



CASE HISTORY — GROWING EDGE PARTNERS

COLLABORATIVE TRI-SECTORAL SOCIETAL CHANGE PROJECT

The Challenge

A large international development agency, CARE, was deeply concerned about the escalating percentage of people going into extreme poverty in Guatemala, one of its key Central American focus countries. CARE's managers asked us to help design and facilitate a breakthrough approach to stop this increase in poverty. We designed a systems dialogue for all of CARE's key in-country stakeholders – each with different perspectives, goals, constituencies and measures of success. The objective was to reach a shared understanding and agreement of what defines poverty. Such a definition, upon which they all could agree, would advance the needs of all individuals and their communities. A common definition would give diverse groups of leaders and organizations—corporations, government, communities and not-for-profits—a basis for future cooperation.

Our Response

We engaged leaders of the national intelligence service, the military policy and leadership institutes, members of the former guerilla movement, leaders of the Catholic church, Mayan spiritual leaders; the head of the President's commission on local economic development, local village leaders – twenty-four different perspectives in all.

We facilitated a 10-day dialogue over several months, in which these different individuals, representing diverse personal and institutional views of what constitutes poverty, could share their perspectives and listen to other views. As they discussed, we created a relatively simple, one-

page representation – a “systems map” – of the combined world views they were sharing. They all understood and agreed that the map represented the parts and interactions of their world.

They gradually came to agreement on the goal – a common definition of poverty. We showed on the map their collective picture of what they wanted to create, their overall goal. We also showed how a handful of critical resources they had identified (6 out of a total of 147) could be leveraged to move in the direction they all want to go.

“Did they really do that?” “Can it be repeated?” “Can others be taught to do it?” The answer to these questions is “yes.” They began to do the impossible: to solve a problem that seems insoluble – to successfully contain and resolve a complex, multi-stakeholder issue like poverty. In a collaborative endeavor requiring a 360° view and a 360° conversation they built a framework by which they will reduce poverty in Guatemala.

Results

- In Guatemala a diverse, highly charged set of stakeholders was able to envision a future with a shared, common goal and agreed on how to achieve it.
- These stakeholders, especially CARE, are now partnering across sectors on projects designed to impact poverty based on a common understanding of its dynamics.
- All the Guatemala stakeholders feel that their work is enriched by working together.
- CARE is involving us in similar projects in Latin America. It sees a systems/dialogue approach as a key capability for its future services in the region going forward.