Child Sponsorship: 
The Approaches Adopted by Two NGOs in 
Response to Child Poverty in Guatemala

by 
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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the 
Requirements for the Degree of 
Master of Arts

in the 
Latin American Studies Program 
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY 
Fall 2014

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Abstract

Child poverty is one of the fundamental issues currently confronting Guatemalan society. This study examines the efforts of two international NGOs to address child poverty in this country. Compassion Guatemala is a faith-based evangelical NGO which enables foreign donors to sponsor individual Guatemalan children by funding the costs of support services in areas of the child’s educational, health and spiritual development, from preschool years through to secondary school completion and beyond. Conversely, Plan Guatemala is an agency with no religious affiliation which has adopted the rationale that a greater positive impact on child poverty can be achieved through the implementation of community development projects which target health, sanitation, food security, education and civic participation. The strategies adopted by these two NGOs raise the question: is child sponsorship an effective response to child poverty in Guatemala?

Keywords: child sponsorship; Plan Guatemala; Compassion Guatemala; NGO
To the children of Guatemala: the nation’s hope
Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to complete this study without the kind cooperation and much-appreciated assistance of many individuals associated with the Plan and Compassion organizations in Guatemala and in Canada, including NGO staff, community members, children’s and youth groups, Canadian sponsors of the NGOs and all the children I met in Guatemala.

Within the Compassion organization I am grateful to Amy Bennett and Stephanie Ross for trail-blazing my trip to Guatemala and for arranging my interviews with Compassion sponsors. In Compassion’s Guatemala Office, I want to thank Sandra de López, Paty Sicajol, Claudia de Ramirez and most particularly Mayra Nolasco for being such a patient and knowledgeable guide. Also thanks to the staff, volunteers and kids I met at Compassion’s Child Development Centers. Especially, I want to thank some of the finest young people I have ever met - the participants in Compassion’s Leadership Development Program. Additionally, thanks to Alistair Sim, Compassion’s Program Effectiveness Research Director, for his insistence on rigorous research standards for my field work.

Within Plan’s Canadian Head Office, I must thank Rosemary McCarney and Kristy Payne for patiently putting up with my many requests for information and sponsor interviews, and for providing introductions to Plan’s Guatemala office. Within Plan Guatemala, I am very grateful to Débora Cóbar, Isabel Costa de Zapata and particularly my wonderful guide, Lorena de Garcia. In Plan’s Program Unit offices, I want to thank Helen Muralles and Antonio José Gutiérrez for their operational updates and for organizing extensive field trips on my behalf. Thanks as well to all the community representatives, youth groups and children that I was honored to meet.

Thanks also to the dedicated donor/sponsors of the two NGOs who were kind enough to let me interview them.

Finally, I would like to thank Alec Dawson, SFU’s Director of the School for International Studies, for suggesting the topic of this thesis.
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List of Acronyms

CESR Center for Economic and Social Rights; an organization founded in 1993 to focus exclusively on the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. CESR has reported extensively on conditions within Guatemala on the topics of child malnutrition, maternal and infant mortality, illiteracy and inequitable tax and land policies.

CHIP Child Poverty Research and Policy Centre; a division of the Overseas Development Institute (UK), an independent think tank dedicated to examining international development and humanitarian issues. CHIP has formulated a definition of child poverty.

CIDA Canadian International Development Agency; formerly, the Government of Canada’s official foreign aid and development agency. In 2014 CIDA was merged with the Department of Foreign Aid and International Trade (DFAIT) to create the new Department of Foreign Aid, Trade and Development (DFATD).

COCODE Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo; Community Development Council; an assembly of community residents elected to promote, facilitate, prioritize and support the coordination and effective participation of the community’s organizations to achieve its development objectives; has representation within the local COMUDES (Municipal Community Development Council).

COCODITO Children’s council, modelled after and mentored by members of the local COCODE; an elected group of children charged with identifying and promoting the rights of children; usually established within the student body of the local school with guidance and assistance provided by Plan Guatemala; the COCODITO initiative has been evaluated by FLACSO and received a favorable rating.

COMUDE Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo; Municipal Development Council, comprised of the municipality’s mayor, council members, trustees and COCODES representatives, plus other civic officials on an on call basis; liaises with Departmental and Federal authorities to achieve local community development objectives.

DFATD Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development; the Government of Canada’s recently created department mandated to address foreign aid and to promote Canadian business initiatives abroad. DFATD was formulated from the merging of the former CIDA and DFAIT organizations.

FLACSO Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales; Latin American Social Sciences Institute; an autonomous inter-governmental organization established in 14 Latin American and Caribbean countries, dedicated to research, dissemination of the social sciences and community development. FLACSO has given a favorable rating to Plan Guatemala’s COCODITO initiatives.
GDP  Gross Domestic Product; an economic calculation referring to the market value of all goods and services produced within a country in a given year.

INE  Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala; the Government of Guatemala’s statistics department. INE’s calculations of child malnutrition are used in this thesis.

LDP  Leadership Development Program; the Compassion International NGO’s program for particularly gifted graduates of its Child Development program. Supported by donor/sponsors, LDP provides all the necessary funding and support required to enable its candidates to complete their post-secondary education and hone their leadership skills.

MDG  Millennium Development Goals. In 2000, the United Nations’ 189 member states defined a set of eight international development goals, the first of which was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. The MDG Project is headed by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, who has advocated for an annual contribution equivalent to 0.7 percent of GDP by each of the 34 member countries of the OECD.

OECD  Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation. An international economic organization comprised of 34 member countries whose stated mandate is to promote economic progress, with a commitment to democracy and the establishment of a worldwide market economy.

PPP  Purchasing Power Parity; an economic method used to determine the relative value of different currencies. It can be applied to the GDP calculation of two countries in order to factor out differences in purchasing power caused by currency market exchange rates.

UFCO  United Fruit Company; formed in 1899, this USA-based corporation traded in tropical fruit (primarily bananas) exported from Central America to markets in North America and Europe. UFCO established a virtual monopoly over Guatemala’s banana industry and had profound hegemonic influence over Guatemala’s domestic policies, giving rise to the term “banana republic”.

UNICEF  United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund; a United Nations program designed to provide emergency relief, in the form of food and health care, to children and mothers in countries experiencing natural or man-made disasters.

UNODC  United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; a United Nations program whose mission statement is “Strengthening the rule of law and institutions of justice”. Among other things, the UNODC compiles statistics relating to violent crime in 219 countries, including Guatemala.
Glossary

Criollo
A racial classification used to identify a person born in the Americas, but of pure European Spanish heritage (i.e. with no Amerindian bloodlines). During colonial times, criollos were of lesser social status than Peninsulares.

Encomienda
During Spanish colonial times, a large tract of land, ownership of which was granted by the Spanish crown to a Spanish colonist in the Americas; as well as the land, ownership extended to all indigenous inhabitants living on that tract of land via a process known as repartimiento. In return for tribute provided by the inhabitants, the encomendero (landowner) was – at least in theory - obligated to provide for their protection and Christian instruction.

First World
During the post-WWII Cold War era, as ideological differences hardened between the Allied nations of Western Europe and North America and the Sino-Soviet bloc nations of Eastern Europe and Asia, the Allied nations become known collectively as the First World.

Genocide
Genocide is usually understood to be the systematic elimination of an ethnic group. In the Guatemalan context, the destruction of more than 70 Mayan villages by Guatemalan military forces during the 36 year civil war resulted in the massacre of an estimated 200,000 people and the diaspora of 1,000,000 others. Since the end of the civil war, several high ranking military leaders of that era have been tried and convicted of genocide.

Gini Coefficient
A method of calculating the income distribution within a country, developed in 1912 by Italian statistician Corrado Gini; it is frequently used as a measure of inequality within a country’s population; a Gini coefficient score of 1 would indicate a situation where all of the country’s income was equally divided amongst its residents. Conversely, a score of 100 would indicate that one person received all of that country’s income. Obviously, such extreme scores would not be possible in the real world: the “most equal” score is currently held by Sweden with a Gini coefficient of 25.0 whereas a “very unequal” rating is held by Guatemala with a score of 55.9.
Human Development Index (HDI)
This is a calculation used to measure the quality of life experienced by a given population. It is a composite derived from statistics for life expectancy, education and income. Currently, the 1st place ranking is held by Norway, whereas the HDI for Guatemala is a very low ranking of 125th place out of the 187 countries rated.

Ladino
In race-conscious Guatemala, this is the term used to designate persons of mixed European Spanish and indigenous heritage. This term is equivalent to the word mestizo commonly used in other Latin American countries. Although estimates vary, it is believed that the population mix of Guatemala is currently about 40% ladino and 60% Mayan, Xinca and Garifuna peoples.

Latifundia
In Latin America, the encomienda system established during colonial times was displaced by a latifundia system. Latifundia are large agricultural estates, dependent for their profitability on cheap labor and debt peonage. Latifundia are still found in Guatemala, as characterized by that country’s disproportionate allocation of land ownership, whereby 80% of all agricultural land is owned by 2% of the population.

Mestizo
In Latin America, a person of mixed European and indigenous heritage. In Guatemala, the synonym ladino is more commonly used.

Millennium Villages Project
A strategy to achieve the United Nations’ MDGs through the establishment of model villages in sub-Saharan Africa, adequately funded to address such community needs as clean water, sanitation, education, food security, health care and environmental sustainability.

Patrón
During Spanish colonial times, the landlord of a typically large land grant (latifundium) awarded to him by the Spanish Crown. The patrón exercised virtual life and death authority over his indigenous peasant tenants.

Peninsulares
In accordance with the Spanish colonial casta system, the highest social caste was held by the minority of persons who were European born on the Iberian Peninsula – Peninsulares.

Repartimiento
During Spanish colonial times, repartimiento was the process of distribution of indigenous people for forced labor on the Spanish-owned encomienda estates.

Second World
During the post-WWII Cold War era, the Second World was a term used to designate countries of Eastern Europe and Asia ideologically aligned with the Sino-Soviet Communist bloc.
Third World During the post-WWII Cold War era, this term was used to designate developing nations not specifically aligned to either of the ideologies of the First World or the Second World. The term Third World has survived the demise of the Cold War and has come to represent all less-developed countries, regardless of political ideology.
Frontispiece: Rural School Girls
Chapter 1.

Introduction

My interest in the phenomenon of Latin American child poverty evolved over several decades. I have had numerous opportunities to travel through fifteen Latin American countries, participating in archeological expeditions, learning Spanish, dancing the tango in Buenos Aires and making lifelong friends in Mexico. Juxtaposed to these enjoyable personal experiences, I had many occasions to observe the effects of poverty throughout Latin America. I decided to become actively involved via child sponsorship.

After considering the child sponsorship programs offered by several different NGOs, I became a regular contributor to the organization known as Foster Parents Plan (later to be renamed Plan International). Accordingly, I undertook the sponsorship of an orphaned nine-year-old girl (Maria), then living in rural Guatemala. We maintained this relationship over a seven-year period, until such time as Maria’s adopted family relocated to a different community and she was withdrawn from Plan’s sponsorship program. During that period of sponsorship, I was able to visit Maria’s village on two occasions, to observe first-hand what impact, if any, my sponsorship was having on the welfare of the child, her family and her community. Shortly after the commencement of my child sponsorship commitment, the Foster Parents Plan NGO redefined its mandate, shifting from a system of individual child sponsorships to a more generalized, albeit still child-focused system of funding community development projects. To reflect its new mandate, the organization changed its name to Plan International. This change of mandate led to some confusion on my part – my original intention had been to fund the health, education and, possibly, the vocational development of Maria, thereby hopefully contributing to a more positive life outcome for her. Under Plan’s new mandate, however, it appeared that I would be funding community development projects in Maria’s village, as opposed to providing her with direct financial assistance. This raised misgivings about the value of my contributions to the personal development of the
sponsored child. Specifically, the revised mandate raised the following question in my mind:

- Is child sponsorship an effective response to child poverty in Guatemala?

At least, that was the question I originally intended to address, but during the course of my research, I came to realize that there was a more fundamental underlying question; namely, what does effectiveness mean to the various stakeholders in the child sponsorship paradigm – the donors, the NGOs and the aid recipients, each of whose perspectives of effectiveness could be quite different? Furthermore, how have my own expectations of the child sponsorship paradigm been impacted by the research findings of this thesis project?

Initially, I approached the project with a somewhat critical perspective, due to the dissonance between my original intentions as a child sponsor (i.e to facilitate the education and personal development of one child living in poverty) and Plan’s revised mandate, which no longer accommodated this kind of individual sponsor-to-child relationship. My scepticism regarding child sponsorship NGOs was reinforced by a series of investigative reports published in the Chicago Tribune which provided examples of questionable NGO administration. Among other stories there were accounts of:

**Lavish Head Office Expenditures:** The copper-tinted $10 million office center exudes an aura of cool professionalism (Jackson, 1998). The journalist speculated that, based on the extravagant spending evident at this NGO’s USA-based Head Office, there couldn’t be a great deal of funding left over to pursue child sponsorship initiatives. This would be consistent with Escobar’s argument, discussed in Chapter 2, that development agencies (including NGOs) may be just as concerned about self-perpetuation as they are about world poverty relief (Escobar, 2001, pp. 430-431). Accordingly, the operations of this NGO were ineffective from the perspective of the donors, whose expectations of child poverty relief were not being met, and from the perspective of the intended beneficiaries, who were being deprived of needed funding.
Poorly Managed Microfinance Initiatives: *Chaos when credit is due* (Goering & Marx, 1998). The authors describe a microfinancing project in several South American communities. NGO staff, with little or no lending experience, issued high-risk loans for the start-up funding of poorly-defined small business initiatives to individuals with minimal ability or willingness to repay the loans. Hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of delinquent loans had to be written off. This project was ineffective on three levels: it wasted donors’ funds, it failed to improve the economic circumstances of the targeted communities and it tarnished the reputation of the NGO.

Outright Fraud: *Relentless campaigns of hollow promises: Charity’s probe finds sponsors funded at least 24 dead children* (Anderson, 1998). Due to inadequate administrative oversight, some unscrupulous members of the local staff of this NGO were able to concoct a scheme whereby the sponsors of West African children would continue to receive positive progress reports and solicitations for continued funding - long after the children had died. Again, this demonstrated ineffectiveness on three levels – failure to meet the expectations of the donors, who were being swindled; failure of the NGO to properly administer the funding; and failure to provide funding to still-living children in need.

Although none of the Tribune stories were directly linked to the operations of the two NGOs I chose to study, they nevertheless established a negative tone regarding the operations of child sponsorship NGOs in general.

I have chosen to compare and contrast the different approaches adopted by two child sponsorship NGOs. Compassion Guatemala is responsible for Compassion International’s Guatemala-based initiatives. This NGO facilitates the sponsorship of individual children by individual donors (as Plan used to do), addressing the health, nutritional and educational requirements of the child. Compassion partners with local (i.e. Guatemala-based) evangelical churches and accordingly views the child’s spiritual development to be an important component of its mandate. The other NGO under study is the one with which I have had direct experience - Plan Guatemala, which is Plan International’s presence within Guatemala. In contrast to Compassion, Plan has no religious affiliation and, rather than facilitating individual child sponsorships, this NGO
currently promotes community development projects which are deemed to be of specific benefit to a targeted community’s children.

The different ways of providing child sponsorship that have been adopted by these two NGOs invites speculation as to which NGO approach might be offering the more productive approach to addressing the phenomenon of child poverty, or if, in fact, their respective approaches should be viewed as two components of a much larger, multi-faceted attack on child poverty involving many other NGOs, government programs and foreign aid initiatives. However, the issue can only be addressed by considering the expectations of donors, aid receivers and the NGOs themselves.

In Chapter 2, I will explore the concept of child poverty and various definitions of the term within the context of Guatemalan social, economic and political conditions. Additionally, I will provide an overview of the poverty alleviation strategies proposed by several well-known development theorists and comment on their relevance to the respective mandates of the two NGOs being examined. Then I will describe the conditions unique to Guatemala which have led to this country’s current state of child poverty. This chapter concludes with an overview of the rather sparse collection of scholarly literature dealing specifically with child sponsorship NGOs.

Chapters 3 and 4 will describe the scope and methodology of the research which I conducted in Guatemala. In Chapter 3, I will present my own research into the activities of the child sponsorship NGO known as Plan International with specific emphasis on its activities in Guatemala. In Chapter 4, I will examine the operations of Compassion International, a faith-based child sponsorship NGO, concentrating on its initiatives in Guatemala.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I will consider the position of child sponsorship NGOs within the spectrum of the other major poverty alleviation strategies currently being proposed and/or implemented for poor communities around the world. Additionally, I will identify current threats to child poverty initiatives in Guatemala and discuss alternative future outlooks.
Chapter 2.

Child Poverty in Guatemala

Child Poverty Defined

There are numerous definitions of poverty; unfortunately, most of them do not differentiate child poverty from poverty in general.

In 2000, the United Nations, working with 189 signatory nations, established eight Millennium Development Goals, the first of which was to “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” (United Nations MDG website).

The World Bank, among other international players, took up this challenge. The Bank’s mission statement includes the phrase “… our dream is a world free of poverty” (World Bank website). As a measurement of poverty, the Bank in 1996 adopted an extreme poverty line of $1.00 per person per day, as its definition of the minimum earnings level below which an individual could not sustain the basic needs for survival, including food, clean water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education. In order to maintain a consistent Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), the World Bank updated this figure to $1.25 in 2005 (World Bank website). This definition can be classified as a needs-based approach to expressing the condition of extreme poverty in terms of dollar purchasing power.

Guatemala uses as its own official definition of poverty the quetzal national currency equivalent of $1.52 per person per day for general poverty and $.67 per person per day for extreme poverty (Hall & Patrinos, 2006, p. 109).

Unfortunately, a strictly monetary definition of poverty has several shortcomings. It is usually based on the per capita share of a given country’s GDP. By this measurement, Guatemala is positioned within the range of middle income countries.
However, a privileged elite minority receives a disproportionately large share of the GDP while the majority of the population remains poor. Table 2.1 indicates that despite the favorable per capita GDP measurement, Guatemala’s Gini Coefficient shows a high level of inequality not reflected in the World Bank poverty definition.

