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Civil Society Participation as the Focus of Northern NGO Support: The Case of Dutch Co-financing Agencies

Irene Guijt

Of the Dutch development cooperation budget, between 11 and 14 per cent is allocated to Dutch non-government organizations that are known as 'co-financing agencies' for supporting partner organizations in the global South. The co-financing agencies (CFAs) claim to further civil society participation in diverse ways: by supporting basic rights education, capacity building on democratization issues, advocacy efforts to address myriad injustices, and strategic networking. In this they take up a long-standing challenge for civil society actors committed to promoting alternative development and social justice: the promotion of citizenship status and rights for marginal people and groups (Nerfin, 1987; Friedmann, 1992). However, and although talk of participation and rights-based approaches is central in their organizational discourse, few use coherent frames of analysis to shape their programmatic strategy or a lens through which to understand the results of the work they fund.

This chapter draws on a recent evaluation that examined how the support given between 1999 and 2004 was used by four of the CFAs – CORDAID, HIVOS, Oxfam NOVIB and Plan Netherlands – to further 'civil society participation' in Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Sri Lanka and Uganda (Guijt, 2005). The evaluation team considered over 330 civil society organizations and over 760 contracts from CORDAID, HIVOS and NOVIB, plus three country programmes for Plan. In exploring the efforts of these CFAs to increase and strengthen the participation of citizens and civil society organizations in decision-making processes, within diverse, violent and conflict-ridden contexts, two issues stand out as having a wider relevance for the theme of NGO alternatives. The first relates to the integration of new forms of analysis within the strategic and operational work of development agencies, and thus

concerns the research/action interface that has been identified as critical with regards to the role of NGOs in promoting development alternatives (Hulme, 1994: Introduction). The second concerns the possibility that NGOs can help build progressive linkages between 'big D' interventions and 'little d' processes of development – in this case processes of citizenship building – through recognized funding modalities *within* the international aid system, rather than departing from it altogether (see Edwards, this volume).

In this chapter, I proceed by providing a contextual discussion of how Dutch NGOs have tended to conceptualize and fund work on civil society participation (CSP) in developing countries, before outlining the contextual features affecting CSP in the five countries involved in the evaluation. I then describe some of the CSP work that was observed, in terms of approaches and outcomes, before proceeding to outline the key ways forward for NGOs seeking to support civil society participation.

Understanding and Promoting Civil Society: Perspectives and Approaches from the Netherlands

Conceptually, understandings of civil society participation amongst the major NGOs or CFAs in the Netherlands originated around concerns to involve the beneficiaries or end users in designing and implementing projects that were to affect their lives, with the aim of making such projects more relevant and more sustainable. Although some aid agencies have always viewed participation through a more radical and political lens, for others it was the rise of rights-based approaches that shifted participation from an instrumental to a political meaning: the right to participate is seen as the right to claim all other rights. Thus, rather than thinking of people as beneficiaries, they are understood as citizens, not in the sense of a certain group of people with formal membership of a particular nation state, but as individuals with inalienable rights that only become effective when claimed through individual or collective action.

Yet it is the term 'civil society building' and not 'civil society participation' that is used by the CFAs to organize their work and report on results to the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation. Civil society building was defined by Biekart (2003: 15) in an earlier evaluation of the CFA's work as a capacity-oriented term, consisting of

- strengthening organizational capacities (of both formal and informal organizations) in civil society;
- building up and strengthening networks of, and alliances between, social organizations;

- building up and strengthening capacities for (policy) advocacy, with the aim of strengthening vertical intermediary channels between civil society and the state and/or the market;
- strengthening citizenship, social consciousness, democratic leadership, and social and political responsibility, with the aim of increasing participation of citizens in the public sphere.

