Promoting Youth Development in a Territorial Context: The Case of the Yeguare Region, Honduras

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine the impacts of the implementation of a territorial model of development in the Yeguare Region of Honduras. The research question looked to determine the impact of the territorial approach on the youth development of the region. The purpose was achieved through the following research question: (a) What has been the impact of the youth participation, and vocational education for the youth in the Yeguare Region? This study used mix methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods permitted to gather and analyze different types of data of the project. The quantitative analysis included descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative analysis elaborated and expanded the quantitative analysis.

Three themes related to the impact of the territorial model of development in the Yeguare Region emerged during the research. Youth leadership and entrepreneurship, youth expectations and future plans, and occupational status and welfare of the families were the emergent themes for youth development.

The contribution of this study to the field of sustainable development was to expand the knowledge about the impacts of a territorial model of development in rural Honduras. Also, policymakers and project stakeholders may use this information to plan, design and implement effective development programs, and may decrease project expenditures, increase income, and benefit the communities.

Keywords: Youth development, Honduras, territorial approach, international development
Introduction

The World Bank (2006b) describes Honduras as one of the poorest countries in Latin America with more than 50 percent of its population below the poverty line. Also, the country has one of the highest rates of inequality in Latin America. Poverty and inequality have specially been aggravated by natural disasters (like Hurricane Mitch in 1998) because the poor commonly live of small-scale agriculture in rural areas.

After the disaster of Hurricane Mitch, Honduras implemented the Poverty Strategy Reduction (PRS) in consultation with civil society and donors. The PRS looks for reducing extreme poverty by half by 2015 (World Bank, 2006b). These actions have allowed Honduras to experience positive economic growth during the last decade averaging three percent annually. However, poverty and inequality have remained constant since 1998 (World Bank, 2006a).

Improvements in its economic indicators have permitted Honduras to reach the HIP (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) Completion point and to benefit from the MDRI (Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) in 2006. However these achievements do not guarantee that Honduras will be able to target the Millennium Development Goals (World Bank, 2006b).

The World Bank (2006b) considers that Honduras must accelerate its economic growth to levels of five or six percent per year. Also, the country needs to be wiser in spending the PRS funds. The World Bank points that Honduras should increase productivity of rural areas and diversify the sources of rural incomes, considering that most of the poor live in rural areas and depend of agricultural activities.

Rural poverty persists in Latin America despite availability of funds focused on reducing poverty and inequality. Existing development models have failed and there exists a demand for alternative models (De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2004). A new approach to development should consider marginal and favorable areas, integrate rural and urban activities in a territorial dimension and promote regional economic projects (De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2000). This new development model has been defined as a territorial approach to development and has been introduced in rural areas of Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras through the Micro-regions Strategy (De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2004). However there exists limited research that analyzes the impacts of the territorial approach in the development of rural areas of Latin America.

Statement of the Problem

The main concern is whether the five counties forming the basis of this study, Guinope, San Antonio de Oriente, Yuscaran, Moroceli y la Villa de San Francisco, have experienced changes in youth development since 2004. Guinope, San Antonio de Oriente, Yuscaran, Moroceli y la Villa de San Francisco are the five counties of the Yeguare Region assisted by the Yeguare Initiative Project (YIP), a Kellogg Foundation-funded and Zamorano University-implemented project. While these counties have experienced visible changes in the involvement of the youth in the communities, generation of local alliances to promote development and creation of business opportunities over the last 4 years, shortfalls in training, economic resources and following up could negatively affect the future of the initiatives. This study plays two roles. From a conceptual point of view the study expands the research that analyzes the impacts of the territorial approach in youth development in rural areas of Latin America. From an operative point of view the study plays a role in assessing the changes and viability of those changes in the counties, particularly in light of the impending withdrawal of the Yeguare Initiative Project from Honduras in August, 2008. If the communities are unable to sustain the benefits from the
initiatives promoted by the Yeguare Initiative Project they will come back to their original situation. The changes in the livelihood of the habitants of the region would depend on the sustainability of the positive changes.

**Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this research is to determine the impacts of the implementation of a territorial approach of development in the Yeguare Region of Honduras. The research questions look to determine the impact of the territorial model for its youth development component (Falck, 2006). The purpose would be achieved through the following research questions:

1. What has been the impact of the youth participation, and vocational education for the youth in the Yeguare Region?

**Methodology**

This research used mix methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods permitted to gather and analyze different types of data of the project. The procedure for the analysis was drawn from Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), Patton (2002) and Merriam (1998). This study was conducted in the Yeguare Initiative Project in the Yeguare Region of Honduras. This project was implemented in 2004 - 2008 by Zamorano University with the economic support of the Kellogg Foundation. The following is a detail description of the quantitative and qualitative methods that were used.

**Delimitations**

The researcher delimited the study to communities of five counties of the Yeguare Region of Honduras. The five counties: San Antonio de Oriente, Guinope, Yuscaran, La Villa de San Francisco and Moroceli represent the locations where the Yeguare Initiative Project was implemented. The study included 61 participants during the period May – June 2008. Women and men who were involved in the Yeguare Initiative Project participated in the study.

**Potential Sample/Respondants**

This research study used a panel survey sampling technique. The panel survey is a longitudinal survey design in which the researcher examines the same people over time (Creswell, 2008). The advantage of this type of study is that the individuals studied will be the same each time, allowing the researcher to determine actual changes in specific individuals. This sample was appropriate because this study did not look to generalize its results (Fraenkel & Warren, 2006; Merriam, 1998), and the purpose of the study was to discover, understand and gain insight about the impacts of the territorial approach of development in Honduras.

The original sample size was 169 people from all of the five counties of the Yeguare Region. This research tried to use the same sample that the Kellogg Foundation used in 2006 to develop the baseline for the project but logistics constraints reduced the sample to 63 participants. Using the same sample permitted the researcher to apply the one group pretest-posttest analysis (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The selected sample identified respondents that could give rich information for the study. Also, the sample size looked to represent the questions being asked, the data gathering, research progress and available resources.
This study defined potential respondents according to the research questions. The questions were linked to the youth development component of the development model being studied.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

Data was collected during May, 2008. The researcher had had past involvement with the project during the years and he had persistent observation during the research process. The researcher used archival data from the period July 2004 – May, 2008. Data came from three different sources: (a) Long – term observation, (b) semi-structured interviews, and (c) review of documents. A four-section instrument was used to collect data from the respondents, including the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents. The instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts consisting of the dissertation committee members of the researcher and officers of the Kellogg Foundation and Zamorano University. The instrument was tested for validity and reliability in May, 2008 upon IRB procedures approval.

**Measures of Quality**

To have quality in the research process the researcher had kept permanent contact with the territorial model project and its stakeholders. The researcher had lived in the region for several years having past involvement with the project over the years. Specifically, the researcher spent one month (July – August, 2007) visiting beneficiaries of the project and he spent four more months in the communities in February-May, 2008.

The study applied trustworthiness quality criteria. These criteria include transferability, dependability, credibility, and confirmability. Transferability was achieved by giving specific details of the research. Then others would be able to decide if the findings are applicable to other cases. Even when this study did not look for generalizing the findings, some social and economical generalizations could be drawn to similar communities in the region. Dependability was addressed by keeping complete records of the data collected and analysis procedures. Credibility was achieved through peer debriefing and stakeholders checking. The researcher conducted an audit trail that compiles the research journal, notes and peer debriefing notes. Confirmability was addressed by supporting conclusions and interpretations with excerpts from the raw data.

**Data Analysis**

The quantitative analysis included descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis included measures of central tendency, hypothesis testing and non-parametrical techniques for categorical data (Chi-squared and Fishers’ exact test). This analysis defined changes in the Yeguare Region resulting from the implementation of the territorial model.

Qualitative analysis elaborated and expanded the quantitative analysis. Merriam (1998) states that qualitative research is emergent. This means that data collection and analysis are recursive and dynamic. The researcher had permanently analyzed the data since the beginning of the investigation. This study developed a case study representative of the impact of the territorial model in the Yeguare Region. The case studied facilitated comparisons of macro-social phenomena cases. This technique allowed to represent the case as a combination of causal and outcome conditions that the quantitative analysis fails to identify.
Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumed that participants were involved in the Yeguare Initiative Project since its implementation. Participants were free to choose their participation and to express their own opinions and perceptions about the impact of the project. Zamorano University and the Kellogg Foundation provided all the necessary resources to achieve the objectives of the research.