Another shortcoming of the monetary approach of measuring poverty is the inherent assumption that, within a family unit, all family members equally benefit from the aggregate family income. In reality, this is often not the case, with some family members, particularly women and children, and especially girl children, not receiving a proportionate benefit from the family’s income (Minujin et al, 2006, p. 486).

Another problem with a monetary definition of poverty is its failure to address the specifics of child poverty. “Children experience poverty as an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development” (ibid, p. 483). For example, child labor is a particular aspect of child poverty which can be overlooked when utilizing family unit income as a measurement of poverty. By participating in the work force, a child may be contributing to the family’s aggregate income, thereby raising it above the level of the World Bank’s defined limit of extreme poverty, but, by being compelled to work, the child is deprived of the opportunity to attend school. This has the effect of excluding the child from the basic education and vocational training necessary to secure a future better-paying livelihood, thus perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of poverty (ibid, p. 483).

Besides the World Bank, various other international organizations, including ChildFund International, UNICEF and the British-based Child Poverty Research and Policy Centre (CHIP), have developed definitions of child poverty which identify deprivations such as lack of access to adequate food, clothing, shelter, clean water, health care and education, thus expanding the scope of poverty definition beyond individual dollar earnings levels (ibid, pp. 485-487). However, there is a growing awareness that children experience poverty differently from their adult counterparts. The CHIP organization has developed a definition stating that the absence of any of the following factors constitutes child poverty: an adequate livelihood, including financial and other resources required for survival and development; human development opportunities, including education and skills training, health, water and sanitation
facilities; family structures and community services that nurture and protect children; and opportunities for voice, the lack of which results in powerlessness to change the circumstances of poverty (CHIP website).

What all of the above definitions have in common is what can be termed a needs-based approach to defining poverty. Lack of access to the basic needs (monetary or otherwise) for individual survival and development is fundamental to such definitions of poverty.

By way of contrast, there is another way of viewing poverty that goes beyond identifying specific deprivations or needs-based definitions. In recognition of the special needs of children, the UN General Assembly has adopted a definition of child poverty which stipulates that children have rights of access to basic social services, including nutrition, water, sanitation, shelter, education, participation and protection. These rights are set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989. A denial of these rights comprises this definition of child poverty (UNICEF website, Convention on the Rights of the Child page). The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) itemizes a set of basic human rights, including adequate food, shelter, health care and education, and has compiled a set of specific reports on human rights conditions in Guatemala (OHCHR website). Implicit in a rights-based definition of child poverty is the assumption that a given country’s children are Rights Holders and the country’s government agencies are the de facto Duty Bearers which must assume ultimate responsibility for any non-fulfillment of these rights.

As one of 193 signatory nations, the Guatemalan government officially accepts the mandate of the OHCHR to investigate and assess its compliance (or lack of it) with human rights standards. Yet, there currently exists widespread lack of access to basic children’s rights throughout the country. This is reflected in the OHCHR’s report on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography (OHCHR Reports: 2013 Child Trafficking Report), its reports on the abuse of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people (ibid, 2010 Mining Report; ibid, 2013 Torture Report), its report on the right to physical and mental health (ibid, 2011 Health Report) and the report on the right to food (ibid, 2010 Food Report).
With respect to children’s needs versus rights, Compassion Guatemala has adopted a needs-based approach to identifying the child’s nutritional, educational, health and spiritual needs. Compassion has taken action to address these needs by formulating a personal development program for each sponsored child, to be implemented through the various programs offered in its Child Development Centers.

Conversely, Plan Guatemala has moved away from a strictly needs-based approach to defining child poverty. Although Plan acknowledges that child poverty is manifested through deprivation of basic needs, as defined by CHIP, and Plan still facilitates community based programs to address these needs, this NGO is now focusing on programs which increase the awareness of children and their parents regarding their rights to freedom from poverty and their obligations as participatory citizens. Consequently, Plan perceives child poverty in terms of government agencies’ failure to fulfill their OHCHR-defined obligations to provide for these children’s rights. Plan promotes this rights-based approach to defining child poverty through the encouragement and support of junior community development councils (COCODITOS) and youth advocacy groups such as COINCIDIR. Concurrent with this, Plan participates in the formation and support of adult community development councils (COCODES) and advocacy groups. All such initiatives nurture and strengthen opportunities for voice at the community level, identified by CHIP as a basic component for changing the circumstances of child poverty.

Poverty Alleviation Theories and Practice

Development theorists have promoted a plethora of (often conflicting) strategies for mitigating world poverty. Jeffrey Sachs and his many supporters (including high-profile celebrities Angelina Jolie and Bono) advocate an increase in foreign aid funding to assist people in overcoming what he terms a poverty trap. Sachs argues that a funds allocation equivalent to 0.7 percent per annum of GDP of all OECD countries could achieve the elimination of extreme poverty worldwide through the establishment of Millennium Villages (Sachs, p. 218). Unfortunately, despite OECD members’ commitment to provide 0.7 percent of GDP, with few exceptions, actual funds allocation has fallen far short of this goal. Consequently, the scale of the Millennium Villages
Project has, by necessity, been reduced, to the extent that arguably the villages could be regarded as isolated islands of development positioned within a much broader spectrum of poverty. Nevertheless, although to date Sachs’ Millennium Villages have not eliminated extreme poverty, the idea of targeting such community needs as clean water, health services and education provides a framework for understanding the development initiatives prioritized by individual communities and supported by Plan Guatemala. Although more modest in scope than the Millennium Village Project, Plan Guatemala’s initiatives targeting the fulfillment of basic community needs have much in common with similar poverty-related programs undertaken in the Millennium Villages.

Paul Collier discusses a number of poverty traps in detail, stating that, despite substantial injections of foreign aid, the poorest countries are becoming poorer. He proposes that in order to facilitate optimal impact, aid must be coupled with a more inclusive international trade policy (Collier, pp. 159-163), internationally recognized laws and charters to discourage corruption, coups and civil wars (ibid, pp. 135-138), and in extreme circumstances, military interventions (ibid, pp. 124-131).

Firstly, a more inclusive international trade policy as proposed by Collier could conceivably provide Guatemala with opportunities to expand its economy. However, given the Guatemalan elite’s resistance to changing its oligarchical system of extremely unequal distribution of national wealth and economic power, this measure by itself would in all likelihood only serve to widen the gap between the rich minority and the poor majority. In order for this measure to have an efficacious impact on poverty in Guatemala, a radical change in political will within the country’s leadership would be required.

Secondly, Collier proposes a system of internationally recognized laws and charters, which, among other benefits, would discourage the corruption of government agencies by foreign business enterprises. If implemented, this measure could have a positive external impact, such as pressuring foreign mining companies to be more responsive to the economic and environmental concerns of Guatemala’s rural communities.
Nevertheless, although commendable, such initiatives as major revisions to international trade policies, laws and charters can only be promulgated through high-level international accords. This implies the necessity of extended international negotiations to achieve a workable consensus. Collier’s first two proposals appear to have merit, but essentially address the long term, since they are dependent on a major shift in Guatemala’s political climate as well as an unprecedented level of international cooperation. Due to their experience in dealing with the effects of poverty, Plan International and Compassion International conceivably could have a constructive role to play in the definition of such broad-spectrum policies. Nevertheless, in the meantime, Plan Guatemala and Compassion Guatemala are attempting to address some of the more localized and immediate issues of poverty.

Thirdly, the proposition of military interventions would in all probability be a non-starter in Guatemala. For many decades this country endured hegemonic threats of foreign military intervention, culminating in a CIA-instigated military coup in 1954. Rather than stabilizing the country politically or alleviating poverty, the foreign-backed succession of repressive military dictatorships provoked a lengthy civil war, the negative effects of which are still being borne by this country’s poor.

Finally, Guatemala is not a major receiver of foreign aid, as indicated in Table 5.1, so Collier’s idea of linking such aid to social, political and economic reforms likely would not be a decisive inducement for the Guatemalan government to comply.

William Easterly is in agreement with Collier that, historically, foreign aid funding has delivered disappointing results. However, he argues that there are no such things as poverty traps, and cites as evidence countries that have pulled themselves out of extreme poverty with little or no foreign aid funding. According to Easterly, what are needed are incentives for governments, donors and aid-receiving individuals to manage the foreign aid funding more effectively (Easterly, 2001, pp. 290-291). As already stated above, Guatemala currently is not a major receiver of international foreign aid, so attempts to link foreign aid to incentives to manage such funding more effectively likely would have minimal impact. However, Easterly’s examples of countries (primarily, the group of so-called Asian Tiger nations) that have overcome poverty with minimal or no foreign aid provide an example of what Guatemala might be able to do on its own, given
the political will. One of the major drivers of the Asian Tigers’ economic success has been a massive investment in public education – a phenomenon that is sorely lacking in Guatemala. Proportional to its GDP, this country currently has the lowest investment in public education of 17 Latin American countries surveyed (CESR, Guatemala Fact Sheet No. 3, p. 7). The Guatemalan state’s lack of investment in education provides the context within which both Plan and Compassion formulate their sponsored children’s education initiatives, to be explained in subsequent chapters.

Dambisa Moyo maintains that foreign aid has been largely unsuccessful inasmuch as it often undermines local entrepreneurial ventures and creates a perpetuating cycle of aid dependency. She suggests that a scheduled reduction of foreign aid, to be offset by government bond issues would foster greater fiscal responsibility and ultimately lead to prosperity (Moyo, pp. 77-78). As stated above, the minimal level of international foreign aid received by Guatemala suggests that using the threat of scheduled reductions of such aid, coupled with an emphasis on government bond issues would have little impact. Furthermore, Moyo’s proposed approach implies that the government would have the political will to address such issues as the poverty of its rural population. This does not coincide with Guatemala’s long history and continuing persistence of inequality, disproportionately skewed land ownership, institutional corruption and exclusion of its indigenous majority from economic, social and political decision-making. Furthermore, the extreme level of Guatemala’s institutional dysfunctionality, as will be detailed in this chapter, suggests that government bond issues would be a very hard sell to international investors due to a complete lack of credibility. Accordingly, government bond issues to offset scheduled decreases in foreign aid may have had some success in other countries and, in theory could conceivably have a positive impact on alleviating poverty in Guatemala’s communities currently targeted by Plan and Compassion initiatives. However, in practice, this is not likely to occur unless the country’s political leaders achieve a much more credible, stable and inclusive style of governance. In the interim, NGOs and aid agencies such as Plan and Compassion are attempting to address the immediate concerns of poverty until such time as the Guatemalan government assumes more responsibility and becomes more responsive to these issues.
Banerjee and Duflo suggest that pro-aid advocates, such as Sachs and Collier, and anti-aid proponents like Easterly and Moyo all assume a “big push” approach to addressing world poverty (Banerjee and Duflo, p. 25) whereas they (i.e. Banerjee and Duflo) recommend smaller scale aid projects to address specific problems, such as providing fertilizer to farmers based on a case by case assessment of their individual circumstances (ibid, p. 28). In this sense, Bannerjee and Duflo’s recommendations align quite closely to the initiatives of Plan, whereby, in conjunction with community representatives, a set of modest development objectives (e.g. a rainwater catchment system or a new school) is agreed upon and a fixed-term implementation plan is undertaken. In a similar vein, Bannerjee and Duflo’s small scale targeted approach parallels Compassion’s focused approach to formulating personal development goals for individual children and establishing a fixed term commitment to their achievement.

Hubbard and Duggan differentiate humanitarian aid from economic aid. They suggest that government agencies and NGOs should focus on humanitarian initiatives and exclude themselves from programs that compete with the local business sector. They recommend that economic aid should be provided directly to local business enterprises, as was done by the post-war European Marshall Aid Plan (Hubbard and Duggan, p. 157). Compassion’s child development initiatives are entirely outside the scope of business sector development, and thus are not a source of competing interests. It could be argued, however, that Plan, through its micro finance initiatives and its provision of start-up funding for small businesses (such as the bakery cooperative I visited in a rural Mayan community) might conceivably be competing unfairly with the (unsubsidized) local business sector. Nevertheless, in reality, Plan’s initiatives to support small businesses are in the form of modest, short-term stepping stones to long-term self-sustaining enterprises, thereby not contributing to a “perpetuating cycle of aid dependency” as suggested by Moyo. Furthermore, as was explained to me by Plan Guatemala’s Country Director, Plan deliberately endeavours to target communities where competing types of NGO assistance, government aid or business financing are not currently being provided.

Hanlon, Barrientos and Hulme argue that poor people themselves are best qualified to decide how household income should be spent and advocate government-sponsored cash transfer systems, as have been implemented with considerable success
in Mexico and Brazil (Hanlon, Barrientos and Hulme, pp. 167-168). In fact, the Guatemalan government has implemented a Conditional Cash Transfer program called *Mi Familia Progresa*. However, Hanlon et al state categorically that such cash transfer programs are only effective if supported by complementary social services, such as schools, vocational training and job creation programs. Unfortunately, Guatemala’s initiative was funded via the cannibalization of other social service budgets. The program also suffers from clientelism, piecemeal implementation, inconsistent funds delivery, corruption and a distribution system that potentially places its recipients (primarily women) under the threat of robbery and physical harm (Gaia, pp. 9-13). A more meaningful implementation of this cash transfer system would undoubtedly be welcomed by both Plan and Compassion as a complement to their respective child poverty alleviation initiatives.

Further exacerbating this issue, as a reaction to its low income tax revenues, the Guatemalan government has imposed a 12% Value Added Tax (VAT) on all sales, services, leases and imports. Paradoxically, the VAT is paired with a VAT Credit in income taxes, which favors higher earners (Schneider and Cabrera, 2012). This places a disproportionate and inequitable tax burden on poor people. Thus, the VAT in its present form can be viewed as a reverse cash transfer system that nullifies any benefit provided by *Mi Familia Progresa*. This is reflected in the fact that Guatemala is the only Latin American country where poor people are poorer today than they were ten years ago (Deutsche World website). Consequently, Plan and Compassion are coping with more child poverty today than in previous times. Cash transfer systems constitute an excellent strategy for poverty alleviation, but only when integrated optimally with complementary social services.

Amartya Sen argues that economic development is only one component of a society’s development in general, which must also encompass an individual’s freedom from the manifestations of poverty caused by social, political and economic exclusion (Sen, pp. 287-288). In this sense, Sen’s position provides a context for the rights-based definition of poverty adopted by Plan Guatemala. This NGO’s focus on creating awareness amongst children and their communities of their citizenship rights and duties, and facilitating voice to address poverty issues, is consistent with Sen’s argument. Similarly, Compassion’s Leadership Development Program is dedicated to nurturing
future community leaders better prepared to challenge the Guatemalan government regarding the indigenous population’s social, political and economic exclusion. This approach is consistent with Sen’s advocacy for freedom from the manifestations of poverty.

Since my own study examines the operations of two NGOs, it is relevant to note that a continuing debate persists amongst development theorists about the positive or negative impact of NGO interventions, as well as the more basic issue of whether NGOs should be assuming responsibility for providing social services which are arguably, under the rights-based approach, the responsibility of the nation’s government. Nevertheless, while both NGOs proceed to address the gaps left in social infrastructure caused by the government’s neglect, they also provide encouragement and opportunities for government participation in their initiatives. For example, in Plan’s 40 schools project, described in Chapter 3, a school project is not undertaken before obtaining a government commitment to provide and pay for teachers. Chapter 4 describes an arrangement whereby Compassion facilitates government participation in its vocational training programs – Compassion provides the classroom space and equipment and the Guatemalan government provides the vocational instructors. Consequently, although government participation in these public education projects appears to be minimal and somewhat reluctant at present, the positive impact of these projects could provide poor communities and NGOs the leverage necessary to demand greater future government involvement.

Another criticism of NGO poverty relief programs is the perception that, while providing aid to some communities, the NGOs are by default excluding other potential aid recipients. In a 2004 study, Anthony Bebbington discusses how NGO poverty relief initiatives in Latin America often result in “Uneven and inequitable geographies of poverty and opportunity [within a given country, resulting in] the continuing concentration of chronic poverty in remote rural areas” (Bebbington et al, p. 730). He suggests that there are patterns to such selectivity that may have more to do with the historical origins and networks of NGOs than with the identification of communities in need. This claim may have some validity inasmuch as, by intention, Compassion selects locations in poor communities that enjoy proximity with a partnering Evangelical church, a public school and a population of children within walking distance of these facilities. Consequently,
Compassion’s operations are situated primarily in urban or semi-urban locations, such as the slums of Guatemala City or smaller urban centers experiencing a high incidence of poverty. This claim appears to have less validity with regard to Plan, which targets both semi-urban and (sometimes logistically difficult to reach) rural communities. In both cases, however, I would suggest that all anti-poverty initiatives, not just those of these two NGOs, are obliged to enact this kind of selectivity, due to finite resources.

I would also question the criticism that such selectivity is responsible for perpetuating inequality. Such inequality has been historically systemic within Guatemalan society for centuries, perpetuating that country’s widespread incidence of poverty into modern times. This inequality cannot reasonably be blamed on the actions of NGOs. Given that currently, over half the population of Guatemala is living below the World Bank-defined poverty line, how does an aid agency with finite resources make a positive impact? Until better solutions can be identified which would overcome such selectivity, the difficult choice appears to be that of helping selected communities versus helping no communities.

Yet another criticism is raised in a 1988 article, wherein Arturo Escobar identifies the professionalization and institutionalization of development (Escobar, pp. 430-431), with the implication that development agencies (including NGOs) may be just as concerned about self-perpetuation as they are about world poverty relief. I would counter-argue that virtually any organization is to some extent driven by the personal ambitions of its members. No organization is immune to this. Arguably, it can prove to be as problematic for NGO-led development as for any other enterprise. Accordingly, as with any other type of organization, such potential problems can be mitigated via administrative checks and balances and by promoting amongst staff a clear commitment to the organization’s mission statement.