Biekart's evaluation left the CFAs keen for more insights into other issues, particularly related to 'strengthening citizenship', and the concept of 'civil society participation' was proposed by the CFAs as a means to understand this. For the purposes of the follow-up evaluation, they defined it as:

the opportunities of citizens – and more specifically of poor and/or marginalized citizens – and the organizations that represent them or can be considered their allies, to actively participate in and influence decision-making processes that affect their lives directly or indirectly. Participation includes 'agency', e.g. taking initiatives and engagement. (CORDAID et al., 2004: 6–7)

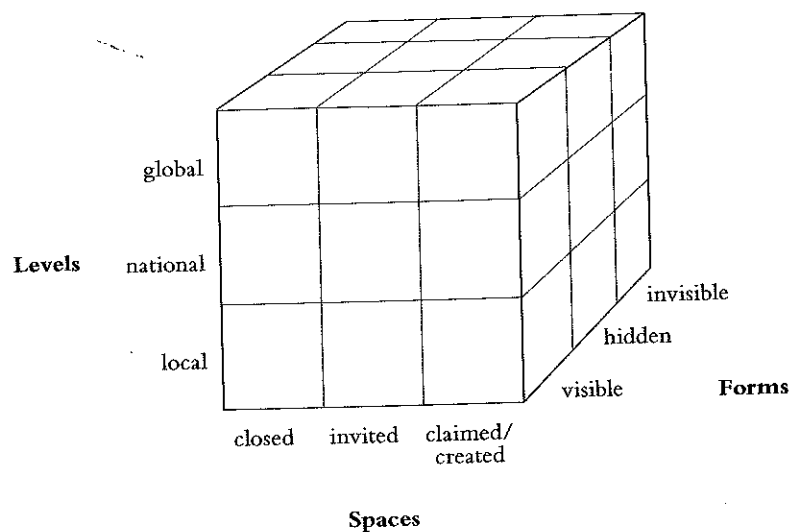
CSP is a layered concept with very diverse manifestations that links three development discourses and areas of practice: participation, civil society and citizenship. Within this, CFAs define civil society, broadly, as citizens and CSOs. As their funding is channelled through partner organizations, this was the unit of analysis of the study, and this has encouraged their adoption of an 'associational' understanding of civil society (Edwards, 2004).

Taken at face value, 'civil society participation' could be viewed as apolitical and neutral in terms of improving the lives of the poor and marginalized. As the explicit mission of these CFAs is to work towards the political empowerment of the poor and marginalized, the evaluation team qualified CSP in terms of its role in addressing societal inequalities. Thus, civil society participation is understood here as an essential contribution towards social justice, democracy and social cohesion.

To help the evaluation team operationalize this understanding, the CFAs identified the power cube framework developed by the Institute of Development Studies as the prime analytical lens for the study. The framework (see Figure 8.1) offers ways to examine participatory action in development and changes in power relations by and/or on behalf of poor and marginalized people (Gaventa, 2005). It does this by distinguishing participatory action along three dimensions:

- at three levels (or 'places'): global, national and local;
- across three types of (political) 'space': closed, invited and created;
- different forms of power at place within the levels and spaces: visible (formal) power, hidden (behind the scenes) power, and invisible (internalized norms) power (see VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002).

Figure 8.1 The power cube



Source: Gaventa, 2005.

The framework was expected to provide more specific insights about the broad notion of 'civil society participation'. The framework understands power 'in relation to how spaces for engagement are created, the levels of power (from local to global), as well as different forms of power across them' (Gaventa, 2006: 2). Using this lens on citizen action enables strategic assessment of the possibilities of transformative action by citizens and how to make these more effective. Unpacking it to enable recognition of CSP during the fieldwork led the team to place inequitable power relations at the centre of their analysis. It meant looking for changes that represent increased, or deepened, participation in decision-making processes and/or the creation, opening or widening of spaces to this effect, either by poor and marginalized citizens or by civil society organizations.

Due to the choice of war-torn, (post-)conflict and fragile peace countries for the evaluation, this framework was supplemented by an explicit look at how violence shapes the potential for civil society participation (Pearce, 2004). The situation of spaces in such contexts adds to the cube a potential dimension of violence either as 'internalized fear/aggression' within it or 'externalized threat/force' outside it. The construction and widening of participatory spaces for the pursuit of social change agendas becomes much more problematic in such contexts, but also more urgent. Participation forces

a focus on alternatives to violence as a means of achieving social change and addressing grievances. The idea of 'civil' as opposed to 'uncivil' society also encourages reflection on which elements of associational life favour 'civil' outcomes that might promote collective goals through non-violent means and which remain committed to particular interests and ends with little discrimination around means.

