



CIEPAC

*Center for Economic
and Political Research
for Community Action*

Grassroots Education in Chiapas

Introduction

CIEPAC (the Center for Economic and Political Research for Community Action) was founded in 1998 and is incorporated under Mexican laws as a civil association. We are a non-profit institution, with no political or religious affiliation. Our present 9-member work team has an interdisciplinary focus.

CIEPAC defines itself as a civil organization that accompanies the social movements in Chiapas, Mexico and Meso-America, as well as the global struggles that seek to build a more democratic world, with justice and dignity for all.

CIEPAC's principal activities are research, information-dissemination, education, training and analysis. The main goal is placing our research within reach of social, civil, faith-based and grassroots groups, and particularly indigenous communities, so that they can make better-informed decisions and plan activities. We wish to see grassroots organizations and communities empowered, and hope the alternative information and analysis we provide can be useful in these processes.

In addition, CIEPAC offers mental health workshops. We have seen the importance of this aspect of our work, particularly in parts of the state of Chiapas where over centuries the indigenous people have faced discrimination, in particular over the past decade by means of low-intensity warfare carried out by the government and armed forces. These workshops are another tool for the empowerment of the people.

Our Style of Work

It is often said that information is power, and due to its importance in organizing at the grassroots level, CIEPAC receives frequent invitations from a wide spectrum of organizations in Chiapas, the rest of Mexico, and other parts of the world, to carry out workshops on the current economic, political and social situation. We usually give focused talks on specific topics, but we also carry out workshops, using popular education methods, in which participants share information and together build a current-events analysis of their particular reality.

We also disseminate our research with the varied materials we produce: booklets, manuals, books, brochures, videos, audio cassettes, posters and t-shirts, for example. These materials are always made with grassroots groups in mind. Occasionally, we write papers aimed at a more scholarly audience.

We also publish information and analysis in our "Chiapas Today" bulletins that come out on average once a week and are distributed free of charge on the internet. Our web page, located at www.ciepac.org, is an invaluable tool for our goal of delving deeper into the many sides of grassroots struggles in Chiapas today, and their links to movements throughout the world. Recently the CIEPAC web site has received on average 75,000 visits per month.

Further, CIEPAC has become a reference point for hundreds of delegations and groups, mainly from abroad, that visit Chiapas yearly. CIEPAC gives talks on a wide range of topics to these visiting groups.

Approach

We are convinced that the major changes needed to construct a more democratic world, with justice and dignity, will come from the bottom up, from grassroots social organizations.

We believe that the overall nature of the struggle will be determined by broad-based social movements.

As a civil organization, therefore, we do not aspire in any way to head up or "guide" social movements. Our goal is to accompany, educate, train and advise social organizations and movements, but never to take their place. At times we are an "information bridge" between social organizations and the international community, but this is a momentary situation and believe it best to withdraw from this role once direct ties have been established.

Our particular economic viewpoint rejects the neoliberal economic model. Still, we believe that part of building a world with greater justice is to put forward ideas, proposals and alternatives, joining hand-in-hand with social organizations, movements and indigenous communities. We believe that it is not our responsibility to build alternatives, but rather to accompany grassroots sectors in their efforts to do so.

Other Activities

CIEPAC has helped to promote and create tolerant "spaces" or opportunities to coordinate activities around topics that are of crucial importance in today`s world. Similarly, CIEPAC has helped encourage forums and gatherings on diverse topics, such as the increasing militarization of our lives, the indigenous autonomy movements, environmentally-unsound dams, our disappearing biodiversity, the Plan Puebla Panama, the World Trade Organization,

reconciliation and peace. We also carried out the Mexican referendum on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in communities and organizations throughout Chiapas.

Networks

We are convinced of the power of working within networks and linking with other like-minded groups in order to strengthen, coordinate and "globalize" the work needed to achieve a better world. We have helped to set up and have participated in numerous regional, national and international gatherings. Presently CIEPAC is a member of RMALC (Mexican Action Network on Free Trade), COMPA (Convergence of the Movements of the Peoples of the Americas), AMAP (Mexican Alliance for People`s Self-Determination), the "With Globalization, the People Come First" International Forum, the Chiapas Gatherings on Neoliberalism, the Hemispheric Forum on Militarization, the Week on Biological and Cultural Diversity, the Meso-American Forum against Dams and the Network for Peace. Likewise CIEPAC is on the board of advisors of the U.S.-based organizations Epica and the Center for Economic Justice.

Funding

Various foundations and cooperating agencies, principally from North America and Europe, support CIEPAC`s work. We also receive donations in solidarity from people throughout the world. We do not receive funding from any governmental office or multilateral banks.

Volunteers

Throughout the year CIEPAC hosts a limited number of volunteers from Mexico and abroad, who wish to participate in our work. For more information, please inquire by e-mail, or visit our web site www.ciepac.org.