank the women of Mezquital for opening up their homes and lives to me and for participating in this research. This thesis would not have been possible if not for their input, excitement and dreams for a better reality. This entire experience has helped shaped who I am today and has renewed my hope that another way is possible. Romans 8:28 has served as a constant encouragement, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

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Alternative Income Generating Opportunities:**A Case study in Mezquital, Mexico.**

by

Kristen Ann Mattila**B.A., Human Services, Spanish Language and Literature,****Western Washington University, 2008****MCRP, University of New Mexico, 2012****MALAS, University of New Mexico, 2012****ABSTRACT**

This thesis is an in-depth exploration of the situation of women in the border town of Mezquital, Mexico. The local experiences of women in Mezquital are situated within the larger theoretical debates of economic policy in Latin America, gender, labor and development. The theoretical analysis sets the stage to facilitate a process aimed at assisting the local women of Mezquital in creating alternative income generating opportunities to meet their specific economic needs and to highlight their talents. A participatory research process was implemented that incorporated the underlying assumptions of the gender and development paradigm. This case study is a snapshot of a community in Northern Mexico that is harnessing their strengths and addressing their needs in an effort to think creatively regarding solutions that will produce positive social and economic multipliers in their local community and region.

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Introduction

In an era when the U.S.-Mexico border is characterized by illegal immigration, drug wars, economic inequality, and violence against women, this case study in Mezquital, Mexico highlights the organizing efforts of women to find stable employment that has the potential to create positive social and economic multipliers for their families, community and region. The employment options available to women in the border region are typically limited to exploitative and unstable jobs such as the maquiladoras, fieldwork, undocumented work or a legal work visa to the United States (Staudt, 2009). This thesis is an in-depth exploration of the situation of women in the border town of Mezquital, Mexico. It analyses both the assets and challenges present in the village with the purpose of engaging local women in a process to examine alternative income generating opportunities. The facilitation process is based on a participatory research method that harnesses the assets of local women to create a holistic and sustainable economic development project.

Mezquital is a small village located in the northern region of Baja California, Mexico in close proximity to U.S.-Mexico border. It is located about ten minutes from the border town of Algodones and forty-five minutes east of the larger metropolis of Mexicali. There is limited aggregate census data on the village of Mezquital. However, I was able to gather substantial socio-economic data through the community meetings and individual interviews.

The following national and regional statistics shed light on the regional context in which Mezquital is positioned. The regional economy in Baja California is primarily based on the fishing, agriculture, and tourism industries. In Baja California, as of 2010, of

the economically active population (which is 1,409,129), 62 percent are men and 38 percent are women.¹ Of the economically active 83,169 are unemployed of which 64 percent are men and 36 percent are women. In comparison to the rest of Mexico the gross rate of women's labor force participation is higher in Baja California. For all of Mexico the rate is 33 percent compared to 42 percent in Baja California. For men, in all of Mexico it is 73.37 percent compared to Baja California at 73.19 percent (INEGI, 2010). In Mexicali, a larger city nearby, the annual yearly income is \$ 6,876.78 USD (Baja California: Ideal Regions for business, 2012). The data paints a picture that the overall state of Baja California is performing quite well economically in comparison to Mexico as a whole. However, this picture does not do justice to the smaller rural villages like Mezquital that are struggling economically.

The local experiences of women from Mezquital are situated within the larger theoretical debates of economic policy in Latin America, gender and development. Women often bear a greater burden of poverty as a result of the oppressive nature of capitalism and patriarchy. Despite often challenging circumstances women have proven resilient and creative in their responses to gender inequality and poverty. The impetus for this study is to understand what the literature says about the experiences of women in relation to employment and poverty to guide my empirical analysis. The theoretical analysis sets the stage to facilitate a process aimed at assisting local women in the creation of an economic development plan to meet the specific economic needs of women in Mezquital.

¹ Economically Active Population refers to those who are of working age, 16-65, who are in work or looking for work.

The over-arching goal of my research was to use a participatory research process that incorporated the underlying assumptions of the gender and development paradigm to help the women in the village create alternatives to working in the various exploitative job environments in Mexico. To accomplish this I implemented a qualitative research process using a variety of methods. The research was completed in three phases over the course of six months. Information was gathered through two community meetings and fifteen individual interviews. The purpose of the community meetings was two fold. I facilitated each community meeting using a variety of activities based on group participation in order to gather information about the specific economic and social situation of the village. An additional goal was to create a space for the women to begin imagining and planning for alternative income generating options. The in-depth interviews allowed me to gather specific information on employment, education, and gender relations. The purpose of the final community meeting was to report back on emerging themes from the interviews and for continued brainstorming geared towards establishing next steps for the economic development ideas.

The purpose of facilitating a community-driven process to investigate alternatives for the local women of Mezquital to increase their income was centered on creating a space for these women to view themselves outside of the lenses of dependency and instead as capable women with a voice (Corbett, 2009). New ideas were born as the Mezquital women engaged in a process that highlighted their ideas and talents. This case study is a snapshot of a community in Northern Mexico that is addressing its needs and thinking creatively about solutions that will create positive multipliers in their local community and region.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Women's roles are continually evolving as the global economic structures and social and cultural norms continue to create spaces in which women are intended to fit. Women are increasingly playing a more diverse role in both the productive and reproductive spheres of life. The literature review guides the reader through a brief review of the historical development trajectory. It is evident that the external forces of colonialism and capitalism have created the patterns of dependency and economic inequality still visible in Latin America today. The forces of patriarchy have dominated women by suppressing their right to education and diminishing their power within the household and society. The experiences of women under the economic policies to be discussed in the following sections are varied. For example, the economic forces associated with neoliberal and women's assimilation into the productive sphere were supposed to liberate women and decrease their economic marginalization. However, many women experienced an increase in their burdens and suffering. The contradictions inherent in global capitalism have made it difficult to determine how and if this integration has, in fact, granted women increased autonomy. Increased income and the removal of financial constraints can help in increasing women's agency. But increased agency rides on women's access to the resources and control over their own economic futures. There are examples of women standing up in defiance of capitalism and increasing their own agency and autonomy rather than waiting on governments and economic policies dependent on their subordination to award them agency. One of the goals of the community-based process in Mezquital is to help women gain control over their economic lives and in doing so, to emerge stronger than before. The case study

illuminates the extent to which women are contributing to their communities and the potential of such efforts to enact lasting change for future generations.

Women and Poverty

In many parts of the world women are worse off than men, with the severity depending on the region, as they have less power and income in spite of the fact that they have more responsibilities and work. Sylvia Chant sheds light on the persistence of gender inequality by explaining that, “inequality is less likely to produce social conflict if the burden is born by women, a group traditionally socialized to accept gender inequality as an acceptable outcome” (Chant, 2003b: 61). For this reason it is important that the income generating project in Mezquital gives attention to gender inequality in order to establish a plan that will benefit women rather than perpetuate their subordination.

A long-term goal of the case study in Mezquital is to eliminate poverty and unemployment. In terms of economic development poverty is often defined using a money-metric approach to measure improvements in the livelihoods of the poor. It is essential to have a holistic view and definition of what poverty is and how it should be measured. Poverty is typically defined quantitatively in terms of income and purchasing power when creating or assessing an economic development policy. While this measurement can be useful it does have its limitations. Measuring poverty requires the use of a more qualitative approach that includes the poor’s perception of what poverty is. By engaging the poor in the definition of poverty it increases the likelihood that all contributing factors are addressed. Studying poverty from different angles and expanding the definition to include factors like the lack of access to land, the inability to influence

the political sector, and oppression within the household allows for a more holistic approach to eliminating poverty (Chant, 2003b).

Some studies have shed light on the correlation between poverty and female-headed households. Mayra Buvinić and Geeta Rao Gupta reviewed 65 studies (16 from Africa, 17 in Asia, and 32 in Latin America and the Caribbean) from the last decade and determined that 38 of the 65 studies indicated that female-headed households are overrepresented among the poor. Two main feminist explanations emerge as the primary reasons for why female-headed households may be poorer-- household structure and occupational sex segregation. Since women tend to be the ones fulfilling the role of caretaker and rearing children they must forego higher paying jobs. Compounding the problem is the lack of affordable childcare options for working women. The jobs women find pay less, are susceptible to fluctuations in the markets, and subject women to gender discrimination. The ramifications of low paying and unstable jobs are augmented if female-headed households are not receiving financial contributions from a male counterpart or any type of support in completing domestic tasks. Buvinić and Gupta explain that female-headed households generally have a higher dependency ratio meaning that less household members work than households with male heads (Buvinić and Rao, 1997). As a result, women are forced to juggle housework, childcare, community service, and earn a wage. Many women opt to work in the informal sector because it permits a more flexible schedule as they struggle to manage all of their duties (Chant, 2003a). Part of understanding poverty is acknowledging all of the work that women perform. Essential to this conversation regarding the unequal division of labor in the household is the “triple role” that many women must fulfill. The triple role includes reproductive work,

productive work, and community managing. Reproductive work includes responsibilities related to raising a family while productive work involves earning a wage or generating income informally. Community managing revolves around collective consumption within the local community as women take on duties such as volunteering for a church or a social services organization. Unlike men who traditionally have one role as the wage earner, women are often expected and even required to fulfill duties associated with the “triple role” (Christenson, 2008; Moser, 1993).

Female-headed households are typically characterized as the poorest of the poor but some scholars consider this to be an over-generalization of the situation of women. First, it is necessary to break down the assumption that household dynamics are based on altruistic relationships. Resources and power are not always distributed equally (Grasmuck and Espinal, 2000). In fact, a woman in a male nuclear household may experience greater poverty than a woman in a single-headed household if the male counterpart has emotional and financial control over the woman. Women may have greater autonomy in a single-headed household than they do in a nuclear household. By viewing poverty in terms of powerlessness one can have a comprehensive understanding of the situation of women with different household compositions. It is possible for a female headed household to fair better than a male headed household if the former has access to basic services and the latter does not. Additionally, critics point to the lack substantial quantitative data and that many international organizations have, “failed to demonstrate with any consistency that female headed households headship predicts an above average probability of poverty” (Chant, 2003b). To establish a better measure of poverty the use of per capita income for households is necessary. There are instances

when male-headed households per capita levels are actually lower than female-headed households due to the presence of more dependents (Chant, 2003b). It is clear that women are a heterogeneous group and experience poverty differently.

While not all females experience poverty in Latin America there are still great numbers of women than men who bear a greater burden of poverty. In order to address solutions to poverty it is necessary to understand the global economic forces that have permitted poverty to persist. The following section will illuminate how the economic development trajectory over the past four centuries has done little to improve the status of women and in many cases has increased gender inequality.

Historical Economic Context in Latin America

The current role and status of the women in Mezquital has been shaped by the workings of colonialism and capitalism, which began with the colonial conquests in the late 1400s and continues to the present day in the form of neoliberal policies. The interest of outside forces in Latin America is nothing new and has contributed to the region's persistent economic volatility and inequality. The colonial campaigns arrived in the Americas and established systems to extract the local wealth of natural resources by exploiting the local indigenous labor force. All profits were shipped back to the colonial powers for consumption with no re-investment in local communities. Colonialism created both new social relations and structures. A hierarchal and oppressive division of labor was established when the Spanish crown implemented the *encomienda* system, giving colonizers control of indigenous peoples' land and labor (D'Agostino, 1997). Capitalism reorganized the labor structure and a new gender division of labor emerged that separated production and reproduction (Tiano, 1984). In pre-capitalist societies both production

and reproduction happened within the household but after capitalism the work was separated between the public and private spheres. Women were removed from their role in the productive sector and mandated to the reproductive sphere to fulfill tasks related to labor reproduction. It created work that was specific for women and men. This transition created a hierarchal division of labor that masked the work women performed outside of the reproductive sector, devalued reproductive work, and limited their ability to succeed politically or economically (Tiano, 1984).

Latin American countries achieved their independence from the colonial powers in the early 1800s. The colonial powers left Latin America in disarray without adequate infrastructure and with a highly uneducated labor force. Newly independent governments began a battle over the proper way to move their countries forward and created systems that perpetuated inequality instead of implementing economic and social structures that would benefit the masses. This propelled Latin American countries into a new era of economic and political instability incapable of maintaining long-term growth (Harper and Cuzan, 1997). Post-independence, Latin American governments have undertaken a variety of economic policies aimed at creating wealth to use for the future development of their countries. Initially, many Latin American countries bet their development future on exporting primary goods with the expectation that their “hot commodity” would carry them into economic prosperity. However, as time went on, economic phenomena like Engels Law and Dutch Disease revealed that long-term growth based on a single primary good would prove unsustainable in light of the volatile global financial climate especially

when the prices of primary commodity plummeted (Franko, 2007).² Compounding the problem was that primary product industries neglected to create forward and backward linkages in the economy. While many Latin America countries experienced significant economic growth during the Golden Age of Exports between 1870- 1914 the countries eventually learned the hard way that every boom has a bust (McKinney, 2011). History continued to reveal an ongoing story of dependence and failed liberal policies. Even after independence from the colonial powers Latin American countries were never really free from the Global North. Economic policies put in place by the Global North often left the Global South with the short end of the stick. As dependency persisted and inequality increased women in Latin America women continued to be oppressed within the household and struggled to make ends meet during economic crisis. After the primary good export policies failed economists in Latin America were looking for an alternative.

In the 1930s and early 40s Latin American governments introduced and implemented Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) in an effort to loosen the grip of the Global North on the economies of Latin America. ISI dominated economic policy in the post-World War II period (McKinney, 2011). The rationale behind ISI, as theorized by economist Raul Prebisch, was for the peripheral economies to break free from the core economies, thus reducing their economic reliance. Prebisch and others recognized the skewed relationship in the globalized economy between industrialized and developing countries. The issue lied within unequal distribution, with core countries achieving economic gains at the expense of the periphery. As such, policies of economic

² Engels Law explains the income elasticity for primary goods. As income increases the demand for primary goods does not increase; for example there is a limit to how much sugar and coffee people will consume. Dutch Disease describes the distorted pattern of development predicted on a hot commodity (Franko, 2007).

nationalism were created with the intention of building up national industries to produce goods previously only available on the global market. Many predicted that Latin American countries would finally achieve self-sufficiency through substitution and protectionism (Franco, 2007). Unfortunately, this policy created industries that were overly dependent on state subsidy and incapable of producing quality and competitive goods comparable to what was available on the global market. Instead of reducing dependency Latin American governments became over-reliant of foreign investment for the funding of their industries. Not only were the economies of Latin America failing to achieve stable economic growth, but also the social conditions continued to deteriorate, doing little to improve the situation of women (Harper and Cuzan, 1997).

An additional economic growth policy was export-led processing. This policy particularly is relevant to the case study in Mezquital as Northern Mexico was a target region for international corporations seeking low wages and cheap labor. Governments in Latin America were looking for an alternative way to achieve lasting economic growth and halt the ever-increasing unemployment (Tiano, 1994).

Export-led industrialization was introduced in the 1960s during a time when developing countries had a high demand for stable jobs and transnational companies sought cheap labor to reduce their costs and increase profits. This led to a shift in production processes as foreign owned companies shipped labor-intensive manufacturing and production abroad for assembly. This allowed U.S. corporations to achieve greater competitiveness on the global market as they exploited cheap labor and took advantage of lax labor laws in developing countries (Wilson, 1992). Proponents of export-led processing often cite how mutually beneficial the new production processes are to

developed and undeveloped countries; as the former offers technical expertise and experiences profit increases and the latter offers labor thus reducing unemployment (Palley, 2011).

