Is More Necessarily Better? Leadership and Organizational Development of Migrant Hometown Associations in Los Angeles, California

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ABSTRACT

Hometown associations (HTAs) in the United States are migrant, voluntary groups with a shared sense of belonging to a region in a different country of origin. Their philanthropic activities across borders have increasingly attracted the attention of government agencies and social and political actors. These actors have endeavored to form more HTAs and place greater demands on them to expand their civic engagement. This strategy, however, will not necessarily lead to that purpose, but instead will likely exacerbate a critical gap in the HTAs' organizational capacity. This paper argues that a different strategy is best suited to strengthen the organizational ability of HTAs, and proposes a framework to achieve this goal based on a capacity building pilot program for Latino HTAs from the Los Angeles region.

Keywords: 1. hometown associations, 2. capacity-building, 3. Latin American migration, 4. collaborative research, 5. Los Angeles.

¿Realmente más es mejor? Liderazgo y desarrollo organizativo entre asociaciones de migrantes en Los Ángeles, California

RESUMEN

Las asociaciones de paisanos en Estados Unidos son grupos de migrantes voluntarios basados en un sentimiento compartido de pertenencia a una región en un país de origen distinto. Sus actividades han llamado cada vez más la atención de instancias gubernamentales y de actores sociales y políticos. Estos actores han favorecido la formación de más de estos grupos, junto con una creciente demanda sobre ellos para que expandan sus compromisos cívicos. Sin embargo, esta estrategia no conduce necesariamente a ello, e incluso podría disminuir la capacidad organizativa de las asociaciones. A partir de un programa piloto basado en la formación de capacidades con asociaciones de migrantes latinos en Los Ángeles, aquí argumentamos que se requiere una estrategia distinta para que las HTAs amplíen su capacidad organizativa.

Palabras clave: 1. asociaciones de migrantes, 2. formación de capacidades, 3. migración latinoamericana, 4. investigación participante, 5. Los Ángeles.

Introduction[1]

In recent years, scholars and wider audiences have become more aware of the existence of migrant-led hometown associations (HTAs) in the United States. Although these migrant groups are a worldwide phenomenon, most of the existing literature has focused on HTAs in the United States formed by Latin American migrants. While Latin American migrants have increased across virtually all of the United States over the last decade, California continues to be their main point of destination. Indeed, Southern California alone has hundreds of HTAs formed by migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua.

In contrast to other types of grassroots organizations, HTAs are voluntary groups based on a shared sense of identity and belonging that arises from strong social networks formed by migrants from the same hometown or region of origin. HTAs are typically driven by a philanthropic mission and most have little or no private foundation or government financial support. To achieve their goals, members raise funds among friends, family members, and fellow hometowners. Their donations support social and economic development projects in their country of origin, and in some cases in their places of destination. Some groups have obtained matching contributions from their governments back home, and in several cases these joint efforts have become public policies

from the latter to support their citizens abroad. Some HTAs focus on policy advocacy in both their home country and the United States.[2]

The enormous volunteer energy generated by these organizations has given rise to a number of beliefs about the role of migrant-led groups and the development of their communities of origin. One of these is that an active "migrant civil society" can effectively address entrenched social and economic issues on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Another belief is that the abundance of HTA-led philanthropic activities reflects a deep leadership and organizational capacity to mobilize large numbers of people. Perhaps for these reasons external social and political actors—like government agencies, foundations, elected officials, and political activists—have increasingly attempted to connect with HTAs, encouraging them to play a greater role in civic, social, and political change. Unfortunately, these external social and political actors fail to understand that many of these grassroots organizations are already overloaded and that their leaders are overburdened with competing responsibilities from work, home, and volunteer commitments. For instance, many external social and political actors have been willing to fund and support HTA activities without inquiring about the internal leadership and organizational capacity of these migrant-led organizations.

The increasing visibility of HTAs in the U.S. public sphere is probably the result of their long tradition of transnational philanthropic activities, not necessarily their increased organizational capacity to take on more cross-border political, social and economic projects. Instead of an abundance of leadership and organizational capacity, we find a growing gap between the increased demands from external social and political actors to expand the HTAs' engagement in their places of origin and/or destination, and the relatively low levels of leadership and organizational infrastructure of typical HTAs.

[2]For a full discussion of the type of projects supported by Mexican HTAs see Orozco (2002), Alarcón (2002), Orozco and Welle (2005), and Rivera-Salgado and Escala Rabadán (2008).

Research on migrant HTAs has underscored the fact that despite their remarkable achievements, HTA leaders often work in relative isolation and find it difficult to cultivate new leadership skills, strengthen their internal organizational systems, establish collaborative networks to leverage resources or plan strategically for the association's development (Zabin and Escala Rabadán, 1998; Escala Rabadán, Bada and Rivera-Salgado, 2006; Somerville, Durana and Terrazas, 2008). Analysis of migrant organizations has indicated that access to internal and external resources (that is, in academic terms, the amounts of social and human capital) is crucial to the functioning and further development of HTAs. Research also revealed that the inability to take full advantage of resources has become a fundamental problem for these groups and that HTA leaders are quite burnt-out and often at the limit of their personal capacity to lead and coordinate the activities and achieve the stated goals of their organizations. The key implication is that even if some of these HTAs were willing to receive external resources, they would probably be unable to translate these resources into greater organizational capacity and effectiveness in achieving their goals.

