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## *Are Artesanal Cooperatives in Guatemala Unraveling?*

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Cooperatives are often instituted to increase socioeconomic opportunities for rural people. While this goal may be achieved in some countries, the specific historical and structural circumstances of the Guatemalan cooperative system contradict this statement. The entrance of cooperatives into the world market system and a change to a mass-marketing climate has altered relations of distribution and production. In particular, traditionally female-organized cooperatives and industries, such as for weaving, have been especially hard hit by these changes. This paper reports the findings from a four-month study of three artisanal cooperatives in highland Guatemala and of the Guatemalan cooperative structure. These findings indicate that the adoption of federations of cooperatives to increase production for a world market has negatively altered the entire artisanal industry and has adversely affected the socioeconomic activities of the small-business weaver.

**Key words:** cooperatives, Guatemala, women's issues, economic development

Guatemala's artisanal cooperatives face a questionable future. The prospect for their continued existence in a cash economy appears grim. Current national and global economies discount handiwork in favor of industrialization and standardization. As well, fluctuating international demands for traditional handicrafts make a very unstable market for such goods. Nevertheless, Guatemala has a strong tradition of cooperative organization with an extensive and complex bureaucratic infrastructure providing support. Additionally, cooperative enterprises are often targeted for support by foreign aid organizations. Crucial to an understanding of artisanal cooperatives in Guatemala is the recognition of the role of the Federation of Artesanal Cooperatives, ARTEXCO, and the place it occupies within the Confederation of Federated Cooperatives. This article uses data derived from a 1993 study of weaving cooperatives in highland Guatemala to illustrate and discuss the situation (Olson 1993).

Many recent economic and social changes experienced by Guatemalans are linked to the rapid growth of the modern world economy and subsequent economic downturns (Blim 1992). During the world recession of the 1980s, a depressed market for export crops had negative consequences for all of

Latin America, but especially for Guatemala, where agricultural production remained the mainstay of its economy (Knudson and Weil 1988:25). In the same decade, Guatemala's economy was further stressed by massive expenditures on military counterinsurgency which drained its national treasury, eventually deflated the value of the quetzal internationally, and caused a serious inflationary crisis internally (Ehlers 1990:160). During the global recession in the 1980s, unemployment, inflation, and cutbacks in education and health services had extreme consequences for the poorest of the poor throughout the world. Poor women and children had been, and continue to be, the groups most adversely affected by this world phenomenon (Black 1988; Bossen 1984; Ehlers 1990; Levy 1988; Momson and Townsend 1987; Pallis 1980; Stamm 1984; Staudt 1990). The domestic economy of Guatemalan women was specifically hard hit by the recession and accompanying inflation rates<sup>1</sup> (Knudson and Weil 1988:25). Bossen (1984:2) suggests that the economic decline of the informal economy has increased gender inequality, transforming women into dependent burdens who have to rely more heavily upon men for their economic security. Continuously rising prices have forced women to recalculate strategies to fulfill their domestic needs. Under such circumstances, it is no surprise that development organizations, local community leaders, and women weavers have turned toward cooperatives as a logical vehicle for increasing women's power and income.

This essay presents the history of cooperative participation in Guatemala, the structure of Guatemala's cooperative system, and the effects of large federations on individual cooperatives. I focus on the artisanal weaving sector and how the sole government artisanal federation, ARTEXCO, has

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actually endangered women's cooperative enterprises in Guatemala. This study of the artisanal cooperative system, which examines both the federated cooperatives of ARTEXCO and other nonaffiliated cooperatives, reveals the irony that the federation has undermined the strength of Guatemala's handicraft industries and, through its current economic practices and policies, is negatively affecting the traditional weaving industry.

### The Study

The data from this study were gathered during a four-month period of research in Guatemala in 1993.<sup>2</sup> My purpose was to develop an understanding of what economic and social benefits women gain from participating in local artisanal cooperatives. Contrary to expectations, however, I found that cooperativism has not necessarily been advantageous to women artisans.<sup>3</sup> I discovered that the massive infrastructure of the cooperative bureaucracy was organized and manipulated by appointed government officials, by male cooperative organization leaders, and particularly by federation managers to the detriment of the female cooperative members.

My analysis of the effects of the artisanal federation's activities is primarily based on data collected from three textile cooperatives in highland Guatemala. Although I visited numerous cooperatives, interviewed government officials, spoke with many vendors and weavers outside of cooperatives, and had discussions with foreign traders, I spent most of my efforts researching three cooperatives (Olson 1993). I have named the cooperatives Pueblo Dos, Pueblo Cuatro, and Pueblo Cinco to ensure the anonymity of the cooperatives and their members.

### Pueblo Dos

This cooperative, located close to the Mexican border in an infrequently visited area of the western highlands, began in 1979, and is considered a "family cooperative."<sup>4</sup> In 1979 the education president and his wife recruited 30 friends and their families to form a cooperative, but one by one they quit. It was suggested that these families did not understand the "sharing ideals" of cooperativism. Later, they went to two small agricultural villages (with populations of 2500 and 1000) to enlist 28 men, 10 of whom had families, to form a cooperative. The families wanted to even out their farming earnings over the year and felt the cooperative would allow them to earn money when they were not working their fields. Membership required access to foot looms (which can cost Q400 and last up to 50 years) and the contribution of Q50 into the cooperative fund. This fund was intended for building homes, aiding the infirm, and sending people for education. The founders aimed at not only increasing incomes, but also at increasing awareness of human rights, especially those of women. They felt that if these goals were accomplished their children would learn to treat women with respect. Achieving this educational objective has been a slow pro-

cess, but they feel that the occasional policing of men's actions through the cooperative has reduced instances of family abuse. Contrary to the founder's statements, one cooperative wife told me that the cooperative board does not interfere with family affairs. She intimated that it would be appreciated if they did police some of the actions of men in her community, particularly their alcoholism.

Pueblo Dos is under the auspices of ARTEXCO, but does not sell exclusively to ARTEXCO. They also have two clients in Guatemala City. As with other cooperatives, they would prefer more direct contacts as they grossed only Q4000 per month with an average payout, depending on personal productivity, of Q400 per family. I was told that the cooperative sells only 45% of what it can produce. This cooperative was overequipped, with every family having at least one loom and some families employing additional weavers to work on idle looms. The member families are allowed to sell outside of the cooperative, but I was told that the markets were not very lucrative. This was further supported by the small amount of weaving activity I observed at their homes.