Using a participation focus and power analysis, the evaluation team found that the CFAs are making a significant and often unique contribution to the capacity and development of civil society – and have been doing so, in some cases, for more than two decades (Guijt, 2005). Central in the work of their partner organizations is the focus on participatory action that tackles persistent inequitable power relations. The work touches geographically isolated areas, 'forgotten' social groups and taboo topics. An important aspect of success is the intertwining of work on several levels. To achieve results of some scale, many CSOs build chains of action, from mobilizing at community level up to national advocacy. Where they do not, impact is limited. Importantly – given the apparent divide between 'technical' and 'political' approaches among NGOs – activities on 'citizenship strengthening' which made information accessible and meaningful to people are often consciously connected to efforts to improve service delivery or lobby work.

The evaluation thus raised a series of critical issues for the CFAs to consider in their support of CSP. These include how service delivery can become transformational and be foundational for other manifestations of civil society participation, the importance of basic rights education work, and the need for situated expectations about democratization. However, the use of power analysis also uncovered significant gaps in the efforts of NGOs to challenge systematically some of the most important inequalities both within the development system, including issues of power and participation in the CFAs' relationships with partners, and within developing contexts, particularly concerning gender.

Co-financing as a particular approach to development

The term 'co-financing' within the Dutch development sector refers to the stream of money that flows from the Dutch government via specific Dutch NGOs with CFA status and then onwards to partner organizations in the South. This policy is an expression of the Dutch government's recognition that much of development emerges from civil society and not the state, and makes it possible for the Netherlands to support poverty eradication in countries where the Dutch government does not want to work with the government. A total of around 25 per cent of the development cooperation budget goes to a range of different national and international civil society organizations. Six organizations currently have CFA status,

namely CORDAID, ICCO, NOVIB, HIVOS, Terre des Hommes and Plan Netherlands. Other Dutch organizations are eligible to apply to this stream of funding, with conditions being that they have a broad programme of activities in various countries that does not overlap with the existing CFAs. Until recently the CFAs could count on a fixed percentage of the development budget, but this has now merged with the thematic co-financing budget into one 'co-financing' system. The co-financing system allows the CFAs to secure resources for a four-year period, maintain autonomy over their own programmatic directions during that time period, and support a large and diverse set of initiatives. Each CFA has a different proportion of its budget that comes from the Dutch government, depending on their capacity to generate additional funds – ranging from around 30 per cent to almost 90 per cent.

In this evaluation, it became apparent that sustaining investment over long time frames was of significant importance to the success of CSP in the countries. This is particularly the case with this type of NGO work given the dynamics of democratization and the slow process of social change, as well as the need to invest in multiple 'projects' of participatory democracy simultaneously. However, as of 2007, a new system of allocating resources has led to greater uncertainty and competition among Dutch development organizations. For example, the new system demands that all CFAs must raise 25 per cent of their own funding by 2009, thus fuelling further competition among them. Although the government argues that the new system enables greater transparency and programmatic quality of Dutch development NGOs, it has been heavily criticized for its rigid formulaic approach to allocating funds, inaccuracy due to double counting of certain criteria and other errors in the allocation process, inability to recognize the strategic added value of certain organizations, and disconnection of allocation decisions from longer-term evaluations (Schulpen and Ruben, 2006). NGOs have invested enormous amounts of time to write highly detailed strategic plans, in an exercise that, at its worst, has become about how well an organization could present itself rather than the actual (potential) contribution to development.

Contextual Features Affecting Civil Society Participation in Conflict-affected Countries

Context is everything when it comes to the opportunities and risks for promoting civil society participation. The potential for CSP to manifest itself is strongly influenced by political, cultural, economic and historical contexts. In all countries examined here, the history of protracted violence

and/or restrictive political regimes shape what kind of participation occurs at different levels and in diverse spaces. A focused context analysis in each country provided initial insights into the challenges for and development of civil society. Although the five countries involved in this evaluation are characterized by unique histories, cultures and politics that have shaped civil society in equally unique ways (see Table 8.1), several commonalities can be noted.