It wasn't long before U.S. corporations realized the economic benefit of relocating close to home in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Reasons such as not having to relocate completely to a different continent, the transportation costs of moving components and finished products were substantially lower, Mexico was experiencing a relatively stable political climate, and lastly Mexico's well-developed communication and transportation systems made this a fertile region for the maquiladora industry to expand. In 1965 Mexico took a serious step toward recruiting corporations by implementing the Border Industrialization Program (BIP). This program created 12.5-mile block of land along the northern border region and offered various incentives such as the duty-free import of raw materials (Tiano, 1994). This program allowed for foreign owned companies to set up shop on the Mexico side of border to take advantage of the large quantities of cheap labor. This helped to transform the northern regions of Mexico into a booming economy of manufacturing and established the maquiladora sector as one of the biggest generators of foreign exchange. The increase in foreign investment in the border regions helped spur economic growth in Northern Mexico. (Martinez, 1996; Tiano 1994; Wilson, 1992). In the early 1990s there were about 2,000 maquiladoras employing about 500,000 workers and the numbers have since increased to around 3,000 maquiladoras employing over 1.3 million workers (Rosenberg).

In a continuing effort to attract foreign corporations and maintain their competitiveness the Mexican government chose to loosen labor laws and wage

requirements. The industry continued to become even more exploitative as it reduced worker security and benefits, which simultaneously had a negative affect on the status of women (Wilson, 1992). Little was done to decrease inequality between men and women as most corporations favored women workers based on gender stereotypes. Corporations often view women as sources of cheaper labor, less likely to unionize, and more willing to perform monotonous work typical of assembly line production (Safa, 1996). Women continue to be employed in specific types of jobs that increase their vulnerability within the capitalist economy. Export-led industrialization did little to decrease the dependency of the Global South from the North; rather it maintained the historical economic interdependence especially in the border region between the United States and Mexico.

By the 1980s the excessive external borrowing to fund development and ISI began to catch up with countries in Latin America. During this time economic and social conditions significantly deteriorated. Compounding the mountain of debt was the worldwide recession and skyrocketing oil prices. In 1982 Mexico admitted to the international financial community that the country was no longer able to pay its debts. As a result, stringent structural adjustment policies known as the Washington Consensus were mandated, ushering in a new era of neo-liberalism. Structural adjustment economic policies can be characterized as, “ deflation, devaluation, decontrol, and privatization,” with social implications such as, “ cuts in public expenditure, reductions in public sector employment, higher prices for food and other crops, and reduction in the role of government intervention in the economy” (Elson, 1992). The effects of the debt crisis and the subsequent economic measures to correct the crisis were felt at all levels of society as governments had to dismiss large amounts of workers and cut subsidies on goods and

services (Franko, 2007). Throughout the decade both men and women lost strides in their overall labor force participation due to high unemployment. Employees also saw a decrease in minimum wages, a decline in labor conditions and an increase in inequality (Hite and Viterna, 2005). Up until 1980 women had seen significant growth in the participation, but saw minimal increases during this decade of economic hardship and stagnation. Although fewer women were added to the labor force during the 1980s than in previous decades the trend of increased labor force participation was not completely reversed (Tiano, 1994).

Since the difficult years of the debt crisis neo-liberalism has emerged as the dominant economic and political model in Mexico. Neoliberalism has infiltrated the economic policies in Mexico beginning with the maquiladora industry that was established in the 1960s, to the Washington Consensus policies in the 1980s and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 (Mexico Solidarity Network, 2012). It is clear that women have not reaped the economic benefits of neo-liberal policies nor have these policies done much to decrease dependency on the North (McKinney, 2011). The overall political processes, economic initiatives, and the international financial system have not created the space for the work of women to be valued and have often masked the contributions of women to the economy (Elson, 1992). The systems are biased against women and have not been successful in creating an equal society that permits women to flourish.

Women and Labor

It is evident that the historical legacies of colonialism up to present day neo-liberal policies have affected the lives of women. When capitalism separated the

reproductive from the productive and in doing so took value away from women's work. Throughout history women have created a diverse set of survival strategies to ensure the financial needs of the household have been met, tended to their reproductive roles, and engaged in community work. Women have become very innovative in their response to global economic crises. Some of the activities that women have taken on are selling food, agricultural products, art and crafts from their homes, the streets, or in market places (Eber, 2001). My data from the interviews reinforce this as some woman either sell food or fireworks or collect recyclable products on the highways and sell them for cash. Not only have women been forced to be resourceful economically but they have also been strategic in making decisions about educating their children, migration, or going without healthcare and basic amenities in an effort to brave economic crises. All over the world women have organized, "so as to put more resources at women's disposal and enhance women's dignity, autonomy, and bargaining power" (Eber, 2001).

While the hard work of women is often made invisible by capitalism, some women have made themselves more visible thus enhancing their agency. All it takes is a little digging to uncover what capitalism has sought to mask as purely reproductive. Latin American women entered the workforce in the 1950s but it wasn't until the 1970s that it became clear women's employment in the workforce would be something permanent and not a temporary trend (Tiano, 2011). The following section will shine light on the role of women in the labor force and development policy to illuminate how women have persevered despite the unsuccessful policy decisions and economic crises that have afflicted their countries. Additionally, this next section will address what Michelle Bachelet acknowledged regarding the potential of involving women in

development when she stated, “Think of how much more we can do, when women are fully empowered as agents of change and progress in their societies” (UN Women Annual Report, 2011).

Women in a capitalist society tend to be kept within the reproductive sphere in order to fulfill their role as both wife and mother, thereby neglecting their potential to succeed in other areas of life. In the 1970s, Ester Boserup found that in pre-capitalist societies women retained more autonomy within the household because production and reproduction were completed to ensure the mutual benefit of the household with the tasks receiving equal value (Jaquette, 1990). One of the changes brought on by the capitalist society was that reproduction and production were separated and reproduction was given a “use value” and production an “exchange value.” As a result, women lost their power within the household as patriarchal norms began to define gender roles and relegated women to the domestic sphere (Tiano, 1986, 1994). However, over the past sixty years women have assimilated into the productive sphere. The literature is mixed on the driving and external forces that have propelled women into the workforce. The differing ideologies can be categorized as integration, marginalization, and exploitation (Tiano, 1986, 1994).

The integration thesis is consistent with modernization theory and neoclassical economics that assume women in pre-capitalist societies were characterized by affliction and difficulty. As a result of capitalist society, proponents of the integration theory argue socio economic development has positively altered women’s experience. Industrialization and the consequent cultural and structural changes increased opportunities available to women in both economic and political life. Proponents of this theory cite improvements

such as a lightened workload, increased options for education, more control over their own fertility, and claim a decline in patriarchal norms as contributing factor to improvements in wellbeing. Women's increased labor force participation is viewed as a liberating experience that enables women to reduce their financial dependence on male counterparts. This empowerment arises, as women are now able to provide for their own basic needs. Empowerment is felt not only by working women, but also for women who choose to not enter the workforce as the new liberal values permeate into the household (Tiano, 1986, 1994).

Marginalization theory emerged as a critique of the integration assumptions of modernization theory. Proponents of the marginalization theory question whether or not modernization has increased the opportunities for women. In fact, they claim that development has disintegrated women's productive role both socially and economically. The household has been separated from the modern firm as a result of capitalism and industrial development, which has increased the division between the productive and domestic sphere. This has increased women's dependence on men as they rely on men for access to cash, property, and additional resources. Marginalization theory has a different interpretation of women in pre-capitalist societies. Marginalization theorists contend that women were fundamental to subsistence production and this led to more egalitarian relationships between men and women. Women had more access to the means of production, which translated into more autonomy within the household and society. This power was reduced as women were consumed into the global capitalist society. Women lost their access to the means of production and land and their value was now based on their biological and reproductive roles (Tiano, 1986, 1994).

The third theory is the exploitation thesis. Exploitation theorists attribute the emergence of the nuclear household and patriarchal values as contributing factors to the exploitation of women. They contend the new gender division of labor has not empowered women but forced them to become economically dependent within the capitalist system. Women's involvement in industrial production is more harmful than beneficial and their value was stripped away. Women's new role was characterized by exploitative free labor within the household and maintained through submission to their male counterpart. Women's position within the productive sphere was lesser than men's as they faced discriminatory hiring policies, lower wages and minimal opportunities to organize. Overall, industrialization has weakened the position of women in the productive sphere. Both the marginalization and exploitation theorists agree that the negative experiences of women are a result of their relegation to the household and the devaluation of their contributions. Theorists from the exploitation perspective explain economic insecurity and necessity as the driving force behind the entrance of women into the labor force (Tiano, 1986, 1994)

Since the 1950s women's participation in the labor force has continued to grow despite the contending theories on how and why women have been integrated into the productive sector. During the 1970s the characteristics of the female labor force changed significantly. In previous decades the majority of women were young and their participation in the labor force was temporary. Many women left the formal labor force as they approached their late twenties or as soon as they married and could begin their duties as wives. However, by the end of the decade, there was a surge in the number of economically active women who were entering the workforce and working longer into

their adult lives. By the 1980s women's participation in the labor force had increased by about 30 percent. The women who entered the work force at this time were between the ages of 25-45 years and were mostly mothers and wives. These changes gave evidence to a breakdown of traditional gender roles (Tiano, 1994). Over the past few decades, the rate of women's labor force participation in Mexico has increased from 36 percent in 1990 to 46 percent in 2009 (The World Bank).

Unlike other industrial countries that saw the female labor force expand in times of economic prosperity, Latin America has experienced growth in the labor force despite economic instability (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, 1992). Typically, economic crises are cited as the driving force behind women's increased participation. However Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, battle with contending economic factors that may or may not influence the increase in participation. They explain that during times of economic downturn households have a greater need for increased income and this propels women to work outside the home for a wage. This is referred to as the "added worker" effect. On the contrary, some studies have suggested that the "discouraged worker" effect predicts that women tend to leave the labor force during economic downturns due to lower wages and lack of employment options. Additionally, the decrease in younger female's participation is not consistent with the "added worker" effect that is frequently used to explain the increase. As such, neither the "added worker" nor the "discouraged worker" effect can effectively explain the trend of women in the labor force. Based on their research, Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, conclude that the increase of female labor force participation cannot be solely attributed to the economic crises in the 1980s but rather it is part of an underlying trend. For this reason, a holistic analysis of female labor force

participation requires an examination of multiple factors to fully understand the increase (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, 1992).

While economic crisis is not the sole factor contributing to the increase in women's labor force participation it does have an effect. For example, during the 1980s debt crisis some women were forced to work in the formal and informal sector to make up for the cuts in state subsidies for food and social services. Economic necessity can be one of the main drivers for the increase in women working outside the home both formally and informally (Blumberg, 1995). By finding employment women were able to lessen the negative effects of poverty and supplement the unemployment of their male counterparts. These explanations are consistent with the exploitation theory that women entered the work force out of economic necessity. The need for increased income was augmented by the increases and changes in consumption patterns in Latin America (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2005).

Besides economic necessity there are other factors that influence the decision to work. Education, family characteristics, geographical location and/or status as head of household can all affect the decision to enter the workforce. Children are a factor in the choice to work depending on the age of the children. It is clear the characteristics that propel women to work in the productive sector cannot be generalized (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, 1992). An additional factor was the increase in employment options for women. First of all, in the 1960s and 1970s when Latin American countries experienced economic growth and political development women were able to find increased employment in the public sector. Secondly, with export-led processing multi-national corporations had a preference for women workers and this opened up doors for increased

numbers of jobs for women (Tiano, 2011) Presently, women have been increasingly employed in the services sector (United Nations, 2010).

The role of women in the labor force continues to evolve. Despite the increases in female labor force participation many women still deal with the implications of gender inequality in the workforce. Women still face inequality in the workforce due to a lack of family planning services and childcare options, segregation towards more feminine types of work, and gendered wage differentials (Safa, 1996; Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos, 1992). Women need to have access to quality jobs, training and fair wages to ensure that their increasing labor force participation is matched with equality (Abramo and Valenzuela, 2005).

Gender and Development

The previous sections provided an overall analysis of why women have typically born a greater burden of poverty due to historical and current economic policies. Additionally, it looked at the increasingly important role women are playing in the labor force. The next section will look at how development policies have traditionally approached women and how policies are continually being modified and improved. Women have proven resilient and improved their personal, household, and community well-being even in the face of constant gender oppression and disproportionate suffering from poverty, all of which is exacerbated by patriarchal norms and the pressures of globalized capitalism. Women are emerging as a result of their organizing efforts with a “stronger political voice, greater access to education and employment, more support from the states, civil society, and international infrastructure to advance their interests, and greater scope to negotiate their personal, conjugal, and domestic lives” (Chant, 2003b).

These improvements are the result of decades of hard work aimed at improving the socio-economic status of women. It is the agency of women that has allowed this change to be possible. Theories of women and gender in the development planning process began to gain notoriety in the 1970s as many began to see the crucial role that women and gender play in achieving sustainable development goals. It became clear that women would not automatically reap the benefits of modernization in a trickle down fashion. It is not enough to just target women as recipients. Rather it is imperative to engage women to become key players and planners in the programs and policies that influence their lives. Anwarul Chowdhury of the United Nations reinforces this notion when he asserts, “No poverty reduction strategy in Least Developed Countries could be successful without creation of productive employment with special attention to women and the youth” (UN News Centre, 2005). The importance of including women in the development process not as welfare recipients but as active agents is three-fold. One, women are disproportionately represented among the poor. Secondly, there are practical benefits involved in bettering the lives of women such as the creation of positive multiplier effects within the household. Lastly, and most importantly, there are observable increases in the agency of women. To this end, countless international and national governmental agencies including the non-profit sector have poured resources into targeting women.

A historical look at how agencies have approached development is useful in highlighting successful processes and assessing areas that need to be redirected. Historically projects have taken two paths: welfare and efficiency. Theorists of the Women in Development (WID) tradition often make a productivity argument that views

women as a source of wealth yet to be captured in gross domestic product (GDP). WID oriented theorists and practitioners typically prioritize harnessing the untapped potential of women for the greater good of the market. The role of women in this process is to contribute to society by following the strategic plans set out by the economists that will create the highest monetary benefit for society and the market. Empowerment is not the main goal of WID but rather a positive benefit from integrating women into the market.

Welfare approaches to development do not view women as economic actors and instead focus on their reproductive role. These programs view the role of women as mothers. Unfortunately these programs perpetuate the stereotypes of women as both weak and dependent. A program under the umbrella of the welfare approach would typically teach women gender biased skills and attempt to use the new skills for economic development programs. As a result, many of these programs became dependent on the outsider who created the initiative, and are unsustainable in the long run (Tinker, 1990).

Once development practitioners began to realize the flaws inherent in the welfare approach the efficiency approach emerged. This new approach broadened the view of women from mothers to active economic agents. Proponents of the efficiency approach believed in the importance of incorporating women into the development process as the key to creating sustainable programs. The focus was on providing basic needs through self-sufficiency rather than dependency. The issue with this approach was a lack of implementation. In theory, this approach valued active participation of women but in practice this rarely materialized. In fact, many of the benefits of these new initiatives created under the efficiency model did not even reach women and went directly to men.

Programs under this approach were sector-focused and aimed at helping women obtain basic necessities. These programs did not understand the situation or the needs of women. Women already knew how to survive and provide for their families. What they needed was support in finding alternative ways to make money and help with access to the marketplace (Tinker, 1990).