### Pueblo Cinco

The Pueblo Cinco cooperative operates in another town no more than a five-minute walk from the headquarters of Pueblo Dos. In 1991, a maquiladora factory in town closed operations. A government cooperative director from INACOP (Instituto Nacional de Cooperativas—National Institute of Cooperatives) urged 35 of the unemployed female workers, all widows, to form a sewing cooperative.<sup>5</sup> These widows had enjoyed the constant flow of generally meager wages from the factory, but also looked forward to the potential of self-management in the cooperatives. The president applied for a financial donation through Padel (a Canadian funding agency based in Montreal) and received Q48,000 which went toward the purchase of six sewing machines and materials. Each woman also paid Q50 to an emergency fund. The cooperative could support work for only seven women, as there were only six machines and one professional steam iron. After six months, 28 of the original 35 women left the organization and were not refunded their Q50 deposit. The remaining widows cut and sewed clothing; however, their lack of experience made it a struggle to continue. The markets were very competitive, and it was not until two years later that they made a meager profit.

In 1993, the women joined ARTEXCO with the hopes of obtaining access to more work. ARTEXCO does most of the cooperative's bookkeeping, makes all administrative decisions, and in effect is treating the cooperative as a subsidiary and the members as its employees. The women are the only sewers for ARTEXCO materials and are not encouraged to create new designs. Comments from various members led me to believe that given the opportunity most would prefer to return to a factory job because under ARTEXCO they received few contracts, and they had not really gained the independence they sought.

## Pueblo Cuatro

The Pueblo Cuatro cooperative was established in 1983 as a reaction to harsh conditions of seasonal work on coastal plantations.<sup>6</sup> The current president believed a weaving cooperative would provide an alternative source of income and a healthier lifestyle than plantation work. One day she came across a replica of an ancient Maya *huipile* (a ceremonial blouse) in a church of a distant highland village. She wanted to reproduce this particular old design for sale and encouraged two other women to join with her. The three women sought financial support in nearby towns and with a Q1000 loan from Banco Caritas they bought thread and paid for some living expenses while they began operations.

The women began selling in nearby tourist towns. They explained that in the 1980s it was difficult for them to sell crafts since 1) there were few tourists during the 1980s, 2) the women did not speak Spanish, and 3) their *huipiles* and bed spreads, made with top quality threads and natural dyes, were expensive. These weavings had to compete with inferior-quality, low-priced products that flooded the market in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, soon afterwards more women from the village wanted to join. By 1993, 32 women worked in the cooperative with a long waiting list of potential members. The cooperative presently sells Q2000 in a good month, but is producing at only 40% of capacity.

In the beginning, many of the husbands were very nervous about the project because their wives, who had contributed to the family income by work in the coastal fincas, were now staying at home. Some husbands told me they quickly changed their minds because their wives, through the cooperative, were generating a higher income than if they had been working on the plantations. Further, their children could stay in the village year-round, attend school, and experience better health.

To assess successes and failures in these three cooperatives it is important to place them within an international and national context. The next sections explain the history of Guatemalan cooperativism and the current structure within which cooperatives operate.

### History of Guatemalan Cooperativism

Guatemala's history of cooperativism officially began January 28, 1903, with the organization of a few small cooperative enterprises (Muñoz 1984). Early cooperative societies in Guatemala operated solely as market enterprises which ignored many of the additional activities and benefits, such as educational workshops and group social events, associated with the more established European and North American cooperatives.<sup>7</sup> According to a regional director of INACOP, the volatile political climate of the time discouraged social functions generally associated with classical cooperativism (Roy 1976). In the early decades of this century, any hint of socialism or cooperative action had a negative, and politically dangerous, connotation in Guatemala.

By 1945, when the cooperative phenomenon had finally gained worldwide acceptance, Guatemalan cooperative societies organized themselves along the more social lines of European cooperatives. In the same year, lawmakers wrote a constitution for Guatemalan cooperatives adhering to the notion "that all men/women were equal and responsible for their actions and that all men/women had freedom of movement" (Muñoz 1984). The constitution incorporated such ideals as teaching members how to work as a group, how to attain a "better" life, how to set good examples for children, how to obtain a higher price for products, and how to buy materials using economies of scale. Also in 1945, the government formed the Ministry of Work and Economy (Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía), and a separate department devoted specifically to cooperatives, the Department for the Advancement of Cooperatives (Departamento de Fomento Cooperativa), later called INACOP<sup>8</sup> (Instituto Nacional de Cooperativas). Although the department was legally empowered to legislate and enforce its laws, it was hampered by several shortcomings. According to one government cooperative educator, Herrera Muñoz (1984:5), the department proved ineffective because it was severely underfunded, it lacked technical personnel, and, most crucially, it lacked a positive vision for positioning cooperatives within future national and international economies. Success at the cooperative level can depend on the vision of leadership, as exemplified by a weaving cooperative in San Antonio Palopó, Guatemala. Ehlers (1990:184-190) notes that the success of this cooperative, in no small part, rested on the long-term goals of a foreign cooperative leader, his understanding of emerging global markets, and his knowledge of the technology of production.

These bureaucratic problems, described by Muñoz, have persisted in INACOP since the 1950s and have contributed to a significant decrease in product output from cooperative associations in the 1990s. In 1975, cooperative production's share of GNP was 3.5%. In 1985, this number dropped to 3.2%, and by 1988 it had decreased to a mere 1.7%.<sup>9</sup> Much of this "underdevelopment" can be attributed to conflicts within the government itself. From the 1970s to mid-1980s, Guatemalan governments persecuted cooperative organizations and agencies. During a 1982 military coup, the government intervened heavily in the activities of INACOP exercising direct control over INACOP and instigating conflicts between the institute and the directors of federations of cooperatives. Such action retarded development plans and placed the cooperative sector in a poor position relative to the other economic sectors that were competing for government favor and funding. Governmental intervention continued to stifle development until the late 1980s.

Although the persecution has ceased, a legacy of disorganization and economic problems remains from the instability of the 1980s. For instance, some federation directors stated that INACOP is withholding economic support for cooperatives and is neglecting to enforce cooperative legislation. A case in point has been the conduct of intermediaries

between cooperative producers and foreign consumers. In theory, intermediaries are prohibited from taking profits that unfairly exceed the producers' earnings. In practice, however, the intermediaries' profits have been excessive—often five times their expenditures and over 20 times the producer earnings. This is particularly the case in artisanal cooperatives in which women are the main participants. Because of their lower status and relatively low level of education, women are easy targets for exploitation and indifference by both intermediaries and government officials. Weaving cooperatives, initially introduced as an economic emancipator for women, were especially neglected. A future director of ARTEXCO wrote in a 1985 study that "the government declared that the artisanal sector is important because it 1) generates employment, 2) offers personal value, 3) keeps tradition alive, 4) diffuses *costumbre*, 5) is a complementary activity, 6) attracts tourism" (Lopez 1985:18). Despite such apparent enthusiasm by the future bureaucrat, very little government support has been directed to the artisanal sector. As a consequence, many cooperatives in highland Guatemala have come to rely on an alternative source of support—the international aid community. In highland cooperatives, 80-90% of cooperative credit financing (Q4.7 million) and 100% of donations (Q5.5 million) come from foreign sources.<sup>10</sup> However, less than 2% of this funding goes to artisanal cooperatives.