This paper contains three main sections. The first part presents a brief account of the significance of HTAs as migrant groups and a critical assessment of some of the programs carried out by migrant-sending states that have sought to form more HTAs and place additional demands on them. The second part describes an action research project that sought to both understand and address the aforementioned leadership and organizational capacity issues faced by HTAs. Rather than study the HTAs' organizational predicament via traditional research approaches, we used a collaborative action that took the form of a pilot program aimed at improving individual leadership skill sets, strengthening organizational capacities, and bolstering cross-organizational collaboration among HTAs from several Latin American countries in the Los Angeles region. Thus, instead of asking these leaders and organizations to take on even more responsibilities, this program sought to provide support to help HTAs build and strengthen their

own internal capacity to share much-needed resources in order to improve their effectiveness as grassroots organizations involved in cross-border philanthropy. Finally, the last part presents an initial framework that can help guide efforts seeking to stengthen HTA leadership and organizational capacity.

Migrant Networks, Organizational Forms, and HTAs

Early approaches to migration assumed that migrants had to inexorably sever their ties with their homelands and follow a standard assimilation path to their countries of destination. However, during the past two decades, many scholars have emphasized that international migration cannot be explained as a one-way process. Indeed, a salient feature of current migration influxes is the recurrent movement back and forth of individuals, commodities, and ideas between communities of origin and destination, forging and consolidating social, economic, and religious ties and practices that link migrants and nonmigrants to one another across borders (Goldring, 1992).

A fundamental manifestation of these migrants' ties is represented by their organizational forms. Grassroots organizations such as HTAs that are based on hometown or region of origin, are common to many migrant groups who have settled in the United States, and have played a pivotal role in the economic empowerment and social incorporation of migrants from a variety of nations into U.S. society. Contrary to conventional perspectives about migrant assimilation, ties and loyalties to the old country, expressed by the preservation of strong social relationships among migrants from a particular town or region, have in some cases actually helped migrants move up the economic ladder and participate in the political sphere (Light, 1972, 2006; Guarnizo, 1992; Levitt, 1997).

The building blocks of these transnational ties are the social networks forged by migrants groups between particular sending villages and cities and specific urban or rural receiving points. Usually started by one or a few migrant pioneers, these social networks eventually turn into a key social infrastructure by reducing

the costs and risks of the migration process, thus opening up opportunities to migrate for others in their communities of origin and helping new migrants access vital resources (jobs, housing, and information) in their new country (Mines, 1981; Massey *et al.*, 1987; Rouse, 1988; Portes and Rumbaut, 1991; Zabin *et al.*, 1993). These networks constitute a key source of what several scholars have called social capital, which is the accumulation of knowledge, contacts, and experience by certain members of the network, as well as the resulting social trust among them that creates a potential stream of returns and resources over time for subsequent entrants belonging to the same networks (Coleman, 1988; Martinelli, 1994; Putnam, 2000; Runsten and Zabin, 1994; Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000). For migrants, as numerous migration scholars have underscored, social capital is a pivotal resource in determining work trajectories and life possibilities in their places of destination (Massey *et al.*, 1987; Portes, 1995; Levitt, 2001; Tsuda, Valdez and Cornelius, 2003).

Organizational forms such as HTAs are built through these migrant social networks, and base themselves in the migrants' locality, ethnic group, or state of origin. These associations trace their origins to informal networks of migrant *paisanos* and demonstrate several social and ethnic constituencies at varied levels of organization, from informal to more formal and institutionalized structures (Levitt, 1997; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998). These specific ties become an essential part of the migrants' social organization, akin to the ties that bind family and friends. Thus, social ties with the "little homeland", far from weakening or disappearing with distance, are strengthened and transformed into *paisano* networks that eventually lead to the forging of a collective identity among migrants from the same community or region, and the construction of groups like HTAs as a privileged means of "translocal" belonging (Rivera-Salgado, 1999; Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2000).

The strength, orientation, and extent of the formal organization of migrant associations in major destination points like the United States have varied both by historical period and nationality. For

example, Chinese and Japanese migrants in the early 20th cen-
tury formed associations based on their regions of origin, which
were instrumental in adapting to and enduring unsympathetic
contexts, and eventually gaining social and economic mobility in
the U.S. (Daniels, 1988; Wong, 1998). Another salient example
were the Jewish HTAS, or *landsmanshaftn*, in New York, in the late
19th and early 20th centuries, which encouraged members to join
unions, supplied strike benefits, and provided a social safety net
for their memberships (Soyer, 1997). Throughout the 20th cen-
tury, similar associations, based on the same place or region of
origin in the old country, have also been key referential points
for their communities in their places of destination, sometimes
becoming a driving force for small business development for mi-
grants from Asia, Latin America, and Europe (Light, 1972, 2006;
Bonacich, 1987; Waldinger, 1986; Guarnizo, 1992; Stepick, 1998;
Min, 1998).

Grassroots organizations such as migrant HTAS have prolifer-
ated in the United States since the early 1980s, especially in met-
ropolitan areas, and by the late 1990s they had become the most
prevalent organizational type for migrant communities from Me-
xico and Central America and the main sources of immigration
to the United States. Indeed, there are literally hundreds of these
HTAS across this country, exhibiting a range of organizational for-
mality and complexity. The most common and simplest type of
association is the informal migrant village network. In the host
society, villagers see each other at various social events, such as the
celebration of the town's traditional patron saint's day fiesta, or at
soccer, baseball, or basketball matches involving hometown-based
teams. These informal networks sometimes take on the provi-
sion of social services for groups excluded from government safety
nets, such as providing funds for emergency medical assistance,
burials, low-cost credit, and help in obtaining housing and jobs
(Light, 1972, 2006; Massey *et al.*, 1987; Goldring, 1992; Qui-
ñones and Mittelstaedt, 2000).

