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## **Persistence and Resistance: Women's Leadership and Ending Gender-Based Violence in Guatemala**

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Serena Cosgrove & Kristi Lee\*

Gender-based violence is a persistent and dangerous problem in Guatemala, with many women at risk for discrimination, violence, and death.<sup>1</sup> This problem has its foundations in the country's history of development, war, and culturally sanctioned oppression of women.<sup>2</sup> However, as we argue in this paper, initial signs exist that civil society-based interventions aimed at eradicating this social problem are beginning to take hold in Guatemala as in other parts of Latin America.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, women are leading these efforts.<sup>4</sup> This paper describes the results of a

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\* Serena Cosgrove and Kristi Lee, both professors at Seattle University, were co-principal investigators for this research project whose objective was to measure the impact of the Asociación Generando, a Guatemalan women's non-governmental organization. This participative research project involved input on research design from Generando management and staff. Cosgrove, Lee, and SU photography professor, Claire Garoutte, led this research project, which included 10 Seattle University students, all with intermediate to advanced levels of Spanish. Michele Frix, director of programs at the Seattle International Foundation, also accompanied the research group. The authors are grateful to the Seattle International Foundation and the Seattle University Global Grants program for providing financial support for the research. All conclusions drawn from this research and presented in this paper come from in-depth analysis of field notes and interview transcripts based on 10 days of fieldwork and interviews with 33 direct Generando beneficiaries, interviews with Generando leadership and staff, nine interviews with local public sector employees, and meetings with other Guatemalan experts in the capital.

<sup>1</sup> Karen Musalo & Blaine Bookey, *Crimes Without Punishment: An Update on Violence Against Women and Impunity In Guatemala*, 10 HASTINGS RACE & POVERTY L. J. 265, 265 (2013).

<sup>2</sup> David Carey Jr. & M. Gabriela Torres, *Precursors to Femicide: Guatemalan Women in a Vortex of Violence*, 45 LATIN AM. RES. REV. 142, 142 (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Frix, *Historic Moment for Women's Rights in Guatemala*, CENTRAL AM. NETWORK, <http://www.centralamericanetwork.org/blog-en/?p=79> (last visited Aug. 3, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> SERENA COSGROVE, *LEADERSHIP FROM THE MARGINS: WOMEN AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ARGENTINA, CHILE, AND EL SALVADOR* 1–2 (2010).

research project conducted in collaboration with a women led civil-society organization based in Chimaltengo, Guatemala, that is working to end gender-based violence.

First, in order to frame this important study, the authors will define the phenomenon of gender-based violence and describe approaches used to address it. There will be a specific focus on civil-society organizations, also called non-governmental or non-profit organizations, which can play a key role in working to end gender-based violence. Second, the authors will describe and contextualize the gender-based violence issue in Guatemala through historical and contemporary causes and consequences. Third, the authors will describe new approaches being used to address this persistent problem in Guatemala. This will include a focus on women's civil-society leadership and its role in improving society. Fourth, the authors will profile a civil-society organization led by women working to end gender-based violence, and will analyze its impact based on field research carried out in Guatemala in June 2013. This article will discuss and describe the impact of this organization on survivors, young women leaders, as well as policy makers and policies.

#### I. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence against women has been defined as “any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.<sup>5</sup> According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), adult women and teenage girls are at particularly high risk for experiencing gender-based violence.<sup>6</sup> They also suffer more extreme consequences than men who

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Felipe Russo & Angela Pirlott, *Gender-Based Violence*, 1087 ANN. N.Y. ACAD. SCI. 178, 181 (2006).

<sup>6</sup> UNFPA STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION, ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE 7 (2009), [http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2009\\_add\\_gen\\_vio.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2009_add_gen_vio.pdf).

experience trauma.<sup>7</sup> This disparity is because women and girls tend to experience gender discrimination, resulting in lower socio-economic status, and thus, fewer resources that can help them prevent or escape abusive situations.<sup>8</sup> The possible physical consequences of gender-based violence include unwanted pregnancy, some at very young ages, sexually transmitted infections, and traumatic fistulas, among others.<sup>9</sup> Psychological consequences include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and more.<sup>10</sup>

## II. ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The effort to eliminate gender-based violence must necessarily be multifaceted and sustained. If a country is to address this problem within its borders, policy-related and legal interventions are required at every level of government. Additionally, countless non-governmental organizations, transnational agencies, international foundations, and privately funded groups throughout the world are working to address gender-based violence. This work is evidenced by the role of gender and women's rights in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and is also evidenced by the increased coverage of these issues.<sup>11</sup> While a full review of the legal and policy approaches used throughout the world to address gender-based violence is outside this article's scope, the authors will focus more on civil society's role in working to eliminate this social ill.

While governmental action in preventing and prosecuting gender-based violence is critical, civil society also has a critical role to play in addressing this social problem. The term *civil society* encompasses a broad aggregate

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> Padmini Murthy et al., *Violence Against Women and the Girl-Child: A Silent Global Pandemic*, in *WOMEN'S GLOBAL HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS* 11, 12 (Padmini Murthy & Clyde L. Smith eds., 2009).

