



Youth in Guatemala: Can disempowerment be reversed among marginalised young people entering adulthood?

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Abstract

This study recognises that in response to today's growing social and economic challenges that young adults can act as dynamic agents of positive change. The focus of this study is on how marginalised young adults can be empowered in the face of existing power complexes that so many find themselves entangled in. Attention will be placed upon factors contributing to the encouragement of a street lifestyle development followed by investigating how such constraints could be reversed. This study makes the case that with opportunities presented and disempowerment reversed that young adults can act as key influential instigators of community-based social change.

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Introduction

...It is high time that we stopped viewing our young people as part of the problem and started cultivating their promise and potential. - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 2007

This study recognises that in response to today's growing social and economic challenges that young adults¹ can act as dynamic agents of positive change. Young people make up almost a fifth of the world's population with 85% of those from developing countries (UN, 2003). Many of today's young people are better educated than ever before. They are a healthy population with potential for promising futures and are poised for leadership in families and society. However alongside this exists a parallel reality with many young people across the world continuing to suffer from poverty, discrimination and inequality. Many still lack access to proper education services with inadequate opportunities to fulfil personal potential.

The focus of this study is on empowering marginalised young adults in Guatemala. Attention will be placed on external constraints including factors that contribute to encouraging a street lifestyle development followed by focussing on how such power constraints could be reversed.

The influence for the writing of this paper is from my own personal involvement with an upcoming movement in Guatemala – *Jovenes Adultos con Proposito en Guatemala* (Young Adults with Purpose in Guatemala) (YAPG). The key principles of YAPG are –

- The personal development of the young adult.
- The facilitation of engagement in community development work.

These two principles are being realised through the aid of monthly group meetings and provision of personal mentor support. In order to help achieve the key principles the partaking of mentor support involves providing practical help (job searching, support with budget planning, advice for accommodation needs, etc), discussion of values, helping identify and facilitate into action young adult's abilities in taking part in community development work, and encouraging the continuation of learning journeys through completing school and the undertaking of further study. YAPG believes such an approach is mutually beneficial to both the personal development of the young adult as well as to marginalised individuals living in communities benefiting from project activity inputs.

¹ In referring to young adults I account for the age group post-childhood. For children I assume that of the UNICEF definition and include anyone under the age of eighteen (UNICEF, 2009). On occasion I will also use the term 'youth' or 'adolescent' when making specific references to young people usually over the age of twelve. I will refer to young adults as individuals aged eighteen-plus.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of development policies that have been guided by mainstream economic doctrine and believing in community empowerment which lies at the heart of the practice of an alternative approach to development is a key understanding in the writing of this paper. While this study on empowering marginalised young adults focuses on a particular research issue, it is part of a larger journey I have embarked upon.

My Story

From January 2010 to July 2011 I took up the offer to volunteer with Viva Latin America² in Bolivia. I worked with a variety of community-based projects and interventions, some of which included an after-school project for children of prostitutes living in a red-light area, a home for children that had experienced a history of severe abuse, a family rehabilitation home as well as working with street-living youths. This gave me a wider breadth of understanding about the varying levels of risk that marginalised individuals face in response to a diverse range of difficult and challenging circumstances. Throughout my time in Bolivia I was highly impressed by the quality of care children received. Initiatives were in place to attend to the younger children and also to the more specific needs of adolescents. Empowerment of children and encouraging agency were key practices.

Throughout my time in Bolivia I investigated whether there were adequate opportunities for young people leaving projects and childcare homes at aged eighteen and returning to living with family or moving into independent housing to try to continue their own personal development and learning journeys. The continued attention from childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood I hoped to see provided was not adequately encountered and I became increasingly concerned for the personal welfare and lack of opportunity for such young adults potentially going to live in challenging environments as they leave childcare projects and homes in making their transition from childhood to adulthood. The high quality of attention invested into these children's lives was too valuable to then perhaps somewhat be going to waste. I became convinced that a further intervention was necessary.

Overview of the Dissertation

This study is divided into four chapters. The research looks to explore the process of restoring the initiative to disempowered marginalised young adults in Guatemala. The chapters progressively develop from research design to literature review, an integration of the findings with the development of theoretical construct followed by a conclusive evaluation. Here is a breakdown of each chapter with a brief description:

² Viva is a charity that networks with a mix of small grassroots initiatives, churches and bigger international organisations in order to prevent and work with street-living children (Viva, 2012) www.viva.org

- Chapter one provides detail of the overall design of the study by highlighting the case study research methodology that was used to collect the data and analyse the findings. A literature review will also be incorporated. Some discussion will take place noting cultural differences between definitions of childhood and adulthood with ideas of how responsibility and of empowerment themselves are at the heart of the transition.
- Chapter two focuses on external power constraints that marginalised young adults may face. It concentrates specifically on the contributing factors that stand in the way of a healthy transition from childhood to adulthood and on the contrary encourages a development of a street lifestyle. A general investigation of these contributing factors seeks to understand aspects that can influence and motivate young Guatemalan people toward a street and possibly gang lifestyle whilst preventing them from the possibility of having positive effects on themselves and society.
- Chapter three will specifically focus on how these power constraints on young Guatemalan people could be reversed. This will be done by analysing relevant literature and applying it to the findings found in chapter two, with the integration and study of theoretical frameworks seeking to explore means by which disempowerment may be reversed in relating to factors that encourage a street lifestyle for young people in Guatemala whilst making them, in many cases, powerless.
- Chapter four concludes the dissertation by evaluating the findings and recommending further research topics that could be investigated as a result of this study.

Chapter 1

Data Collection and Methodology

1.1 Undertaking of the Literature Search

Initially a preliminary literature research was carried out using various internet and online database search engines. This was done using key words involving the theoretical frameworks that are central to my study. Carrying out the literature search gave me foundational principles for the methodology that my research question is based on. Analysing the literature available helped highlight the work that has been carried out thus far on empowerment, youth participation and agency. From a personal point of view it was refreshing to see academic literature and debates come alive in the field.

1.2 Collection of Primary Research

Primary research collection was carried out in Guatemala throughout a two month period during June and July 2012. It was a moderate amount of time to assess the work of YAPG thus far and to build friendships which in response ultimately aided the quality of my research. Of course having more time to investigate would have helped the quantity, quality and accuracy of my work, however I thought the time spent was adequate to carry out the level of analysis I sought to achieve.

The two sides to my primary research included 1) the observation and 2) the involvement of participants. Participation implies the 'involvement by a local population and, at times, additional stakeholders in the creation, conduct and content of a program or policy designed to change their lives. Built on a belief that citizens can be trusted to shape their own future, participatory development uses local decision making and capacities to steer and define the nature of an intervention' (Jennings, 2000). The participants involved were a part of the events I studied and have contributed significantly to the outcome of my work.