All five countries deal – to varying degrees – with a state with formal institutions in which *de facto* power dynamics limit the effective political opportunities of those in formally elected positions. All countries struggle with relatively new constitutions that have been eroded in practice or – as in the cases of Guinea and Guatemala (Buchy and Curtis, 2005; Gish et al., 2005) – that have yet to be implemented in meaningful ways. Violence, often open conflict, and the repression of civil society efforts are characteristics of each country, with Colombia offering the starkest examples of a corrupt institutionality in which extremely powerful drug and paramilitary interests act to maintain the new status quo.

Violence has profoundly marked the psyche of civil society in these countries, both historically and today. It has contributed to a climate in which political activity is deemed subversive, and therefore subject to reprisals or condemnation, and worse. Even within this evaluation, the evaluators in Colombia were asked to stop the tape recordings when topics became too sensitive, while in Uganda it is perhaps more insidious in terms of the self-censorship of CSOs with regard to where they dare to tread. As Pearce and Vela (2005) note,

Violence does not just imply an external effect of threat. It can be internalised and be taken into participatory spaces where it can exist in the form of silences and inner fear, or even as aggressions towards others due to years of living in violent conditions and/or lack of appropriate channels for expressing differences and conflicts.

In Guinea, Uganda and Sri Lanka, CSO activities have been focused strongly in service delivery, particularly in Guinea where many such organizations are implementing government policies and strategies. In that context, CSOs are only just discovering their potential advocacy role, while this capacity is more strongly present and strengthening in Uganda and Sri Lanka. In both Guatemala and Colombia, civil society emerged from histories of (violent) resistance against repressive regimes, with Colombia reaping some benefits from a longer history of social movements while Guatemalan CSOs are still fragile and fragmented.

Decentralization, prominent in Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Guinea and Uganda, does not appear to have lived up to the full promise of more citizen

engagement in local development. It remains captured by state procedures and non-democratic processes, with only Uganda showing signs of potential for citizens' direct engagement in local development – and only then when mediated by organized groups. This is one example of the potential opening of closed spaces and the challenges CSOs have faced to use those spaces effectively in favour of the marginalized.

In Uganda and Guinea (although there investment is considerably less), the influence of foreign funding agencies on CSOs appears to be strong in terms of their financial dependency but also in terms of (active) partnership. In Guinea, CSOs and funding agencies alike have limited political dialogue with the state following laws that increased presidential powers, while in Uganda funding agencies actively encourage policy advocacy initiatives by CSOs. Guatemalan CSOs also have benefited from strong international support prior to but in particular after the Peace Accords of 1996.

In all countries, many civil society organizations face internal challenges, including limited human resource capacities, weak internal democratic processes, limited strategic capacity, limited networking, and a general related lack of confidence to engage with the demanding tasks of pro-poor democracy-strengthening activities.

Supporting Civil Society Participation in the South: The Role of CFAs

Approaches to CSP

Our examination of the myriad examples of 'citizen and civil society participation' led to a framework that identified six key domains. These domains are specifically concerned with the capacity of poor, marginalized and vulnerable people to realize their full citizenship. Each domain describes a form of participation and achievement in which CSOs play specific roles, and also lists a series of possible progress markers that could be observed among those involved. Together, these six domains of CSP can lead to structural change in societal, state and economic institutions for the realization of citizens' rights and the enhancement of democratic participation.

Citizenship strengthening comprises activities such as civic education about basic rights and engaging citizens in critical reflection on and capacity building around political processes, but also ensuring basic conditions such as birth registration that gives people formal access to their rights. These activities lead to better informed people who can understand their rights and are able to engage constructively and effectively in claim making,

Table 8.1 Overview of countries involved in the CSP programme evaluation

Country	Colombia	Guatemala	Guinea	Sri Lanka	Uganda
Population (m) (2003)	44.2	12.0	9.0	20.4	26.9
Human Development Index rank (out of 177) (2005)	69	117	156	93	144
Inequity (% share of income or consumption of poorest 20%) (HDI)	2.7	2.6	6.4	8.0	5.9
% living below national poverty line (1990–2002) (HDI)	64	56.2	40	25	44
Official development assistance received (net disbursements per capita, US\$) (HDI)	10.1	20.1	30.0	18.2	25.5
Most recent constitution	1991	1985 (reforms 1993)	1990	1978	1995
Levels of government	3: national, departments (32) plus one capital district, municipalities	3: national, provincial (departments), municipal	5: national, region, prefectures, rural development communities', districts	3: national, province, district	6: national, district, county council, sub-county, parish, village
History of conflict	Ongoing since 1964 (founding of the FARC guerrilla movement)	Military rule until 1985; Peace Accords signed in 1996 (everyday violence increasing)	Dictatorship until 1984; current regime authoritarian, conflicts along Sierra Leone/Liberia border	Early 1980s until now	1962–86 (regional conflicts continue)

