Yearning of Yalambojoch

A field study on rural poverty in northwestern Guatemala and the importance of local influence over development

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Executive summary

In 1996, Guatemala achieved peace after a 36 years long civil war which took root in the political and social oppression of the country’s vast indigenous population. To counter the country’s widespread poverty, inequality and ongoing political and social frustrations the Guatemalan government adopted a liberal peace building agenda by ‘globalizing’ its economy and by decentralizing the political and economic process. Through this process, Guatemala has achieved a democracy which is accepted by western standards as well as the classification of a middle income country. However, the vast, and predominately rural, indigenous population has been left behind in this progress. It is estimated that 7 out 10 indigenous Guatemalans today are facing more or less severe livelihood conditions below the poverty line, and Guatemala remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. The government now hopes to overcome the shortcomings in the rural sector by stimulating local agricultural projects which are anchored in the many and various territorially strengths and challenges throughout Guatemala’s countryside. The intention is, in other words, to encourage a stronger local control over the development process.

This study explores the conditions for, and the relevance of, local ownership of development in terms of livelihood improvements in Yalambojoch, one indigenous agriculture community in one of the most poor and war torn regions in Guatemala. An abductive field work with a holistic livelihood-approach has been necessary in order to localize more or less obvious factors that are trapping the village in poverty, and to understand to what degree poverty is determined by the village’s level of autonomy, or ownership, over its development. The results show that the village's low livelihood level is determined by agricultural insufficiency, poor access to crucial services and a political and socio economic isolation. The village's empowerment is restricted to protection of territory, which reproduces a context in which a more participant autonomy in a wider societal setting is thwarted, where external development projects are often reluctantly rejected due to local mistrust, frustration and discontentment with public as well as private agencies and where the livelihood situation consequently remains essentially static.

Key words: agriculture, local ownership, development, Guatemala, sustainable livelihoods
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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>ASDECOHUE</td>
<td>Agencia de Servicios y Desarrollo Económico y Social de Huehuetenango</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONAP</td>
<td>Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegida</td>
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<tr>
<td>COCODE</td>
<td>Consejos Comunitarios de Desarrollo</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<td>IICA</td>
<td>Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labor Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNDRI</td>
<td>Política nacional de desarrollo rural integral</td>
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<td>SRL</td>
<td>Sustainable Rural Livelihood</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children Emergency Fund</td>
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<td>UNRG</td>
<td>Union Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca</td>
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### Currency

1 Quetzal (GTQ) = 0.130745 USD  
1 USD = 7.64850 GTQ

1 GTQ = 0.104999 EUR  
1 EUR = 9.52390 GTQ

1 GTQ = 0.974015 SEK  
1 SEK = 1.02668 GTQ
I Introduction

1.1. Problem context and relevance of study

What is the importance of letting local actors govern the peace building and poverty fighting process in a post-war community? What role could, and should, local actors of war torn societies play in order to foster sustainable development in peace building activities? These two questions reflect a growing discussion among peace and development scholars that takes roots in the finitude of the liberal peace project, the western founded doctrine which has dominated international peace building and development activities in most post-war nations during the last five six decades (Saxby 2003; Reich 2006; Futamura & Notaras 2011).

Although far from reaching consensus concerning why these traditional peace building programs have not satisfied expectations, scholars of the field seem to be sharing the notion that local communities of post-war societies must be far more involved in their own development process than what they have generally been up to this point of time. And except for the hypothetical disputes, alternative attempts from the international community to promote a more locally governed development have also been tried in practice to an increasing extent over the last twenty years (Pietz and von Carlowitz 2007; Donais 2009; UNDP 2012). However, the effects of these still relatively young peace building and development programs are still up for evaluation and the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the discussions on local ownership in peace building and development still waits for to be settled, why the progression of this hungry yet relatively young field of research is restrained. Scholars of the alternative doctrine now requests more comprehensive analysis of the various and particular regional factors affecting people’s livelihoods and determining the relevance of, and potential for, local ownership of development within a given country or society (Futamura & Notaras 2011).

With this said who are the local communities which promoters of this doctrine are talking about? Although obviously different from each other in terms of culture and history, these communities are generally, and vaguely, considered rural and indigenous. And they are, to put it simple, communities whose people are having a harder time reaching a satisfying livelihood compared to other habitants in their countries. In fact, global poverty is particularly visible in fringe
rural communities where indigenous people are overrepresented, whose geographical detachment means little enjoyment of public services and private prospects and whose cultural features tends to be barriers to good governance and civic participation (IFAD 2011). The overcoming of global poverty, thus, is very much depending on whether or not poverty within rural and indigenous communities around the world can be decreased by 2015 (Poole, Gauthier & Mizrahi 2007; IFAD 2011).

Against this background, one nation which deserves a fair share of attention is Guatemala. In 1996, this Central American nation reached the end of a 36 year long civil war between the government’s military forces and the indigenous guerilla URNG through the finalizing of two years UN facilitated peace negotiations. The agreement admitted the historical social and political marginalization of indigenous people as the source of the military conflict as well as the main obstacle to Guatemala’s comprehensive development (Monterroso-Rivas 2009). As a direct outcome of this process, the Guatemalan government embraced the spirit of a liberal peace process by adjusting its political system closer to western standards and conjoining its economy to the global market. Moreover, this course has been accompanied by a decentralization process in which the autonomy of municipalities has increased significantly, in line with the resolutions of the Peace Agreement which heralded a democratic political and social society that recognizes and respects the diversity of Guatemala’s heterogeneous population (Copeland 2011; Yagenova & Garcia 2009; Monterroso-Rivas 2009).

Today, the armed combats are long gone and there have been no real signs of relapse into civil war since the last bullets between the national military and URNG were fired. Adding to this, Guatemala’s economy has grown into the biggest of all in Central America with a GDP per capita growth from roughly 2.0$ in 2004 to 3.5$ in 2014. Thus, Guatemala has taken the leap from being regarded as a low income country to become a middle income country by international standards (World Bank 2014).

Guatemala’s economical triumph is, however, overshadowed by the fact that 70 % of the country’s rural populations, which is roughly half of the total population and to the largest extend indigenous, are still living under more or less severe conditions below the poverty line. To clarify indigenous people’s vulnerability in Guatemala it is estimated that 7 out of 10 indigenous people are poor and that indigenous people are carrying 75 % of the total poverty burden in Guatemala (IFAD 2011). With these numbers Guatemala remains one of the most unequal countries in
The continuing of rural poverty and inequality in Guatemala has fostered a wide and trenchant resistance from the civil society towards the government’s post-war neoliberal development agenda, an agenda which above all has been characterized by a market-led reform of land policy as well as the expansion of so called “mega projects” throughout the Guatemalan countryside (Urkidi 2011; Sieder 2010; Escobar 2001).

While the market-led system is perceived by indigenous communities as negligence towards indigenous communities’ cultural attachment and communitarian approach towards their territory, their farming and their living habits, mega projects - such as for example mining and hydropower operations – are controversial since they are often performed by private profit seeking companies operating on historically indigenous land. Much of the social unrest at the Guatemalan countryside is therefore a mere reflection of the government’s incapability to satisfy those peace accords from 1996 which emphasized the strongest demands from UNRG; that is, a more inclusive rural development that admits indigenous communities historical land rights and the recognition of indigenous people’s political and cultural freedoms (Dueholm-Rasch 2012; Yagenova & Garcia 2009; Granovsky-Larsen 2013).

Guatemala’s large yet highly unequal economic growth has consequently called out for alternative attempts to relax the vulnerability of the continuously excluded indigenous communities, hereafter referred to as Mayan communities. In a fresh attempt to address the persistence of poverty in the rural regions the government released a new policy document last year, namely la Política Nacional de Desarrollo Rural (PNDRI) (in English the National Politic for Rural Development). In this document, the persistence of poverty throughout the Guatemalan countryside is explained by the government’s so far incapability of solving the many and territorially varying problems within the agriculture sector. The idea with this new policy is to promote and facilitate rural development projects that are tailored after those regionally specific needs, capacities and visions which distinguish a certain vulnerable area with the objective of achieving local ownership of development based upon self-propelled local economies, or - as the government names them - “peasant economies” (Gobierno de Guatemala, Propuesta de Plan para implementar la política nacional de Desarrollo rural integral, 2013, p.31, my translation).
My interest in exploring the persistence of poverty in rural Guatemala 18 years after the Peace Agreements brought me to Yalambojoch. Yalambojoch is a small agriculture village in the department of Huehuetenango in northwestern Guatemala, one of the poorest and most war torn regions in the country. Six weeks field work with semi-structured interviews and observations was made in the village where I, in an ethnographical manner, searched for an understanding of what is trapping the village in poverty and, in the light of the discussion above, the significance of local ownership for Yalambojoch in terms of livelihood improvements and sustainable development. The relevance of this study, hence, is that it reveals the challenges and aspirations of a post-war community in rural Guatemala which might be of interest and inspiration for relevant development agents in the area. Also, the study seeks to contribute with new empirical material to the discussion of local ownership in post-conflict peace building and development activities.

1.3. Purpose statement

The purpose of this study is to identify the connection between Yalambojoch’s livelihood situation and the village level of ownership over its development process.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What are the factors that are determining the low livelihood level in Yalambojoch?
2. How can Yalambojoch’s level of local ownership be understood? In what way(s) is development locally owned?
3. What is the relevance of local ownership for Yalambojoch in terms of livelihood improvement?

1.5. Disposition

The subsequent work will be presented as follows:

Chapter 2 outlines the methodological approach towards this study, the methods used, limitations and delimitations as well as an ethical reflection over the whole procedure;

Chapter 3 consists of a more extensive introduction to the academic debate on local ownership as well as my conceptual definition of local ownership, as emerging from the debate. This introduction
is followed by a presentation of the Sustainable Rural Livelihood framework and how I have used this framework together with my concepts of local ownership. Chapter three ends with an epistemological summation in order to provide the reader a deeper understanding of my, as a human being and researcher, personal consideration regarding the scientific value and usefulness of the information that will be extracted through the analytical process;

Chapter 4 provides a concise contextual and historical background of Guatemala, followed by a short introduction to the department of Huehuetenango as well as a brief overview of Yalambojoch; Chapter 5 presents the main findings from the fieldwork as categorized into different themes, which answers research question 1 and 2;

Chapter 6 analyzes the findings in a complicating discussion around research question 1 and 2, which paves the way for a fruitful analytical treatment of research question 3;

Chapter 7 entails a conclusion as well as a final discussion of the wider implications of the research results.
2. Methodology

The purpose with this chapter is to explain the methods used while carrying out this research and my reasons for using them. Also, this chapter provides a description of the evolvement of the research by discussing the practical lapses and insights which have directed my methodological and analytical approach to it, from the devising stage of the research to my following reflections over the experiences I had throughout the process. Then, I will clarify the limitations and delimitations which have shaped this study as well as my ethical contemplations over it. The final part of the chapter provides a rough guide to what sort of information is to be found in each part of the paper.

2.1. Overarching methodology and evolvement of study

My initial idea for going to Yalambojoch was to study the indigenous resistance against the Guatemalan government’s rural development agenda, with mining operations as my central focus. This idea arose rather naturally after a few nights at my Swedish library diving into the academic discussions around poverty and underdevelopment in contemporary Guatemala. The lack of locally portrayed realities and the overall rather normative nature of the literature around indigenous resistance towards mining and other so called ‘mega projects’ fostered my interest in doing an explorative and livelihood-centered fieldwork in the hope of understanding this phenomenon better.

I wanted to understand the social and cultural milieu of Yalambojoch and the people’s ways of reasoning by maintaining an inductive attitude towards my experiences. That is, to keep up an intimate, by turns interactive and by turns observing, approach towards the people I targeted and to regard my ability to gather empirical data using my senses as my prime scientific instruments (Eriksen 2000).

Although I to a certain degree followed these initial intensions it became apparent early into the fieldwork that I had to reconsider my topic of study, as well as the scope of data that I required. Surely, Yalambojoch is a village with strong opinions about mining extractions and its people has a concurrent understanding of the Guatemalan mining market as a labor alternative which should be kept at an agreeable distance. However, it became clear to me that no mining operations were
directly affecting the life of Yalambojoch, and the village’s engagement in this trenchant national
development issue was too limited for me to construct a relevant research upon the bases of it; my
initial research idea would simply have been more relevant to realize in another area of Guatemala.

Hence, having in mind Britta Mikkelsen’s criterion for a development researcher’s choice of
topic to be ‘…sufficiently flexible to incorporate interests other than his/her private ones’
(Mikkelsen, 2005. p.37), I finally came to the point where I dropped my original plans and instead
became more attentive to the outspoken problems in the village, what was being done about them
and by whom. This renewed focus steered me into contact with interesting external actors with a
development related relationship to the village. These external actors were the coordinator of
Colchaj Nac Luum, a Swedish NGO located in the village since 1996 which is running a preschool,
an intermediary school and a sewing association as well as providing the village with assistance to
other kinds of development projects; a worker from Ceiba, which is another NGO working in the
village from time to time by spreading information on health care, agriculture and gender issues; a
biologist which has assisted a reforestation association in the village; an agriculture expert and
independent researcher/author who has been offering workshops in the village regarding alternative
development ideas; and a teacher/researcher at the intermediary school who is not from the
community originally.

These outside actors all supplied me with their own notions regarding the poverty situation of
Yalambojoch as well as with interesting documents, investigations and statistics etc. directly or
indirectly connected to the village. Gradually, the study evolved into a study around the topic of
local ownership of development. Thus, the qualitative spirit of the research remained throughout the
process yet my updated study now required a more complementary, "zigzagging" relationship
between empirical data and theoretical discussion, why this research is more fairly labeled as a case
of abduction rather than induction (Hylland Eriksen 2000).

2.2. Ethnographic approach

An intimate and flexible research within the natural setting of the participants is the essence of
ethnographic research (Creswell 2009). However, it should be said that ethnographic research is
often performed during a significantly longer period of time in comparison to this six week long
field study, why the strategy for this inquiry should not be mistaken for a classical, in-depth-
ethnography but rather as a lighter version of ethnography. Moreover, since a big part of my interest in Yalambojoch was to explore the persistence of poverty, and the relevance of local ownership of development for overcoming poverty, through the fears, hopes and stories of the villagers, this research is also rather close to the phenomenological school of thought (ibid). Thus, I consider my strategy of inquiry as a mixture of ethnographic and phenomenological research.

2.3. Methods

All of the methods conducted throughout this study falls under what Mikkelsen (2005 p.63) refer to as participatory methods. Central to the theme of participatory learning and action is, among else, the researcher’s quest to understand how different actors are enjoying different types of accesses, rights and levels of inclusion within different spheres of the society. Mikkelsen refers these things to the study of social differentiation (ibid), which is a suiting concept for my interest in evaluating the livelihood situation in Yalambojoch; that is, what assets are in reach for the people and how are people making use of them?

There are many different techniques for participatory data collecting methods. The following three techniques have been prioritized for this research: Semi-structured interviews (with key individuals, focus groups, chain of interviews and probing questions); Direct and passive observations (such as field trips to agriculture land and work together with local people, presence in community meetings, regular walks around the village etc.) and; Review of secondary sources (documents, statistics, reports, books, files, maps etc.). Moreover, at the core of this research are also the residents of Yalambojoch’s experienced livelihood challenges and strengths, as well as their outspoken developmental concerns and notions of how to ideally meet these concerns.