As a foreigner and newcomer into the participant's lives my participation was at times limited. This felt so in the first three to four weeks as I found myself focussing more on building genuine relationships with those I came into contact with, especially so as I will be working with them in the longer-term. I was hesitant at first to take notes in their presence, ask for permission to reference them and to photograph them. As time went on I found myself surprised by how eager the YAPG young adults were to have their stories recorded and opinions heard. As friendships between us developed the young adults became more enthusiastic and open towards contributing to my research. In addition there were also some who, although not having known the individual for very long, were

very keen to speak and have their opinions heard. It often felt like my presence acted as an opportunity for stories to be told in the hope that positive intervention and action would take place.

In the majority, research was collected in the form of observation and informal one-to-one conversations. I attended two monthly meetings with those who are part of YAPG. I found that a group dynamic had both its advantages and disadvantages. In groups a high abundance of data could be collected. However I found that in one-to-one conversations participants spoke with more intensity, honesty, passion and feeling.

1.3 Anthropological Distinctions between Childhood and Adulthood

In this study on whether disempowerment can be reversed among marginalised young people entering adulthood it is important to both distinguish and link the roles of the child and adult given that the question focuses on such a transition between these two different stages in one's lifetime.

Ideas about children, childhood, and the processes by which when a child becomes a fully socialised, adult human being are found in much anthropological work. Such ideas have become central among anthropologists in understanding the nature of childhood in its difference to adulthood across global societies. With an abundance of anthropological literature increasingly recognising children as 'agents' (Aries, 1996; James and Prout, 1997; Kehily, 2008) the identification of what actually constitutes and differentiates an adult and a child in that respect has become less apparent.

Although, as mandated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child a child is anyone below the age of eighteen, it is in classifying the roles that children and adults each have that is important. Throughout the transition from childhood to adulthood are ideas of how responsibility and empowerment are at the heart of it. Academics and practitioners are increasingly recognising the value in giving children more freedom and responsibility in participating in activities. Many are recognising that the involvement of children in developmental projects and community life can reveal new perspectives on challenges and obstacles that may not have come about without their participation.

With such a shift increasingly taking place amongst literature and practice it is becoming more difficult to distinguish an actual point of difference where a change occurs at a moment in time between the roles of children and adults as a transition takes place. With children having increased responsibility and becoming more empowered as they progress throughout childhood, such a line of thinking and practice may help aid the transition as it takes place as many will recognise that such a change needs to be smooth and managed carefully

as opposed to occurring in a short quantity of time, which could subsequently present a risk to the individual embarking upon their journey of adulthood.

Chapter 2

Contributing Factors towards Developing a Street Lifestyle

For a study that seeks to analyse whether disempowerment can be reversed among marginalised young adults in Guatemala it is important to understand the contributing factors that can encourage, push and pull young people into a street lifestyle development and absorption into gang culture. Such a connection needs to be made to understand the potential dangers and demands involved facing young adults and their personal futures. Learning about and discovering these key factors will help provide information to begin engaging with the theoretical frameworks of reversing the process of disempowerment within such a population. I argue that young adults are at an age where an 'energy' is ready to be encountered, formulated and channelled. Throughout this chapter I will highlight the key external constraints and factors that intrude upon desired freedoms and accessibilities to an empowered and influential lifestyle for older adolescents and young people.

The issues surrounding what causes children, adolescents and young adults to leave their homes is complicated to understand. Factors can be identified and investigated and other forms of theorising can be undertaken however a simple answer is rarely the result. A common question I have been asked is 'why are there children and young people living on the streets?' People are interested to know what motivates them to be there. There have been moments where I have responded with a fast and easy answer referring to either poverty or family issues and then other moments where I have had little insight to give. Raffaelli (1997, 90) writes, 'Although poverty is seen as the underlying cause of the street youth phenomenon, little is known about the factors that lead children onto different pathways once they are exposed to the street environment.' It is arguably unknown whether and is unlikely that the factors outlined in this chapter will cover every causal possibility for every feasible scenario, however each will simply act as a guideline for possible reasons and motives, thus acting as a guide to investigating possible rationales for why adolescents and eventually young people develop such lifestyles.

2.1 Factors Emanating from Guatemalan History

Civil War

Following on from Guatemala's "genocide-filled" history - as labelled by many as a result of the "scorched earth" policies - after a thirty-six year-old civil war mostly fought between the government and various rebel groups mainly supported by Maya indigenous people and poor peasants which ended in 1996, despite peace accords having been signed the continuity in violence from the war is still being wielded by the military as a political

weapon with which to remain in power. Chamarbagwala and Moran (2010, 2) in reference to countries coming out of civil war write, 'While death, injury, destruction and displacement caused by war end once peace is restored, there may be lasting adverse effects on poverty, inequality, health, education, and human capital.'

The Guatemalan army has historically resisted efforts to curb their power. The civil war granted the military with an opportunity to substantiate and broaden the scope of its operations and increase their presence in nearly every part of the country, including the rural highlands. In the aftermath of the civil war, social structures were reformed however they reflected the logic of warfare and suppression of democratic elements by the military. Schirmer (1998, 9) writes, 'Each threat came to represent an opportunity for the military to consolidate as an institution and to expand its power.' Using violence as a means of remaining in power has been a long standing goal of the Guatemalan state. Thus, by maintaining a climate of violence the military apparatus will always have its place in Guatemala as long as the current power structure remains.

Illegitimacy

The role of illegitimacy in contributing to child homelessness and wandering is an important topic given its ever-continuing position in Latin American social history. Many children in Latin America are forced, due to abandonment, to turn to scavenging and begging and are frequently referred to as —*niños vagos* (wandering children). Milanich (2002, 73) informs us that some Latin American communities had rates as high as fifty percent of out-of-wedlock born children, while European illegitimacy rates were as low as one or two percent in England and as high as nine percent in France.

Maria Emma Mannarelli, a Peruvian historian, states that vagrancy was, in part, a natural consequence to the stigmatization that illegitimate children received. She also argues that illegitimate children had a much higher abandonment rate than their natural counterparts. She asserts that the reasons behind the high illegitimacy rates in Lima, in part, are that of a weakened economy and economic difficulties among those residents of colonial Lima. Mannarelli claims that illegitimacy discouraged the formation and development of strong nuclear families and that this in turn motivated to a certain degree casual relationships. She states that the outcomes were illegitimate children (1993, 162-163). Although this is a case study from Peru, it could be argued that the same logic may apply to Guatemala and other Latin American countries.

