Abstract

Mira, Ecuador, is a village which has undergone significant socio-economic change in the past twenty-five years, including the growth of cottage industries and the building of high schools. Although this change initially provided substantial opportunities, young women now coming of age see few options. Public sector jobs have become scarce, and a diploma carries less weight than it once did. Paradoxically, Mira's educational and economic strategies have worked too well, and the usefulness of expanding access to higher education has largely disappeared. Thus, the system which brought such success to the previous generation is now at best unreliable.

The editor of this series wishes to congratulate Amalia Gladhart who, as author of this paper, won the undergraduate award for the 1988-89 Student Paper Competition, sponsored by MSU-WID.

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Limits to Increased Educational Opportunities as a Development Strategy: A Case Study in Ecuador

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LIMITS TO INCREASED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: A CASE STUDY IN ECUADOR

Education has long been considered an important ingredient of development, seen as both a catalyst to and a potential benefit of development not only in the developing world but in already industrialized nations. In the 1800s, for example, education was frequently cited as a crucial element in the industrialization of the United States. Thus, in 1852, the English investigators Sir Joseph Witworth and George Wallis were "thoroughly impressed with the importance of broadly based education ...'so that everybody reads, and intelligence penetrates through the lowest grades of society'" (North 1965:61). Initially, problems of education were viewed primarily in terms of access and resources, as though "enough" education, once provided, would solve a myriad of social ills. During the 1960s it was argued that an educated labor force would be more productive, thus spurring modernization (Lewin 1985:117; Irizarry 1980:338). Lauchlin Currie wrote that "a highly educated people is not only a desirable end product of a high standard of living, but also a cause" (Currie 1966:107). Investment in education at all levels increased, and in many countries the proportion of school-age children enrolled in classes rose markedly. At the same time, in many cases a disproportionate quantity of resources was directed toward providing upper level university education, to the detriment of primary level programs (Jackson 1969:21; Irizarry 1980:340).

Yet while the 1970s brought increasing doubts about education's potential as an "engine of growth," such doubts were voiced primarily within academic circles or international donor agencies, rather than among either the politicians or people of developing countries (Lewin 1985:117-18). In many areas, faith in education persists, and not entirely without reason. Education is seen by many, in both the developing and industrialized worlds, as a means of achieving greater social status and prosperity; "in many developing countries schooling is perceived to be concerned with acquiring and legitimating access to desirable jobs" (120-21). From the policy side, education may be looked on as a clear benefit which government can offer its people. Nevertheless, many developing countries now find themselves burdened with growing numbers of "educated unemployed," a process exacerbated by "the state bureaucracies' excessive employment of university graduates, a factor that stimulates the demand for higher education" (Irizarry 1980:339). Thus, the expansion of educational opportunities has not only been incomplete but also has produced a series of new problems.

Efforts to improve educational opportunities for women and girls have tended to focus on discrepancies between male and female rates of enrollment, literacy, and eventual employment. Thus, girls' school experience has been characterized as "a more restricted participation than that of boys, often broken attendance, an unbalanced distribution among the different types of education, [and] an education which does not have a high market value in active life" (Eliou 1987:60). Moreover, in environments where certificates may be all important, "obtaining the same certificates does not give a guarantee of an equal welcome on the labour market" (ibid.:66). All of these indicies are valid, and certainly social equity cannot be achieved unless women are offered the same opportunities, both in type and number, as are men.

At the same time, it has been pointed out in many instances, that the introduction of new technologies, of which education is a form, has often served to diminish women's status rather than enhance it when those technologies were distributed in accordance with "local cultural values, reflecting male dominance in community affairs rather than female involvement in productive activities" (Bourque and Warren 1987:175). Moreover, it is inaccurate to simply lump all women together as a group suffering educational deprivation. Significantly, "the proportion of girls who are in school can vary more among provinces than among countries taken as wholes" (Bowman and Anderson 1980:25). Rosemary Preston, writing on Ecuador, notes further than not only does education vary between urban and rural areas, but "educational provision within the rural sector varies from place to place both quantitatively and qualitatively" favoring the small town over the village (Preston 1985:93). Adequate treatment of the educational problems of women in the developing world must go beyond merely expanding access at a national level. Educational systems need to be restructured so as to provide not merely degree credentials--a process which necessarily perpetuates itself as ever more people reach previously exclusive certification levels--but genuine opportunities for gainful employment. At the same time, equity demands that ongoing inequalities of educational provision be addressed; herein lies the paradox.

