

Chapter 4

The Origin of the National Reconstruction Committee and the Setting of Policy With Respect to the Reconstruction Process

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Introduction

The NEC was a relief and emergency coordinating unit with limited manpower, scientific and technical support and with specific legal responsibilities that excluded it from the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development processes. Under the special circumstances created by the magnitude of the earthquake, the NEC nevertheless coordinated the rehabilitation of some services but the Guatemalan government realized that a new institutional structure was required to coordinate the massive reconstruction process that was needed to overcome the effects of the disaster. It was believed that highly bureaucratized governmental departments and the operational processes ordinarily used by these institutions could not cope with the consequences of such a massive disaster. A new conceptual framework, policies, mechanisms, actions and operational capacities were needed to reconstruct the infrastructure of the country. The knowledge, skills and imagination of top Guatemalan scientists with humanistic orientations backed up by field experience needed to be mobilized in order to crystalize the facts and define the basic needs of communities affected by the earthquake of February, 1976.

The NEC had been enriched by the ideas and proposed programs presented by the three main advisory groups discussed earlier. The group led by the Guatemalan Chamber of Construction, and some members of the National Economic Planning Council, saw the earthquake as a means to obtain a new definition of and new goals for the National Plan for Development for 1975-1979. This group proposed several relief alternatives to the NEC through the "100 Days Plan" and advocated the idea that BANVI and BANDESA should be the banks through which funds would be managed and housing programs would be financed.

The NEC, and later the NRC accepted these ideas. According to members of NRC, very positive results were eventually achieved through BANDESA but only fair results through BANVI. This latter institution was new and did not yet have the operational or institutional capabilities to carry on construction programs.

The second group, led by the GSNCEP and the Bank of Guatemala presented a series of economic concepts and general ideas about the rehabilitation and reconstruction process to the Guatemalan government. Most of these ideas were derived from the speeches given by the President of Guatemala and especially the first Executive Director of the NRC.

The President knew about the main guidelines stated in the programs presented by the aforementioned groups and also about other programs developed by the Army General Staff. He did not like any of them and asked General Ricardo Peralta-Mendez to analyze them and propose his own plan. The plan proposed by General Peralta-Mendez was accepted by the President and became policy for the reconstruction process. The

Guatemalan government and its institutions were informed about these plans and policies at the ceremonies inaugurating the NRC, when the President presented the general framework, and General Peralta, who had been appointed the Executive Director of NRC, discussed the concepts, policies, objectives and details of the reconstruction development process. This ceremony took place on March 18, 1976.

Other complementary concepts as important to the reconstruction process as those expressed on that date originated with Guatemalan field scientists who made up the third group formulating ideas about what was needed in the reconstruction process. These scientists were interviewed by the personnel of GSNCEP during the course of their preliminary inventory of the damages and economic consequences of the earthquake and their views became part of the information GSNCEP used in formulating plans. Other views of reconstruction came from medium level Guatemalan scientists and university scholars who worked during this period as part of the GSNCEP. These ideas were later incorporated in a second document presented by the GSNCEP to the President of Guatemala, and were as follows:

- Damages caused by the earthquake were mainly to the social sector and specifically to the poorest rural communities and urban slums. The economic gap between rich and poor could increase considerably because of the earthquake and therefore attention should be concentrated on poor communities during the reconstruction process.

- The earthquake had exposed the absolute poverty and deprived quality of life of poor communities, as well as their high levels of expectation. The reconstruction process offered a very good opportunity to improve the quality of human life in these communities by channeling those expectations into productive and effective community development programs. It was believed that the earthquake should be visualized as an instrument of change and a vehicle for the poor to obtain social and economic gains. Reconstruction was thought of as a mere mechanism or model to be used to develop the country by giving the communities a vital role in the planning, operational and action processes.

- The GSNCEP saw the earthquake as a means to make the goals of the National Plan for Development, 1975-1979 compatible with needs derived from the disaster and the reconstruction process. The reconstruction process was regarded as an opportunity to reformulate policies and to improve development. Unfortunately, although the GSNCEP incorporated into some of its early documents some of the ideas stated by the first Executive Director and by Guatemalan field scientists, it did not have the capacity to develop a comprehensive operational approach and attempted to achieve these rather complex goals using purely economic mechanisms. Eventually, the NRC placed pressure on the government to adjust these policies so that more appropriate methods related to the original goals could be used.