It can be construed that children born out-of-wedlock are more prone to abandonment and negligence due to an abundance of social pressures placed upon mothers and fathers of such children. Burch (2009, 64) writes that 'the consequences were very serious for children who were procreated out of such relationships, as many of

them would be placed into children homes and later, in adolescence (if they survived that long), tended to migrate into street vagrancy.'

While other factors are acknowledged as key issues for why children are abandoned, illegitimacy appears to be a significant contributing force.

2.2 Power Keeping the Poor Powerless

In investigating the contributing factors involved in encouraging a street lifestyle it is of great importance to take regard to the topic of power. It is necessary to examine where issues of power stand and fit in relation to the contributing factors that are disempowering marginalised young people on their journeys into adulthood. I believe that social powerlessness is a fundamental driver through which poverty cycles are maintained and continue to grow and develop.

The state of powerlessness continues to put different population groups at risk today. Young Guatemalan people continue to experience powerlessness in various areas of their lives in their transition to adulthood. Jayakumar Christian defines the traditional understanding of power as – 'the capacity of some persons within a social relationship to be in a position to carry out their own will toward creating intended and foreseen effects on others despite resistance' (1999, 11). Christian is asserting that social power is a relationship between humans where one gains advantage above another. Depending upon the actions of those with power carrying out their own will, the consequences of such a relationship leaves those with less power and without the ability to resist in positions that are unfair. Young adults that have spent their childhood and adolescence living on the street are well aware of powers that have pushed and pulled them into unfavourable situations and undesired outcomes resulting in them being where they are and becoming who they are today. Christian describes such people as being in a state of 'powerlessness', of which he describes as 'an ongoing process of disempowerment' (1999, 157). A comment by Ricardo who was nineteen years old, was particularly eye opening as he discussed his feelings about this issue: *"Te sientes afligido, como ya no tienes ganas de hacer nada, todos mis deseos se han ido"* (you feel afflicted, like you don't have a desire anymore, all my desires have gone) (Translation mine) (Ricardo (pseudonym) street-living young adult, 12 July 2012). This helps to illustrate the feelings taking place as power is taken away resulting in a loss of ambition and motive in a young person's life.

The issue of who holds and exercises influence over power within a society is not a new concern among development practitioners. The debate on causes of poverty has been continually enriched by the contributions of Robert Chambers who has been integral in differentiating between poverty and powerlessness. Chambers

urgently advocates that re-examining the causes of poverty must be done from the perspective of the poor, although Chambers in referring to Paulo Freire and his followers in Latin America and elsewhere states that this practice has been taking place over decades of history (1997, 206). Chambers' reflections on the "deprivation trap" – poverty, isolation, powerlessness, vulnerability and physical weakness – provide a helpful tool for understanding the complex nature of the causes of poverty (1983, 112).

John Friedmann also investigated the theoretical foundations for an alternative approach to development in proposing the (dis)empowerment model. In the (dis)empowerment model Friedmann defined poverty 'as lack of access to bases of social power.' In using the household as the basic political and economic unit, he identified eight bases of social power - 'the principal means available to a household economy in the production of its life and livelihood: financial resources, social networks, appropriate information, surplus time over subsistence requirement, instruments of work and livelihood, social organisation, knowledge and skills, and defensible life space.' In this model Friedmann defines empowerment as 'the movement of the poor from abject poverty – lack of access to these bases of social power – to complete access to all eight bases of power' (Friedmann, 1992, 67).

Friedmann further writes that disempowering processes come from political powers in the form of political corruption and dictatorships. He states that these can increase the powerlessness of ordinary citizens that are not aligned with the ruling power (1992, 30). Most often this involves the poor, those whom are very often excluded from economic and political power, who are the essence of a 'systematic disempowerment' (1992, 30). Burch asserts that this concerns itself with more than just power within the political realm. He states that political power is much more than just the right to vote but includes the freedom to having a voice and collective action as a community (2009, 81). Marginalised young adults living in and experiencing desperate situations are frequently victims of disempowerment. This resulting powerlessness then creates a state in which young people become more fragmented from the community to which they belong.

2.3 Street Lifestyle Development

The phrase *street lifestyle development* was created and used by Greg Burch in his research into *Protagonismo Infantil* (Child Protagonism) in the lives of Latin American street children. In using the phrase, Burch seeks to emphasise that those who live on the street (and those who work in a street environment) develop a lifestyle of street-living and working, instead of just simply deciding one day to move and remain there (2009, 177). Burch writes that such children over time 'grow in their existence on the street.' He writes about this including a progression which includes an introduction to earning money on the street, sleeping on the street, disregarding family ties (although certainly not always), drug abuse (in some cases), delinquent behaviour, etc. Those in

Guatemala I encountered who work with children and youth on the street recognise this street lifestyle development process. This was also validated by those involved with prevention projects – drop-in centres of attention and day-care projects. On a short visit to Guatemala in 2008 I met a boy called Pedro (pseudonym) (aged fourteen) living in a children’s home. He had previously spent his life on and off the street developing the characteristics mentioned above. Over time, as Pedro kept returning to street-living, the pull to return to the street kept growing stronger and stronger. Shortly after I left Guatemala in 2008 he was back on the streets and to our understanding has stayed there since. Each time he moved back to the streets his street lifestyle development grew. The further a child or young person develops their street lifestyle, the harder it is to leave the streets. According to Sexton:

It has been proven again and again that the longer a child is on the streets, the harder it is for them to leave the streets. Also if a long-term street child can leave the streets, then the longer they have been on the streets, the stronger the pull to return. (2004, 10)

As a child or young person develops a street lifestyle a clear progression can be identified. The individual may move from wearing clean clothes to dirty ones, from being a non-glue sniffing user to beginning the use of glue. Understanding the factors that are connected with the development of this lifestyle will help formulate different strategies, projects and interventions that seek to encounter such states of risk at an early stage. Such a theory illustrates the internal battle marginalised children and youth in Guatemala and across Latin America face in response to being pushed and pulled to and away from living a street lifestyle.

2.4 Push and Pull Factors

Rizzini, Irene & Udi Mandel Butler (2003, 11) state that studies from Latin America describe the process of street involvement as a gradual one, with both practitioners and researchers often looking to the interaction of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. The push and pull model is not limited to research on street youth but is also frequently utilised in dealings with poverty, urban studies and educational issues.