As such, I have maintained an approach towards my respondents which quite much mirrors the logic of Phronetic research, as discussed by Mikkelsen (2005, p 36-37). Phronetic research addresses and clarifies the values and interests shaping people’s development desires as well as the power relations between different actors that are making up the basis for praxis. A Phronetic researcher asks questions such as where are we going? Is this path desirable? Who wins and who loses? What should be done and what are the prospects of changing existing power relations? (ibid). These questions have been emphasized in every interview, with local people as well as with external development agents, in order to gain a fair picture of the extent to which the development
of Yalambojoch is locally owned, how far the villagers are pursuing their ideas and how well these ideas rhyme with those from the outside.

2.4. Sampling and delimitations

My respondents can be divided into two groups; primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are those people who are directly affected by a certain type of peace building/developmental intervention, while secondary stakeholders can be seen as external agents whom in different ways are involved in the implementation of these operations (Mikkelsen 2005 p.72). The primary stakeholders in this study are sheer habitants of Yalambojoch whereas the secondary stakeholders are outside experts, such as teachers, NGO workers or independent researchers; all with a current or former involvement in the development of the village. The term stakeholder will only be used when necessary, however, since I find this term rather inconvenient to use when referring to the people I met throughout the field work and who some of I became personal with. Instead I have used the terms respondent, local or villager in a varying manner. These three terms are, if no other information is being given, exclusively used for reflecting all sorts of data gathered from the habitants of Yalambojoch, that is, the primary stakeholders of this study. Whenever an external expert or agent is referred to, it should be clear from the text.

When I arrived to Yalambojoch I knew very little about the habitants there. What I had learned before my arrival, through a few conversations with the Swedish NGO Colchaj Nac Luum, which is operating in the village since 1996, was that all the families in the village are farming families more or less dependent upon their production of maize. A female teacher and independent researcher at Colchaj Nac Luum’s secondary school provided me with a list of 20 people within the village which she, based upon her own previous research in the village, considered to be willing to sit down and talk to me for some time about their lives. From this list 14 people became respondents to my semi structured interviews. These persons served my wish to have an age and gender diverse sample of primary stakeholders. Furthermore, 7 other persons were later added to the sample. These 7 persons were either friends or relatives to the first 14 persons whom I met through my meetings with the latter, or persons I met while just walking around in the village. Thus, although I to some extent followed what Mikkelsen refers to as purposive sampling (since I traced those persons I was recommended to ask) I was to a large extent also reliant upon the snowball and
the random walk technique in order to establish interviews (Mikkelsen 2005, p.193).

In total, semi structured interviews were realized with 21 habitants of the village of whom 10 were women and 11 were men in the age of 16-73. All respondents were asked the same questions. Some questions were more precise than others but respondents were allowed to answer all questions as reflectively and detailed as possible and I only rephrased the questions or insisted on further information when I felt it was appropriate to do so, for the sake of my own interest as well as in terms of respect to the respondents’ limited time and energy. The intention was, in line with the logic behind semi-structured interviews, to establish a relaxed conversational atmosphere in which the respondents felt confident to share any thought of relevance coming to their heads along the interviews. The upcoming chapter regarding my analytical framework, and of course the chapter which reveals my findings, will both hint about the questions which have guided the interviews.

As a final mark upon the samplings and the interviews it might be of interest to know that I designed my questions in a way that enabled me to create a picture of the whole households, and not just the everyday routines of the responding man or women. I chose to do so partly to satisfy my own curiosity about the "life behind the person" and partly because policy design is household-centered in rural Guatemala, why household information is more useful for development workers in a given area (Guardiola & García-Muñoz 2010).

2.5. Limitations

Regarding the interview procedures, while some respondents had nothing or very little to say about certain questions others kept on talking for minutes by for example sharing everyday situations or reflecting about their past. This meant that some of the interviews were hard to finish without either exhausting myself, my respondents or my translator. Although follow up interviews were possible with most of these more talkative respondents it was not possible to meet twice with everyone, why some interviews were left halting. Moreover, the language barrier certainly restrained the research, not least in terms of efficiency. Surely the interviews would have gone much smoother if there were no need for translation; some respondents showed signs of fatigue due to the parallel translation from Spanish to English between me and my translator. It should be said, too, that the quality of Spanish varied between the respondents. Also, of the two interpreters I hired only one spoke the local Mayan language Chuj, why it is fair to assume that the point of some questions sometimes
might have been mistaken throughout the interviews. As Creswell points out, a qualitative researcher “keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researcher bring to the research or writers express in the literature” (Creswell 2009, p.175). In other words, trying to understand people’s reasons for living and thinking like they do and to establish a mutual intellectual process between the participant and myself as a researcher is rather difficult, and surely a bit naïve to expect from every interview under these conditions.

Another challenge to the fieldwork occurred one morning in May, half way through the field work, when I received a phone call from my contact person saying that my presence in the area was suddenly troubled. The trouble regarded an old, politically strained hydroelectric conflict in the neighboring village Barillas, which now had taken violent forms. I was informed that Scandinavian development workers who takes action for the protection of indigenous rights tends, in the eyes of some political actors or sympathizers, to be unrightfully associated with these types of violations and therefore regarded as "obstacles" in the Guatemalan government's national development vision.

Although I was in Yalambojoch to make an, as far as possible, objective and independently research I was advised to leave the village for a while and travel to the Swedish embassy in Guatemala City to meet up with my contact person (who left the village for the same reason the night before me) as well as the Swedish embassy personal to discuss my situation. Thankfully the conflict in Barillas calmed down quickly and I was informed that I could return to the village, although my contact person took the advice of his lawyer to leave the country for three months. This occurrence, however, decreased the length of my field work schedule from 7 weeks to 6, which meant I lost one valuable week of data collection in the village.

2.6. Ethical Consideration

Being an alien in an alien culture asking people about their problems and reasons for living like they do surely is attached to a fear of "stepping over the line" to what is not of my business. I was, however, sensitive to responses and reactions which followed my questions and I remained ready to change subject or speed up the interviews whenever that felt necessary to do. Furthermore, I informed every respondent that their answer would be anonymous if they did not necessarily want their names published. I also asked for permission to record the interviews digitally.
3. Analytical Framework

This chapter is divided into three parts: Part I presents the academic debate around local ownership of development in international peace building processes. In the end of this first part three indicators of local ownership, as emerging from the debate, will be stated which will facilitate an assessment of the level of local ownership in Yalambojoch. Part II of this chapter presents the Sustainable Rural Livelihood approach (SRL), which is the tool I have used to analyze the livelihood level in the village. Thus, the analytical framework which I use to interpret my data is a combination of the three indicators of local ownership and the SRL approach. An illustration of this combination will be provided in the end of this second part of the chapter. This chapter ends with an epistemological summation clarifying the scientific potency of the analytical framework as well as my personal perspective upon the value of the knowledge it creates.

3.1. Local Ownership Debate

3.1.1. Contrasting doctrines within the field of international peace building

The traditional notion of what should be the fundamentals for the re-establishment and development of a post-war society has underwent a change within peace and development circles in the western world throughout the last 20 years. This change can briefly be explained as a slow realization of the inconvenience of having foreign standards of development not just serving as goals for underdeveloped and/or war-torn societies, but also for governing the process towards these targets. The shortcomings, and drawbacks, of this traditional dogma, often referred to as liberal peace (Paris 1997; Richmond 2006), are many and surely varying from region to region. Yet, accompanying the critique against this doctrine is the growing consensus within academia upon the importance of grass root-founded and grass-root out carried peace building and development projects. This growing academic consensus is most often rested against the assumed value of the still rather fuzzy concept local ownership of development, which can be defined as when “solutions to a particular society’s needs are developed in concert with the people who are going to live with, and uphold, these solutions in the long run” (Hansen & Wiharta 2007, The Transition to a Just

As a milestone in the evolvement of this new stream of thought came the General Assembly Security Council report in 2009, which rather trenchantly urged the international community to learn from past errors and complications due to having a too narrowed, western-based approach towards development assistance in post-conflict societies. For peace building and development activities to be sustainable it is essential that they are constructed and performed in a way that satisfies the needs and desires of the nation, and which admits the local customs, structures, knowledge systems and capabilities existing within it (General Assembly Security Council 2009).

Furthermore, Futamura & Notaras (2011) underlines that overseeing the needs of local people and failing to interact with indigenous culture and traditional institutions fosters alienation of large parts of the population, and consequently the continuing of significant socio-economic root causes of conflicts. In fact, underestimation of the importance of capacity development "… constrains national actors from taking ownership of their recovery and limits accountability between the State and its people" (General Assembly Security Council 2009, p.7). In fact, the very issue of reconstituting the accountability between the state and its people, that is, to reconstitute the social contract, is the central theme in UNDP’s report Governance for Peace from 2012, a report which intends to be the "pace setter" for how governance capacity should be built in fragile and conflict prone contexts (UNDP 2012, Governance for Peace p.12). Admitting that the concept of fragility in this sense lacks a concrete definition within academia, the Governance for Peace report (2012, p.17) chooses to define fragile contexts as “those countries and territories experiencing armed conflict, emerging from armed conflict, or affected by acute political, social, and economic vulnerability, and susceptible to chronic forms of organized criminal violence”.

The evolvement of the debate around local ownership is visible in other UN-related documents since the Millennium shift as well, such as the Brahimi Report (2000), Responsibility to protect (2001) and No Exit without Strategy (2001). Further, some central thoughts of local ownership have progressed from a chain of important international conference produced documents, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Busan Partnership document (2011) and local ownership is nowadays promoted by many international organizations and bilateral donors in excess of the UN, such as the World Bank, the OECD and DFID (Sending 2009; Pouligny 2009).
While appreciation of this shift of policy seems wide and sincere, the faith in how far local ownership can be achieved in practice, as well as the actual value of achieving it, is on the contrary two questions separating scholars of the subject. A skeptic group of scholars namely warns for romanticizing local cultures by ignoring the embedded social, political and economic problems which often characterizes war-torn countries with a long history of colonization or economic inequality. To just “hand over” a certain peace building or development project in this context risks the project to be undermined by the very problems it seeks to tackle, since the process is likely to be overtaken by local patrons or organizations who tends to prioritize their own personal interests rather than those of the community (Mac Ginty 2011; Futamura & Notoras 2011; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall 2011).

An even more pessimistic wing of scholars claims that promotion of local ownership is just another way for external actors to justify their operations. That is, the local empowering methods which external actors are preaching can be seen either as a strategy for lengthen their paid assistance or as a shortcut out from the too arduous work which they have realized that they have undertaken (Pietz & von Carlowitz 2007).

3.1.2. Who is "local" and what is meant by "ownership"?

Regardless if local ownership is essentially a good or a bad idea it is an idea that requires far more investigations and analysis, of its mere importance as well as of what the phrase local ownership actually contains. Because despite the expansion and centralization of this phrase within the international development agenda there is little literature treating this phenomenon directly; the academic literature around local ownership is rather indirectly addressing this idea by discussing related themes such as partnership, participation and aid conditionality (Saxby 2003). Besides, the idea of local ownership is yet not even conceptually anchored nor does the literature provide many operational components or practical implications for it. In other words, there is a mismatch between the trenchant advocacy of local ownership within international development and the so far vague academic understanding of it, which makes these policy documents "more metaphorical than analytical" (Saxby 2003, Local ownership and development co-operation – the role of Northern civil society p.2).

While the term local at first seemed to be equal to that of local leadership, and chiefly
involved local power groups, political leaders or civil society organizations, promoters and debaters of the subject have increasingly criticized this approach for oversimplifying the nature and composition of local actors, and thereby failing to recognize the often contradictory needs and perspectives of sub-groups within a nation, a region or a community (Donais 2012). Moreover, finding positive leadership that represents ideas from a wide range of local actors is extremely difficult in countries which have experienced extended violent conflicts (Peake, Gormley-Heenan & Fitzduff 2004).

Broader definitions of the term *local* that embraces the ideas of the whole community rather than just those of its elites are therefore needed. This view is crucial according to some scholars since it harmonizes with one of the central goals within contemporary peace building and development in post-war societies; to strive for democratic governance that fosters a truly legitimate social process reflecting the fundamental ideas of a population (William 2000). For the sake of this study the term local ownership is limited to the community of Yalambojoch, and the village relation to governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions. This is important to clarify since the literature sometimes equates *local ownership* with *country ownership* (Devex 2013).

The second term, *ownership*, seems just as diffuse and problematic as the first. While some advocators stresses that local communities should mold their own development agendas and drive them in full autonomy towards their ends, with external actors serving only advisory roles (Edomwonyi 2003), others are claiming this approach to be unrealistic or even counterproductive. The latter opinion is based upon the same argument as aforementioned, concerning the volatile conditions which characterize many post-conflict societies in which certain power groups or elites are seeking control over their nations or communities (Reich 2006; Saxby 2003). Also, promotion of full communitarian control is considered by the same critics to ignore the very conditions and structures determining the space and potential for successful international peace building and development activities. In this sense, the fact that external agents are involved does not necessarily mean that there is a lack of local ownership; rather, it is through the collaboration between local actors and external agencies that a nation or a community’s goals most effectively can be implemented. From the same scholars it is stressed that the term *ownership* within Peace and Development should neither be considered as something final nor as something possessive. In fact, local ownership should be seen as an inclusive and dynamic *process* in which local actors and
external agencies together works for enhancing the empowerment of the former.

3.1.3. Determining three indicators of local ownership

Subsequently, Saxby (2003 p.2) defines three main groups of stakeholders among which ownership is weighted, these three stakeholders are: 1): the governments of developing countries; 2): communities and organizations in those countries (outside the government) and 3): donors or multilateral development agencies and financial institutions.

Inspired by Saxby (2003) I have constructed three indicators of local ownership which will form my analytical framework, together with another analytical tool as presented hereafter. These three indicators of local ownership are formulated as follows: 1): Beneficiaries (habitants of Yalambojoch) are influencing the decision making processes concerning the village development and; 2): are influencing the implementation of development projects and; 3): controls the finances of these implementations.

3.2. Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL)

In order to explore the conditions for, and the relevance of, local ownership of the development in Yalambojoch I have adapted the Sustainable Rural Livelihood framework (SRL). This framework admits the complex and vibrant every-day life of a struggling household (or just one individual) and claims that poverty is a relative concept that cannot be understood rightfully without a holistic picture of a household’s different capacities and limitations. This framework also measures to what degree these capacities and limitations are determined by the societal structures and processes, as well as the environmental advantages and challenges that are characterizing the given area in which a studied household exists (Mazibuko 2013).

Consequently, the point with combining these two frameworks – the SRL and the three indicators of local ownership – is to identify the relationship between Yalambojoch’s livelihood level and the village degree of local ownership.
3.2.1. Livelihood assets

At the heart of the SRL framework is the pentagon which can be seen in the illustration above. The framework builds upon the notion that households must have a working balance between five different yet interrelating assets in order to cope with stresses and maintain a sustainable and satisfying livelihood through more or less rigid times. The five assets can briefly be described as follows:

- **Natural capital**: refers to the scope and the limit of the natural resource stock which supplies a livelihood with important natural means, such as land, water, biodiversity, wildlife and environmental resources.

- **Physical capital**: contains those infrastructural services which provide a household with more or less crucial conveniences such as shelter, electricity, transport, communications and other material equipment allowing people to have more flexible and creative livelihoods.

- **Human capital**: means essentially a household’s health and labour condition as well as its level of education and overall skills or knowledge which the household is using to come up with different livelihood strategies.