Source: Country studies; Human Development Index.

collective action, governance and political processes. Examples of work in this domain include PREDO's work (CORDAID–Sri Lanka) that has facilitated the registration of people and helped plantation workers obtain 22,000 identity cards and 11,500 birth certificates. Plan's offices in Guinea and Uganda are working to ensure birth registration as a fundamental right of children – making these children visible citizens – and thus providing the statistical basis for good local development planning and monitoring the abuse of children's rights. Local youth clubs, youth radio and village drama are enabling children to learn about and engage in the issues that affect their future as citizens. In Uganda, Plan also works to establish school health clubs that raise children's awareness about the sexual rights and responsibilities and assist them to respond effectively to inappropriate physical or sexual exploitation and abuse. CALDH (Guatemala–HIVOS) is working with young people in the Human Rights Observatory, which receives human rights complaints in fifteen municipalities and which has a network of 150 representatives. The exposure of the youth to everyday rights abuses, from the family through to more public violence and abuse, via the complaints that the observers receive, gives them knowledge of the consequences of what might otherwise remain invisible. The young people have begun to analyse and understand the negative impact on Guatemala of the everyday abuses. This understanding of the importance of 'rights' helps them to legitimize a public role as defenders of those rights. The move of a few into broader public roles, such as participation on the local councils, is a significant outcome of the work.

People's participation in CSO governance, programming, monitoring and accountability relates to the notion of 'participatory culture' within and among CSOs, looking at how CSOs themselves understand and embody what would make for good participatory development. It manifests itself as critically (self-) reflective, democratically functioning and accountable CSOs that are responsive to the rights, values, aspirations, interests and priority needs of their constituencies. Examples for this domain would have required a more thorough look at the internal mechanisms of CSOs, which was beyond the scope of this evaluation. If more time had been available to look at this in depth, it would have included examples such as that of NAFSO (Sri Lanka–HIVOS), which insists on equal representation of men and women as a democratic practice, and active participation in networks and forums.

The third domain of civil society participation relates to CSOs that facilitate *people's participation in local development and service delivery initiatives*. For pro-poor local service delivery to become a reality, CSOs are building the capacity of local people to take on new roles and responsibilities in contexts of decentralization, establishing citizen-driven planning and management structures, and working to make service deliverers more responsive

to people's needs. Examples here abound, including the work of TDDA (CORDAID–Sri Lanka) to facilitate claims for service delivery under the post-conflict reconstruction programme; Oasis (HIVOS–Guatemala), which is undertaking sectoral coordination in relation to AIDS; and ACORD (NOVIB–Uganda), providing basic services to communities in northern Uganda. I comment further on the tension between service delivery and transformation in the next subsection.

Many CSOs involved in the evaluation are active in the area of *advocacy and structural change*. CSOs facilitate citizens to undertake their own advocacy work and also undertake lobbying work for certain groups. Related activities include research and consultation on 'forgotten' issues and with ignored groups, creating mechanisms for citizens to participate in public forums, putting issues on formal agendas, and mobilizing support for campaigns. Notable in many of the examples seen is the multiple levels at which activities occur, and the linkages between the levels – from community mobilization to national campaigns. Examples of work on this include:

- LABE's (Uganda–NOVIB) efforts in a national coalition focusing on adult literacy, which has been marginalized in policy making. Its advocacy and lobbying successes led to the participatory formulation of the Adult Literacy Strategic Investment Plan 2002/03, and has enabled local communities to monitor the allocation of funds to literacy programmes and demand accountability from district local councils and/or PAF funds.
- UDN (Uganda–CORDAID and HIVOS) led the campaign for debt relief, building a chain of action from community monitoring up to international advocacy, by investing in capacity-building, research and intensive use of the media for advocacy. To ensure that complaints about use of debt relief funds are acted on, UDN is facilitating communities to undertake quick-action advocacy. Nationally it remains the most reliable source of information on the effects of debt relief on poverty.
- UNIWELO (Sri Lanka–CORDAID) is a district-based CSO that has achieved official recognition of women in the Joint Plantation Development Committees, which were earlier exclusively for males.
- The National Association of Waste Recyclers (Colombia–NOVIB) is a grassroots social movement seeking to influence national and municipal policies towards waste collection and thus protect the livelihoods of some of the poorest citizens (15,000 families) of Bogotá. The Association has helped defeat President Pastrana's attempt to privatize waste recycling with Decree 1713.

A fifth domain in which CSOs are increasingly active is that of enhancing *citizen and CSO participation in economic life*. This work focuses on market

engagement by poor, vulnerable people (and organizations working on their behalf) on their terms and for their economic needs, and aiming to make the concept of pro-poor economic growth a reality. Despite being given limited attention in the evaluation (the CFAs being involved in a separate evaluation on this issue), two types of examples were found: organizing for economic justice such as holding the business sector to account, and the insertion of a pro-poor perspective and presence in existing economic institutions. Examples of the latter include: Diocese of Fort Portal (CORDAID-Uganda), which has developed an innovative marketing model for 'high volume-low value' crops; facilitating producer groups to engage with market boards and improve their bargaining power (CORDAID-Uganda); and CONIC's (HIVOS-Guatemala) role in developing participatory methods to work out strategic approaches to agrarian reform over multiple timescales.

CSOs are also active in cultivating values of *trust, dignity, culture* and *identity* that create the bedrock for mutually respectful social relationships and engendering trust in others based on positive experiences, which is essential for joint action in other domains. CSOs active in these areas include informal support groups for minorities, cultural expressions, and working on vibrant community centres. Examples include the Butterfly Peace Garden (BPG) (Sri Lanka-HIVOS), which works to help war-affected children overcome their traumatic experiences through arts, play and counselling. Children come to the garden in mixed groups, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious, from communities that are at strife with one another, a process that is contributing towards a healing and reconciliation effect among the wider community. In Guatemala, MMK (HIVOS-supported) enables Mayan women to understand the problems they face within indigenous communities and in spaces with non-indigenous men and women. The Mayan cosmovision-oriented work has helped women, over the years, to gain confidence and discuss issues around identity and sexuality that were never discussed publicly in the past.

Transformation through service delivery

While the CFA policies are clear about how service delivery work can enhance 'civil society participation', many of the partner organizations would not necessarily consider much of their service delivery work to fall under this label. Furthermore, it was clear that while partner organizations consider issues of power, (political) space and violence in their service delivery work, it is not always guided by a clear understanding of how service delivery, empowerment and CSP are related.

Nevertheless, some examples show what is possible – but also how the context shapes what can be expected. Plan's child-centred work in Guinea, Colombia and Uganda emphasizes this. The work has helped increase the

number of community organizations and strengthen local capacities within these countries, including examples where children take overall responsibility for project management and implementation. In Guinea, this happens under very difficult circumstances where development-oriented CBOs are still a relative novelty. Initiatives such as 'Child-to-Child' and the Children's Parliament increase children's participation in particular. Plan's school programmes offer models of education that encourage children to speak out, form their own opinions and engage in school decision-making. A further example comes from Uganda, where ACORD (NOVIB-supported) has evolved from a relief and infrastructure focus to an institutional and rights-based emphasis on capacity-building of local government and strengthening of civil society in the North. Local government has noticeably resisted civil society participation and CSOs have been relatively weak and contract-oriented. ACORD's encouragement and training have enabled a shift in the dynamics of civil society-local government relations, particularly in parish development committees, where CBOs are more visible and planning decisions are more transparent than at higher levels where NGOs dominate.

Since the relatively recent surge of interest in rights-based approaches (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2005), development activities seem to be viewed by some development actors in a rather dichotomous manner as constituting either political or non-political work. Much of what is deemed to fit within a rights-based logic is considered 'political' and tackling structural causes of poverty, while the rest is considered 'old style' service delivery development that alleviates the symptoms of poverty. Again it must be noted that this is not the case for the CFAs, but has been noted among partner organizations. The CSP perspective of this evaluation challenges this simplistic dichotomy as being both unhelpful and misleading, leading to missed opportunities.