PUSH AND PULL THEORY

(Anderson, 2001; Lusk, Peralta and Vest, 1989)

Push	Pull
Broken homes	Gangs and organised crime
Political forces	Opportunities
Natural calamities	Income
Economics	Freedom
Spiritual failure	
Exploitation and abuse	
Neglect	

Listed above are a collection of push and pull factors I observed as a result of encounters with different groups of street-living youths. One of the stronger factors is the influence of gangs and other organised crime in pulling youth towards developing a street lifestyle. A local Guatemalan, Cesar Garcia with his own street outreach programme - *Tiempo de Rescate*, who has been working with street children and older youth for nine years, described to me the linkages between how the civil war, although having finished in 1996, has impacted upon present day Guatemalan gang culture. Garcia stated that although the civil war had officially terminated, that Guatemala has since continued to be in a social war between gang members and communities. Garcia highlighted the three main reasons for gang activity and members growing since 1996 - a lack of job opportunities for ex-military from the war, rural to urban migration, and orphaned children taking to street living. Each of these three reasons interlinks as well as stand on their own. For example a lack of job opportunities in rural areas resulted in migration to cities, and migration to cities would not always lead to a better standard of living resulting in many taking to living on the streets.

Such scenarios put many in conditions where power would repeatedly be taken away. Garcia stated that for many in Guatemala survival is always the priority. A study conducted by researchers at the Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública (IUDOP) revealed a partial correlation between youth unemployment and gang memberships, as only 17 per cent of gang members were employed, and 66 per cent actively characterized themselves as 'unemployed' (Santacruz Giralt and Concha-Eastman, 2001). Stereotypical 'determinants' involving participation in gang membership such as family fragmentation, domestic abuse, or a particular psychological makeup are not consistently significant, and the only factor that has been reported as systematically affecting gang membership is religious, insofar as evangelical Protestant youths tending not to join gangs (Rodgers, 2006, 273). With such sought after key services (job availability and education) in order to provide a source of living not adequately in

existence the inevitable response is for many youth and young people to take up activities where power could be attained and survival accomplished.

Such external constraints placed upon Guatemala's marginalised youth population have had significant effects on the countries' poorer communities. Lisett Ordoñez, now part of YAPG, brought up in one of the six most notably renowned dangerous zones in Guatemala City with gang activity taking place, now aged nineteen, told me first-hand about how appealing gang life can seem to children. "*Las pandillas ofrecen una sensación engañosa de seguridad y de pertenencia a los niños que viven en la calle, que a menudo han sido rechazados por sus propias familias*" (Gangs offer a deceptive sense of safety and belonging to street children, who have often been rejected by their own families) (Translation mine) (Ordoñez, 27 July, 2012). Ordoñez told me about challenges that herself and her friends faced in their community throughout their childhoods. She and her friends were often asked to deliver and collect suspicious packages in return for rewards such as money, sweets, food as well as security and protection provided by gang members. She expressed to me the great value children hold to gang members in order for their activity to be carried out. Ordoñez highlighted that with children living in hostile family environments this often resulted in cravings for new family and friends where love and recognition can be felt and experienced, however this would often ultimately lead to more exploitation, abuse and a life-long commitment to gang brutality. Ordoñez outlined that overall this process illustrates a clear picture of marginalised children acting as suffering victims of their own powerlessness, notably emphasising their lack of agency and ability to seek direction for a way out. She continued, stating that they simply enrol on the conveyor belt that leads them and their own subsequent generations towards a future of taking part in gang activity and organised crime unless a significant intervention is encountered and provides a successful outcome.

It is also important to note that while not as frequent, there are some practitioners and researchers who have concluded that at least some children and youth have opted for the street desiring a fun or adventuresome experience. For the groups of street-living youth that I visited, shame was a state of identity they could not escape from. However Thomas Stodulka, in his research on street youths in Indonesia notes the influential impact that solidarity in a group can have - 'Through solidarity, the negative emotions of shame and loneliness can be replaced by the positive emotion of collective pride' (2009, 339).

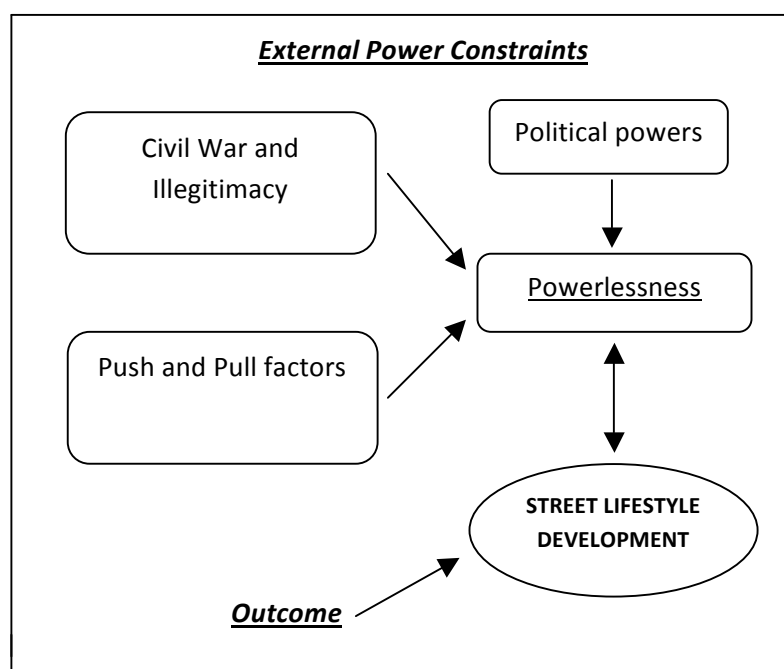
Burch (2012, 69) in making a key point notes that some academics theorising on the factors that have contributed to the street lifestyle refuse to speculate on the causes as much as the choices. For example, Hecht strays from using the wording – what causes street children, but says, 'I have thus replaced extensive speculation

about the causes of street children with a wider examination of the alternative – staying at home, where home is a shack and home life is steeped in hunger, deprivation, and violence’ (1998, 25).

Many who have written about the causal factors of the lifestyles of street children and youth recognise that they, in most cases, do not deserve the blame for their lifestyle. This is not to fully discount the possibility that some have made intentional decisions to live on the street, but most acknowledge that children and youth are forced by their powerlessness to a street life due to a certain extent as a result of incontrollable wider circumstances and powers.

Chapter 2: Key Summary Points

- In seeking to analyse the (dis)empowered nature of marginalised young adults in Guatemala it is important to understand the contributing factors that can encourage, push and pull young people into a journey of street lifestyle development and absorption into gang culture.
- The chasing of power with selfish habits to satisfy oneself by those who are able to is the groundwork upon which Guatemala’s social problems have been and are being built.
- Social powerlessness is currently keeping generations of marginalised Guatemalan youth in poverty cycles leaving them increasingly disempowered and vulnerable.