These informal migrant village networks constitute the starting
point for further organizational developments among migrants,

like HTAs, which as we pointed out above, are a more formal orga-
nizational stage that organizes and represents the daughter com-
munity. Sometimes this process is initiated by a few civic-minded
migrants, often motivated by a philanthropic aim in favor of
their hometown of origin.[3] At other times, local civil or religious
authorities at home request the formation of a committee rep-
resenting the migrant community. Once constituted, the main
activities of these groups are fund-raising events to finance the
philanthropic projects requested in their towns of origin. In turn,
these events serve two important objectives: they enable these
groups to finance projects in their home communities, and forge
a sense of community by strengthening the ties and identities
among migrant *paisanos* (Rivera-Salgado and Escala Rabadán,
2004; Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004).

While migrant HTAs are scattered throughout the United
States, their most significant clustering is represented by Latino
migrant groups in Southern California, specifically the Los An-
geles region. This area usually comprises several counties, with
Los Angeles County at its core, and between 1990 and 2000 be-
came the largest metropolitan reception area with a foreign-born
population in the U.S., as a result of three decades of continu-
ous immigrant influx (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr, 1996; Light,
2006). Among the various immigrant populations that constitute
this multicultural metropolis, migrants from Latin America, es-
pecially from Mexico and Central America, constitute the ma-
jority (Eekhoff, 1994). Similarly, this remarkable concentration
of Latino migrants in this metropolitan area is reflected in the
increasing presence of grassroots organizations, particularly HTAs.
For example, some observers have pointed out the expansion of
these associations among Mexican migrants—the largest migrant
group by far—from 170 in 1998 to 420 in 2005 in the Los Ange-
les area alone (Escala Rabadán, Bada and Rivera-Salgado, 2006).

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[3]However, we should emphasize this distinction is analytical. In practice, the pas-
sage from informal to formal migrant organizations does not follow necessarily the
path just described. Indeed, the distinction between both levels is usually blurred,
and formal associations remain embedded in the informal migrant network.

We mentioned earlier that the flourishing of HTAs in places such as the Los Angeles region and their projects to support their communities both in the U.S. and in their homeland have garnered praise and public recognition (Thomson, 2005). Nevertheless, as we argue, this acknowledgement does not consider the organizational weak spots of these voluntary groups, much less possible ways of improving their performance. In this respect, while the membership of these HTAs has different amounts of *personal* social capital, in most cases this personal asset is not transformed into a significant *organizational* social capital among these groups. At a more theoretical level (Cohen and Prusak, 2001), social capital at the organizational level translates into the availability of resources beyond individual members, which leads to higher levels of trust, knowledge sharing, common goals, and more stable memberships in an organization.

This theoretical consideration is important *vis-à-vis* the prevailing working conditions of these migrant associations. As we pointed out before, most HTA leaders and their membership face increasing demands from multiple social and political actors, which becomes a serious obstacle to strengthening their organizational skills. As a result, in most cases, these organizations not only exhibit low amounts of social capital, they also face critical constraints on expanding it (Orozco, 2002; Somerville, Durana and Terrazas, 2008).

Among the different social and political actors that have forged ties with these groups, immigrant-sending national and sub-national governments are probably the most important reference for HTAs. Most of these national and sub-national government entities have developed outreach policies and strategies targeting their immigrant communities in the U.S., seeking to preserve their economic, social, and cultural bond to their places of origin. According to some analysts (González, 2006; Yrizar, 2009; Yrizar and Alarcón, 2010), these policies seek to address the different needs of their diasporic communities, such as the provision of information and legal advice, the management of guest workers' programs and of matching-grant programs linked

to local development in the country of origin, the preservation of cultural aspects in their places of destination, and the administration of expatriate political participation.

An important component of these policies refers to the creation of HTAS. Based on a general assessment of Latin American agencies from different key immigrant-sending countries and states,[4] a more proactive approach can be observed from these governments towards their diasporic population, which includes promoting the creation of different groups, including HTAS. The rise and spread of HTAS demonstrates that these groups are an effective structure through which governments and immigrants may negotiate and agree on managing development projects in the countries of origin, as well as on the political support and cultural representation of their communities in the places of destination. These outreach initiatives also include the promotion of organizational forms within these communities, with the aim of strengthening their ties and representation. As a result, we find an array of associations for various purposes, from soccer leagues to HTAS, which in several cases are the result of these policies. These outreach policies and strategies reveal the increasing institutionalization of actions carried out by national and sub-national governments towards their immigrant communities in the U.S.