- The relocation and reconstruction of the physical infrastructure was seen as an opportunity to organize communities and to allow people to participate in the decision making process. Grass-roots planning and operational activities at the community level were advocated. It was believed that everyone should be responsible for his own destiny. Furthermore, it was believed that they would have to satisfy their levels of expectations gradually. Physical reconstruction was regarded as just the beginning of a long-term rural development process and as a by-product of community organization efforts. It was considered desirable that each community decide what their priorities were regarding their own development. It was believed that this designation of priorities would generate a cooperative effort that would result in community and not individual gains. The setting of priorities also would mean that a community decision-making process attuned to local culture would be established, and as a consequence, could result in the renewal of local values and the rejection of exotic ones.

- The reconstruction process was defined as being a responsibility of all Guatemalans. This concept was generated by the first Executive Director of the Reconstruction Committee and was one of the mottos used by the President of Guatemala to build national unity following the earthquake. Later, scientists of the NRC created other mottos in an attempt to build the high level of national cohesiveness that was needed during the first three years

of the reconstruction process. The idea that reconstruction was the people's responsibility was designed to create a positive feeling towards community participation. This willingness to cooperate at the community level was regarded as the most important positive psychological factor in the emergency, relief and reconstruction processes. Participation meant grass roots involvement and through it, new young leaders surfaced to participate in the decision-making process. As a result of this grass roots decision-making process, part of the distrust that Indian and peasant communities have always felt for the institutions of the Guatemalan government began to disappear and new channels of communications were opened.

- The idea of developing a sense of nationhood within a pluralistic society was like a hidden goal underlying the reconstruction process. Members of the National Reconstruction Committee report that these feelings increased up well into the second part of 1978. At this time changes in governmental policies concerning the concept of community development took place and feelings of mistrust returned and old social tensions emerged again.

- Another objective of this group was to use the system of agricultural and credit cooperatives to support the reconstruction process. Cooperatives were seen as ideal legal structures by which to introduce the ideas expressed above into communities. They were also seen as entities that could take the responsibility and handle the funding, technical assistance and other services

needed to speed up the community development processes. They also represented organized labor. They were rather fragile mechanisms to use in satisfying local expectations because consumerism processes had already taken root in them.

Cooperatives were also perceived as structures that could be legally controlled through the allocation of economic resources. This concept was generated by the demands of international banking systems that needed an operational structure that could guarantee their loans.

Later, as has been stated, all these ideas were integrated into a second and public document named, "Evaluación de los Daños Causados por el Terremoto, su impacto sobre el Desarrollo Económico y Social, y Lineamientos para un Programa Inmediato de Reconstrucción," published by the GSNCEP and the Bank of Guatemala in March-April, 1976 (SGCNPE 1976). The most important conclusions reached in this document and the guidelines presented in it represent the official government view and were a more detailed product of the speeches delivered on March 18, 1976 at the inauguration of the Reconstruction Committee. They are as follows:

- (1) The Guatemalan government did not have the capacity to cope with the problem. Governmental institutions were seen as being too inefficient and bureaucratized and staffed by low-paid technical personnel to handle the enormous task required for reconstruction. New institutions without the negative baggage of older ones were needed to conduct the reconstruction process.
- (2) The earthquake had not damaged the productive sector very much, as compared to the social infrastructure. One-sixth of the population was without shelter and without

urban services. Forty percent of the medical and health services, 25 percent of the educational services and 40 percent of the welfare services of the country were destroyed. This represented a 25 percent reduction in the housing stock of the country. To cope with the enormous economic problems associated with this loss, the Guatemalan government needed to increase the gross national product (GNP) from 6.4 percent in 1975 to 13.2 percent in 1976. It also needed to increase the economic investment coefficient from 14.5 percent of the GNP in 1975 to 23.4 percent in 1976. In addition it needed to increase the level of productivity of the construction industry threefold; and to increase the productivity of the industrial sector by 25 percent over 1975. It had to obtain immediately about 330 million dollars to be used in reconstruction in addition to the 625 million U. S. dollars needed for the National Plan for Development, 1975-1979.

(3) The earthquake could trigger an inflationary spiral and price speculation could occur due to the need to import more foreign products in order to repair damages and to increase the investments needed in the social sectors. It was recognized that as a final result of the crisis, the fiscal imbalance and disequilibrium could increase the economic vulnerability of Guatemala, in spite of its past history of adequate economic reserves and its good international credit rating.

To avoid these problems, the GSNCEP proposed that economic policies be centrally coordinated within the public sector in order to speed up negotiations with international banking institutions for needed funds. As correlaries of this broad analysis the economists of the GSNCEP proposed the following recommendations:

(a) The objectives of the National Plan for Development 1975-1979 and of the reconstruction and rehabilitation process should be made compatible. Funds for reconstruction should be in addition to the funds allocated for development in the period 1975-1979. It was recommended that agricultural and energy development projects be continued.

