

ISSUES FACED IN PROGRAMMING GUATEMALA

DISASTER REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE

1. Introduction

The world's attention was drawn to the Guatemala earthquake of February 4, 1976 and an international flood of well intended charitable assistance for the disaster victims ensued. Over 200 different organizations responded to the emergency and the total number of individuals and groups who contributed is incalculable. The situation immediately after the disaster can be described paradoxically as mass pandemonium with everyone working for one cause in an unprecedentedly cooperative and unified manner. During the first weeks, assessment of the damage and injuries was open to considerable variation of opinion. Yet Guatemalans and foreigners alike saturated Guatemala with relief supplies, materials and programs which were intended to meet the needs of the victims.

But what about the victims themselves? Obviously, the bitter realization of loss of life, home, and belongings was a considerable shock. Nevertheless, the disaster was a simple, one shot ordeal. Within a short period of time, the disaster-stricken people were able to pick themselves up and assess the situation around them. In brief, they rapidly knew what could be done and what they needed in order to return to normal livelihood.

This essay examines some important factors that almost all assistance agencies faced in the Guatemalan post-earthquake period, and analyzes the different ways these were taken into consideration in programming each agency's response. The arguments summarize actual experiences drawn from the whole gamut of programs and their results. Specific agencies are mentioned and their programs are discussed in order that those familiar with the scenario can more clearly visualize the discussion, but no criticism or judgment is intended of the

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