### Structure

The structure of the cooperative movement in Guatemala is a multitiered hierarchy ranging from the individual cooperative itself to the system's central services (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Organization of Cooperative Entities**

Level	Entity	Activity
1	cooperative	creates and harvests products
2	federation	specializes by sector and fulfills social, economic, and administrative activities (e.g., ARTEXCO)
3	confederation	acts as the legal representative of cooperatives and coordinates all sectors of the federation (e.g., CONFECOOP).
4	central service	satisfies the needs of cooperatives in all aspects (e.g., INACOP and INGECOP).

\*Source: Olson 1994

The following sections discuss each of the tiers, beginning at the central services level and working downward to the level of individual cooperatives.

### Central Services

Two central services, INACOP and INGECOP, are available to all cooperatives regardless of industry or specialization. INACOP (Instituto Nacional de Cooperativas) is a government ministry formally in charge of cooperative registration and development. While these operations fulfill the majority of INACOP's mandate, its activities extend beyond mere secretarial/administrative duties. The institute also loans individual cooperatives start-up and working capital. Cooperatives generally have difficulty procuring capital through Guatemalan private banks and lenders. Although INACOP provides loans, the substantial interest charged makes the cooperative's relationship to the institute one of dependency. Women from one weaving cooperative were quite vocal about the high loan interest charged by INACOP. One woman complained that "it is not right that they encourage us to open a business to increase what money I can bring into my family, and to offer opportunities to other people in our community, and then steal back our profits in loan interest. When we complain they tell us that it was the only way we could start our cooperative...I do not have confidence in them." These women heard that other cooperatives were offered help from international development agencies but did not know how to obtain such funding. INACOP directors stated that in 1993 over 68% of cooperatives defaulted on their loans and therefore they want future cooperatives to rely 100% on international and other private financing.

The second government organization that aids the cooperative sector is INGECOP (Inspección General de

**Table 2. Federations and the Number of Member Cooperatives**

Name of Federation	Sector	Number of Cooperatives
FENACOAC R.L.	savings and credit	65
FEDECOCAQUA R.L.	coffee growers	57
FEDECOAG R.L.	Guatemala agriculture	54
FEDECCON R.L.	consumer	34
FEDECOVERA R.L.	shepherds	29
FENACOVI R.L.	housing	20
ARTEXCO R.L.	artisanal	12 (23) <sup>1</sup>
FENCOMERQ R.L.	marketing (agriculture)	12
FECOAR R.L.	regional agriculture	06
FEDESPECA R.L.	Pacific fishing	03

\*Source: INACOP census data 1991

<sup>1</sup> Of the 23 cooperatives associated with ARTEXCO only 12 are active.

Cooperativas—Auditor General for Cooperatives). Its formal mandate is to monitor finances, oversee cooperative ideals, and solve legal problems for cooperatives. In an interview with one of the directors of INGECOP, I was told that only the first of these three objectives was regularly met.

## Confederation

CONFECOOP R.L. (La Confederación Guatemalteca de Federaciones Cooperativas—The Guatemalan Confederation of Federated Cooperatives) was founded May 19, 1977, as a limited corporation to organize and represent the entire Guatemalan cooperative movement. Mainly, it guides its 10 affiliated federations (See Table 2.) by 1) representing the Guatemalan cooperative movement before both the national and international community, 2) promoting organization among cooperatives in Guatemala, and 3) helping with cooperative short- and long-term development. Its secondary activities include helping nonfederated cooperatives, participating in international forums on cooperativism, export promotion, encouraging education, and helping members with housing and credit problems.

## Federation

Federations are composed of groups of individual cooperatives trying to gain economies of scale in the marketplace and greater presence in political arenas. The government helped form federations to aid individual cooperatives by specializing in the needs of each of 10 specific sectors. These sectors cover banks, houses, consumer products, coffee planters, agriculturists, agricultural markets, regional agricultural boards, shepherds, artisans, and fishermen.

Cooperatives are not required to join federations, but if they lack capital or require either administrative or technical expertise the federation's help in such matters can be attractive. According to the census of 1991, only 20% of all cooperatives were registered as having federated status, but their members accounted for 80% of cooperative membership. In the artisanal production sector, however, only 48.5% of all members were federated under ARTEXCO.<sup>11</sup> In general, though, federated cooperatives tend to have larger memberships than nonfederated organizations. I found that while the average membership in federated cooperatives is 124.63 associates, the average number of associates per nonfederated cooperative is only 36.76.

I was interested in determining if federated cooperatives are more successful or permanent than nonfederated ones in the lives of the associates. One indicator is whether or not a cooperative is economically active. In 1991, the INACOP registry listed 9.7% of all associates and 32.5% of all cooperatives as inactive. Of these cooperatives, 5.5% were federated and 27% were nonfederated, suggesting that federated cooperatives have a better record of remaining active.<sup>12</sup>

The 1991 census data for cooperatives do not take into account the fact that the artisanal federation, ARTEXCO, included many inactive cooperatives in its active listings. In reality, 11 of the 23 cooperatives associated with ARTEXCO became inactive in 1990-1991.<sup>13</sup> According to personnel at INACOP, when international demand declined, ARTEXCO cut prices by 20%. This decrease in the demand for products, and the price cutting, fatally affected the operations of these 11 cooperatives. Adjusting statistics to accommodate 11 inactive ARTEXCO cooperatives changes the percentage for all inactive federated cooperatives from 5.5% to 8.1%. The reduction in artisanal cooperatives was not only restricted to ARTEXCO. Many nonfederated artisanal cooperatives also disappeared after 1989 due to economic failures associated with the dual effects of the recession and civil war.