People's citizenship entitles them to basic services and provides the springboard for other developmental endeavours in terms of claiming rights. At the same time, claiming service delivery provision is itself a political act of rights realization. Therefore a critical component in service delivery is how the poor, marginalized and vulnerable (and their organizations) participate in defining needs and priorities, ensuring access to and quality of services, and collaborative service provision, including volunteer-based service provision. This is a decades-old debate that has spawned much of the participatory focus of development activities in recent times. Added to this is the renewed emphasis by many government funding agencies in the North on direct poverty alleviation goals in the form of service delivery as a technical/administrative activity, and a shift in channelling this through government channels in the interests of stimulating 'good governance'. As

a result, CSOs in general are experiencing a squeeze on resources for this work. Simultaneously, they are also recognized by funding agencies as playing a vital role in the social change and advocacy spheres.

Thus the challenge for CSOs lies in articulating clearly the interconnect-edness between their service delivery function and that of more structural change-of-power relations, or the advocacy function. And the CFAs have a role to play in enabling and encouraging this.

The never-ending challenge of gender equity

All of the CFAs fund work that addresses gender inequalities, most often in ways that reflect the more political 'gender and development' approach, as opposed to the more conservative 'women in development' approach. Many partner organizations focus on:

creating opportunities for women to occupy claimed spaces and to gain self-confidence in these claimed spaces. They prepare women to negotiate in the invited spaces with government authorities and with others with powerful positions like the police, community leaders, etc. They are equipped to challenge the power structures and to claim their rights. These women's groups are further strengthened through networking and often bring information on alternative forms of development to the 'male'-streamed development processes. (Perera and Walters, 2005: 33)

In Sri Lanka, HIVOS's support focuses on violence against women and migrant workers, while in Guatemala it supports CSOs that build (indigenous) women's capacity to claim rights and access decision-making, audit government policies and work on sexual identity. Plan's work on gender issues focuses largely on capacity-building for empowerment – through training of women promoters, ensuring girls' access to schools, and awareness-raising about reproductive rights, but also facilitating equitable access services and providing legal support. CORDAID's support for gender-related work in Sri Lanka focuses on the plantation sector, including violence against women, capacity-building and representation on plantation committees. In Uganda, regional and national legal rights advocacy work is funded by CORDAID, while in Colombia the work of the CSO Conciudadania stands out for building a sense of cultural identity and belonging which could enable a civic and civil response, notably by women leaders. NOVIB's work on gender in Uganda has focused mainly on advocacy issues, such as support for women's engagement with the review of the 1995 Constitution, and advocacy on women's land rights and on the Domestic Relations Bill. In Colombia, NOVIB supports work on promoting female participation in public policymaking and generating feminist consciousness.

The results of these efforts give rise to two observations in particular. First, gender relations, violence (in all shades) and civil society participation

are strongly interwoven. Intra-family violence in Colombia lays the basis for a climate of fear and social relationships mediated by conflict that affects the quality of citizen participation at other levels, such as the respect given to and felt by women in formal spaces. In Sri Lanka, the war, violence, insecurity and poverty have resulted in high levels of alcoholism, domestic violence and suicides, which adversely affect women disproportionately. Hence the importance of work such as *Mujeres Maya Kaq'la* (HIVOS–Guatemala), which helps Mayan women move from victimhood to public participants and that lays the foundation for more participatory society.

The second observation is the considerable variation in attitude among partner organizations to gendered aspects of CSP. The Uganda country study lauded the long-term investment by CFAs in women's organizations and the focus on gender issues, which had contributed to very significant advances for gender equality in terms of economic and political opportunities, policy analysis and change, competencies among women at all levels to have a significant voice on their issues, and strong organizations working on domestic violence, gendered dimensions of HIV/AIDS, education, and so forth. In Sri Lanka, notable advances have been made in the areas of Muslim women's rights and the lives of women tea plantation workers. By contrast, in Colombia, while women are high among the victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence and forced displacement, and have played key roles in community mobilizing and civil resistance, they still appear to be very poorly represented as political leaders and holders of power. In Guinea, while significant advances have been made in girls' schooling, which is undoubtedly significant work, and women are now allowed to participate in (some) councils of elders and community councils, other critical opportunities for engaging with entrenched gender inequalities and abuses, such as female genital mutilation and gender issues within CSOs, have not been taken up.