Chapter 3

Youth Participation: Integrating Agency and Empowerment into groups of Marginalised Young Adults

This chapter investigates how these power constraints on young Guatemalan people could be reversed. This will be carried out by analysing relevant literature and applying it to the findings found in chapter two, with the integration and study of certain theoretical frameworks seeking to explore means by which disempowerment may be reversed in relating to factors that encourage a street lifestyle for young people in Guatemala. Over time development practitioners have been sorely handicapped by the absence of well-taught and sufficiently adequate, scholarly, compassionate and readable texts that focus on the powerless, oppressed and marginalised state of the world's poor. In this current age the international development community are increasingly exploring the ideas of and learning that responses to the powerlessness of the poor need to be practical, contextually appropriate, empowering and transformational. This has caused Non-Governmental Organisations, worldwide development institutions, social movements, donor agencies, researchers and other practitioners to increasingly consider implementing more participatory and empowering methods of practice which in turn is shaping worldwide policy in delivering services. Carrying out such methods of practice have resulted in extremely pressing questions being asked about how different kinds of knowledge and values are shaping the rules of policy choices –

What are the societal and political processes through which power operates that inform whose voice is heard and whose is excluded? This then leads to asking what is power? Is it just about someone making other people act against their best interests? Or, is it also the glue that keeps society together? What are the connections between power and social change? (Eyben, Harris & Pettit, 2006, 1)

These are huge questions that bring up many themes, asking and testing whether those in power are acting within ways that benefit those who are marginalised. Eyben, Harris and Pettit directly point the finger at those responsible for societal and political processes, seeking to convict such people in response to the decisions they make. This chapter, as Eyben, Harris and Pettit likewise seek to find out, investigates the connections between power and social change in influencing and empowering the lives of young adults in Guatemala.

3.1 Fostering Youth Engagement in Community Change

The second key principle of YAPG is that of encouraging young people to engage with and participate in community work opportunities. In 1975, the National Commission on Resources for Youth in the United States defined youth participation as:

...Youth participation is the involving of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequence is extended to others— i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves. Other desirable features of youth participation are provision for critical reflection on the participatory activity³ and the opportunity for group effort toward a common goal.

Matheson (2010, 31) writes about poverty not just acting as an economic catastrophe, but from the perspective that it isolates, disempowers and marginalises. Matheson argues that all people need relationship to be fully human. Therefore a key part of the work of YAPG is to build supportive relationships and foster community. This integrates fully into the ethos behind what youth participation tries to achieve. YAPG believes that ‘the involvement of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs,’ as quoted above, will be both mutually beneficial to the young adults’ own personal development as well as the improvement of others’ well-being.

Chapter two identified some of the contributing factors involved in encouraging street lifestyles in the lives of young people in Guatemala. With such strong push and pull factors in existence, as illustrated in section 2.4, this magnifies the challenge in place when seeking to integrate an engagement of Guatemalan youth to take part in community change. Garcia spoke with me about the temptations that young people, that even those who are part of YAPG, face on a daily basis. He illustrated this to me by listing the financial rewards of which he is aware of that are given out for taking part in certain gang activities and how this could impact upon one young adult in particular who is part of YAPG with challenging responsibilities in terms of economically providing for his four younger siblings and baby niece. Garcia expressed his sadness that even those with the best of intentions for a good future for themselves and those closest to them are persistently faced with a tempting way out. Again, as always, Garcia pointed the blame not at the vulnerable individuals but to the powers that force young people to take such action in order to win survival for themselves and others. It becomes clear that with this illustration as well as with other influential factors that the challenge involved in engaging with and empowering marginalised young adults in Guatemala represents a huge test. However despite the challenge, Garcia emphasised the great value in working with such a group because of the potentially huge benefits that can be achieved as a result of an investment, especially with those who live so close to and have experience in the familiarity of local community

³ This definition refers to young people drawing upon group effort to work together towards a common goal. This will be further elaborated upon and investigated in section 3.3 - Action Learning: Learning Communities and Community Development.

activity⁴. Garcia himself is an operator in not just carrying out his own work with street-living youth but also in training others to do so. It was exciting for him to share his vision with me for how he seeks to integrate his project - *Tiempo Rescate* - with the young people who are part of YAPG in encouraging participation in community work in working alongside marginalised Guatemalan youth.

Providing youth engagement opportunities allow youth to contribute to their own development by learning and applying life skills. Curnan and Hughes (2002, 27) write about the importance of youth contributing to the development of their communities by designing solutions to address local issues. Such practice involves youth developing goals, aims, focus and meaning – characteristics of which are often lost in marginalised Guatemalan youths as they finish (if they get that far) or drop out of school and suffer from unemployment. Again I refer to Ricardo, a young adult living on the street (see back to section 2.2) who told me about how he has been afflicted and had his desires taken away. His primary hurt is not that of economic poverty but his need for community, direction and relationship. It is important that young people are engaged in contributing to something that fulfils their desires. In accordance Rudduck and Futter (2000, 78) identify how in related studies within the field of education, that researchers have found that students improve academically when teachers provide youth with opportunities to work with them to improve curriculum and instruction, that is, when students are engaged. Such experiences can be a catalyst for young people's sense of belonging within a community.

Hart (1992, 9) acknowledges the caution of youth engagement efforts simply resembling tokenism unless genuine opportunities exist for youth to make decisions and complete meaningful tasks. According to Mueller et al. (2000, 41), youth engagement efforts are more likely to be sustained when adults provide youth with 'developmentally-appropriate tasks which gradually increase in level of responsibility over time.' The transfer of skills between adults and youth is therefore an essentially important process. It is necessary that youth are given time to learn and grow in their roles. Scheve, Perkins and Mincemoyer (2006, 4) write that 'depending on the age and skill level, youth may perform small tasks before being given additional, more complex responsibilities.' Garcia expressed to me his plan in taking the same approach with two young people from YAPG who are showing strong initial interest in working with him with street-living youths. He hopes that one day, after having taken on enough responsibility and experience, that they will be able to carry out their own programme activities with street youths without direct supervision and the potential to start their own projects. Camino (2000, 27-30) writes about this taking place through appropriate guidance and coaching by adults. Camino, in line with Garcia's thinking, writes that adults should assist youth in their responsibilities, with their assistance decreasing as youth's

⁴ Kanter (1995) and Henderson (1996) reflect a sense of how communities must continue to rely on the skills and knowledge of its own residents.

competency and comfort in completing tasks increases – a key practice that YAPG will perform in order to help achieve its principles and vision.

Huebner (1998) expresses the importance that upon completion of tasks it would be beneficial for a time to be scheduled between adults and youth to reflect upon their successes and challenges encountered and to discuss methods in order to make improvements for the future. YAPG recognises the importance of this and in response is consistently in the process of identifying and integrating new mentors. It is important that young adults are not disenchanted by any unexpected or disappointing outcomes but instead, through interaction with mentors, learn how to deal with such failings in a courageous way in order to be trained and to improve as a result of experience.