**The Invention of Child Poverty in Guatemala – Historical Context**

In order to understand why Guatemala currently has such a high incidence of child poverty, it is necessary to consider how Guatemala’s historical progression has led to this current state of affairs. From Spanish Colonial times to the present era, Guatemalan society has been characterised by the wholesale dispossession of the
indigenous population from its traditional lands and an extreme concentration of land ownership. An institutionalized system was established of rigid social stratification, racial discrimination, illegal or quasi-legal land expropriations, social and political exclusion of indigenous society, endemic debt peonage and brutal military repression, which has continued in one form or another until the present time (Allen & Mondragon, 2012, PowerPoint presentation, slides 27-35, SFU1; Menchú & Burgos-Debray, 1984, pp. 172-174; Yates, 1983; Yates, 2011).

Views from the Core includes a table derived from Walter Rostow’s Stages of Economic Growth (Rostow, 1960, per Porter & Sheppard, 1998, p. 83), which, in terms of Rostow’s Modernization Theory, could be used to argue that Guatemala at this point has completed its transition from a Phase 1 Traditional Society to the Phase 2 Preconditions for Takeoff stage. However, inasmuch as Rostow’s Stages of Economic Growth theory was based primarily on the experience of industrialized Europe, it does not provide a suitable overlay for non-industrialized societies such as Guatemala, whose economy still remains predominantly dependent on agricultural exports.

Instead, it could be counter-argued that, rather than progressing through Rostow’s stages towards modernization, Guatemala’s economy became stalled by the late 1800’s as a consequence of its dispossessed majority. Amartya Sen’s The Perspective of Freedom chapter (Sen, 1999, pp. 13-34) discusses how the “unfreedom” [sic] resulting from poverty can impede development (ibid, p. 15). Sen’s argument can be applied to Guatemala’s experience during this period; the high incidence of malnutrition and inadequate access to education, health care and sanitation experienced by the indigenous majority, presented a significant obstacle to the economic development of Guatemala.

External Influences

Resistance to the intolerable social and economic conditions imposed by a series of repressive US-subsidized military regimes led to the outbreak of a prolonged and catastrophic civil war, which lasted from 1960 until peace accords were signed in 1996.

1 Unpublished presentation at Simon Fraser University by T. Allen and Y. Mondragon.
This period was characterized by many human rights atrocities, over 90% of which were committed by government forces and government-sanctioned paramilitaries (Briggs, 2007). An estimated 200,000 people (mostly Mayan civilian peasants) lost their lives, and more than 1,000,000 refugees were expatriated (Allen & Mondragon, 2012, slide 18; Yates, 1988; OHCHR 2013 Torture Report, p.3; Menchú & Burgos-Debray, 1984, pp. 145-148).

U.S. foreign aid to Guatemala during this period was primarily in the form of munitions and war materiel to support a succession of right-wing military regimes. Publicly, the United States government justified this degree of extra-national intervention as support for allies of the First World (North America and Western Europe) in their struggle against the ambitions of the Second World (Soviet Russia, Communist China and their allied countries) to expand the influence of Communism throughout the Third World (non-aligned developing nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America). At the national level, Guatemala’s military regimes found it convenient to label as Communist anyone who resisted their repressive and oligarchic form of governance, thereby justifying their violence against rural Mayan communities, including forced evictions, with continued military support from the United States (Yates, 2011; OHCHR 2010 Food Report, p.7).

One can conclude that little was being done in terms of social, political or economic development during Guatemala’s ruinous 36-year civil war, which only ended after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the aftermath of which the United States discontinued its Cold War rationale for providing military aid to dictatorial regimes in Latin America.

Post-Cold War Developments in Latin America – General Trends

Since the termination of the Cold War, there has been a significant move towards political moderation amongst the national governments of Latin America. An analysis of ideological placement of the populations of seventeen Latin American countries was performed by Marco A. Morales. The analysis shows that after decades of rigid, right-wing and often violent military regimes, there is currently a general trend towards democratization and a moderate, centrist political stance (Castañeda & Morales, 2008,

Encouraging indications of social, economic and political development are observable in present-day Chile, Brazil, Bolivia and other Latin American countries. Guatemala, although not included in this survey, appears to be an exception to this positive trend. A recent survey indicates that Guatemala is the only Latin American country where the poorest segment of the population is getting poorer. Whereas 10 years ago, 40% of the population was living on less than $1.60 per day, that same 40% is currently living on less than $1.50 per day (Deutsche World, 2014).

Post-Cold War Developments in Guatemala

While other Latin American countries are making significant progress towards democratization and development, Guatemala appears to be mired in long-standing confrontation between its ladino oligarchy and its indigenous majority, currently estimated to be 60% of the population (OHCHR 2012 Child Trafficking Report, p. 4), over matters of political and economic exclusion, human rights violations and land ownership issues (Yates film seminar, March 6, 2013, SFU; OHCHR 2010 Food Report, p. 7). This has relevance to my own study inasmuch as Plan Guatemala’s Program Units are situated in predominantly indigenous rural communities, which are still coping with widespread poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, illegal land seizures and a lengthy history of exclusion from the country’s economic, social and political policy making.

Amartya Sen’s Development as Freedom discusses a nation’s development progression “in terms of the substantive freedoms of people” (Sen, 1999, p. 33), which can serve as the basis of an examination of how Guatemala’s experience of authoritarian military regimes, racial inequality and endemic poverty has negatively impacted the course of its social, political and economic development, especially for its children of indigenous descent.

Estimates of Guatemala’s indigenous population vary widely due to the fact that many indigenous births are not registered, suggesting that official estimates may be significantly understated.
Sen’s chapter on “Poverty as Capability Deprivation” (Sen, 1999, pp. 87-110) discusses how poverty in terms of lack of adequate income (ibid, p. 90), inequality (ibid, p. 92), widespread unemployment (ibid, p. 94) and lack of access to health care (ibid, p. 96) impedes the population’s ability to make positive changes in terms of nutrition, education, health care and quality of life. All such deprivations are applicable to the majority of Guatemalans and present formidable barriers to the possibility of escaping poverty.

Currently, an estimated 80% of Guatemala’s agricultural land is controlled by 2% of the population (OHCHR 2010 Food Report, p. 5). The corollary of this is that the majority of agricultural landowners’ holdings are not adequate to sustain their families’ food requirements, resulting in a current national poverty rate of 56.2% (CIA World Fact Book, 2012) and a nationwide child malnutrition rate of 49.8%, of which 70% are indigenous children (INE 2010). As noted in the OHCHR 2010 Health Report:

“Land ownership remains highly inequitable in Guatemala. The holdings of the largely indigenous poor are noted to be small, untitled, isolated and of poor quality; indeed, the main reason identified for welfare disparity between indigenous and non-indigenous households is low asset holdings” (OHCHR 2010 Health Report, p. 11).

Consequently, it can be argued that Guatemala’s history of highly concentrated land ownership has impeded the population majority’s ability to progress socially, politically and economically.

**Current Era**

**Inequality**

According to the most current United Nations Human Development Report (2013), Guatemala scores very low on its Human Development Index combined with very high inequality on the Gini Index. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP), calculated using the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) method indicates that Guatemala can be classified as having a middle income level of per capita GDP (see Table 2.1 below), yet due to the very high Gini score for inequality, GDP does not accurately reflect the
extremely distorted distribution of income, most of which goes to a wealthy elite minority while 56.2% of the population lives in poverty (CIA World Fact Book, 2012).

The OHCHR 2014 Annual Report indicates that inequality persists, with a definite bias against indigenous people. Guatemala’s Rural Poverty Map is a survey of 55 communities having a large composition of indigenous residents (85% to 97%). The survey shows that 60% of the children under age 5 in these communities suffered from chronic malnutrition. The survey also indicates that in the past year, 106 children died of causes relating to acute malnutrition (OHCHR 2014 Annual Report, p. 5). What is particularly shocking is the fact that the 13,193 recorded cases of malnutrition amongst children under the age of 5 represent a 15% increase over the previous year (ibid. p. 15).

“Chronic malnutrition among children in Guatemala is far greater than in any other country in Latin America and the Caribbean. Elsewhere in the world, only Bangladesh and Yemen have higher rates of [children’s growth] stunting”

(Hall & Patrinos, 2006, p. 141).

Racial inequality is a significant factor relating to poverty. According to Hall and Patrinos, 74% of indigenous Guatemalans are living in poverty as compared to 38% of the non-indigenous ladino population (Hall & Patrinos, 2006, p. 110).

| Table 2.1. Comparative HDI, Gini Rankings and per Capita GDP for Selected Countries |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Country                          | HDI Ranking     | Gini (In)Equality Index | GDP (PPP) per Capita, 2013 |
| Norway                           | 1               | 25.8 very low       | $65,461          |
| United States                    | 5               | 48.0 high           | $53,143          |
| Canada                           | 8               | 32.6 low            | $43,247          |
| Sweden                           | 12              | 25.0 lowest         | $43,533          |
| Guatemala                        | 125             | 55.9 very high      | $7,295           |
| Central African Republic         | 185             | 56.3 very high      | $604             |

(Sources: Adapted from United Nations Human Development Report 2013, World Bank Gini 2014 Survey and International Monetary Fund 2013 Survey)
As indicated previously in Footnote 2, Guatemala’s per capita GDP may be overstated due to a significantly understated estimate of the country’s indigenous population.

Crime

Following the brief tenure of a moderate left-of-center government led by Alvaro Colóm (2008-2012), a new right-wing government, currently led by Otto Perez Molina was elected, advocating a widely publicized *mano dura* (i.e “strong fist”) anti-crime platform.

However, after three years in power, the Perez government has had minimal observable impact on Guatemala’s ongoing problems of social unrest, crime, poverty, illiteracy, inequality and corruption (Allison, January 2013), all of which appear to be escalating. There is a disturbing recent trend towards increasingly prevalent violence instigated by drug cartels, suggesting a major deterioration in the country’s ability to maintain even a modicum of law and order.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ranks Guatemala as one of the world’s most dangerous countries (UNODC, 2013). Although the right-wing Perez government was elected with a “tough on crime” platform, the level of violent crime, as reflected in the homicide rates tabulated below, has remained high. In fact, with the growing influence of drug cartels in this country, violent crime appears to be escalating (Plan Guatemala Travel Advisory). While in Guatemala, I have experienced two robbery attempts – in one instance by the local police.

During 2013 there have been 5,156 violent deaths, including 664 women, 356 boys and 122 girls. Eighty-one percent of the homicides were through the use of firearms, compared to a world average of 42% (OHCHR 2013 Annual Report, p. 5).
Table 2.2. Homicide Deaths per 100,000 Persons for Selected Countries (2012 Report)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Homicide Rate Per 100,000 Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monaco</td>
<td>0.0 (best)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>38.5 (bad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>91.6 (worst)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Adapted from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012)

Lack of public confidence in the official police force’s ability to control crime is reflected in the observable prevalence of guns in private hands, and the presence of armed private security guards stationed in front of all banks and many businesses. Of the 3,806 violent deaths that occurred during an 8-month period, 82% were caused by firearms; at present, there is no limit or control over the number of firearms an individual can possess (OHCHR 2013 Child Trafficking Report).

During a conversation with a resident of a town in northeastern Guatemala, I was informed that his small community has at times resorted to vigilante action: “If the police are unable or unwilling to deal with a known troublemaker, we citizens will form a committee to escort the individual into the [Petén] jungle” (statement of a resident of Viejo Naranjo). He implied that the troublemaker would be “terminated”. It is of interest to note that widespread criminality interferes with the delivery of Plan Guatemala’s child-focused community development services. During my interview with Plan Guatemala’s Country Director, I was informed that one of Plan’s staff had been murdered in recent weeks, leading to the shutdown of Plan’s operations in one of its regional Program Units due to the presence of ongoing violence. Accordingly, Plan Guatemala has issued a Travel Advisory for its visiting child sponsors, describing the crime-related risks confronting travellers to Guatemala (Plan Guatemala Travel Advisory).
Child sex tourism is also a major concern. Sex tourists, predominantly from Canada, the USA and Europe, are rarely prosecuted within Guatemala and those that are arrested frequently skip bail and flee the country with impunity (OHCHR 2013 Child Trafficking Report, pp. 6-7). During my own visit to a small Mayan community, a resident mother expressed concern that I might be a child abductor for the sex industry.

Escalating drug cartel related violence has resulted in a diaspora of children, from Central America, whose families are sending them northwards in the hope of having them escape being conscripted into the narcotics industry as gang members, drug couriers, kidnap victims or sex slaves. Current estimates indicate that over 24,000 such children were apprehended at the United States border in the past year (Chomsky, 2014). Perversely, it appears that drug cartels have found ways to profit from the diaspora, either by charging the human traffickers a “tax” to cross borders or by participating directly in the trafficking business, charging the families of the migrating children up to $10,000 per child for transport services (Fox News Latino, 2014).

Educational Deficiency

“Guatemala’s education indicators are worse than all other countries in the Western Hemisphere but Haiti”

(Hall & Patrinos, 2006, p. 127).

This is consistent with Guatemala’s low expenditure on education. As a percentage of GDP, at 2.6% Guatemala’s education budget is the lowest of 17 Latin American countries surveyed, whose average was 4.3% of GDP in 2008 (CESR, Guatemala Fact Sheet No. 3, p. 7).

In terms of educational attainment, rural school completion rates are much lower than in the urban areas, and there is a significant gap between completion rates for boys and girls. As an example of contrast, it is estimated that while 97% of urban, non-indigenous young men are literate, the literacy rate for rural indigenous women is only 68% (ibid, p.6). Both the quality and proximity of rural schools are contributing factors to this phenomenon, along with entrenched traditional attitudes amongst many indigenous people who place minimal value on education - particularly for girls.
Table 2.3. Literacy Rankings and Rates for Selected Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Literacy Rate (%) of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 (best)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>not shown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>22 (Worst)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Adapted from CIA World Fact Book, 2012)

Several NGOs are attempting to address the issue of Guatemala’s literacy problem. Among the most successful of these appear to be the three NGOs known respectively as Child Aid International, Compassion International and Plan International. Child Aid has established libraries, teacher training programs and literacy programs in 50 rural communities throughout Guatemala (Child Aid International website). Compassion has provided statistical data that appears to support its contention that the literacy component of its child sponsorship programs in Guatemala is having a positive impact (Wydick, Glewwe & Rutledge, 2013, pp. 21-22). Plan is currently involved in establishing 40 primary schools as the coordinator of a joint initiative, partnering with a private corporate benefactor and the Guatemalan government. While promoting literacy is commendable, it raises an important issue: by taking on this responsibility, are foreign aid organizations absolving the domestic government of its responsibility to fund public literacy? However, as will be noted in Chapters 3 and 4, both Compassion Guatemala and Plan Guatemala provide opportunities for, and encouragement of, government participation in the delivery of their education programs.

**Corruption**

Transparency International has created an index of the perception of public sector corruption. A score of 10 indicates the perception of a very clean public sector
whereas a score of 1 indicates the perception of prevalent public sector corruption. Table 2.4 indicates a low “Perceived Honesty” score for Guatemala’s public sector.

Table 2.4. Perceptions of Public Sector Corruption for Selected Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Public Sector Honesty Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.5 (best)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>1.0 (worst)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Adapted from Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, 2011)

The United Nations-supported International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala indicted 13 of Guatemala’s high-level judges during 2012 for making corrupt deals (Cawley, 2013). Corruptibility within the judicial sector can encourage activities that are counter-productive to the country’s development and contribute significantly to social unrest. There even appears to be an unfortunate link between the activities of Canadian mining concerns in Guatemala and human rights abuses, with the apparent complicity of the Guatemalan judiciary system.

Irresponsible Mining Practices

The OHCHR 2010 Mining Report notes that foreign mining companies, including a significant representation of Canadian companies, appear to engage in human rights violations with impunity and often with the complicity of the Guatemalan judiciary system. The report notes the adverse impacts of extractive industries and their privately employed security forces on indigenous communities, including contamination of water sources, infant illnesses, livestock deaths, harassment, attacks on and killings of community leaders, forced evictions, demolition of housing and the sexual abuse of women. The report also discusses the “judicial action taken against members of indigenous communities engaged in acts of protest against the [mining] companies’ activities” (OHCHR 2010 Mining Report, p. 3) and notes “the speed with which such
proceedings were conducted compared with the apparent lack of response to community demands for the prosecution of [mining companies for] violations of their rights” (ibid, p. 3).

Social Unrest, Unresolved Grievances

From colonial times to the present day, the rural indigenous communities of Guatemala have endured racial discrimination, illegal or quasi-legal land seizures, multiple forms of near-slavery, many human rights violations, frequently abetted by collusion between foreign mining interests and the Guatemalan judiciary, government sanctioned death squads and a 36-year long civil war characterized by an overt campaign of government authorized genocide.

The court-proven genocide, during which an estimated 200,000 Mayan peasants were killed (Yates, 1983), has had a profound impact on the children and families of the indigenous peasant population, many of whose communities are currently targeted for Plan Guatemala assistance.

With little evidence of the government’s willingness or ability to take the initiative regarding basic human rights, Plan is focusing on increasing the awareness of indigenous children and their families regarding their constitutional entitlements as Rights Holders and the government’s agencies as Duty Bearers. Specifically, Plan outlines its objectives as “strengthening the capacity of State Institutions” (Plan Guatemala Country Strategic Plan), “Policy advocacy through alliances and coalitions with many actors to define policies favoring children” (ibid) and “Participation and social mobility of marginalized children and communities” (ibid).

Public Health Issues

The violence of the civil war, combined with longstanding systemic prejudice and repression has resulted in a high incidence of physical and mental health problems for indigenous people, who face many obstacles when trying to obtain health services. Firstly, at 2% of GDP, not only is public health expenditure lower in Guatemala than in comparable Latin American countries, but that expenditure has been declining over the
past two decades (OHCHR 2010 Health Report, pp. 5-6). Secondly, public health expenditures are most heavily concentrated in the urban centers, with up to 80% of public health staff based in metropolitan areas, thus impeding access to health services by the largely rural indigenous population (ibid). Thirdly, all public services, including health services are severely under-resourced due to underfunding resulting from the low aggregate tax revenue rate of 11.3% of GDP, one of the lowest in the world (ibid). Finally, of the already underfunded health budget, only 1% is allocated to mental health services (ibid). This is reflected in the 2010 Health Report:

“Moreover, the trauma of the civil war has added to the burden of mental illness and disability in the population, particularly in rural indigenous communities that were disproportionately affected by violence during the war. This issue is not being adequately addressed by the Government; only one per cent of the current health budget is allocated to mental health care, and community mental health services do not exist.”