This paper describes a research project carried out in Mira, Ecuador, between January and July 1987--a project which sought to discover and analyze the educational and career options of young people in an environment of rapid change and economic uncertainty.[1] The study suggests some of the limitations of increased provision of education as an ongoing developing strategy. Although the study included men as well as women, my findings are particularly reflective of the problems of women in their twenties, a group which finds itself caught not only in the economic vise of slowing or stalled development, but also in an uncertain social territory that combines aspects of Ecuador's traditional, male-centered culture with a gradually expanding awareness of women's rights and independence.

Mira is a small town in northern Ecuador which has experienced unusual economic development in the past twenty years. Between 1954 and 1975, Mireños were fortunate in being among the first villagers in Ecuador to achieve land reform, and most of the town's 5,000 people are still largely supported by agriculture. Though there is not enough space in this paper to fully analyze the impact of land reform on Mira, the important fact here is that land ownership dramatically improved the economic situation of many Mireños. Another important source of prosperity was the introduction of sweater-knitting as a cottage industry in the mid-1960s. However, today the market for sweaters has to some extent diminished. Many of the Otavalan Indians who used to buy sweaters in Mira now have them knit in and around Otavalo. The larger number of high quality sweaters in the Otavalo market means that fewer tourists make it as far north as Mira. Still, for many women, sweaters remain a profitable venture. In addition, the national prosperity following the oil boom of the 1970s contributed to Mira's growth with the paving of the Panamerican Highway, a branch of which now passes through Mira. This has substantially decreased Mira's isolation; the nearest large city, Ibarra, is now only forty-five minutes away, and the trip to the captial has shrunk from eight hours to three. A further source of new income in the Municipality of Mira, established in 1981 when the town became a county seat, which employs about fifty people.

Education has always been important to Mireños, and this emphasis has developed hand-in-hand with town's improved economic status. Mira is located in the predominantly mestizo province of Carchi, a provice which according to 1974 census data had the country's highest literacy rate, 79.6 percent of the population age ten and over (Preston 1985:95). As they have become more affluent, Mireños have increasingly invested in education. Since the mid-1960s, the town has acquired two colegios (high schools). The Colegio León Ruales, a private Catholic high school, built in 1967, was a victory for Mireños who opposed the bishop's plan to build a girls' primary school. Parents argued that they already had a primary school; moreover, they wanted to educate their sons as well as their daughters. The Colegio Nacional Carlos Míartinez Acosta, a government school, opened in 1971. Both high schools are co-educational. Today, many more students are ale to complete colegio than could do so when high school meant boarding away from home, in Ibarra, El Angel, or Quito, with all the expenses that entailed. Students now come from outlying areas to studying in Mira, either riding the daily bus or, if they live farther away, renting rooms in town. Furthermore, many now go on to the university, either in the capital or in Ibarra.

With these possibilities newly available, the eldest children of the original knitters have found the past twenty years to be a relatively easy path to education and the sought-after puesto seguro or public sector job. However, the youngest children of those knitters, now in their late teens to early twenties, are not experiencing the same easy advancement. This applies to the whole spectrum of young people in Mira today, not only those with well-placed older sibling; it is particularly visible in families where the opportunities seem to have dried up before all the children were taken care of, and before parents, or the children themselves, could think of an alternate plan to replace the first approach that had worked so well.

Methodology

We originally planned to interview the original knitters and their children, later amending this to include other people in their early twenties. I formally interviewed seven women in Mira, ranging in age between twenty and forty years old. Individual interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours, and were based on a questionnaire drawn up by Dr. Peter Gladhart. The questionnaire included questions about family educational levels and goals, who paid for the education of various family members, where they were living and whether they were likely to leave Mira, what changes they had noticed in the town over the past twenty years, and their opinion of those changes. During the interviews I took nearly verbatim notes, which I later analyzed at home. The women I interviewed hold a variety of occupations. Two are employed at the colegios in Mira, one as a laboratory aide, the other as a professor. A third combines part-time teaching with work as a dental technician. Two are housewives, one of them primarily occupied in caring for her young daughter while the other combines a variety of income-generating pursuits, such as raising animals, running a small grocery, and occasional work as a beautician. Finally, two of them were studying: one was a university student in Quito, pursuing a degree in computer programming; the other was about to graduate as a dressmaker through a certificate program in Mira.