(b) The reconstruction process had to be seen as a mechanism to improve the infrastructure, productivity systems and the services of the country and not merely as an attempt to rebuild them as they were. The main efforts had to be carried out in the rural areas. Investments had to be decentralized to diffuse and to prevent further concentrations of urban population in Guatemala City.

(c) Grass roots participation in the decision-making at the community level and in construction and other action processes had to be sought. Through this participation the Guatemalan government needed to stimulate the creative capacity and initiative of the Guatemalan people. Local people had to be organized to obtain credit and be trained in self-construction practices. It recommended that local organizational mechanisms, cultural values and urbanization processes be respected.

(d) A powerful centralized institution needed to be created, with flexible and speedy mechanisms to initiate, control and coordinate the rehabilitation and reconstruction processes. Reconstruction should be understood as the responsibility of all Guatemalans and should be regarded as an internal effort. To achieve this goal of self-reliance, local organizational capacities of the communities had to be strengthened to a maximum degree.

While GSNCEP and the group centered around the Guatemalan Chamber of Construction, the National Planning Council, and BANVI were considering potential strategies for the reconstruction process emphasizing various institutional, economic and financing aspects, the group of Guatemalan scientists, some of whom had already been interviewed by the personnel of the GSNCEP, and members of NGOs helping communities in the field were concerned about the potential damage which could arise out of the rehabilitation and reconstruction process.

Most of the members of this group had academic training as well as field experience in rural integrated development programs and had shared experiences and knowledge with the affected communities for several years. The group consisted, not of desk type theoreticians, but thinkers and doers. Members of this group recognized immediately that the earthquake was, perhaps, one of the few opportunities that Guatemala would have to achieve social reforms in a peaceful and orderly way. Through some

of the Guatemalan scientists who had direct links to the NEC and to top Guatemalan officials these concepts reached the President of Guatemala and the Coordinator of the NEC as well as other government officers. The main concepts promoted by this group were as follows: They perceived that the earthquake exposed the fragility of Guatemalan institutions and the inequities of urban and rural life. It also dramatized the futility of most government development programs and revealed the increased levels of poverty and deterioration found in most Guatemalan communities. It was evident that a growing number of people were becoming poor, hungry, trapped in consumerism and in a degraded environment by previous "Plans of Development."

They noted, however, that the Guatemalan people, without outside direction, had reacted positively to a major disaster. They had picked themselves up and organized, and then assessed the local situation. The community leadership knew what should be done, what was needed and where to look for it. This group of field scientists felt that existing local capabilities developed the best mechanisms to cope with local situations and the Guatemalan government should cooperate to complement these indigenous capabilities and drives. The government needed to channel this organization potential into productive non-violent development activities and to establish mechanisms to increase these capabilities and drives.

The earthquake also exposed to the Guatemalan middle class and to the small wealthy minority the true human conditions of most of their fellow countrymen, especially in rural and urban slum communities. The

problems were on view for everyone to see. This included not only the national, but international community. A sympathetic feeling arose among the richer communities and countries. Food, clothing, supplies, medical attention, goods and services flooded in and a paternalistic approach to relief developed.

This group of scientists and technicians believed that the reconstruction process had to do away with paternalism, since the foundations of development were being negatively affected by what they saw as a sincere, honest, humanitarian, sometimes emotional and irrational give-away approach to relief.

This group recommended to the Guatemalan government that the rehabilitation and reconstruction processes discard the paternalistic approach which they believed was a source of human deterioration, social unrest and potential violence. Such an approach, according to their perceptions, would create dependence and above all, was open to the discriminatory influences and inequities associated with politics. Because persons affected by the earthquake belonged to a variety of political parties, ethnic and linguistic groups, economic and social strata and had different degrees of educational and technological experience, the NRC had to cooperate with everybody.

According to this group of scientists and technicians, the main goal of reconstruction should be the improvement of the quality of human life in a peaceful way through a harmonious development and reconstruction process. The best instrument to achieve this goal was believed to be grass roots organization which would involve the people's participation in the decision making process and in planning actions and executing the

reconstruction process.

It was considered essential to develop a sense of community at the national, local and family level in order to unite Guatemalan society as well as to decrease the gap between rich and poor. The final product of such a process could be not only social and economic development but the sharing of an inter-cultural process that might bring about needed social and economic changes by peaceful rather than by violent means. The reconstruction process opened the door for major peaceful evolutionary changes which could, if successful, close the door to a violent revolution and terrorism, the methods which had always accompanied change throughout the Central American region in the past.