This study was limited by different constraints. The investigation used a sample that could not be representative for communities outside of the Yeguare Region. Time and budget constraints affected the number of people who were interviewed. Participants could not completely express their opinion and feeling about the Yeguare Initiative Project due to cultural reasons. Being the researcher an outsider could not be able to understand the dynamic and structure of the Yeguare Region.

Results

The research question sought to determine the impacts of the youth participation and vocational education for the youth in the Yeguare Region. In answering this research question, the researcher interviewed 15 youth of the region who have been involved in the project since 2004. Participants included 10 women and 3 men. Respondents’ ages ranged from 15-30 years old. The participants were interviewed about their knowledge and perceptions of the social, economic and political initiatives that they have developed in the region, the youth capabilities to implement those initiatives, the influence of the initiatives on the probability of occurrence of the future plans of the youth, reasons for changes in the situation of their families, participation in youth organizations, and characteristics of the jobs that they hold.

The Yeguare Initiative Project considered the youth as the key element to promote development in the region. This section identified changes in the roles the youth played in the development of the Yeguare Region. The researcher analyzed the responses of the participants and three themes emerged from the analysis. The emergent themes were: youth leadership and entrepreneurship, youth expectations and future plans, and occupational status and welfare of the families.

Youth Leadership and Entrepreneurship

The Yeguare Initiative Project Strategic Plan conceived the youth as the center of the model of the territorial model of development in the region (Documents 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). The Yeguare Initiative Project promoted youth leadership and entrepreneurship through the support of youth organizations in the region. In 2008 the project continued supporting 11 youth organizations. The 11 youth organizations involved 573 youth, 298 men and 275 women. The project helped the groups in defining their vision and mission, developing their annual plans and structuring their organization. The youth organizations focused their work in social service projects, entrepreneur activities, leadership development and, cultural performances (Document 1). Some of the most recognized organizations in the region were: La Roca (El Jicarito, San Antonio de Oriente), Cultural Center (Yuscaran), Moroceli Youth Network (Moroceli) and COMVIDA (Communication for Life) (Yuscaran).

The youth appreciated their participation in youth organizations and entrepreneur activities and considered them as very important for their future. Participant 31 stated that “participating in a group has allowed me to help the youth in the development of the community” and participant 19 shared that “being a member of the ROCA group I have learned to respect each other, to help my neighbors and to value my capabilities.”
The youth in the Yeguare Region developed their leadership skills through their participation in youth and student organizations and activities. Also, the youth received several leadership workshops during the life of the project (Document 1). Participant 63 mentioned that “during my time in the Cultural Center I have improved my leadership capabilities like oral expression and training” while participant 11 stated, “The Moroceli Youth Network has given me additional qualifications like leadership and speaking qualifications.”

The researcher identified 11 youth organization in the Yeguare Region. Most of them were created in 2002. By 2004 the organizations did not have a consolidated structure, objectives and action plans. Participants indicated that the Yeguare Project has been very helpful in building capabilities for their organizations through training sessions and permanent follow up of their actions (Documents 1, 19, 20 and 21; Participants 11, 23 and 62).

By 2008 the youth organizations had been able to define their objectives and to implement actions related to them. However, the organizations had not defined their mission, vision and area of influence. Also, the communities were not completely aware of their activities. Participants considered that the implementation of formal programs and integration as part of the communities would be the next stage in the development of their organization upon consolidation of their structure and definition of their goals (Documents 1, 19, 20 and 21; Participants 11, 4 and 63).

Participant 21 stated, “My organization planted trees and cleaned the streets of the village. We believe we can create a better environment and improve the daily life of everybody here with our actions.” Most of the participants did similar social service activities like participant 21’s organization. Youth organizations saw their organizations as a channel to improve and be part of the community. Since 2004, the participants considered the youth had taken relevant roles in the development of the villages. Participant 23 stated, “We have understood our role in the communities. With our actions we are showing to the adults that we are able to communicate, to work as a team and most important to be part of the change of the community.”