<sup>9</sup> UNFPA, *supra* note 6, at 7.

<sup>10</sup> Murthy et al., *supra* note 8, at 18.

<sup>11</sup> Serena Cosgrove, *Gender and Poverty* 164 (2010) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author); COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 3.

of movements and organizations that function outside direct state control to forward various causes.<sup>12</sup> Civil society creates an associational space in which citizens can build coalitions, collaborate on projects or causes, and organize to achieve change on issues of importance to them.<sup>13</sup> *Civil-society organizations*, also often referred to as non-profit or non-governmental organizations or NGOs, advocate for causes and increased capacity and accountability of governments.<sup>14</sup> An “essential ingredient in both democratization and the health of established democracies,”<sup>15</sup> civil-society organizations, nevertheless, have been used by politicians, theorists, activists, and development practitioners to promote radically different programs, policies, and agendas.<sup>16</sup> Actions of civil-society organizations have ranged from participating in social movements critical of governments to covering the holes created by the withdrawal of government spending support social programming.<sup>17</sup> Through providing citizens an avenue to act on their own behalf, civil society offers “both a touchstone for social movements and a practical framework for organizing resistance and alternative solutions to social, economic and political problems.”<sup>18</sup> Civil society has great importance to democratization throughout the world.<sup>19</sup> This article will use the terms civil society organization, non-profit organization, and non-governmental organization interchangeably.

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<sup>12</sup> COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 16.

<sup>13</sup> *See generally id.* (showing significant state department resource allocation and support for a variety of civil service organizations and their centrality to the elimination of gender-based violence).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 18.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Foley & Bob Edwards, *The Paradox of Civil Society*, 7 J. OF DEMOCRACY 38, 38 (1996).

<sup>16</sup> *See generally* COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 16.

<sup>18</sup> MICHAEL EDWARDS, CIVIL SOCIETY 110 (2004).

<sup>19</sup> COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 17–18.

Civil-society organizations are critical to eliminating gender-based violence within the United States and throughout the world.<sup>20</sup> International, national, and local non-governmental organizations play a key role in working to prevent gender-based violence through advocacy and education programs, while also working to address the needs of women and girls.<sup>21</sup> While these organizations vary widely in their size and access to funding, eliminating gender-based violence would likely be impossible without them.<sup>22</sup>

### III. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA

Gender-based violence is at epidemic levels in Guatemala; the country ranks third in the killings of women worldwide. The women of Guatemala experience high levels of violence against them in the forms of physical, sexual, and psychological violence.<sup>23</sup> Women are also subject to social isolation, economic oppression, human trafficking, and murder.<sup>24</sup> In 2011, there were 20,398 cases filed reporting violence against women.<sup>25</sup> This number represents approximately two-thirds more cases than those filed in Paraguay, a country similar to Guatemala in many aspects.<sup>26</sup> While this number of reports seems high, it is also believed that crimes relating to violence against women are underreported in Guatemala and other countries.<sup>27</sup> These crimes are perpetrated by husbands, boyfriends, male relatives, bosses, and strangers.<sup>28</sup> The high rate of gender-based violence

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<sup>20</sup> *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*, US DEPT. OF STATE, <http://go.usa.gov/3mkFe> (last visited Nov. 10, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Julie Guinan, *After Peace Pact, Guatemala's Women Relive Violence*, CNN.COM (Apr. 7, 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/02/world/iyw-guatemala-gender-violence>.

<sup>24</sup> Musalo & Bookey, *supra* note 1, at 269.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

has many roots in the country's history,<sup>29</sup> the political repression of women, and the genocidal intention of the Guatemalan army during the civil war, which had gendered consequences.<sup>30</sup> Together, these factors contribute to Guatemala's position as the country with the third-highest killings of women worldwide.<sup>31</sup>

Murders of Guatemalan women occur at an alarming rate.<sup>32</sup> When women are murder victims "because they are female,"<sup>33</sup> this is defined as "femicide." Based on "femicide," the term "feminicide" is a political term holding institutions responsible for not protecting women's integrity.<sup>34</sup> Feminicide "encompasses more than femicide because it holds responsible not only the male perpetrators but also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny."<sup>35</sup> Guatemala has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world.<sup>36</sup> This specific type of murder of women "relies on the presence of systemic impunity, historically rooted gender inequalities, and the pervasive normalization of violence as a social relation,"<sup>37</sup> which is why many researchers refer to the phenomenon as "feminicide." A culture of impunity has permitted most perpetrators of gender-based violence to escape punishment for their crimes.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> David Carey Jr. & M. Gabriela Torres, *Precursors to Femicide: Guatemalan Women in a Vortex of Violence*, 45 *LATIN AM. RES. REV.* 142, 145–147 (2010).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 154–156; see also Victoria Sanford, *From Genocide to Feminicide: Impunity and Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Guatemala*, 7 *J. OF HUMAN RIGHTS* 104, 107 (2008).

<sup>31</sup> Guinan, *supra* note 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> Sanford, *supra* note 30, at 112.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> Guinan, *supra* note 23.

