

THE HEART OF THE PUZZLE: Nurturing that inner spark Tlamacazapa and Atzin in Mexico

Working in Tlamacazapa over the past 17 years, the Atzin team gradually pieced together a big puzzle of a complicated village situation. At the beginning, it was easy to see the living conditions of severe *economic* poverty. It took time, listening, many questions and a digging for data, to realize the critical *environmental* problems and importantly, the suffering caused by a collective *poverty of spirit*.

A poverty of spirit means that people can't imagine that tomorrow will be any different than today or yesterday. Hopelessness often prevails, with most impoverished families having little vision for a better future.

Bring enough resources to bear on a situation and environmental degradation and economic poverty can be solved if people can work together with a common purpose. But a poverty of spirit crushes this possibility from the start. That's why Atzin focuses on bringing people together to support one another.

Whether it's a group of women sewing quilts, preparing food for the school breakfast program, or discussing problems faced by young families, our approach is people-centered. Our task is to create opportunities on many fronts. Individuals learn to trust over time, as they share and discuss, help each other, and seek solutions step by step together. Our annual ten day training retreat for thirty young village women is a dramatic example of community building. The training is highly participatory as well as challenging, allowing the women to form friendships, greater insights and a sense of common-unity. This is vital foundational "glue." These women all carry responsibilities as program "promoters" and in turn, influence others in a positive rippling effect.

Persistence is leading to better prospects, illustrated best by good stories of people's progress. Please take a few minutes to consider the heart of the puzzle: a sense of empowerment always starts with a spark of possibility and grows from within. No one can actually empower someone else or hand them a richer spirit or life. The nurturing of that inner spark is the real work of development.