(OHCHR 2010 Health Report, pp. 5-6).

As noted in the CHIP definition of child poverty earlier in this chapter, inability to access health resources is a critical determining factor of child poverty.

**Failing State?**

Given the high levels of poverty, inequality, crime, illiteracy, public sector corruption and government reluctance to deal with longstanding social grievances, it is not surprising to find Guatemala in the “Warning” category of the Fund for Peace NGO’s Failed States Index.
Table 2.5. Failed States Index Ratings for Selected Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>177 (best)</td>
<td>sustainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>sustainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>sustainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>sustainable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>2 (worst)</td>
<td>alert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1 (worst)</td>
<td>alert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Adapted from Fund for Peace Failed States Index, 2012)

Child Sponsorship NGOs - Previous Research

To date, very little scholarly research has been published on child sponsorship NGOs. I have been able to locate five authors who deal specifically with child sponsorship programs.

In 2001, American Ethnologist published an article about the child sponsorship initiatives of the World Vision NGO in Zimbabwe, comprised of individual child sponsorships as well as community development projects, such as drilling boreholes for drinking water or the construction of schools. At the time of writing, World Vision was de-emphasizing individual child sponsorships in favor of its community-based projects. The author analyzes the usage of the Child Sponsorship Model as World Vision’s primary fund-raising strategy.

“The personal connection - from individual to individual in relationships of correspondence both effaces the global political-economic context that engenders sponsorship and transcends the potential impersonality of a monthly remittance.”

(Bornstein 2001, p. 597).

Bornstein suggests that World Vision’s continued use of the child sponsorship model for its fund raising programs is intended to create a sense of personal relationship between sponsor and sponsored child and mask the fact that such a sponsorship is essentially a monetary exchange.
While such an approach may be effective as a fund-raising strategy, World Vision’s change in mandate was perceived quite differently by some of the sponsored children. Bornstein’s study documents the case of a sponsored child in Zimbabwe, who originally received direct benefits from World Vision’s child sponsorship program. However, when World Vision discontinued funding the child directly in 1987:

“[The sponsored child] experienced World Vision’s initiative of self-sufficiency as abandonment.”

(ibid, p. 599).

Bornstein also discusses the lack of success in getting wealthy Zimbabweans to embrace World Vision’s essentially Western concept of child sponsorship, based on an individual’s willingness to help children that one has never met personally (ibid, pp. 612-613). Apparently, in Zimbabwean society, charity is geared more towards a personalized concept of helping needy members of one’s own extended family and less towards assisting strangers, especially within such a depersonalized realm as an entire community. This suggests that, while many people in Western society may consider child sponsorship to be an appropriate vehicle to address child poverty, as evidenced by the hundreds of millions of dollars generated annually by child sponsorship appeals, this particular concept of charity may be alien to other cultures.

In his book, *The Life You Can Save*, Peter Singer discusses and defends Plan’s rationale for switching from its direct child sponsorship model to its community development model, arguing that community-based initiatives have a broader beneficial impact by focusing on poverty issues which can only be addressed at the community level, such as facilitating clean water systems, health clinics or schools. He claims that the community based model also avoids potential dissension between individual recipients of aid and non-recipients within families and communities. Nevertheless, Singer sees value in Plan’s continued use of the Child Sponsorship Model as a fund-raising strategy. He argues that by citing specific examples of children living in poverty, Plan overcomes much of the impersonality of making financial remittances (Singer 2010, pp. 63-64). This appears to be consistent with Bornstein’s observations of World Vision’s continued use of the child sponsorship model for fund raising purposes.
However, an NGO’s change in mandate from individual child sponsorship to community development can sometimes lead to misunderstanding and negative reaction amongst individuals and communities experiencing the change at the receiving end. Cooper and Pratten’s research into World Vision’s operations in Kenya indicated that the change of focus towards community development was accompanied by a concurrent transition from employing international staff to local Kenyan staff. This created a widespread impression amongst former direct aid recipients that the NGO’s (presumably corrupt) Kenyan staff members were not fairly allocating the goods and services received from (presumably honest) foreign donors (Cooper & Pratten 2013, p.7). As expressed by a former direct aid recipient: “My disappointment has been that when the [white foreigners] send us something, [the Kenyan World Vision staff] take it” (ibid p.7).

Cooper and Pratten’s analysis of Kenya-based child sponsorship programs argues that the perceived inconsistency and lack of long-term sustainability of the programs they observed creates the impression amongst aid recipients that the benefits are entirely dependent on the vagaries of chance. As such, they are widely perceived as comparable to a one-time lottery win, unlikely to be continued over time and not conducive to supporting long-term plans for self-development (ibid, p. 4).

In their soon to be published book, Charity and Chance, the authors suggest that, subsequent to such changes in mandate, the interventions of the ChildFund, World Vision and Plan NGOs in Kenyan communities have been perceived by recipients as being so piecemeal, arbitrary, inconsistent and lacking in accountability that the benefits are regarded as bits of luck or chance, with negligible impact on the long-term wellbeing of sponsored children and families (ibid, p. 14). Cooper and Pratten comment on World Vision’s letter writing program (similar in many respects to Plan’s and Compassion’s letter writing programs). In their Kenyan example, sponsored children are periodically summoned to attend meetings in a neighboring village where letters to their sponsors are scripted for them. According to Cooper and Pratten’s observations, this process is perceived by the sponsored children as a meaningless chore for which they receive no material benefit. As expressed by two of the sponsored children:

‘As you know, [the neighbouring village where meetings are often held] is quite a distance from here so we walk all that way for nothing but a soda. You feel it’s
not good.’ One more boy added: ‘Sometimes our parents will even tell us not to go to those meetings because there is nothing we get from them.’

(Cooper & Pratten 2013, p. 6)

The perception of NGO benefits as an unpredictable windfall is suggestive of a parallel situation that occurred in another place and time. During and after WWII, Melanesians, observing firstly Japanese, then later Allied planes parachuting food, tools, weaponry and medicines into remote jungle areas developed “Cargo Cult” religions based on the expectation of largess falling from the sky (literally). Similarly, as suggested in Cooper and Pratten’s example, NGO aid recipients’ expectation of receiving material goods as a consequence of one’s own good luck is unlikely to provide a basis upon which an infrastructure of sustainable community development can be established.

However, not all child sponsorship NGOs have discontinued offering individual child sponsorship programs and the continuation of such programs appears to have a positive impact. In 2013, the Journal of Political Economy published a survey conducted by Bruce Wydick of San Francisco University. Wydick was able to track down a number of Compassion International’s formerly sponsored children, including children in Guatemala (now adults), arguing that participation in Compassion’s programs had positive effects in terms of years of schooling completed and the probability of formal employment (Wydick et al, 2013, pp. 19-20).

O’Neill discusses the activities of a faith-based NGO from North Carolina and its child sponsorship initiatives in one of Guatemala City’s most violent neighborhoods, pseudonymously named La Paloma. He suggests that, given a prescribed set of circumstances, a symbiotic relationship can evolve between the sponsored child and the sponsor. The article quotes one of the child sponsors as follows:

“[The people of La Paloma] need to be liberated from the oppression of poverty, drug abuse, sexual abuse, a lack of education, and opportunity. But I (and we) need to be liberated from materialism, consumerism, narcissism, entitlement, meaningless distractions, and so much more.”

(O’Neill, p. 2)
Yet, the article goes on to argue that, in order for the child to enjoy continued sponsorship, he or she must conform to the sponsor’s preconceptions of appropriate responses to said sponsor’s sense of Christian charity, wherein:

“The sponsored child asks the right questions. He writes the perfect letter. She recites a beautiful prayer. This behavior tends to mobilize the compassionate [sponsor], motivating a transfer of resources and opportunities.”

(ibid, p.2)

On the other hand, O'Neill argues that children in the same neighborhood, who fail to conform to such preconceived expectations of appropriate behavior, tend to be excluded from the sponsorship program, thereby often becoming more vulnerable to local gang influence, thus giving substance to the article’s title, *Left Behind*. “Some children fulfill a [sponsor’s] need. Others do not; they get left behind.” (ibid, p.12). So, whereas Bebbington suggests that NGOs’ selectivity of communities tends to exclude some while others benefit, O'Neill makes the parallel conclusion that individuals within a single community can be either selected for assistance or excluded from it. Such selectivity may be due to the constraints of funding, logistics, ideology or a combination of these factors.

O’Neill’s NGO (not identified by name in his journal article) guides the children to write appropriately scripted letters to their Christian sponsors meant to encourage continuing support by creating “a context in which [the child] might choose God over gangs.” (ibid, p. 5). This coaching of the children’s letter writing to their sponsors resonates with Cooper and Pratten’s observations in Kenya, as well as my own observations in Guatemala.

The following two chapters deal specifically with the operations of Plan Guatemala and Compassion Guatemala and their impact on child poverty in that country.
Chapter 3.

Plan International and Plan Guatemala

Mission Statement

“Plan aims to achieve lasting improvements in the quality of life of children, families and communities in developing countries. We do this through a process of collaboration that unites people across cultures, adding meaning and value to their lives by:

Enabling children, their families and communities to meet their basic needs and to increase their ability to participate in and benefit from their societies

Building relationships to increase understanding and unity among peoples of different cultures and countries

Advocating and promoting the rights and interests of the world's children, with a special focus on girls’ rights to overcome issues of gender discrimination.”

(Plan Canada website)

History and Financial Overview

Plan International originated in 1937 as an organization called Foster Parents Plan, dedicated to assisting children whose lives were impacted by the Spanish Civil War. Unlike many other international child sponsorship NGOs, such as World Vision, ChildFund or Compassion, Plan has no religious affiliation. Initially, Plan facilitated the linking of individual sponsors to individual children, so that a given sponsor’s donations contributed to the health, education and welfare of a particular child. In this sense, the donor became a “foster parent” of the child (Plan International website 2013, History page). However, in the early 1990’s the organization concluded that giving money to individual children wasn't a particularly effective way to alleviate poverty, reasoning that
it did nothing to help lift the child’s family out of poverty and it often created dissension between the families of aid beneficiaries and the families of children not receiving aid. Furthermore, it did not address prevailing problems such as clean drinking water, sanitation and health care, which can only be dealt with effectively at a community-wide level. Accordingly, the NGO redirected its attention towards community-based projects (albeit with a continuing focus on the wellbeing of children).

Where applicable, the following financial information, some of which has been extracted from Plan International Annual Reports, has been converted by me from figures reported in euros into equivalent Canadian dollars. Plan International, headquartered in Surrey, England, is the Head Office for Plan’s affiliate NGOs located in 20 donor countries and 50 recipient countries. As an affiliate, Plan Canada is one of the donor country NGOs, representing 208,480 Canadian donor/sponsors (Plan Canada website 2013, Annual Review section), that for many years has provided fund raising services for international child sponsorship programs in disadvantaged regions of the world. Of the fundraising countries, during 2013 Plan Canada was the largest fund raiser, contributing $194,502,000 CDN to the International organization, comprising 19.23% of Plan’s total global revenue of $1,011,372,000 CDN (Plan International website 2013, Annual Review, p. 11, derived from the euro equivalent). Accordingly, Canadian donors have a large vested interest in ensuring that their contributions are being employed appropriately and judiciously.

Of the global revenue, Plan Guatemala received a relatively small share totalling $12,726,000 CDN (ibid, p.25). Of the total global revenue, $549,233,000 CDN or 54.3% was derived from PLAN’s Child Sponsorship fund-raising campaign (ibid, p.1). Interestingly, within Canada a somewhat smaller share of total Plan Canada revenue was derived from the Child Sponsorship Model (44.5%), the balance coming from grants (25.7%), gifts in kind (19.0%), contributions (10.5%) and other income (0.3%) (Plan Canada website 2013, Financial Overview, p.1).

Like all of its fund-receiving affiliates, Plan Guatemala allocates its spending into eight program areas: education (24%), early childhood care and development (17%), disaster management (10%), child participation (16%), child protection (9%), economic
security (12%), sexual and reproductive health (8%), and water and sanitation (4%) (Plan Guatemala Memoria de Labores 2012, p. 11).

Of total revenues received, Plan International expends 76% on the above programs (Plan International website). Of the remainder, 14.5% is expended on fundraising and 9.5% on other operating expenses (ibid). For a charitable organization, an administration expense allocation of 20% to 25% would appear to be a realistic allocation of funds. Some charities like to boast about how little they spend on administration as compared to their expenditure on charitable programs. However, a more cautious viewpoint would suggest that too little spent on administration could result in inadequate operational control and increased opportunities for mismanagement and corruption.

Notwithstanding the plethora of financial data noted in the above section, it is difficult, if not impossible to correlate monies spent (i.e. costs) to the specific impact such expenditures might have on the lives of children in Guatemala (i.e. benefits). Although such a quantitative analysis may be feasible, it would require an intensive study which would be beyond the scope and time frame allocated for this thesis. Furthermore, such a narrowly-focused financial analysis might not yield the desired result of assessing the quality of programs undertaken by this NGO. Consequently, I have structured my study to be more of a qualitative analysis of the NGO’s initiatives.

**Original Mandate**

The original premise of Foster Parents Plan was that the fund raising agencies of donor NGOs, located in wealthier countries, would solicit donations from those countries’ residents to be used for the benefit of children living in poorer countries. Recipient NGOs, including the Guatemala affiliate, would receive and distribute the donors’ funds in accordance with their regional priorities. The donor NGO would set up child sponsor relationships whereby individual children would establish relationships with individual donors. Through the exchange of letters, gifts, photographs and NGO-produced progress reports, an emotional bond often would form between sponsor and child, which would encourage the sponsor’s ongoing commitment to providing funds for that child’s
nutrition, health and educational needs. Consistent with this concept of individual sponsor-to-child relationships, it could be argued that, at least in a financial sense, a Canadian donor was “foster-parenting” the welfare of one child, thus justifying the organization’s original name - Foster Parents Plan of Canada.

The Child Sponsorship Fund Raising Model

Plan International originally offered individual child sponsorship programs, but in recent years Plan has moved away from the practice of providing direct assistance to individual children and instead has shifted most of its funding into a broad range of community development projects. Nevertheless, Plan continues to employ its so-called Child Sponsorship Model as its primary fund-raising vehicle. For example, when accessing the Plan Canada Website the viewer is presented with an appeal to “Sponsor a Child” (Plan Canada website 2014, Home Page). Over half of all donations received by Plan International during 2013 (54%) were obtained via this Child Sponsorship Model (Plan International website 2013, Annual Report, p. 7). Potential donors are invited to sponsor a child through a program of monthly remittances (currently $37 for Canadian donors). Although Plan’s promotional literature stipulates that its focus is primarily on community development projects as opposed to individual child sponsorship, its prominent use of the child sponsorship model in its public appeals tends to overshadow its true mandate of child-focused community development. Plan’s continued use of the child sponsorship model is very successful for fund raising. O’Neill argues that it creates a sense of connection with a child that cultivates feelings within the sponsor of moral consciousness, empathy and self-worth (O’Neill, p. 4). This, then, is reflected in continuing financial support. Accordingly, the nature of the funds appeal not only addresses the expectations of the donor, but also supports the financial needs of the NGO:

“Grainy Polaroids, handwritten notes, and annual report cards brokered hypermediated relationships while at the same time generating significant amounts of money.”

(ibid, p.5)
Singer suggests that use of the child sponsorship model provides a potential donor with a sense of connection to an individual child, which acts as a powerful inducement to establish a long term financial commitment to assist that child (Singer 2010, pp 63-64). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Plan’s supporting literature clarifies the true nature of its mandate.

“Sponsorship contributions are pooled centrally, and used to fund programs benefiting sponsored children, their families and communities. More than 70 years of experience have taught us that helping families and communities become self-sufficient is the best way to secure the child’s future”

(Plan Canada 2014, FAQS website page).

Consistent with this, the interviews that I conducted with Plan’s Canadian donors indicated that they were well aware that their funding was not directed to individual children. Furthermore, in my own experience, although the NGO’s change of name and change of mandate to community development came as a surprise to me, I continued to be a child sponsor for a period of seven years. This is consistent with responses I received from the donors I contacted, who were all aware of Plan’s community development focus. Yet they demonstrated a willingness to provide long-term support for Plan’s many community development projects. Thus, it can be concluded that although the donors realize that they do not fund individual children, the nature of the child sponsorship funds appeal still compels them to support Plan. This suggests that even indirectly supporting the wellbeing of children meets the expectations of the donors to the extent that they contribute more than half a billion dollars to the child sponsorship model..

Therefore, notwithstanding the donors’ understanding that they are not sponsoring individual children, their motivation to remain long-term financial contributors suggests that they derive a level of satisfaction from the donor relationship. In this sense, the child sponsorship model is effective in meeting the expectations of the donors, inducing them to continue their financial support. Furthermore, the child sponsorship campaign, being a very effective fund raising vehicle, meets the expectations of the NGO. This would be consistent with O’Neill’s contention that such financial support cultivates a sense of moral consciousness, empathy and self-worth in the giver.
Interestingly, Bornstein’s investigations in Zimbabwe would confirm that this inherent altruism imbedded in the act of child sponsorship is essentially a manifestation of Western society’s cultural concept of charity. She noted the singular lack of success that child sponsorship NGOs experienced in attempting to recruit donors from wealthier population segments of Zimbabwean society, whose concept of charity she determined is essentially familial in nature. An additional contributing factor to this lack of interest in child sponsorship programs could be that the prevalence of poverty throughout Zimbabwe suggests that enough needy individuals can be found within the extended family to preclude any interest in helping non-family members.

Helping Individuals or Communities?