<sup>37</sup> Carey & Torres, *supra* note 29, at 160.

<sup>38</sup> Musalo & Bookey, *supra* note 1, at 271.

*A. Antecedents, Causes, and Conditions*

The oppression and victimization of women in Guatemalan society has roots in historical social relations.<sup>39</sup> Spanish colonial rule instituted hierarchies based on race, gender, and class in which those of Spanish or European descent had social, economic, and political power over the indigenous majority of the country.<sup>40</sup> People of mixed European and Indigenous descent, called “Ladinos,” joined a nascent middle and working class.<sup>41</sup> The indigenous Maya were systematically denied citizenship and lived on the margins of society.<sup>42</sup> Further, the gendered nature of this stratified society denied women—regardless of their ethnicity—full citizenship in society, exemplified by the fact that literate women did not gain suffrage until 1944. Finally, in 1985, all women gained the right to vote.<sup>43</sup>

A trajectory can be drawn from patriarchal, social, and economic forms of sexism and racism in the early twentieth century, to the gendered forms of state oppression during “La Violencia” in the Guatemalan civil war.<sup>44</sup> Guatemalan society suffered a 36-year civil war from 1960 to 1996 in which society was militarized with national army forces fighting guerrilla forces.<sup>45</sup> Government-sponsored violence targeted Mayan communities.<sup>46</sup> The Guatemalan army increasingly turned from seeking out only guerrilla fighters to eradicating the rural Mayan communities where they supposed

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<sup>39</sup> Carey & Torres, *supra* note 29, at 144.

<sup>40</sup> CECILIA MENJIVAR, ENDURING VIOLENCE: LADINA WOMEN’S LIVES IN GUATEMALA 3 (2011).

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> MEEYLYN LORENA MEJIA LOPEZ, CANADIAN FOUND. FOR THE AMERICAS, INDIGENOUS WOMEN & GOVERNANCE IN GUATEMALA 6 (2006), *available at* [http://www.focal.ca/pdf/mujer\\_indigena\\_e.pdf](http://www.focal.ca/pdf/mujer_indigena_e.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Carey & Torres, *supra* note 29, at 144.

<sup>45</sup> VICTORIA SANFORD, BURIED SECRETS: TRUTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN GUATEMALA 14–15 (2003).

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 14.



the guerrilla social base existed.<sup>47</sup> The army referred to this counterinsurgency technique as “empty the ocean to catch the fish.”<sup>48</sup> Its use meant that large numbers of civilians, and particularly Indigenous or rural farming communities, became army targets.<sup>49</sup> The arrests of former president Efraín Ríos Montt and his former head of intelligence, Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, are evidence of this strategy.<sup>50</sup> In January 2012, a court convicted Ríos Montt of overseeing the murders of 1,771 Mayan Ixils in 15 different massacres between the years 1982 and 1983 when he was de facto head of state.<sup>51</sup>

As violence permeated society during the civil war, the Guatemalan army demonstrated that women’s bodies were part of the battleground.<sup>52</sup> The long conflict affected thousands of women.<sup>53</sup> Used as a strategy of war, Guatemala’s army’s chain of command ordered officers to rape.<sup>54</sup> Paloma Soria, a legal expert on gender and international law, corroborated this fact stating, “The attack on women was generalized and systematic and was used to exterminate the Mayan community. The use of sexual violence was used to sow terror and break the social and cultural fabric” of Mayan society.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sanford, *supra* note 30, at 106.

<sup>48</sup> COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 83.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Efraín Ríos Montt & Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez: Before the National Courts of Guatemala*, INT’L JUST. MONITOR, <http://www.ijmonitor.org/efrain-rios-montt-and-mauricio-rodriguez-sanchez-background/> (last visited Nov. 15, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> Sanford, *supra* note 30, at 107.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> Victoria Sanford, Sofia Duyos-Alvarez & Kathleen Dill, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon During the Guatemalan Genocide 2* (Jan. 2015) (forthcoming manuscript) (on file with authors).

<sup>55</sup> *Atrocities Committed Against Women During the Guatemala Genocide Will Be Investigated*, WOMEN’S LINK WORLDWIDE (June 7, 2011), [http://www2.womenslinkworldwide.org/wlw/new.php?modo=detalle\\_prensa&dc=298&lang=en](http://www2.womenslinkworldwide.org/wlw/new.php?modo=detalle_prensa&dc=298&lang=en).

Estimates indicate that one out of every four victims of human rights violations and violent incidents during the civil war were women.<sup>56</sup> According to the Genocide Convention adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948, genocide entails a series of acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.”<sup>57</sup> The Genocide Convention also considers acts interrupting a group’s ability to have children as genocidal.<sup>58</sup> Because of the explicit focus on exterminating Mayan communities, and the systematic rape of women, experts have identified the Guatemalan army’s actions as Mayan genocide.<sup>59</sup> The cultural practice of gender-based violence and discrimination against women expanded during the war due to these genocidal practices, resulting in normalizing and systematizing violence against women.<sup>60</sup>

#### *B. Approaches to Ending Gender-based Violence in Guatemala*

Recent changes in the Guatemalan government resulted in collaborations between civil-society organizations and the public sector working to eradicate violence against women, according to staff at the Seattle International Foundation (a foundation committed to promoting women’s leadership in Central America)<sup>61</sup> and interviews in Guatemala.<sup>62</sup> As

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<sup>56</sup> Catherine Nolin Hanlon & Finola Shankar, *Gendered Spaces of Terror and Assault: The Testimonio of REMHI and the Commission of Historical Clarification in Guatemala*, 7 GENDER, PLACE & CULTURE 265, 275 (2000).