Through the reconstruction process the scientists and technicians believed cultural and environmental approaches to the relationship between man and nature and man and society could be introduced. This group believed that Guatemala could not develop if its institutions, laws, human resources, wealth distribution and other socioeconomic characteristics were not discussed, analyzed and revised. The reconstruction process could open a true dialogue between the Guatemalan government, different interest groups, communities and other groups based on region, ethnicity, wealth and power.

During the first three years the NRC did, in fact, open a dialogue and for the first time in Guatemalan history, poor rural and urban communities and neighborhoods expressed their feelings, expectations, convictions and basic needs to the Guatemalan government without fear.

While this dialogue went on the reconstruction process was also concerned with the physical geography of the country. The scientific-technical group believed that no development could take place in the long run if the soils, water, vegetation and other geomorphological resources were degraded or extinguished. Therefore it was believed that every reconstruction project should optimize the development reconstruction process on the basis of two variables. One, natural resources should be used on a perpetual or renewable basis and the other, any project should bring about as much permanent social and economic gain as possible. The relationship between man and nature should be not only technologically and socially efficient but effective in terms of bringing to the communities advances in their quality of life. As a by-product, communities needed to rediscover their own skills, knowledge and wisdom and be proud of the appropriate technology embedded in their culture. This could yield self-sufficiency, and self-reliance by promoting use of local materials.

This group believed that the reconstruction process should also stress the relationship between man and society. Any human being needs to satisfy his basic biological rights to survive; the right to breathe and exist, to eat nutritious foods, to have adequate shelter and clothing, to exercise and recreate and to have security and the freedom to move about his environment. If a person does not satisfy these biological and social needs, he or she can not develop and therefore improve their relationship to nature and to society. It is believed, however, that these biological and social rights were only the starting point to achieve

"development rights." Development rights were visualized as the opportunities that any person has to be educated, trained, and be able to work, to participate in all sectors of society and to seek self-expression and self-realization. It was also believed that these rights should be extended to women and children who should have the same opportunities that men have to attain these goals.

The last recommendation of this scientific technical group concerned consumerism and dependence. The reconstruction process, according to this group, could bring to rural communities and urban slums a better quality of life, greater income and an increase in the cash flow. The economic increases should be invested in social gains and not in increasing consumerism which emphasizes industrialized and imported goods. Rural communities should rely on their own resources and try to avoid dependence on exotic innovations brought in by outsiders.

Outsiders tend to view local disaster and development problems in quantitative, analytical, rational terms and to express local requirements, needs and solutions in numbers which will assist them in obtaining funding and other support from their sponsors. In contrast, insiders view problems in more qualitative and historic terms. Locals are concerned with cultural disruption, appropriate technology, ecological diversity and long-term goals and achievements and understand more of the consequences of consumerism and dependence. Therefore reconstruction-development projects should be controlled by insiders, or by Guatemalans or foreigners intimately familiar with local conditions.

While these three Guatemalan groups (the 100 Days Plan Group, the GSNCEP and the scientific-technical group) were offering advice and

recommending solutions, and even sometimes demanding action from top Guatemalan governmental decision makers, another group formed by Guatemalan and international private voluntary organizations met first with AID and U.S. Embassy officials and later with the United National Development Program (UNDP) directors. The original idea of these meetings was to coordinate private emergency relief and rehabilitation operations and to avoid overlapping in operational activities, the diffusion of resources and, above all, to try to find a common approach to reconstruction problems. Representatives of the NEC participated in these meetings but did not have the experience and capacities to coordinate non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their programs.

The numerous NGOs involved in disaster relief and reconstruction had different and varied goals and concepts concerning relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. They also varied tremendously in operational capacities. Rather than attempting to manage the work of NGOs in detail, the NEC assigned them a geographical area in which to develop their programs and left them alone to manage their own affairs.

This decision was later regarded as a good one by the NRC but various voluntary organizations disagreed conceptually. Some wanted to work at the grass roots level, with anti-paternalistic approaches using local community networks to perform reconstruction programs and others wanted to be paternalistic, use foreign technicians and exotic supplies to carry out their programs, and to give their aid away to disaster victims without requiring them to participate in their own recovery. Many also wanted to receive recognition through the media in order to

bolster contributions from their donors. This division between NGOs created problems for the NEC and for communities that, in some cases, became "experimental grounds" for "pilot projects."

