

Who's Who? Power Mapping, Decision Making and Development Concerns in an Indigenous Community of Oaxaca, Mexico

Francisco Guevara-Hernández¹, Nils Max McCune², Luis A. Rodríguez-Larramendi³ and Gillian E. Newell⁴

¹*Faculty of Agronomic Sciences at the Autonomous University of Chiapas. Carretera Ocozacoautla –Villaflora km. 84.5, Apdo. Postal 78, C.P. 30470 Villaflora, Chiapas, Mexico
Telephone: + 52 965 6521477. Contact: Francisco.Guevara@unach.mx*

²*Agricultural Economics at Ghent University (Belgium) and Guest researcher at the Faculty of Agronomic Sciences, Autonomous University of Chiapas, Mexico*

³*Institute for Research on Agricultural Sciences «Jorge Dimitrov», Bayamo, Granma, Cuba*

⁴*School of Archeology in the University of Sciences and Arts of Chiapas. Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas, Mexico*

KEYWORDS Participatory Action Research. Ethnography. Local Governance. Power Structures. Development Actors

ABSTRACT This paper examines how power is understood and exercised by actors involved in local decision making, by drawing on an experience in participatory power mapping in an indigenous community of Oaxaca, Mexico. Research was carried out during 2003-2007 by coupling a participatory action research approach and ethnographic methods to focus on the *usos y costumbres* system (U and C or local customary law) as the most important framework ensuring social order at the community level. The major recognized local actors and their interrelations are identified as the most powerful elements in the local decision-making process. Local people as well as outsiders must act within the framework of local values and norms to attend development interventions. New research approaches towards community self-assessment can clarify how actors shape and re-shape local power structures through daily routines, contributing to a better understanding of community development from a productive perspective.