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A Secure Perspective

Fiamma Rupp-Gembs, Ed.M.'08, is founder and director of Secure Perspectives, a development organization committed to improving health, education, and infrastructure in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.

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A Secure Perspective: Fiamma Rupp-Gembs, Ed.M.'08

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By Amanda Dagg

Children in rural Guatemala attend schools that are constructed out of corrugated iron and plastic tarps. During the dry season the dirt floors cause respiratory problems, and during the wet season they turn into mud puddles. [Education Policy and Management \(EPM\) Program](#) graduate Fiamma Rupp-Gembs, Ed.M.'08, witnessed these conditions on a post-high school volunteer trip to Guatemala and has been dedicated to improving them ever since. Today, she is founder and director of Secure Perspectives, a development organization committed to improving health, education, and infrastructure in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. She and her team recently won the prestigious Mondialogo Engineering Award for one of their development project proposals.

Rupp-Gembs started Secure Perspectives in 2004 as a way to bring accountability and sustainability to the poor, rural areas of Guatemala. An essential part of her mission is to involve the indigenous population in her work and promote self-help and initiative. "I think you can't go into a country as a foreigner and impose your own views, but if you work with

the indigenous people and they help you shape your model, it can change the country,” she says.

The organization is currently working with community members on several different projects to improve the local primary schools, including teacher professional development, health lectures and vaccinations in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, and creative workshops that allow students to express themselves through artistic measures. Secure Perspective’s largest current project is the construction of a cement school in La Cipresada, which will be built primarily by community members.

Secure Perspectives took a three-pronged approach to development in Guatemala in which Rupp-Gembs’ team developed a sustainable construction material, an innovative curriculum, and a community business plan. The curriculum includes workshops in carpentry, baking, and computer skills for primary school students, and similar apprenticeships for older children. “The model is that the community will manage these mini-enterprises in a community effort, and thus they can sustain them,” she says.

As finalists for the 2007 Mondialogo Engineering Award, a partner initiative of Daimler and UNESCO, Rupp-Gembs and her team presented their project at a symposium in Mumbai, India in December. In addition to winning 20,000 euro to implement the project, she says the award gives legitimacy to their work.

Rupp-Gembs’ studies at HGSE were invaluable to the success and progress of Secure Perspectives. “I really liked the flexibility that the [EPM] Program gave me,” she says. “I was able to choose courses that gave me the tools I need for the future. The courses where I learned about education policy in developing countries exposed me to different educational methods that have been useful.” Furthermore, Rupp-Gembs says the combination of courses at HGSE, HKS, and HBS has helped her better understand the organizational structure of Secure Perspectives.

Ultimately, Rupp-Gembs would like to develop her own education model, teaching methodology, and curriculum for primary schools in rural Guatemala. While she would love to see a successful model that could be implemented elsewhere, her primary goal is to bring change to the communities of the Western Highlands. “I think that if you work hard and work on quality, you don’t necessarily have to go to scale,” she says.