More than 210 NGOs and other private groups operated in Guatemala after the earthquake but only about half of them were registered at the NEC and some confusion arose. For example, some of the larger NGOs proceeded to develop reconstruction policies of their own without consultation with the NEC. Such policy decisions were supposed to be the prerogative of the Guatemalan government. Some of the emerging independent non-governmental policies were regarded as being unduly paternalistic by the NEC and as promoting dependency and consumerism. Later, the NRC used its power to attempt to correct them.

The Relationship Between the NEC and the NRC

The NEC did an outstanding job in the impact, emergency, relief and early rehabilitation operations but did not have the legal, technical and operational capacity to coordinate the total reconstruction process in Guatemala. The Guatemalan government, especially the President and General Coordinator of the NEC, realized this, and relying on the conceptual inputs from the three national level groups discussed above, decided to create the National Reconstruction Committee (NRC). This institution absorbed the rehabilitation programs of the NEC, and was assigned responsibility for coordinating, supervising and controlling all of the reconstruction-development projects that needed to be carried out. The NEC was glad to be relieved of these programs. However, with

these already on-going reconstruction programs, the NRC inherited a series of problems and along with them, a power struggle which was going on to control the reconstruction process.

Circumstances of the Transition from the Emergency
to the Reconstruction Committee

The GSNCEP wanted the NRC to depend on its manpower and to adopt its decisions, thereby behaving as an "economic development unit." The private sector visualized the reconstruction process and the NRC as a means to obtain large profitable construction contracts to rehabilitate the infrastructure and at the same time, a legalized relationship to NGOs as an institutional base for their operations in the area affected by the earthquake. The army saw the reconstruction process as a means of improving its image. Still other power groups wanted personal gains from the NRC.

Fortunately, the President of Guatemala named an able senior army officer as the first Executive Director and two other top government civilian officers who were related to the private sector and to the cooperative systems. These officials had high credibility with the public and good administrative credentials.

The most important decision was made at the operational and conceptual levels. The President of Guatemala, but especially the Executive Director of the NRC, decided to name experienced army officers and Guatemalan civilian scientists with courage, charisma and excellent working records as coordinators of the various programs within the NRC. These persons had field experience and some belonged to the group of scientific and technical experts who had been advising the NEC. Members of this group formed the core of the NRC. In addition to this group of

coordinators, other army officers and high level, cool-headed Guatemalan government professionals were transferred to the NRC to advise and support the committee's coordination activities. Without any doubt, most of the personnel that initially formed the NRC were among the best persons the government could find. These choices created an entity with large scientifically based decision making and operational capacities which enabled the committee to respond positively to the development needs of rural communities.

With the creation of the NRC, the NEC returned to relief and emergency operations and left all the rehabilitation and reconstruction responsibilities to the NRC. These institutions complemented each other with supporting activities and very few transitional problems arose.

Soon after the formation of the NRC, problems began to develop for it, but they were not between it and the NEC. The resourcefulness of the people in stricken communities and on the part of some of the personnel of the NRC in initiating reconstruction programs caused jealousy among regular government bureaucrats who saw themselves as being ignored. Problems also arose in relations between the committee and a few economic planners. Top officials, even ministers, tried to undercut the policies of the NRC. To these bureaucrats and politicians, the NRC was an emerging political force that interfered with their personal or partisan goals. As a consequence, they wanted to control it. The best way to do this was to discredit and defame the NRC staff. In this process an internal struggle arose within the government in the months following the earthquake. According to some NRC personnel, an attempt was made to create an impression of corruption and the mismanagement of funds by the

top leaders of the NRC, even though they never directly managed funds. These accusations were eventually discredited.

The NRC became the spokesman for rural Guatemalan communities and for the poor and carried out this role from 1976 to the beginning of 1979. Soon after its formation, the NRC became a threat to the regular governmental bureaucracy which was comprised of what many committee members saw as inefficient government institutions. It was especially disliked by desk planners and by ultra-conservative sectors of Guatemalan society as well as the extreme left. All of these groups believed that it should be neutralized, restructured, and redefined in order to transform it into a "normal" government entity. These were the most important circumstances under which the transition from emergency to reconstruction took place. As the reconstruction process progressed, and this power struggle continued, the original technical staff of the NRC was replaced by a largely political staff and its role as spokesman for the rural poor was weakened.

The Organization and Responsibilities of the NRC as Contrasted to the NEC

The Guatemalan government has close to 174 different institutions to carry out its executive, legislative and judicial actions designed to organize, develop and control the country. The majority of these governmental bureaus depend directly on the Presidency and its Ministries of State and are highly bureaucratized, relatively inefficient and outdated. Many Guatemalans interested in development believe that without any doubt the governmental bureaucracy is the most effective Guatemalan system against development.

