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The Honduras Immersion

The Honduras Immersion exposed me to systems of change in the individual and government as an American and for those living in Honduras. The experience allowed me to view how a true democracy requires a sense of human rights, active participation as well as accountability of leaders. It was absolutely thrilling to watch Gloria, a leader of Heifer International, work with group of rural women in Quebrada Honda, Honduras. Within one day, I witnessed Gloria lead the women into a greater sense of their human rights and strategizing for increased participation on the local level. Certainly systemic change is a slow process, but there was obvious personal change within a room of women who moved from whispering their name in introductions to active dialogue on how to change their community. The same technique of social change can be applied within the democracies of Honduras and the United States of America. Heifer targets change through developing the leadership of the economically disenfranchised women by providing skill and the means of economic, personal, and communal growth.

Before this trip, I didn't take the time to evaluate political and economic histories of developing countries like Honduras. When I was given the reading materials on the political and economic development of Honduras, I was less than pleased. I found the information extremely boring and frustrating because I was looking forward to working with the people of Honduras. I couldn't wait to learn about the social conditions of the people through personal exchange. Initially, I focused my interest on what it meant to be a woman living in Honduras rather than the historical context that has influenced the

present day Honduran woman. It wasn't until after I left Honduras that I was able to process the importance of understanding the historical, political, and economic development of Honduras in order to create change.

A greater understanding of these developments will enable an individual or group to work in solidarity for change within a community. Certainly, I have a lot more to learn if I would like to work for Heifer International in Honduras. Gloria's knowledge of the country as well as the context of each community is critical for her work to be successful. The women in Quebrada Honda had already come a long way in leadership and community development with the example of the women led medicine shop, knitting sales and animal products. Since they had established such growth in the past year, Gloria felt prepared to take on the next step of women's involvement in local government. Although the American women at Saint Mary's College may not be in the same context as the women in Quebrada Honda, the greater understanding of our college's history and our present community will allow for change in our community.

Instilling a greater sense of self-confidence, leadership and economic independence in women are aspects of change that can be targeted in both countries no matter how different the local contexts appear to be. Gloria noted that each Honduran community is different, giving the examples of impoverished urban and rural communities. However, Heifer offered programs in both communities that improved the status of women while targeting economic development in slightly different ways. The United States is not exempt for the realities of poverty and the need for development in many areas of American life. It would be interesting to visit a Heifer project in the United States to compare the techniques used within the American context.