

Oaxaca Workshop

Background:

Oaxaca contains the largest indigenous population in Mexico, and the highest levels of poverty and marginalization. More than half the state's population earns less than the national minimum wage of 45 pesos per day, or \$4.50 US dollars. As Oaxaca is rich in biodiversity and natural resources it has been the target of corporate-lead development at the expense of communal land, indigenous people's right to self-determination, as well as economic and ecological sustainability. Oaxaca is also first in the nation for violence against women and is among the top five Mexican states with the highest level of immigration to the United States.

The Oaxacan state and federal governments have a vested interest in maintaining the appearance of peace and tranquility, as the state is a popular tourist destination. In fact, through both political and violent coercion, the state is being remade to suit the interests of the tourist and big business industries which results in the expropriation of land, culture and autonomy from indigenous people. Due to the privatization of beaches and restrictions on commerce, local residents often have few economic options other than selling trinkets to tourists. In addition, newly elected governor, Ulises Ruíz, is working hard to eliminate rights such as freedom of the press, expression, and consultation. Many fear that in the months preceding the July 2006 presidential elections, violence against activists and grassroots organizations will only increase.

Learning Objectives:

The Oaxaca workshop provides an overarching assessment of the current political situation in Oaxaca.

Preparation:

All preparation for this workshop falls to the facilitator(s).

Directions:

This workshop should be led by several facilitators, dividing up the five sections of the presentation between them. The first facilitator begins with a statistical overview of social indicators for Oaxaca such as population demographics, linguistic diversity, and poverty rates.
(15 minutes)

Following this introductory portion, the next facilitator should provide a brief history of Oaxaca noting major historical figures such as Benito Juárez and the state's history of attracting international investment. This presenter should include a timeline with his/her

presentation.
(20 minutes)

This section is followed by a presentation outlining the Usos y Costumbres form of government used by many indigenous communities in Oaxaca. The facilitator of this section should provide a definition of the system as well as outline its basic components such as the cargo system and the asamblea.

(15-minutes)

Next, the facilitator should divide the participants into four groups to read and discuss several short summaries on four topics fundamental to understanding the current political climate in Oaxaca. These are: land battles, human rights, environment and immigration. These fact sheets are available for download below. The facilitator then brings the groups together to present each topic summary sheet and answer the corresponding questions as a group.

(20 minutes)

The workshop concludes with the next facilitator presenting a brief overview of current political organizing around these issues in Oaxaca. He/she should include relevant political parties/organizations as well as information on the frequency of human rights violations.

(10-15 minutes)