However, while these policies aim to promote the rise of immigrant associations of different kinds, their emphasis seems to be on increasing the number of groups rather than strengthening their leadership and organization capacity. Their underlying premise is that the more groups and associations are forged, the stronger the immigrant community will be in the various places of destination. While this premise is not necessarily wrong, the

[4]This general assessment is based on the web pages of the following national governments: <http://www.ime.gob.mx/DirectorioOrganizaciones/>, for Mexico; <http://www.rree.gob.sv>, for El Salvador; and <http://www.unidosporguate.gob. gt/>, for Guatemala. At the sub-national level, we checked the following links of Mexican states: <http://www.iemzacatecas.gob.mx/>, for the state of Zacatecas; <http://www.migrantes.oaxaca.gob.mx>, for the state of Oaxaca; and <http://migrantes.michoacan.gob.mx/>, for the state of Michoacán. All web pages were initially consulted in August 15, 2009, and last accessed on April 15, 2010.

main problem is that it underestimates the critical importance of leadership and organizational development within these groups.

The outcome is a gap between the proliferation of migrant groups such as HTAS in key destination points such the Los Angeles region and their actual organizational capacity issues. This is a problem that has attracted the attention of several observers of the dynamics of these groups. For example, a recent report by the Migration Policy Institute on the role of HTAS notes that "they face organizational, capacity, and funding challenges that policy-makers are only partially addressing" (Somerville, Durana, and Terrazas, 2008:10).

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (2005), in its assessment of the potential role of immigrant remittances in the achievement of development goals, acknowledges that the Programme "as a development player can engage and include the diaspora including migrant leaders and hometown associations (HTAS) in the development debate" (p. 4), but it also points out that "investment in human capital is the greatest challenge that impedes their effectiveness. Success of HTAS would depend on available capacity to become more organized, to gain more knowledge, to invest in human capital and to exchange experiences with other parts of the world" (p. 3).

Based on our previous research on immigrant HTAS, we realized that a viable way of bridging this gap was through a hands-on approach to provide an array of information on leadership and organizational development, in a safe learning environment, with the aim of improving their associations' capacities. In the following section, we briefly describe and examine the development of a capacity-building pilot program for Latino HTAS in the Los Angeles region, an initiative aimed at strengthening their leadership skills and increasing their access to organizational resources.

Migrant *HTAS* and Capacity-Building

The proposed pilot program on Latino HTAS stems from incremental work carried out over the past few years with these

groups, based on a "participatory action research" approach (Babbie, 2001; Whyte, Greenwood, and Lazes, 1991; Stephen, 2007). Previous academic research (González, 1993; Alarcón, 2002; Rivera-Salgado and Escala Rabadán, 2004) examined how HTAs, using binational strategies, were working for the betterment of their members' communities of origin, and pointed out the potential assets and internal resources wielded by migrants in the United States, particularly in the Los Angeles region. This research path let us consider how additional resources and capacity building might strengthen the organizational skills of these volunteer groups.

In a previous initiative,[5] we organized a set of meetings and workshops with leaders and members of Latino HTAs in the Los Angeles region, with the aim of identifying and tackling key organizational challenges, as well as promoting their connections with each other and other civic and government groups. However, these initial attempts had limited success due to several factors, namely the lack of human resources for the logistical planning and coordination of these workshops (*i. e.,* maintaining a list of participants, reserving space and parking, providing materials, sending meeting reminders, to name but a few). The lack of sufficient logistical and coordination capacity led to a marked decline in participants' attendance and difficulties in following up on the range of requests raised by the participants.

This initial experience taught us that proper implementation of an initiative such as this demanded several elements for its eventual success: a firm commitment from the selected HTA leaders and members to participate throughout the planning activities; sufficient staff and resources to cover the necessary costs of these activities; the ability to offer relevant skill-building contents; and proper evaluation of the program, in order to learn about the effectiveness of the intervention. In this respect, the first stage

[5]For instance, Gaspar Rivera-Salgado organized a conference entitled, "Working in Community Across Many Borders: Los Angeles-Based Hometown Associations from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico" on April 29, 2000, at the University of Southern California.

of workshops and meetings proved useful because by listening to the participants during these sessions, we learned about how they operate internally and the services they offer, the shortfall in resources they face, and the way HTAs interact—or fail to interact—with other organizations. Feedback from participants clearly indicated the need to build capacity so that their organizations could address the many needs of their memberships and obtain resources to broaden and deepen their work. Their feedback helped us design a capacity-building program focused on the specific organizational needs of Latino HTAs in the Los Angeles region.

The resulting pilot program was made possible once we obtained the necessary funding (from a specific foundation, the Los Angeles Immigrant Funders' Collaborative [LAIFC]), proper facilities (provided by the University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture), and a team to implement the program curriculum and logistics. This program targeted emerging and established leaders of HTAs that represented migrant populations from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua in the Los Angeles region. The program had two components: *1)* capacity-building workshops, designed to improve individual leadership skills, organizational effectiveness, and cross-organizational collaboration; and *2)* mini-grants for HTAs to implement civic participation, health promotion, and capacity-building projects, as a means of immediate, material benefits for some of the participant organizations in their search to strengthen their organizational capacity.

The main hypothesis guiding the implementation of this initiative was that the inability of HTAs to take advantage of their internal and external resources to achieve their goals and fulfill their mission was primarily due to the following: *a)* volunteer HTA leaders are overburdened with personal and organizational responsibilities, and therefore have little time to invest in themselves and their organizations; *b)* there are few available opportunities for a critical mass of emerging organizational leaders to strengthen their individual leadership skills to coordinate orga-

nizational processes efficiently and effectively; *c)* there is a lack of spaces to build trust and knowledge across HTAS and other informal and formal organizations in key areas for immigrants like the Los Angeles region; and, *d)* most notably, while most immigrant-sending nations have implemented different policies regarding the well-being of their diasporic populations, their policies focus mainly on the promotion and numeric growth of these and other immigrant groups, but pay little or no attention to the strengthening of their organizational capacity.