- **Financial capital**: are chiefly incomes, savings, pensions, remittances and access to credit. However, it can also be seen as possession of something that could be traded for money, such as for example animals or abundance of land.

- **Social capital**: can be understood as a household’s level of reliance upon its social network in difficult times. It can further be explained as a person or a household’s gainful exchange with other persons or families, important groups or organizations which positively affect the
livelihood. This capital also contains a person or a household’s political influence. As emphasized by Carney (1998), the point with the SRL approach is to let poor people governing their development process by listening to their interpretations of and priorities for their livelihoods. In fact, in order to reach a fair understanding of poverty in a certain region the researcher should watch the problems through the eyes of the targeted people as much as he or she possibly can (ibid).

It is important to say, moreover, that there is no one-to-one link between people’s different resource status and the sustainability of their livelihoods, nor is there any simple way of defining some sort of absolute minimum for any of the five axles of the pentagon under which people can be considered to be poor or vulnerable. It is rather intuitive that there is a close connection between households overall resource status, the certain assets they can use through troubled times and the robustness of their livelihoods. And this robustness might demonstrate itself when a household rises from poverty and/or when a household increases its possibility to affect those policies and institutions which defines its livelihood conditions (ibid).

Embedded in the SRL framework lays also the curiosity to understand the fluctuation of resources throughout time. Are people feeling that they are on a positive or negative track of development? Is the development consistent throughout all five axles? What changes are expected to occur during the upcoming 10-15 years? This type of analysis might reveal the characteristics of those people who has “fled” poverty in a certain area and might explain much of the combinations and sequencing of assets and strategies which have enabled them to do so (ibid).

3.2.2. Influencing processes

Important as it is to understand people’s different resources, their accessibility to and their use of them, of equal importance is to be aware of the structures and policies that are determining the value of these resources. As explained in the document Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets, constructed by the Department for International Development (DFID), structures can be seen as the “hardware” – the public and private organizations - which externalizes policies and legislations and which “…deliver services, purchase, trade and perform all manner of other functions that affects livelihoods” (DFID 1999 p.19). Policies, on the other hand, should be seen as the “software” which determines the way structures, and individuals, operates and interacts. The institutions and policies behind transforming structures and processes have great influence upon people’s access to different
assets since they both create assets, for example when the state invest in basic infrastructure (which directly affects peoples physical capital), and determines peoples access to different assesses through for example land rights (which first and foremost relates to natural capital) (ibid).

It should be said however that there is no simple one way relationship between people’s assets and transforming structures and processes either, since individuals and groups are correspondingly influencing these structures and processes. To generalize, the more vigorous the aforementioned resource pentagon is the more influence people can exert over these structures and processes. In other words, one way to achieve empowerment can be to help people build up their resource capital (DFID 1999).

3.2.3. Livelihood strategies and outcomes

A people-centered analytical framework such as the SRL approach requires, except for an investigation of people’s assets, also an analysis of the objectives people are seeking as well as their strategies for achieving these objectives (ibid). Overall, households with more assets tend to have a greater variation of alternatives and the capability to alter between multiple strategies when necessary in order to protect their livelihoods. Also, livelihoods are formed by a multitude of varying forces and factors which are always under change. In fact, every region and every time of history have their own structures and processes which are determining what fruits a household can harvest from a certain livelihood strategy (ibid).

3.2.4. Vulnerability context

Another element of the SRL framework contributing to the understanding of the regionally specific conditions which determines the prospects for sustainable development is the vulnerability context. The vulnerability context refers to those shocks and seasonality based trends affecting livelihoods and which people have limited or no control over. These can be trends of population, political trends, shocks such as natural disasters or health diseases, seasonality shifts of for example employment opportunities, food prices and conditions for production - all of which can be very difficult for a household to cope with and which requires a robust and flexible livelihood. For example, conflicts regarding access to resources become increasingly important as populations grow and the pressure upon these resources increases. If attention is not being paid to these kinds of
conflicts, they may marginalize already vulnerable groups of people even more (DFID 1999). It is worth mentioning, though, that the vulnerability context also reveals positive trends, shocks or seasonality patterns since within this context “…assets are both destroyed and created” (DFID 1999 p.6).

Finally, it’s important to highlight that the SRL approach cannot be claimed as a theory *per se*, since it does not demand any specific procedures to be followed. It does not explain any certain phenomenon either. This approach is more to be considered as a perspective, or a worldview, providing a way of perceiving peoples realities as well as guidelines for the investigation of them. On the other hand, however, the SRL framework can be useful in order to discover patterns and factors which are somehow linked to the phenomenon of study. These discoveries might then, sometimes, evolve into a theory or a model of description (Mazibuko 2013).

![Analytical Framework Illustration]

*Note:* This is an illustration of the analytical framework for this study. As can be seen in the illustration the framework is a combination between the SRL framework and the three indicators of local ownership.

### 3.3. Epistemological summation

Now, before entering the second half of this thesis, which reveals and analyzes the collected data, a short epistemological reflection should further clarify the usefulness of the above presented analytical framework. The question here is: what knowledge will this illustrated analytical process produce? What “truth” will it crystallize from the empirical material? First and foremost it is important to emphasize that although I do intend to draw connections and conclusions upon my data, and thereby at least slightly please the positivist’s quest for a generalized picture of an
empirically understood reality (Roberts 2014), I am with this geographically and time-limited field work not making any pretense of revealing an absolute truth about the phenomenon of study. Besides, observable patterns explaining what people are doing with, or about, their poverty would simply not adequately satisfy my rather explorative methodological approach towards this research; in fact, the how and why-factor of and behind people’s behavior, wants and opinions regarding development is, as explained throughout the previous chapters, the driving concerns of this work.

Thus, another epistemological viewpoint which better reflects the research logic of this work as well as my personal notions of knowledge and reality is critical realism. This viewpoint claims, unlike positivism, that something is real and worth scientific attention as long as it has a causal effect; that is to say, anything that disturbs the social reality and affects human behavior which has individual or collective consequences, although not necessarily empirically measurable, is of scientific interest. Moreover, critical realism claims that human actions and behavior are in a mutually affective relationship with the norms and structures of culture and society, which are always under change and whose rules are not universal but rather special for a given time and place (ibid).

Hence, the aspiration, and the real challenge, with the epistemological approach of this field work is to - through the notions and opinions of the respondents - find out, render and reflect upon the underlying rules, structures and mechanisms which determines the virtual development process of Yalambojoch as well as the potential for - and the significance of - local ownership of this process.
4. National, regional and local context

This chapter begins with a concise yet necessary presentation of the contemporary condition of Guatemala, as well as a quick dive into the country’s modern history. The national background is followed by a brief sketch of the regional plus the local context of Yalambojoch.

4.1. National context

4.1.1. Geographic and demographic overview

Guatemala is a tropical and multi-ethnic country attaching Mexico in the northwest, Belize in the northeast and Honduras and El Salvador in the south. Two thirds of the country’s landscape is mountainous with thick jungles in the north and fertile steppes on the coast. The climate is subtropical, warm and steamy in the lowlands and mild in the highlands. 13.22 percent of the land is arable of which 5, 6 percent is used for permanent harvesting (UNDP 2009). The population is growing in a speed above the Latin American average and with over 15 million habitants Guatemala is the most populated country in Central America (Indexmundi.com 2014)

Guatemala lodges the area that once was the heart of the Mayan civilization, which heritage is still salient; some 40 of the population is considered indigenous descendants of the highly diversified Mayan culture speaking one of 21 different Mayan languages. This makes Guatemala’s indigenous population the largest one in Latin America together with the indigenous population of Bolivia (UNDP 2009).

4.1.2. Agriculture and the overall socio-economic situation

Agriculture accounts for a fifth of Guatemala’s GDP and employs circa 40 percent of the country’s total labour force. Indigenous and rural communities are essentially devoted to small scale family agriculture based on either subsistence or a modest market-oriented production (IFAD 2013). While Guatemala has the largest economy in Central America, and one of the strongest growing economies in whole Latin America, the country is also subscribing on one of the highest rates of poverty on the continent and the worst rates in terms of economic inequality after Panama (UNDP
In 2011, Guatemala reached a modest 131th position on the UNDPs Human Development Index (HDI). Guatemala’s poverty and inequality is strikingly embodied by the indigenous, rural population; 7 out of 10 Mayan people are living below the poverty line and indigenous people are carrying 75% of Guatemala’s total poverty burden (IFAD 2013; UNDP 2009).

4.1.3. History

To understand the poverty situation in contemporary Guatemala a short dive into this country’s history is necessary. To make a long story short, what can be said is that the indigenous population of Guatemala has been disregarded in the country’s political process, a suppression which took fire about 55 years ago when a 36 years long civil war between the government’s military force and the leftist, indigenous guerilla – the Guatemalan National Revolution Army (URNG) - broke loose which came to kill 200,000 people and scatter and displace over 400,000 more. Most of these victims were indigenous people and many of them women and children throughout the Guatemalan countryside (UNDP 2009).

In 1996 peace was achieved after a decade of democratization. The Peace Agreements imagined a resolution to the structural problems and injustices from which the war took root by addressing a wide range of matters such as poverty, unequal distribution of land, lack of access to healthcare and education, human rights violations, impunity and food and employment instability. The armed conflict ended with the Peace Agreements, which also ended political persecutions as the political process began to open up (Ibid). This progress has, however, not been sufficient and many of the problems as stated in the Peace Agreement remain unsolved. Moreover, since the militant violence vanished social violence has grown till a point beyond the control of the deeply corrupt and spineless juridical and political system, which governance is one of the weakest in Latin America (ibid).

4.1.4. Neoliberalism and decentralization

Two main processes kicked off from the Peace Agreement which came to change Guatemala’s political, economic and juridical landscape significantly: neoliberalism and decentralization. Roughly speaking, what these processes has meant for rural and indigenous farming communities is
an increased economic sensibility to the global market, as well as new political conditions where departmental and municipal governments have become more autonomic (Rivas 2009).

Actions and reforms for a more inclusive rural development have long been considered crucial for Guatemala’s development within international discussions (UNDP 2009; IFAD 2013; World Bank 2014) and a patent response from the government came last year through the release of PNDRI, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper. By emphasizing the importance of communal, grass-root development projects, tailored after territorial needs, capacities and potentials, this new policy indicates a new approach towards the persistent and varying livelihood challenges throughout the diversified Guatemalan countryside (Gobierno de Guatemala 2013).

4.2. Regional context - Huehuetenango

Although poverty is a national problem in Guatemala, poverty rates are substantially higher in the western and northern region of the country which were toughest affected by the civil war. This poverty belt comprises the department of Quiché, San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Alta and Baja Verapaz, Sololá, Totonicapán and Huehuetenango, of which the latter is the region housing Yalambojoch. Except from being severely affected by the war, Huehuetenango suffers from particular topographic problems as well. The terrain in Huehuetenango is predominantly steep, rocky and unfertile and thus not the most favorable environment for agriculture why more and more people are seeking employment within industrial or merchant businesses (Municipio de Huehuetenango 2003). Huehuetenango is further characterized as a region with one of the highest rate of migration to Mexico and the U.S over the last three decades (Ibid). It is important to mention that although a vast part of the migrants are young men with no secondary education, many migrants do have secondary education and not seldom further qualifications, why the department (and the country as a whole) loses important competence (Huehue en Cifras 2008).

What is more, Huehuetenango is a province rich in minerals. The province’s luscious mountains holds gold, silver, zinc, nickel, copper, antimony, cobalt and chrome which are attracting many foreign mining companies to the area, many of whom have been allowed permission from the government to establish their operation within the region in the aftermath of the Peace Agreement. Up till 2012 more than 50 businesses had been granted for exploration and extractions of minerals
in Huehuetenango among most of these operations have been performed by Canadian mining companies. These so called “mega projects”, often supported by the World Bank, have played a central role in Guatemala’s national rural development agenda throughout the post-war period. These projects have concurrently provoked a sharp resistance from indigenous communities and organizations, of which many regards these actions as another, more disguised form of colonization since they are more often than not operating on traditional indigenous land (Dueholm-Rasch 2012; Yagenova & Garcia 2009; Granovsky Larsen 2013).

4.3. Local context - Yalambojoch

Yalambojoch belongs to the municipality Nentón in the department of Huehuetenango. The village is located 48 kilometers north of the municipality capital Nentón, near the Mexican border and is to be found in a sunken valley 1590 meters over sea level surrounded by green hills of pines. The village is in the center of several other villages of which some are bordering: Yaltoya and Yuxquén in the northwest, El Aguacate in the west, El New Salamay Camp in the southeast, Llano Grande in southwest Bulej in the south and the former village San Francisco in the east.

Yalambojoch has one main river, Río Salchilá, with a mountain stream supplying every household with drinking water. Río Salchilá is connected to Laguna Yolnajab, which is a lagoon 2 hours walk from the village connected to the Mexican Gulf. Around this lagoon most families of the village have corn and coffee fields. A few families produce vegetables and fruits, which the climate around Laguna Yolnajab offers.

However, cultivation of maize is the basis for every livelihood and agriculture is family-based and practiced in a non-profit manner, with a few temporal exceptions when some families manage to produce a small surplus of coffee, fruits or vegetables.

The climate is rather unique in a national context; cold, foggy and very humid with an average annual rainfall of 3,000 mm, most of which is produced by the great contrasts of the mountain ranges in the region. Rain season stretches from late May till March when summer arrives, often with a draught.

Yalambojoch was founded 150 years ago by people from San Mateo Ixtatán. Today there are about 1100 people (roughly 180 households) living in the village of which 99.8 % have chuj as their native language while 0.2 % speaks Kanjobal, both Mayan languages. Most habitants speak Spanish
with varying quality. Chuj communities are known for having a strong community organization structured by a clear hierarchy where the Alcalde and the assistant Alcalde, who are always men, are the highest authorities.

In terms of religion, Catholicism predominates with 80 practicing families. About 20 families exercises charismatic Catholicism, another 20 families are religious Pentecost, 10 families belongs to a Central American evangelical religion while another 2 families are traditionalists practicing only Maya spirituality. There are family groups who do not belong to any of the village’s five churches.

On the 17\textsuperscript{th} of July in 1982 the neighboring village San Francisco was destroyed in an afternoon massacre by soldiers of the government’s military force. All but 2 or 3 of the roughly 600 habitants of San Francisco were murdered and the village was burned to the ground. In the next dawn, every family in Yalambojoch fled together up to Chiapas, the Mayan influenced region in the Mexican south. While some were captured and murdered on their way, most of the people managed to reach Mexico, where they came to spend 10-15 years until they dared to return to Yalambojoch again. During the civil war Yalambojoch had political connections with the URNG, who established a small military base on top of the hill which is centering the village. Yalambojoch continues to be politically and culturally associated with the guerilla movement. Today, this hill constitutes a culture and education center driven by a Swedish NGO named Colchaj Nac Luum, which has been present in the village since the peace in 1996.
5. Findings

This chapter can be seen as three parts: the first part describes the livelihood level of Yalambojoch by presenting the five pentagon capitals separately. Part two presents the institutional framework in which Yalambojoch’s livelihood is determined by addressing policy documents such as laws, development strategies and programs which are of relevance for the village. The third part of the chapter points out high and low indicators of local ownership.