The NRC, because of these circumstances, decided that it could not be part of it. Instead, it attempted to become an institution with the freedom to operate autonomously and to make quick decisions that would increase development effectiveness. Due to the special circumstances of the earthquake and its consequences, a coordinating and supervising entity was needed, with enough support, power and authority to speed up and control reconstruction projects being carried out by government institutions and private organizations. As a result of Presidential decisions, the NRC became the highest authority in the reconstruction process within the earthquake area, especially with respect to the coordination of Guatemalan governmental efforts.

The Guatemalan government wanted to create a temporary, and not a permanent, institution. It was estimated that the reconstruction process would be finished in 10 to 12 years. During that period it was hoped that the NRC would create a new attitude and mentality in the bureaucrats making up the regular ministries of the Guatemalan government.

The creation of a temporary entity seemed to be the easiest solution in 1976 because it would not alter the basic institutional structure of the government. To change that structure would have required the laws and regulations that govern them to be changed. The idea of the President of Guatemala, based upon the concepts and logic of the document prepared by the first Executive Director of the NRC, was to complement the operational capacity of the Guatemalan government with a flexible coordinating institutional superstructure and to furnish the necessary supporting laws, personnel and authority. He did not wish to create more

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c - To promote the voluntary participation of the non-governmental sectors, social services entities and other international assistance organisms; determining the aspects and areas of their participation as well as the operational regulations and other attributions.

- Article 4 = All government institutions and decentralized entities are obliged to supply to the NRC the help and cooperation requested by it (by the NRC). Particularly, the Ministries of State will accomplish and will facilitate the accomplishment of the decrees and directives of the NRC, regarding reconstruction plans and programs.

- Article 5 = The technical and administrative personnel that the NRC requires, as well as other facilities and services that are needed to exercise its functions, will be supplied by the Ministries of State, Secretaries of the Presidency, decentralized entities and other public institutions, charging the expenses to their ordinary budgets. The non-government entities that are collaborating voluntarily with the NRC will cover their own expenses in the operations that they will perform.

- Article 6 = The NRC will designate specific consultant and advisory commissions that could be comprised of government officers and public employees of any category in order to develop the studies, recommendations, projects or plans needed for the reconstruction process.

- Article 7 = All public and decentralized entities, autonomous or semi-autonomous, which are required by the NRC, will designate

one of their top officers or employees to become the coordinating element between their entities and the NRC and they are in charge of carrying out and accomplishing the orders given to their entities.

- Article 8 = All appointments for positions within the NRC will be made by the President of Guatemala and the jobs will be performed ad-honorem.
- Article 9 = All the documents used by the NRC will be collected in order to create a data bank and a reference to establish the ideal mechanisms to cope with future catastrophes.
- Article 10 = The NRC will operate and function as long as the President of Guatemala considers it a necessary entity for the reconstruction process.

Structurally the NRC operated in the following way. The President of Guatemala delegated his authority to the Executive Director who was second in command of the committee. To speed up and improve coordination within the government, the Minister of Public Finances was named in 1976 to the third ranking position, that of Coordinator of the NRC. This nomination was necessary because that Ministry manages ordinary and reconstruction budgets and makes decisions about the allocation of funds to other government institutions. Through that Ministry the NRC would also obtain the support of the GSNCEP - Bank of Guatemala. This support was needed for economic planning and for the funding of the community development projects.

The fourth ranking member of the committee was the Representative of the Cooperative Systems. This person was the Vice-president of the

National Bank for Agrarian Development (BANDESA) in 1976 and had strong ties with the rural cooperatives and communities and through them could channel funds, technologies and reconstruction goals.

These four officials formed the power base and top authority structure of the NRC and produced the decrees and directives under which the committee operated. Due to their positions, the NRC was a super governmental structure, well conceived and well designed.

Within the NRC and providing the operational, functional, scientific, technical, conceptual and logistic support to these authorities there were two secretariats. One, the General Secretariat, was in charge of the administration and coordination of all the functional and operational systems of the NRC and it was supported by six units that were assigned specific coordination and supervision activities. The first one was the Planning, Programming and Information Unit (originally Information Unit) - PPIU. It coordinated planning, programming and evaluation procedures for reconstruction operations and collected, analyzed and corrected the data that was needed to measure the progress of reconstruction projects. Other activities performed by the PPIU were the coordination of urban community development projects in Guatemala City carried out by BANVI, the provision of guidelines for urban land use and zoning in reconstruction schemes, the production of annual reports to provide information to the public and the keeping of a detailed register of the construction time schedule and monetary investment of every reconstruction project. It coordinated reconstruction activities with the GSNCEP and the Bank of Guatemala in order to keep the Executive Director informed on the progress of the reconstruction process and to recommend which measures

should be taken to improve the operational capacity of the Guatemalan government. This unit also prepared the annual budget request for NRC operations and personnel.