According to PLAN Canada’s 2013-14 fund-raising catalogue of development activities, community projects currently under way include the provision of clean water, pharmaceuticals, school supplies and facilities, and the establishment of centers for general, maternal and obstetric health care. (PLAN Canada Gifts of Hope Catalogue 2013-14, p. 4).

Nevertheless, despite Plan’s stated intention to focus on community development projects, many of the initiatives described in PLAN Canada’s promotional literature still appear to be directed towards selected individuals, as opposed to community projects: for example, education scholarships for individual girls, or livestock donations to selected families (PLAN Canada Gifts of Hope Catalogue 2013-14, pp. 5-7, 17). Such initiatives are obviously commendable, yet they illustrate the fact that given its finite source of funding, the NGO cannot avoid becoming selective about the communities, families and individuals it chooses to help. A Plan Canada staff member explained to me that in such cases, representatives of the target communities will identify which individuals or families are most in need of special assistance. Nevertheless, such selectivity reflects O’Neill’s observations in La Paloma and Bebbington’s observations in general. Additionally, a side benefit to the NGO of programs that address the needs of individual children or families is that they reinforce the donor’s sense of helping an identifiable recipient instead of a more generalized community project.
Plan Guatemala currently administers six Program Units, located primarily in the south-eastern regions of the country. They are identified as the Program Units for San Pedro Carchá, Salamá, Rabinal, Jalapa, Polochic and Gualan. The Program Unit for Escuintla, with which I previously had direct dealings as a former child sponsor, has now been phased out. This is consistent with Plan Guatemala’s approach to adhere to a predetermined fixed time frame (usually ten years) for its tenure within a given community, at which time it is anticipated that the community would have achieved its objective of self-sufficiency with respect to the development projects undertaken with Plan’s assistance. It should be noted, however, that prior to engaging a particular community, it was explained to me that Plan Guatemala, in conjunction with the community’s leaders, clearly define the goals, budget, time frame and desired outcome of community projects to be undertaken.

**Plan Guatemala – Field Research**

Plan International offers programs in many parts of the world, but I have selected Guatemala as my research target for a number of reasons. I have travelled extensively throughout Guatemala and have observed firsthand many of the social, political and economic problems confronting the children of that country.

For seven years, I was a PLAN Canada sponsor of a child living in Guatemala, providing me with a donor’s perspective of the program, initially as an individual child sponsor under the Foster Parents Plan mandate and subsequently as a community development sponsor under the revised Plan International mandate. Visits to my sponsored child’s community have given me the opportunity to compare my initial perception of child sponsorship to the NGO’s actual delivery of services on the ground.

Cooper and Pratten’s Kenyan aid recipients and Bornstein’s Zimbabwean aid recipients expressed confusion and disappointment resulting from the NGOs’ change in mandate from individual child sponsorship to community development projects; I as a child sponsor experienced similar confusion and disappointment. Prior to visiting
Maria’s village, I had selected a Christmas gift for her, a *mochila* (i.e. knapsack) from Plan’s website, which I considered would be useful for transporting her school books and supplies. However, during my visit, Maria assured me that the gift had never been received by her. It should be noted, however, that in response to my complaint, Plan was later able to rectify this oversight. During the transition of mandate, the annual progress reports I received from Plan Guatemala were cursory at best regarding the welfare of the child and were so generic about development projects that they provided no real information about her specific community. For example, the extensive clean water project that was inaugurated during my visit to Maria’s community was never mentioned in any of the progress reports that I received. In fact, the reports I received in two consecutive years contained exactly the same wording. It also became obvious to me that the letters I received, ostensibly from Maria, were in fact written on her behalf by others, since I discovered during my visits that she was not regularly attending school and that she was functionally illiterate and unable to write such letters. It would be fair to say that during this period, my expectations as a child sponsor were not being met by the NGO. Nevertheless, during the course of my field research for this thesis, I was able to observe positive changes in Plan’s programs: Plan’s problem-ridden Christmas gift program has been eliminated altogether; the boiler plate status reports have been replaced by a system of more detailed and informative reporting of Plan’s specific activities in each of their six Program Unit areas. A typical Program Unit Report will provide photos and some basic information regarding the sponsored child’s welfare (Plan International Sponsorship Update), but the bulk of the report provides details about specific issues confronting all children within the Program Unit (Plan Guatemala Program Unit Status Report); Plan Guatemala’s Country Strategic Plan shows current and future initiatives with respect to education, health, food security and children’s rights.

Preserving the confidentiality of donors and sponsored children was of concern, not only to SFU’s Office of Research Ethics, but also to both NGOs investigated in this study. Accordingly, I have used pseudonyms or generic identifiers for all persons contacted throughout the study. Additionally, although in this chapter I am identifying the geographic locations that I visited, throughout the rest of this document I will use

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3 Pseudonyms have been employed for all children’s names used in this study.
pseudonymous or non-specific place names; this is to allay the NGOs’ concerns that a reader might deduce the identity of persons - particularly children - that I contacted.

While doing my field research, but also during earlier trips to see to my sponsored child, I visited communities located in the Departments of Guatemala, Sololá, Alta Verapaz, Jalapa, Petén and Esquintla. I visited the cities, towns and villages of Guatemala City, Antigua, Ciénaga Grande, San Pedro Carchá, San Luis Jilotepeque, San Jorge, Jalapa, Tierra Blanca Chijotóm, Cobán, La Montaña, Guardiania and Flores.
With the assistance of Plan Guatemala, I was able to establish an itinerary that enabled me to visit a selection of Plan projects, interacting with the staff of Plan’s regional Program Units, school children, teachers, school principals, community
development council members (COCODES), junior community development council members (COCODITOS), children and youth advocacy group members (COINCIDIR), and the owner-operators of a Plan-supported co-operative bakery project.

**Head Office Visit**

At the Guatemala City based Plan Head Office, I met the Country Director, who graciously consented to a formal interview. I was given an overview of Plan Guatemala’s operations: Plan has projects ongoing in 640 communities throughout the country, coordinated through Plan’s six regional Program Units. Typically, representatives of a given community will approach Plan for assistance in dealing with specific issues confronting the community, for example: lack of clean water, or local school deficiencies. After a situation analysis, local community members, including children, are consulted to develop a mutually-acceptable proposal, identifying the responsibilities of community members, children, various levels of government and Plan. If other NGOs are currently active in the targeted community, Plan strives to coordinate its activities with these NGOs to optimize cooperation and eliminate any duplication of services. A project plan, budget and time frame are defined, typically covering a 10 year period, including Plan’s phase-in, implementation and phase-out stages, beyond which it is expected that the community will have achieved self-sufficiency regarding the defined project(s).

Plan Guatemala’s Country Director emphasized that Plan adopts a rights-based approach to addressing child poverty and dedicates considerable effort to familiarizing members of the community development councils (COCODES) with their citizenship rights and responsibilities. In conjunction with this, Plan provides COCODE members with training, support and reference material regarding effective ways to involve municipal, departmental and federal levels of government in local community development projects. The COCODE system of grassroots level governance is fairly recent, having come about as a condition of the 1996 post-civil-war peace accords. As an adjunct to the COCODE system, Plan, with its child oriented focus, has promoted the formation of junior community development councils (COCODITOS) focusing specifically on children’s rights. Although the COCODITOS have no officially recognized authority, Plan views them as a training ground for future community leaders and COCODE
members. At the time of my field research, Plan Guatemala was in the process of arranging a meeting of COCODITO members with the President of Guatemala, thus to some extent providing legitimacy to the COCODITO initiative. The Country Director emphasized the importance of Plan’s COCODITO project in giving children a voice regarding their rights. She referred to the role of COCODITOS in overcoming a deeply imbedded “culture of silence” within indigenous communities that evolved over centuries of violent repression by the ruling elite. Another important role of COCODITOS is to overcome traditional attitudes within indigenous communities regarding the non-participation of women and children in community decision making.

Unregistered births are fairly common throughout the indigenous population. Therefore, another important initiative in supporting children’s rights is Plan’s mandate to ensure that certificates are issued for all births that occur in Plan’s targeted communities. Birth registration serves as a child’s official link to education and health care entitlements, as well as protection against abuse and exploitation. Birth registration also serves as a subsequent guarantee of adult voter eligibility. This initiative is augmented by a Plan-coordinated radio campaign promoting birth registrations nationwide (Plan Guatemala 2012 Memoria de Labores, p. 24).

Originally I had hoped to be able to track the donations of Canadian child sponsors through Plan International’s financial system to actual projects undertaken in Guatemala. This proved to be impossible. I was informed by the Country Director that contributions from 20 donor countries, including Canada, are pooled at the International Head Office in Great Britain. Then they are distributed to the Country Offices of the 50 recipient countries, in accordance with annual budgets submitted by the Country Offices. Therefore, there is no direct linkage between projects advertised by Plan’s fund-raising media in donor countries and the specific projects actually undertaken in the communities of fund-receiving countries.

In his documentary film Where’s My Goat? Christopher Richardson details his difficulty in attempting to track the destination of a goat he purchased through Plan Canada’s Gifts of Hope catalogue. With some effort, he was able to confirm that a) his donation was equivalent to the purchase price of a goat; b) a certain amount of Plan International’s donor funding is allocated to the purchase of goats; and c) a child in
Africa was provided with a goat by Plan and Richardson was able to meet face-to-face with the child and the goat (Richardson 2013 documentary). Nevertheless, there was no direct linkage between Richardson’s cash donation and the specific goat he ultimately located. Although Plan’s budgeting and funds allocation process may not be widely understood by the general public, Plan has no apparent desire to obfuscate the process. This is exemplified by the fact that the Where’s My Goat? DVD is currently available for purchase via the Plan Canada website.

With regard to my intention to observe some of Plan Guatemala’s initiatives, it was quite apparent, on the one hand, that the Head Office genuinely wanted me to visit their field locations. Yet on the other hand, it was clear that the NGO wanted to “handle” my access to their staff, donors, targeted communities, development programs and their beneficiaries so as to present them in the most favorable light. Reflecting on why this was happening, I can suggest several reasons:

a) Public Relations – In an organization totally dependent on the goodwill of charitable donors, it may be perceived as incumbent to maintain a public image of honesty, dedication and altruism. Consequently, it was important to the organization to present its most positive aspects to me.

b) Lack of Quantifiable Data – In a traditional business environment, success is usually measured in monetary terms of profitability, return on investment and quantifiable long term outcomes. Such measures are all but impossible to tabulate for the operations of Plan Guatemala. As indicated in the Financial Overview section of this chapter, although the amount of money allocated to the NGO’s programs can be tabulated, this does not provide insight into the specific impact of these programs on the lives of children. The NGO’s beneficiaries exist in a society that is corrupt, lawless and violent. In such an environment, it is easy for children to simply disappear due to unregistered births, foul play or unrecorded family relocation, thus providing formidable obstacles to any long term tracking of their adult outcomes. Furthermore, how feasible is it to quantify many of Plan’s program results? How can one place a dollar value on citizenship rights training, clean water for a community or a child’s access to emergency medical care? Plan can only rely on the donor’s acknowledgement of the intrinsic value
of such initiatives. Plan wanted me to focus more on the qualitative nature of its initiatives and not so much on quantitative costs versus benefits.

c) Donor Motivation – despite the lack of quantifiable results, Plan International’s Child Sponsorship Model consistently manages to raise worldwide charitable donations in excess of half a billion dollars per annum. This would suggest that the donors are motivated not so much by a desire for specific returns on investment as by a general desire to “do good” for a sponsored child and his/her community, and perhaps also the personal satisfaction the donors derive from their acts of charity. This motivation of donors has already been discussed within the context of O’Neill’s La Paloma study.

d) Language Barriers – Many of the residents of remote indigenous communities do not speak Spanish as their first language, or in many cases, do not speak Spanish at all. Where necessary, Plan arranged interpreter services for me.

e) Logistical Issues – Some of the communities I visited had virtually no road access; I was able to reach one location at the end of a very rough four-wheel drive track; another community was accessible only via a steep mountain footpath. Without Plan’s assistance, I wouldn’t even have been able to find such communities.

  e) Physical Danger – Nearly everyone I spoke to while I was in Guatemala had a personal story to tell me about confrontations with criminals; even I experienced attempted holdups on two occasions. Escalating crime due to the increasing influence of the drug cartels has made it dangerous to travel freely in certain regions of the country. For example, large areas of the Department of El Petén, adjacent to the Mexican border, currently are under the direct control of drug cartels, making travel in this region extremely dangerous. A planned visit by me to a community in the Department of Jalapa had to be curtailed due to violent confrontations the community was experiencing with the agents of a Canadian mining company. I would like think that Plan Guatemala’s precautions regarding my personal safety were motivated at least as much from a genuine concern for my wellbeing as for potentially negative public relations fallout should I get myself killed during my field research.

Consequently, the fact that the above factors limited the scope of my research and findings cannot be denied. In a more accessible, more open, more documented and
more secure environment, I may have encountered data which would have enabled a more intensive analysis of child poverty in Guatemala, which arguably may have led me to a different set of conclusions. However, I have attempted to mitigate these inevitable limitations through a reliance on previous personal experience derived from my travels within, readings about, and direct observations of Guatemala and its manifestations of child poverty.

**Program Unit “A” Visit**

The Program Unit Director provided an overview of Plan’s activities in this region. This Program Unit is active in 177 communities, assisting 10,300 families representing 100,000 individuals. The Program Unit Director explained to me that although the local residents have traditionally sown five corn kernels per planting, Plan established a demonstration garden to prove that sowing two kernels per planting resulted in significantly higher yields. Sometimes less can be more. Furthermore, I was told the demonstration garden provided proof that sowing kernels selected from the middle portion of the cob produced larger ears of corn than those grown from randomly selected kernels. Plan has been operating in this area for 6 years. At the outset, the malnutrition rate here was 70%, which is consistent with official estimates for indigenous communities, but through the promotion of more effective farming methods and nutritious recipes, I was informed that this rate has been reduced to 56%. Although during my meeting with the Program Unit Director I didn’t ascertain the source of the latter statistic, in a subsequent conversation with a Regional Public Health Nurse, I learned that one of her duties was to track children’s growth stunting. The reduction in the rate of children’s growth stunting in this region since Plan’s involvement lends credence to the effectiveness of Plan’s food security initiatives.

Plan estimates that 13% to 16% of the population in this area had no official birth registration, but Plan is aiming to achieve 100% registration. The initiatives of this Program Unit include the promotion of children’s rights through the establishment of COCODITOS, advisory support of local COCODES, anti-bullying instruction in the

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4 I have substituted pseudonyms in place of the actual code names employed by Plan Guatemala for its regional Program Units.
schools and supplementary training for teachers. One objective is to get more girls through school; traditionally within indigenous communities, the pattern has been to discourage girls from attending school beyond the first two grades and to pressure them into early marriage, sometimes as young as 12 years of age. Through Plan’s advocacy for a more even gender balance of school enrollment, the local primary school mix in Plan target communities is now 60% boys and 40% girls. Plan also offers secondary school scholarships, with a preference given to girls. Another obstacle to school completion amongst indigenous children is the fact that many of them are monolingual or more fluent in their local Mayan language than in Spanish, placing them at a disadvantage at the outset of their school attendance. In an effort to develop a more inclusive education system, instruction is now officially bilingual (i.e. in both Spanish and in the most locally predominant of 24 indigenous languages). Although the statistics that I was being quoted are next to impossible to verify independently, they were not inconsistent with my personal observations.

In summary, Program Unit “A” appears to be addressing child poverty on several fronts. Its food security initiatives through the advocacy of improved agricultural techniques are a direct response to high rates of malnutrition and children’s growth stunting. It employs a rights-based approach to confronting child poverty through its advisory support of children’s community development councils (COCODITOS). The COCODITOS can be viewed as a training ground for future adult participation in community governance. In an effort to overcome traditional indigenous gender bias, it places emphasis on the rights of girls through promotion of gender parity in classrooms and in COCODITO participation, as well as the provision of secondary school scholarships for girls. Through periodic progress reports, donor/sponsors’ expectations are addressed by highlighting how their funding is improving the lives of children. Plan’s expectations are met inasmuch as the programs outlined above demonstrably support the NGO’s mandate to improve the lives of children. Finally, the children themselves benefit from the development plans initially defined by community members and Plan representatives.
Mayan Village Visit

Within the jurisdiction of the above mentioned Program Unit, I visited a remote Mayan village to observe Plan’s activities there. The village is located in a mountainous area, accessible via a steep walking trail from the end of a very rough four-wheel drive track. The nearest school is located 4 to 5 kilometers away. The residents of this village are more fortunate than most indigenous Guatemalans in terms of land ownership. At one time, the surrounding area was one very large, privately owned coffee plantation. However, during a major decline in international coffee export prices, the owner decided to retire and generously deeded the land to members of his former labor force. Accordingly, six villages were established, including the one I visited. This community consists of 220 Mayan families representing 1,320 individuals. The village has no electricity and its only potable water source is rainwater. Very few of the residents are fluent in Spanish5, so I utilized the translation services of Hugo, a young teacher from a nearby village. The primary objective of my visit was to investigate a co-operative bakery, the establishment of which was supported by Plan as a revenue-generating project for the village. With start-up funding from Plan, a bakery building with a wood-fired clay oven was constructed.

5 Lack of Spanish fluency has been a longstanding obstacle to success in school and literacy in general amongst the indigenous population. Guatemalan public schools are now required to provide bilingual instruction in both Spanish and the prevailing indigenous language of the region. In addition to Spanish, the Guatemalan population utilizes 22 Mayan languages, as well as the non-Mayan Xinca language, plus the Garifuna language commonly used by communities of African heritage. As a single example of the linguistic disparity confronting anglophones, hispanophones and monolingual Mayans, community members informed me that my name (Thomas) translates into K’iche’ Mayan as ‘Ma’sh.
Figure 3.2. Bakery Co-op in a Mayan village

The co-operative currently employs 6 women and 12 girls; the girls work at the bakery in the afternoons after their daily school attendance. The bakery has been successful on several fronts: providing local employment, generating revenue within the community from the sale of baked goods to the residents of surrounding villages and demonstrating that women and girls, as co-op members and business owners, can be a viable economic force. The co-op members have learned the basics of cost accounting and showed me their start-up budget. They informed me that the business is now self-sustaining and profitable.