Under the Women in Development approach women and men are believed to have different preferences and as such women are often the targets of specific programs. Women are believed to be more benevolent, more risk averse, and more apt to direct resources toward the consumption of their children than men. In terms of development policy it is practical to target women because the benefits will most likely produce quantifiable outcomes like better health and nutrition and increased education for the children in a household. Women tend to contribute all of their earnings to the household while men have been found to demand extra money in addition to their own wages from their female counterparts. For example, in Honduras one third of male earnings are withheld from collective funds and increases to 50 percent in Nicaragua and Mexico. Proponents of targeting women often cite that men's "discretionary personal income," tends to be used on tobacco and alcohol exacting less benefit for the overall household (Chant, 2003b).

Gender and Development (GAD) emerged shortly after to address the inherent flaws in WID. Since then GAD has continued to receive attention and in the mid to late 1980's literature began to be published that credited GAD not a passing trend but as a new academic approach. Historically women have been valued in the development process for their ability to "survive," but Elson argues that this viewpoint needs to be

extended to a gender aware approach to development. GAD looks at how social relations have oppressed women and how those relationships must be restructured (Elson, 1992).

As such, GAD is more than a request for resources for women-- it is an analysis of how “male privilege and power” has affected women and how women can be emancipated (Elson, 1992). This does not eliminate the need to address practical gender needs; rather GAD seeks to go deeper. By allowing women to express their practical needs it opens up a platform to analyze the interrelatedness between practical and strategic gender needs and then allows for strategic gender needs to be met (Elson, 1992).

The GAD paradigm steers away from WID in that it doesn't view the problems women face in terms of their sex. Instead it analyzes the issues in terms of gender and how the relationships between men and women have been reproduced in the patriarchal society creating a subordinated role for women (Moser, 1993). The primary goal is to create power for women. Proponents of GAD believe that once women are empowered then the women themselves can decide how and if they want to engage in the market. The decision making power of women is respected and decisions on engaging in the productive sector are not made for them by an outsider. It is not enough to consider women in the planning process; women must play a key role in development projects. GAD envisions equality for women inside and outside of the home that will in turn allow women to achieve their highest potential. Additionally it looks to remove all forms of oppression by creating a more just social and economic order through, “the involvement of women in national liberation strategies, in plans for national development, and in local and global strategies for change” (Bunch and Carrillo, 1990).

GAD planning understands that men and women do not necessarily have similar interests or needs. When planning with women in the third world the strategies must be based on their prioritized needs. In planning there is a necessary distinction between practical and strategic gender needs. Maxine Molyneux distinguishes the difference between different types of gender needs, “Gender interests are those that women (or men for that matter) may develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes. Gender interests can be either strategic or practical, each being derived in a different way and each involving differing implications for women’s subjectivity” (Moser, 1993).

Strategic gender needs are needs identified by women as a result of their subordinate position to men in society. These needs arise out of inequalities in the gender division of labor, legal issues, a lack of power in the household and or society and inequality in the workplace. Above all what a strategic gender need seeks to accomplish is to increase equality for women by challenging patriarchal norms. Practical gender needs are needs that women identify in their socially accepted roles. In order for a practical gender need to be met it does not have to address their status in society even though these needs often arise out of their subservient position. Gender needs are objective such as employment, healthcare, or housing (Elson, 1992; Moser, 1993). For example, offering women training would be meeting a practical gender need, but increasing women’s economic independence would be achieving a strategic gender need.

Agency is the key to successful development projects and is the basis of the GAD approach. In the fight towards gender equality and improvement in the lives of women it is not enough to focus on the well being of women. Traditionally, development

approaches have excluded women in the planning process and focused only on the basic needs of women. As such, it became essential to focus on the agency of women and their ability to devise creative strategies for the improvement of their own lives. Approaches to development are changing and women are more commonly viewed as promoters of change rather than beneficiaries. Amartya Sen views women as, “the dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of both women and men” (Sen, 2010).

Women need to be viewed as active and responsible agents for helping achieve change. Meeting basic needs and increasing agency are interrelated in a way that results in mutual benefit. With the increased agency of women there is a higher chance that the inequalities negatively affecting women’s livelihoods will decrease. The ability of women to earn an independent income, to have a quality education, obtain property rights, and experience increased power within the household has a positive impact on women. Additionally all of the improvements in the lives of women have positive contributions to increase women’s power within the household, community, and personally. As a woman gains education she becomes more informed about decisions both individually and within the household. Furthermore, as women achieve higher educational levels they are better able to invest in their children’s futures, which will create multiplier effects into future generations. Increased access to the political sector is an additional benefit as women begin to feel more empowered and better able to assert their voice in the political decisions that will affect their families and communities. All of these improvements will help to decrease inequality between men and women (In Pursuit of Justice, 2011). The ability of women to have control over their own lives and futures will be a determinant of whether or not the next generation of women will see increased

agency. At this point in time it is essential to build upon the successes of development efforts over the past few decades and use that momentum to create societies that provide women and men with equal opportunities so that women will no longer bear a greater burden of poverty. As Hillary Clinton explains the multiplier effects of empowering women,

“When we liberate the economic potential of women, we elevate the economic performance of communities, nations, and the world. There is a simulative and ripple effect that kicks in when women have greater access to jobs and the economic lives of our countries: Greater political stability. Fewer military conflicts. More food. More educational opportunities for children. By harnessing the economic potential of all women, we boost opportunity for all people” (Ellison, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO: Alternative Economic Development Tools

Imagining a different path is at the forefront of this project. It is about creating a space for the women from Mezquital to imagine how they would like to earn a living outside of the limited and often exploitative situations presented to them by the global capitalist society. The idea of constructing an alternative future, characterized not by exploitation but rather by self-sufficiency and sustainability, is nothing new. In the past, countless people have imagined various alternative ideals apart from the current economic system. The purpose of this research is to analyze the local socio-economic situation of the women and based on those findings examine alternative ways in which the women can create a sustainable community economy. The initial research was to understand the difficulties the women face and to deconstruct the unsustainable elements of the current system. The neo-liberal ideologies of market power and self-interest have impressed upon people their lack of control in the economic sector and urged them to accept what the market has dealt them (Gibson-Graham, 2003). An alternative path refuses to give way to the powers of the capitalist society. One example of an alternative way is referred to as the Solidarity Economy (Allard, 2007). The solidarity economy is a grassroots movement grounded on growing solidarity and cooperation through creating economic democracy that shares a vision for equitable and sustainable development (Allard, 2007).

The concepts from the solidarity economy are more than idealistic dreams but rather ideas accompanied by a set of tools such as cooperatives or microfinance that allow for increased control at the local level. While there are models to compare best

practices and various tools to help implement change one author reminds us that, “when building sustainable, socially equitable and culturally distinctive community economies there are not pre-given pathways to follow, no economic models that can be pulled down from the shelf and set in place to ensure success” (Gibson-Graham, 2003). It is more than choosing the correct model of economic development but rather it is a

“Process of enabling such economies to develop (which) involves continual debate over economic and ethical decisions that will direct future pathways and crystallize community values. It is through this process that economic imaginaries are made into concrete, actually existing practices and institutions” (Gibson-Graham, 2003).

This process is about re-working tools to fit the unique situation in Mezquital.

This next section will take a theoretical look behind cooperatives, microfinance and social business to compare the basic components of each model, which will serve as a starting point for those women who are interested in any of these tools. In the findings section there is a more practical analysis to explain the applicability of these models in Mezquital. I have chosen to expand on both microfinance and cooperatives as many women expressed interest in ideas that sound similar and conveyed needs that these tools have been able to supply. For example, a few women commented on the desire to use the cooperative model for a childcare center. And other women expressed the desire to start a small business with the help of microloans. I have also included a brief analysis of social business as some women shared ideas that could fit under that umbrella.

Cooperatives

In 2012, the United Nations declared that it would be the International Year of Co-operatives to highlight the growth of the co-operative movement worldwide. This dedication by the UN reveals that cooperatives have the ability to allow the “fullest participation in the economic and social development of all people.” Cooperatives have proven to be successful alternative business models and have been more resilient than for-profit business in light of the recent global economic crises. Cooperatives reshape not only the business model but also the current economic order and social relationships (Webster, 2012). What separates cooperatives from other forms of business are their distinct principles such as open and voluntary membership, democratic control, limited interest on shared capital, fair distribution of surplus, and the promotion of education (Bottomley, 1987). An additional study added community concern to that list as many cooperatives are formed to meet the needs of a community rather than with business motives (Harper, 2000).

Over time one of the main goals of cooperatives has been to respond to unemployment and to allow people to engage in significant work. Cooperatives have taken many forms such as agricultural credit, thrift and credit, consumer, housing, workers’ cooperatives, marketing and supply, joint farming and multi-purpose cooperatives (Bottomley, 1994). Another distinction can be made between two types of cooperatives. For example, a cooperative can take the form of a commercial entity whose main goal is to produce goods and services for the market. By contrast, other types of cooperatives may be created with the goal of offering a service that the market has failed to provide. A childcare cooperative would fall under this category, if it responded to a need within the community that was not being provided for (Clarke, 1984). The former

addresses economic needs that have persisted as a result of the increasingly large income inequalities resulting from the labor markets and the latter has the objective of meeting social needs (Clarke, 1984). Neither one is better than the other, but it is important for members to be on the same page regarding the purpose and mission of the cooperative.

The shape cooperatives take and their potential effect on society depends on the ideologies from which they operate. Liberal economists view cooperatives as the means to achieve utopian worker capitalism while cooperative theorists envision a utopian cooperative commonwealth. Those who adhere to the liberal economic view are not concerned with overcoming capitalism but rather they focus on making capitalism better through making workers responsible for their businesses (Clarke, 1984). Cooperative theorists' end goal can be to offer alternatives or to change the exploitative elements of capitalism. It can be about creating an avenue to democratic ownership over the means of production by using alternative business and social models. This will allow them to compete in the capitalist market while abiding by cooperative ideals. The ability of a cooperative to overturn capitalism depends on the context in which the cooperative operates. More often than not cooperatives are an alternative business model within capitalism instead of an alternative to the whole system (Webster, 2012). It is important for the cooperative to have a good understanding of their ideological position as this will help inform present decisions and future decisions.

The literature is clear that there are not set stages for creating a cooperative. However this does not mean that each community must re-invent the wheel. I believe that there are successful models that can serve as guides to help a group of women decide how they want to approach their project. This will allow them to discuss a variety of

issues that other cooperatives have identified in the past as being key points to ensure success. This next section is not a blueprint, but rather suggestions on pathways to take in the planning stages of a project such as described here (Clarke, 1984).

While there are many examples of cooperatives, the Mondragon case offers both a relevant and appropriate set of basic principles. Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta initiated a cooperative movement in the Basque country in Spain to help economically downtrodden communities. The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation is an example of how an economic alternative can actually come to life. It offers ten cooperative principles that are useful for groups pursuing the cooperative model in their community or business. They are as follows (Gibson, 2003):

1. They offer open admission to anyone who makes a commitment to adhere to their basic values and principles.
2. The cooperative is organized into a democratic organization. Each owner-worker is an equal member and is guaranteed one vote in the general assembly of the enterprise and for the election of members to other governing structures.
3. They refrain from making a distinction between the “productive” (direct producers of surplus) workers and the “unproductive” (office and sales personnel) workers. All workers have a primary role in the distribution of surpluses. They refer to this as the sovereignty of labor.
4. An important principle that they adhere to is the valuing of people over capital. They do not want capital to impede the participation in the cooperative and redistribute the returns paid out on capital in a, “just but limited” way.

5. The entire cooperative is self-managed by the democratic participation of all members. It is based on a free flow of information regarding all different decisions.

6. For the cooperative wages are set based on the principles of pay solidarity between employees, cooperatives, and workers in similar capitalist enterprises. Wages are determined through a democratic process using standards of “equilibrio” that establish safeguards to prevent against extreme wage differentials. They value community stability over immediate personal consumption.

7. Group cooperation is an aspect of ensuring success of the cooperative.

8. Social transformation toward a just society.

9. They maintain solidarity and universality with other workers in the international cooperativism movement.

10. Education is a high priority to ensure all members understand the basic principles of the cooperative. If members are not educated about the rules and processes then they will not be able to fully engage in the process.

Based on the literature and the ideas of local women from Mezquital, the cooperative can provide an economic development model that can help the women to provide a service in the community and meet their economic needs.

Microfinance

Traditionally, for people living in poverty the idea of obtaining a business loan to create their own business venture was almost unthinkable. There are a few central reasons as to why capital has not flown naturally to the poor. One particular factor is risk. It is a very risky prospect for a banker to invest in a rural village in the developing world compared to investing within the United States because global investors lack both the

time and resources to stay in tune with local conditions in impoverished areas. This has led to a shortage of loans for lower-income people. Another reason is the shortage of information about poor borrowers and the lack of collateral. This issue is heightened due to adverse selection when banks are unable to identify who is the riskier borrower. Also, the problem of moral hazard arises when banks are not in a position to determine whether or not a borrower is putting in the proper amount of effort to get a maximum return on their investment. Lastly, it is more costly for a bank to process multiple loans than one large transaction. From a business perspective, it would make more sense for a bank to make one large loan rather than 15 smaller loans. All of these issues have compounded the problem of getting the poor financial services (Armendariz, 2005).

During the severe famine that struck Bangladesh in 1974 a local professor, Muhammad Yunus, began to rethink banking to the poor. He saw firsthand the barriers the poor had to accessing loans and the problem of predatory lending in impoverished communities. Not only did he uncover glitches of lending to the poor, but he also saw flaws in how economists have traditionally approached the topics of poverty and hunger. He questioned stereotypical views of the poor. Yunus saw firsthand that relying on the prosperity of the rich to trickle down to the poor was not going to solve the problem of persistent poverty (Yunus, 2007). According to Yunus,

“... poor people are like bonsai trees. When you plant the best seed of the tallest tree in a six-inch-deep flowerpot, you get a perfect replica of the tallest tree, but it is only inches tall. There is nothing wrong with the seed you planted; only the soil-base you provided was inadequate. Poor people are bonsai people. There is nothing wrong with their seeds. Only

society never gave them the base to grow on. All that is required to get poor people out of poverty is for us to create an enabling environment for them. Once the poor are allowed to unleash their energy and creativity, poverty will disappear very quickly” (Pick and Sirkin, 2010).

These realizations led him to construct the concept of micro-credit.

In 1977, after years of working with the rural poor in Bangladesh and struggling with local banks Yunus established the Grameen Bank to offer micro-credit to the poor. Historically, conventional banks and credit cooperatives required large re-payments at the end of loan period. This presented a problem for borrowers who often did not have a large sum of cash at the end of the period to pay their debt leading many to default on their loans. In the long run this inevitably increased the amount owed, making repayment even more of a challenge. When forming Grameen Bank, Yunus opted to do the opposite of what banks had been doing in the past. Instead of requiring large sum payments at the end of the period, he chose to require daily small payments so as to not place such a heavy financial burden on borrowers. He required that each loan be paid back fully in one year (Yunus, 2007). The daily or weekly repayment method is one of the main characteristics of microfinance institutions all over the world.