<sup>57</sup> Sanford, *supra* note 30, at 106.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> JAN-MICHAEL SIMON, LA COMISIÓN PARA EL ESCLARAMIENTO HISTÓRICO, VERDAD Y JUSTICIA EN GUATEMALA 180 (2002), available at [https://www.unifr.ch/ddp1/derechopenal/obrasportales/op\\_20080612\\_54.pdf](https://www.unifr.ch/ddp1/derechopenal/obrasportales/op_20080612_54.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Sanford, *supra* note 30, at 104–106.

<sup>61</sup> For more information, see generally SEATTLE INT’L FOUND., <http://seaif.org/> (last visited Nov. 21, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> Michele Frix, *SIF Witnesses Historic Moment for Women’s Rights in Guatemala*, CENTRAL AM. NETWORK, <http://www.centralamericanetwork.org/blog-en/?p=79> (last visited Aug. 3, 2015); Interview with Danessa Luna, Founder and Co-Director, Asociación Generando, in Chimaltenango, Guat. (July 4, 2013).

described above, the united efforts of government and civil society are necessary in order to prevent and prosecute gender-based violence. Women leaders of civil-society organizations are playing a key role in these efforts.<sup>63</sup>

Gender-based violence became a priority for the Guatemalan government through Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz, Guatemala's first female attorney general.<sup>64</sup> Working to bring justice for victims through ending the culture of impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence was high priority for Paz y Paz.<sup>65</sup> She built a coalition of support that included international partners, such as the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, the United Nations Population Fund, and the Seattle International Foundation.<sup>66</sup> In addition, she partnered with several governmental agencies, the Guatemalan women's movement, and several local non-governmental organizations, as corroborated by our interviews in Guatemala. As noted by Danessa Luna, the co-director of our NGO research partner, this coalition came together to seek justice for women survivors of violence and femicide.<sup>67</sup>

The passage of a new law and the establishment of a new court focused on prosecuting violence against women evidence the coalition's success.<sup>68</sup> On April 9, 2008, the Guatemalan Congress passed Decree 22-2008, the Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women.<sup>69</sup> This new law codified an expansive definition of violence against women

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<sup>63</sup> Michelle Frix, *Mujeres Adelantes: Making the Case for Investing in Grassroots Women's Leaders 1* (May 21, 2014) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author).

<sup>64</sup> Frix, *supra* note 62.

<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> Michele Frix, *Seattle International Foundation Witnesses Historic Moment for Women's Rights in Guatemala*, CENTRAL AM. NETWORK, <http://www.centralamericanetwork.org/blog-en/?p=79> (last visited Aug. 3, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> *Id.*

<sup>68</sup> THE GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMM'N/USA, *GUATEMALA'S FEMICIDE LAW: PROGRESS AGAINST IMPUNITY?* 9–11 (May 2009), available at [http://www.ghrc-usa.org/Publications/Femicide\\_Law\\_ProgressAgainstImpunity.pdf](http://www.ghrc-usa.org/Publications/Femicide_Law_ProgressAgainstImpunity.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

and officially recognized femicide as a punishable crime.<sup>70</sup> For the first time, Guatemalan women had codified legal protection from harm, violence, and death.<sup>71</sup> In addition, Guatemala saw the establishment of a specialized court tasked with prosecuting gender-based violence and femicide.<sup>72</sup> Yet, even with all of this progress, Paz y Paz recently stated, “It’s still not enough.”<sup>73</sup>

In addition to expanding government services for survivors of gender-based violence, Paz y Paz has also partnered with civil-society organizations throughout the country in order to provide critical services for women survivors of violence.<sup>74</sup> These critical services include housing, childcare, emergency shelter, psychological counseling, education and employment training opportunities, and other services.<sup>75</sup> Through these actions, Paz y Paz affirmed that partnering with civil-society organizations is vital for the success of a collaborative model to eradicate gender-based violence.

#### IV. THE ROLE OF WOMEN LEADERS IN CIVIL SOCIETY IN LATIN AMERICA

Civil-society organizations have played a key role in improving society in Latin America, and women have often led them.<sup>76</sup> The traditional gender hierarchy that exists in Latin America privileges men to hold formal leadership positions and to have power to make decisions.<sup>77</sup> Societal expectations significantly influence the wide breadth of roles that women

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<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*

<sup>73</sup> Roque Plana, *Why Violence Against Women in Guatemala is a Problem for the U.S.*, THE WORLD POST, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/violence-against-women-guatemala\\_56201af8e4b069b4e1fb7c1a](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/violence-against-women-guatemala_56201af8e4b069b4e1fb7c1a) (last visited Oct. 17, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> THE GUATEMALA HUMAN RIGHTS COMM’N/USA, *supra* note 68, at 8.