5.1. Livelihood assets

5.1.2. Natural Capital

"The forests, lakes, rivers, wells, soil, wildlife, air, wild plants and the mountains are the natural resources that we have in our village"

As for most Mayan communities around Guatemala the ability to produce their own food is a direct prerequisite for survival in Yalambojoch. The importance of maize, which is the basis of every meal in the village, not only confirmed my initial idea about the Milpa’s strong cultural value for Guatemala’s indigenous people but rather strengthened it. The Milpa’s role for the development of the village is thus something I will come back to throughout the rest of this paper.

Land rights

The land system is very complicated and cannot be understood by mere juridical knowledge. The 1350 hectares which constitutes the village are legally entitled to 68 men who became collective owners through a title deed in 1973. However, most of these men are dead and many of their descendants don’t live in the village anymore. According to the national legislation these descendants have the legal right to claim back their land pieces. The problem is just that no description of the

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1 Milpa is the term used for Mayan cultures agriculture method of combining maize, beans and sometimes also squash in the same cultivation.
distribution within these 1350 hectares among these 68 men is given in this title deed nor does any
testaments of these land areas exist, which according to the national legislation is mandatory for a
juridical investigation to be considered. Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to clarify who is the
legal owner of the different land areas within the village. In practice, dealership of land is handled by
the community’s committee for land issues, Comité de la tierra. This committee has decided that
those farmers who have left the village after the peace in 1996, or those who never came back from
Mexico after the war, have no right to claim back their previous land. Moreover, no one in the
village is allowed to sell his or her land to anyone who doesn’t live in the village.

Equally tangled is the land situation around Laguna Yulnajab, where Yalambojoch possess 40
% of 2700 hectares of arable land. The rest of these hectares belong to the community of Aguacate
and Yulquén. This area is delicate due to the fact that some farmers of Aguacate still refuses to
return pieces of land to farmers of Yalambojoch, areas which they took while the habitants of
Yalambojoch were refugees in Chiapas (the habitants of Aguacate never fled their homes during the
war since the government’s army watched them and promised them several benefits, including land
areas of other villages). Tensions regarding these 2700 hectares are, however, held under control
during continuously consultations between the committees of these three villages. In fact, the unity
of these three villages regarding these 2700 hectares makes them resistant against other villages or
landlords who want these hectares.

According to the coordinator of Colchaj Nac Luum the land situation is even too complicated
to make sense of for some families in the village. What can be said, however, is that Yalambojoch,
by virtue of these title deeds and a strong organizations and commitment to informal agreements, is
well protected from aspiring land buyers in comparison to most other arable communities in the
country.

Accessibility to and use of land

Each family I spoke with declared ownership of at least 10-20 cuerdas. Besides, many families
have a certain amount of cuerdas which they don’t use and which they didn’t consider mention at
first when I asked about their land areas. Reasons for not using every cuerda varies; while some
families see it as strategically viable to save a certain amount of cuerdas each year (to rest the soil

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2 1 cuerda = 0.97 acres.
and thereby stimulate the fertility) other families lack the time and/or money for working with a satisfyingly area of production.

My understanding for how paradoxical agricultural life in the village can appear widened one day half way through the month of May when I assisted two brothers and their sons with their plantation of maize and beans. After we had walked 40 minutes from the village we reached an already cleaned field of 12 cuerdas, on which we began planting the second and last cultivation of maize and beans for the year (the first crops are sown in January and harvested in April). We almost managed to finish the job in 6 hours and during the work I observed an ocean of green, unused land surrounding us. I asked one of the brothers who owns all that green surrounding field, whereupon he proudly replied that that field, which was roughly 20 cuerdas, belongs to him and his brother. "We are rich ... very rich," he added and gave me a grand smile. Since the same man a few weeks earlier had told me that he wanted more land, that lack of land is one of the reasons for why his family has no money, I felt prompted to ask why he’s not using more of his land. "Because we are lazy" he replied, and lit up in an even bigger smile. This man later informed me that he had additionally 100-150 untouched cuerdas around Laguna Yulnajab. This man surely doesn’t answer for the whole village why this example is rather to be seen as an indication for how the quantity of land can differ considerably from family to family.

Nevertheless, the plentiful access to arable land in Yalambojoch is according to every respondent the main reason for why they don’t want to live anywhere else, and I was informed by every external agent I talked to that Yalambojoch enjoys an amount of land, and a natural capital in general, which is very generous compared to most other rural villages in Guatemala.

**Environmental conditions for agriculture**

The range mountain’s surrounding Yalambojoch and the fact that the village is at the breaking point of the so-called Trinidad belt, where the ocean breezes of the Atlantic meets those of the Pacific, means that the village has a relatively humid climate of a subtropical character. Rain periods have a tendency to vary in time and intensity from year to year just like the dry season does (normally lasting from February till May), which makes farming life in Yalambojoch very unpredictable. This uncertain climate, which has become less certain over the last decade, is together with the weak fertility of the Milpas the two largest agricultural problems according to the habitants of Yalambojoch.

Moreover, a worker for the non-governmental organization Ceiba (whose assistance in the
village will be highlighted later), estimates that 85% of the land within and around Yalambojoch is more appropriate used for forest plantations rather than maize production. The rest 15%, he explains, is best used for avocado plantations and similar products. Other external actors I spoke with agree about the adverse conditions for maize production. In fact, the agriculture researcher I spoke with told me that Yalambojoch has a peculiar potential for a more diversified agriculture than what is practiced today. This researcher stressed that Yalambojoch has a unique ability to combine corn and bean productions within and nearby the village with fruit and vegetable production in the warmer lowlands around Laguna Yulnajab, a territory which provides “ideal conditions for different exotic fruits and vegetables”.

Water and firewood

Every house has clean water from a mountain stream which flows into Río Salchilá, a source which is protected by the reforestation association AwumTé. Also, access to firewood is equally good as I noticed how smoke is wafting from dusk till dawn from the wood stove kitchens in which the women three times per day prepares their families self-produced corn tortillas and black beans. The village’s management of forestry and water will be further highlighted throughout this chapter.

Summing up Natural capital it can be stated that: 1) accessibility to clean water and firewood is good as well as possession of productive land; 2) land system is perceived to be fair, safe and well working; 3) the environmental conditions are not in favor for the type of agriculture Yalambojoch practice today, but rather proposes a more diversified and effective type of agriculture which does not compromise with the forestry capital of the village.

5.1.3. Physical Capital

Material conditions, at home and outside

Most houses in the village are made of wood from the surrounding forests and are characterized by holes and cracks in walls and rooftops. Due to financial and constructional support from Colchaj Nac Luum, however, most if not all houses have concrete floors in the main building as well as washing up sinks.

Over the last 20 years, however, more and more concrete houses have been built. These houses,
which are often referred to as “American houses” since they are financed by *remesas*\(^3\) from the United States, are also bigger and often two floored. The advantage of these houses, except for being a safer shelter against harsh weather, is that they enables storing of food, seed and fertilizers, something which is more troublesome in the less sealed wooden houses which are more exposed to visit of free range chickens and vermins.

Despite the fact that the village is relatively sheltered from the otherwise fairly common earthquakes in Central America there are other climate threats to be concerned about. The Alcalde of the village told me that a tornado which swept through the area a couple of years ago tore apart many tin roofs and caused a great devastation in the village. The absence of proper building equipment, particularly for improving the bad tin roofs, is, according to the Alcalde, therefore of most acute need for the village since the fear of a new tornado or other weather related problems constantly lingers in peoples' minds.

What is more the village lacks sewerage why holes in the ground are still used as toilets, and most houses also lack isolation and heating system which makes them dependent upon firewood to heat up the houses between August and February, when temperature fluctuates between -2 and + 10 degrees.

**Access and use of electricity**

Electricity reached the village in 1994 and is mainly used for mobile phones and light bulbs. The former state owned electricity company Energuate was privatized a few years ago which meant a high increase of electricity prices; the price for electricity is today roughly 150 Quetzals per month compared to 10 Quetzals before the privatization. The increase of electricity prices has led to that all families in the village, as following the decision of the village council a few years ago, has stopped paying their utility bills why many families now have large debts to Energuate which they cannot pay. Instead, Yalambojoch, like many other rural villages in the region, began using hot-wired electricity from an illegal company for a more surmountable cost. The service remains poor, however, and during my presence in the village I counted 13 power outages which lasted from 12 hours to 6 days.

Hydropower has been up for discussion as an alternative since 1999 when Colchaj Nac Luum examined the possibility of hydropower in Rio Salchilá, a study which showed that there is potential for a power plant with a capacity of about 45 kilowatts. According to the coordinator for Colchaj

\(^3\) Remesas = Remittances
Nac Luum hydropower would be the cheapest and most reliable energy option for Yalambojoch, whose long and misty rainy season means fewer opportunities for relatively more costly solar cells or panels. Today people in Yalambojoch together consume less than 100,000 kilowatt hours per year why a hydropower system of approximately 100 kW would both satisfy the village’s energy needs and also provide the ability to sell electricity despite the fact that only 1% of the river's capacity would be utilized.

Transportation to fields

Distance to the more agriculture suitable fields around Laguna Yulnajab is a problem for many families in the village. Even if an old drivable road to the lagoon was deliberated in 2005 not many families have benefited from this, since few have access to a car or other favorable transportation. To get a picture of the distance to these lands around Laguna Brava I rented a horse on a dry and sunny day and rode from the village to Laguna Brava and back. This trip took five hours and cost me 50 Quetzal as well as all my energy for the rest of the day. I was told that people, when they are working on their fields nearby Laguna Brava, most often uses a wooden booth or a windbreak near the lake to sleep under at night instead of walking back and forth between the village and the field.

Transportation beyond fields

It is possible to travel back and forth by bus to important places and junction points such as for example trade markets, hospitals, universities and banks, between 5 in the morning until 7 at night. Some examples: bus to Gracias a Dios (a small but busy trading town at the Mexican border) costs 10 Quetzal one way and takes about 1, 5 hour by bus; bus to Nentón (the municipality capital located 48 km away from the village which holds the nearest public hospital, governmental agencies and financial services) costs 20 Quetzal and takes about two hours by bus; bus to Huehuetenango (the departmental capital located 160 km away from the village where most villagers mainly travel to receive help with more serious health problems) costs 35 Quetzal and takes about 6 hours one way.

These long travelling hours are a combination of the old, overloaded buses and the rocky and choppy sand road which leads into the village, which is difficult if not impossible to drive through without a four wheeled car during the most severe rain periods.
Communication services

The cell phone and Internet companies Tigo and Claro have offered service in the village since 2004 and pay 3-4000 Quetzals in rent to the village each year for their presence in the area. Most women, men and even young children are regularly using cell phones which above all has allowed them to stay in contact with relatives in Mexico and U.S. "Some here in the village would rather go hungry than not being able to afford to put money into their cell phones," a teacher tells me and laughs.

Some villagers, mainly the younger people, are occasionally using the internet through their mobile phones yet the internet use is very limited, chiefly due to the fact that it costs about 200 quetzals per month to use internet on a daily basis.

A final note on communication is that half of the households that I visited had a functioning television and/or radios which prominently or solely provides Mexican channels.

Accessibility to health and education

There are two schools in Yalambojoch: one public primary school and one basico (intermediate school) operated by Colchaj Nac Luum since 2006. The public primary school is free for every student. Each year around 10 students attends the intermediate school which has an annual fee of 250 Quetzal for boys but is free for girls. The monthly fee for intermediate school is 10 Quetzal for each student, boy or girl. Colchaj Nac Luum also runs a preschool which is free for every family against the only demand that the mothers of the children work one day each week for the school, for example by picking weed.

Regarding health care, there is a small room at the village center square housing a broken bed and some basic medication for sale, although this room was unmanned during my six weeks in the village. The only health care offered, I was told, is the limited service offered by a few people in the village who through the organization Ceiba has received some advisory health training and therefore can offer some guidance in the community. However, I was often met with laughter and a big sigh when I asked people how they experience the quality of this service. “There is no health service here and has never been one”, a woman told me, “…if you get sick and you don’t have any money, the only thing you can do is to lay here in your bed until you die”.

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Summing up physical capital: 1) the material living standard has improved in the post-war era due to the work of Colchaj Nac Luum and through an increased inflow of remittances from U.S and Mexico; 2) the public transportation system is perceived as functioning yet poor roads slows up crucial transportation to for example hospitals; 3) the unsustainable electricity system rules out the possibility to store food as well as essential communication.

5.1.4. Human Capital

Demographics and family patterns

According to Colchaj Nac Luum the population of the village has doubled since 1996 and will be doubled again in 20 years. This population growth is not just a consequence of the national population growth and a decrease of child mortality but also, and mainly, the result of a frequent amount of returning war refugees from Chiapas.

The families I have spoken with have an average of four children. Although many young men are considering migration to Mexico or the U.S and even if more and more young people are taking on studies in distant places it is still unusual for a person born and raised in Yalambojoch to leave the village for good; the biological and social ties to the village are very strong just like peoples relationship towards their land and the nature in the village. Besides, chances for establishing a better life outside the village are not that good without a higher education or successful migration try outs. Moreover, the traditional view upon women to marry and have children at a young age and spend their lives as housewives in the village is surely another factor which contributes to the growing population. This persistent notion of the role of the women is regarded by some respondents, women as well as men, to be an obstacle to the development of the village since it undermines young women’s opportunities to make life decisions based upon their own will; a will which they may not be able to discover. It should be said, however, that more and more women are challenging this norm and much is due to the work of Ceiba and Colchaj Nac Luum who have provided several young women with scholarships for continuing studies outside the village as well as with employment within their organizations.

Education

Only three of the male respondents and three of the female respondents have finished Basico, that
is, intermediate school. One of these three women has with the help of a scholarship’s from Colchaj Nac Luum and Ceiba educated herself to become a nurse through a 1-year training program outside the village. This woman is now currently working in a town 4 hours outside of the village. She told me that she would like to educate herself further within health care, preferably at a university, but explained that she probably never would be able to afford that. Her dream has always been to practice health care in Yalambojoch. "Although I would love to work with an NGO here in the village, I would probably never dare to leave my public job even if it is far away and badly paid" she says, and explains that the safeness of a public employment overshadows the uncertainty of working with NGOs in Guatemala whose existences are always challenged by the harsh financial conditions NGOs in this country are facing.

Another female respondent who has completed basico also dreams of continuing study but tells me that she lacks the financial support from her parents. This woman, who is only 16 years old, would most of all like to work as a nurse in the village although she is curious about all sorts of jobs. She recently was offered a scholarship from a chef school in Guatemala City through Colchaj Nac Luum, but was forced to decline that offer since her parents could not afford to pay the 300 Quetzal’s a month which her life in the capital would have cost them. "My parents are not against my plans for further education”, she clarified – “they just tell me that the only requirement they have to let me continue studying is that they won’t have to pay a single quetzal for it."

Every male respondent have finished primero school. Three of the men have also made it through basico. One of these three men, 27 years old, has through a scholarship from Colchaj Nac Luum been able to become a basico teacher and is nowadays enjoying his role as a teacher in Colchaj Nac Luum’s classrooms. All the male respondents are well literate in Chuj as well as in Spanish while women’s levels of Spanish vary.