The project began with Yunus lending villagers money out of his pocket. As time would show, these borrowers were benefiting greatly from the loans and were repaying without collateral. He explains this outcome by claiming that the poor recognize the loan as their one and only chance to receive financial support, which ensures a solid work ethic to guarantee a timely repayment. Another key characteristic of microfinance is the

group-lending model. This model allowed Yunus to loan without collateral. Group lending has also helped micro lenders overcome the “adverse selection” problem. Often banks have a hard time determining who the “risky” or “safe” borrowers are, but the group lending methodology has helped to mitigate this issue. In the joint liability lending model the loan is made to a group of borrowers who are then responsible to each other to make sure the loan is paid back. This means if one group member does not make a payment then the rest of the group is responsible for covering the missed payment. If the group doesn’t pay back the loan then they are all guilty of non-repayment and all will be denied future loans from the microfinance institution. Sometimes it is hard to find good clients to form a group and the lender will be lenient on this rule and will dismiss the member who defaulted. The group accountability provides the remedy to adverse selection because the borrowers play a key role in screening, monitoring, and enforcing the contracts instead of the banker. This method has proven to be more successful than traditional banking methods. Since group members live in close proximity to one another, have social ties, and can access information about the other members’ activities they are able to assess who will be more likely to pay back the loan. This helps in eliminating most of the risk because people will most often select group members who are less risky (Armendariz and Murdoch, 2004).

Through all of his hard work Yunus was determined to show that, “the financial untouchables are actually touchable, even huggable” (Yunus, 2007). Since the beginnings of the Grameen bank microcredit has evolved into microfinance. There are three main components of microfinance: credit, savings, and insurance. All of these components help to provide a holistic economic development tool for those living in poverty, particularly

women. Microfinance has increasingly been used for other purposes such as healthcare, housing improvements, consumption, or education (Vaughan, 2009). Savings are an important element for economic development but they are often overlooked. It has been assumed that the poor have no need for savings because of their minimal needs associated with their subsistence level of living. Lenders often contended that extra funds could be put into borrower's businesses or farms rather than a savings account. These assumptions have since been proved wrong as the poor have shown a desire to save as a way to build up their assets and invest in the future (Armendariz and Murdoch, 2004). My research shows that savings are a need in the community as expressed by the majority of the woman. Most women have an interest in saving for education and future needs. Many microfinance organizations realize offering a woman access to a loan may not be sufficient to increase empowerment and as such have incorporated additional services to the lending package. Some additional services include business training, healthcare support, and empowerment and gender awareness trainings. Overall, microfinance is about empowering people with the chance to invest in themselves and their ideas simultaneously increasing their disposable income (Vaughan, 2009). While microfinance may not immediately overturn gender inequalities completely it does provide a way for women to have access to financial services. Ideally these services will increase their income and allow them to have more control over the solutions to the problems they face. (Blumberg, 1995).

Social Business

While the cooperative idea and microfinance were the main focus of the conversations at the community meetings there were a few women who discussed the

desire to own a business that would have a bottom line of meeting social needs over profit maximization.

In recent years it has become clear that there have been many market, institutional, and state failures leaving social needs unmet. While some corporations have stepped in, there still is room for the continued growth and responsibility for corporations who have yet to show any significant strides toward corporate responsibility. Furthermore, technological advances and shared responsibility have increased access to information which have allowed social entrepreneurs to have greater exposure to social venture opportunities around the world. Many corporations realize it is in their best interest to address the pressing social needs such as inequality and poverty as these issues can affect both the long-term sustainability of their ventures and the economic situations of the country they operate in. Globalization has helped these corporations to access a greater array of resources and institutions that can help in the effort to combat poverty and its negative effects worldwide (Bhawe, et.al, 2005).

A great amount of literature discusses the idea of social business and whether a for-profit business can truly achieve justice and meet social needs. Jeff Swartz (2005), CEO of Timberland who believes that business and social innovation can work in harmony, has explained, "I'm convinced business can create innovative, valuable social solutions that are good for business and society. Commerce and justice don't have to be antagonistic notions." He runs his company on the principles of social entrepreneurship:

"We operate on the core theory, on the belief that doing well and doing good are not separate ideas; they are inseparable ideas. That, in fact, they are inextricably linked and that everything we do, every business

decisions we make, every strategy we promulgate, every speech we make, or every pair of boots or shoes that we ship, have to be the embodiment of commerce and justice, and that's just a different model" (Austin et al., 2005).

While firms still hold to the primary goal of profit maximization and wealth creation, social entrepreneurship adds sustainable development goals to the agenda. Now, the goal of these corporations incorporates the objective of catering to basic humanitarian needs through long-term production and services (Seelos and Mair, 2005).

Muhammad Yunus is a leader in the social business movement. One of the main characteristics of social business that sets it apart from corporate social responsibility is fund allocation. A profit-maximizing company may give 95 percent of its resources to producing profits and five percent to social causes. On the contrary, a social business allocates 100 percent of its resources towards achieving social and economic equality.

In Yunus' opinion, it is immoral to extract a profit from the poor because it is wrong to benefit financially from those who are suffering. When times get tough economically, a profit-maximizing business will always have to choose profit over social benefit. A social business would never have to make a choice between profit and people because their bottom line is fixed (Yunus, 2010). The overarching goal of a social business is to solve a social problem using a business model. It is the goal of Yunus is to, "encourage young people to become social business entrepreneurs and contribute to the world, rather than just making money. Making money is no fun. Contributing to and changing the world is a lot more fun" (Social Earth).

The use of technology is another area of differentiation. While profit-maximizing companies use technology to make the most money, Yunus contends that those who want to end poverty can use technology as the means to achieve the elimination of poverty. Yunus holds that when technology is used for diverse purposes like poverty alleviation, the powers of technological innovation will continue to expand (Yunus, 2010).

Yunus introduces two models for social business. The first type is a non-loss, non-dividend company owned by investors who continually reinvest all profits in expanding and improving the business. One important aspect is that, “a dollar is a dollar,” and investment repayments are not allowed to increase due to inflation. The owners do not receive a profit, but they can get a return on their investment over a specific period of time. The second type is a profit-making company where control is in the hands of the poor. This model helps alleviate poverty as profits flow directly to the poor who serve as depositors and customers.

An example of social entrepreneurship in Mexico is the Union de Ejidos de la Selva. This organization is comprised of coffee-producing families with the purpose of increasing their income and self-sufficiency. One aspect of this organization that sets it apart from other cooperatives is the commercialization strategy. Members’ control of the entire chain of coffee production gives them the ability sell their products directly to the consumer. Profits are distributed equally and are used to meet social needs in their own communities. They reinvest in their businesses and work to ensure their product is certified organic and environmentally sustainable (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2012).

The next chapters will explore the research findings and how the women in Mezquital are becoming agents of change as they create alternative income generating projects.

CHAPTER THREE: Mezquital, Mexico: A Case Study

Research Methodology

In this section I present my research approach and the specific tools I used to create an inclusive and safe participatory process for the women in Mezquital.³ The rationale for my research stems from a need to create holistic economic development programs. Top-down development programs that are simply handed to communities rarely provide the intended results. I believe that development programs need must increase economic well being in the short-term as well as achieve positive long-term impacts for women and their communities. The process implements the ideals of participatory action research (PAR). The process was created to facilitate a process of working alongside women in Mezquital to help them identify their specific gender needs. PAR values, honors, and reflects on the experiences of people who are directly affected by the issues in the community. These basic principles allow for the local voice to dominate and creates a space for local people to shape the strategies that will address their specific community needs (Participatory Action Research). For this reason I chose to do a qualitative study using a feminist participatory research process that would highlight the local story and incorporate them into the economic development process.

Rationale for Research

Over the past 11 years I have spent various amounts of time in Mezquital. The impetus for my research was born out of conversations that I had with a few women in Mezquital in the Fall of 2010. During a three month-stay in the village one of the women that I stayed with opened up to me regarding the economic hardships in her life and in the

³ I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

lives of her relatives and the lack of employment options to make a living. Diana continued to elaborate that since her recent divorce she had no other option but to find employment in order to provide for her family. Betsa shared how recent unemployment has forced her to seek employment in the factories and the informal sector, both of which are unstable sources of income. Based on the experience I had within the community I was able to observe the skills and talents of the local women. I started to connect what I was learning in school about economic development, the apparent needs addressed in the community, and the capabilities of all the women. I began to imagine the impact of what non-exploitative employment could have in the lives of these women. It could empower them, bring dignity to their lives, equip them to become economically self-sufficient, and provide the space to analyze and break down any gender inequality in their homes or community. After a few conversations with some leaders in the community I decided to engage in a process with local women to facilitate the creation of alternative income generating opportunities. The purpose of this process was to create a space for women to join together to discuss the issues in the community, to dream about alternatives, and to take action on their ideas to make them a reality. My role as facilitator in this process was to engage women as experts on their own situation in the hope that they would realize their immense potential and agency and to ensure ownership remained in the hands of the women. Not only was I the facilitator, but I had other duties that included synthesizing the data to present back to the community and offering technical advice regarding economic development tools as needed.

Participatory Research

Participatory planning approaches are flexible and inclusive and highlight the importance of genuine participation from local community members. This approach recognizes that deep-seated problems in communities cannot be solved overnight through top down development programs. It is imperative to realize that community development is a process and the solutions often take time to uncover. It is important to clarify the meaning of participation as it often takes multiple forms depending on how it is used. Some development agencies use participation as a means to achieve their hidden agenda and only engage the community for the sake of being able to claim there was community involvement. This form of participation usually maintains the status quo and does little to uncover what is really going on in community. On the other hand, some community developers value participation as a process of engaging, organizing, learning, planning, and acting without a specific end. The emphasis is on transforming the present system and allowing those without a voice or power to regain what was previously taken from them (Rocheleau, 1995). The process of participation is threefold and encompasses research, education or training, and action. It begins by working with disadvantaged communities to let them identify what their personal and community needs are. Once needs are identified it is necessary to figure out who has the skills and resources within the community to meet those needs and then look outside for training to obtain any additional necessary skills. Lastly, it is important to create and implement an action plan. It is important to analyze how the process is including the community.

“How have they fostered equality of voice...how have they promoted the capacity of affected people to learn together about their

common future, about their diverse concerns and about the option they can create?” (Rahder, 1999).

Out of participatory planning emerged the feminist participatory planning process, which, like all feminist processes, sought to give voice to women’s experience and separate it from that of men. This has historically not been the case in planning.

Philosopher C. Gilligan highlights the power of voice and silence of women,

“ As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. Yet in the different voices of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection.”

The purpose here is not just for women to be heard, but to allow that voice to have value. It is about allowing that voice to mean something and for that voice to be capable of challenging the status quo in an effort to overcome the subordination of women (Moser, 1993).

An additional goal of this process in Mezquital is to ensure local control over projects. Allowing the women to maintain control over the ideas and future projects will help reduce the likelihood that the project will not become dependent on my involvement. This process will extend beyond the findings of this research. As Melissa commented, “no matter what the physical outcome is in terms of project at least we are talking together as a group and that there is now momentum to do something for the community.” An element of this project is to assist the women of Mezquital to realize

that their potential extends outside of opportunities offered to them by the patriarchal and capitalist society. There is room for another way. Arundhati Roy stated that, “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing” (date). This quote captures the dream that another way is possible and these women are the key players in realizing that within their community, region, and country. This project is hopefully a breath of another way.

Part of engaging in the participatory research process is to be flexible and open to the process and to allow an outcome to arise out of an inclusive community dialogue. I wanted to remain clear that I was unable to promise concrete results at the end in terms of a program. I explained this was an investigative process and that together we would come up with an action plan for the next steps. While I came to the table with ideas from what I had seen function into other parts of Latin America in terms of economic development I maintained my role as a facilitator and did not press any ideas on the women in the group. When appropriate I offered ideas regarding the economic development tools I had studied in school. Additionally, by not bringing the answers I was able to lessen my role as the “expert researcher” thus placing that responsibility back into the hands of the women and allowing them to be creative in addressing the needs in the community.

During an interview, Priscilla and I were able to escape the busyness of the household into a smaller and much quieter room in the back of the house. I began listening to her story and at the end of the interview she explained to me the necessity for Mexico and the United States to work together for mutual benefit. She then continued to tell me that even if nothing came out of this project in terms of something tangible for the women of the village she still wanted to help me in some way get the information I

needed to complete my thesis. In her eyes, this project was an example of two groups working together to help one another, with each group contributing to the process. At that moment I felt I had been dethroned of whatever had given me this authority as an “expert” outsider. It was not about me coming to Mexico and hoping to help Priscilla and the other women. Rather she was interested in helping me. It became clear that everyone in the process had something to offer and that it was for mutual benefit. At that moment the process moved a little bit closer towards an equal exchange as all sat as equals around the table discussing the needs of the community and most importantly the solutions.

Limits of the Research

Although I structured my research using the model of PAR there are some limitations to my research. The main limitation is the lack of aggregate economic data on the specific situation in the village. During the initial stages of my investigation I uncovered countless plans and documents regarding the state of Baja California and the international planning agreements between the larger metropolises and their sister U.S. border cities, but nothing specific to the village of Mezquital. I inquired further with the Mayor about any type of long term or strategic planning documents that would assist my search for quantitative data about the situation in the village. I additionally asked if there had been any past projects that this project could build upon. I found nothing but aggregate data for the larger region that had little relevance to the village of roughly 1,500 people. At one point during my study, a local woman suggested that I do a census in the village. Due to the limits of my study and time constraints I was unable to do so. If there was quantitative data available about the socio-economic status of the village it

could prove useful as the women pursue a variety of funding opportunities for their projects. This could serve a point for future research in the village.

I was only able to interview a limited number of women for a variety of reasons. First of all, I didn't want to force participation in the project and as such no one was obligated to join the process. After networking and marketing the project I ultimately left the decision to participate in the hands of the women. I was very pleased with the number of women who agreed to participate in the meetings and interviews. Secondly, I did not have the time or the resources to perform a comprehensive participatory project where every woman in the village was engaged. Though this project sheds light on the overall socio-economic situation of the village, I do not want to over generalize and assume that the situation of the fifteen women that I engaged with over the past six months is fully representative of all women in Mezquital.

Research Design

My research design was divided into two components. I initially gathered foundational information by investigating the current socio-economic situation in Mezquital. The latter part of the process involved identifying alternative income generating opportunities and formulating next steps. All of this research was made possible through informal conversations, community meetings, and structured interviews. About 25 women participated in the two community meetings and 15 women participated in the interviews. Not all of the women who were at the community meetings participated in the interviews and not all of the interviewed women were able to attend both meetings. My research process took place over six months in three separate phases. I chose to

complete my research over a longer course of time so that I would have time to perform an adequate analysis since each phase built upon the other.

This next section will explain the main aspects of what each phase of research looked like. I used a variety of methods to gather the necessary data and information that would inform my thesis. I conducted two community meetings to facilitate the discussion and interchange of ideas. In the community group meetings I asked opened ended questions and had interactive activities to help create an atmosphere where we could engage in deeper dialogue. At the end of the first community meeting I had a sign-up sheet and calendar where I scheduled interviews with women who expressed interest in further participation. The next time I returned to the community I was able to conduct fifteen interviews. My interview questions were composed of close-ended questions to get basic employment and educational information. The other questions were open-ended that allowed the women to further expand on subjects of interest to them (See Appendix B). The next section summarizes each stage of research.