<sup>75</sup> Frix, *supra* note 66.

<sup>76</sup> COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Id.* at 1.

are expected to play, including taking care of the family, contributing to the household income, and supporting community well-being through volunteerism and participation in churches, development activities, and other communal groups.<sup>78</sup> Within these roles, women often develop important leadership skills such as “cooperation, networking, and listening across difference.”<sup>79</sup> Women have leveraged these skills in leading civil society efforts, especially in times of economic crisis and political turmoil.<sup>80</sup> Civil society is an arena where women’s participation equals or surpasses that of men throughout Latin America.<sup>81</sup> Anthropologist Lynn Stephen stated that women “are the backbone of a wide range of social movements in Latin America.”<sup>82</sup> Their efforts have included movements to improve living conditions, human rights, land rights, labor conditions, reproductive rights, indigenous rights, and many others.<sup>83</sup> Women in Latin America are achieving greater representation in civil-society organizations, taking advantage of leadership opportunities, and making progress towards parity with men.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, women’s civil-society leadership is not just limited to the elite class.<sup>85</sup> Latin America has seen a surge in leadership by women in marginalized groups. This is true despite the fact that they experience multiple levels of discrimination and oppression due to sexism, racism,

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<sup>78</sup> *Id.* at 5, 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>81</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>82</sup> Lynn Steven, *Women’s Rights are Human Rights: The Merging of Feminine and Feminist Interests among El Salvador’s Mothers of the Disappeared (CO-MADRES)*, 22 AM. ETHNOLOGIST 807, 807 (1995).

<sup>83</sup> COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 7; *see generally* Nikki Craske, *Gender, Poverty, and Social Movements*, in GENDER IN LATIN AMERICA 46 (2003); *see generally* THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA: PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY (Jane S. Jaquette ed., 2nd ed. 1990); *see generally* WOMEN AND CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA (Elizabeth Jelin ed., 1990); *see generally* LYNN STEVEN, WOMEN & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA: POWER FROM BELOW (1997).

<sup>84</sup> COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

ethnic discrimination, and poverty.<sup>86</sup> This leadership from the margins involves women using their experiences of hardship, discrimination, and suffering to say, “No more.”<sup>87</sup> Through participation and leadership in civil society organizations, women are organizing other women to become active in making changes in their own societies.<sup>88</sup>

Women civil-society leaders in Latin America have used their roles to fight gender-based violence.<sup>89</sup> This is also true in Guatemala, where women’s civil-society leadership has been strategically important in the fight against rampant gender-based violence over the past decades as the country emerged from its lengthy civil war.<sup>90</sup> Civil-society organizations can work effectively to prevent and treat survivors of gender-based violence,<sup>91</sup> and this may be an effective model in Guatemala as well. Civil-society organizations led by women have an important role to play in protecting women in this Central American nation. Generando, led by Danessa Luna, working to end gender-based violence provides an illustrative example.<sup>92</sup> Researchers partnered with this organization to develop an understanding of its impact on the problem of gender-based violence in Guatemala.

#### V. ASOCIACIÓN GENERANDO

Asociación Generando (Generando) is a Guatemalan civil-society organization committed to serving women survivors and working to end gender-based violence.<sup>93</sup> Danessa Luna, its founder and co-director, launched Generando in 2007 to provide much needed services to women and girls suffering from domestic violence, sexual harassment, violence,

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<sup>86</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>87</sup> *See generally id.*

<sup>88</sup> *See generally id.*

<sup>89</sup> *Id.* at 1–2.

<sup>90</sup> Frix, *supra* note 66, at 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*, *supra* note 20.

<sup>92</sup> Frix, *supra* note 66, at 6.

<sup>93</sup> *See* ASOGEN, <http://asociaciongenerando.org/asogen/> (last visited Nov. 19, 2015).

and generalized aggression at the hands of male relatives, bosses, or strangers.<sup>94</sup> At the time of Generando's founding, there were no specialized resources available to address gender-based violence in Chimaltenango, a Guatemalan municipality, where Generando is located.<sup>95</sup> Danessa Luna was able to start Generando through receiving leadership training and financial support from international women's foundations.<sup>96</sup> Generando receives 50 requests for services per month.<sup>97</sup> The services it provides include mental health counseling, case management services, and legal counsel to accompany women and girls in their cases against perpetrators.<sup>98</sup> The organization employs 10 staff members, including a psychologist, two lawyers, a social worker, and others.<sup>99</sup> At the time this research was conducted in 2013, Generando had worked with over 2,000 survivors of gender-based violence.<sup>100</sup> Partnering with Generando, Seattle International Foundation, professors, and students, a rapid impact assessment research design was carried out in order to determine Generando's impact on the problem of gender-based violence.

