
TURNINGPOINTS

- Because ending poverty requires the end of violence -

Pilot Study in Guatemala, Honduras & Mexico



In October, Nanna and Claus went to Central America on TurningPoint's first pilot study. We visited Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico and met the NGOs Ilepez and CIPREVI Honduras, as well as other civil groups and organisations. The aim of this newsletter is to tell you about some of the people we met, the learnings we had, and the plans we made. Hopefully, upon reading it, you will have a concrete impression of what it is we are trying to do in TurningPoints.

After months of planning, it was amazing to see how much could be obtained and learned over the course of two intense weeks. None of

Guatemala: the bigger volcano, Acatenango, to the left, and the smaller volcano, Fuego, to the right. What we thought was thunder was actually Fuego being active. In the photo Fuego has just spoken, and you can see the smoke coming out...

this would have been possible without the help of our friends and partners i llepaz, along with the helpful people who volunteered to house us, drive us and translate between English and Spanish. So let us start by telling the story of Gerardo.

Thank you, Gerardo!

It was Gerardo from the NGO, llepaz, who took care of arranging most of the meetings, workshops, bus travels, food and private accommodation.

Gerardo Perez is a very humble and considerate man, always aware of the people around him, and at the same time he is a very determined and brave man. Working with human rights in Mesoamerica is dangerous, and once Gerardo even had to escape when his car was being attacked by gunmen.

Gerardo was born and raised in Acatenango, Guatemala. He has a degree in legal and social Sciences from the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, with more than 14 years of experience in implementation of public policies for the prevention of organized violence in Central America. In 1996 after the signing of the peace accord Gerardo was working as a peace mediator, after which he worked with human right issues, among others the prevention of torture. So, as can be seen Gerardo is a highly educated, skilled and experienced man, but still, he had to leave his wife and daughters for a while and go

abroad to do unskilled work as a construction worker and

dish washer to be able to support his family. There was no work to be found in Guatemala in spite of his qualifications.

This is what hundred of thousands of people experience all over the world. So, Gerardo has the experience under his skin and knows the pain and worry of leaving your family and country and working under poor conditions with low pay in a foreign country.

Claus and Gerardo know each other from the work with the prevention of torture. Together they developed the bold idea to offer the police education in leadership and conflict resolution. Because of this concerted effort they managed to train approximately 500 police officers from El Salvador and Guatemala in 2013-2015.

The roads of Gerardo and Claus separated for some 5 years, until they happened to get in contact with each other again via the internet. In their conversations, it became clear that they both simultaneously had stopped their work with 'reparation of past time crimes' - instead they both decided to look at the future and how to start building civil societies which were not prone with poverty, but sustainable and peaceful. A bold project indeed!



San Cristobal, Gerardo and Claus-
A symbolic picture of strong bonds forming, based on shared values and visions.

“Crime and violence have emerged in recent years as major obstacles to the realisation of development objectives.”

- WORLD BANK

This now all come together in the two NGOs, Ilepez and TurningPoints - both working with poverty and the related violence and how this cocktail is stopping a much needed development.

Because of this dual focus both NGOs offer to work with sustainable start-ups (Pass It On) and with the police, so that the police can support social security and general social trust through better, more qualified policing.

During our visit it became clear that with these shared visions it makes very good sense to cooperate on projects in Central America.

A short summary of the trip

During the first 3 days in Acatenango, we had 3 meetings. One meeting with the head of the board of Ilepez, and two other meetings with Cooperatives in respectively Socorro and Comalapa. We learned about their troubles, dreams and visions.

With all this new information Nanna and Claus together with Humberto Cana and Gerardo Perez from Ilepez went on a bus tour to Honduras via El Salvador. In Tegucigalpa, Honduras, we had an introductory meeting with the NGO CIPREVI Honduras, and heard about the Honduran situation, which is very difficult.

CIPREVI Honduras did not believe that it at present would be possible to work with the police. The political situation was all to tense. They suggested that our work

could be started with a group of young university students. Ilepez and TurningPoints could do workshops and train these students at the university, and they would in turn would do workshops with local populations.

After Honduras we had one day back in Acatenango in which we did a short introduction workshop with the municipality police.

They were open and curious



and eager to get more education and training.

Acatenango - A Valley of Peace!

Acatenango is statistically interesting, because if you look at Guatemala as a country, you will see that 607 peoples were killed in 2018. However, a closer look at the numbers of Acatenango is 0. The neighbouring municipalities show that 1 or 2 persons were killed. But not in Acatenango! You could rightly call it a valley of peace. This makes Acatenango an ideal place to start the Pass It On process as well as the training courses with the local police.



Tegucigalpa - The group of ILEPAZ, TurningPoints and CIPREVI Honduras.



Acatenango - workshop with municipality police. Claus is showing videos of Danish police playing football with local children as an example of building trust between police and community.