Three Phases of Research

Phase 1: Identification of Strengths and Weaknesses within the Community

This phase was the initial contact that I had with the community regarding my research. In the previous months, I had brief contact with a few community leaders to inform them of my research plans. During my first week I put up informational posters around the village to inform community members about the initial community meeting that I would be holding. (See Appendix A) Some of my previous contacts in the village helped me network with other women they knew. Brenda works on behalf of the Mexican government, helping women in very low-income households apply for subsidized school

uniforms, roofs for their houses, and energy assistance. She invited me to a meeting that she was having with the women. She introduced me and gave me a few minutes to discuss my research project with the women. This was extremely helpful as many of the women I met that day expressed interest and attended the community meeting later that week. I also met Andrea, the mayor of the village, to inform her of my research and explained that her participation at any stage in the process would be helpful. I held a community meeting where I engaged the women in conversations regarding the strengths of the community, the gender division of labor, the pressing needs of the village, and their hopes for the future. I also shared with them my motivation for conducting the research in their village and opened up the doors for further participation if they desired to participate. The overall purpose of this week was to gain a basic understanding of their socio-economic situation, network with women in the community, and to further elicit their engagement in the research.

Phase 2: In-depth Interviews

After gaining a base of information from the women in the community I returned a few months later to conduct extensive interviews with fifteen different women. The women had signed up for interviews at the initial community meeting and all of the women were 18 years of age or older. The interviews consisted of a variety of questions regarding personal socio-economic status, issues locally and nationally, strengths of the participants, and their hopes for future economic development initiatives.

Phase 3: Final Community Meeting and Report-Back

After completing the interviews I synthesized all of the information, pulled out emerging themes and reported back to the women in a community meeting. Not only was

this meeting for the purposes of a report back, but it was also geared towards identifying next steps in the process. A variety of economic development options were mentioned in the interviews and this meeting provided the space and time to flesh out the ideas as a group.

CHAPTER FOUR: Summary of Findings

The following section reports on the findings from the research that I conducted in Mezquital, Mexico. I hope their personal accounts illuminate how women in Mezquital are faring in the context of the larger regional border economy. The opinions expressed in the following sections should not be generalized to represent the needs of the entire community as most responses are based on perceptual knowledge and personal experience. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the women. However, it does provide a snapshot of some of the pressing issues facing the village including ideas for solutions.

Assets and Challenges Facing Mezquital

An important part of the community development process is to focus on the strengths within the community before addressing the challenges. Structuring the process this way allows community members to discover and reflect on what is already working within the community and it highlights assets. Identifying assets was an important element to the interviews and the community meetings. The women had a lot of positive things to say about their community. The strengths are a platform upon which the women can build as they investigate and create alternative income generating opportunities.

When asked about the strengths of the community Lupe responded, “The people unite when there is work to be done. When someone’s house burns down or an accident happens, the people in the village will get together and help those in need.” Many women were in agreement about the ability of the community to work together to make sure people are cared for especially in times of need. Another woman, Julia, who has one child shared, “The people, we look out for each other. It is safe for the kids to be playing

outside. For example, if your child gets hurt, then your neighbor will help out.” Not only do community members work together to meet needs within the community, but there are also social services programs. Some of the federal social service programs in the community provide scholarships, stipends to help lower income families with school uniforms, or provide the materials to fix the roofs and floors of homes in the community. Another government program called “*Los Sesentas y Mas*” offers resources for the elderly. There is an additional government program that seeks to provide low-income households with part-time employment. This program pays qualified women 118 pesos for eight hours of work. The jobs often include cleaning the park or the school.

A few women commented on the role of women in ensuring that social needs are met in the community. One example that Luisa shared was how women in her church organized a clothing drive for families who live down at the canal. She explained how her church group seeks to meet needs in the community: “We see what the need is and then we try to figure out how we can help them. In the church we get clothes together and bring them to the people who live down near the canal where there is a lot of need. It is about helping those who have less than you.” It is clear that the people in Mezquital have a history of working together to meet the needs in the community and as Betsa shared, “the community is hard working and any opportunity that people have they will work. People are not just sitting at home.” All of these strengths will be utilized as the women work together in the future.

Based on some initial conversations within the community I had a general idea of some of the needs but I wanted a more in-depth analysis and to hear directly from other

women. This next section is a summary of the different needs that women identified in the community.

One of the biggest challenges that was reinforced throughout the interviews was the outside dependence on the United States for economic well-being. During an initial conversation with Andrea, she highlighted that due to Mexico's reliance on the United States their community has been hard hit during the economic crisis. She likened the relationship between the two countries to two trees. The United States, she said, is like the big tree with large branches and full of leaves and Mexico usually can find shelter underneath the tree. She then asked, what happens when the big tree dries up and no longer offers shade? She explained that Mexicans are in a desperate situation and can no longer find enough shade from the United States.

During the initial community meeting many women agreed that there was a lack of public services and public works projects to address the various physical infrastructure needs in the village. One such need is the dangerous dilapidated road off the main highway that leads into the village. Many accidents have occurred on this road and it needs to be repaired. The source of water for community members is a community owned well. Each month every household pays a set fee for water usage as determined by a committee of men and women who administer the finances and upkeep of the well. The well is old and on numerous occasions it has broken down and requires constant repair. Often times community members are left without running water for weeks. Adding to the public works to-do list, Julia commented, "Better lighting, better streets... we need paved streets." During the rainy season the dirt roads turn into lakes of mud making it hard to leave the house and at night the lighting is very poor on the streets.

Part of the problem is that there are not enough institutions to meet the needs and existing organizations are not fulfilling their purposes. Melissa reinforced this observation when she commented, “the *Junta de Mejor* isn’t doing what they are supposed to do. For example, they don’t even pay the *Centro de Salud* which is something that is supposed to benefit the community.” The village has a health center, *Centro de Salud*, but the doctor is only able to come on Mondays for limited hours. Many women expressed concern over not having access to a full time health care professional in the community. During another conversation with Andrea regarding the lack of public works projects she informed me the village does not have any comprehensive plans addressing the aforementioned needs. Compounding this problem is that there is not any money available to the community for improvement projects like streetlights. She attributes the lack of funding as to why people are unable to move ahead in life.

The lack of public transportation is an issue for a variety of people in the community. Transportation services are limited to the private buses that pass through the village picking up workers and transporting them to the fields. Betsa explained there was a need for public transport for students who decide to attend “*la secundaria*” (middle school) or “*la prepa*” (high school). Mezquital only has “*el kinder*” (Preschool) and “*la primaria*” (primary school) and all other students must travel outside the village for higher education. There is a need for transportation to get workers who do not have cars to their places of employment.

A lack of security was identified as a key concern as there has been an increase in robberies and drug-related issues. According to some women, safety concerns are compounded by the fact that there is not a permanent police station in the village. Julia

shared that, “we need a police station. We need one here. The closest police station is in Hermosillo. Even if there were only three police cars. But we need one here in the village.” Police officers from the neighboring village of Hermosillo will patrol the village, but many women believe a greater police presence would help enhance community safety.

There is a need for community members to have easier access to a variety of material goods. Mezquital is a very tiny village with a few small-scale stores that sell basic staples. The women created a list of amenities unavailable in the village such as a pharmacy, a large market store with a greater variety of items, a clothing store, and a store to purchase school uniforms.

Based on my conversations with the women there are a variety of needs in the community and Berta shared, “the truth is that this village is a very solitary, it is a sad place, because there really isn’t much here.” While the needs are great the women are eager to get involved to create solutions to improve the overall situation in Mezquital. Besides material and physical infrastructure needs, the majority of interviewees identified that the most pressing issues facing the community are the lack of job security and economic instability.

Economic Instability

One of the recurring themes around the conversation of employment is the lack of jobs in the community. Echoing what every women shared, Kati explains, “There really aren’t many job options. Everyone has to go outside the community to look for work. That is one thing that we lack in the village. Jobs.” The jobs that are available are limited and are failing to meet the needs of the entire community. Compounding the problem is

the lack of land ownership. The village is surrounded by fields but Andrea explained that the majority of landowners do not live in Mezquital and rent out their land to locals. In her eyes this is a problem because people are not able to work on their own land.

Of the jobs available to most people are seasonal. Rosa shared, “The jobs that are available are in the fields. But it is seasonal work. It is not ideal because people have to go far to find other jobs in the off-season.” This has a negative effect on the families because workers have to travel outside of Mezquital to cities like the Valle de Trinidad, Ensenada, San Quintin, or even the United States to find agricultural work in the off months. Not everyone has the means to be able to travel to other areas to work due to the lack of public transportation. Diana explained that what the community needs is, “more jobs --like if there was a source of jobs-- that way people would not have to travel to go and find a job.”

A conversation with Andrea sheds light on the underlying factors behind the economic issues in the village. Andrea explained that agriculture is the basis of the local economy. Due to the seasonal nature of the jobs as a result of the climate in the region, agriculture is not a sustainable source of jobs for the community. The different vegetables grown in the region cannot be cultivated year round due to the extremely high temperatures in the summer months. Echoing Andrea’s analysis many women reported that May through October are not only the hottest months but also the toughest for people in the village as many face extended periods of unemployment. Augmenting the problem is the increased cost of living in the summer months and the lack of income. It was reiterated in the interviews what many women stated in the initial community meeting that people have a difficult time paying their light and air conditioning bills in the

summer months. The costs and usage of energy significantly increases during the summer, compounding the problems associated with the tight economic situation.

One of the contributing factors to job insecurity is the dependence on other cities or countries to provide employment. In the long-term the village will not be able to sustain itself without a steady source of stable jobs. Many families rely on visas and work permits to the United States for employment. This outside dependence was reinforced in the interviews. When asked about the relationship between the United States many women characterized the relationship as the United States offering visas to Mexican workers who are willing to do the work that the Americans do not want to perform. This highlights the dependency of Mexicans on the corporations in the United States to offer visas.

All of the previously mentioned factors are inhibiting long-term economic stability and growth in the community. Not only are these constraints affecting day-to-day life but they will also have an affect the ability of future generations to find employment. The current situation is not sustainable. Since unemployment was identified as an issue in the community meeting I chose to gather more in-depth data on the employment status of women in the village in the personal interviews. As I listened to personal experiences regarding employment I was able to get a clearer picture of the magnitude of the problem. The next section looks at the jobs women have and the wages associated with different jobs. The latter part of this section will look at the gender division of labor and how inequality has an effect on the women's ability to find employment.

Employment

This section looks at the typical earnings of women within a range of different jobs. Even though the aggregate data shows that Baja California is doing quite well economically relative to the rest of Mexico it doesn't capture the whole picture. Rosario explained that on paper Baja California looks like it is doing well, but the truth is that the smaller villages like Mezquital are suffering and still experience poverty. She continued to explain that it costs more in Northern Mexico and families are not able to make ends meet. Additionally, the rural nature and location of the village prohibits women from obtaining employment in the larger cities. There may be more jobs in the maquiladoras in Mexicali, but if the women lack transportation and need to be home at decent hours to care for their children traveling for work is not an option.

Women in the village are employed in a variety of capacities. Out of the fifteen women who were interviewed, eight of them are currently unemployed. Many of these women have been previously employed in variety of occupations, but for different reasons are no longer employed. The women identified a host of barriers to finding employment. Andrea shared that the older generation in the village is having a hard time finding stable jobs since employers prefer to hire younger workers whom they see as more physically capable and more technically savvy. Rosa explained her difficulty with finding a job that is related to what she studied in school.

The majority of the women agreed that having women working is beneficial. A main concern about women working outside of the household was that the children often are home alone. A few women commented that when women work they are able to support their husbands financially thus increasing the overall income in the household. With more income families are able to save and more children are able to be educated.

Rosa shared, “In my opinion, it is good for the women to work. It helps out the household economy when the man and women work. The household will do better economically.”

In agreement, quite a few women pointed out that if more women were working and contributing financially to their homes there would be less need and people could live better. There would be more financial stability and people wouldn't have to worry about paying back debts.

Of the women who were previously employed many had worked in the agricultural sector. Two women had been working in the fields; one picking garlic and the other onions. Several reported that they used to work in the fields that surround the village. Their pay range varied significantly, with one earning 930 pesos/week and the other 500 pesos/week. Recently, Lupe obtained a three- week job picking cotton in the fields surrounding the village and she earned 400 pesos/week. Luisa shared part of her employment history, “When I was 17, I went to work in a maquiladora that made *ropa interior* and I worked there for two years. I used to work at an *empaque de otrializas* close to Mezquital. I have also worked in the garlic fields.” When she can find work in the fields she is paid about 770 pesos/ week compared to the *fabrica* where she is paid 800 pesos/week. Another woman used to work for a company in the United States where she would make between \$180-200/ week and on some occasions she took home \$350/ week. Berta explained that she was not formally employed so that she can take care of her kids and shared how she contributes financially, “I am not working now. But to help out my husband I will sell fireworks, tamales, or candy during special times of the year. I try and make the most of the seasonal time. So, I sell fireworks December 15th through January. I don't have a steady job. Sometimes I make up to a 1,000 pesos a week selling tamales.”

Kati, who was 18 and married, is the only woman who had never held a formal wage-earning job; as she explained, “Most of the women don’t have jobs—they devote most of their time to their houses.”

A large proportion of the women from Mezquital were working in the fields picking lettuce or onions at the time of the interviews. There is a substantial wage differential between women who work in the lettuce fields and those working in the onion fields. The average salary of women working in the lettuce ranges from 1,000-2,050 pesos/week compared to the average salary of women working in the onions who make 600-800 pesos/week. Diana described some of the different jobs that she had held in the past: “Before I would clean houses in the United States but my tourist visa ran out so I can’t go clean anymore. I recently worked in a store. But I left my job at the store to work in the lettuce fields because of the wage difference. In the store I would only make 600 pesos per week but in the lettuce fields I make 1,500 pesos per week.”

There is one woman who is currently working in the onion fields who before that found employment working in an *empaque* and cleaning houses in the village. In 1995, Sara was able to get a permanent visa and she is now the only woman in the group working in the United States as an agricultural laborer. She is making about \$240-260/week. Betsa explained her employment history over the past few years, “Currently I am filling in for a teacher who is sick. Before that I was teacher. I studied to be a *secundaria* teacher but I ended up teaching in the *primaria* due to job availability. I was unemployed because my contract was over. So, I went to work in a garlic *empaque*. Then I started my own business selling *raspados* and hotdogs.”

Many women find themselves unemployed and many who do not have jobs believe that they are not working in an ideal position. Many women shared the experience of waking up at 3 or 4 a.m. and working for 12 hours with limited breaks, cold temperatures in the mornings, and demanding physical labor in the fields. We engaged in a conversation that highlighted the positive aspects of particular jobs in the community and what made those jobs desirable. Many acknowledged that working in the United States is an ideal situation for people in the village. Kati explained the wage differential and said, “People want to work in the United States. They pay so much more than they do here in Mexico. You can make, for example, \$70/ day in the United States and you make that same amount working for a whole week in Mexico.” When Kati was younger she recalled a memory of her younger sister. Her father used to work in the United States and then was unable to get a visa and Kati’s sister asked her father when he would be able to work in the United States so that their family could be rich again.

Besides getting a visa to the United States many women explained that most people who work in the fields want to get a job with the lettuce companies. Lettuce is the highest paying agricultural job and is the most competitive. Each season only thirty people from the village are hired to work in the lettuce fields. One woman commented that an ideal job is being able to work in the fields that surround the village because it is closer to their homes and children.

A few women stated that having a job in the construction business is ideal because of the higher wages and the fact that you are able to work for yourself. Maria shared that running your own business is the ideal job. Lastly, Mimi said that working in the *fabricas* is the ideal job because those workers have a job all year round.