Hubbard and Duggan might argue against such projects as this co-op bakery inasmuch as they believe that NGOs should not be engaging in economic aid projects that potentially could put local businesses at a competitive disadvantage. Nevertheless, the Plan-provided start-up funding for this bakery was very modest, the project appeared to have the support of the whole village and there was no evidence of alternative
sources of start-up funding (such as the Marshall Aid type of funding advocated by Hubbard and Duggan) in this small and remote Mayan village. Furthermore, the project is now self-sustaining, thereby obviating Hubbard and Duggan’s concern about long term dependency on external aid. The bakery co-op appears to fall more within the context of the targeted, smaller scale aid projects advocated by Bannerjee and Duflo. It would appear that the bakery co-op project meets the notions of effectivity on three levels – donors can take pride in providing the necessary funding to establish a sustainable business in an economically underdeveloped region while simultaneously supporting gender parity in education and business; the NGO can take credit for stimulating the formation of the co-op through the injection of the needed start-up capital; the girls, as literate owner-operators of a successful small business are the direct beneficiaries of this NGO project.

Another Plan-supported project in this village was a rainwater catchment system consisting of rooftop gutters and a series of large plastic storage tanks. Materials and construction engineers were funded by Plan España, and Plan Guatemala provided motorcycles to enable the engineers to commute to this remote location during the project’s construction phase. This system is the village’s only potable water source. This project falls within Plan’s mandate to fund community initiatives to facilitate the supply of clean water and sanitation. Accordingly, it effectively addresses one of Plan’s primary objectives, while at the same time satisfying the target community’s need for this service.
Figure 3.3. Mayan village rainwater catchment system

Hubbard and Duggan would likely be more accepting of the legitimacy of this NGO project, which appears to fall within their interpretation of humanitarian relief (i.e. clean water for the community). Yet, despite their resistance to NGO participation in business development, the lack of any evidence in this community of assistance derived from foreign aid, national government or private enterprise suggests that neither the water system nor the bakery would have been achieved without the support of Plan.

Most of the terrain surrounding this community consists of steep mountain slopes. In one of the few relatively flat areas, the village has established a communal vegetable garden. Plan did not attempt to claim any credit for establishing the communal garden, but it was obviously a well-regarded community asset in a region that has reportedly managed to reduce its malnutrition rate from 70% to 56% (statistics provided by the Program Unit Director).
Before I took my leave of the village, the residents invited me into their communal hall, where the bakery girls treated me to samples of their freshly-baked goods, accompanied by a traditional hot drink made from cinnamon and amaranth. An indirect Q and A session ensued, with Hugo providing translations between Spanish and K’iche’ Mayan.

One of the mothers indicated to me that, prior to my visit, there was concern that I might be a child abductor. This is a valid concern given the prevalence of such activity as reported in the OHCHR 2012 Child Trafficking Report. There have been anecdotal reports of foreigners being treated roughly by locals for exhibiting too much interest in their children. Fortunately, Plan’s intercedence on my behalf prevented any misunderstanding of my intentions.

The benefits of Plan’s involvement with this community are obvious. The rainwater catchment system contributes to the health of the entire community by providing its only source of potable water. The bakery project is succeeding on several fronts: it generates revenue for the village, it provides a source for learning the fundamentals of operating a sustainable business and it demonstrates that the participation of women and girls can accrue real economic benefits to the community. The villagers themselves can take credit for the communal garden, but it nevertheless demonstrates the value of community effort, which is a principle much advocated by Plan.

A School Visit

Plan arranged for me to visit another project within the Program Unit “A” area of operations – one of 40 new primary schools. A grant to Plan Guatemala has been obtained from the German company, Beiersdorf Inc. (the makers of Nivea brand products) for the establishment of 40 schools in rural communities throughout the country. To commemorate its 100th anniversary, the Nivea company decided to offer this grant as a gesture of social responsibility. Nivea is providing the funding for the construction of school classrooms and cisterns, teacher training, furniture and school supplies; Plan coordinates the project and provides supplementary teacher training; and the Guatemalan government hires the teachers (about 240 to date) and pays their
salaries. I was informed that Plan has learned from previous experience that school projects are not sustainable unless the government makes an ongoing commitment to pay teachers’ salaries.

The school cisterns facilitate a sanitation program of daily hand and face-washing and dental hygiene.

This school project effectively addresses Plan’s mandate in several areas:

a) Education – The project provides a well-provisioned primary education facility, facilitates supplementary teacher training and bilingual instruction;

b) Citizenship participation – The school enrollment process facilitates birth registration, gender parity and participation in Plan’s COCODITO program focusing on citizenship rights and responsibilities;

c) Water and sanitation – the school’s water catchment cisterns provide clean drinking water and facilitate the children’s personal sanitation.
Secondary school education is accessible at 2 locations within a half hour walk from this community. Last year, 6 local students (4 boys, 2 girls) continued their studies into the secondary school level. To date, the Nivea project is accommodating 6,500 indigenous children. The school I visited serves 83 primary school children as well as 20 pre-school children.
During my visit, I participated in a Q&A session in each classroom. There was evidence of bilingual instruction – charts with days of the week and numbers displayed in both Spanish and the local Mayan language. Some of the students were rather vague in their understanding of where Canada was located. One child thought it was somewhere near Peru, but by referring to a Nivea-provided globe in the classroom I was able to clear up this misconception.

The construction and administration of schools by NGOs and foreign donors revisits the issue of third parties assuming the social responsibilities of the Guatemalan government. In an ideal world, the government would be fully responsible for building, staffing and administering schools. However, the reality of Guatemala’s rural communities is the government’s general indifference to the needs of its indigenous people, underfunding of social infrastructure and widespread corruption. In such an environment, it should be regarded as commendable that Plan and Nivea have been able to establish a delicate balance with government authorities whereby the building of the schools would be contingent on the government’s commitment to provide and pay for teachers – no government commitment, no schools.

This school visit provided me with an appreciation of the positive impact of Plan’s involvement with this community. The school’s rainwater catchment system provided the source of clean water necessary to facilitate the personal hygiene station, contributing to the physical health of all students by enabling them to attend to the cleaning of their hands, faces and teeth. Despite the school’s remote location, Plan’s corporate benefactor, Nivea, has funded a generous supply of books, globes, whiteboards and classroom furniture. Bilingual instructors ensure that children with minimal or no Spanish fluency have an improved opportunity to succeed at school. The auxiliary teacher training provided by Plan ensures that teachers in schools like this are better prepared to meaningfully engage their students than those receiving their teaching certificates upon completion of secondary school. Six of last year’s graduating class (out of an average class size of 14) continued on to secondary school, despite the 30-minute walking distance to the nearest secondary school. Given the history of low literacy in this country, this illustrates the will of students to continue their studies, given the motivation provided by a well-equipped and well-staffed primary school. Furthermore, the fact that 2 of the 6 students are girls is indicative of a growing acceptance of girls’
education, where the norm for girls’ school attendance in indigenous communities in this country is 2 years or less.

**Program Unit “B” Visit**

Plan Guatemala’s Country Director was eager for me to visit this particular Program Unit Office, since its Manager was formerly a Plan-sponsored child herself. The Manager informed me that this Program Unit assists 6500 families in 90 communities. The population is 19% indigenous, with 68% living in rural areas. The general poverty rate is 61.2% and the extreme poverty rate is 22.7%. Plan focuses its activities on food security, child safety, birth registration, maternal and infant health programs and micro-finance. The Program Unit also offers workshops for extended teacher training. I observed such a workshop in progress. These workshops are of particular value, since basic teacher training in Guatemala is minimal; students who have taken the teacher training program of studies can receive their teaching certification upon graduation from secondary school. A post-secondary level of teacher training is offered at residential teachers’ colleges (*escuelas normales*), but this is not affordable for the majority of prospective teachers. School dropout rates and illiteracy are affected, at least partly, by the low standard of training available to most teachers. Plan’s teacher workshops focus on effective instructional methodologies and strategies to retain the interest of students.

In its efforts to increase community members’ awareness of their citizenship rights and responsibilities, Plan’s Program Unit office contains a resource center where COCODE members and other community groups can receive training and instructional literature relating to community development, government responsibilities and civil rights. Of particular interest to me was a series of booklets published by the *Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Azobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG)*. These are written in straightforward, basic Spanish language, and deal with such topics as fundamental human rights, civil rights, labor rights and penal rights. Although the resource center primarily targets adult community members, and particularly COCODE members, the children are indirect beneficiaries of a better informed and more proactive community. The resource center also provides a playroom for the children of visiting adults.
This program unit appears to be providing important services to the communities within its jurisdiction, particularly in areas not being addressed by other agencies (governmental and non-governmental) - supplementary teacher training and citizenship rights awareness.

A Village Visit

I met the principal of the local school, who explained to me that her school was established in 1977 and currently has 128 students enrolled, covering Grades 1 through 6. Teachers at the local school are bilingual, although the majority of students in this location are non-indigenous and do not customarily speak the locally predominant indigenous language (Xinca). In the past year, 22 students who completed the primary school program went on to continue their studies at the nearest secondary school, located 7 km away. Of the 22 students, 11 were boys and 11 were girls, reflecting the local school’s success at achieving gender parity. The nearest secondary school offers a vocational training program in mechanics, which is popular with students because of a current employment demand for people with this job skill. The principal of the village school indicated to me that Plan has provided her with valuable administrative training designed specifically for school principals. As well, Plan offers additional training dealing with such issues as conflict resolution, bullying, and technical training for the teaching of literacy to adults.

Nearly all students completing last year’s primary school program continued on to secondary school studies, although the nearest secondary school is 7 km. distant. Of these 22 students, 11 were girls. Compared to the previously described rural school, this illustrates 2 issues: a) this predominantly non-indigenous community has a relatively high commitment to secondary school education (i.e. almost 100% continuance as compared to the predominantly indigenous school’s 29% continuance); and b) the local school appears to be achieving gender parity (1-to-1 gender parity as compared to the rural school’s 2-to-1 split). The lower rate of continuance into secondary school by the predominantly indigenous group may reflect the additional hurdle many of the children face of having to learn a second language (Spanish). The difference in gender parity ratios suggests that indigenous communities may still be coping with gender bias to a
greater extent than non-indigenous communities, but such a limited sample size cannot be considered adequate to provide conclusive evidence of this.

At the school, I was introduced to members of the local COCODITO, the Plan-supported junior community development council, consisting of 6 members (2 boys, 4 girls) elected by the school’s student body. They explained to me that COCODITO elections are held at the beginning of each school term, with opposing electoral teams campaigning in the election. This COCODITO won their election on the basis of a campaign promise to provide uniforms for the school’s football team. When I asked how they were able to fulfil that promise, they told me that they had approached the municipal mayor (a member of the local COMUDE) for the required funding. Other COCODITO initiatives included the planting of trees on the school property (peaches for food and jacarandas for shade), and the organization of a Mothers’ Day celebration, funded through the sale of donated fresh-ground coffee (a sample of which, I was given to take back to Canada). These activities illustrate that COCODITOS provide an instructive process for the children in civics, democratic process, fund-raising and negotiation with government agencies. Although COCODITOS have no officially recognized status, they establish the groundwork for developing a culture of informed community involvement as the children reach adulthood.

I met with an assembly of local community activists, including the president and members of the community development council (COCODE), members of the local child protection network, a youth group comprised of former COCODITO members whose current mandate is the promotion of reproductive and sexual health, the District Health Nurse and her local volunteer assistant, a Plan representative and the School Principal. This appears to be a community that is well prepared to address development issues at the grassroots level, as well as being adequately informed and equipped to employ a rights-based strategy to identifying the government’s responsibilities for dealing with local child poverty issues.

This village visit gave me an opportunity to observe at first hand the support that Plan provides to communities in several areas: a) assistance to schools, including enhanced training for teachers and principals; b) emphasis on gender parity amongst the students; c) advisory services to, and participation in, local community development
A Children’s and Youth Advocacy Group

I met with four members of a youth advocacy group located in a town of 26,300 residents. This group, along with other youth groups, municipality officials and Plan representatives form an official municipal commission dedicated to promoting the rights of children and youth. Local issues requiring attention in the areas of education, water and sanitation, child safety, health, cultural identity and political participation are addressed by this commission. The mandate of the group that I met is to liaise between other youth groups, children at large and the municipal commission, thus providing a voice for children in the municipal policy making process.

Plan’s support of such groups is consistent with its rights based approach to addressing child poverty. Raising the awareness of children’s and youth groups regarding their citizenship rights and responsibilities, and encouraging their participation with municipal authorities enables children and youth to participate in the policy and decision-making processes that impact them directly.

Donor Interviews

My efforts to interview Plan’s Canadian donors were closely monitored by Plan Canada’s Head Office. I was given various reasons for this, ranging from concerns for preserving the confidentiality of donors and their sponsored children to the possibility that I might be a pedophile attempting to gain access to children. In Chapter 5 I will explore other possible reasons for Plan’s efforts to control my access to its operations in Canada and Guatemala. Ultimately, Plan Canada vetted three donors with whom I was then able to conduct interviews. Although such a small sample size does not constitute statistically significant results, it nevertheless derived an interesting set of commonalities:

All interviewees were long term donors; this coincides with Plan literature that suggests that a typical child sponsorship arrangement lasts an average of seven years,
and is consistent with the tenure my own child sponsorship experience. When asked about her reaction to Plan’s change in mandate from individual child sponsorship to community development, one long-term donor responded:

“At first, I was surprised … I saw it for the good, but I regret it... Sort of the loss of the personal feeling. I was, in fact, able to maintain the foster children I had sponsored before the change. I had difficulty developing the relationship with the children that were called sponsored children that were in the child orientated community program.”

(Donor Brenda)

The small sample size did not provide me with the opportunity to interview shorter-term donors, or former donors, who may have expressed different opinions regarding the efficacy of Plan’s programs. For example, the Canadian government’s new trade and foreign aid agency provided a grant to Plan Canada to cooperate with Canadian mining interests in developing an education program in Burkina Faso. Some Plan donors have perceived this grant as a subsidy to mining companies and have subsequently withdrawn their financial support from Plan (Westhead Toronto Star article; McCarney response to Westhead article). Other donors expressed a negative reaction to this initiative, but chose to remain committed to Plan with a proviso that the NGO should not engage in similarly structured initiatives in the future. Obviously, this project did not meet the expectations of some of Plan’s donors.

All interviewees were aware that their donations were for the purpose of child-oriented community development projects, and not for the specific sponsorship of individual children. Again, by limiting my access exclusively to long term donors, the range of interviews may have overlooked donors who withdrew from the program due to a subsequent realization that they were not sponsoring individual children.

Attitudes regarding the letter-writing aspect of child sponsorship varied greatly. One interviewee conscientiously exchanged letters with her two sponsored children several times per year:

“Probably, a few times per year. Probably, say, two-three times a year.”

(Donor Sadie)
At the other extreme, a donor expressed the feeling that the letter-writing soon became a superficial exercise causing embarrassment to the sponsored child and to herself, to the extent that she stopped sending letters altogether. This parallels Cooper and Pratten’s observations of World Vision’s letter-writing regime in Africa, regarded by some sponsored children as a meaningless chore.

Gail: I’m a bit of an apathetic child sponsor, in a sense that when I started with Plan years ago, I [wrote letters regularly], I think, more to get involved with the individual [child]. I also had an opportunity to visit the child, but decided at the end not to. … I started by writing letters and trying to be more involved. Over the years, I’ve sort of purposely distanced myself from it, just because I felt it was uncomfortable.

TA: Uncomfortable for you or for the...?

Gail: Yes. Well, maybe for them as well. But for me, I started feeling... How should I put it? I don't know. It felt for me a little bit egotistical. To be anonymous I found was easier. I just felt it was difficult to write to the child, because I didn't really know what to say to them. Their situation is so different than the situation that I would live in, so I just didn't know what to talk to them about that didn't seem out of context or had very little meaning in their day-to-day lives.

(Dialogue with Donor Gail)

None of the interviewees were overly concerned with the specifics of how their donations were being allocated, generally confident that Plan was doing commendable work for its targeted communities:

“I think my main motivation [for being a sponsor] basically relates to just one contribution … that really helps their community. I can see that - the way Plan works with sustainable development. “

(Donor Sadie)

“The thing I like the best about Plan programming is the fact that it’s community built.”

(Donor Gail)

One of the interviewees expressed an attitude similar to my own when I was a donor – that it was of importance that Plan had no religious affiliation or agenda.
TA: What do you like best about the Plan programs?

Gail: The reason that I think I started in the first place, and the reason I continue is: One, I believe that the funds are being used properly. Two, I think there’s no religious affiliation whatsoever. World Vision for instance, I would never give to. I’m sure they do a good job. I just don’t like the religion aspect of it.

(Dialogue with Donor Gail)

This coincides with my own personal feelings and one of the reasons I selected Plan over other child sponsorship programs in the first place. Notwithstanding the good work performed by child sponsorship organizations with religious affiliations, the preference of me and others is to support an organization that does not append a religious agenda, with its attendant costs, onto its child sponsorship mandate. Furthermore, as indicated by O’Neill, child sponsorship programs operating within a religious context can sometimes be selective of some children and exclusionary of others based on the donors’ religion-based expectations.

In general, the donors I interviewed impressed me as being well-meaning people more interested in making an effort to help impoverished children than in tabulating the precise costs and benefits of Plan’s initiatives. Interviewees’ comments suggest that they trust Plan to make appropriate decisions on their behalf with respect to child-oriented community development projects. Nevertheless, it could be argued that donors derive some measure of personal satisfaction from the process of funding Plan’s projects. In this sense, involvement in Plan’s mandate is meeting donor expectations as well as effectively soliciting the funding necessary for Plan’s projects.