YAPG's second principle – the facilitation of engagement in community work, has the ability to influence upon the first principle – the personal development of the young adult. Checkoway et al. (2003, 302) state that having opportunities to address community issues and to improve the quality of life for other community members may result in enhancing youth's civic competencies, social networks, and feelings of social responsibility. Both principles of YAPG, as one is developed, has the ability to influence the other.

3.2 Child Empowerment: Influence of *Protagonismo Infantil*

The majority of young adults who are currently part of YAPG are those who have recently left childcare homes. On leaving some will be reintegrated back into living with their families, however others, due to reasons such as being orphaned, abandoned, or continuing family issues that make a reintegration difficult will take up independent living. As a result of my own personal investigation over the last three years, mainly in Bolivia and Guatemala, through personal working relationships and contacts with grassroots projects, day-care centres and childcare homes, the amount of support provided for young people aged eighteen-plus as they leave childcare varied from most often offering little to a small number providing strong and tangible continuing support. Deeper reasoning behind why this is so within grassroots project circles would be worthwhile investigating.

Due to the quality of attention provided in childcare such a group of young people leaving aged eighteen do so with great promise and potential however under economic constraints - whether that involves moving back in with family which is often part of a marginalised environment but especially if undertaking independent living. Many in childcare are brought up in loving and well-educated environments receiving good quality schooling to the extent to which many would successfully undertake university and further study. With such a great investment bestowed by all involved from donors to those running the projects it would somewhat be a waste if

this was not sustained and such children eventually grew up as young adults returning to environments of risk where they struggle to exert influence and instead experience, once again, powerlessness and vulnerability.

An expression gaining ground in Latin American childcare organisations as well as amongst academics and practitioners is that of *protagonismo infantil*, a term that some, while difficult to literally define by the English reader, would describe as 'child empowerment' (Burch, 2009, 132). Liebel, Overwien and Recknagel (2001, 380) in referring to the term define it as being 'used in Latin America {and that it} implies for adults (and their institutions) to respect and support children as equal and essential partners in the organising of their lives.' We generally consider childcare institutions to be owned and run by adults (as identified in the previous definition). However as *protagonismo infantil* desires, it would be better if children could be given greater ownership and responsibility, not just acting as simply beneficiaries in care-giving institutions but also to be empowered as agents of change - being brought up as stakeholders in their communities and having their input and skills heard and utilised. This is what the practice of *protagonismo infantil* seeks to achieve. According to Cussianovich (2001, 166) the following components are considered significant contributors to *protagonismo infantil*: participation, representation, projection, solidarity, self-reflection or identity, autonomy and continuity.

Liebel (2007, 62) writes that for most adults *protagonismo infantil* does not refer to children's autonomy or independence but to their ability to play an active role in the world and to contribute to its change. It is becoming clear that the term appears to be in accordance with the emerging paradigm in recent literature for introducing a participative approach to childhood. A childcare institution actively pursuing such practice is *Mi Especial Tesoro*, a home for teenage girls based in Chimaltenango, Guatemala - for which many of whom were rescued from living on the streets and/or have a history of suffering from various forms of abuse. Cesar and Carol de Lopez, the house-parents and founders of the home, described to me their ethos of intervention and about how they carry out such work to achieve the outcomes in the girls' lives that they aspire to occur. While providing the necessary care and attention that is regularly required Cesar and Carol both recognise the impact of how other forms of activity can help with the girls' journey of rehabilitation while at the same time benefiting the lives of others. *Mi Especial Tesoro* has its own educational project whereby the girls, with help and coordination from Cesar and Carol, go twice a week to give school classes at the local city rubbish dump where children spend each day of the week working and scavenging with their parents. This is the only form of schooling education the children at the rubbish dump receive. As well as the obvious benefit to the children at the dump, the girls from *Mi Especial Tesoro* are learning from, implementing and reflecting upon skills practiced and are gaining in confidence and leadership.

Cesar and Carol informed me that many of the girls when initially moving into the home do so with a great sense of low self-esteem, hurt, apprehension, uncertainty and depression. They told me the girls are often very dependent upon being recipients of attention, love and support, as would be expected. The thought that they could do something to give and contribute to another person's well-being simply wouldn't enter their thoughts and if it did would be a very abstract and overwhelming concept. However in response to taking part in the project each of the girls have continued to grow in motivation, responsibility and enthusiasm, with them encouraged that they possess confidence and the ability to exert their own skills to help better the lives of others in need. Cesar and Carol described such a process as a key instigator in the progression whilst on the steps to rehabilitation for each of the girls' lives and state that as a result the influence had on the girls by participating in the activities of the project has been extremely positive. Such activity is a great illustration of what successfully carried out *protagonismo infantil* methodology can achieve. Lisett Ordoñez, as referenced to in chapter two is a 19 year-old young adult on the core team of YAPG who lived in *Mi Especial Tesoro* for two years, has obtained the resources necessary and drawn on help from volunteers within her local community to run her own project for 50 children in her local area in a zone with high gang crime and other influential factors encouraging the development of street lifestyles. Such a story is of great testimony to the work and influence of *Mi Especial Tesoro* and YAPG.

For children in childcare to develop such levels of agency, responsibility and confidence throughout childhood and adolescence it is important this is built on and sustained as they leave aged eighteen and embark on a transition to adulthood and experience and encounter the subsequent changes that follow, rather than falling back into conditions of risk without opportunities to fulfil personal goals and ambitions. Such a scenario would put to waste the personal development assembled and would halt the young persons' learning journey. Since its inauguration *Mi Especial Tesoro* has committed itself to providing various levels of support required for girls that leave once aged eighteen. Cesar and Carol de Lopez have carried out the assistance needed to those that have left in the past to help them integrate back into society and begin adulthood successfully. They have identified the need for sustained attention though with a healthy balance of allowing enough space for the young adult to become increasingly independent over time.

Stern, Dethier and Rogers (2005) write about the importance of having a good 'investment climate' of which they describe as 'the policy, institutional, behavioural, and physical environment – that influences the perceived risks and returns associated with investment.' Studying the investment climate can bring forth views about, as Stern, Dethier and Rogers describe it, 'the barriers to productivity,' of which as depicted in this paper are many for young Guatemalan adults. The authors continue - 'An investment climate that discourages entrepreneurship and innovation is typically less open to new entrants – yet it could be considered "good" by existing firms precisely

because they are protected from potential competition.’ Has Guatemala, inadvertently or not, created itself an environment where the investment climate is elusive to marginalised but gifted young adults, leaving perhaps only the economically fortunate individuals to prosper? It is important that the formalities and trends of this climate created is studied, challenged and where possible, acted upon for the benefit of marginalised groups such as young adults as they reintegrate back into Guatemalan society on leaving childcare. In the third and final section of this chapter I will write about how an investment climate with an endorsement of action learning-accredited qualifications could help initiate transformation in the lives of Guatemalan young adults and subsequently others in their communities.