Based on the responses it is apparent the women value stable jobs with decent wages. Not only do women need higher wages but they also want better working conditions than working in the fields can provide. Many women do not have a choice but to work in the fields even if it means leaving their children at home and working in exploitative conditions. Few people in the village have the luxury of owning their own business. All of these factors will be addressed in future planning for alternative economic development projects.

Gender Division of Labor

An additional part of the analysis of women and work is to understand if and how gender plays a role in the opportunities for women. During the initial community meeting we had a conversation about the gender division of labor in the community. In order to gather this information I decided to do a small activity. I passed out note cards and asked the women to write down what women do in the village. I explained that it could be wage work, household work, or community service. Julia explained the differences between men and women in the village. She shared that, “when both work in the household the women still have to come home and do the dishes, laundry, and other household chores. The men come home and they just rest and rarely contribute to completing the household tasks. And you know, if they both work and there is a meeting at their children’s school the woman has to ask for the day off. The men don’t go to school meetings or anything like that. There are mostly women in church. Like ten years ago there were hardly any men at the church or any event. The women organize and do everything for community parties, fundraising for the schools, and parades.” After a few minutes of reflection

everyone shared what they had come up with and I wrote the responses on the flip chart.

The following is a list of all jobs/tasks women could have in the village:

- Selling candy and purses
- Teachers
- In the fields either in Mexico or the United States
- Selling Mary Kay which is based on commission
- Sewing
- Cooking
- Arts and crafts
- Staying at home
- Cleaning houses
- *Fabricas*. (Translated as “factories”)
- Offering specialty classes like arts and crafts and business techniques to

help market the product.

- Beauty
- Caring for children
- Teaching classes on how to live a better life

After compiling a list of what characterizes “women’s” work I asked them to write down all the work that men perform in the village. The following is a list:

- In the fields working in the onion, cilantro, broccoli, or cotton *
- Teachers *
- Carpenters

- Mechanics. The women commented that there was one woman mechanic in the village.

- Chauffeur
- Watering the fields
- *Fabricas* or factories*
- Firefighters
- Car Washes
- Electricians
- Cutting hair*
- Store Owners*
- Counselors
- *Ejidatarios* those who own land in the *ejido* *

After comparing the differences between men and women's work we discussed what jobs both sexes share. Those jobs listed under the male section that have an asterisk next to them signify jobs that are held by both men and women. Based on the responses it is clear that there is still a gender division of labor. Men and women are both working in agriculture and the *fabricas* but there are still other sectors that are more strictly divided. Women continue to do most of the household work and men have the more technical jobs. A few women shared that there is one woman in the village who is a mechanic which is a job typically held by men.

Some women reflected on how the role of women in the labor force has changed from women rarely working outside the home to the increased opportunities women have to find employment. In the past, according to Julia, there were no jobs for women other

than cleaning houses but now they can find work even in agriculture and construction. Diana explained a gas station will be opening up nearby and the owners are hiring women. Gas stations have never employed women before and this is another job that is being opened up to women. She shared, "In the past, people didn't think that women could do things, but look at how things are changing. They will continue to improve."

While there are more jobs for women there are still some areas in which women face gender inequality. The conversation around wages was mixed. Many shared that men and women make the same amount in the fields and factories while other women claim that men are still making more money than women. "There is still inequality," Kati explained, "Look, the men are *machistas*. You can't do this or you can't have that. People just don't hire women as much as men." She continued to explain that employers will not hire women on the basis that women gossip too much or that they fight more than men.

A useful indicator of how women are faring within the household is the extent to which they have control over finances and resource distribution. All of the household compositions were different and each had their own system for handling finances. As such, it is difficult to generalize about who has control of financial resources within the households in Mezquital. There were three main household situations that emerged from this question; the nuclear household, single headed households, and multigenerational households. Of the interviewed women many claimed that the husband and wife both controlled the finances. This occurred in households where only the husband works for a wage and in households where both the husband and wife are working for a wage. Five women interviewed stated that they were the ones in charge of controlling the finances

while their husbands were the ones who earned a wage. One woman explained she is the only one contributing financially which puts her charge of spending in the home.

There were other households that didn't fit within the category of the nuclear household. Many women live with their parents or extended family. Luisa shared that her brother is the only one who contributes the finances, but her mother controls the finances. Maria, who lives with her parents, stated that her and her father both contribute financially and control the finances. In Sara's family, her husband, her son, and her daughter Diana all work and combine their incomes but it is Sara who controls the finances. Similarly Betsa lives with her parents and siblings. They all work and combine their finances and her mother controls the finances.

It appears women have a good amount of control over how resources are spent and allocated within the home. This can be attributed to the household structure. It could also be attributed to how women spend the finances as Priscilla explained that men are more irresponsible with their money and women are financially responsible and direct more resources to the home.

Many women spoke of the increased autonomy and agency of women. Many women compared the situation of women to when they were younger and noted that they have witnessed changes in the overall well-being of women. Rosa shared that "the situation of women is getting better in a variety of aspects. My grandmothers would tell me that men wouldn't let the women do many things. Men wouldn't allow the women to leave the house. The men were very *machista*. And now it looks like the men and women are almost equal. There are still some households where machismo is present, but not in my house. *Gracias a Dios.*"

Mimi commented that women used to be very enslaved but now as their opportunities to work are expanding women are experiencing more freedom. In agreement, Kati stated that women are much better off now than before and explained that in the past women were subject to their husbands' demands and household chores, but now women can do whatever they want without a man telling them no. Women used to be very submissive and never did what they wanted, explained Berta, but now women are more self-sufficient and have moved ahead in life. Women can leave and get stuff done and no longer have to wait around to get permission from their husbands. Clara shared that when she was younger she suffered a great deal, but now she is able to provide her children with clothes and shoes. Besides having achieved greater access to jobs Julia said that education opportunities are expanding for women as people see the benefit of educating girls. Additionally, women are gaining more awareness in the political sector. Julia explained that presidents are now referring to women in their speeches and agendas and she stated, "Mexico is finally looking to women."

Education Levels of Interviewed Women

A few of the interviewed women were unable to finish school past the primary level. Sara explained why she was unable to go past third grade: "My dad believed that women shouldn't study. He thought that women were supposed to be in the house." Sandra shared a similar experience. She explained that she didn't finish school because when she was growing up people didn't send their kids to school and that her parents had different ideas and customs regarding the education of their children. Luisa shared that she was unable to finish school because of the bad economy. Her family did not have enough money to send her to school so she had to stop attending school. Other families

were in a similar bind and Clara explained that when she was growing it up it was a huge financial burden to send your children to school because you had to buy shoes and clothes. At this point in time Luisa is the only woman who has returned to school to continue her education. Priscilla stopped attending school after she completed her primary education because learning was difficult for her.

All of the women have different ideas of why their children should be educated. Some women expressed barriers to educating their children. Appendix C is a matrix that conveys all of the responses of the different women about the future education of their children. There are significant barriers for youth in Mezquital regarding education. As previously mentioned Mezquital only has a kindergarten and a primary school. On top of the need for a secondary school and a high school several women reported the need for greater availability of educational opportunities. They suggested a technical school as well as a school that would cater to the needs of children who are either physically or mentally disabled.

As the conversations continued regarding future opportunities, education emerged as an important element for combating economic instability. Education seems to be a portal in which many women see their children advancing into other careers that were not available to them. Many women view education as the path to a better future for their children. Berta wants her children to advance to the university level where they can obtain an established career because she feels that will translate into better job opportunities. She said her children will pursue a higher education and imagines them obtaining jobs like a supervisor, mechanic, or an engineer.

Education has not always been an option for everyone in the community. Part of the reason is that families are responsible to pay for school uniforms, supplies, and festivals throughout the academic year. Additionally some families need for their school aged children to work. Sandra commented that school is now more readily available with lower costs, which allows more children to stay in school, and she explained that scholarships are available for some students to continue their education. In fact, there are opportunities for adults in the community to go back to school. Even though the costs are lower for public education it is still not low enough for all families. Quite a few of the women explained that their children will not be able to continue their education past *la secundaria* for financial reasons. Education is very costly and in some families there isn't money to send the children to the *prepa* or the university. Clara said that her children have not been able to finish their career training because they do not have enough money. A few women were unsure if their children would advance past *la secundaria* for financial reasons.

Future Generations: What are their opportunities?

“My kids will continue to study and pursue a career and get a job. They could be a teacher or whatever they want. I try as a single mom to make sure that my kids move ahead in their studies. Education is the best thing that I can give to my kids. My son does really well in school and my daughter too. What could a mother want more than for her kids to move ahead in life and not have to pass through the same difficulties that I did, ” explained Luisa when asked about the future opportunities for her children.

I wanted to gather more information about the women's views on how the situation in Mezquital has improved and their opinions about future opportunities for

their children. Berta shared that her dad used to work in the fields in Mexico, but he now works in the United States. In her opinion there are more employment opportunities in comparison to what was available for her parents. In the past there were not as many chances for people to get visas and now it is easier to obtain a visa. She believes that there will be higher quality jobs for her children as they enter the workforce in the future. Sara is originally from Michoacán and migrated here with her family in 1955 for reasons of economic necessity. When they arrived her father found a job picking cotton. Many women shared that in the past picking cotton was one of the few jobs available to people. There was a general consensus about the greater availability of jobs in the fields and *fabricas*, and for obtaining visas in the United States. Priscilla has seven children and all of her children either work in the fields or have permissions to work in the United States. She believes that the jobs of the future will be to get a visa to work in the United States. Clara hopes that there will be more chances for her children to work in the fabricas. She sees this as an improvement over working in the fields because of the long hours, low pay and tough conditions characteristic of fieldwork in Mexico.

There was some skepticism about the future availability of jobs and career opportunities. A few women are unconvinced that the socio-economic situation will improve and one said that her children will have to look outside of the village to find work. Betsa explained some of the underlying factors for the poor economic climate in the village. She attributed the bad economy and Mexico's dependence on the United State as the main cause of the limited opportunities and believes this will affect her children's future. She continued that as long as technology continues to remove the need for workers in the field, women will have even less opportunities for employment.

After conversing about future opportunities we dived into more concrete ideas about alternative income generating opportunities. We began by looking at individual skills and then considered how those skills could be used in conjunction with other women's skills to create more cohesive and stronger projects.

Alternative Income Generating Opportunities

“My dream was always...Do you know what I really love to do? It is sewing and a sewing machine and I have always loved to sew. Sewing on a machine. It is just something that I really enjoy. My daughter bought me a sewing machine and when I have time I like to sew. I just really love it. If I would have been allowed to study this is what I would have wanted to study, *corte y confeccion*,” explained Sara when queried about her ideal job.

The main part of this process apart from identifying needs within the community is brainstorming and being creative about alternative income generating opportunities. The purpose of this section is to highlight the dreams and ideas that women have regarding their futures and then to discuss details about how to start these projects.

Generally speaking many women shared that they want to start businesses that will benefit the community and make it a better place to live. Besta explained that she would like to start a business that would create more jobs for people living in Mezquital. Many women spoke about power relations within the workplace and their desire to change the traditional employer-employee dynamic they are accustomed to. They explained that when one person is in charge of a business the owners pay the employees less resulting in very high wage differentials. For this reason, they suggest a business model that would have multiple owners as a way to curtail wage inequality. The ideals

put forth during this conversation resonate with the economic development tools discussed in the literature review. When asked what a community needs to be healthy most of the women responded with a variety of answers such as the necessity for the community to have values, a willingness to think about the welfare of others, the creation of more jobs, and planning for the future. A reoccurring theme is the need to plan for the future in a way that creates solutions that tackle issues of unemployment. In order to change the system people in the community need to work together for the common good. One woman reiterated this point by explaining that people must be willing to do something of benefit for those who are outside of your family.

After conversing generally regarding objectives of a community-based business we moved on to specific business ideas. The following list was compiled during community meetings and interviews: (Appendix C has a more complete description)

- A clothing store
- A tortilla store
- A paper store
- A childcare center. Eight women from the interviews expressed an interest

in starting a project like this.

- Own a restaurant
- A store to sell handicrafts
- Maquiladora
- Candy store
- Sewing business
- Beauty Salon

- Teacher
- Pursue higher education to get masters or doctorate in nursing
- A larger market. There is a need for a larger store rather than six little

stores in the village that all sell the same thing.

The ideas range from micro-businesses to cooperatives to a social business. The range of ideas highlights a wide range of interests of the women. To illuminate not only their diverse interests and their inter-connectedness I conducted a few activities.

For the meeting I prepared a small activity to highlight the interrelatedness of the women in the room. I brought a roll of yarn and handed it to one lady. I had the women form a circle in the room and I asked her to toss the roll of yarn to two other women with whom she felt some sort of connection whether it is a relative or an acquaintance through a social network. Once everyone woman had received the yarn and had taken a turn to toss the yarn we paused to look at what had been created between them. If we had tossed another roll of yarn on top of the newly created network of yarn it would have been caught and not fallen to the ground. The purpose of this activity was to represent the strength and capacity the women have as a collective. I explained that this interconnectedness and strength could be harnessed and used to create the change they want in their community. Additionally, this activity highlights already established connections and the potential that could be unleashed once relationships are not just identified but utilized.

I thought it would be beneficial for the women to start talking about their skills and assets. I didn't want the nature of the conversation to be about "what are you lacking," but rather to focus on what the woman are good at. Each woman in the

community has been blessed with social networks, knowledge, creativity, intelligence, and many other skills that need to be identified and given value (Corbett, 2009). To initiate this conversation I handed everyone a note card and a pen. I asked each of them to write a list of their talents and skills. This was initially hard for some of the women and I explained that it could be anything from making the best tamales to knowing how to fix things or having business skills. I explained that this didn't have to be skills for which they had received formal training. For example, Diana used to own a hotdog stand with her ex-husband and she was in charge of purchasing everything for the stand and monitoring the finances. Even though she didn't realize it, she had business skills. After a few minutes I gathered up the note cards and wrote all of the skills on a flip chart. Then we started drawing connections between the different skills and compared how the identified talents could be mobilized in the project. Below is a list of everything that the women wrote down:

- Cooking (three women wrote this down)
- Sewing clothes
- Playing the guitar
- She has a heart for helping take care of the sick and commented, "*me nace cuidar enfermos*"
- Teaching
- Decorating
- Designing
- Taking care of children (three women wrote this down)
- Serving (two women wrote this down)

- Cleaning her house
- Sewing using a machine (Two women wrote this down)
- Inject shots
- Check blood pressure
- Knit/ Weave (two women said this)
- Make flowers out of '*fomy*' (arts and crafts)
- Helping
- Going to church

This activity confirmed the existence a wide variety of skills within the community. After talking about individual skills we shifted the conversation toward specific project ideas. The childcare center or "*guarderia*" was brought up as a project of interest. As such we spent a substantial amount of time discussing the specifics of this idea. All of the ideas proposed by the women in Mezquital can be implemented using the cooperative, microfinance, or social business model. The next section will highlight some of the key issues to consider as the women decide on which model would serve their specific ideas best.

A cooperative model seems to be the best option for the childcare center based on the needs and desires expressed by various women. As such, I want to offer some suggestions, based on ideals of the Mondragon cooperative previously mentioned in the literature review, as a place to start. Since the women expressed a need to establish rules and a code of conduct the following themes will be relevant as the women start the implementation process.