## VI. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research project's design and implementation utilized a participative and collaborative model between three organizations: The Seattle International Foundation, three professors and 10 students from Seattle University, and Generando. Concerned about the rising levels of citizen insecurity and gender-based violence in Central America in general and Guatemala specifically, the Seattle International Foundation dedicated half of their annual resources to support civil-society and public sector leaders

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Danessa Luna, *supra* note 62.

<sup>95</sup> *Id.*

<sup>96</sup> *Id.*

<sup>97</sup> *Id.*

<sup>98</sup> *Id.*

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*

working to ending violence.<sup>101</sup> Researchers from Seattle University worked collaboratively with Generando to determine how best to find evidence of their organizational impact. Together, researchers decided to use a participative, rapid impact assessment methodology. A commonly used data collection technique, researchers chose this approach to assess the broad impact of Generando's efforts. Researchers conducted interviews with people in four groups: (1) 33 Generando beneficiaries, (2) 15 young women leaders receiving training as youth advocates, (3) multiple state officials who have received gender-sensitive training or other training services from Generando, and (4) national experts on the topic of structural violence and gender-based violence. In addition, researchers spent time in the communities served by Generando, carrying out participant observation in which they observed Generando-led activities and visited beneficiaries in their homes. Initial conclusions were reviewed and discussed with Generando leaders and staff after collecting and summarizing all data. A focus group of beneficiaries vetted these same initial conclusions for additional refinement.

The results of this study indicated that there are multiple impacts that trace back to the organization through the work of its team and its co-director, Danessa Luna. Through her leadership and the efforts of her colleagues, the ripple effects of women's leadership in civil society were observable in three spheres: (1) the women beneficiaries served, (2) the young women mentored by Danessa Luna, and (3) the public sector officials trained by Generando.

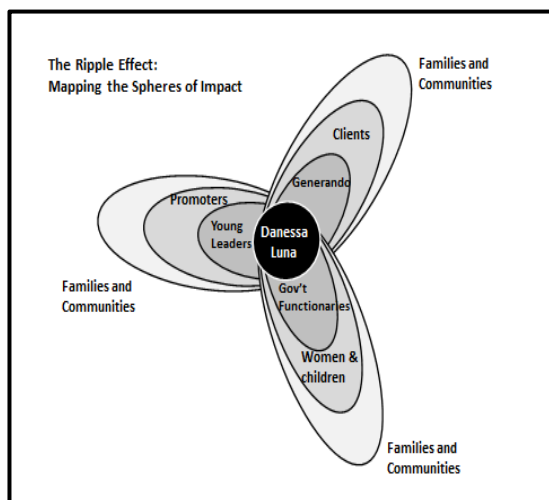
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<sup>101</sup> Frix, *supra* note 66, at 1–2.



## VII. THE STUDY'S FINDINGS

This section describes the impact of Generando's work on the issue of gender-based violence in three different areas, which we are calling *spheres of impact*.



The first sphere of impact was through the organization Generando and its provision of services to women and girls who had experienced gender-based violence. Women and girls directly benefit from the services provided by Generando. They, in turn, became advocates for women's

rights in their families and communities. The second sphere of impact was on the young women leaders who Danessa Luna mentored. She has potentiated their leadership abilities and thus has helped create a new organization as well as a new generation of young indigenous women leaders in Sololá, a predominantly indigenous area of Guatemala.<sup>102</sup> According to the young women we interviewed, there was unanimous agreement about the multiplier effect of Danessa Luna's support and their programs in their families and communities.<sup>103</sup> The third sphere of impact was on public sector officials, including judges, prosecutors, mayors, and municipal staff. The gender-sensitive trainings to public functionaries had

<sup>102</sup> Focus Group with 15 members of the Sololá Organization for the Rights of Young Indigenous Women (June 30, 2013).

<sup>103</sup> *Id.*; Interview with Gladis Tambriz, Founder of Sololá Organization for the Rights of Young Indigenous Women, in Sololá, Guat. (June 30, 2013).

immediate ramifications for the families and communities served by the state employees.

*A. First Sphere of Impact: Survivors of Gender-Based Violence and Beyond*

In interviewing 33 women beneficiaries and family members, it was clear that beneficiaries of Generando received support in many different ways. Unanimous agreement existed among beneficiaries that Generando's services were vital to their ability to create legal cases against their perpetrators. Generando provided beneficiaries with legal advice and accompanied them through the entire legal process with their cases. In addition, the services the beneficiaries received enabled them to move forward with their lives after victimization. Beneficiaries and family members received services with social workers and counseling with psychologists. They also received educational trainings about gender-based violence and their rights in society. In response to our questions about Generando's services, the vast majority described finding a safe place at Generando, where they have been able to regain self-esteem and make plans for the future. One beneficiary stated, "I have received counseling from Generando, and now I feel more security. I feel more positive now. I feel I have more control over my life, and I am not as scared of my ex-husband."<sup>104</sup> Another said of her family's experience with Generando, "We couldn't have gotten through this trauma without Generando. We've received psychological services and medical support for my little daughter who was sexually assaulted by her uncle. Now my little girl is less afraid of men."<sup>105</sup>

In addition to discussing the services they had received and how Generando has helped them individually, the beneficiaries also talked about how they recommend Generando's services to family and community

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Juana, Generando Beneficiary, in Chimaltenango, Guat. (July 1, 2013). To honor our interviewee's privacy, her full name has been omitted.