All 42 children (17 girls and 25 boys) over 6 years old whose parents I have interviewed has either completed or are about to complete primero school. Colchaj Nac Luum’s coordinator estimates that approximately 60 children have examined the organization’s basico education since the school opened in 2006. 50 of these children are from Yalambojoch while the rest have come from neighboring villages. In this number lays a gender difference: barely 1/3 of these 50 children from Yalambojoch who have finished basico are girls. Moreover, of those 20 children from Yalambojoch which have taken on education beyond basico outside of the village only 6 are girls. It
must be said, also, that several respondents informed me that there are still many children in the village who are not going to school because their parents don’t let them to, something which I observed during my weekly walks in the village. I understood from my respondents that the appreciation towards the public primary school is weak since many parents complains about poor education quality, delayed semester starts and uninvolved teachers who some days are not even showing up. Furthermore I was also told that not every family is positive to the existence of Colchaj Nac Luum Basico School in the village either. One of the Basico teachers explained that much of the antagonism towards education in the village can be understood by the fact that indigenous people in Guatemala historically have been excluded from education. This reproduced oppression, he continued, naturally follows that many indigenous families still find education as something irrelevant for their children. The fact that there is no education committee in Yalambojoch is for this teacher a pure manifestation of education’s traditionally weak role in the community.

Overall, education is something which every respondent perceives as important, both in terms of their children’s personal growth and the affect it might have upon the family in terms of future finance, increased knowledge and skills, but also for the general development of the community.

Health

Understanding the health situation in Yalambojoch is difficult, if not impossible, from a few health-based interview questions. An interesting note is that two women in their 40’s perceive their health as relatively weak in comparison to the other respondents, and striking with these women was their lack of knowledge about their health problems; one of the women has diabetes without knowing what diabetes really is while the other woman has regular stomach ailments since years back with no idea why. Many people in the village have a latent concern for someone in the family to fall ill from something more serious than what the village's medicine cabinet can handle.

Despite a decline in the last 20 years parturition related accidents and deaths is still a big problem in Yalambojoch just like in many other rural areas around the country. Although the competence for child delivery within the village has grown, much due to the work of Ceiba, this knowledge is still limited and the distance to hospitals is very troublesome. It is clear that the infant mortality rate remains a big problem; the coordinator of Colcahj Nac Luum estimates it to be 10-15 %, which is a relatively high number in comparison to the national infant
mortality rate of 2% in 2011 (indexmundi.com 2014).

Moreover the village continues to suffer from malnutrition and many respondents expressed a concern about being dependent upon a lucky maize harvests to be able to saturate their children every day. Malnutrition is common in rural Guatemala and can be understood as a result of poor harvest periods and a monotonous, maize-based diet at home (Isakson 2007).

Knowledge, information and development participation

All respondents consider themselves to have either a non-existent or, at best, very weak awareness of those political discussions and developmental decisions that are taken beyond the green hills of Yalambojoch. Most men blame their low awareness upon corruption, on national and regional level, as well as Yalambojoch’s chronically political alienation. Feelings of frustration regarding this political alienation were expressed from some women as well, although the majority of women claimed no interest for anything outside the community. In fact, when I asked about such things as politics and development I was often met with laughter from the women who humbly explained to me that they are housewives and therefore not interested in anything which doesn’t regard their traditional chores at home.

Extensive services

Ceiba is headquartered in the neighboring village Chacula since 1993 why this non-governmental organization frequently has been able to visit Yalambojoch throughout the postwar period. Ceiba’s main intention has been to help war-torn societies organize themselves in order to become self-sufficient upon their production by providing these communities consultations and guidance for agriculture. Ceiba’s main objective has, in other words, been to help these communities develop their own local economy, while a parallel mission has been to increase the health knowledge within these communities. Opinions towards Ceiba’s work differ among the respondents in Yalambojoch. Aside from the two women who express their gratitude to the moral encouragement and the financial support they have received throughout their educations, less positive criticism comes from other respondents. "Before, Ceiba would give us seeds and sometimes even some money, but now we get nothing" two women explained. "I still go to Ceiba’s meetings because I am a part of their study here in the village," another woman said, "but it's a waste of time ... because they're just talking about things that we already know… about how we should work with our fields". Some male respondents share this view, arguing that agronomic
information is the last Yalambojoch need. "Agriculture is the only thing we know, so why should we listen to them?" one man asked me rhetorically and laughed.

The Ceiba worker I spoke with is self-critical regarding his organization’s work in Yalambojoch, explaining that the reason for why Yalambojoch has shown so little interest in his organization is because Ceiba has been more interested in spreading their ideas throughout Yalambojoch than listening to those ideas existing within the village. Another reason for why Ceiba’s work in Yalambojoch has not gone better, he continues, is because the population of Yalambojoch was scattered when they fled to Chiapas during the war. The refugees from Chacula, on the other hand, were all living together in Chiapas during the war where they developed a dream together of how they should live when they came back as well as a “natural sense of cooperation between each other”. The families of Chacula therefore embraced Ceiba’s help to develop an organized and community-based agriculture adjusted to the agriculture conditions in the village. When Yalambojoch, on the other hand, became inhabited again many families were strangers to each other and some knew nothing about the agricultural situation they now faced in the village. “They had no vision from the beginning, and it is still impossible to understand what they want, how they want to proceed, because they never ask you for anything”.

A final difference between Chacula and Yalambojoch which the Ceiba worker stresses is that except from having a more united and market-close production Chacula has also developed an organizational system which allows women to take part in important communal discussions. That is of crucial importance for Yalambojoch to do as well, he concludes, where the more persistent machista culture continues to be a major obstacle for development.

To sum up human capital it can be stated that: 1) population growth might challenge the currently strong natural resource base in the community; 2) the role of education has strengthened, much due to Colchaj Nac Luum’s services; 3) more and more girls are continuing to study beyond primero, much due to the moral encouragement and the financial assistance from Ceiba and Colchaj Nac Luum; 4) women are much less involved in the decision making process at the community level and reports a weaker knowledge of, and interest in, political and developmental issues in general compared to the men; 5) external agricultural ideas/information are generally not embraced and implemented.
5.1.5. Financial capital

The economic role of agriculture

Agriculture in Yalambojoch is still on a subsistence level; all respondents except 3 reported that their productions contribute 0% to their household’s yearly financial economy. There are a few certain obstacles to profitable agriculture in Yalambojoch, as explained by the respondents. Above all, the village’s tricky climate makes it very difficult for families to produce a surplus of maize and beans, the two types of crops which constitute most families agricultural production. In fact, all respondents told me that their harvests most years not even satisfies the hunger of their families but covers only 6-9 months of the households yearly meals. The poor harvest is also explained by the respondents with the fact that few families can afford fertilizers, which they need to nourish their torn soil.

Besides, as mentioned earlier many families don’t use their lands to a sufficient extent due to distance and/or a limited potential of labor within the family. It happens that a household hires someone from the village for a day or two, paying 40 Quetzal per day. Hired labour, however, is according to the respondents a rather rare thing in Yalambojoch since very few families can afford it.

Coffee production used to be a reliant yet modest source of income for many families before they fled to Mexico. Since the global coffee crisis in the early 90’s however Yalambojoch’s coffee business has not managed to recover. More to the point, most coffee producing families in the village have gotten their cultivation ravaged by several pests during the last decade.

Cultivation of vegetables such as carrots, cabbage and broccoli has meant a certain income for two respondents in recent years. It should be mentioned that these farmers uses the income from their diverse agriculture to emancipate time from their Milpas. As one of the men explained he used the money earned on his vegetables last year to buy maize for a year instead of cultivating his own. In that way he was able to let his Milpa rest and recover at least for one season while he could devote more time to his task within the community’s forest association AwumTé.

Although some trade have traditionally been made with the neighboring village Bulej, 20 minutes away by car, more profitable market junctions for crops such as vegetables and fruits are Gracias a dios or Nentón. The distance too these markets and the lack of appropriate transport is making it hard for those few fruits and vegetable farmers in the village who are trying to expand
their modest business. If someone wants to sell anything in the village, the easiest way is to pay the 5 Quetzal community fee for using the village’s bullhorn system and shout out the offer.

Furthermore, many families sell chickens but don’t regard it as a favorable activity in terms of income. To grow a chicken takes roughly 6 month until it can be sold for approximately 100 Quetzal which, needless to say, is a modest profit when such things as vaccination and nutrition costs are added to the calculation. Some families have a pig or two which they regard as an investment for future costs and one man is for example planning to establish a pig farm at his house with the help from his son, who has recently migrated to USA and who is planning to send home regularly remittances as soon as he finds a job.

**The role of non-farm activities in Yalambojoch**

Some families have a small shop at their house in which they sell basic things such as rice, eggs, different kinds of canned food and snacks, as well as credits for using the cell phone and internet services of Claro and Tigo. Most of these products are bought in Gracias a dios or in Comitan and some of them are delivered to the village by middle men. The products are thereafter sold for a slightly profit in the village. To my surprise I counted over 10 shops of this kind in the village, of which only two had a fair amount of frequent customers. Nonetheless, one female owner of one of these two more profitable shops told me that she basically only makes a small profit from the fruits and vegetables she buys in Comitan or Gracias a Dios, since her shop is one among two or three in the village which are regularly importing these types of perishables.

**Credits, funds and loans**

A few female respondents, all wives, mothers or sisters to former or current migrants, have a bank account which they opened to enable receiving of remittances. Otherwise, none of the respondents have any exchange with financial institutions, public or private. Without formal employment or political connections people are simply just dismissed any kind of financial assistance, I was informed.

**Eco Tourism**

Some efforts to establish a community driven eco-tourism have been made over the last 10 years,
with the Laguna Brava as the main attraction point. Many families are welcoming tourists to eat and sleep in their houses for 20-30 Quetzals per day and Colchaj Nac Luum offers rooms for 50 Quetzals per night. Some respondents have worked as tourist guides within the village under payment from the community’s collective saving account. These efforts have, though, waned as focus has shifted more towards the work of AwumTé why the financial significance of the eco-tourism is still marginal. Intentions, and not least the potential, for a wider and more profitable eco-tourism still exists however and despite Yalambojoch’s geographical isolation a small amount of tourists, Guatemalan as well as international, are finding their way to the village from time to time to explore the nature as well as the culture of the community. All said, the modest but promising eco-tourism business in Yalambojoch is an example of a process which meets the three criterions of local ownership.

**AwumTé**

AwumTé provides some income for approximately 80 families. These are families who own a piece of land which is part of the reforestation project. By managing these areas in accordance with the policies of AwumTé families are receiving some economic compensation which is possible due to the financial support AwumTé gets from the governmental agency *Instituto nacional de Bosques*\(^4\). While this income is an extra income for most of these 80 beneficiaries some families with a larger area of land devoted to reforestation have been able to make a living upon this income. Moreover, AwumTé has diversified its association with other forestry-related projects in the village as well, such as the establishment of sawmill and a carpentry center. These so far young projects are, in terms of livelihood capital, cross-cutting since they stimulate the knowledge and organization of the village and are at the same time perceived as income generating activities in a longer perspective.

**Temporarily and permanent migration**

The most typical income-strategy during the post-war era has been migration. Since 1996 it has been common, especially for young men, to cross the Mexican border for temporary jobs at different farms, particularly coffee farms. It is relatively easy for people in Yalambojoch to find jobs in Chiapas (the neighboring region in the south of Mexico), for different reasons. One is that

\(^4\) *Institutional Nacional del Bosque = National forest institution*
most of the adults in Yalambojoch have Mexican citizenships since their time as refugees in the country, which allows them to cross the border without any problems. Also, Guatemalan temporary workers generally demands less in wage compared to their Mexican fellows. Furthermore, some families have relatives who never returned from Chiapas, where they now have farms at which they are offering their relatives in Yalambojoch occasionally work.

In terms of more permanent income, though, the most rewarding strategy is migration to Mexico City or United States. In a 2010 study regarding migration in Yalambojoch it was estimated that 60-70 persons from the village had migrated to U.S since 1996, of which 54 have returned to the village after an average time of 3-5 years. Of these 54 returnees (of which only one was a woman) 22 were deported while 32 returned more or less voluntarily. Moreover, 17 people from Yalambojoch were by the time of the study permanent migrants in Mexico (Falla & Yojcom 2012).

After some years in the U.S the typical, successful migrant, first buys some 120 cuerdas of land within or nearby Yalambojoch aimed for maize cultivation, and additionally 20 cuerdas for coffee production. Thereafter the migrant buys material and hires construction workers to build a new house in the village for an average cost of 120 000 Quetzals. Normally migrants as well buy cars which - except for facilitating travels - also ease the production of distant fields. The rest of the money is normally saved and used for every-day consumption. In other words, a sort of “semi-rural production” is established where the main part of the earnings are concentrated into non-profit investments (Falla & Yojcom 2012 p.86, my translation).

**Summarizing financial capital** it is safe to say that: 1) in terms of agriculture, there are tendencies of profit-potential through a more diversified production of vegetables and fruits; 2) the non-farm economy provides no income for Yalambojoch except for those few men working with construction in the village or nearby as well as those small shops who makes a modest profit from selling imported products from Mexico; 3) AwumTé provides varied income to some members due to financial aid from the government, although few families makes a living on this income; 4) most, close to all, money reaching the village are remittances from Mexico or the U.S.

5.1.6. Social Capital

Work as well as everyday life activities are palpably family-centered. It should be said, however,
that the perception of the family is not restricted to biology; in fact, many respondents have emphasized the role of their *compadres* \(^5\) in terms of livelihood protection. I was told that the compadre system, which is a typical social system in Latin America, means reciprocal relationships beyond the nucleus family which enables a more reliant and dynamic life. Howsoever, cooperation between families in terms of production seems rather uncommon; the agricultural cooperation that exists is generally limited to exchange and support between relatives. For example, if a family needs more land but cannot afford it, or if a family’s cultivation have gone bad, that family is more or less reliant upon support from relatives or compadres to the wife or the husband.

**NGO’s and other external agencies**

As mentioned earlier, Ceiba has tried to foster a more collective approach towards agriculture in the village and has also offered extension services directed towards a more effective and diversified production, although with a limited effect. The work of Ceiba should not be underestimated, however, since the organization has paved the way for many girls and boys to take on education beyond the educational limits of the village.

Likewise, Colchaj Nac Luum has without doubt increased the social capital of the village as well, not least considering the organizations bridge-making affect between the village and other organizations and foundations, national as well as international and private as well as public. Yalambojoch is an interesting village to study for many reasons, and with the facilities offered by Colchaj Nac Luum researchers like myself frequently finds their way to the village which enables the relatively remote people of Yalambojoch to connect with outside experts and development agents. The perhaps best example of how Colchaj Nac Luum’s operations have stimulated the social capital of the village is the organizations supportive role during the creation and evolvement of AwumTé, the reforestation project through which Yalambojoch in 2004 was awarded as the best Guatemalan community in terms of forest management.

AwumTé, which is Chuj for “sawyer”, was established in 2003 when the Swedish NGO Colchaj Nac Luum answered a group of women in the village wishes of organizing their small scale and non-profit work with reforestation in the neighboring ancient village San Francisco. These women had been informed about the possibility of a governmental supported reforestation project offered by *Instituto nacional de Bosques*, which is an public administration internationally

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\(^5\) Compadré can be translated to ‘god father’ or ‘comrade’.
recognized for its action of promotion, management and awareness of sustainable development of the forest sector in Guatemala and whose work contributes to ‘promote an improvement in the economic and quality of life of its population’ ( http://www.inab.gob.gt/ 2014, my translation).

Before AwumTé existed, one of the associations committee members told me, every family used the "slash and burn" method upon the village's forest in order to clear fertile soil for their maize production. Now, however, due to increased awareness of sustainability, roughly 30 % of the families continue to use this method.