The program's intervention hypothesis was as follows: if a critical mass of emerging HTA leaders were intensively exposed over a sustained period of time to concepts pertaining to organizational dynamics and effectiveness and to leadership skill building exercises, they would increase their ability to take advantage of internal and external resources to achieve their goals and fulfill their mission. This intervention model is what we call the "capacity building process". Capacity building can be broadly defined as "the ability of non-profit organizations to fulfill their mission in an effective manner" (De Vita and Fleming, 2001:1). As we applied this concept to the specific realities of HTAS in our program, we conceptualized capacity-building as a long-term process of change that involves three overlapping areas: individual leadership skills, internal organizational processes, and coalition-building strategies. Our operational assumption was that each organization would need to bring in two or more people to build a critical mass within each organization in order to turn stronger leadership skills into improved organizational effectiveness and sustained networks with other organizations. Accordingly, some of the workshops targeted HTA leaders at the individual level, to help them increase their human capital, that is, the education, knowledge, skills, health, or values that an individual possesses.[6] In the specific case of HTA leaders, important human capital endowments include organizing experience, specific skills, educational

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[6]Gary Becker's (1964) classic work defines human capital as individual endowments such as education, knowledge, skill, health and values.

attainment, and strong civic values, which lead to an understanding of how to achieve social improvement for their communities.

Our challenge was to link individual-level skill development with an effective understanding of the nuts and bolts of organizational dynamics, at the informal and formal levels. We did not want to impose a theory of organizational development. Instead, we chose to work within the existing situations that represented real situations for HTAs. We used a framework that distinguished organizations along a continuum of organizational forms, from informal to formal-institutional.

As previously noted, social capital usually refers to stocks of knowledge, contacts, experience, norms, and social trust, and norms that people can draw upon based on their membership of different types of social networks (Fukuyama, 1999; Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000). Traditionally, the definition of social capital has centered on the actions of neighborhood associations, sports clubs, and cooperatives, which scholars like Putnam (2000) claim create the "networks of civic engagement". Our program also sought to thicken HTAs' "networks of civic engagement". This would be achieved by increasing the number of organizations that participate in those networks and enhancing the contacts and connections among the leaders of those associations, and between that leadership and other organizations.[7] The goal would be to leverage resources, from both informal and formal institutions (such as foundations, government agencies, and personal networks of key contacts, such as politicians and other civic leaders). We therefore focused on developing an array of skills for collaboration and coalition-building throughout this initiative. In other words, we would not only attempt to increase the human capital (individual skills) of HTA leaders but also to ensure that this training would lead directly to an increase in the social capital of the volunteer-driven organizations these leaders represent.

[7]Jonathan Fox (1996) states that "societal 'thickness' refers to the breadth and density of representative societal organizations, and can also be thought of in terms of social capital accumulation" (p. 1089).

Working with the topics proposed by participants and available funding, we organized a total of 12 workshops in seven sessions.[8] The workshops focused on the following topics: *1)* developing community projects; *2)* writing grant proposals, and project evaluation; *3)* bringing in new membership; *4)* a review of a foundation's call for proposals; *5)* technology for organizational efficiency; *6)* incorporating a nonprofit organization; *7)* time management; *8)* strategies for successful meetings, conflict resolution, and inter-group collaboration; *9)* organizational structure and decision-making; *10)* strategic planning and community planning; *11)* educational opportunities for HTA members and their families; and *12)* fundraising strategies.

The workshops had three key elements. First, in order to ensure that we offered high quality, participatory workshops, we provided training on several topics that were important cornerstones for building capacity in the HTAs. For most of these workshops, we invited experts on the topics. Second, all workshops were held at the campus of the University of Southern California (USC), with free parking and food provided, and conducted at weekends. The university setting provided a neutral space where everyday concerns and competition among organizations were momentarily suspended, meaning that the representatives of participating HTAs were able to engage in a learning process. Finally, we produced extensive transcripts documenting the details of each session, which were given to the participants on the following session, thus enabling them to assemble a text they could subsequently use as a key organizational reference.

We used two outreach strategies. First, we contacted key leaders from HTAs who had extensive contacts within their own communities. The leaders of HTA coalitions and federations were particularly helpful in identifying the emerging leaders within their membership organizations. The second strategy was to contact the leaders, either by phone, through a formal invitation,

[8]For more information about the content of each workshop and the participating Hometown Associations, see Rivera-Salgado, Rodríguez and Escala Rabadán, 2004.

or in some cases, by giving presentations to the HTAS' governing boards. At these presentations, we emphasized the importance of attendance and requested that the organizations take responsibility for ensuring that two of their members attend continuously throughout the entire workshop series.

Our goal was to recruit a diverse group of HTAS' leaders along national, ethnic, and gender lines. We were especially interested in attracting HTAS that were at an intermediary, or partly consolidated, stage of development. In addition, we targeted leaders from both stand-alone HTAS and coalitions of these organizations, including umbrella federations for communities in Mexico's traditional sending states such as Zacatecas, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Oaxaca; and networks of Salvadoran and Guatemalan migrant organizations.