The second operational unit of the reconstruction committee was called the Physical Reconstruction Unit (PRU). Its original functions were the coordination and supervision of all construction programs and projects carried out by the Guatemalan government and its executive entities. Other initial activities were the preparation of technical documents to improve the reconstruction process as well as the provision of technical field supervision by architects and engineers of structures being built. It was also expected to advise on community development.

During the first two and a half years this unit worked very productively in spite of serious political confrontations. It coordinated and supervised most of the reconstruction programs in the field and induced other government institutions to improve their ability to build infrastructure facilities and services. It also demonstrated the qualitative and quantitative differences in construction and administrative costs that existed between the government and NGOs. The publication of this information resulted in a negative reaction against that unit since it reported that government costs were up to three times higher for the similar types of infrastructure - houses, hospitals, roads, bridges, etc. than those of NGOs. The NRC costs for construction were similar to the ones of the NGO. When these facts became known, the PRU tried to lower government costs, most of which were due to bureaucracy.

This unit was also in charge of controlling the distribution of construction materials produced in Guatemala. In spite of the scarcity,

it managed to keep the flow of materials into the reconstruction process going. Unfortunately, this was done quantitatively and not qualitatively due to the lack of national regulations for construction materials. The responsibility for such standards lay with the Guatemalan Commission of Regulations (COGUANOR) but this Commission had not done so. Later in the reconstruction process (1979) control over construction materials was transferred to the Army Secretariat.

The PRU faced its biggest reconstruction and technical problems during 1976, 1977 and 1978. There were no technical regulations or codes for land use zoning, construction processes or for quality standards for construction materials. The GSNCEP did not even have a scheme for territorial zoning or a model for spatial occupancy in Guatemala for different time scenarios. There was no rational plan for reconstruction or development. Because of the lack of cooperation from other Governmental institutions, the NRC decided to perform six studies through the PRU as a basis for reconstruction and development planning. These studies were sent to the National Council for Economic Development for approval and most of them "were lost." The studies were titled:

- "Ecological Indicators for Spatial Occupation with Special Emphasis to Urban-Rural Settlements," by Dr. Luis A. Ferraté.
- "Guidelines for a Land Acquisition Policy for Human Settlements at a National Level," by Dr. Gustavo Gaitán and Lic. Victor Ramirez.
- "Seismic Risk Plan," by personnel of P.R.U.
- "Construction and Proposals for Prefabricated Houses," by personnel of P.R.U.
- "Quality Control Regulations and Standards for Building Materials," by Ing. Emilio Beltranena and Arq. Zoemia Prado.

- "A Guatemalan Typology for Housing," by Arq. Zoemia Prado and Dr. Luis Ferraté.

Unfortunately, most of these studies were lost somewhere in the bureaucracy and the few copies that survived at the NRC were not used because legal approval was needed. These studies were finished in late 1977, but aroused a high degree of animosity among some of the Ministries of State toward the NRC. Indirectly, the documents exposed the inefficiency of some Guatemalan bureaucrats and this fact aroused the anger of the Ministries affected.

The PRU was substantially reduced after 1979 and was left with very few technical personnel. After that it only coordinated activities and exercised general field supervision over the construction of infrastructure carried out by Guatemalan institutions and by the Military Secretariat.

The third unit of the reconstruction committee was called the Social Promotion Unit (SPU). It was in charge of the organization and coordination of local reconstruction committees in urban and rural areas, as well as the compiling of an inventory of basic services in cooperation with local communities. It was also charged with evaluating the impact of reconstruction projects on the development of communities. It was supposed to promote technological and social solutions to problems that would not create social disruption, but due to its low technological and conceptual capacities, this was not possible. It was the largest unit of the committee, divided in two sub-units - Metropolitan Area of Guatemala City and the Urban-Rural Unit. From the beginning it was coordinated by army officers who did an excellent job and fought against

the politicization of this unit.