Except from protecting the great forest of Yalambojoch AwumTé has also worked hard to protect the village's water capital through careful maintenance of the water system, as well as through informative community meetings regarding the dangers of water pollution. Since May 2014 AwumTé is an independent association yet Colchaj Nac Luum remains ready to assist with consultation if the association asks for it. The coordinator of Colchaj Nac Luum has great faith in this association, just like the other experts or agents I have spoken with, and claims that the village is doing a good job protecting its forest as well as the lakes, the rivers and the mountains which supplies every house with clean water.

Important to mention is also that through AwumTé’s work Yalambojoch has gained a stronger voice within the developmental debate of the province, which for example the association’s collaboration with ASDECOHUE6 has demonstrated. ASDECOHUE is a civil service organization whose mission is to promote local economic development through the amplification of economic opportunities between different local actors in the province of Huehuetenango. Due to a collaborative study with this organization AwumTé came in contact with the UNDP supported Fundación Solar7. Fundación Solar is a private Guatemalan development organization who supports and develops local projects focusing upon renewable energy and protection of the environment. Recently, through AwumTé, the development committee of Yalambojoch employed Fundación Solar for preliminary investigations of hydroelectric conditions in Rio Salchilá. How AwumTé has enhanced Yalambojoch’s political voice will be further highlighted in the second part of this chapter.

Apart from for Colchaj Nac Luum and Ceiba, no other NGO’s, public or communitarian

6 Agencia de Servicios y Desarrollo Económico y Social de Huehuetenango http://www.ilsleda.org/leda/agencies-details.php?id=17
7 http://www.fundacionsolar.org.gt/
organizations or associations were noticed during the field work. However, understanding people’s levels of social capital is very difficult for a foreign researcher with limited time who, by concentrating too much at the amount of associations or organizations existing in a community and their amount of members, risks to leave the field with a vague understanding of the often very complex and informal ways in which people empower each other (DFID 1999). Therefore, in order to expand my understanding of people’s social networks and how they use them in terms of livelihood protection and improvements, I was to a large extent relying upon my every day observations in the village. What I saw and what I felt in the village was, above all, a strong commitment to the common good of the community. This was often manifested to me by large group of people working nonprofit together with such things as garbage collection, manual street drainage and other infrastructural projects.

I also asked the villagers questions such as: who is the most important person in your life outside your family and how come? How and with whom are you cooperating with here in order to facilitate your life? From these questions it turned out that there is a strong faith in the organizational structure of the village as most people pointed out the village’s Alcalde as the most important contact outside the family since he is the one who “takes care of their problems”. The Alcalde, who is always a man and elected by popular vote in the village every January, assigns a group of other men, referred to as Cocodes within the village who together with the Alcalde are responsible for the security in the village as well as the implementation of those development project which the village decides upon at community meetings. I witnessed that these meetings were exclusively attended by men. Although women are explicitly not forbidden, their participation in these meetings is simply just not “part of the tradition”.

The Alcalde-system is maintaining the solidarity factor between the families of the village which, according to every respondent, always has been strong. One respondent declared this factor to me by pointing out the example of the churches within the community. Although the village is all but united in terms of religion all people, regardless of faith, comes together two times every year to celebrate a Catholic fiesta which is arranged by the traditional Catholic Church.

Another sign of solidarity, or at least collaboration, is how the village responds when somebody takes serious illness and needs money to pay for private transport to the hospitals in Nentón, Huehuetenango or Comitan. In these situations, the troubled family contacts the Alcalde

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8 The village’s developing councils working under the alcalde
who shouts out the situation through the village’s loudhailer, until every family has brought 5 Quetzals each which together usually covers most of the sick persons transport and medical care.

**Visitors participating in protection of natural resources**

In an so far unreleased study conducted by CONAP in march 2014, which is a governmental institution working to “ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and protected areas of Guatemala, as well as natural goods and services they provide to present and future generations” ([www.conap.gob.gt](http://www.conap.gob.gt) 2014, my translation), it is mentioned that 75 % of all residents and visitors of Yalambojoch are engaging themselves in collective work to protect the village natural resources.

**Summing up social capital**, it is clear that: 1) every respondent has a strong commitment to the organizational and hierarchal structure of the village, which pays back when for example someone takes sick; 2) the collective approach towards agriculture is limited to the family; 3) the services of Ceiba and especially Colchaj Nac Luum provides new knowledge and attracts other developmental workers or organizations which enables villagers to increase their social capital.

**5.2. Influencing processes**

**5.2.1. The 1996 Peace Accords**

In order to comprehend the rather complex institutional context of Guatemala in which laws and policies are constructed and exercised, a broader knowledge of the 1996 Peace Accords is required. A satisfying summary of these accords is, however, not possible within the scope of this paper since the accords are brimming with recommendations, guidelines and demands which stretch over all spheres of the Guatemalan society. Besides, the peace agreement is far from implemented why using it as reference point to understand the developmental conditions for Yalambojoch would be troublesome. On the other hand, the accords still serve as the foundation for development discussions in Guatemala why their inadequacy can be seen as a reflection of the many structural inequalities which continues to determine the livelihood dynamics in the country. Thus, those for Yalambojoch most relevant parts of the accords will now be briefly highlighted.
Identity and cultural rights for Indigenous peoples

These parts of the Peace Accords admits the importance of respecting Mayan communities’ ethical and moral values - which are based upon solidarity and loyalty to authorities as well as Mayan communities’ cultural traditions and “age-old capacity for resistance to assimilation”. The role of maize, both as a crop and as a sacred symbol which constitutes the basis of everyday life, is one of many examples of cultural elements that distinguish the Mayan “worldview” (Accords of the Guatemalan Peace Process p.41). The Mayan culture is further admitted as the origins of Guatemalan culture why it must be an “active and dynamic factor in the development and progress of Guatemalan society” (p.43).

Civil, Political, Social and economic rights

This part of the peace agreements recognizes, most significantly, the role of the communities within the structure of municipal autonomy to practice the rights of indigenous people and allow them to take their own development decisions. For this to be possible the creation of a new, regionalized political system was decided within the peace agreement in which departments and municipalities are becoming more or less independent yet receiving a fair distribution of the national budget. A rather concrete consequence of this part of the Peace agreement has been the government’s approval of the International Labour Organization convention No 169, accepted and activated by the congress in 1996. This convention was mentioned by some respondents as especially important for Yalambojoch and other indigenous communities which are resisting the government’s promotion of mega projects throughout the countryside.

5.2.2. Neoliberalism and decentralization

What was promised in the Peace agreement and what has being done thereafter are, however, two different things. In terms of intrinsic change the agreements sparked two main processes which came to transform the political and economic landscape in rural Guatemala throughout the post-war era: first, Guatemala adopted a modern, global economic model through state deregulation, structural adjustment and trade liberalization policies (Rivas 2009). Secondly, rural development has been accompanied by decentralization policies, which have allocated public funds into three levels of government: central, departmental and municipal (ibid).
According to the government, the decentralization reflects the vision of the Peace Accords to create a more just and inclusive Guatemalan society with the shift from an authoritarian counter-insurgency state towards a more democratic state model, allowing a stronger civil society. From this view, decentralization can be perceived as a way of letting local communities take control of their own development (Segeplan 2008).

For Yalambojoch, this new political structure has consequently meant that the development of the village to a large extent has been determined by the decisions and discussions within the department of Huehuetenango and the municipality of Nentón. Except from the experienced remoteness in terms of participation and overall insight into the political rooms outside the village, equally striking to hear throughout the field work was how little financial assistance Yalambojoch has received from the municipality of Nentón throughout the post-war era. Colchaj Nac Luum’s coordinator informed me that the only financial assistance the village has received from the municipality - since he moved in to the village in 1996 - is a 5000 quetzal grant for a new tin roof to the public school. The reason for why Yalambojoch is not receiving any help from the municipality, as I was told by the respondents, is because the majority of the villagers have not voted for those municipal Alcaldes which have later become selected. The municipality’s exclusion of Yalambojoch is according to several respondents therefore just a demonstration of the historically sour relationship between Yalambojoch and the government of Nentón, as well as between Yalambojoch and other, more Nentón-favored communities in the region.

For Rivas (2009), the 1996 Peace Accords brought about a new institutional framework which structure facilitates the implementation of those Peace agreements that changed Guatemala’s rural development policies. The problem is just, he argue, that in practice, political and social actors are still playing outside this new framework. The fact that Guatemala has made so little progress in reducing its rural poverty although the country’s financial resources available are more than the Latin America average makes the country’s rural development policies appear as an “out-of-tune and dis-coordinated orchestra” (Rivas 2009, *Institutions and public policies for rural development in Guatemala*, p.168). This notion is shared by Tetra Tech ARD, an international organization that supports policy reforms to improve decentralization and local governance in Guatemala. Tetra Tech ARD stresses that the functionality of local governments continues to be highly dependent upon budget transfers from the central government, and are continuously hampered
by corruption, on local as well as on national level. Also, even if citizens are now allowed to participate in the local political process they seldom have enough basic information and skills to effectively do so (Tetra Tech ARD 2014).

5.2.3. Public expenditures

A striking example of how the national budget is distributed was highlighted in the World Development Report from 2011, showing that in 2005 violence cost Guatemala 7% of its GDP - which was twice as much as the combined budget for health, education and agriculture in the same year. Moreover, in order to clarify how public expenditures are being distributed, with the ongoing decentralization process in mind, some more numbers are useful. In 2007, the municipal and departmental levels implemented 43% of the total public investment in Guatemala. In terms of expenditures within the municipal and departmental levels, what can be said is there has been a distinct prioritization of improving infrastructure, while social investments (although with a focus upon social infrastructure such as school buildings) have come in second-hand and productive investments (above all crop farming and livestock breeding) has been the least prioritized sector. An interesting notice is that departmental governments only channeled 2% of their funds into productive development in 2004-2007, of which the agricultural sector absorbed more than 83%. Other sectors within the productive development category, such as forestry and irrigation, have been more or less untouched in financial matters (Rivas 2009).

5.2.4. PNDRI

Guatemala’s incapability to break the reproduction of rural poverty and to realize the visions of the Peace Agreement is, according to the government in 2013, mainly to be explained by the deficient performance within the agricultural sector. Thus, the government formulated a new policy for rural development - la Política Nacional de Desarrollo Rural (PNDRI) (in English the National Politic for Rural Development) - under the influence and assistance of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The purpose of this new policy is to promote and facilitate rural development projects that are tailored to regionally specific needs, capacities and visions distinguishing a certain vulnerable area, with the objective of achieving local ownership of development based upon self-propelled so called “peasant
economies”. With peasant economies, the policy refers to "the systematic set of strategies and activities that families and rural communities develop in order to satisfy their material and spiritual life needs”, in order to achieve “…a decent life, in harmony with the land and the environment with which they live” (Gobierno de Guatemala, Propuesta de Plan para implementar la política nacional de Desarrollo rural integral, 2013, p.31, my translation).

Although the government admits its responsibility for the implementation of this policy, the leading roles of this process are played by so called mancomunidades throughout the Guatemalan countryside. Mancomunidades can be explained as two or more collaborating municipalities which are united in a commitment to a common, grass-root constituted development vision. Or, to quote article 49 of the legislative decree 12-2002, “An association of municipalities with legal personality”. Mancomunidades was legally incorporated to the municipality level when the Municipality code was written into the constitution in 2002. The municipality code was implemented as a response to the commitment in the Peace Agreement to issue “Municipal legislation adequate to the reality of the Guatemalan nation, which is characterized as a national, multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual unit” (Decreto Numero 12-2002 El Congreso De La Republica De Guatemala, my translation). This implementation has enabled mancomunidades to exercise competences of municipalities and provide municipal services.

There are 31 mancomunidades, comprising 179 municipalities, which have applied their projects to the PNDRI. The implementation phases of these mancomunidades projects follow a territorial prioritization approach based upon the “Plan Hambre Cero” covenant, (in English “Zero Hunger Project”), which is an ongoing project in Guatemala operating in the purpose of eliminating the root causes of chronic hunger and malnutrition. Nentón, that is the municipality in where Yalambojoch is located, is together with 8 other municipalities within the department of Huehuetenango part of the mancomunidad called HUISTO, which is Guatemala’s oldest mancomunidad created in 2004. HUISTO exists of these nine municipalities common belief of the importance of strengthening the role of ecological agriculture in the region of Huehuetenango. HUISTO was prioritized to the first phase of the PNDRI implementation which started out in October 2013. How this project may come to affect the agriculture and the overall livelihood of Yalambojoch is difficult to say, though, since the implementation phase is scheduled until December 2014. Besides, no respondent in Yalambojoch reported any involvement or recognition
of this mancomunidad. Still, the PNDRI deserves attention since it implicitly admits the acute situation of Yalambojoch as part a region which suffers from one of the highest rates of hunger and malnutrition, and thus it might just be a matter of time until the village is addressed by this policy more directly.

5.2.5. Mega Projects

The government’s commitment to infrastructure investments as the main key to development in rural Guatemala is demonstrated by the many Mega projects which have been spreading throughout the countryside as a consequence of Guatemala’s economic liberalization. Mega projects are highly controversial business in Guatemala since these projects are most often trespassing on indigenous land, where concurrence to these projects varies from place to place. The wide spread indigenous resistance towards these missions, above all mining operations, was unmistakable in Yalambojoch and in the department of Huehuetenango as a whole, where I noticed sign after sign with anti-mining messages as I passed through towns and villages. And as mentioned earlier, in Barillas, about 30 kilometers from Yalambojoch, efforts to build a hydroelectric station have provoked frustrations during many years due to habitants of Barilla’s discontent regarding their exclusion from the construction process. One morning during the field work these frustrations rose to a point where habitants of Barillas, and sympathizers from other villagers in the region, decided to take action and cancel the project once and for all by vandalizing company equipment for a various amount of millions, depending on which newspaper one read. This happening did not just reveal how trans-boundary these development projects are throughout indigenous communities; it also revealed how provoking the Guatemalan political system continues to appear. Shortly after these destructions the coordinator of Colchaj Nac Luum decided to leave the country for three months since foreign solidarity organizations - which are known to support the rights of indigenous communities - are associated with these “terrorists”, as indigenous protesters often are referred to by political voices in favor of these mega projects. Having said that, the hydroelectric installation which have been up for discussion in Yalambojoch is therefore a question which regards more than just the natural and physical conditions for the project; it also requires that the people of Yalambojoch supports the idea and finds reliable financial support for the project.

Another mega project which is of concern in Yalambojoch and in many other indigenous
communities is *Franja Transversal del Norte*. Transversal Del Norte is the planned 362 kilometer long highway which since it began to be built in Livingston in the eastern part of the country 2010 has transformed the transportation system in big parts of Guatemala. The muddy, bumpy gravel road that runs through Yalambojoch was supposed to be transformed into this highway during the time of my field work. However, the initiative to expand Franja Transversal del Norte through Yalambojoch has been paused since the committee of Yalambojoch together with the committees of El Aguacate, La Trinidad, Nueva Esperanza Chacula and La Benedición signed a jointly requests to Guatemala’s Minister of Communication in 2011 asking the project to be stopped, a request which was accepted. While these villages have different concerns regarding this highway they are united by their demands of a new process for the construction of the road in the department of Huehuetenango in which authorities and representatives of their communities are involved from the designing stage throughout the whole construction.