These formal interviews were supplemented by participant observation within the community and informal conversations with several friends. Of the past nine years, I have spent nearly two living in Mira and traveling in Ecuador. This time has allowed me to form many friendships and to get to know the town in such a way that I believe the women I interviewed form a representative cross-section. Their attitudes and remarks tended to coincide with what I gathered from general conversation with other members of the community. The ways in which they make decisions and consider options are likely reflective of other women in similar situations. In this essay I also draw on discussions with Dr. Gladhart of our research as it was going on, and on the insights and observations of Emily Winter Gladhart. These interviews and discussions gave me a picture of the ways in which opportunities had changed for young people in Mira, the possibilities now open to them and the ways in which the progress of the past twenty years has shaped their situation. (I have changed the names of people discussed in this paper in order to respect their privacy.)

Initial Results of Mira's Gender Prosperity

Over the past twenty years, rapid social has brought about changes in attitudes. However, because these ideas developed more slowly than the social change which induced them, they were almost outdated by the time they were widely accepted. The idea that one could have a professional career was adopted whole-heartedly by many; that personal initiative might play a decisive role is neither clearly demonstrated by the system nor widely believed by the participants. A great deal of emphasis is still placed on family leverage, and parents continue to play an extensive role in the planning and organization of their children's lives. However today, neither family connections nor personal merit offer any guarantee of success. The opportunities which lead to their older siblings' success are no longer available, but viable alternatives have not yet been developed; this creates an environment of uncertainty and helplessness for many young people now completing their education. They are essentially suspended between the promise of their siblings' progress and the economic realities of the present.

A few years ago, if parents could give their children colegio education, they had given them something valuable and, in a certain sense, complete. The first generation of students to graduate from the Mira colegios found themselves with saleable degrees and fine job prospects. During the period in which these people were looking for jobs, many new teaching positions were being created as Ecuador's military government actively promoted the establishment of more and more schools in rural communities, both primary schools and cicio básico colegios, high schools offering the first three years of instruction. There were also jobs for those with normal school degrees, such as Maria B., a daughter of one of the first knitters, who finished her normalista degree at San Pablo and, after a year of substitute teaching in the neighboring community of El Hato, used her mother's connections to arrange a position in Mira, which she still holds. Others found work with local banks and businesses, as did one young woman who became a bookkeeper at a nearby sugar mill. Early graduates of the national universities had similar good fortune; they are now teachers, doctors, school directors, engineers, and architects. However, Mira was not the only rural town to acquire greater school facilities; a colegio education is now available to a relatively large portion of the population. Thus, a simple bookkeeping degree is no longer

enough. Much like the U.S. experience, the minimum degree required for various categories of jobs has been inflated as more and more of the population achieves the former threshold. Thus, where one could once find a job straight out of colegio, one now has to complete a university degree..

Students graduating from colegio today find themselves in a peculiar situation. The high-status jobs which they have been prepared to expect are no longer available without further study. On the other hand, colegio graduates are cut off from occupations perceived to be below their social positions. Few people praise education for its own sake, as an end in itself education is for a purpose for job, for a particular kind of job. Education is frequently equated with being "cultured," with becoming a person of higher social status who is respected in the community. Having a colegio degree, an individual is too high-status to retreat to agricultural labor. As Inez T. told me, while some students are extremely bright, there are no resources to send them to the university, so, stuck in Mira with only bachilleratos they are forced back to farming. Another woman was horrified when her educated daughter suggested raising cuyes (guinea pigs) for sale. Since such meat has been a traditional delicacy, the venture would likely have have been profitable. However, the mother could not reconcile herself to the idea that her daughter would go back to raising animals, with so much time and money invested in her education.