3.3 Action Learning: Learning Communities and Community Development

On reflection of the state of Guatemalan youth and young adults living in marginalised areas under challenging circumstances and conditions whilst participating amongst the powers that rule them, it can be strongly argued that this is stimulated by a sheer lack of opportunities for personal growth and change from that of which the investment climate, especially within the formal job sector, offers. Such marginalised Guatemalan youth are at risk with many disempowered, unmotivated and without any personal goals or aims. Without such future hope, a street lifestyle and participation in gang activity become opportunities to obtain and achieve the empowerment, goals, aims and hope that so many long for, as well as a chance for survival. Some of the young adults who are part of YAPG that I conversed with testified to this with a few, especially the boys, frightened by the prospect of becoming overcome by the temptation to engage in gang activity in order to survive and to help provide for family and loved ones. Although they acknowledged that they are responsible for the consequences of their own decisions and actions it is clear that the influences they have upon them make choices difficult.

If the energy and potential that young people possess is going to be used in a positive way, a receiving investment climate needs to be available and ready. YAPG seeks to function to help facilitate the engagement of young people to assist in developing and sustaining their communities. The works of Kanter (1995) and Henderson (1996) reflect a sense of how communities must continue to rely on the skills and knowledge of its residents. This is important as the skills and values of residents that have grown up in the community will need to be utilised as well as those of newcomers who may have experiences and perspectives from other places. Moore and Brooks (2000, 3) write about the power of locals and new residents together having a wealth of information, skills, knowledge and strategies for learning that can be shared and forged into a powerful force for community development. Freire writes –

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can

better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. (1996, 27)

Reginald Revans, the originator of Action Learning, strongly held that the key to betterment does not lie with 'experts' but with practitioners themselves. Therefore he devised Action Learning as a process whereby the participant studies his or her own actions and experiences in conjunction with others in small groups called Action Learning sets with a learning coach assisting the group (1982). That way a healthy environment of networking is created whereby knowledge of creative ways to develop communities can be planned and carried out by community youth and its residents.

The findings in chapter two help illustrate a type of society that is built as youth and young people strive to survive, to satisfy their needs and obtain a hopeful future in an environment where one is somewhat powerless to have a positive effect on themselves and others due to uncontrollable influential forces. In an informal interview with Mario Larios, Director of the El Shaddai Institute of Leadership, he affirmed the great need for Guatemala to have programmes available on a wide scale that are accessible to marginalised young adults. Larios believes this is important so that a young generation can be mobilised and empowered to be the instigators of positive change in Guatemala. He also anticipated that with such opportunities for young people to channel focus and energy that another possible positive outcome could be the decrease in crime and gang activity, of which as illustrated in chapter two are present areas of key concern. Larios believes the development, accreditation and use of Action Learning sets and qualifications could be fundamental building blocks for youth and residents of marginalised communities to transform themselves and those around them.

In informal conversations with Dr Richard Teare, President of the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) web: www.gullonline.org, we conversed about the necessity for a change in the behaviours and habits of marginalised groups and the powerful importance of such individuals working together in order to help community transformation ultimately occur. Marginalised groups often find themselves in a cycle of poverty that from their position they find extremely difficult to break out of by lacking in the personal motivational abilities to do so. Freire (1996, 26) in referring to the world's oppressed writes about the 'dehumanization' of those whose humanity has been stolen, and in the same vein to those (the oppressors) who 'dehumanize the oppressed.' Freire (1996, 86) continues in claiming that the oppressed 'perceive reality as dense, impenetrable, and enveloping.' He then goes on to state that it is then therefore important to tackle this in proceeding by means of abstraction. It is essential then that in order to start, marginalised Guatemalan youth must become invigorated, excited and empowered so that to begin the transformation of themselves. It is clear that this is the point where such a process must begin. Dr Richard Teare, with experience from his work with GULL over the last five years

since its beginning, stresses that it is such change in behaviours and habits that are always fundamental to initiating a personal and community-based growth and development. By accrediting individuals, communities and organisations for the sustainment of learning and application of outcomes using Action Learning, GULL has witnessed transformation in the lives of those living in communities in impoverished regions across the world. In doing so GULL offers a credible alternative to traditional learning and education - that of which is accessible to all individuals from any background. GULL does this by providing 'active' learning with pathways to professional certification which are each aligned with the learners' level of life experience and workplace or community role. Dr Richard Teare on the GULL website writes about the power of individuals meeting together –

Nothing is more powerful than people working together to better themselves, solve problems and create stronger societies for their families and future generations. Typically, action learning occurs when people learn from each other, create their own resources, identify their own problems and form their own solutions.

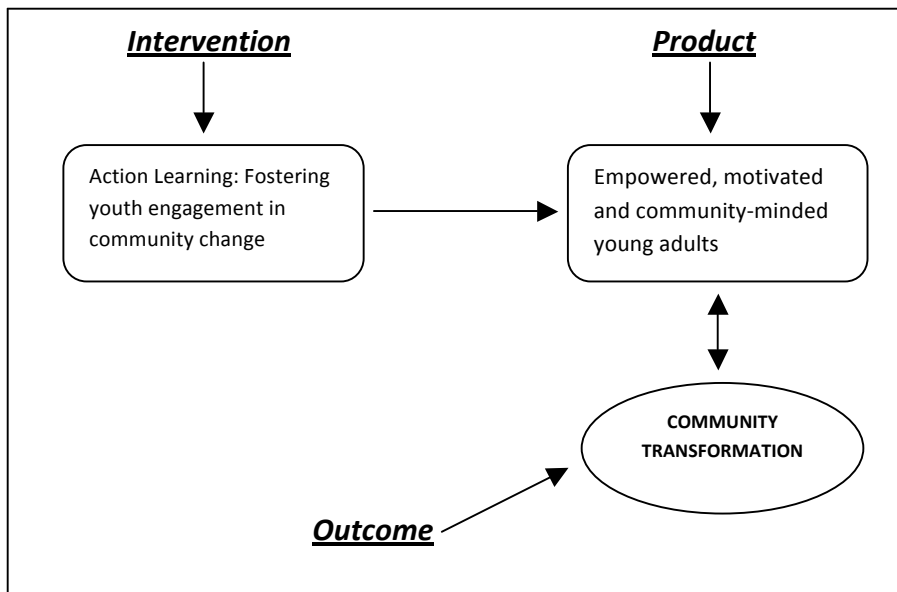
Such an approach in working with marginalised young adults could have a great impact on achieving YAPG's two principles. Furthermore it provides us with a powerful message in encouraging investment as within a period of perhaps two years, a sponsored young adult's value will have risen dramatically. After two years the young adult will hopefully have grown from a vulnerable, disempowered and unmotivated individual without a strong hope for a successful future into a confident and strong-willed person taking on responsibility and having not only bettered their own life but also the lives of others. At this point the young adult could be in a strong position in having the ability to find a good job in the formal sector or instead be creating jobs perhaps through microenterprise opportunities. Of course, as illustrated in chapter two and throughout the study, there are huge challenges, barriers and temptations to overcome, however with the correct attention, facilitation and application from willing local residents and mentors disempowerment could be reversed among marginalised young adults in Guatemala.