Field Observations - Concluding Remarks

Plan Canada and Plan Guatemala made a concerted effort to show me the most positive aspects of their organization. In part, this was done by restricting my interview access to a selection of long term Canadian donors, all of whom were very supportive of Plan’s programs. This somewhat biased sample of opinions was partly offset by media reports of certain donors withdrawing their support, questioning Plan Canada’s controversial association with DFATD and Canadian mining interests (Westhead article and McCarney response). Admittedly, while in Guatemala, the arrangements made on
my behalf by Plan Guatemala regarding travel and meetings with field staff and program beneficiaries were meant to present to me the most positive aspects of Plan’s programs. Nevertheless, I have concluded that they also provided me with a substantive overview of Plan’s Guatemalan initiatives in the areas of clean water, food security, education, birth registration, small business start-ups, consultation with community leaders, gender parity and citizens’ rights training for children, youth and adults.

Problems noted during my previous tenure as a child sponsor have been rectified. The web-based Christmas gift program, that did not deliver my gift to Maria, has been discontinued. The largely uninformative Child Sponsor Reports have been replaced by the much more comprehensive Country Strategic Plan and Program Unit Status Reports. Although there still appears to be a widespread public misunderstanding of how donors’ funds are actually allocated, Plan attempts to mitigate this by including explanations in its promotional media and through such actions as distributing Richardson’s Where’s My Goat? documentary.

Are the initiatives of Plan Guatemala an effective response to that country’s child poverty? The word “effective” is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “producing a result that is wanted: having an intended effect” (Merriam Webster Dictionary website).

From the standpoint of eliminating child poverty in Guatemala, aid agencies appear to be losing the battle. As indicated earlier, the poorest 40% of Guatemalans are poorer now than they were 10 years ago (Deutsche World report). Furthermore, the rate of child malnutrition is increasing year by year (OHCHR 2014 Annual Report).

Nevertheless, Plan targets specific communities and helps them to address deficiencies in clean water, sanitation, health care, education and small business development in much the same way as does the Millennium Villages project. Furthermore, by facilitating a voice for children’s rights through the COCODITO and youth advocacy programs, Plan is confronting the manifestations of poverty caused by social, political and economic exclusion, as identified by Amartya Sen. Plan may not have eliminated extreme poverty in Guatemala, but it is taking positive steps to establish a groundwork which will make later progress possible. In this sense, Plan’s initiatives
are achieving the intended results outlined in its Mission Statement, thereby
demonstrating effectiveness at that level. The continuing financial support of Plan
International, exceeding $1 billion in the past year illustrates that Plan is to a large
degree satisfying the expectations of its donors. So, whereas poverty in general
appears to be on the increase in Guatemala, Plan is able to address the expectations of
at least some of the children living in poverty.
Chapter 4.

Compassion International and Compassion Guatemala

Mission Statement

Releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name

In response to the Great Commission, Compassion International exists as an advocate for children, to release them from their spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty and enable them to become responsible and fulfilled Christian adults.

(Compassion International website)

Initial Contact

In contrast to Plan’s rationale for favoring community development projects, Compassion International continues to provide a program of individual child sponsorship. Prior to my field trip to Guatemala, I made contact with Compassion Canada’s Head office in London, Ontario. Similar to my experience with Plan Canada, I was subjected to Compassion’s due diligence protocol to ensure that all my intentions regarding the children were academically legitimate. It could be argued that such diligence is particularly germane to Guatemala’s situation, with its high incidence of child abduction, illegal adoption, sale of children, child prostitution, sex trafficking, child sex tourism, child pornography and the harvesting of human organs (OHCHR 2013 Child Trafficking Report, pp. 5-7). Among other things, I was required to agree to the following conditions: to be accompanied at all times by a Compassion staff member during visitations; no overnight stays with the child in the child’s home, the Compassion staff member’s home or elsewhere, and no exchange of personal contact information with the child. In Chapter 5, I will explore other possible reasons for Compassion’s insistence on
such close supervision of my investigations. Having survived Compassion’s vetting protocol, I received considerable and much-appreciated assistance; Compassion Canada liaised with Compassion Guatemala to arrange an itinerary of field trips to four of its areas of operation in Guatemala. With respect to my wish to interview a number of Compassion’s Canadian donors, as in the case of Plan, I requested Compassion to facilitate telephone interviews for me with 10 Compassion donors and I obtained permission to contact three of them. Compassion established a conference call with each interviewee, and a Compassion Canada staff member audited the entire interview process. By sheer coincidence, I discovered that an American cousin of mine was also a Compassion child sponsor, so with her permission I was able to interview a fourth donor (Compassion Interview Transcripts, 2013).

**Compassion’s Scope of Operations**

Compassion International was established in 1952 to provide relief for children orphaned during the Korean War (Compassion International, 2014, FAQs page). Its approach has been to identify children in need of assistance, then to link up each child to an individual sponsor, who, through monthly remittances, provides the necessary financial assistance to cover the costs of Compassion’s services to that child. The organization is international in scope inasmuch as it obtains its funding from child sponsors located in 13 donor countries, including Canada, and it provides services in 26 receiving countries located in four geographic areas: the Central America/Caribbean region, South America, Africa and Asia. Currently, over 1,350,590 children (Compassion International website 2014, Home page) are sponsored by Compassion donors, of which 100,000 are sponsored by Canadian donors. During 2013, Canadian donors provided $43,500,509 (Compassion International website, Annual Report page) of Compassion International’s total sponsorship budget of $657,748,746 (ibid, Financial Integrity page). Compassion donors worldwide contributed $88,981,605 (ibid, Form 990 page) to the Central America/Caribbean region’s 250,000 sponsored children (ibid, Where We Work page); the 33,300 sponsored Guatemalan children (ibid, Guatemala page) represent 13.3% of this allotment, totalling an estimated $11,852,350 (my interpolation)
As stated previously with respect to Plan Guatemala, I found that attempting to interpret Compassion’s financial data was not leading me towards the type of qualitative analysis of its programs that I wanted to accomplish. My research was directed more towards assessing how effectively Compassion was meeting the expectations of its donors, its sponsored children and its own mandate.

**Compassion’s Mandate**

Compassion offers three related programs to address child poverty in Guatemala. A fourth Compassion program, focusing on infant and maternal health, is not currently offered in Guatemala. I was informed that through consultation with Evangelical church attendees, children are identified from families deemed to be most in need to become candidates for Compassion’s programs.

**Child Sponsorship Program**

Compassion partners with 140 Evangelical churches located throughout Guatemala. The churches provide the required physical space and facilities for Compassion to establish its Child Development Centers, through which the NGO provides after-school programs for children between the ages of 4 to 18, including: assistance with school fees and supplies; regular health checkups, dental screenings and vaccinations; access to injury or illness treatment; academic tutoring through primary and secondary grades; computer instruction; vocational training; extracurricular activities, including sports, field trips, arts, and games; and individual personal development plans. Because of the organization’s Evangelical mission, religious instruction comprises a significant part of the program. In order to be accepted into Compassion’s Child Development program, a child must meet six basic criteria: 1) to come from a low-income family, living within one half an hour’s walking distance from the Child Development Center; 2) to be given special priority if orphaned; 3) to not be receiving benefit from any other sponsorship program; 4) to participate in the program’s Christian religious instruction component; 5) to be restricted to a maximum of three sponsored children per family; and 6) to be 12 years old or younger upon acceptance into the program (Wydick et al, 2013, p. 9). A powerful inducement for the child to
participate in the program is the provision of nutritious meals, funded by Compassion and prepared voluntarily by teams of mothers of the participating children. Each child’s participation in the program is supported by donations from an individual sponsor at the current rate of $41 per month.

**Leadership Development Program**

As adolescents complete the Child Development Program, those who have demonstrated exceptional academic accomplishment and leadership potential become eligible to apply for the Leadership Development Program (LDP), which is designed to support them through their post-secondary education.

**Response Programs**

This is the third component of Compassion’s initiatives in Guatemala. It is geared to address specific needs of individual children, families or communities in the event of emergencies. Appeals for funds are made on an ad hoc basis from Compassion donors and from the general public to address a child’s need for emergency medical care, major surgery or dental care. Depending on circumstances, a family might be offered specific job training or education and treatment for HIV/AIDS, malaria and malnutrition. Communities may be provided with clean water systems and latrines if their lack interferes with the delivery of Compassion’s primary services.
Compassion Guatemala – Field Research

With the assistance of Compassion Guatemala, I was able to establish an itinerary enabling me to visit Compassion Guatemala’s Head Office and two of Compassion’s Child Development Centers, meeting with CDC program administrators and children. Additionally, I visited the home of one of the Compassion-sponsored children. I was also able to meet with three of Compassion’s young Leadership Development Program participants.

Child Development Center Visit – Guatemala City

Child Development Center GUaaa,\(^6\) is one of 140 such centers in Guatemala. It is located in a classroom/activity room/playground facility located on the grounds of the local Evangelical church with which Compassion partners in that neighborhood of Guatemala City. As in its other Child Development Centers, Compassion provides an after-school program divided into five age groupings (3-5 years, 6-8 years, 9-11 years, 12-14 years and 15-18 years). Students of 19 and older who have graduated from the Child Development Program and who have exceptional academic and leadership potential can apply for acceptance into the Leadership Development Program, which will support them through the full term of their post-secondary education. At the time of my visit, GUaaa was accommodating 327 children in its program, including 37 unsponsored children on a conditional basis, the Center had space for them, but as yet they did not have individual sponsors, so their participation was being supported through Compassion’s Un-sponsored Children’s Fund.

Via the funding received from their individual sponsors, the children are provided with primary and secondary education school fees, after-school tutoring, and workshops on how to take tests and write papers. They also receive regular health checkups – my visit to GUaaa coincided with a medical checkup day performed by a doctor visiting the facility. The cost of these checkups ($1.00 per child) is incorporated into the child sponsors’ regular monthly donations of $41.00.

\(^6\) I have substituted pseudonyms for the actual code names utilized by Compassion to identify its regional Child Development Centers.
After regular school day attendance (the normal school day is from 7:30 AM to 12:30 PM), the children come to the Child Development Center two afternoons per week; in addition to this, older students come for half a day on Saturdays to receive vocational instruction in various programs, including tailoring, hair styling, baking and pastry-making, mechanics, electronics and computer literacy. Compassion provides the facilities and equipment for this vocational training and the Guatemalan government provides the instructors. Compassion provides the food for a program of mid-day meals and snacks for the children, prepared by a rotating committee of the children’s mothers. During my visit, after doing Q&A sessions with the children in all five classrooms, I was served a tasty chicken and rice combo. With the high rate of child malnutrition in Guatemala, Compassion’s after-school meal program could be providing the most nutritious meals many of the children receive all week.
GUaaa’s Program Director explained to me that Compassion’s Child Development curriculum includes age-appropriate instruction in areas of cognitive development, physical health, religion and interpersonal skills development. An individualized program of personal development is established for each child based on age, interests, aptitudes and family history. The personal development of each child is overseen by a mentor, with ongoing tracking of the child’s participation in activities, academic progress, gifts received from sponsors, program benefits received, home visits, medical interventions and bi-annual progress reports (Compassion Guatemala Development Reports, 2013). Considerable documentation is maintained of each child’s development, to which the child’s sponsor is given full access. Therefore, although the child’s sponsorship is essentially a financial arrangement, Compassion makes a considerable effort to keep the sponsor informed regarding the child’s wellbeing. This constant feedback appears to satisfy the sponsor’s expectations that his/her involvement
is having a positive impact on the sponsored child’s life. It also underscores the Compassion NGO’s objective of facilitating long-term financial support for its programs.

**Child Development Center Visit – Sololá Department**

Child Development Center GUbbb is located in the village of Montaña Verde\(^7\), near Lake Atitlán. Similar to GUaaa, this Child Development Center is situated in a classroom/activity room/playground facility located on the grounds of the local Evangelical church with which Compassion partners in the village. I met with two of the program coordinators, who provided me with a tour and an overview of their facility. As with the GUaaa facility in Guatemala City, this center groups its sponsored children into five age-appropriate instruction levels. Its Child Development Program curriculum is identical to the one I observed in GUaaa.

**Response Program Garden**

An additional feature of this center is a nearby garden tended by the students and staff. As well as growing vegetables, this mini-farm also raises chickens, ducks, geese and goats. The garden is a component of Compassion’s Response Program initiative and is used to supplement the food supplies of some of the neediest families whose children are Compassion program participants.

So, whereas Compassion’s Child Development Centers comprise the primary focus of its activities, GUbbb’s mini-farm addresses the food security objectives of its Emergency Response Program.

I noted that the garden was situated in a less than ideal location, probably due to Guatemala’s vastly inequitable distribution of agricultural land. This garden was positioned alongside a creek, as indicated in Figure 4.2, which is subject to periodic flooding, as evidenced by a washed out footbridge at the time of my visit.

\(^7\) Pseudonymous place names have been employed.
Hector’s Home Visit

I was invited to the home of Hector, one of the sponsored students I met in Montaña Verde. Hector, aged 18, was just completing his secondary school studies and his tenure at the Child Development Center. He was hoping to obtain a scholarship for admittance into Compassion’s Leadership Development Program. We met in Hector’s home – a very modest 3-room cinder block construction which has an electricity hookup but no water service or indoor plumbing - that Hector shares with his parents and seven siblings. At the time of my visit, Hector’s father and the oldest sibling, Juan, were not present, as they were both working. Hector’s father’s primary mode of employment was of a non-permanent nature, performing security duties for various coffee plantation owners in the vicinity. Juan was doing whatever casual labor he could obtain.
I was advised by a Compassion staff member that, typically, a day laborer at one of the nearby coffee or banana plantations could expect to earn about 100 quetzales ($7.00) for a 10-hour work day – no benefits, no job security. Using Guatemala’s official poverty level markers of $1.52 per day for general poverty and $.67 per day for extreme poverty (Hall 2006, p.152), and if we assume that Hector’s family of 10 has two breadwinners, each more or less steadily employed and earning about $7.00 per day, we can extrapolate that the family’s per capita income, at $1.40 per person per day falls just under the official general poverty level. However, this level of family income is only achieved through Juan sacrificing his chance to attend school in order to work. Without Juan’s supplementary earnings, at $.70 per person per day, the family’s per capita income would approximate Guatemala’s official extreme poverty level. Furthermore, with limited or no education, Juan will most likely perpetuate the family’s intergenerational cycle of poverty.
However, on a more uplifting note, in addition to Hector, two of his younger siblings are currently enrolled at the Montaña Verde Child Development Center. Compassion’s eligibility criteria stipulate that a maximum of three children per family can be enrolled in Compassion’s programs at any given time. Hector’s mother told me she was very grateful for the assistance her family was receiving from Compassion.

Nevertheless, Hector appears to be small for his chronological age, most likely due to Guatemala’s high incidence of childhood growth stunting. When we were introduced, I was surprised to see an 18 year old with the physical appearance of a 14 year old.

I was informed by Compassion staff that Hector is a very hardworking and motivated student (confirming my own first impression), and they encourage him in his efforts to get accepted into the Leadership Development Program. Placements are limited, however, inasmuch as sponsors are required to make a four-year commitment of $400 per month per student to cover the costs of tuition, books, lab fees, health care and living expenses. Currently, Compassion sponsors are supporting 76 Guatemalan students in the Leadership Development Program (LDP).

**Leadership Development Program**

In Antigua\(^8\), I was privileged to meet with three LDP participants: Alejandro was completing his final year of Electronic Engineering; Lourdes had already completed her university training and was employed as a certified physiotherapist; and Juanita was in her first year of an education degree program. While researching Compassion’s LDP program, I discovered that the Compassion International website highlights a Guatemalan girl, Silvia, who despite her father’s insistence that she abandon her schooling, completed her college education with support from the LDP program and is currently pursuing her career as a social worker (Compassion International website, *Develop a Future Leader* page).

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\(^8\) During my stay in Guatemala, I rented an apartment in Antigua, which I used as a home base between my trips to other parts of the country.
In addition to formal post-secondary studies, LDP training involves ongoing religious mentorship from an adult member of the student’s Evangelical church. The objective of this mentorship is to encourage the LDP candidate to become an active member of the church and to serve as a positive role model for the younger children enrolled in Compassion’s Child Development Program.

Long Term Sponsorship Commitment

Compassion International’s holistic approach to maintaining a one-on-one sponsor-child relationship throughout preschool, primary and secondary school years (and beyond for the more gifted students) illustrates its objective of helping individual children living in poor circumstances to develop to their optimal potential through long term sponsorship commitments. While interviewing Canadian child sponsors, I spoke to Ellen, who has been sponsoring Compassion children for 32 years. Currently, she is sponsoring children in 22 countries, including Guatemala. Two of her sponsored children are nearing completion of the Child Development Program and she anticipates continuing her support of them through the Leadership Development Program.

It would appear that Compassion has been effective in encouraging the long-term financial support of its donor/sponsors.

Donor Interviews

As previously mentioned, my access to Compassion’s donors was strictly monitored. Three Canadian donors were vetted by Compassion and my interviews with them were structured as telephone conference calls, audited by a Compassion Canada staff member. Additionally, by chance I discovered that an American cousin of mine was also a Compassion sponsor, and I was able to interview her outside the scope of Compassion’s supervision.

The duration of interviewees’ involvement with Compassion varied from 6 years to 32 years. Long term contributors might sponsor a series of different children over the duration of their involvement with Compassion. The nature of Compassion’s child sponsorship program is to encourage a long term bond between sponsor and child for
the duration of the child’s primary and secondary education and in some circumstances post-secondary education. Therefore, child-sponsor commitments spanning multiple years are common. Nevertheless, Compassion’s vetting approach precluded my ability to interview donors of lesser duration and to explore their reasons for withdrawing from the program.

The number of concurrent children being sponsored varied from 1 child to 22 children. One long term sponsor of several children anticipates supporting 1 or more through the Leadership Development Program:

“I have a couple of kids who are graduating in a couple of years in Ecuador and other countries, are showing all signs of top leaders. I may be sponsoring a couple of Leadership students very soon.”

(Sponsor Ellen)

All interviewees participated in sponsor-child letter exchanges:

“They would get a letter from me at least four times a year. My goal is to make it more, so it's kind of hit-and-miss sometimes.”