There is no single departmental jurisdiction in Guatemala in which the number of inactive cooperatives outnumbered active cooperatives. Although inactivity is not concentrated in any one region or jurisdiction, the Department of Quiché does have the largest percentage of inactive versus active societies (45.65% inactive cooperatives with 78.22% of associates considered inactive). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Quiché experienced considerable instability and violence. The military and the guerrillas in this department were involved in a civil war that devastated the land and the people of Quiché (Carmack 1995). Any business remotely resembling a socialist or a guerrilla activity, such as a cooperative, was subject to severe and often violent military sanction. One cooperative member stated that three to four members from every cooperative in the area went missing or were killed, while many other members fled to Mexico. Not surprisingly, most cooperatives stopped operating. Among the other departments in the country, an average of 36.5% of registered cooperatives are listed as inactive, accounting for 9.18% of their associate population. The federation officials stated that most cooperatives become inactive primarily due to poor cooperative organization and to low sales. On December 31, 1991, INACOP had under registration 1,174 cooperatives and 277,125 members, which represented 9.6% of Guatemala's economically active population.

This decline in growth through the 1980s can in part be attributed to the political persecution of cooperatives and to a serious reduction in external markets. The decrease in export markets is a consequence of diminished world prices and the fact that the world had taken note of the political instability in the country. ARTEXCO directors mentioned how political problems in the country adversely affected their sales. Many countries were reluctant to purchase goods from a country with highly publicized human rights violations.

Particularly interesting are the reasons why cooperatives would join a federation in the first place, and I have identified a number of specific motives. Many cooperatives do not have the capital to purchase raw materials and pay for operating costs. They see loans from federations, such as ARTEXCO, as their only option. Also, many international

aid agencies donate money to be dispersed directly through the federations, leaving nonfederated cooperatives without access to these funds. Another reason for joining a federation is to gain access to the federation markets. Their markets are larger and based on an international clientele. Many researchers have noted that for craft cooperatives and workshops to survive in a global market they must become familiar with the design tastes and demands of foreign markets as well as have knowledge of distribution networks (Cohen 1998; Eber and Rosenbaum 1993; Ehlers 1993; Olson 1993; Stephen 1993; Tice 1995). In the artisanal sector, ARTEXCO buys 29% of all locally manufactured products and is ranked as the largest artisanal intermediary between producer and buyer. As an intermediary ARTEXCO has extensive knowledge of foreign markets and consumer tastes. The director explained to me the design and color preferences for various countries. For instance, continental Europe favored dark brown colors, while England preferred bright blues and reds. Further, they have buyers and networks in place to solicit and distribute orders. If a cooperative can sell most of its items through ARTEXCO then it does not have to be aware of international operations. Without this burden they can focus on ARTEXCO's production criteria, rather than the demands of numerous other intermediaries and tourists.<sup>14</sup>

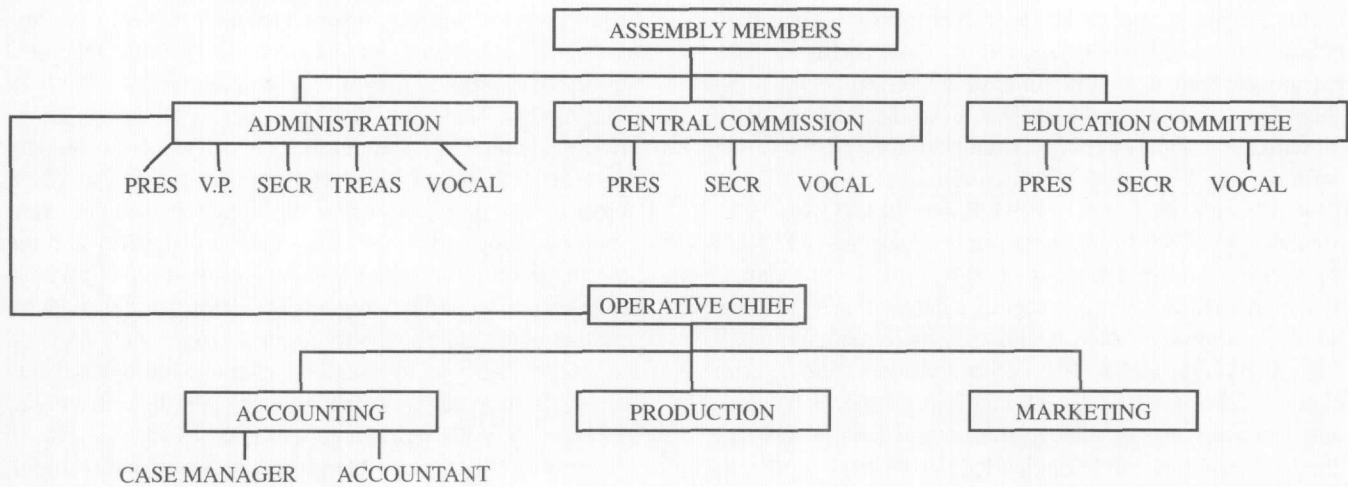
To fill large international orders, a substantial corps of trained workers is needed to create a standardized product. ARTEXCO operates a small school for men and women to learn how to produce items to meet ARTEXCO's criteria.<sup>15</sup> Many individual cooperatives and weavers have different loom sizes, dye lots, and use variable weave widths. However, to fill large orders and offer uniform and consistent products, ARTEXCO requires that cooperatives use standardized inputs. For example, cooperative members in the ARTEXCO federation must buy all materials, including cotton, wool, and polyester, from the federation, and every member is required to own a loom of a standard size. The raw materials purchased from the federation generally, are more expensive than those from private vendors. Therefore, even though the federated cooperatives are paid a higher premium on their work from ARTEXCO, their higher input costs reduce net profits to roughly those of nonfederated cooperatives. The president of the federated Pueblo Dos cooperative stated that they are aware of this higher price but believe their products will be of better quality, consistent designs, and sell more quickly. Weavers from an ex-federated cooperative disputed the quality consistency and attractiveness opinions expressed by the federated cooperative president. The nonfederated weavers told me they also buy good quality cotton or dye large quantities of cotton to produce a single-dye lot. Many of their international clients actually prefer inconsistencies in the cloth, dye lot, and designs because they appear unique and noncommercial (having an indigenous quality). Storeowners who sell international crafts in Alberta, with whom I spoke, echoed this same preference for crafts that have an imperfect (handmade) appearance.