Even if it were considered socially appropriate for the educated, agriculture is no longer the vialbe option it once was. Though land reform originally provided many families with plots of about five hectares, if these are divided among succeeding generation, they must grow smaller and smaller, less and less able to support families. The government's policy--or non-policy--in the realm of agriculture has led to low and unstable prices, making farming less profitable. Finally, a number of dry years have made recent crops very poor. Still some people do choose this route. Tomás C., who did not finish colegio, is one example. He works his father Juan's land in return for a half-share of the profits. However, Juan C. is a self-made man from El Hato, where he first acquired land as a member of the cooperative that bought part of the El Hato hacienda in the mid-1960s. Since then, through both farming and grain dealing, Juan has managed to buy still more land. Nevertheless, he remains outside the Mira status game in some ways, a game he has never fully learned how to play to his best advantage. For example, when he was able to build a larger house, he moved his family off one of the prestigious main streets to a back street further out of town. When his daughter Carla's election as queen of the village fiestas in 1987 led to accusations of bribery and venemous gossip, the family retreated further. Thus, the social position of his father may have contributed to Tomás choice; his need to support a wife and daughter was doubtless also a factor. It also means Tomás cannot be seen as typical of young Mireños.

Tomás's younger sister Carla has also been able to find herself a good job in Mira without further education, providing an exception to the rule that, with or without a university degree, one must leave Mira in order to find work. Carla is twenty years old and has worked at the Colegio Martinez Acosta as a laboratory aide since July 1986. Her job is to watch over the labs and make sure nothing is broken or stolen. Carla earns 30,000 sucres a month (in July 1987, the exchange rate was US$1.00 = S$192.5; by June 1989, it was US$1.00 = S$500.0). Half of this is her base salary and half a bonus because

of her responsibility: if something is damaged, Carla must pay for it. Carla is also covered by a bond from an insurance company in Ibarra; her father mortgaged a house to provide the S$140,000 for the policy. Carla saves S$1,000 each month through a savings cooperative at the colegio, and because she lives with her parents, who take care of the household expenses, she is able to spend the rest of her money as she likes, making her relatively wealthy. Carla is somewhat unusual in that she got her job through her own efforts, rather than family connections. She had wanted to go to Quito to study medical technology, but her mother insisted she stay in Mira. Bored at home, Carla went to the colegio from which she had graduated in 1985 and asked for a job. She had always gotten along well with the professors there, and they helped her secure the position.

Carla was adamant that she did not want to leave Mira, complaining that Quito was too noisy. Instead, she is now studying for a licenciature (bachelor's degree) in chemistry-biology, through the Universidad Libre de Loja's correspondence program. When she finishes her degree, Carla hopes to stay in Mira as a professor at the same colegio. Though there are still opportunities for colegio graduates to teach in the Oriente, the less developed Amazon provinces of the country, a licenciatura is now required to teach in one of the Mira high schools.

The Universidad Libre is also popular with young married women in Mira who were unable to finish the university in Quito while still single, and it is an option for those who already have jobs and wish to move to a higher pay category. For example, Teresa O., a teacher in El Chincal, near the Colombian border, began work on an English degree through the Universidad Libre. However, the program requires that the student take exams on certain dates at various locations around the country, and Teresa was unable to get permission to leave work for that purpose and gave up studying. Flor N., another knitter's daughter, completed her degree with the Uiversidad Libre while working as a secretary at the Colegio Martinez Acosta. Now that she is a licenciada she has become a professor, jumping several pay categories as well as enjoying higher status.

Where People Study

Most Mireños who attend the university go to one of three major schools in Quito: the Universidad Central, the Universidad Católica, or the Universidad Polytécnica. The Central, with about forty thousand students, is by far the largest. Education is essentially free, costing only a minimal matriculation fee of S$1500. However, many people complain of the political nature of the Centra. Oscar N., in his fifth year of the six-year civil engineering program, complained that while the engineering program had been the best in the country when he began, it had deteriorated because of many unqualified professors receiving political appointments. In addition, many complain that students are encouraged to riot; university students frequently participate in demonstrations. As a public university, the Central also has budgetary problems; in 1987 it closed for three months when workers went on strike to protest a four-month backlog in unpaid salaries. Because of the climate of political opposition on campus, the conservative government of President León Febres Cordero found it in its best interest that the university remain closed, and solutions were not sought as promptly as they might have been.