Youth organizations realized the importance of moving forward and going beyond the borders of their communities. Youth organizations in the Yeguare Region have become part of national youth initiatives like the National Youth Forum. Participants considered that this forum allowed them to expand their political, cultural, community and religious initiatives in favor of the well being of the region (Participants 31, 32, and 35).

The youth developed social, economic and political activities in their communities. Most of them participated in a wide range of social service activities like health prevention, cleaning of their communities and protection of the forests. Participants involved in social service initiatives were motivated by their strong commitment with the villages and their desire to be better citizens (Documents 19, 20 and 21). Participant 27 shared that “working together in building the Cultural Center we have improved our community but also we have been able to work as a team and (personally) I have a better self-esteem now.”

A reduced group of the participants have been involved in political activities. Their participation was related to supporting candidates during the election process. They were mostly motivated by their own interests rather than by the well being of the community. The youth considered that being part of a political campaign they would have better chances to get a job.

A considerable number of participants were involved in economic activities. In 2004, their economic activities were very simple and included the sale of raw agricultural products and groceries, and the offer of maintenance services for homes and rural properties. Since that time,
the Yeguare Initiative Project made important efforts to develop those isolated (and very small) business ideas and transform those unorganized economic activities in well-structured and organized small business. By 2008, the experiences were diverse in type and results. Participant 24 mentioned that “the project supported our initiatives and we had been able to become economic sustainable” and participant 4 stated, “The project helped us to get the funds for the building of the community computer center. Now, we have learned to manage the center and we provide a good service to the students and people from the village.” However, most of the economic initiatives did not give the expected step forward or they just simply lost interest. Participant 27 shared, “My organization plans parties and events in the community to support our current activities like celebration of mothers’ day or cultural nights. We are not interested in developing businesses.” Participants also shared their experiences related to non-successful economic activities. Participant 19 mentioned, “My group lost motivation and we separated. So, we had to close our small jelly business” and participant 11 stated, “Our bakery idea died even before we started the business. This was not a money related problem. We just lost interest.”

**Youth Expectations and Future Plans**

During the needs assessment analysis the Yeguare Initiative concluded that most of the youth had limited and short-term expectations for their future. The Initiative had a priority to motivate the youth to establish higher expectations for their life. Also, the Initiative cared about supporting the youth to achieve their goals. Since 2004 the Initiative provided and promoted formal and continuing education, health education and services, economic initiatives and leadership workshops for the youth. The Initiative considered that these activities would generate a favorable environment for the youth to feel motivated to accomplish their goals (Documents 1, 2, 19, 20 and 21).

Since 2004, youth expectations have remained similar. Most of the youth gave priority to start or finish their education. Participant 63 stated, “I want to go to college and get my BS in Pedagogy” while participant 23 shared that he “wanted to finish med school and to get a specialization in pediatrics.” The second priority for the youth was to get a job. Participant 62 mentioned that “after finishing my studies, I would like to get a good job and start my family” and participant 28 showed her interests in “starting my own business.”

Even though when the youth expectations have not changed during the last four years, they felt more confident about themselves. Participant 11 stated, “I feel a change in my life. I have learned how to express myself appropriately and I have become a leader between my friends. These abilities would help me to achieve my goals.” The researcher could perceive a positive attitude in the youth to pursue their objectives, however several economic (level of income of the families), cultural (gender discrimination) and social (racism) barriers appear to be the main obstacles to the youth future aspirations (Document 1).

**Occupational Status and Welfare of the Families**

Most of the youth perceived that their families’ situation had improved in different ways. The youth mentioned positive changes in the economic situation and the integration of the families. New job opportunities (Participants 4, 32, 63, 27 and 28) and the possibility of starting their own businesses (Participants 23 and 19) were the main reason for improvements in the families’ economies. The youth also perceived better communication with their families. They stated that the influence of the church, maturity of the families and openness of the parents had motivated important changes in the family’s environment (Participants 11 and 21).
Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis identified three emergent themes related to youth development. The themes were youth leadership and entrepreneurship, youth expectations and future plans, and occupational status and welfare of the families.