Federated cooperatives do not have to sell items exclusively through ARTEXCO and often bypass the federation's "cut," which is often an unreasonable amount given the few orders cooperatives have been given in recent years. As long as they do not "steal" buyers from ARTEXCO, federated cooperatives are permitted to sell smaller orders directly to other clients. The behavior of one former federation cooperative (Pueblo Uno) stands out. This cooperative originally began under the leadership of a German woman who stumbled across a fledgling cooperative in the late 1970s. The community was located on the Pan-American Highway and she saw an opportunity for the weavers to sell to traveling tourists. She assisted them in organizing a professional cooperative that could supply quality products to not only tourists, but also to supply an international clientele through bulk orders. This cooperative expanded from less than 20 to over 508 weavers. With such a large artisan base they were able to accept and fill large international orders from Holland, Canada, Germany, and Italy. The German manager stated that instead of selling to ARTEXCO, they could now fill large textile orders and sell directly to the foreign market without losing profit through an intermediary's cut. Recognizing its size and access to markets, Pueblo Uno split from ARTEXCO in 1990 and stands as a notable independent.<sup>16</sup>

Before a cooperative group can join a federation, its members are required to take three main and three optional courses at CENDEC, the school for cooperative training. The schooling does not include basic reading, writing, and math, but does offer courses on administration, organization, and such cooperative values as honesty and how to work together. Many directors stated that teaching those values is not an easy task and explained that cooperatives often folded before any trust is developed.

CENDEC directors also told me that a cooperative would not succeed if none of the members spoke Spanish. Accordingly, CENDEC has only furthered the education of women who already had some schooling and training in Spanish. The logistics of educating women has also posed a problem for CENDEC. Typically, husbands do not allow wives to leave their villages to travel to the big cities for a week of schooling. On occasion CENDEC directors have traveled to small communities and taught the women at their homes. One member from Pueblo Cuatro traveled six hours to Quetzaltenango to attend the school for three days. At CENDEC she said she learned cooperative ideals, but more importantly received training in the *jaspé*<sup>17</sup> technique of dying for which she is the only specialist in the cooperative. I was surprised she learned artisan skills, but she stated that it was a special program arranged by CENDEC. She commented that it was difficult leaving her community for three days (half of what CENDEC prefers) as her husband was not very supportive and she had to leave her young children with a sister. Often women are further restricted in joining a cooperative unless their husbands give permission to join, or unless their husbands already belong to some cooperative organization. I found significant exceptions to the above rules to be the members of

**Figure 1. Structure of Individual Cooperative**



\*Source: communication with ARTEXCO'S director

widow cooperatives run without direct involvement by men and members of cooperatives that operate in very poor communities where women are expected to bring in a portion of the family income, such as in Pueblo Cuatro. Weavers from the all-female Pueblo Cuatro cooperative mentioned that their husbands, in general, were very supportive of their endeavor to bring in income, but also said their husbands had seen the success of a few cooperatives in nearby communities.

The directors of CENDEC also noted that the sexual makeup of a cooperative can often determine its success or survival. They find that cooperatives entirely composed of men, entirely of women, or primarily of men function and survive as active businesses. On the contrary, cooperatives with mostly women, or of one or two men, tend to dissolve after a few months. CENDEC officials cited numerous cases where the few men would treat the female members as employees and cheat them out of profits. These cooperatives, officials mentioned, "never succeed because the women often joined cooperatives to escape exploitive situations. With only a few men competing for positions a hierarchy can easily develop. The female majority often become frustrated and would rather work as an employee for an exploitive company where at least they would be paid on a regular basis, even if small."

These CENDEC beliefs often reflected reality. I noted that cooperatives with a larger percentage of men excluded women from processes important to the association. I attended a Day for Cooperativism meeting of the family cooperative Pueblo Dos in which 16 men and only 1 female attended. The lone woman was the wife of the president and the co-founder of the cooperative. I asked why women were not at the meeting. This was followed by laughter and one man said, "I don't want my wife stared at and sitting next to him". This sexual discrimination has also been noted in other areas of Guatemalan life.<sup>18</sup>

## Cooperatives

The individual cooperative represents the lowest tier in the cooperative system structure. Although the structure of a cooperative varies with its size, a general plan is recommended by the confederation (See Figure 1). ARTEXCO mandates a comprehensive organizational structure for artesanal cooperatives that includes both the usual bureaucratic positions of president, vice-president, and treasurer, as well as locally sanctioned offices of *vocal* and *comité de vigelencia*.

The vocal is responsible for organizing a group's participation in social activities, such as fiestas for the anniversary of the cooperative, International Cooperativism Day celebrations, and local saint days. Fiestas are important social and religious activities in Guatemala, and participation in fiestas as a group allows cooperative members to build cohesion within the cooperative and display this solidarity to nonmembers. The president of Pueblo Cuatro told me that during community fiestas all cooperative members wear their traditional dress and parade behind a banner bearing the cooperative name. Fiestas are a time when members can balance their economic interests within the socioreligious fabric of Guatemalan life (Annis 1987; Chinchilla 1977). The vocal also works closely with the education committee to recruit new members, prepare study groups, and coordinate seminars on cooperative ideals for the members. Seminars are rarely carried out, however, since members seldom have spare time to attend the information sessions.

The vigilance committee controls product types, sets inventory, and balances bank accounts. A representative of ARTEXCO, more often than not, heads this committee for federated cooperatives. ARTEXCO says it can ensure a higher quality control and less fraud with an imposed representa-

tive. Cooperative members do not echo this statement. On the contrary, member emotions and comments often ranged from anger due to loss of control by the cooperative to frustration with the representative's lack of understanding of their cooperative mission and product. Despite the comprehensiveness of the ARTEXCO organizational template, many cooperatives, especially smaller ones, do not involve themselves with all the potential positions and functions suggested.

### Discussion

The Federation of Artesanal Cooperatives, ARTEXCO, affects all cooperative projects both directly and indirectly. For Pueblo Dos and Pueblo Cinco, the federation cooperatives, ARTEXCO provides both direct advantages and disadvantages. The implied advantage for the federation members lies in greater access to administrative courses, to federation expertise, to financial assistance, and especially access to larger international markets.

### Education and Health

While male members of Pueblo Dos and female members of Pueblo Cinco were sent to the Cooperative Center for Education, CENDEC, female associates of Pueblo Dos were excluded from this opportunity. In spite of CENDEC's insistence that the women from Pueblo Dos be trained, the cooperative argued that at least one member from each household already had proper education. Less than one-fifth of the male members of Pueblo Dos and one-third of Pueblo Cinco had attended CENDEC. This suggests that one of the main benefits of federation status was not made available to women.

The federation also supplies a doctor to visit the cooperatives once a year. One member of Pueblos Dos sarcastically remarked that, "Everyone is sick almost every day, yet the doctor comes once a year. With my luck, I won't be sick that day!" One visit per year to prescribe overly expensive pharmaceuticals is a questionable benefit.