Nobody liberates anybody else, and nobody liberates themselves all alone. People liberate themselves with fellowship with each other. (Freire, 1996)

Chapter 3: Key Summary Points

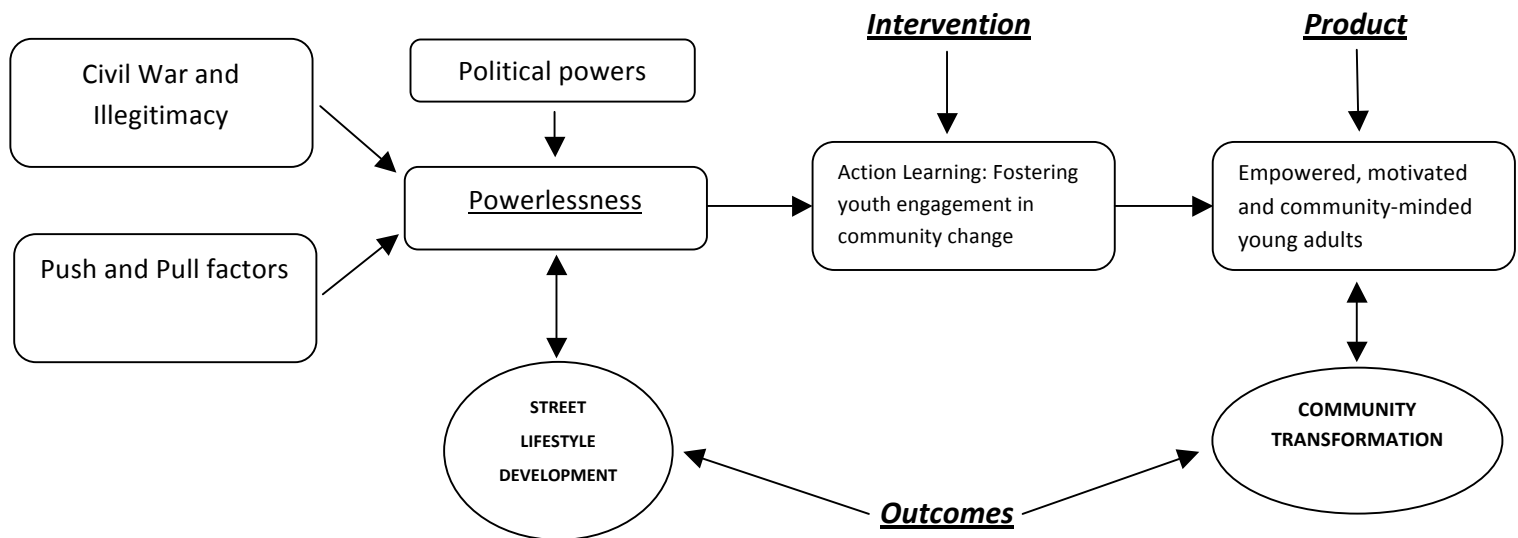
- The involvement of young adults in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs is beneficial to both the personal development of young people involved and the well-being of others. This can be carried out through appropriate guidance by adults through carefully managed coaching and empowerment.

- For children in childcare developing high levels of agency, responsibility and confidence throughout childhood and adolescence it is important this is built on and sustained as they leave childcare to help prevent the possibility of falling back into conditions of risk, vulnerability and disempowerment.
- There is a great power in people working together and learning from each other in striving to achieve community transformation. In doing so individuals are collectively empowered and increase in confidence, personal self-worth and ability.



Conclusion

External Power Constraints



The end of chapter key summary points and the diagram above help illustrate the progression of themes that have been covered throughout this study on whether disempowerment can be reversed among marginalised young Guatemalan people entering adulthood. Firstly I gave an overview of some contributing factors that challenge the healthy transition from childhood to adulthood and on the contrary encourage a development of a street lifestyle which in turn leads young people to powerlessness, vulnerability and into a cycle of poverty. Secondly I explored some interventions in focussing on how these power constraints could be reversed. This involved fostering youth engagement in community change and undertaking Action Learning by bringing residents of communities together to work with and learn from one another. I propose that this can lead to young people becoming empowered, motivated and influential agents in changing and shaping their communities.

A wide number of topics were covered while at the same time bringing to light areas that would be worth investing upon with further study. An area of great significance worth investigating more would be for childcare homes to consider more carefully the process of reintegrating eighteen year-olds back into families or independent living in order to ensure a sustainable and healthy transition for the young person, thus leaving them in a promising position to continue their development. With more attention placed here the issue of young adults becoming powerless and vulnerable after leaving childcare would be less prominent, however with such a group it is important that their potential is given opportunities to be realised. Secondly it is yet to be known

whether the intervention as illustrated would be suited to working with and empowering street youth. Elements of the study could be incorporated into such work however a great challenge would be anticipated in working with confident and prideful street youth, those of which have been referred to as 'street kings' (Stodulka, 2009). Thirdly a study of the influence of the Guatemalan church and its potential to contribute would be highly appropriate. Guatemalan churches, of which there are an abundance, develop strong networks of local community members. In discussion with local church attendees there is a balance of churches simply focussing on investing in themselves, their own building and institution and others that devote attention to and provide for outside community needs. Pastors, held in an extremely powerful role, take the ultimate decisions on how to utilise church resources. The Guatemalan church therefore presents itself as a potentially positively influential network to bring youth together to take part in community outreach initiatives.

In considering whether the question – 'Youth in Guatemala: Can disempowerment be reversed among marginalised young people entering adulthood?' – has been completely answered I would have to say, not yet. I propose that with the correct execution and application of the principles and methodologies discussed, and in overcoming and developing understanding of the challenges illustrated in chapter two, it can be. In reality this is only so much my investigation thus far can cover. This study was not an examination or impact evaluation as my research was based on a new model that is in its initiation of development. It will operate as a contributor to future work in Guatemala. It will be enlightening to assess the successes, failures and challenges that will emerge over time.

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