We reached our target population. For instance, 36 people attended the workshop series, 36 percent of whom were women (13 out of 36), evidence that we had, at least partly achieved the gender diversity that was one of our goals. In general, more participants came from individual groups than from state or countrywide HTAS federations, and most of the participants occupied a formal leadership position in their organization. However, the type of leadership needs varied depending upon the organizational structure (individual organization being less complex than federations) and also on the country of origin (since the politics and ethnic composition of each of the five countries of origin involved is unique).

Participants were drawn from 20 organizations in five countries: El Salvador (Comité del Desfile y Festival de Independencia Salvadoreña [Codefisal]; Comunidades Unificadas de Ayuda Directa a El Salvador; Asociación Migueleña Siglo XXI; and Suchitotenses Asociados en Los Ángeles [SALA]); Guatemala (Fraternidad Mazateca en Los Ángeles; Consejo de Integración Maya en Los Ángeles; and Maya Visión); Honduras (Hondureños Unidos de Los Ángeles [HULA]); Mexico (Unión de Comunidades Serranas de Oaxaca [UCSO]-Federación Oaxaqueña de Comunidades y Organizaciones Indígenas de California [Focoica]; Unión de

Mujeres Oaxaqueñas [UDMO]; Grupo Folklórico Huaxyacac; Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos del Sur de California; Federación Californiana de Michoacanos "Lázaro Cárdenas del Río"; Jalisco clubs in Los Angeles: Talpa de Allende, Quila, Comunitario Jamay, Zapotitán de Hidalgo and Oconahua; and Club Chapala, Jalisco, in Santa Barbara); and Nicaragua (Nicaraguan American Development and Education Foundation [NADEF]).

Key Results

With regards to the mini-grants that were part of this program, we collaborated closely with the Los Angeles Immigrant Funders' Collaborative (LAIFC) in the definition of guidelines for their allocation. These guidelines focused on the feasibility of the proposed initiatives, to ensure that a project would increase an organization's ability to meet its grassroots philanthropic mission. As a result, four organizations that had met the criteria for using the funds submitted brief project proposals. In addition to the grants provided, the team helped the organizations refine the design and implementation of those projects, which were completed over a one-year period.

The following four groups were selected to receive a mini-grant for organizational capacity-building:

1. The Unión de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas (Alliance of Oaxacan Women), an umbrella organization for HTAs, proposed to increase the leadership and participation of migrant women from Oaxacan communities represented in their associations.
2. Comunidades Unificadas de Ayuda Directa a El Salvador (Communities Providing Direct Aid for El Salvador), known as Comunidades. This coalition of 19 Salvadoran HTAs based in the Los Angeles region presented a leadership-development project that would incorporate the use of new technologies into the work of Salvadoran HTAs.
3. The Grupo Folklórico Huaxyacac (Huaxyacac Folk Dance Troupe), comprising 45 migrant youths from the state of Oaxa-

ca, Mexico, proposed to build the troupe's capacity by hiring a dance instructor, who helped them to learn and stage new dances.

4. The Unión de Comunidades Serranas de Oaxaca (Alliance of Oaxacan Mountain Region Communities), in collaboration with the Federación Oaxaqueña de Comunidades y Organizaciones Indígenas de California (Oaxacan Federation of Indigenous Communities and Organizations of California) proposed a series of health-education workshops to improve the well-being of the Oaxacan migrant community. The workshops were organized together with a series of basketball tournaments, in which approximately 85 teams, representing many of the Oaxacan HTAs in the Los Angeles region, participated. These tournaments provided a ready-made audience eager to learn about health and well-being issues.

With respect to the workshop series, this new stage required proper evaluation of its performance. To this end, while we departed from several approaches (Weiss, 1998; Wholey, Hatry and Newcomer, 1994), we adopted an evaluation framework based mostly on what some scholars (Fetterman, 2001) call an "empowerment approach". Empowerment evaluation stresses the process of using the evaluation process to help individuals and groups gain greater control over their environment. This evaluation approach seemed the most suitable choice to evaluate the program's design and implementation. Moreover, we also used a formative evaluation strategy because the program itself was under development. To this end, we asked three main questions and used different methods to generate and interpret information to answer them. The questions, methods, and findings are given below:

A. Did We Reach the Target Population?

Method. We collected background information on the participants in terms of their formal and informal roles within their organizations.

Findings. We were successful in reaching out to the HTAs that we wished to participate in the program, and we were able to sustain consistent attendance by their representatives.

B. Was the Program Implemented According to Its Design?

Method. We attended and observed all sessions and kept copious notes on how the workshops proceeded. We paid special attention to the interaction between participants and presenters, interaction among participants themselves during workshop activities, and patterns of participation. Lastly, we compared the contents of the presentations against the agenda for each session to determine if what had been promised was actually delivered.
Findings. We covered most of the topics suggested by the HTAs in the planning sessions. However, we did not have any control over the delivery of the workshops since we partnered with facilitators from other organizations for the first time. We also asked about this issue in the final questionnaire that evaluated the sessions facilitated by our team, when we were able to control for the quality of the information and the facilitating techniques.

C. Did a "Theory of Change" Work? Specifically, *a)* Did the workshops build individual leadership skills? *b)* Did the participants help their organization improve effectiveness? *c)* Did the organizations develop stronger cross-organizational relationships?