Defining the Purpose

Hunt (1992) analyzed the three stages that cooperatives pass through and offers helpful advice for newly forming cooperatives. The article explains that stage one in the cooperative process is when negotiations about the meaning and purpose of the organization must occur. It is about understanding what led to the birth of this new organization and establishing, as a group, what the special niche for the group will be. The women in Mezquital will need to engage in conversations so as to define their purpose and objectives for the cooperative. They need to have concrete goals and objectives for their project especially as they begin to apply for funding.

Democratic Process

Democratic processes are fundamental to cooperatives. It is important for a cooperative to be clear on what the democratic process will look like. The purpose of the democratic process is to ensure that workers are able to garner a voice in the process and influence the decisions that affect them. Many of the women from Mezquital have never before engaged in a cooperative business venture, making it of paramount importance to dialogue about expectations for the democratic process. This is not a one-time conversation but will need to be renegotiated and reshaped as the needs and pressures facing the cooperative change. On top of establishing a democratic process the women will benefit from understanding the role of conflict in the process and creating ways in which to address conflict. After establishing ideals for the cooperative it is important to have a conversation about maintaining these ideals in the long run especially when conflict arises and push comes to shove. This process is not perfect. In fact, for many organizations it has required mistakes along the road to shine light on areas in the process that were not functioning properly and to sort out issues relating to control (Hunt, 1992).

It is recommended that the women engage in regular check-in meetings to discuss the process and to evaluate areas that need improvement.

Sub-division of Tasks

Another issue that must be addressed is the specialization or the sub-division of work tasks. If the women decide to sub-divide the tasks then there are some potential concerns that should be addressed. One issue is that there is a hierarchal aspect to sub-dividing labor. Dividing the labor process can create the need for oversight or upper management to ensure that all tasks are completed. A hierarchy opens up the door for power imbalances that can result in unequal power relations and salary differentials. Cooperatives, like any business, need to operate efficiently and specialization is one way to achieve this. Specialization can improve efficiency but this doesn't have to come at the expense of equality (Hunt, 1992). During the final community meeting it was made clear that the women have a wide variety of skills that can be used in the cooperative project. To avoid imbalances of power the cooperative members need to be clear about how the subdivided tasks will each be given equal value. Overall, it is important to ensure that a hierarchical cooperative structure doesn't develop, perpetuating the unequal labor conditions that cooperatives seek to alleviate.

Leadership

The women will need to initiate a conversation regarding leadership. If the group forms a consensus regarding the role of the leader it will help to mitigate power struggles in the future. This area is not cut and dry. Having a clear leader in some cooperatives will function well while other cooperatives may opt for a more participative form of leadership. Tushaar Shah commented, "the Real Question is what exactly do the leaders

DO that makes all the difference” (Harper, 2000). A key part of this stage is to recreate the definition of what leadership is and to move away from how the capitalist society defines leadership. Rather than equating leadership with power and complete control a cooperative model leaves room for servant leadership. Leadership is no longer about garnering more control and money for oneself but about leading the organization for the good of the members and the community (Harper, 2000).

Democratic processes, sub-division of tasks and leadership are all essential components to consider when organizing a cooperative. While the previous themes are not completely comprehensive they can serve as a starting point for the women as they embark on their journey. The next section will address the concerns presented by the women regarding microfinance. While there was significant concern over the model there are quite a few women who could benefit from a small micro loan and as such I do not want to rule out microfinance all together.

Almost all of the women shared concerns about their inability to save for the future. Many women stated that their leftover money is often used for immediate needs rather than put in a savings account. Sara explained that she tries to save money to help out with her grandchildren so that they won't have to suffer. A few women explained that their leftover money is used to make repairs or additions on their homes. Luisa explained that with extra money she buys milk or anything else that her children need. Two women had received loans to help pay for household necessities. More specifically, one family got a loan for a car and to help pay their medical expenses. Another family used a loan to pay for basic necessities when they were unemployed. It is clear that many women in Mezquital have limited access to financial resources and have never used a

loan for economic development like a small business. Throughout the research process many women expressed a desire to start a small business in the community and explained that a lack of financial resources was the primary barrier.

Microfinance is not a new concept to women in the village. Recently, Mexico's largest for-profit microfinance institution Compartamos was in the village offering small loans to citizens. During a group discussion at the final community meeting quite a few women shared their concerns regarding the group-lending model. Some of the women did not understand how prohibiting family members from forming a lending group would be beneficial. Betsa explained she would prefer to form a lending group with family members because she knows that her family is responsible and trustworthy. The women expressed concern about being responsible for other members' loans especially when uncontrollable circumstances arise that inhibit a person's ability to repay. Betsa explained that savings groups would serve as a better model for the community than microfinance because family members could work together. Melissa commented that she did not want to request a loan from Compartamos because they require weekly loan repayments.

While there are substantial concerns from the women regarding microfinance I still believe that this model could be beneficial for the women who want to start their own small business. Typically, micro lenders will not lend to family members because studies have demonstrated that when families borrow together they are more prone to conspire against the lending institution to defer payments (Hermes, 2007). In regards to the weekly payments, micro lending institutions have found that borrowers have an easier time paying it back in small payments rather than one large sum at the end of the lending period. Weekly repayments ensure timely repayment and cause less financial stress on

borrowers. Since the creation of microfinance the model has constantly been evolving to fit the ever changing and specific needs of communities. As such, this model can be adapted to meet the needs of the women in the community to maximize their rate of success.

Next Steps and Recommendations

After the assets and challenges were addressed the group of women discussed concrete ideas and plans regarding the childcare cooperative. The outcome of a childcare cooperative is the product of the women's diverse experiences in their productive, reproductive, and community managing roles. The childcare cooperative responds to the regional and transnational needs of the community. It will create opportunities for social and economic multipliers in Mezquital.

The next section includes a detailed action plan to help guide the women as they pursue the childcare cooperative. This is a fundamental part of this process—the transition of a vision into implementable steps. Throughout the process I spoke to women regarding their dreams and aspirations and most importantly their goals for the future. Many projects do not leave the envisioning stage but my goal is that this next section offers tangible and practical steps for the women that will assist them in making their ideas a reality.

I. The first step will be the acquisition of land.

There are two main components to this step: determining a site and obtaining a plot. I recommend that a few women within the group be selected and form a task group to investigate the aforementioned needs.

The women need to decide on a location site. One woman suggested locating the childcare center near the fields so children can be close to their parents. One concern with this option is that during the months where there is not fieldwork the childcare center will either be empty or parents would have to bring their children to this location. This may not be the most efficient location as most people change jobs in the summer. Additionally, not all of the fields where parents are employed are located in a central location. As such there would be a need for more than one childcare center to accommodate the diverse needs of families. I recommend having a conversation about location sites to determine the most appropriate site. Perhaps having a focus group or even casual conversations with working mothers regarding preferable locations could help in this decision-making process.

In terms of land acquisition there are currently empty plots in the village that need to be assessed as potential sites for the childcare center. The group should gather basic information on costs, accessibility for families and the condition of the plot to determine if the plot will require substantial clean up prior to construction. To get this process started the women should make a list of all empty plots in the village, determine who the land owners are and obtain contact information as not all landowners currently reside in the village.

During this investigation the women should gather information about the costs of building the center and perhaps local construction workers will be able to provide necessary information on the current prices of building materials. The local construction workers will be a great asset to this part of the process, as they understand what will be required regarding land use regulations, building codes and are familiar with the

development process. These types of partnerships highlight a recommendation from one woman who said she would like to see businesses working together in the community to get this childcare project off the ground. Some of the women already have connections with local construction businesses and a few of the woman are married to men who can be utilized as initial contact points.

If both of these steps are completed within the next few months it will be a huge step forward in the direction of creating a childcare cooperative.

II. The second step is Project Funding.

The majority of the women are interested in pursuing next steps with the childcare cooperative and as such obtaining funding is a top priority. When queried about barriers to starting the project the women identified funding as a main concern. During the final community meeting the women tasked me with researching potential funding options for the childcare cooperative. At a later date, I will report back to the women regarding viable funding options for their projects. I have highlighted various organizations with mission statements that align with the childcare cooperative project and who have a history of funding like projects in Mexico and Latin America, some of which are even specific to the U.S.-Mexico border region. I included basic contact information alongside the brief organizational overview, all of which is detailed in Appendix D. It will be up to the women in the village to decide for themselves which funding options they chose to pursue. Again, I recommend that an additional task group be created to review my funding sources. This task group can report back to the larger group on which sources

align most closely with their vision. They will need to create a timeline with detailed descriptions on funding deadlines and requirements.

If the group agrees to pursue outside funding then there are a few potential issues that need to be addressed. When seeking outside financial support for the project the women will need to be strategic in order to ensure the project remains community based. For the project to remain in the hands of the women there needs to be a consensus that the women will retain full control even when outsiders enter in to offer assistance. It is important to stress the value of local knowledge as to not get overrun by outsiders (Isaac, 1996). If outside funding is solicited there is always a chance that there may be restrictions regarding the use of funding and the possibility of official interference. Also, the women will need to decide whether or not they want to use an initial subsidy. If they chose to go the route of a subsidy then there needs to be a plan on how to become self-sufficient to avoid long-term dependence on an outside source (Harper, 2000). Acknowledging potential roadblocks and then coming to an agreement on how to handle issues when they arise will help to ensure the success of this project.

I also recommend partnering with the mayor, Casa de Salud and the woman who works with the government to dispense financial support to garner their support of the project. It will help to legitimize the project in the eyes of potential funders. Partnerships will increase the probability that the project will benefit not only the women but also the entire community of Mezquital including the greater border region. During the application process I recommend that the women are very specific about the work they are already doing in the community to highlight to the funders that they have taken the time to prepare and lay a solid foundation that will ensure future success.

III. Pursue strategic community partnerships.

Given the limited financial resources strategic partnerships will be imperative and will help with the long-term sustainability of the project. During a conversation with Kati, she expressed her desire to see the community organize by way of supportive networks on a project of this nature. She envisions the childcare center partnering with other businesses in the village to get discounts on food and supplies. More specifically, if the childcare center makes a long-term commitment to purchasing goods locally from a small grocery store then they could possibly get the goods at a reduced price. Not only could there be partnerships with local businesses, but Kati suggested community members could donate items like benches, blankets, and other necessities that the childcare cooperative may need. She suggested establishing a community garden that could grow food for the childcare center.

This childcare cooperative has the potential to create economic multipliers within the community. If the women decide to pursue these partnerships I recommend that the women start by making a list of the various businesses in the village and then arrange meetings with each business owner to discuss how both entities can work together. I would also start networking with other community members who have the skills to meet other various needs. This will help connect people and could also serve as a great point to highlight on funding applications.

IV. Detailed Needs Assessment for Childcare Center.

I recommend that the women in the village complete a detailed needs assessment regarding the needs of families with children in the community. This will help inform

decisions on what services the childcare cooperative will offer. This assessment will allow for a better understanding of the financial situation of many of the communities families especially as many women suggested having a sliding scale for payments. Additionally, this assessment will help determine what age groups of children have a need for this type of service. The majority of childcare centers in nearby cities have age limits. However, the women would like for their center to be open for older children. To get this started I recommend that the women who have previous experience working at a childcare center help create the assessment as they have a solid understanding about what a childcare center can provide and have knowledge about what families look for in terms of services.

V. Assessment of individual and group skill set.

An element of the final community meeting was to highlight the different skills and talents of the participants. After that I used a community building exercise to highlight the interconnectedness of the different women and display how all their talents could be combined for use in the childcare cooperative. The women have a diverse skill set, but I would recommend that the women complete a more extensive assessment on how all of their skills can be applied to the task at hand. This will be instrumental in identifying what skills require further development. I recommend compiling a list of all the different tasks and skills necessary to initiate and maintain the childcare cooperative. An honest assessment will help to ensure that the cooperative is run efficiently and effectively. This is an opportunity for skill development. For example, a few women suggested the need for business training. Perhaps successful business owners in the village could offer assistance or even classes on how to create a business plan.

VI. Investigate government regulations.

There are specific codes and regulations that must be followed and implemented in order to qualify as a certified childcare center. A few women have experience working in other childcare centers and as such will have a base knowledge on what the restrictions and codes are. I recommend that a few women form a task group to investigate the regulations so that as this process moves along the group is abiding by the proper regulations and will help to avoid any curve balls at the end.

I recommend that the participants review the proposed action steps to ensure that the steps encompass all of the needs they identified in the final community meeting. If new needs are identified they can be added. After a discussion the women should create a timeline that prioritizes the different tasks and creates deadlines for the task groups to report back on the findings. This will help move the process along ensuring the women maintain momentum. Additionally, having regular meetings will create the space for problem solving if women encounter roadblocks in any of the steps. I believe all of these recommendations will aid in moving this process along and ensuring that it moves into the implementation stage.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

The findings in this thesis give a glimpse of a growing movement of communities banding together to alleviate their current situation and invest in the future. The historical legacies of oppression and inequality have shaped the present situation in Mezquital, but now is the time for these women to pursue another path. While problems persist of economic instability, and despite minimal educational options for youth and a lack of public services, the women in Mezquital have created alternative income generating ideas that they are actively pursuing. The childcare cooperative proposed by the women aims to alleviate the problem of high unemployment that will create positive multipliers both economically and socially.

This entire document bridges the gap between the theoretical and empirical as the stories of the women shine light on the theories that attempt to explain their situation. This is evidenced in a variety of aspects. For example, Julia's analysis of the triple role of women was spot on with what the literature describes. Additionally, the literature speaks to the interrelatedness of poverty and women, which is exemplified in my data as many women are struggling to make ends meet on their own. It is evident how the theory of integration has led many women to believe that working in the fields or fabricas would lead to economic independence and empowerment. Instead of reaping the benefits of capitalist development most women find themselves located between the marginalization and exploitation theories as they face underemployment, gender discrimination in some productive sectors, dependence on men for resources, and exploitative work conditions due to the realities of capitalism and patriarchal norms.

Throughout the participatory process I noted how the experiences of women in development processes are related to the WID and GAD approaches. Women in Mezquital have rarely, if ever, been incorporated into the development process. Their role has been characterized as recipients of donations or programs. The participation of women in my research process mirrors the ideals of GAD as the local knowledge and ideas of this disadvantaged community were respected and women were allowed to be key decision makers.

A common thread of this thesis relates to the ability of ideals to inform and shape reality. One goal of this research was to allow these women to dream and imagine how their economic situation could be transformed into something much less exploitative. A main component of this research was to exemplify the ability of women to increase not only their personal agency but also their group agency. In *Breaking the Poverty Cycle* the authors shared that, “empowerment has also been defined as a means of enhancing an individual’s or groups capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Pick and Sirkin, 2010). The women come from a variety of backgrounds with different employment experiences and education levels all of which have contributed in some form to their various levels of disempowerment. The findings of this case study reveal experiences of increased empowerment for both individuals and the group.

I think that as a group the women increased their social capital through increased social networks and support systems as the interconnectedness of the different women was highlighted throughout the process. Additionally, as the women united and brainstormed alternative income generating opportunities they experienced increased

group agency. Some of the women were more interested in pursuing their own projects, but quite a few women wanted to pursue a group project. Betsa commented that she wanted to have a business where all the women could work together to avoid the typical top down hierarchical structure common to most businesses. During the final community meeting, Melissa explained that even if nothing directly derives from this process that at least the women are now communicating as a group, working together and have momentum going towards creating actual change.