The SPU performed an outstanding job during 1976 and 1977, but after 1978, with the change of government and a shift in specific political and sectarian interests, this unit became partially politicized and the reconstruction process lost a certain amount of credibility and confidence. In late 1978, the Guatemalan government replaced the technical staff of this unit by non-qualified persons, introducing "political participation." In spite of the efforts of the army officers coordinating this unit, it gradually fell apart, causing more problems than benefits to the NRC. The unqualified staff members eventually placed in this unit represented different political parties and different philosophies of reconstruction. For these reasons, internal attrition increased after 1979 and most of the technical and scientific staff of the committee left or were forced to leave the NRC. The scientists and technicians who left the NRC had no particular political interests or participation. According to early members of the NRC these scientists were the ones that brought charisma and credibility to the committee on an international level.

It is worth stressing that all the army coordinators of this unit were non-political and made sincere efforts to correct the internal situation. The NRC, however, did not seem to have the political or real power to stop the politicization in this unit and the erosion of the NRC credibility after 1978.

The Social Promotion Unit, in spite of its problems, achieved certain successes, nevertheless. In 1979, 1980 and 1981, with the cooperation of other entities, it moved about 16,000 families from

refugee camps and "settlements" to permanent housing projects and urbanized lots in Guatemala City. This is believed to be the largest voluntary movement of families in Central America. There were no severe problems associated with this move because families looked forward to developing the houses and urbanized lots they received.

In 1976-1977, the same unit also organized 1,533 local reconstruction committees, 63 municipal committees and four departmental ones. Through most of these committees, the SPU tried to teach construction techniques, organize programs to obtain basic services, and to promote local technologies, and to obtain labor and materials.

The fourth operational unit of the NRC was called the Public Relations Unit. This unit was supposed to coordinate public relations and media services. It did not, however, have the funding and the motivation to do its job. In some respects it was a failure and in others, a success. It was a failure because the enormous efforts and operational actions of the NRC remained unknown or were distorted through outside media perception. It was a success because the NRC, due to its lack of activity, maintained a low profile most of the time. As a consequence it did not challenge other Guatemalan institutions who reported their work through vast media propaganda programs. This unit did keep records of the public inauguration ceremonies for NRC projects and of the social-political events related to the reconstruction process.

The fifth operational unit (URPAC) was designed for the coordination of projects aimed towards the preservation of the cultural

patrimony of the country. Its main objective was to search out and rescue cultural artifacts of historical significance that were under the rubble or lost during the earthquake and to reconstruct indigenous, colonial or any other monument with cultural value. This unit was under the Ministry of Education, but attached itself to the NRC due to lack of support, funds and authority from the Ministry. Its personnel were excellent and did very good salvage and restoration work within funding limitations. It was absorbed by the Institute of Anthropology and History in 1980.

The sixth unit of the National Reconstruction Committee was called the National and International Cooperation Unit (NICU) and inherited the supervision of some of the NGO programs initiated by the NEC in 1976. Its job was to promote and coordinate reconstruction and development programs and projects carried out by non-government organizations, private voluntary organizations and other entities of the private sector in rural areas and in some slums of Guatemala City.

It also provided institutional support and services to NGOs in the field of customs clearance and money exchange. It did the paper work for importing equipment and machinery for the reconstruction processes duty-free.

After 1976, this unit coordinated approximately 165 agreements and addenda that represented the reconstruction, rehabilitation or economic support for about 16 temporary housing projects (approximately 29,699 units); 39 school projects (554 units); 36 medical and health projects (241 health centers, posts and medical clinics); 34 infrastructure

and service projects (498 potable water systems, drainage-sewage systems, community centers, child care centers, dental clinics, libraries, museums, warehouses, "pilas," roads, churches and other services); 661 programs for community development, self-construction, food and nutrition, family planning, home economics, agricultural and natural resources management and finally, 29 programs of building materials distribution and other services (Balcarcel et al 1978).

This unit was also responsible for maintaining good relations with all national and international NGOs and for staying in close contact with relevant embassies, consulates and service clubs. The original idea behind the NICU was to provide services to facilitate the administrative functions and field operations of NGOs and to establish guidelines to minimize unnecessary cultural disruption. Preventing cultural disruption was understood as prevention of the introduction of innovations that might cause severe negative social, economic and environmental changes, or increase consumerism and dependence, without producing development or satisfying basic needs.

The NICU, due to its unique function, developed such strong ties with foreign and Guatemalan NGOs that it became a kind of "credibility center" for the NRC from 1976 to 1980. Some of its coordinators and staff had several years of field experience in rural development projects, natural resources management and agricultural improvement, and in the use of appropriate technology. From 1976 to the beginning of 1980, the NICU coordinated the largest reconstruction and development projects carried out by non-government organizations and became the conceptual think-tank for rural community development in Guatemala.