The rest of the trip was spent in In San Cristóbal, Mexico. Ilepaz and TurningPoints had two day-long meetings with presentations of the purposes of the two organisations, and with a lot of brainstorms on what to do to get development working. The ideas of this brainstorm were then prioritised and several concrete ideas chosen, see below.

In between these two meetings, three workshops were carried out with the police and with a vigilante group. Both groups expressed that they were interested in more education and training.

The stay in Mexico ended with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Ilepaz and TurningPoints.

Two lessons from the trip: the importance of organising, and neo-colonial economy



On the importance of organising:

The vigilante group we did a workshop with in San Cristobal, Mexico, was not really a group when we met them. They were paid by the municipality and the community to create local order by regulating traffic, stopping conflicts and preventing crime, but they had never actually met as a group. Therefore they turned up to the workshop as individual, worried and frustrated persons who were were doing their best to handle the task given: to create some security in their neighbourhood.

This task was very difficult, as they were carrying out their duties with rather vague mandates. They had no police or mediation education, no uniform that could identify them as having a mandate to work with public security and order. Also they had no tools to perform their duties (communication tools to coordinate their work and ask for backup when needed, traffic regulation tools like whistles or signs, etc). Seeing that they had never met as a group, and had no training or tools, they could not be regarded as a homogeneous professional group showing cohesion and professional ethics.

When the workshop started, we did not know about their situation and working conditions - when their frustration became clear, Claus changed the programme and had a very fruitful discussion with the group, who gradually showed trust and started feeling hope. It became clear that they could help each other by forming a group and present their needs for uniforms and tools as a group and not as individuals. It was very inspiring to see how the group identity slowly started forming during the workshop.

With this group it is highly important to emphasise the teaching and training needed to build knowledge about rule of law, knowledge and practical skills to carry out conflict mediation.

On neo-colonial economy:

During our trip we witnessed and heard about cultural violence - that indigenous people and peripherally positioned social groups through history has lost parts of their culture, identity and many of their rights. In this historical process they were also confronted with structural violence in the forms of lost possessions such as buildings and territory.



These two types of violence seems to have led to an epidemic spread of various forms of direct violence.

Indeed, and as only one example, one of our interpreters expressed his observation of the malnutrition, he saw in an area of natural abundance of diverse biological life and possibilities. This made us think of the quotation: 'you are what you eat.' While this expression is absurd literally, when applied to economic systems it contains a kernel of truth: what people put on their tables will have a great impact on the organization of their economy.

So, what do the local population eat? And what do they *want* to eat and drink? Coffee? Only coffee...? Only corn and avocado? No.

So, why do people eat 'poorly' when living in a region of natural abundance? The immediate answer is economical poverty and no ownership of and access to land. The result is several mono-cultures: life-style, political and economical. It seems, that the region is dominated by a neo-colonial economic thinking and practise. The result of this neo-colonial thinking is cultural poverty, economic poverty, knowledge poverty - and violence. In this situation it is easy to get stuck with no local identification to own development process.



This is why we need to adjust some basic economical mechanisms, just as the economists Karl Polanyi and Amartya Sen have argued.

Civil Society

The economic strength of the people we visited is low. This is reflected in everything from food, clothing, housing, to larger facilities such as buildings and roads.

The individuals we met and spoke with were industrious and diligent, but could not work themselves out of their financial situation regardless of their work efforts.



Comalapa - The walls lining the main road into the city had paintings of the history, thus repeating the same history of suffering over and over again.

So, people become poor, passive or desperate, and at the same time very low institutional capacity can be observed, also with the police. This combination together with the history of the region seems to cause crime and violence - and hinder basic development much needed.

We see in Comalapa that the relation to the tourists is influenced by the fact that they have money - the final goal is to sell something (as a Mayan folkloric image). And that can give them access to clothes, food, etc. In this type of production they just produce for their family, and they don't see how they can help their neighbour.

For people to enter into the concept of Pass It On, and to produce also for the community, and not only for their family, will be a change of mentality - of ideas, deep routines and structures.

In Acatenango and Comalapa, people don't need research - they need new concepts, practical training and simple advice to change their situation for the better.

The observed diligent and industrious work-performance appeared uninformed about markets and the general economy. Raw materials were produced as well as end-products (fabric and paintings) without much insight into the global markets. Many of the items were aimed at tourists, with only a small knowledge about tourists interests and needs. The raw materials produced were coffee, fruit and vegetables, which on the world market have no great profit return rate for the producer. The return rate is probably about 2 % of the market value of the goods they produce!

Therefore, even with a significant increase in these productions this will not lead to any local economic progress. More knowledge would probably make the local population realise that no major increase in income is possible in the current production, but that a shift towards home or local markets could lead to a significant improvement in living conditions: better nutrition, clothes, overall health, etc.



Socorro - Take a good look at these people. This is a group of people who take care of each other, and who help each other. But it is also a group that remains poor no matter how hard they work.

The assessment is therefore that there is a fundamental need to expand the general knowledge of the specific local economy, markets and sales.