### Foreign Aid

Cooperatives in the federation stand to benefit greatly from foreign aid donations, because foreign agencies react positively to the health and education opportunities promised in ARTEXCO's brochures. Some aid organizations, such as Canada's Padel (the largest funding agency for cooperatives in the highlands) are now bypassing the Guatemalan government as its dispenser of funds. Its donations are sent directly to ARTEXCO. This decreases administration costs for Padel and tentatively reassures the organization that the government is not appropriating the money improperly. Padel has given ARTEXCO the authority over where and how the funds are to be allocated. Unfortunately, the majority of these funds rarely reach the individual cooperatives. Because it is not affiliated with the federation, Pueblo Cuatro has not ben-

efited from of this administrative procedure. They have received only a few thousand quetzals (from another organization, Cenat) to send women to training, whereas the federation cooperatives Pueblo Dos and Cinco are more generously funded.

### Markets

The extensive foreign business contacts of the federation give its member cooperatives the opportunity to supply a greater market base. The federation supplies markets the world over and many of its orders are very large. Only a cooperative with a substantial membership (over 250 members), or a federation of similar cooperatives, would have the productive capacity to fill large orders quickly. This climate of mass marketing has led to numerous production and distribution problems.

ARTEXCO's main objective has been to increase foreign markets. In this regard, understanding international consumer behavior and expenditures are foremost in ARTEXCO's plans. A director of ARTEXCO mentioned that although the demand for the craft market may have been flat in the past, it is now increasing. In contrast, Guatemalan craft sellers I interviewed in Canada all stated that demand is falling. Even so, these merchants require constant variation in stock to meet the fickle and fast-changing consumer tastes in colors and styles at all price ranges. These constant demands for changes in their distinctive products are quite foreign to the traditions of most weaving cooperative members. The cooperatives have been asked to supply socks, shorts, and winter jackets in soft colors of rose, mint, and mauve at inexpensive prices. It is the federation's belief that the artisans must change to these styles and colors and products for their market to increase. Such changes in color, style, and product type have affected each group differently.

The sewers from Pueblo Cinco, for instance, do not care what the products are, as long as they sell. The factory employee mentality in this cooperative is quite obvious. The weaving cooperative members of Pueblos Cuatro and Dos displayed varying degrees of resistance to change. I believe this is due to cooperative ideals and goals set up by the founders of the cooperatives. The female members of Pueblo Dos were fairly complacent about the design selection and were willing to consider whatever their husbands decided would bring in the most money. A few Pueblo Dos women, however, told me that they miss weaving and embroidering huipiles. Two had in fact quit weaving solely for the cooperative and were spending most of their time weaving huipiles and bed covers.

The majority of women in Pueblo Cuatro, however, were much more vocal about their mission to preserve traditional designs. The first year I visited the cooperative, I found most products to be ceremonial huipiles, bed coverings, *rebozos*, and small scarves. Three years later in 1996, their repertoire expanded to include vests, knapsacks, hats, bags, and bolts of cloth. I asked them if producing these new items dimin-



ished their goal of preserving traditional designs. They mentioned that to continue weaving, and eating, they also had to create more tourist items. They hoped that once people bought the cooperative's "tourist gifts and mementos" they would also be interested in their fine quality huipiles. A significant marketing problem for these weavers is that their inputs of cotton and dyes are more expensive than those of other cooperatives. These women have compromised on one aspect, design, but have kept the quality of inputs and weaving up to their standard. As a consequence their products are often 30% more expensive than the same type of product found elsewhere in the market. Between 1993 and 1996 I noticed that their selling prices had not increased, while the cost of inputs had risen substantially. They explained that they had to keep their items in line with other weavers to sell anything. Most of the members were satisfied with selling at a lower cost, but a few were quietly considering quitting the cooperative and forming their own group. Another strategy the women are employing is to sell bulk amounts of cloth. While this would not be sold to the general tourist, they are hoping they can make contacts with cloth-buying importers.

The Pueblo Cuatro president fears that if they do not continue to make high-quality pieces in traditional designs and teach their youngsters in the craft, that both the designs and traditional weaving knowledge will be lost, especially the backstrap loom technique. Her sentiments are quite real. Few daughters of weavers see hand weaving as profitable. In reaction, many turn to other forms of labor—as housemaids, as laborers in maquiladora factories, or as store clerks. Infrequently, daughters will leave villages to continue their education at higher levels in hopes of obtaining professional jobs, as was the case with two of the nieces of the president of Pueblo Cinco.

As part of its main market strategy, ARTEXCO has also demanded that artisans switch to standard-sized looms. In consequence, ARTEXCO is now composed of 1) all-male cooperatives that use the culturally "male" foot loom, 2) cooperatives with women who must rely on men to prepare the "male" foot loom, and 3) women operating industrial sewing machines. The more efficient foot loom is used because it allows for quicker production and greater potential profits. Traditional weavers cannot meet the quick changing demands of a mass market using the more time-consuming backstrap looms. Cheaper products of the more efficient foot loom, however, tend to flood the market and exert a downward pressure on prices directly affecting the federation cooperatives. Indirectly all weavers in the country suffer from the inconstant ebb and flow of the purchase decisions of foreign buyers. Weavers outside of the federation now have to rely on foreign markets because government coups and continued political instability have negatively affected tourism and reduced tourists' purchases at the local markets and shops. During the time of the study, the global economy was experiencing a serious recession in which less money was available for tourism and crafts—both of which were then viewed as luxury expenses.

The world recession also affected the price of cotton. The major material costs for a traditional weaver are good quality cotton and natural dyes. With the abrupt rise in the cost of fine cotton many weavers switched to poorer quality cotton or inexpensive polyesters. Numerous importers said they would prefer to sell traditional high-quality cotton goods, however, they recognized that the market tended to bear only the foot-loomed, poor-quality "tourist" items. Thus, the bulk of imported Guatemalan crafts to which North Americans are introduced are misrepresented as "traditional" utilitarian goods. In fact, many of these items have lost any meaning of "traditional." The goods' symbolic meaning has been reduced to such a minimal level that it now represents a simple language interpretable by both the local producers and the foreign consumers. Often, these symbols have little to do with either of their cultural environments (Appadurai 1986; Graburn 1976; Nash 1993). The commodification of culture has also reduced the identification of the product to the producer (Appadurai 1986; Stephen 1991). For instance, the male president of Pueblo Dos asked me one day if I would look at the bikini swimsuits they were producing for the American market. The large-size bikini was suitable for a full bosomed woman, but with the torso figure of a 10 year old. He admitted that he had only seen bikinis on models and actresses from the television show *Baywatch* and had assumed North American women would want the same. Some women members were horrified that their weavings were being sewn into such profane clothing and the bikini line never was produced. Karen Tice also found this lack of identification among women in a Panamanian cooperative who were contracted to produce mola-designed snowman Christmas ornaments (Tice 1995:95). One woman asked Tice "what snowmen ate, how big they were, and if they lived in the jungle or the sea."