<sup>105</sup> *Id.*

members. Many of the beneficiaries mentioned talking to friends about their rights, demonstrating that women who know their own rights talk to other women about their rights. Our analysis showed the connection between individual beneficiaries to their immediate families and the wider community. One woman stated, “I found out about Generando from another beneficiary. She recommended I come too, so I did, . . . and now, I talk with other women from my community. One woman has actually started coming here after I recommended that she receive services from Generando.”<sup>106</sup> Another stated simply, “When I have a friend who needs support, I send them to Generando.”<sup>107</sup>

*B. Second Sphere of Impact: Young Women Leaders and Beyond*

The second sphere of impact involved young women leaders Danessa Luna mentored. Our research findings demonstrated that one way to challenge the social, political, and economic relations in Guatemala that sustain discrimination, gender-based violence, and femicide is to promote the leadership of women, especially young indigenous Maya women. Danessa Luna has worked with a group of young women in Sololá.<sup>108</sup> Through her mentorship, two young indigenous women founded the Sololá Organization for the Rights of Young Indigenous Women.<sup>109</sup> These two young women leaders built a network of young women who teach courses for community youth related to topics of sexual education and women’s rights.<sup>110</sup> Results of individual interviews and a focus group with the young women demonstrated that empowering young Mayan women to change their community’s restrictive norms has a number of powerful impacts. For the young women of the Sololá Organization for the Rights of Young Indigenous Women, these impacts include young women’s commitment to

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<sup>106</sup> *Id.*

<sup>107</sup> *Id.*

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Gladis Tambriz, *supra* note 103.

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*

<sup>110</sup> *Id.*

staying in school, changing gender norms within their own families through dialogue, and becoming role models for other young women. They were able to articulate the role society has assigned women. One young woman said, “These are the messages we receive about being women: men are superior, women can’t go to school, we’re only good for working at home and raising kids, men take all the decisions, this is discrimination.”<sup>111</sup> Through their new awareness of their rights, they will be able to make changes in their communities. These changes will include increased safety. Another young woman stated, “We don’t want to leave our culture behind, but things can always be improved.”<sup>112</sup>

Yet, empowering women can come with risks for them in a society that continues to oppress them. As young women indicated, they learned from Danessa Luna that coming home with knowledge of their rights and higher self-esteem can generate a violent response from male relatives if programming does not also include involving male relatives in dialogue. In the case of young women from Sololá, they worked to bring their families along with them in their process of empowerment. They described reaching out and talking to fathers, brothers, uncles, and boyfriends about topics of women’s rights and equality. As they shared what they were learning with their families, some families were supportive and wanted these young women to spread the knowledge they gained. These young women described their mothers as generally supportive; some even attended meetings and began exercising their own rights at home in domestic affairs. However, community elders still maintained the commitment to old customs, including maintaining the idea that men have more rights than women. However, these young women persevered in telling their families and communities that times had changed. One young woman said, “The boys let us girls play soccer with them now. And now my father lets my

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<sup>111</sup> Focus Group, *supra* note 102.

<sup>112</sup> *Id.*

mother participate in activities and groups outside of the home.”<sup>113</sup> Another stated, “Now the men in my family treat me differently.”<sup>114</sup> Through empowering this group of young women, the sphere of impact widened from young women leaders to families and communities.

*C. Third Sphere of Impact: Government Officials and Policy*

Generando’s third sphere of impact involved government officials and public policy. Researchers interviewed a small sample of government functionaries, including a judge, two prosecutors, a city social worker, a mayor, and the head of a local municipal women’s office. Generando provided direct training and sensitization to these government officials on gender-based violence. It also provided accompaniment and support to officials who advocate for women’s issues with the broader government. Through this work, Generando played a vital role in reinforcing the state’s responsibility in working to reduce gender-based violence. Among the interviewed government functionaries, there was unanimous agreement—the women served by Generando were positively impacted by their services. Government officials reported that the state is unable to pay for the necessary elements of a violence reduction plan for women such as legal counsel, psychological and counseling services, and training about women’s rights and the Guatemalan legal system. Generando earned the respect of government officials. The positive working relationships between Generando and government officials also had the additional benefit of increased accountability and responsiveness of these officials.

It was also evident that government officials valued their partnership with Generando and understood that Generando contributed importantly to addressing gender-based violence. In the nearby municipality of El Tejar, Generando offered trainings to community members who were vulnerable to violence. One government official stated, “Resources from the

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<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> *Id.*

municipality are not enough. Generando carries out sensitization workshops with community members and . . . if women are mistreated by their husbands or family members, we remit them to Generando.”<sup>115</sup> Another official agreed, saying, “The work that Generando carries out is very important. If they didn’t do it, no one would because the state doesn’t have resources.”<sup>116</sup> Generando’s work with local public sector officials shows that change is possible and that civil society organizations and the public sector can work together to serve the best interests of women and children. These two groups can work together to end gender-based violence.

