



On the Record: Central American Civil Society after Mitch (1999)

From the AP Editorial Desk

In May 1999, The Advocacy Project partnered with Guatemala Partners, an NGO friend, to profile the valiant efforts to civil society to respond to one of the worst natural disasters ever to hit Central America.

Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador with extreme fury. In a departure from policy, which had focused upon reporting from international conferences, AP decided to visit the region and look at the effort to rebuild. In the process, it uncovered the deep structural injustice and inequality that hindered the region's development. The series even visited the Lempa river valley in El Salvador, and talked to migrants starting out on their dangerous clandestine journey north to the United States.

As we wrote in the intro, "by looking at reconstruction in Central America through the prism of civil society, we have also been able to assess how seriously aid donors take their commitment to help participation."

The material on Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala was researched and written by Iain Guest, an associate member of The Advocacy Project who visited the region in March. Donna Vukelich, a writer who lives and works in Nicaragua, has contributed articles on Nicaragua. We are grateful to Midge Quandt for her interview with Sophia Montenegro, a prominent Nicaraguan activist, and to Andres Conteris, a tireless activist for community development who accompanied Iain Guest on interviews.

Otherwise, the series followed the usual format. Each issue went out by email to AP's list of subscribers and included several different articles. The issues were distributed daily, or every other day, up to and throughout the Stockholm conference.

At the time Guatemala Partners was based in Washington and had funded scores of community-based rights, relief, and development projects in the region. In the aftermath of Mitch, GP provided many grants to local organizations that advocated for a rights-based approach to reconstruction. Several are profiled in this series. Guatemala Partners was subsequently renamed as Rights Action, and moved to Canada, where it continues to support community-based advocacy in Central and South America.