### Project Ownership

A critical problem faced by all federated cooperatives is the concept of project ownership. Even though the federation was created to help the individual cooperatives, the effect of ARTEXCO management has been to reduce its federated cooperatives to the status of subsidiaries and their members to the level of employees. The federation secures clients, decides what is to be produced in what fabrics, colors, and sizes, and establishes production quotas and delivery deadlines. Many cooperative members, even though they may appreciate the economic survival of their cooperative, feel that in a federated environment they do not have adequate control over their destiny. It is for this reason that the associates of Pueblo Uno abandoned their federation membership. This cooperative, however, was fortunate in that it had already established a large enough foreign market base for survival.

Although the widowed women from Pueblo Cinco do not suffer the interference of husbands guiding their daily operations, the position of the husbands has been taken over by the officers and agents of ARTEXCO, who likewise al-

low these women little say in decision making concerning the cooperative. Economic reality compels Pueblo Cinco to remain within ARTEXCO since the small cooperative could not survive economically without federation support and services. On a social and personal level, the women of Pueblo Dos are ill served by ARTEXCO. The federation has not recognized these talented workers as worthy of full participation in the enterprise by impeding their attendance at meetings and restricting their access to training courses. While Pueblo Cuatro members may be economically in a tenuous position, they have more control over cooperative decisions than their federated counterparts. For example, they can decide what colors, quantities, and articles to produce as well as where to sell them. Also, they do not have to purchase a foot loom or buy their input materials directly from ARTEXCO.

### Conclusion

My study indicates that women have not increased their social and economic power through participating in the cooperative system—certainly not to the extent they would have expected. The women of Pueblo Dos had very few forms of social power. Through their participation in the project they actually suffered a great loss of female status associated with the use of a backstrap loom when the looms were replaced with foot looms. The members of Pueblo Cinco feel they are under the employment of ARTEXCO directors and are very much aware that their expendable income is no greater than their pre-cooperative earnings derived from maquiladora labor. The women of Pueblo Cuatro, who have more social power, constitute an exception to the other two cooperatives. This may be because they live in a community whose history lends itself to social equality and to their group's existence outside of the federation structure. Operating outside of ARTEXCO has hurt their involvement in the international economic market but has for the time being allowed them the opportunity to produce high-quality goods of which they are justly proud.

ARTEXCO notes that without a change in production, the artisanal weaving industry will become obsolete. While I agree with their general statement, their methods and results are less than alluring. In their plans to enter the global market and compete with factories, foreign cooperatives, and multinational companies, they have ignored any effects on local artisans. Mass marketing, including the accompanying changes in looms and poor quality inputs, are seen by ARTEXCO as the primary measure to compete in the crowded craft market. These decisions, however, have adversely affected the control women have over their weavings, their businesses, and, ultimately, their livelihood. As shown, many artisanal cooperatives, both federated and nonfederated, are struggling to survive. In the cooperatives studied, over 78% of members were either dissatisfied with ARTEXCO's activities or with the effects of the federation policies on the artisanal weaving market. While many of these women may not understand the complexity of the international market

they are aware that their fine products are no longer selling and that they can profit instead from inferior items. The president of Pueblo Cinco mentioned repeatedly that she wants to weave "art" and often complained about the poor quality of the weavings she sees in the market. She hopes her daughters will not be forced to give up the weaving tradition that she has tried to instill in them, but recognizes that the market is changing so rapidly that they may too have to follow the other cooperatives. She, along with other experienced weavers, discussed strategies to keep up with the new demand for products without losing the knowledge of their great craft. These strategies included introducing a cheaper product line for tourists less interested in quality than price. They thought selling some poorer quality items would allow them to continue to produce their high-quality weavings.<sup>19</sup>

The question lingers as to how cooperative development can simultaneously assist weavers in their quest for empowerment, while supporting the continuation of traditional Guatemalan weaving. I doubt we could ever produce one model to encompass all aspects of the tangled web of development. Jan Black (1991:200) cogently observes that "real development of the sort we are calling empowerment, will never be neat and orderly and predictable." While development agencies address one economic or social issue, their strategy often stimulates a mutant problem which may even be more difficult to tackle.

The weaving cooperatives in highland Guatemala are at the base of a highly complex structure superceded by the often ineffective INACOP and the penetrating policies of the federation ARTEXCO. In spite of cooperative's presumed powerless position in relation to governmental development offices, I suggest that cooperatives continue to be the most suitable vehicle for such weaving products and also seem to provide a communal environment in which the perquisite knowledge, skills, and traditions can be preserved and passed on to future generations. Grassroots development may be one of the few strategies to counteract the effects of poorly designed or incomplete strategies imposed by federations and government agencies. Accordingly, it is essential that both government moneys and foreign aid be directed to viable grassroots organizations and community-level cooperatives with a minimum of dilution by way of the various administrative changes of the bureaucratic hierarchy.

Even if funds are directed to individual cooperatives and the strategies begun by ARTEXCO are addressed by nonpartisan organizations, it does not lessen the fact that employment and income associated with cooperative enterprises are at present diminishing. Nor does it eliminate the fact that authentic handcrafted articles currently are uneconomical in local and international markets and are being supplanted by mass-produced items of lesser quality and price. While change from a small-scale weaving industry to a mass-marketed one may appear inevitable, some frontline female weavers are applying creative strategies to curb the influences of mass marketing. Change is inevitable, but the disappearance of a high-quality and traditionally based weaving industry is not.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Between 1989 and 1990 the retail cost of cereals and vegetables rose 53-82%, meat rose 40-60%, cooking oil was inflated by 41%, and transportation costs more than tripled. Electricity costs also skyrocketed. In 1991 rates increased 50-70% and by the fall of that year they again increased some 37%. By February 1993, the government announced it would again raise rates another 50% to pay for the repair of electrical towers damaged by leftist insurgents (Berger 1993; Banco de Guatemala 1990).

<sup>2</sup>In the first research phase I spoke with five different governmental ministers to gain their unique perspectives on the Guatemalan cooperative system. During this phase I also ascertained structural aspects of the cooperative system and the services the ministries offered in support. I consulted with regional ministers from INACOP, INGECOOP, CENDEC, with the directors of ARTEXCO, and the Canadian funding agency, Padel. From fieldwork, I later verified the authenticity of this information. Although I focused on three artisanal cooperatives I included information gathered from other projects. During the second phase, members' personal information, involvement with the cooperative, and partial life histories were gathered by interviews and through participant observation. Rather than spending over one month with each cooperative, I worked intermittently with the groups. This pattern not only gave the cooperative members a break from my intrusion in their lives, but also offered the option to re-question cooperatives in the light of newly gathered and relevant information, and provided an opportunity for constant comparison and assessment.