To avoid the upheavals of the Central, some Mireños choose the Polytécnica, believing it far less likely to close, and less likely to experience political disruption. Though fees are considerbly higher at the Ploytécnica, many argue that it is less expensive in the long run, both because programs are shorter and because it is less likely to shut down. Some also believe the education provided at the Polytécnica is better. It is also more demanding, and many students find it best to complete the "pre" (preparatory year) before entering a regular program.

Rather than study at one of the Major Quito universities, there is the previously discussed option of correspondence school. There is also a university in Ibarra where some people from Mira study, including, according to Carla C., many professors of the Colegio León Ruales. Non-university professional programs are another possibility. These private institutes offer certification in a variety of areas, such as languages, tourism, and computer programming. There are also newer, less-known universities in Quito, such as the Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial (UTE) which opened in north Quito in 1986. The UTE offers majors in areas such as external commerce and textile engineering.

For all its advantages, university education brings with it special problems. Greater access to education has changed both the aspirations of young adults and the ways in which their families deal with them. Because greater education tends to convey higher status, parents who have not attended colegio are educating their children to positions of greater status than themselves. While this in itself is desirable--a frequent justification for further schooling being that one's children might have things better--it raises new problems. Parents are unable, and frequently reluctant, to advise their children.

When the central university closed in March 1987, Mira was inundated with bored teen-agers. Boredom, and bored teenagers hanging around complaining of boredom, are both new to Mira, and it was very frustrating for parents to suddenly have on their hands these young people who slept until noon and complained that Mira offered nothing to do. Students were unable to evade the workers' strike by transferring to another university, because so long as the Central remained closed, there were no secretaries available to fill out the appropriate forms. Should the school reopen, transferring would no longer be attractive: time and credits are always lost in changing institutions, no two universities offer precisely the same programs, and many of the specialties chosen by the students were unavailable elsewhere. Families with students provisionally home from the university also experienced a financial pinch. Not knowing when the school would reopen, they were reluctant to give up the rooms or apartments they had rented in Quito, and feared they would be unable to find other housing as it is both scarce and expensive in the capital. This meant paying double rent indefinitely. For instance, Louisa Y's family went through protracted discussions on whether or not to move her things back from Quito to Ibarra, where her family had moved from Mira several years earlier when they finally did bring her belongings home, the university was rumored to be on the verge of reopening, and the Y. family had to begin looking again for a place for Luisa to live.

Financial difficulties, boredom, and uncertainty as to when, if ever, classes would resume, made the atmosphere in Mira quite edgy during this

period. Both students and their families were unable to make long-range plans, and there appeared to be few interim options. Some parent encouraged their children to look for jobs, but this was dismissed as impossible. Not only would a job be difficult to find under ideal circumstances, but students argued that no one would hire them knowing the university might re-open at any time; making them unavailable to work. After nearly three months of forced vacation, Luisa Y. did manage to find a job conducting surveys for a medical firm, a job she had to give up after little more than a week when the university finally re-opened.

In any case, it is rare for a student to work during college. Many of the jobs which those in the U.S. regard as "student jobs"--fast food, waitressing, many retail positions--are long-term positions for Ecuadorian adults and therefore are unavailable to young people looking for extra money to get through school. In addition, as Magdalena S. pointed out, most students wouldn't want that kind of job, thinking it beneath them. The impossibility of scheduling work hours around the arbitrary and immutable timetables of the university is another frequent complaint made by students who insist they would work if they could. There are exceptions. One of my friends, Mónica P., a student of international commerce at the UTE, has worked during school and hopes to find a job again. For over a year she worked at Agropic, an agricultural supply agency, a job which an uncle helped her secure. However, as she no longer liked the work, and because it had little bearing on her field, Mónica quit and is currently looking for a job as a bank teller. Because she takes classes at night, it will be relatively easy to mesh work and school.