Method. We took extensive field notes for each session, developed and distributed a brief questionnaire, and used focus groups. The brief questionnaires were distributed to participants beforehand to obtain their assessment of the impact of the workshops for them and their organizations. We organized a day-long reflection session at the end of the series of workshops to determine the program's impact. In this reflection session, we deliberately placed participants from different organizations at different tables to elicit as much dialogue as possible. Then we held a large-group discussion on each of the questions in order to obtain a more col-

lective reflection on the achievements and shortcomings of this experience.

Findings. The responses from the participants provided us with systematic feedback on the impact of our initiative. As we had noticed throughout the series, participants unanimously made positive comments on aspects ranging from the formal to the more qualitative. Some participants pointed out the following:

> All [the facilitators] were very well trained and delivered good presentations. There was also a good mix of community groups and organizations from different countries and different states within Mexico. The contents were quite varied (Norma, Unión de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas).

> What I liked best were some of the facilitators: the invitations were consistent and in writing, sometimes there were phone reminders, the resulting notes were useful, the food was sometimes good, we had access to free parking and it was always available, and it made us feel like we were [college] students (Guadalupe, Hondureños Unidos in Los Angeles).

> I liked the way the coordinators promoted these workshops, the way they contacted us and the continuity of this contact, reminding us, telling us when we were going to have this or that workshop … also the punctuality of most of the presenters. I also liked the variety of topics and that we didn't have the same routine … and also [I liked the fact that] most of my fellow participants were interested (Pedro, Jalisco Club Comunitario Jamay in Los Angeles).

> And it helps a lot in these workshops to have an appealing yet ordinary language, like the kind we use, because despite the level being quite academic, it wasn't too complicated for us (Cándida, Unión de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas).

However, we wanted to probe participants' reaction to the workshops in more detail and at a substantive level their written responses emphasized the following achievements:

1. *Participants reported that these workshops significantly affected them.* Through their written responses, participants depicted the series of workshops as a highly meaningful learning experience, and some of its contents have already been adapted to their roles as leaders and members in their organizations. The following excerpts convey this achievement:

I think all this guidance was extremely important because this way, you can do things more specifically, can't you? You are grounded, and you can provide better guidance that wouldn't be possible without this training. And after all, you organize things as best you can, don't you? I mean, that's what happened to me. However, now that I'm in touch with the hometown associations, when it's my turn to share something with one of these groups, I share all these things I've learned, and they become motivated to take a course like the one we had here, right? And I can remember the comment [that one of the facilitators made], telling us "Sometimes we have to almost beg to make you attend these workshops!" And that's true, but if you go and talk with the other members of the group, they feel motivated to take courses like these and learn. I think that's important, it's important because you [the facilitators] had to struggle a lot to bring us here, right? And to me that's very important, to have this inspiration and be able to share it with others (Bertha, Federación Californiana de Michoacanos "Lázaro Cárdenas del Río").

What I have learned is that you have to know the difference between needs and priorities that many of us have to cope with. Well, I was personally quite mixed up, but now I know how to establish priorities, and that way I know how to achieve them. We really learned to identify what priorities are, how to do something to make it come true, how to establish priorities in our organizations and in our personal lives. And that was something I learned, from setting a timeline to defining how much time you're going to assign for your needs and your priorities, and to prove it with facts (Henry, Comité del Desfile y Festival de Independencia Salvadoreña).

What I liked was to be able to determine the percentage of time you give to each activity or the worth of each one of the things you do.

Suddenly, you say that the family deserves 100 percent of our time, but then you realize this is not true, you devote time to your job, that's what usually takes most of our time, and then comes all the activities you do for the communities you're involved with, like social welfare work. And out of that, perhaps you'll have time for your family, at a lower percentage, and then, if any time is left over, you study, and at the very end are things like health or religion. That's what I realized when I did this mapping exercise, that is, when you find yourself and establish the priorities you give to various activities (Natalio, Unión de Comunidades Serranas de Oaxaca-Federación Oaxaqueña de Comunidades y Organizaciones Indígenas de California).

2. *All participants emphasized that they felt more empowered as individuals and community leaders.* A basic principle of empowerment theory and evaluation is that individuals must feel empowered in order to perform as change makers through their organizations and institutions. In this respect, the following excerpts illustrate the development of several skills that convey important changes in that direction:

[This workshop series] was like a guide, like a road map to empower not only myself but also to become a better leader in my organization. What I liked best was the confidence we achieved about how to come up with an idea and nurture it until it becomes a funding proposal, I liked the fact that it was such a detailed and elaborate process in which you shared your knowledge in order to transform it into a proposal … this idea will lead to good things for the future of our organization, but most of all I think it was a very powerful tool that will help us to become consolidated as organizations in the achievement of our goals and objectives, and hopefully, they will crystallize and won't be reduced to wishful thinking. What I also liked was how we were encouraged to work collectively, to use our time and to think that we were a single group that had to move forward together … In the future, it would be good to include a workshop on gender and leadership, that is, how to learn that both men and women want to work on a common agenda, and that there should be mutual respect within our organizations, which means that women should not be treated as if they were a big zero or merely

as someone who can't do a thing, that is, gender issues. I liked what we did here because men and women have shown the same respect to each other when talking and doing everything, but we must see how we can bring that into our organizations (Martha, Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos del Sur de California).

The fact is that we [at Comunidades] have been working for quite a while on this, and we really need this training in our community work, I think these workshops were excellent, but I still need more, there are still lots of things I need to learn, and those of us involved in community work realize that others really need it too, especially those who are in new associations. We have about six groups that just joined Comunidades this year and they're newer than us, but they also have the same needs for training, and that's what we're planning to do, we want to share whatever we might have learned here, based on the notes from the workshops (Patricia, Comunidades).