Although most persons I spoke with in Yalambojoch expressed their worries of being exposed to the in Guatemala so wide spread drug-related violence, which they argue that the highway inevitable will expose them to, no one claimed to be against the idea of having a highway passing through the village. In fact, this highway is rather welcomed since the village sees the many advantages of a transportation system that connects Yalambojoch to the rest of the country. What Yalambojoch, like other communities have opposed, however, is the Israeli high-way construction company Solel Boneh (chosen by the Guatemalan government) “disrespectful approach and bad attitude”, as some villagers put it.

The despair against the highway project in Yalambojoch began one day in January 2010 when workers for Solel Boneh without permission cut down over 400 square meters of protected forest next to Rio Salchilá, in order to pave way for the construction. The village managed to stop the company whose acts AwumTé reported to the national police. A meeting at the center square in Yalambojoch between authorities of Solel Boneh and Yalambojoch took place the 12th of May the same year and attracted 400 representatives from 30 different villagers. What derived from these protests was that Solel Boneh agreed upon a demand from Yalambojoch that any trees which the company needs to remove must be legitimized by an application through AwumTé. Also, following this talk Solel Boneh contracted AwumTé to carry out a land-study over the area needed for the

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9 *Franja Transversal del Norte: Northern Transversal Strip*
conclusion of the high way. This study is necessary since 40-60 houses will be directly affected by the new road. “We are not against the project, we just think it is reasonable that we should receive a fair compensation for giving up our houses and our land”, one men explained to me during our conversation in his garden, which most likely will be swallowed by the highway.

By the time of my departure from the village, Franja Transversal del Norte still seemed far away. In fact, during one of my last days the Alcalde arranged a meeting which attracted 63 men from the village in order to discuss Yalambojoch’s possibilities to build its own new main road, or at least shape up the current one. During this meeting it was decided that the neighboring village Bulej was going to be invited in the project since “they have the machines and we have the material”, as one man told me. A second meeting was planned to be held a few days after my departure, this time in Bulej. Before I left the village I asked the same man about the negotiations about Franja Transversal del Norte, and he explained to me that the highway was no longer relevant. "We chased them away” he said, referring to Solel Boneh, "... they won’t come back here again”.

5.2.6. Migration and the global economic crisis

Migration has had, and continuous to have, a huge impact over Yalambojoch, not only in terms of physical and natural investments (houses, cars, land etc.) but also in terms of the human and social capital of the village. The effect upon these two latter capitals is explained as a “transformation of mentality” which follows when people are being exposed to the American culture (Falla & Yojcom 2010, p.86 my translation). My impression from conversation with villagers, both those who have migrated and those who have not, as well as with the external agents is that migration is affecting Yalambojoch in many ways. While it surely improves the living standard for those families who are benefitting, and surely brings hope to non-beneficiaries, it simultaneously challenge the traditional customs and structures of the village since many migrants tends to “lose touch” with the community after some time abroad. Also, many migrants loses track of themselves in their new cultures and often returns as criminals or abusers, perhaps with less money than they left with and thus often becomes victims under self-guilt, shame and disappointment which tends to decrease their interaction and engagement with the village (Falla & Yojcom 2010).

On the other hand, some return from the U.S with a stronger appraisal to the culture and the nature of the village, and demonstrates a new born commitment to the collective progression of the community. Besides, some returning migrants have been offered important posts within the village
due to the experience and knowledge they have received outside Yalambojoch (ibid).

The coordinator of Colchaj Nac Luum told me that for him, the future of the village is very much determined by the migration phenomenon. That is to which extent people will be able to find jobs and earn money in Mexico and the U.S, how they will spend their money and what they will make of their new experiences and visions. Because as for now, he explained, Yalambojoch is in the middle of a transitional period from have being a “traditional farming community” to become “something else… something still unknown”.

Furthermore, migration is a phenomenon which is sensitive to international economic and political winds. The global economic crisis in 2008 meant that many migrates from Yalambojoch had to go back from U.S since they could no longer find enough of work. Falla & Yojcom (2010) reports that before this crisis broke out in 2008, 50-60 people in Yalambojoch did some kind of construction work in the village for friends or relatives in the U.S who paid them and financed the material by sending home remittances which were administered by someone in the family. After the crisis, though, more and more of these construction projects were cancelled or slowed down.

During my field work, 4 years after Fallas and Yojcom’s research, I noticed only two “America houses” under construction while many other were left half-finished. The effect of this crisis upon Guatemala is confirmed by a UNICEF survey over remittance-receiving households. In this survey, two-third of roughly 3000 investigated households reported having suffered from negative effects due to the global economic crisis. 73 % of these households reported having less income 2009 in comparison with 2008 (UNICEF 2010).

As a final note, it should be said that the services of Colchaj Nac Luum and Ceiba have been challenged by the global economic crisis as well. While Colchaj Nac Luum have managed to keep up its Basico school since the start in 2006, the preschool has been forced to shut down temporarily from time to time due to financial problems yet always been re-opened again, sometimes due do salvaging grants from individual collaborations partners or contributors to the organization. Ceiba has been forced to diminish their assistance in the village to a few irregular visits from just one worker, since the organization is no more receiving the same financial support it used to do from Spain.

**Summing up influencing processes**, what can be said is that: 1) ; public expenditures are not reaching Yalambojoch why basic needs such as health care are not satisfied; 2) the government’s latest policy for rural development indicates increased attention to the agricultural shortcomings of
Yalambojoch and the department of Huehuetenango as a whole; 3) Franja Transversal del Norte will decrease Yalambojoch’s remoteness and increase the village accessibility to important junctions and services yet will also expose the village to violence and criminality.

5.3. Indicators of Local ownership

5.3.1. Indicators of high local ownership

- Through *committee de la tierra* Yalambojoch has control over the village resource reserve, which is protected by title deeds, strong organization and commitment to informal agreement’s that are mastering the juridical vagueness of the land system.

- Most respondents perceive the political system in Yalambojoch as democratic and transparent, although women are not participating in important discussions to the same extent as men due to tradition.

- Yalambojoch’s social network is enhancing the village level of ownership since every external agency or organization is representing the aspirations of the community.

- The understanding, and the loyalty, within the village to protect the natural resource reserve is both stimulating local development efforts, such as the progression of AwumTé, and attracting outside actors (organizations, researchers and tourists) to work for the common good of the community.

- The operations of Colchaj Nac Luum are considered to represent the interest of the village, which is explained by three things; First, teachers and other employees are essentially descendants of the community who are participating in decision processes in the organization and have an overview of the organizations financial situation; secondly, the facilities of Colchaj Nac Luum are collectively owned by the village why the village has the power to end these services whenever it wants to; thirdly, Colchaj Nac Luum’s activities are driven with the intention to hand over all responsibility to the locally anchored staff when their competence is considered sufficient.
• AwumTé has control over the financial distribution of the grants which the association receives from Institutional Nacional del Bosque.

• The Peace Agreement has enabled indigenous communities such as Yalambojoch’s power of negotiation in terms of for example transforming mega projects, not least through the implementation of ILO convention No 169.

5.3.2. Indicators of low local ownership

• Every respondent reports a low level of participation in and awareness of political discussions outside the borders of Yalambojoch, explained by corruption and historical exclusion of Yalambojoch within the regional and national development process.

• Yalambojoch’s demand for more inclusion and insight into governmental development projects such as Franja Transversal del Norte remains unanswered why the village leverage in these issues is limited to a right of resistance.

• Weak public attention or capacity to satisfy fundamental needs such as for example nutrition and overall health care is reproducing the vulnerability of Yalambojoch’s and therefore also a state of apathy and hopelessness which naturally challenges local development initiatives.
6. Analysis

This chapter begins with a presentation of Yalambojoch’s vulnerability context, as I have interpreted it due to the research results presented in the foregoing chapter. The vulnerability context will clarify the setting in which livelihoods of Yalambojoch’s are determined, as well as the conditions for local ownership. After having presented the vulnerability context I will discuss and elaborate around research question 1 and 2, which is necessary in order to reach an answer to research question 3 and consequently the overarching interest of this research; is local ownership improving the livelihoods of Yalambojoch?

6.1. The Vulnerability context

As seen in the previous chapter Yalambojoch has a rich nature which it, by virtue of being a private and strongly organized community, is able to utilize in accordance with the rights and policies which are collectively taken in the village. This virtue not only imply a favorable accessibility to farmable land and an assurance of water and forest; it also implies a shield against dismissed external projects which in some way might unsettle the life in the village, such as for example the aforementioned highway project Franja Transversal del Norte. It must be said, though, that having a more or less autarchic system of natural resources always exposes a village such as Yalambojoch in a country like Guatemala, whose population is growing with 1.95 % a year (the second largest population growth in Latin America after the population growth of Belize, according to Indexmundi.com 2014) and where fundamental resources are already far from given in every community. For example, the fact that Yalambojoch has potential for hydroelectric power in Río Salchilá might come to affect more than just the physical development of the village, bearing in mind how the expansions of Mega Projects are shaking the political, economic and social ground throughout the country.

Moreover, although Yalambojoch plays a marginal, if not irrelevant, role on the national and international market agriculture is still the foundation for most livelihoods in the village, even those receiving regular remittances. Even though there is potential for a more trustworthy and profitable agriculture as proclaimed by the outside agents, and even if the village would abandon its
cultural agricultural heritage of maize cultivation and shift towards a more market profitable production of fruits and vegetables, how would the village be able to compete in the market? Where would it sell its production and to who? A transformative effort like this would certainly require practical and financial support in a long term perspective, reminding about the low prioritization of public agricultural investments in Huehuetenango where farmers suffer from low productivity, remoteness from markets for agricultural products, limited access to agricultural credit and price instability. These are features which determine a situation where it is “very difficult for agricultural production alone to sustain the needs of the majority of the population” (Camposeco, Thomas & Krenmayr, Huehue en Cifras 2008, p? my translation).

As expressed by most villagers, there is currently no way of coping with the poor fertility, draughts and pests and the overall unpredictable climate other than to migrate, temporarily or permanently. Yet, being dependent upon remittances makes a household vulnerable to everything that comes to affect the migration, such as economic crisis and deportation efforts; consequently, factors beyond the control of the household.

Another angle of migration’s influence over Yalambojoch, as seen in the previous chapter, is that this phenomenon risks having a negative effect upon the integrity and the solidarity factor of the village which might decrease Yalambojoch’s currently strong resistance towards brusque external development projects.

6.2. The complicated livelihood situation of Yalambojoch

It is clear from the results that Yalambojoch is a village with many interesting features in terms of poverty and livelihood dynamics which, sometimes, appear rather confusing or even contradictory. Because first of all, is it reasonable to talk about one poverty in Yalambojoch? Is it possible to imagine one livelihood pentagram which reflects the reality of every family? It seems as if there are a few main pros and cons towards a possible affirmation of these questions:

Pros: 1) every family is heavily dependent upon the village natural resource reserve and uses this reserve in a strikingly similar manner; 2) every family suffers the village’s vulnerability and remoteness in terms of geography and environment (unpredictable climate, weak fertility), infrastructure (poor transportation system and disconnection to crucial things such as markets and hospitals) and politics (expressions of being victims of the war and the continuation of oppression
due to a shared indigenous heritage); 3) the social organization and the collective mentality is strong why every household is affected by what is decided upon within the village. **Cons:** 1) the amount of land, and the accessibility to it, differs from family to family just like the production-related benefits from one’s social capital (some families are for example much more favorable in terms of land legacy); 2) migration has polarized the village significantly - not least in terms of material conveniences and improvements; 3) human capital differs among and within families since women are enjoying much less influence over important decisions taken at home, in the community and in the wider society due to low education and their traditional cultural characters as housewives. Also, the recognition of education as something important varies between families, which consequently affect the future of children differently.

These partly homogenous and partly heterogeneous features which reflect the rather ambiguous face of Yalambojoch is naturally challenging an analysis of Yalambojoch’s level of empowerment as a community.

**6.3. Elaborating the concept of local ownership in the case of Yalambojoch**

So far it should be understood that Yalambojoch’s isolated position within a national and regional development context determines a situation in which local ownership is simultaneously stimulated and challenged. It is challenged in that sense that without satisfaction of fundamental human needs the idea of migration will always linger in the back of people’s minds. Yet although migration might be perceived as an exit from poverty, or at least as a livelihood enhancing strategy, which it surely also has been for many families, it is rather regarded as an inevitable but reluctant “last option” for most families in the village in order to challenge their more or less critical “status quo” situation. In other words, the fact that the dream of a better life in the village after a few years in the U.S (which most external agents claim to be an “illusion”) continues to be so vivid in Yalambojoch can for the sake of this discussion be understood as a dual message; while migration is both a practical challenge per se towards a possible establishment of a sustainable development, perhaps a development centered around what the government refer to as a “peasant economy”, it is at the same time a mere reflection of many villagers lack of credence in the village capacity of changing anything with its current leverage of developmental ownership.

Moreover, reminding of the many hitches embedded in the mere concept of local ownership as
discussed through chapter 3, it is inevitable to distinguish between two kinds of local ownerships in Yalambojoch, or let’s say, two sides of the same coin. On the one side are those less evident, more divided perceptions of what is desirable for the village while the other side of the coin reflects a more visible, united commitment to, and agreement of, the “common good”. Because following the reasoning regarding the poverty and the livelihood dynamics of the village, it is equally problematic to talk about local development as something singular, or something straightforward, regardless of how homogenous the village seems to be in terms of everyday practices, accessibilities of resources, outspoken or unspoken needs and worries.

Starting with the first side of the coin, there are for example differences in opinions regarding education as something rewardingly or not, something important or not for the development of the community. And related to education there are those who are more positive to the presence of Colchaj Nac Luum than others. While most of the respondents highlighted the continuing work of this organization as important and in some cases even vital for the future development of the village I have learned - from the same respondents as well as from the organization itself - that there are those villagers who have wanted, or continuous to want, Colchaj Nac Luum out of the community.

Also, disappointment towards how the “machista mentality” in the village excludes women from the biggest discussion tables was expressed by some villagers (interestingly all respondents with an education beyond basico) as well as by outside agents. All these examples of internal disagreements, albeit suppressed, reveal averseness to conform to the normative way of life and perception of the future, and are consequently also an indication of fissures within the community which might deepen as time goes by.

Having addressed the internal and external challenges against a local and sustainable development in Yalambojoch it is important to say that local ownership is at the same time stimulated by these very challenges, and the village “status quo” of development. For it is still feasible to talk about something “commonly good” in Yalambojoch. That is, the other side of the coin. This side reflects a more palpable, outspoken and jointly determination of what is regarded to be the best for the community. This jointly determination - together with the fact that the village has very limited governmental support - means that in the end of the day the families of Yalambojoch stands alone yet united in their struggle for keeping together a somewhat functioning livelihood, with no real

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10 Machista = macho
alternatives but taking development in their own hands. And the perhaps best example of how the village has done so is the existence of AwumTé. The creation of this association can be seen as the result of local people bringing their survival strategies together in order to protect something which no one but the villagers themselves are compelled to take care of, in this case their forests. Through AwumTé Yalambojoch is not only securing and improving a vital livelihood element, it has also implied the village first judicial and autonomous association which has given the village a stronger political voice. However, as much as the success story of AwumTé is a result of local capacity and will power to organize around a collective interest, it is equally much the result of the village firm and patient educational cooperation with Colchaj Nac Luum, and not least to mention the financial support from Institutional Nacional del Bosque.