Most people find that once they complete the university, the available jobs are most likely in Quito, as there is little demand for professionals in the rural areas. Thus, for all the benefits conferred on Mira by the colegios, they are essentially educating young people to leave. Practical education at the high school level would perhaps be one way of making them stay, through this seems to be more wishful thinking than anything else. The Mother Superior of the Catholic school, as well as the village priest, have both expressed the need for agriculurally-oriented practical education, and plans have been discussed for making the Colegio Martinez Acosta a technical school as well. Nevertheless, these programs have yet to be implemented and their results are doubtful at best. One vocational program which has been established is a three-year dressmaking course, which allows young women to become licensed dressmakers. Lola J. was to complete this program in July. She said she began the course thinking primarily of sewing for the family, though when she realized there would be a degree conferred by the program, Lola thought she might try to find work after all. She also chose the course because it was something she could do without her primary school certificate, which she had never completed due to health problems. During the first two years, Lola and the other women, still lacking their elementary degrees, received equivalency classes at the girls' school. During the first part of her training, Lola knit for her mother, Patricia J., and managed to pay her own way--corte students must provide their own fabrics to practice on, so that the process becomes quite expensive. With graduation approaching and innumerable notebooks to perfect and turn in, Lola no longer had time to knit when I interviewed her in July, and her mother was supporting her.

The irony of this program was not lost on Lola, or on other people I talked to. Many people involved with the course would suggest that they mostly wanted to learn sewing "for the home," though it would be helpful if they could find work. Still, everyone agreed that work for forty seamstresses was unlikely in these days of ready-made clothes, any many also acknowledged that the large investment of both time and money in this degree only to se "for the home" was a bit ridiculous. Yet, as Yolanda F. commented, the corte class may provide a means to find work for some young women who might otherwise simply have gone to Quito as maids. With a formal license, a woman is free to work wherever she chooses, whereas an untitled dressmaker would be limited to her own community, where people would know her well enough to bring her work and would not turn her in for working without certification.

Whether or not other practical education programs will be established in Mira, and how successful they would be, remains to be seen. The challenge of establishing vocational education is complicated by the important issues of status which are tied to schooling. It is possible that, until white-collar jobs become even more difficult to secure, few young people will be anxious to commit themselves to a low-status program.

The Mireños stay in or return to Mira is considered desirable for a number of reasons. One is the frequently cited confianza, or confidence, which one can have with those one has known all one's life. When asked about changes in the town over the past twenty years, the first answer was nearly always that everything is more expensive now, and the second was frequently that the people were "different": they were worse, they were nearly all strangers, the people of Mira were no longer really Mireños. This opinion was voiced by Berta T., who said, "more than anything today, you have foreigners here" (meaning Ecuadorians from other areas), and her sister Inez noted that, "customs have changed because the people are all different."

Several people suggested it would be best if all the teaching positions at the Mira colegios were filled by Mireños. Carla C. felt that professors from other areas did not collaborate fully with the colegio. When the school wants to put on a program, only staff members from Mira show up; commuters seize on any excuse to catch the next bus out of town. Yolanda F. also suggested that many professors in Mira were most interested in gaining work experience in order to transfer to more prestigious schools, and she thought that if Mireños who wanted to stay in town could be hired, this situation might improve.

These same colegios are also cited as a reason for leaving Mira. Though, by and large, Mira's schools are considered sufficient in terms of quality, as parental educational levels rise, more people feel that a degree from a Mira colegio would be insufficient for their children's advancement. Others argue that, as the professional market narrows, graduates of the Mira schools will be unable to compete with those who attended more prestigious and higher quality schools in the capital. Yolanda F. complained about the quality of teaching at the Colegio Martinez Acosta and suggested that Quito schools were much better. She said she initially had some difficulties at the Polytécnica because the Mira schools offer little geometry or trigonometry. Because Quito colegios teach both these areas with their other math classes, the Polytecnica reviews them very quickly. This leaves students like Yolanda at a disadvantage because she was learning for the first time what some students were merely reviewing. Carla C. also recognized the inferiority of one of the

Colegio Martinez Acosta's math teachers, saying that while during high school she and her classmates were overjoyed at the easiness of his classes, it has caught up with her now that she was studying in the Universidad Libre. Thus, as Mira has become a hub of educational opportunities for the surrounding areas, the more affluent among its own population feel the need to go elsewhere in order to advance.