#### VIII. DISCUSSION

The study’s primary conclusion is that Generando, through the leadership of its founder Danessa Luna and the work of its staff, has made vital contributions to reducing gender-based violence in Chimaltenango, Guatemala, through the provision of direct services, support to young women leaders, and trainings of public sector employees. The ramifications of this part of their work move the impact out into the families and communities of the department of Chimaltenango. This conclusion about the effectiveness of Danessa’s leadership aligns with the broader conclusions Serena Cosgrove reached in her book on women’s civil-society leadership in Latin America in which she argued that, historically and presently, Latin American women take on leadership positions in civil society (and often in the public sector) during times of conflict, violence, and political unrest. We would argue, in fact, that Danessa’s contributions as a leader are not a unique case, but rather she is one of many women civil-society leaders working for sustainable change in Guatemala. Generando and Danessa Luna have achieved these contributions through three primary spheres of impact.

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Creymar Manolo Mendez, Mayor of El Tejar, Chimaltenango, Guat., in El Tejar. (July 3, 2013).

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Ana Hernandez, State Attorney, Chimaltenango, Guat. (July 3, 2013).

The first sphere of impact is through building an organization that serves survivors of violence by providing them with legal, psychological, and social work services, as well as education about their rights as women and citizens of Guatemala. These women and girls were able to move forward with their lives after times of extreme suffering and trauma because of the services Generando provided. In addition, many of them have become women's rights advocates through sharing information with women and family members in their communities who might be at risk of gender-based violence.

The second sphere of impact is through Danessa Luna's work to prepare a new generation of women leaders. This work has implications that extend into the communities where these young women leaders are active. As these young women share what they have learned with their families and communities, the culture is changing to be safer for women. These young women can now grow up with dreams as well as the hope that they can one day achieve their dreams.

The third sphere of impact is with the public sector. Danessa Luna and her staff at Generando are impacting policy change through their work with government officials. Generando provides the public sector functionaries with support, access to information, and complementary services they need to address gender-based violence at all spheres of government. Policy changes have the power to impact the families and communities in Chimaltenango.

Given the complex nature of the violence that affects Guatemala, making it the third most violent country in the world, long-term, sustainable change must come from within Guatemala. Decades—even centuries—of exclusion, civil war and militarism, drug and gang violence, and discrimination against women mean that gender-based violence has been integrated into the fabric of social relations; it has become accepted and normalized. Changing this type of relations requires long-term commitment from the government, civil society, and the women and men of Guatemala,

but particularly the leadership of women. This is why investing in women leaders like Danessa Luna is such a strong contribution towards ending the cycle of violence. However, the importance of good institutions and effective governance to maintain a safe space for civil-society action should never be underestimated. On May 18, 2015, six homemade bombs firebombed Generando's office.<sup>117</sup> The office did sustain damage, but because the bombing occurred early in the morning, no one was injured. However, this type of intimidation shows that the work of organizations like Generando are challenging the status quo and are speaking to the importance of civil society-government collaboration to achieve sustainable change.

The conclusions about the effectiveness of Generando's programming and Danessa Luna's leadership aligns with the broader conclusions reached in other research on women's civil-society leadership in Latin America.<sup>118</sup> It also confirms the important role that civil-society organizations play in the fight against gender-based violence.<sup>119</sup> Historically and currently, Latin American women take on leadership positions in civil society (and often in the public sector) during times of conflict, violence, and political unrest.<sup>120</sup> In this sense, Danessa Luna's contributions as a leader is not a unique case, but rather she is one of many women civil-society leaders working for sustainable change in Guatemala and throughout the region. She is continuing the work of generations of women before her who have worked to make society safer for women.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Given the complex nature of the violence that affects Guatemala, long-term, sustainable change must come from within Guatemala. For this

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<sup>117</sup> Press Release, Asociación Generando (May 19, 2015).

<sup>118</sup> See generally COSGROVE, *supra* note 4.

<sup>119</sup> *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, <http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/programs/policy/gbv/> (last visited Oct. 7, 2015).

<sup>120</sup> COSGROVE, *supra* note 4, at 8.



reason, we argue that transforming harmful cultural practices requires a long-term view and must have a bottom-up and top-down approach; change is seldom accepted just because another country or institution says something should be done differently. Change has to be led locally and must involve those who suffer discrimination as well as the perpetrators. Government agencies also need to fulfill their mandates and implement legal frameworks to protect women and vulnerable groups in society. It is not enough to empower a woman; she will return home and her request for fair treatment may be met with disregard, at best, or violence, at worst. Changing unfair gender roles means educating men and women—it means enacting new laws and ensuring their implementation. The transformation of unjust social practices emerges from participation and education; community or cultural outsiders cannot impose it. Achieving change requires long-term, coordinated efforts from the government of Guatemala and the women and men of Guatemala, but particularly the leadership and empowerment of women. This is why investing in civil society organizations and women leaders like Danessa Luna makes such a strong contribution towards ending the cycle of violence.