The example of AwumTé, therefore, seems to be the perfect example of local ownership bringing back to mind the three indicators of high local ownership which have been used for this study, as well as Saxby’s (2003) three categories of stakeholders in a project such as this. In fact, the case of AwumTé is the only substantial developmental connection between Yalambojoch and the rather ghostly government which has been found in this field work, putting aside the public primary school. The optimist might therefore regard this connection as a first step towards a reestablishment of some form of a social contract between Yalambojoch and the state, while the cynical might claim that Yalambojoch’s reforestation vision just happens to fit into the current national agenda. Regardless, understanding a village such as Yalambojoch’s degree of influence over its development surely requires a comprehension of the wider context in which the weight of this influence can be measured.

6.4. Estimating the level of local ownership in Yalambojoch

Hypothetically speaking, even if there would be a more solid, unified vision in Yalambojoch on how to overcome poverty, what would this vision be worth in the current shape of the Guatemalan society? What impact could for example an organized, diversified and export-oriented agriculture have upon the development of a politically remote village such as this, whose echoing umbrage is considered first when Israeli road builders of a public highway are being stopped at the borders of the community?

The point to be made here is that ownership of development, as far as this study has been able
to explain, is not achieved just because a community has the legal right and the power to say No to something happening within its territory. Rather, with Reich (2006) and Saxby’s (2003) definitions in mind, a fair share of ownership can be assumed when local people, or communities, are included and considered in the development process from its initial stage and onwards. This point has proven to be highly relevant for Yalambojoch, which not least the once again example of the disrupted highway has shown. One could easily mistake this event as a mere demonstration of Yalambojoch (or the region’s) autonomy, when it’s in fact rather should be understood as a manifestation of a broken, or nonexistent, social contract.

Yalambojoch’s political remoteness not only forecloses accountability and transparency between the village and the government, it also reproduces a widespread and profound distrust against the regional and the national political system. The same remoteness and historical exclusion is proven to maintain a feeling of “us against them” among the villagers, where “them” a bit diffusively can be seen as those outside forces which are perceived as negative for the community.

Thus, in a larger context Yalambojoch’s autonomy, or level of ownership, seems restricted to a right of resistance rather than participation of development, and in the highway case, somewhat ironically, against something which in reality is intrinsically wanted.

6.5. Is then, local ownership improving livelihoods in Yalambojoch?

In excess of Awumté’s effects upon the village’s livelihoods, concrete indicators of how local ownership improves development in Yalambojoch are sparse. This is, however, more to be explained by the village continuing political and socio economic remoteness than by how well the village is making use of its restricted developmental leverage; as long as there is none or just a defective relation between Yalambojoch and important public and private agencies the community’s level of ownership appears rather static and unproductive.

AwumTé, hence, is surely an exception of the rule in this sense which undeniably confirms the importance of outside agents, public and private, paying attention to the needs, the fears, the aspirations and the competences which exist within the community. Colchaj Nac Luum’s presence in the village, thus, has certainly meant a necessary injection into the village human and social capital. Yet, whether or not Colchaj Nac Luum’s rather long term educational investments will have a profound and breaching effect upon the village’s livelihoods is still too soon to answer.
In this sense, though, Yalambojoch can be seen as a community in the middle of an empowerment process, a process which already has proven important for many persons and families in the village. This process should, however, not be regarded as a process without potential pitfalls; being represented by international organizations is not always something which exclusively favors a village such as Yalambojoch. Apart from the rather obvious risk of becoming dependent upon external assistance, whether that dependency is manifested by weekly deliverances of seeds or if it is a slumbering hope of some kind of a drastic change coming from the outside, one might also argue that there is a political downside for an indigenous community to be supported by organizations or agencies which are not always synchronized with the national developmental agenda as being driven by the government. Looking at the hydropower conflict in the neighboring village of Yalambojoch and how this conflict hampered Colchaj Nac Luum’s operations in Yalambojoch indicates how strained the political climate in Guatemala continuous to appear, and consequently how fragile the cooperation between a foreign organization and a secluded community as Yalambojoch remains.

Ending this analysis I want to emphasize that although an affirmative of whether or not local ownership improves development in Yalambojoch would have to be based upon a few yet strong indicators as outlined in this analysis, it is safe to say that as long as Yalambojoch’s trust and participation in the national development agenda remains insufficient there will most likely not be many substantial livelihood improvements in the village nearest future.

6. Conclusion

Yalambojoch’s poverty is explained by a few main factors. First, and above all, livelihoods are based upon an age old self-sufficiency farming practice which is neither generating income nor is guaranteeing a satisfaction of the most basic needs throughout a year. Farmers lack equipment and protection against agricultural threats such as intense rain periods, draughts and pests which they perceive occur more and more frequently. Most households have more land than they can manage due to long distances to fields, insufficient labor force within the family and a too scarce economy to be able to employ somebody at the fields for more than a few days at a time. Also, lack of knowledge and/or interest for shifting towards a less extensive yet more secure and profitable
cultivation of fruits and vegetables, as well as unfavorable accessibility and transportation to markets are two more factors which are determining the inadequate agricultural life in the village.

Non-farm economic activities in the region are limited to those few people with professional experience of practical jobs such as construction, electricity and carpentry. Travelling over the Mexican border for day or week jobs in Chiapas, or long-term migration to Mexico City or U.S is therefore regarded as the only way of coping with poverty although the international economic crisis have obstructed migration since 2008.

Moreover, the village receives little public support and is especially troubled by the absence of health care, and the Human capital remains substantially low due to a transmission of political and socio economic remoteness, although foreign NGOs in the area have boosted this capital significantly over the last 10 years. As a consequence the village has embarked an empowerment process which has strengthened the village capacity of managing its natural resource reserve in a sustainable way and also spurred engagement in a common vision of future economic activities connected to the reforestation project. The economic limitations of the village future forestry business, though, are clear just like the village commitment to its traditional practice of agriculture, why the village development seems to remain governed by continuous migration and the hazy effects of young but promising educational investments.

This empowerment process has also strengthened the village leverage in a larger development context stretching beyond the politics of Yalambojoch, which not least is demonstrated by the spirit of AwumTé. However, this leverage remains more determined by the village virtue of being “protected” by significant territorial title deeds rather than by a commitment to a collective development agenda or vision.

Yalambojoch’s limited inclusiveness in projects and processes which are not community founded persists, and is preserving a rather static development dialogue with external development institutions in which Yalambojoch’s autonomy is restricted to a right of resistance rather than participation. This reproduces a context in which Yalambojoch continues to be remote from public or private prospects, where a more participant and creative autonomy is thwarted and where the livelihood situation remains essentially static.
7. Final reflections and thoughts of the future

This study can both be seen as an exploration of livelihood challenges in one of many indigenous communities in rural Guatemala and at the same time a case example of the many promises and problems attached to the concept of local ownership. Some of these promises and problems deserve a final note.

Considering the academic debate around local ownership, as outlined in chapter 3, what can be said about it in the light of this study? Or rather, how is this study contributing to the debate? First and foremost, the case of Yalambojoch reveals how decades of marginalization reproduces dual feelings of hope and doubt, commitment and resignation, yearning and saturation towards development that somehow linger in a collective consciousness which becomes vivid first when the ground starts to shake and when the “status quo” becomes threatened, which not least the grand highway example in this study has portrayed. What this study is emphasizing, however, is not that local ownership in any way is equal with protection or backwardness but rather the contrary; local ownership becomes determinative for substantial development to take place in a village such as Yalambojoch whose features and feelings surely mirrors many other communities which have been left behind in the national development course throughout Guatemala’s post war chapter.

Coming back to the UNDP report (2012), there is no doubt that Guatemala remains a fragile society in which the only thing that can be claimed as some form of a social contract is the unsatisfied and seemingly vanishing Peace agreement. And in a region such as Yalambojoch’s, which sometimes appear as a region within an economic and political vacuum, the consequences of being economic and political remote certainly challenges external development assistance regardless how “locally tailored” this assistance might be, since it always risks to evolve into some form of dependence. “They don’t need more fertilizers, they need to be taught English” the agricultural expert and development researcher told me with a frustrated smile, while referring directly to the people of Yalambojoch. He developed his argument by pointing at the same thing as the other outside agents proclaimed to me, namely that the village is crammed with dormant dreams and ideas which can only be raised and realized through investments in the human capital.

The fact that I was not able to crystallize any homegrown, sustainable vision of development during my time in Yalambojoch should therefore possibly be regarded as an indicator of the importance for the international community to prioritize an establishing of a trustful playing field.
between Saxby’s (2003) three stakeholders within post-conflict development, before the distance between communities such as Yalambojoch and the government can shrimp and before local ownership can become what it is supposed to be; a perhaps staggering yet at least interacting process rather than a political stalemate. Whether or not the government’s new approach towards Guatemala’s rural development will budge these current conditions remains to be seen.
8. References


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Annex 1

Sample of interview questions

I here provide a brief sample of the interview questions asked during the field work. These questions reflect the concentration of my conversations with the villagers and the outside agents. It is, essentially, the answers and reactions to these questions upon which this research is built.

Sample of questions asked to villagers

- For how long have you lived here in Yalambojoch and how do you like living here?
- What’s the best thing with living in Yalambojoch?
- What’s the worst thing with living in Yalambojoch?
- Would you like to describe how and with whom you live here?
- What would you say is the biggest challenge with being a parent in Yalambojoch?
- Are your children going to school? (If adult, which level of education do they have?) If children are not going to school or have dropped out, why not?
- What do you wish upon your children’s future regarding work and education?
- Are you and your wife/husband having the same visions/hopes for your children’s future or are they different?
- Are you pleased with the accessibility to and the quality of basic institutional services such as the school, the law system, and the health system here in Yalambojoch or nearby? If no, why not?
- If you could decide, how would you change these systems/institutions? What would you make different?
- What do you do if you or someone else in your family gets sick?
- Who is the most important person in your life outside of your family and why?
- How would you describe the level of unity among households here in Yalambojoch? What impact would you say that this level of unity has upon people’s life here?
- Is there a strong organizational life here in the village? When and why do people get together and what’s the purpose of these gatherings?
- Are you taking part in any group/association/union (informal and/or formal) and if so, how would you describe the value of this participation for you?

- Are you pleased with your access to different natural resources (such as land, water, firewood etc.)? If not, how come?

- How would you describe the value of different natural resources for you? In which ways are you using them?

- Is the situation regarding natural resources here in Yalambojoch better or worse today compared to how it used to be? How would you say that the situation has changed over time?

- What’s your opinion about the ‘sustainability’ regarding your use of natural resources here in Yalambojoch, and people’s use of natural resources in Guatemala in general?

- If you could improve anything regarding the infrastructure (that is roads, bridges, transport in general) here in Yalambojoch and around, what would that be? What kind of value would that improvement have for you and your family?

- I read that the government is planning to build a new highway which will go through Yalambojoch. What’s your opinion about this project? What consequences do you think it will have upon your life and for Yalambojoch in general?

- How often do you go outside Yalambojoch and in which purposes? Do you wish that you could go outside Yalambojoch more often and if so, why?

- What kinds of material assets do you miss in your life (for example, any certain kitchen or toilet device, computer/internet or any other particular technology within the house hold, or at work) what would access to this thing or things mean for you?

- Who in your household is in charge over the economy?

- Are you doing any kinds of savings and if so, in what form?

- How would you say that your income changes from season to season (considering climate change for example)?

- Are you receiving any money from relatives in Mexico or the U.S? If yes, how important are these money for you and your family here would you say? What would happen if you didn’t receive more money from today?

- How safe do you feel with your family’s financial situation in general?
- What's your biggest concern(s) regarding the direction of the development here in Yalambojoch and in Guatemala in general?
- How would you describe your level of political participation?
- How would you describe your level of interest and awareness of, the municipality of Nentón’s development agenda, and the national government’s development visions for Guatemala in general?
- If you play with the thought that you were the president over this country for one day, what would you change in order to improve the situation for you and for the people in Yalambojoch in general?
- What would you say are the biggest obstacles for your wishes to be answered? What would have to happen in order to implement these changes?

Sample of questions asked to the Alcalde of Yalambojoch

- How's life as the Alcalde of Yalambojoch? What role do you play for the organization and the development of the village?
- How do you perceive the solidarity between families and people in the village?
- What are your biggest concerns regarding the life and development of Yalambojoch?
- How would you describe Yalambojoch’s relation to the municipality of Nentón?
- How would you describe Yalambojoch’s level of independency?
- What would you like to change as the Alcalde of Yalambojoch and why?
- Looking forward 10-15 years, what do you hope for in terms of change? And if speculating, what changes to you expect?
- What your opinion about international peace building and developmental help is in regards to your situation here in Yalambojoch? Is Yalambojoch dependent upon external assistance?
- How would you describe the peace building process since you returned from the exile years in Mexico?
- How would you describe your political awareness of the developmental discussions outside of Yalambojoch?
Sample of questions asked to the coordinator of Colchaj Nac Luum

- **How would you describe your role in the development process of Yalambojoch?**
- **How would you describe the process of your assistance in the village over the years? What has been successful and what has not been successful and how come?**
- **What is your perception of Yalambojoch’s, as a community, level of autonomy and influence over its development?**
- **What is your vision of sustainable development in Yalambojoch?**
- **What do you perceive as the greatest problems for a sustainable development of Yalambojoch?**
- **What do you perceive as the greatest advantages for a sustainable development of Yalambojoch?**
- **How would you describe your organizations relation to the municipality of Nentón and to the Guatemalan government in general?**
- **In what way(s) have the Peace Agreements from 1996 benefited Yalambojoch? What have they actually meant for the village in terms of livelihood improvement?**
- **How can I understand the land situation in Yalambojoch and outside? Are there any conflicts regarding land and if so, what are the roots to these conflicts?**

Sample of questions asked to CEIBA

- **How would you describe your organization’s interaction with Yalambojoch in the post-conflict era?**
- **What have been positive and what have been less positive in terms of your assistance to Yalambojoch over these years and why?**
- **How would you describe the environmental conditions for agriculture in Yalambojoch?**
- **Why, do you feel, are so few people in Yalambojoch cultivating anything other than maize despite your organization’s stubborn encouragement of a more diversified agriculture?**
- **How would you describe the economical conditions for agriculture in Yalambojoch?**
- **What is your vision of sustainable development in Yalambojoch?**
- **What advantages for a sustainable development exists in Yalambojoch and to what degree would you say that Yalambojoch is taking advantage of these advantages?**
- What have been different with your assistance in the neighboring village Chacula in the post-war period?

Sample of questions asked during conversations with other outside agents (teachers, biologists, agricultural scholars)

- What’s your biggest concern(s) regarding the direction of the development here in Yalambojoch and in Guatemala in general?
- What’s your perception of the gender factor in Yalambojoch in terms of development influence and how do you feel about
- What’s your opinion about the ‘sustainability’ regarding the use of natural resources here in Yalambojoch, and in Guatemala in general?
- Would you say that the fact that so many people are leaving Yalambojoch for work in Mexico or USA is a good or bad thing for these people and for Yalambojoch in general?
- What characterizes the agriculture in Yalambojoch?
- What means, in terms of agriculture, does Yalambojoch need in order to reach a more rewarding agriculture?
- How could, and should, Yalambojoch change in terms of agriculture, in order to find a more sustainable and rewarding way of agricultural production
- Does the development of Yalambojoch rests upon Agriculture, or should Yalambojoch shift to something else?
- How can the agricultural situation in Yalambojoch be understood in a wider perspective, with national and international agricultural institutions and structures in mind?