Youth Leadership and Entrepreneurship

The Yeguare Initiative Project gave priority to youth development to achieve its strategic objectives. Creation, development and strengthening of youth organizations were the most important means to promote youth development (Crave & El Sawi, 2001). In 2008 the Yeguare Initiative continued supporting 11 youth organizations that involved 573 youth. The conclusion is that youth organizations became an effective way to promote youth leadership and entrepreneurship in the Yeguare Region. Therefore it is recommended that future development initiatives continue to involve the youth as key actors of change in the Yeguare Region.

A second key finding was the positive perception of the youth about their participation in youth and student organizations, and entrepreneur activities. In 2008 the youth considered that they were able to develop leadership and entrepreneurship skills. Also, the youth perceived their participation in youth organizations was very important in their personal development. The conclusion is that youth organizations permit the youth to develop personal skills. Therefore it is recommended that development programs use youth organizations as a mechanism to develop the youth capabilities, thus motivate them to involve in the development of their communities.

A third key finding was that youth organizations are still in the process of development and they are not implementing formal development programs yet. In 2008 youth organizations had been able to define their objectives and to implement actions related to them but the organizations had not defined their mission, vision and area of influence. However, participants recognized that the Yeguare Initiative had been very helpful in building capabilities for their organizations through training sessions and permanent follow up of their actions. The conclusion is that the youth organizations have not developed a solid structure and the required capabilities to lead development programs, and they are still in a process of consolidation as organizations. Therefore, it is recommended to continue strengthening, supporting and following up youth organizations until they become self-sustainable.

A fourth key finding was the limited participation of the youth in social and politic organizations. In 2008 youth organizations had started to involved in national youth initiatives like the National Youth Forum. Participants considered that participating in the forum allowed them to expand their political, cultural, community and religious initiatives in favor of the well being of the region. The conclusion is that the youth realized the importance of youth networks in their own development as well as in the development of their communities. It is necessary to create mechanisms to promote youth participation in local, regional and national youth networks.

A fifth key finding was the active participation of the youth in social and economic activities. In 2008 the youth had participate in social service activities like health prevention, protection of the forests and cleaning of their communities. Youth participation in social service activities was motivated by their desire to be better citizen and their strong commitment with the villages. Economic activities evolved since 2004. In 2008 the youth had moved from the sale of the sale of raw agricultural products, groceries and non-skilled labor activities to the sale of value-add products (pizza, jelly) and skilled activities (computers centers). The conclusion is that the participation of the youth in social and economic activities promotes the involvement of the
youth with their communities and generates new sources of income for them. Therefore, it is recommended to continue promoting and supporting the involvement of the youth in social and economic activities as a mechanism of social and economic change in the villages.

Youth Expectations and Future Plans

In 2004 the Yeguare Initiative concluded that most of the youth had limited and short-term expectations for their future. The Initiative had a priority to motivate the youth to establish higher expectations for their life. In 2008 the youth continued having the same expectations than in 2004. However, the youth felt more confident about themselves in achieving their goals. The most important expectations of the youth were to continue and finish their formal education, and to get a job. The conclusion is that the youth prioritized short-term plans instead of future plans. Therefore it is necessary to work with the youth in changing their attitudes. The youth need to be motivated to be more pro-active and think with a vision of their future.

A second important key finding was that the youth perceived that their families supported their plans. This perception was similar in 2004 and 2008 However, there is no evidence of the actions that the families took to support their kids. Therefore, it is recommended to develop programs with the parents where they realize the importance of education and how they can support the youth in the accomplishment of their future goals.

Occupational Status and Welfare of the Families

The first key finding was that local businesses, entrepreneurship initiatives and agricultural activities were the main sources of employment for the youth of the Yeguare Region. Youth family owned businesses were another source of employment but they were not attractive for the youth because of the low level of income that they generate. Agricultural activities generate better levels of income for the youth. Therefore it is recommended to promote the development of entrepreneurship activities for the youth, specifically those related to agricultural activities.

A second key finding was that the youth perceived that the welfare of the family had improved over the years. Also, the youth mentioned positive changes in non-economic aspects like communication and spirituality. The quantitative analysis did not identify those changes in family conditions. The conclusion is that the youth felt motivated to change their familiar environments and perceived signs of change in their families. Therefore, it is recommended that future interventions continuing promoting entrepreneur activities to motivate the youth to promote changes in their homes.

References