(Tammy, sponsor of 4 children)

However, one respondent commented that the letters received were often redundant and not particularly specific about the child’s personal experiences.

“I'm a little bit frustrated by that, because the letters are so redundant. When we send a gift or something, or something specific is asked and discussed in the letters, I don't get a direct response, so then it feels like something gets lost in the translation ... The times that I've sent things, I don't get anything specific back about it like she's received it or anything like that. It would be nice to know...”

(Sponsor Harriet)

As an aside, I can mention that during my visit to GUaaa I observed a mentor coaching a group of children through their letter-writing activity. This suggested to me that some of the letters more likely reflected the coach’s suggestions than the children’s personal experiences. This coincides with O’Neill’s observations in La Paloma, where he indicated that children were scripted to say the kinds of things in their letters that were deemed to meet the religious expectations of sponsors.

All interviewees valued Compassion’s church affiliation:

TA: What's the thing you like the best about the Compassion Program?
Tammy: The emphasis that's put on the local church and raising up the strength through people who work there by enabling them to really connect with people and form those lasting relationships, and the fact that Jesus is at the center of everything. Just recognizing that you cannot release a child from entire poverty without connecting the physical with the spiritual ... I think it's an organization or ministry that recognizes that people are limited and so a lot of emphasis is placed on allowing God to direct how the ministry works. It's very biblical-based in many aspects.

Fran: The fact they are Christ centered and work thru the local church exclusively. That’s very important to us.

Ellen: I like the Compassion program for their transparency and accountability, and the fact that they work strictly through the local church.

Harriet: I like that, because I'm a Christian, I like that there is an Evangelistic component.

All interviewees were very supportive of Compassion’s long-term holistic approach to individual child development.

TA: Do you believe that the Compassion Program provides a significant support to the sponsored child's ability to be successful in school?

Tammy: I do. I think, one when it provides meals that otherwise you would not be able to have. It definitely helps that physical growth, mentally and physically your body, as well as the after school programs. If there is extra help needed, there are tutors who are able to encourage that. Again, when a child is cared for in all aspects of their life, that development is really well rounded and sets them up for good potential as fulfilled adults.

Ellen: It gives stability to that community. It covers the holistic child sponsorship model; it's emotional, physical, economic, and spiritual. It's a full-meal-deal ... Some of the other NGO's, for example Plan or World Vision, they focus more on more generalized community development ... for me the one-on-one relationship is key. That's about probably one of the number one reasons why I just love the one-on-one relationship, and knowing that I'm that child's only sponsor.

In contrast to Plan’s programs, Compassion contributors maintain a one-to-one sponsoring commitment to an individual child. The relationship is reinforced by the donors’ ability to track the social, academic and spiritual development of their sponsored child via Compassion's password-protected intranet facility, periodic written reports on the child’s progress provided by the Child Development Center and letter exchanges with the child.
Field Observations – Concluding Remarks

Plan’s programs are flexible to the extent that they are tailored to meet the development requirements of each community, consistent with the approach advocated by Banerjee and Duflo, Compassion adheres to a uniform methodology in all of its Child Development Centers. The same curriculum is followed in all of its 26 countries of operation. There is a basic set of criteria for setting up a Child Development Center – to be located in a poor area, utilizing premises provided by an Evangelical church, near a public school and with access to a population of children within walking distance.

Such specificity conforms to Bebbington’s argument that selectivity of placement of NGO facilities can result in “uneven and inequitable geographies of poverty and opportunity”. Furthermore, although Compassion states that it welcomes children of all faiths, it stipulates that all attendees of its Child Development Centers must accept the religious component of its program. In this sense, as O’Neill observed in La Paloma, some children can be selected based on predetermined religious expectations while others in the same neighborhood or family can be excluded.

Nevertheless, beyond its Evangelical orientation, Compassion provides concrete benefits to its sponsored children in terms of after-school tutoring, individual mentoring, mid-day meals, recreational facilities, health care, vocational training, leadership training and in some cases, the funding of post-secondary education.

Accordingly, with its success in recruiting long-term child sponsors, Compassion is demonstrating that it can meet the immediate and long-term expectations of its financial supporters. By providing supplementary educational services to its sponsored children, Compassion is providing an effective basis for those children to lift themselves out of poverty. Finally, Compassion is effectively achieving the mandate set out in its Mission Statement: “Releasing children from poverty in Jesus’ name”.

Chapter 5. Conclusions

Are Child Sponsorship NGOs Effective?

Are child sponsorship programs having a positive effect on alleviating child poverty? In order to answer this question, it is relevant to revisit the positions of various anti-poverty advocates. Although the proposed solutions offered by Sachs, Collier Easterly and Moyo, outlined in Chapter 2, differ widely in approach, they all hold one view in common – the trillion-plus dollars spent to date on foreign aid have had little or no impact on poverty reduction (Easterly, 2001, p. 33). However, in terms of per capita foreign aid, Guatemala is a relatively modest receiver compared to other Central American countries coping with similar poverty problems (specifically, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua).

Table 5.1. Comparison of 2012 Foreign Aid Receipts for Selected Central American Countries (Millions USD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Foreign Aid</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Foreign Aid per Capita, 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>$ 299.4 M</td>
<td>15,468,203</td>
<td>$ 19.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>$ 571.5 M</td>
<td>8,097,688</td>
<td>$ 70.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>$ 230.4 M</td>
<td>6,080,478</td>
<td>$ 37.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>$ 532.3 M</td>
<td>6,340,454</td>
<td>$ 84.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>$ 32.7 M</td>
<td>4,953,313</td>
<td>$ 6.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>$ 50.7 M</td>
<td>3,864,170</td>
<td>$ 13.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Adapted from 2013 World Bank Statistics http://data.worldbank.org/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD)

Guatemala’s GDP per capita of $7,295 (as reported in Table 2.1 and almost certainly overstated due to the high incidence of unregistered indigenous births), would suggest a middle income country, which probably has a great deal of bearing on its relatively insignificant total foreign aid allocation of $19.44 per capita. Foreign aid is not
a major aspect of Guatemala’s economy, so poverty reduction strategies based on proposed improvements to the administration of foreign aid probably would have little or no impact in Guatemala. In any case, given Guatemala’s history of inequality, lack of expenditure on social services, high incidence of corruption and increasing poverty, it would appear that very little of the existing foreign aid funding is reaching its intended targets.

With respect to NGO funding, the magnitude of funding provided to Plan Guatemala and Compassion Guatemala via their international parent organizations is relatively small. Of Plan International’s total 2013 revenue of over $1 billion, Plan Guatemala received about $12 million, or 1.2% (Plan International website 2013, Annual Report). Compassion International’s total revenue for 2013 was $657 million of which an estimated $11 million or 1.8% was allocated to Compassion Guatemala (Compassion International website 2013 Annual Report). Guatemala’s needs are overshadowed by the much larger proportion of international donations going to African countries.

Consequently, whereas Sachs, Collier, Easterly and Moyo scale their development theories within the context of national and international aid initiatives, the two NGOs discussed here must operate by necessity at the level of targeted, affordable projects, consistent with Banerjee and Duflo’s recommendation for smaller scale aid projects to address specific problems.

In spite of Hubbard and Duggan’s objection to NGO initiatives described in Chapter 2, the success of Plan Guatemala’s 40 schools development project, its commitment to rights-based education and such micro financing projects as the cooperative bakery described in Chapter 3 exemplify the positive impact this NGO can have. Similarly, Compassion Guatemala’s long term commitment to the education and personal development of individual children described in Chapter 4 illustrates how this NGO improves the lives of its sponsored children.

Although Sachs’ MDG Villages project provides for public goods such as health care and education to specific targeted villages, the project falls far short of the funding Sachs envisions as necessary to enable all the world’s poor to break out of the poverty
trap. In this sense, although Bebbington criticizes NGO poverty relief initiatives in Latin America as causing "uneven and inequitable geographies of poverty and opportunity", the same criticism could levelled at the United Nations Millennium Development Goals project as it selectively targets individual villages for assistance. The only currently viable alternative to selective aid would be no aid at all.

Collier’s proposals require action at a macro level (e.g. international charters). Although commendable, they do not address the immediate day-to-day needs of poor communities, which are instead targeted by NGOs such as Plan and Compassion.

Market-focused strategies such as those proposed by Easterly and Moyo do not make provision for what Sen classifies as public goods, such as education, which can not only benefit the recipient, but also contribute to social change through increased literacy of the population (Sen, pp128-129). The education initiatives of Plan and Compassion specifically address this issue.

Hanlon et al point to the success of government sponsored cash transfer programs for poor people in Mexico and Brazil. However, they stress that cash transfers alone are only one component of a more comprehensive government anti-poverty campaign that also provides schools, public health facilities, access to land and income generating opportunities (Hanlon et al, p. 175). Although Guatemala initiated a cash transfer program in 2008, entitled Mi Familia Progresa, the program has had limited success to date due to underfunding (such funding coming primarily from transfers out of the public education and health budgets) as well as administrative problems (Gaia, p. 13). The fact that Guatemala introduced the program at the expense of other much-needed social services does not bode well for a successful cash transfer program. Plan Guatemala’s health clinic and school initiatives help to fill in some of the gaps created by depleted health and education budgets. Similarly, Compassion’s support of individual children’s health and educational needs addresses areas of public service deficiencies.

Compassion focuses on long term support for educating individual children from preschool through secondary, vocational and post-secondary phases. Plan builds schools, trains teachers and raises the awareness of children and parents regarding their rights as citizens.
Although the actions of child sponsorship NGOs cannot provide an all-encompassing approach to child poverty, they comprise an important facet amongst the many other anti-poverty initiatives currently under way in Guatemala.

**Final Observations**

It could be argued that the two NGOs featured in this study have striven to "manage" my observations of their programs by vetting the donors that I was permitted to interview and directing me to locations that portrayed their programs in the best possible light. Why should this be the case? One would assume that an organization with nothing to hide would adopt an "open book" policy, whereby my investigations would be unfettered and unsupervised. After all, truth and evidence would be their best defence. Nevertheless, I soon concluded that examining balance sheets was not going to help me evaluate the impact of child sponsorship NGOs on the sponsor/donors, the sponsored children and the NGOs themselves.

Notwithstanding all of the arguments for or against NGO activity outlined by development theorists, the fact remains that it is virtually impossible to demonstrate the outcomes of child sponsorship NGO programs in terms of costs versus benefits. There simply is no data to track what is happening to villagers in highland Guatemala. Unregistered births and deaths, health issues, criminal activity, family relocations and forced relocations of entire communities all negatively impact the continuity of NGO programs. Even my own sponsored child ultimately disappeared.

Accordingly, the NGOs are unable to provide a bottom-line justification for their existence, and, in any case, such a justification would be so narrow in scope as to overlook such factors as: a) the motivation of sponsors to continue their financial support; b) the social, political and economic constraints under which the NGOs are required to operate in such a dysfunctional country as Guatemala; and c) the impact on sponsored children derived from improved water, sanitation and health facilities, better schools, gender parity, increased awareness and voice regarding citizenship rights and obligations and more access to income-generating opportunities. Therefore, unable to provide a strictly financial justification for their activities, in order to create a favorable
impression, the NGOs showcased some of their most attractive works in progress. This doesn’t mean that the work they perform is not legitimate – it simply means that if they are unable to demonstrate cost/benefit outcomes, they prefer to be judged according to a different framework.

Furthermore, for the most part, donors do not appear to be largely affected by the financial bottom line. Instead, they appear to be influenced primarily by a desire to help unfortunate children and are therefore more likely to be motivated by emotional appeals to “sponsor a child” and by images of projects geared to improve the lives of children in terms of health, education or income generation. The donors also appear to derive a lot of personal satisfaction from the child sponsorship paradigm. The success of this approach is confirmed by hundreds of millions of dollars donated each year to Plan International and Compassion International.

Is child sponsorship an effective response to child poverty in Guatemala? Obviously, these two NGO’s have not succeeded in eliminating endemic child poverty in Guatemala. But then neither has any other type of aid - at the local, national or international level. If we accept the definition of “effective” to mean “producing a result that is wanted: having an intended effect” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), then we have to consider what is meant by the concept of effectivity by the various actors in the child sponsorship paradigm.

For the donor/sponsors, effectivity appears to mean being able to achieve a sense that the money they provide enables the NGO programs to meet donor expectations in terms of helping children to lift themselves out of poverty and to lead a better life. It also suggests that some donors consider the programs effective if they can achieve a connection with a sponsored child through the exchange of letters, as long as the letters received provide the donor with reassurance that certain expectations are being met – the child is healthy, is continuing his/her education and, in the case of the Compassion NGO, embracing Christian fundamentals. In this respect, the NGOs will usually instruct the child regarding appropriate responses to include in the letters. Conversely, other donors consider the letter exchange process to be an artificial construct and a source of embarrassment to both sponsor and child. However, regardless of whether or not the sponsor accepts or rejects the child-sponsor
connection, it is apparent the donors derive enough personal satisfaction out of the child sponsorship paradigm to become long-term financial supporters. Therefore, the NGO programs are effective for donors inasmuch as they are perceived to enable donors to help children living in poverty and to provide personal satisfaction by doing so.

The two NGO’s are effectively achieving their mandate of addressing the impacts of child poverty within the context of their respective Mission Statements. They appear to be addressing children’s immediate needs in terms of health, nutrition and education that are currently not being adequately fulfilled by the proposals of development theorists advocating for incentives for good governance (Easterly), increased foreign aid (Sachs), international laws and charters (Collier), Marshall-type aid for local businesses (Hubbard and Duggan), or government bond issues (Moyo). Furthermore, through the citizenship awareness training offered by Plan and the post-secondary educational support offered by Compassion to exceptional students, these NGOs are nurturing future community leaders capable of playing a proactive role in local, regional and national governance. By providing official voice to the concerns of poor people, such leaders hopefully will be ably prepared to advocate meaningful anti-poverty measures to be adopted by all levels of government. Although the two NGOs have not succeeded in eliminating child poverty in Guatemala, they are effective from the NGO perspective inasmuch as they appear to be meeting the objectives defined in their respective Mission Statements.

From the viewpoint of the NGOs’ beneficiaries, the programs are effective when they provide health services, food security, sanitation, educational support and income-generating opportunities that are not being provided by an unresponsive government. The children derive concrete benefits from these programs.

Can the impact of child sponsorship programs be meaningfully quantified in terms of positive life outcomes? For rural Guatemala, the answer is no, given the difficulty of correlating sparse statistical and financial data with the life experiences of the sponsored children. Such quantification, however, appears to be of lesser importance to donors than the satisfaction they derive from developing a bond, albeit primarily monetary, with a sponsored child and the sense that they are helping a child in need. In lieu of quantifying the results of their programs, the two NGOs focus on the quality of the programs they are able to provide, thereby demonstrating their goodwill, dedication,
resourcefulness and concrete action. They engage in development practice as opposed to development theory, and for the many long term child sponsors funding these NGOs, this appears to be an effective basis for continuing support.

I commenced this study with a rather negative perspective of child sponsorship NGOs based on my personal experience as a child sponsor, which in some respects I found to be disappointing, as described in Chapter 1. However, during the course of my research, I came to appreciate the many positive aspects of these two NGOs.

I acknowledge the commendable work undertaken by Compassion Guatemala. I appreciate that NGO’s efforts to show me many aspects of their Child Development, Emergency Response and Leadership Development programs and to facilitate my access to the beneficiaries of these programs. I was especially impressed with the Leadership Development Program, and even entertained the possibility of becoming an LDP sponsor myself. However, on a personal level, I determined that Compassion’s religious mandate would not be a comfortable fit me. I wish Compassion well, but the organization will have to continue its good work without my personal participation.

With respect to Plan Guatemala, I was very impressed by the organization’s initiatives in establishing schools, clean water facilities, supplementary teacher training, gender parity initiatives and providing opportunities for voice to address issues of community development and governance. I have reservations, however, regarding certain aspects of Plan’s child sponsorship model. Under its original mandate, Plan provided a genuine link (albeit primarily monetary) between a single sponsor and a single child. At a later date, Plan changed its mandate to discontinue sponsoring individual children, yet it openly retained the child sponsorship model as a fund raising strategy – admittedly, a very successful one. However, my previous experience as a child sponsor left me with the impression that Plan’s attempt to link donors with children was essentially an artificial construct. Obviously, many of Plan’s donors do not share this sentiment, and appear to derive personal satisfaction from letter exchanges with their sponsored child and sometimes, personal visits to the child’s community.

I am no longer a child sponsor. However, I am still a financial supporter of Plan’s many initiatives. In recent years, I have been contributing towards Plan projects such as
the establishment of medical clinics and secondary school scholarships for girls. Furthermore, I have to admit that I derive a lot of personal satisfaction from this kind of participation in Plan’s programs. Therefore, it must be concluded that I find Plan’s programs effective.

**Future Outlook**

The escalating incidence of drug cartel related violence throughout Central America will undoubtedly have negative effects on the operations of both NGOs. Plan Guatemala has already had to suspend operations in certain Program Unit areas. If the diaspora of children northwards to escape the violence continues, Plan’s child-oriented programs may have to be re-directed towards assisting in the resettlement of children into safer communities, or helping with the repatriation of children turned back by Mexican and United States border authorities. Compassion’s programs may also be affected if children find it increasingly unsafe to commute to and from Compassion’s Child Development Centers.

Child sponsorship NGOs are ill-equipped to confront violent drug cartels and unless government authorities implement effective strategies to curb this state of increasing lawlessness, this country could plausibly drop from its present “Warning” status to the “Alert” status of a “Failed State” (reference: Table 2.5).

On a more optimistic note, Plan’s efforts to address children’s fundamental needs and to raise their awareness of their citizenship rights and responsibilities should yield long term positive results as they attain adulthood and become participatory citizens in Guatemala’s social, economic and political development. Similarly, Compassion’s commitment to the health, educational and leadership skills development of individual children points to a future of healthier, better informed citizens capable of addressing the improvements needed in their society.
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