<sup>3</sup>The women in this study all suffer from varying effects of poverty, which include lack of money, poor health, little education, and from the effects of machismo. Not only has Guatemalan cooperative strategy failed to address the social or economic problems affecting their lives, it has in reality offered little opportunity for improvements in their standard of living. Members from each of the studied cooperatives had varied experiences from their participation in cooperativism. Pueblo Dos women have gained some economic advantage, but in most cases this money remains in the hands of their husbands. Pueblo Cuatro women lack significant economic power, but due to the cooperative have made great advances in individual and collective social power in their community as measured by social indicators. Pueblo Cinco women seem to have acquired neither economic nor social power through their involvement with their federated cooperative. Overall, members of the two federation cooperatives have not experienced any improvement in social power, which was advocated by the head of CENDEC as one of cooperativism's main ideals.

<sup>4</sup>A family cooperative is defined as one that used the labor of all family members. Wives, husbands, and older children were involved in particular aspects of the weaving process. The other two cooperatives studied in this research were based on a different structure—only widows worked in the Pueblo Dos cooperative and only female members of families worked in the Pueblo Cuatro cooperative. One family from this latter cooperative had three generations of women working in the cooperative.

<sup>5</sup>Maquiladora plants primarily employ young women with little or no prior experience in the industrial workplace. Extremely low wages, hazardous working conditions, high production pressures, and a staunchly anti-union managerial orientation characterize these fabricas (Gettman and Pena 1986; Mirowski and Helper 1989; Stinson 1990). The women in Pueblo Cinco worked eight hours a day and made between Q8-10 per day. The closing of the factory and its relocation to another town stimulated the recently unemployed women to organize into a cooperative.

<sup>6</sup>The fincas, as described to me by an elder in the village, are "hated and hot." It is emotionally difficult for the people to leave their village and their families. Every month, however, they return for three to four days to see loved ones and guard their village. At the time of the study, on the Pacific coast they worked all day picking coffee and cotton, earning Q7 to 10 per day. The earnings in the 1980s were as low as Q1.5 to 3 per day. The women, with nimbler fingers, often picked 1.5 times that of the men. Nevertheless, picking was not easy for either gender and there was little regard for the welfare of child laborers. Heat, humidity, and mosquitoes were all but unbearable for workers coming from the colder highlands. Worse yet was a lack of care in the use of pesticides. When workers returned to their village, it was not uncommon for them to be sick for a time. One woman told me that she would be ill in bed with respiratory problems for up to two months after she returned. This was a result not only of climatic changes and physical stress, but also due to the inhalation of insecticides. At the end of the month a laborer might earn Q150-250, but high room and board charges by the finca would be deducted. Cigarettes and liquor alone could put a worker in debt to the finca store. While at the fincas, the migrant laborers would eat only frijoles (black beans) and tortillas (a corn bread) with occasional coffee. The housing conditions were primitive. Overcrowding and a lack of family privacy were the rule. Further, the workers coming from different villages in the highlands spoke a variety of mutually incomprehensible languages which kept them from creating a sense of solidarity. This linguistic barrier is lessening as more and more workers have learned to speak Spanish.

<sup>7</sup>Six principles were agreed upon by the International Cooperative Alliance in 1966, which is an alliance of a number of member countries. The six principles are 1) open and voluntary membership; 2) democratic control; 3) limited interest on share capital; 4) profits to be distributed fairly; 5) continued education; 6) cooperation amongst cooperatives (Roy 1976).

<sup>8</sup>In addition to INACOP, the four agencies organized in 1978, consist of INGECOOP (General Inspector of Cooperatives—Inspección General de Cooperativas), and CONFECOOP (Guatemalan Confederation of Cooperatives—Confederación Guatemalteca de Cooperativas) and the now inoperative CONCAO (National Coordinator of Cooperatives—Coordinador Nacional de Cooperativas).

<sup>9</sup>These percentages appear even smaller when one considers that the number of economically active people employed by the cooperative sector grew from 8.11% in 1989 to 14.58% in 1991 (Blair 1993).

<sup>10</sup>All statistics and numbers are based on compiled data taken from the most recent INACOP census of December 31, 1991. They were gathered at the INACOP center in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

<sup>11</sup>I suspect that the percentage of federated artisanal members dropped significantly below the national average for all industries when a cooperative with 508 members left ARTEXCO.

<sup>12</sup>No statistics were found on the percentage of federated and nonfederated members.

<sup>13</sup>The remaining 12 cooperatives of ARTEXCO are in various states of productivity. ARTEXCO has six "type a" cooperatives (in good condition), four "type b" cooperatives (in medium condition) and two "type c" cooperatives (in poor condition).

<sup>14</sup>Muñoz (1984) calculated that in 1983 ARTEXCO purchased 29% of Guatemalan textiles, while tourists purchased 34%, and other intermediaries collectively purchased 37%.

<sup>15</sup>The ARTEXCO school is attached to its store and administrative offices in Quetzaltenango. It offers classes in dyeing techniques, sort-

ing and cleaning cotton, and the operations of using a footloom. This schooling is only available to a few students because of operating costs, living costs for students, and the difficulty of coming to Quetzaltenango for training. I visited the offices on more than 10 occasions and not once did I see any training occurring. People working on the school equipment were employees of ARTEXCO producing items for sale to tourists in the shop.

<sup>16</sup>Relations between ARTEXCO and Pueblo Uno are antagonistic and ARTEXCO directors even discouraged me from visiting the cooperative and purchasing their crafts.

<sup>17</sup>Jaspé is a particular method of dyeing cotton that resembles tie dyeing. This technique involves tying knots in warp threads at specific intervals and then dipping the thread into a liquid dye. One jaspé dyer told me that she typically spends a week preparing the ties for a cotton twine bundle to produce a run of cloth measuring 18 inches by 12 feet. She mentioned that the tying is particularly difficult and that her fingers get sore after about one hour. Designs most common among the cooperatives I worked in were cat eye, roses with crab, and dolls.

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Babb (1990), Black (1988), Bossen (1984), Chinchilla (1977), Knudson and Weil (1988).

<sup>19</sup>When I returned to this cooperative in 1996 they had introduced some product styles more palatable to tourists, however, they continued to use high-quality cotton, dyes, and time-consuming weaving techniques and designs. The sales only increased because they lowered prices to compete with other weavers, and their profit return had not risen. Their most recent strategy was to approach foreign shop buyers interested in higher-quality weavings, but at that time they had not made any contacts.

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