3. *Most importantly, participants also emphasized the significance of their participation for their own groups.* While participants appreciated the importance of learning new skills for them as individuals, they linked this achievement to its usefulness for their organizations, a clear reflection of the achievements of this program. Future evaluations of the dynamics within the organizations that sent representatives to the workshop series will give us a better idea of the long-term impact. This significance can be appreciated in views such as the following:

The truth is that through these training sessions, we've learned, both personally and for our organization, how to lead better and to better identify our goals. Before, our work plan only defined the general objectives we had, and we jumped into doing whatever had to be done. But through these training sessions ... we've already learned how to have a better perspective on the project we want to carry out. Here we're also talking about targeting the population. That has enabled us to be very specific about what we're doing. In the past, we used to say "We want to do such and such a thing", and it was so ambiguous. We didn't really specify the purpose of the activities we wanted to carry out. In this regard, these training sessions have

certainly helped us ... I have also been able to unburden myself of some of my responsibilities because I have also learned to delegate activities (Edwin, Fraternidad Mazateca en Los Ángeles).

Well, these workshops also taught us how to organize ourselves better and carry out a community survey in order to really identify which community we will work with, where we will be working, and to develop a project strategy and carry it out. Thanks to that, we were able to carry out a more accurate analysis of how we were going to carry out this survey for the community we want to work with and to implement it. In fact, that's the first thing we did, we did the first survey just today, and we think it was possible because we had the necessary information from the workshops. And that's what we're just doing today, putting into practice what we learned (Cándida, Unión de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas).

I liked that we recognized that without the concept of "target population", we would have been very confused about how to use our scarce resources as small organizations serving a vast population, given that the resources are simply insufficient to help the entire population (Ronald, Nicaraguan American Development and Education Foundation).

[And the most important thing I learned was] to put this knowledge into practice, and also to motivate other members of my organization so that they also train and take advantage of this opportunity. And I have to continue learning, because the more I learn, the easier it gets to organize (Bertha, Federación Californiana de Michoacanos "Lázaro Cárdenas del Río").

Conclusions

While the praise and recognition that social and political actors have showered on HTAs is well deserved, our fundamental concern is that their growing visibility is also leading to greater demands from government agencies and other social and political actors, both in the U.S. and in their places of origin. These demands are straining the capacity of these organizations, given

the already overloaded agendas of these volunteer organizations. From this angle, simply creating more organizations and asking them to take on more activities will probably not translate into better or more projects. This strategy will heighten, not diminish, the organizational predicament of HTA leaders. Instead, we believe that what is required is investment in the leadership and organizational capacity of HTAs to help their leaders strengthen their individual skills, their internal organizational infrastructure, and their connection to other organizations in order to take full advantage of the external resources required to succeed in future community and development projects.

The formative evaluation of this pilot program aimed at strengthening the leadership and organizational capacity of HTAs yielded three core lessons for those interested in supporting a capacity-building strategy for HTAs. The first lesson is that effective capacity-building programs targeting HTAs need to cover and connect three areas: foster individual leadership skills; apply these leadership skills to building greater organizational effectiveness; and embed these organizations into networks that provide access to more resources.

The second lesson is that effective capacity building with HTAs taps into what groups really care about. Hence capacity builders need to meaningfully involve HTA leaders in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of the program. Effective capacity building needs to be very grounded in the real situations faced by the HTA leaders, and should help HTA leaders gain greater awareness of the diversity of organizational forms and how to structure their organizations. This will help them improve their practices, their organizational effectiveness, and cross-organizational collaboration to address the issues they care about deeply. In other words, effective capacity building with migrant HTAs should be a highly participatory process through which participants use their concrete experiences in their organizations to form, test, and apply their own theories and concepts of leadership, organizations, and related topics. To this end, it is important for capacity builders to be careful about unconsciously importing and applying organizational models from other fields. They should avoid simply

transforming migrant-led associations into organizations that can merely manage government and foundation projects and funds.

A third lesson is that collaborative initiatives between HTAs and nontraditional actors (beyond governments in their states and sub-states of origin), such as foundations, universities, and scholars, are not only feasible but necessary. On their own, HTAs do not have the resources to sustain ongoing leadership development and capacity building programs. Indeed, the establishment of meaningful partnerships with these and other actors will be a key factor in the organizational growth of HTAs in the future, an issue that has been underscored by other observers (Somerville, Durana and Terrazas, 2008).[9]

While we are aware of the limited scope of this initiative and our ability to make larger claims based on this one capacity-building program, we believe that this pilot program crystallized insights that resonated with program participants and with our work over the past decade with these organizations. The program's participants, who constituted the leadership of HTAs in various ways, acknowledged the need to invest in the development of their own organization. They acknowledged the fact that this type of investment is imperative if they are to respond effectively to the increasing needs and demands of their memberships and the social and philanthropic projects in their hometowns. Future evaluations of this learning experience among participant groups, as well as comparisons with similar experiences, will enable us to more accurately determine the extent of these interventions in order to expand the organizational strength of migrant HTAs.

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[9]In their recent report on the role of HTAs and immigrant integration, these authors conclude that "[s]mall, well-crafted interventions (with the voluntary cooperation of HTAs) should be made where they can enhance the effectiveness" of these groups (p. 16).

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