Likewise, our assessment is that there is a fundamental need to change the composition and direction of production. From production of mono-crops aimed at the global market of the richer countries to a more varied production targeted local markets.

Why Meso America?

Why did we chose to go to Mesoamerica? First of all there is the connection between Gerardo and Claus - and the experience and network they have; next is that Mesoamerica and the countries Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico are among the most violent in the world. Honduras is the country with with the highest murder rate in the world.



Socorro - These kids need the local production to recognise and target their needs.

The high level of violence has already slowed down regional development and still threatens the economic and social development of these countries as it destroys the feeling of security and trust among people and to the basic state-institutions, such as the police. For these reasons the building of basic economic structures and security structures are top priorities for TurningPoints and Ilepez.

If you listen to the interviews of the Mesoamerican refugees waiting at the boarder to USA they almost unanimously give this reason for their migration: poverty and violence.

And, if you cannot work your way out of this situation, the logical step is to migrate to a place where you believe you can. In America this is: USA.

The next steps:

As practical outcomes of both our meetings with the local populations, the local NGOs and your own observations, we have together with Ilepez and CIPREVI decided to go on with the following steps:

1. TurningPoints will raise money to finance the building of a development center building in Socorro. The amount of money needed for this is \$ 3,000 They will build the Development Center themselves. So, we need to raise \$ 3,000!
2. The First Pass It On:
The Development Center will be contracted to be the center of Pass It On activities of Socorro, thus setting in motion a selfpropelling local development of economy.
3. TurningPoints will work closely with ASODESE through Ilepez, Guatemala
4. TurningPoints will come to Comalapa and do Pass It On workshops on how to change and develop production into local production.
5. All these activities will be carried out together with the training of the local police.
6. And when all the courses and the training are done, the police and the people from Socorro and Comalapa will do workshops together in respectively Acatenango and Comalapa.

However, this is not all... There are more projects to be presented with Ilepez, Mexico and CIPREVI Honduras; and also, we have new projects in the 'pipeline' this time in East Africa... More to come!

PS - Economical Logics and Some (Sorry) Facts

Karl Polanyi: “A market economy is an economic system controlled, regulated, and directed by market prices; order in the production and distribution of goods is entrusted to this self-regulating mechanism. (..) Self-regulating implies that all production is for sale on the market and that all incomes derive from such sales. Accordingly, there are markets for all elements of industry (..) for labor, land, and money.(..) A self-regulating market demands nothing less than the institutional separation of society into an economic and a political sphere. (..) Such an institutional pattern could not have functioned unless society was somehow subordinated to its requirements. A market economy can exist only in a market society.” However, to.. “allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society.

“During the most active period of the Industrial Revolution, from 1795 to 1834, the creating of a labor market in England was prevented through the Speenhamland Law.” The Speenhamland Law “introduced no less a social and economic innovation than ‘the right to live’.” (..) “The Poor Law Reform of 1834 did away with this obstruction of the labor market: the ‘right to live’ was abolished. (..) hence industrial capitalism as a social system cannot be said to have existed before that date.”¹

After this, the idea of a self-regulating global market has come with a heavy burden to the colonies and developing countries, because with the wish for democracy comes also its sibling, the free - meaning the self-regulating - market, however on the global market there is no such law as the Speenhamland Law to protect the lives of the peoples:

- *Development:* The divide between rich and poor countries is in 1980 twice as deep as in 1960 in spite of development aid, trade, loans and negotiations about a new economic order.²
- *Income:* The number between \$1.25 and \$2.00 a day doubled from 648 million to 1.18 billion between 1981 and 2008 ³
- *Poverty rates:* The absolute number of people living on \$2.00 a day, which is very tough, barely budged from 2.59 billion in 1981 to 2.47 billion in 2008 - and there will still be 2 billion in 2015. On the other hand, a whopping 70 % of people in the developing world in 1981 lived on less than \$2.00 a day, which came down to 43 % in 2008.
- *Health:* 7.6 million children under 5 years of age die from preventable and treatable causes (mostly lack of food and medical care) each year - but that is half (15 million) the child mortality rate of 30 years ago.
- *Hunger:* Almost a billion people in the world go hungry (925 million) and 16 % of the people in the developing world are undernourished, but in 1981, a full quarter were undernourished.
- *Education:* Around the world, 67.5 million children do not get to go to school at all, and 775 million adults cannot read or write. But from 1999 to 2008, 52 million children who previously had no chance to go to school could get a primary education.
- *Housing:* There are 1.6 billion people in substandard housing, with 100 million homeless, but the percentage of people living in slums has decreased from 46 % to 32 %.

¹ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 1944, p. 71ff.

² Jan Oberg, *Myter om vor sikkerhed*, 1981, p. 269

³ Gary Haugen, *The Locust Effect*, 2014, p. 38ff. The rest of the quotes on this page are also from *The Locust Effect*.