This would seem to be a particularly difficult time to be either in colegio in Mira or at the university. Uncertainty is compounded by boredom and discontent. The advent of leisure time is a relatively recent occurrence and hobbies have not yet followed, leaving people with free time but no way to use it. Books remain quite expensive, and though educated people often invest in them, they generally select encyclopedias from the seemingly endless array advertised on television. Reading for pleasure is rare and considered odd by many. There is no movie theatre in Mira, nor do young people have exercise programs to pursue or fast food restaurants to use as hangouts; no one collects stamps or engages in gardening. Some young women do craft projects, such as knitting baby sweaters or making plastic flowers, but few of those currently in colegio want to knit the heavy wool sweaters which can be sold. The most available recreation in Mira is sitting: sitting in the park, sitting in the house, or sitting in front of the television.

Worse yet, a university degree is no longer any assurance of employment, still less the professional, high status and highly paid jobs desired and expected by students. Many of the most popular major programs lead to the chronically over-supplied professions; stories circulate about doctors driving taxis. One Mireños who recently completed his civil engineering degree, Roberto Q., has opened an office in Quito with several friends. However, his sister-in-law Inez T. notes that business has proved difficult, and for the most part, Roberto dedicates himself to other enterprises. For instance, one weekend he brought several Chinese sweaters up to Mira which he hoped Inez would help sell. Students are quite aware of this type of situation, but having committed themselves to a course of study, they are constrained to continue. All students in a given specialization, at either the colegio or the university level, take the same classes and follow the same schedule. Furthermore, the Ecuadorian university is structured in such a way that it is extremely difficult to change majors. Having a degree, one is qualified to work only in the area specified by that certificate. There is little or no possibility of studying one area but actually working in another. Students must therefore down-play negative predictions as much as possible; they must hope things will get better before they graduate, or that they will have the necessary family connections to land a position despite the odds.

Conclusions

The paradox suggested by the case of Mira, which I believe to be applicable to other parts of the developing world and perhaps to the credential-driven developed world as well, is that its economic and educational development strategies seem to have withered with success. On the whole, Mireños see the educational strategy pursued over the last twenty-five years as a success, and most people feel themselves to be better off than they were previously. Surely the opinions of those supposedly aided by development is an important index of that development's success or failure. Yet while its members have benefited in many ways from the development of Mira, and of

Ecuador as a whole, the generation presently coming of age finds itself virtually without options, and the results of any given path are less and less certain. They can no longer look to agriculture as a means of earning a living, nor can they find work with only a colegio degree. Having a professional career has become an almost universal goal. However, few feel they can control this process, and securing a professional position is believed to be largely a matter of luck. Mira has become caught in a "Mutually reinforcing cyclical process" whereby "educational attainment increases occupational aspirations and access to modern sector or off farm employment, but commitment to education is generated by a realistic expectation of being able to achieve such ends" (Preston 1985:100). While education has indeed increased well-being and opportunity for many, it appears not to be self-sustaining as a development strategy, but rather to offer substantial success only so long as the economy is able to absorb graduates into the kinds of professional jobs they desire.

A solution to the employment problems of young Mireños lies not only in varying the educational offerings to include more vocational or practical programs, but in a rethinking of certain values, so that status and acceptability are no longer equated solely with a limited range of professions. How to achieve this remains in question. Mireños long not for new and untested career avenues so much as a return to the days in which a degree was a nearly automatic ticket to high status professional employment. Today's students persist in trying to replicate the old pattern; they seek that magic formula that will give them the jobs their older sisters got. These young adults are preparing themselves for employment within an economic system which no longer exists as they envisioned it when they began. This problem is compounded by the very size of the lead made by Mireños since the early 1960s, progressing in one generation from shoeless farmers to civil engineers. The town acquired a paved highway, potable water, regular garbage collection, and a reliable electrical system. Private home phones are soon to be installed, many of the streets have been paved with flagstones, and the loan for the rest of the paving has already been approved. The present generation understandably expects not just progress, but comparable progress.

Notes

1. As Peace Corps Volunteers in Mira in the early 1960s, my parents, Peter Galdhart and Emily Winter Gladhart, organized a sweater-knitting cooperative with community women. In 1979, when I was eleven, our family returned to Mira for fifteen months, during which time my parents conducted research on the effects of the initial sweater project and on changing educational possibilities in the village. The project described in this paper was carried out during a third extended visit, in 1987. While the 1979 study concentrated on the knitters themselves, our goal in 1987 was to determine how the changing economic conditions of the area had affected the children of those knitters, as well as other young people within the community.

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