Individual agency was also increased as women began to dream about their futures. During my conversation with Sara she was hesitant at first to imagine what her dream job would be, but after a while she couldn't stop talking. It was encouraging to see a woman who was denied access to education by her father to finally start dreaming about what she would like to do for herself and what would make her happy. This is the beginning of a process for many women as they start to discover their dreams and take an active role in making them a reality as they shape their futures.

The capstone of this process is that the ideas and dreams of the women would translate into action. My role in this process is coming to an end; it is now in the hands of the women. Eleanor Roosevelt stated, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."⁴ The women in Mezquital have the strength, the talent and the vision to take their ideas and translate them into various projects that will benefit generations to come.

⁴ Available at:
http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/e/eleanor_roosevelt.html.

Appendix A:

Reunion Comunitaria para mujeres

**Una oportunidad para discutir
alternativas de ingreso y generar
actividades.**

**Donde:
Iglesia Sinai in
Mezquital**

**Cuando: 17 de
Septiembre 2011 a las
10 de la mañana.**

Yo, Kristen Mattila, estudiante de la Universidad de Nuevo México, estaré presentando una reunión comunitaria con el propósito de buscar alternativas de trabajos para las mujeres del Mezquital, México. Las alternativas pueden ser microfinanzas y modelos cooperativos. El objetivo de esta investigación es buscar mas oportunidades para el desarrollo económico y así también poder presentar mi tesis y obtener la maestría.

Después de la reunión habrán mas oportunidades para participar y presentar mas opciones para la mejora de la misma.

**Todas están invitadas asistir y partici-
par voluntariamente.**



**Te gustaria
discutir diferentes
alternativas para
ganarte la vida?
Que ideas tienes
para tu futuro?
Le invito a asistir
e intercambiar sus
diferentes puntos
de vistas!**

Appendix B:

Questions for November Interview:

- 1) What have your families being doing historically for work? En todo este tiempo en que has trabajado? Su familia? Ha cambiado mucho de trabajo en los ultimos anos? De que trabajas o a que dedicas? Tienes beneficios? Por ejemplo si pierdes su trabajo recibes subsidio de desempleo o seguro de enfermedad?
- 2) Have you seen a change in the opportunities available to your parents or grandparents to what is available for you today? En la actualidad, has visto algun cambio en cuanto a las oportunidades que tenian tus abuelos o padres y las oportunidades que se te presentan hoy en dia? En el futuro, en su opinion, cuales seran los oportunidades para tus hijos.
- 3) What is your education level? Cual es tu nivel de la educación? Porque no continuaste con la escuela? Si tuvieras Si podría, volviera a la escuela?
- 4) Who works in the family? Who contributes? Como divide los trabajos en la casa? Quien controla las finanzas ? Quien trabaja en sus familia fuera de la casa? Quienes contribuyen a pagar los gastos de la casa?
- 5) What options do you see for your children's future when they enter the work force? Cuales son las oportunidades de trabajos que ves en el futuro para sus hijos e hijas? Y le educación?
- 6) Ideally, if you could have any job what would you do? Si pudiera escoger entre cualquier trabajo cual seria el ideal?

- 7) How could you make that a reality? Como podrias hacer esto una realidad?
Cuales son los recursos que necesitas para hacer su trabajo ideal una realidad?
- 8) What are barriers that you see to accomplishing this? What support would you need?
- 9) Can I ask about income? Cuanto ganas actualmente en tu trabajo?
- 10) En Mezquital hay trabajos sostenibles para que la gente sigan viviendo aqui?
Para que la gente tiene un trabajo todo el ano? Cuales son obstáculos que ves? En relacion a trabajos estables.
- 11) Para que necesitas ahorrar dinero? Has podido ahorrar dinero para el futuro? These are additional questions that may clarify the first one if they don't have an answer: Tienes los recursos para ahorrar dinero para la educacion futuro de tus hijos? O ahorras para que pueda tener dinero si al caso que pierdas su trabajo?
- 12) Alguna vez, has podido o tratado de recibir un prestamo de un banco? Si no, sabes si hay lugares donde puedes obtener un prestamo?
- 13) Cuales son las cosas buenas que ves en tu comunidad- hablando de organizaciones comuntarios, la gente, trabajos, ect. Que hace bien la comunidad? Cual es la fuerza de la comunidad? O algo que ves en otras comunidades que quieres para su comunidad?
- 14) Cuales son los necesidades de la comunidad? Que necesitas para traer vitalidad a la comunidad? Que otras posibilidades o opciones existen para ganarse la vida en al comunidad?

- 15) Como ves la relación entre Mexico y los EEUU? These are additional questions for clarification: Como podria Mexico ser independiente de los EEUU? Como crees que ambos paises pueden trabajar juntos para mejorar la economica?
- 16) Cuales son los trabajos que tiene las mujeres? Tiene responsabilidades de la casa, trabajando fuera de la casa ganando un sueldo y también para organizaciones sociales como la iglesia. En su opinión hay una "idea cultural" de la idea de tener la mujer trabajando afuera de la casa.
- 17) Como será muy beneficioso tener un trabajo donde ganas mas dinero? Como podra beneficiar su familia?
- 18) Do you feel you have the same access to resources as men in terms of job access and wages? En su opinion, hay igualdad de oportunidades, en terminos de trabajos.
- 19) What are the best jobs that people have in the community? What makes these jobs ideal? Cuales son los trabajos ideales en la comunidad? Que es de estas trabajos que lo hacen ser ideal?
- 20) Puedes comparar la situación entre las mujeres y hombres en la comunidad?
- 21) Que es tu experiencia con hogares con solo una mujer o sea la madre es la cabeza de la familia? Fue criado en un hogar asi o conoces a familias asi? Que piensas sobre la situacion de los hogares donde solo hay una mujer trabajando—en la ausencia de un hombre? Es su situacion mejor o peor a los que tiene dos personas. Cuales son las diferencias? Como ha sido creativas las mujeres que son las únicas la familia?

- 22) En la reunión comunitario, algunas mujeres hablaron de la idea de una cooperativa—un negocio colectiva controlada por un grupo de mujeres donde todos benefician igual que los otros. Has visto estos tipos de organizaciones en la comunidad. Cuales son los pros y los contras sobre este tipo negocio?
- 23) Has visto que la situación de las mujeres que estan cambiando para lo mejor. Cuales son la fuerzas que tienen la mujeres?

Appendix C:

Name and Education Level	Future Education of Children	Financial Control in the Household	Alternative Income Generating Options
Luisa: She finished primary education. She is continuing adult education through a federal government program. She is currently unemployed	She wants her children to continue to the university level so they can have a career and have a better job that working in the fields. She believes education is the best thing she can give to her children.	She lives with her brother and her mother. Her brother works and her mother controls the finances. Sometimes she will pick up recyclables on the side of the highway to earn extra money.	She would like to open a candy store. There is a need in the community for such a store.
Lupe: She finished 8 th grade. She is currently unemployed.	She thinks that her children need to study if they want to get a job. There will be more opportunities for my children and better jobs.	Her and her husband control the finances in the household. Her husband is the only one contributing to the finances. She rarely works	She enjoys caring for children and often cares for her nieces and nephews. She would like to make this a job by starting a childcare center.
Rosa: She received a business administration degree. She is currently unemployed.	One of her daughters went to college, but can't get a job. She wants all of her daughters to advance to the university level.	Her husband is the only one working in the family.	She would like to go back to school to get computer skills so she can find a job doing what she went to school for.
Maria: She finished 8 th grade and is currently working in the lettuce fields.		She lives with her parents. Maria and her father contribute and control the finances .	She would like a job where she doesn't have to get up so early in the morning and a job where it isn't so cold. She thought that a child care center could be an option.
Sara: Finished third grade. She has a permanent visa to work in the United States.	One of her daughters went to the university and became a teacher. She thinks that children need to study. She saves for her grandchildren so they can study and not have to work	Sara, her husband, daughter, and son all contribute to the finances. Sara controls the finances.	Her dream would be to have a sewing business. She has a sewing machine and loves to sew. She studied 'corte y confeccion' sewing and tailoring. She would like to learn how to make

	tough jobs.		dresses.
Mimi: She finished 8 th grade and is currently working in the lettuce fields.		Her husband works and she controls the finances.	She would like to have paperleria or a paperstore.
Kati: Finished 8 th grade and would like to return to technical school. She has never been employed.		Her husband works and then gives her the money and she pays all the bills.	She would like to go back to school and study to be a beautician and then open up a beauty salon in the village.
Julia: She went to college in the United States, but didn't complete her degree. She wants to go back to school and get a degree in secondary education. She is currently unemployed.	She explained that most people want to send their kids to school, but they don't have money.	Her husband is the only one working and she is in control of how the money is spent.	She would like to go back to school and then open up an academy or a private school where she would teach English.
Priscilla: She finished primary school. She is currently unemployed. She has a sewing machine and sometimes people will bring her clothes to sew and fix. This allows her to earn a little money.	For youth to continue with school Mezquital needs to get a middle school.	She is the only one who makes money and she controls the finances.	She would like to care for children. One idea is a childcare center.
Diana: She finished 8 th grade. She is currently employed in the lettuce fields.	Her children will probably go to middle school. High school and the university are too expensive. If she had enough money she would save for her children's education	Her father, mother (Sara), brother, and herself all contribute to finances. She mother controls the finances.	She doesn't want to work in the fields because you have to get up so early. She would like to own a business so she could work from home.
Betsa: She went to the university and got a degree in secondary education with a focus on science education. She is currently working as a substitute teacher	For the youth who continue to study there is a possibility that there will be careers for them.	Three people in her family work and they all help with the expenses. Her mother is in control of administering the finances.	Ideally she would like to work in her career. But she has always been fascinated by business. She would like to open a business that would benefit the

and sells hotdogs.			community. She hopes this project could serve as a model for other communities in similar situations.
Berta: She finished 8 th grade and would like to continue her education to become a nurse. She is unemployed.	As school is more available there are more job opportunities like a supervisor. She explained the those who are more educated are able to find jobs with better working conditions.	Her husband works and she controls the finances.	She would like to get her masters or a doctorate in nursing. She studied for two years and would like to finish. She also sees a need for an “estancia infantil” and would like to open one in the community.
Clara: She finished up to fifth grade. She is currently employed in the onion fields.	She children didn't finish their career schooling because there wasn't enough money.	Her husband works and she administers the finances.	She would like to open a childcare center. There is a need in the community as people leave to work and have no where to leave their children.
Sandra: She finished sixth grade. She is unemployed.	There are more opportunities for education. In some cases there are scholarships available.	Her husband works and they both control the finances.	She would like to sell her arts and crafts. She also likes to cook and would like to own a restaurant.
Melissa: She finished eighth grade. She is currently employed in the onion fields.	It is very expensive to send your children to high school or the university. Also, transportation is a barrier to getting kids to school..	Her and her husband both work and contribute and control the finances.	She likes to help sick people and take care of kids. She would like to open a childcare center in the village or near the fields where people work. People have to wake up in the middle of the night to leave for work and they need some place for their children to stay. It would be a good idea to have the center near the fields so children are

			closer to their parents.
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Appendix D:

The following is a list of potential funders

- **Borderless:** This is a faith-based organization that has been working with the community for the past 15 years. Leaders in this organization have expressed interest in helping fund a project of this nature. Due to their prior involvement with this community and their established relationships, this option seems quite viable. I would recommend pursuing this option.
- **Inter American Foundation (IAF)** is an agency of the United States government. This organization is dedicated to improving the well-being and civic engagement of the organized poor in Latin America and the Caribbean. The IAF issues grants directly to grassroots groups in that region. Part of their mission is to support self-help efforts aimed at increasing individual development. They also have a commitment to provide opportunities for wider community participation in development projects. I would recommend partnering with a local agency like La Casa de Salud to pursue this funding. Many IAF grants are awarded to organizations already in existence and a partnership would be a strategic move. The following link will direct to the webpage that describes the different organizations in Mexico that have received funding: <http://www.iaf.gov/DevelopmentGrants.aspx>. For more information on the application process, see this website for grant application guidelines: <http://www.iaf.gov/DevelopmentGrants>. Additionally, the IAF established the U.S.-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership that seeks to

provide financial assistance for development programs aimed at improving the quality of life in disadvantaged border communities. The project ideas from the women in Mezquital could fall under this umbrella and this could serve as an avenue for getting funding for the projects. See this website for more information: <http://www.borderpartnership.org/>.

- **OXFAM** is an international organization committed to helping people in poverty exercise their human rights and take control of their lives. One aspect of their work is development and they work with communities and local partners on long-term projects to eradicate poverty. The purpose of OXFAM is to empower people to create a future that is secure, just, and free from poverty. The potential project in Mezquital is about the women creating a sustainable future for their community by providing for economic and social needs. This organization should be further explored as an option for securing financing for the program. See <http://www.oxfamMexico.org/oxfam/> for more information. I have provided additional contact information below. For further inquiries email: contacto@oxfamMexico.org or call: +525556873002/56873203.
- **Los Niños International:** Los Niños is a community-based organization that seeks to improve the lives of those living in poverty by creating social and economic opportunities and seeks to help people realize their potential as entrepreneurs. They use a participatory process in which communities identify their needs and then organize themselves to improve their

situations. They have been working in the border region for over 28 years and they offer micro-credit and micro-enterprise programs. Since the project thus far has been based in a participatory process and seeks to empower women in the border regions to be active in creating the solutions for their communities' needs this organization seems like a natural fit. See this website for more information about obtaining financial assistance:

<http://www.losninosintl.org/contact.php>.

- **CHEMONICS:** They operate as a part of the U.S. Agency for International Development on projects addressing needs related to health, environmental management, gender, democracy, etc. CHEMONICS offers microloans and technical assistances to businesses. The project ideas of the women in Mezquital seem to fall under a variety of the ideals held by CHEMONICS such as financial services, education, health and gender. It is advised to explore this organization as a source of funding and perhaps technical assistance if the women see fit. See the following website for more information:

http://marketstandards.chemonics.net/projects/projects_region.asp?region_id={6F03A3B3-F2AB-4851-A6D0-C728FBE87D14}.

- **VIA International** is non-profit organization that is committed to building, “paths to self-reliance for an interdependent world” (<http://www.viainternational.org/>). VIA supports a variety of projects with the goal of helping community members become active agents in changing

their communities. One particular aspect of their work is microcredit and microenterprise supports. VIA has programs in Mexico and is looking to expand opportunities in the border regions. According to their website VIA has offered financial support for, “ingredients and materials for the sale of tamales, pizza, confections, honey and derivatives, and other home-produced items. Resale items include sale of kitchen items, candy and miscellaneous snack items, paper and personal hygiene products, clothing, jewelry, shoes and purses, and cosmetics” (<http://viainternational.org>). Since some of the women are proposing ideas that seek to achieve both economic and social goals through a community driven process this organization will be a good fit. The following website has contact information regarding programs and funding: <http://www.viainternational.org/index.html>.

- **The Ford Foundation** works with people who are on the frontlines of creating social change. They work in Mexico on a variety of projects. One of the elements of their projects in Mexico is migration and mitigating the problems associated with the mass migrations north. Mezquital is situated in the border region and this project could serve as a way to create sustainable communities in northern Mexico in a time when the border is characterized by violence. This community driven program seeks to alleviate the issues of unemployment in the village and to provide social services by caring for children. In essence this project seeks to create a safer, less violent, and sustainable border region.

For more information on the grant process see the following website:

<http://www.fordfoundation.org/regions/mexico-and-central-america> or

email: ford-mexico@fordfoundation.org

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