Understanding the gendered dimension of power and violence is a cornerstone of effective CSO support. Separating these two perspectives risks a false separation between support for gender-related action and for civil society participation in contexts of violence. As such, three useful suggestions can be made here. First, NGOs can seek a more integrated perspective on gender policies and conflict/peace-building policies, to come to a gendered understanding of violence and conflict that can then inform their country/regional strategies. Second, support for partner organizations should go beyond strategies that simply place women in previously 'closed spaces' and invest more in strategies that seek to transform these spaces in ways that ensure that they are genuinely used to further women's interests or to address tough topics related to invisible power. Third, NGOs need to assess whether their support – in a collective sense – constitutes the type of

multi-level action that is required to change patriarchal practices that exist throughout societies. Again, this will involve using the power framework to analyse where gender-equity obstacles exist, where strategic efforts are occurring and where critical gaps remain and could be addressed by the CFAs and their partner organizations.

Moving Forward: Conceptual and Practical Advances

Conceptually, two analytical tools were used within this study – the power analysis framework and the notion of CSP domains – and each emerged as having a high degree of practical relevance for how NGOs go about their work in this field. In addition, the evaluation showed that there are significant gains to be had in terms of promoting CSP where funding is sustained over significant periods; where international funder-partners encourage a participatory culture both within their local partners and between themselves; and also through the documentation and sharing of findings. I deal with each of these ways forward in turn.

The power cube framework

The 'power cube framework' that guided the study proved a valuable and flexible tool to seek answers about how power inequalities were being tackled and to stimulate discussions on strategies for and dynamics of participation with the CSOs. The workshops where partner organizations met to discuss 'civil society participation' were widely appreciated for enabling more detailed and strategic discussions on their activities. It helped the organizations locate their work alongside that of others, assess its relevance and reflect on the relative merits of different strategies being used. These discussions highlighted the changing in-country political realities, which had, for example, opened up new spaces for engagement in Uganda but in Colombia and Guatemala were threatening to close painfully conquered space. Rich-country level examples illustrated every dimension of the framework, varying greatly by context, shaped as they are by the histories and realities of violence and conflict. Clearly, there is no recipe for what constitutes effective participatory action.

The emerging issues related to 'place' and 'space' have several implications for CFAs and their partner organizations. They need to:

- continue to work at all levels (global to local) but invest more in conscious building of linkages between partners across these levels so that efforts can complement each other more strategically;
- encourage CSOs to strategise consciously about which 'space' (closed, invited, claimed) is most relevant and potentially effective for a specific

issue, but also in terms of what type of intervention is needed in each space – and then support partners to gain required capacities needed for greater effectiveness;

- be clear that 'participation' in a particular space does not necessarily mean transformation of power inequalities – there can be much action, with little political or practical change, but conversely many strategies of engagement are critical and necessary in order to affect the decision-making that affects the lives of the poor.

The dimension of 'power' has other practical potential:

- defining and recognizing the importance of different manifestations of power can ensure more consciously adopted, strategic action – and the identification of alternatives to current strategies – that can effectively transform power inequalities;
- the CFAs need to locate themselves more fully within the 'power cube framework', thus ensuring that analysis of participation and power is useful for them internally and not only for the CSOs.

Notwithstanding the usefulness of the framework for critical reflection, other uses must be approached with more caution (see Gaventa, 2006). In particular, the framework should be viewed as dynamic and flexible, and not as a static checklist for categorizing organizations.

The domains of civil society participation

A second 'tool for thought' is the six-domains framework of civil society participation. It helps specify more clearly what CSP means in practice and, in more general terms, renders underlying development processes more apparent and amenable to action through development interventions. The six domains, along with the findings from the country studies, underscore the CFAs' original concern that civil-society building, as it is often (but not universally) understood, does not adequately address deeper issues of participation, empowerment and voice in decision-making and political processes. In practice, CSB has often centred on strengthening civil groups and non-governmental organizations and their activities. What this study shows is the importance of questioning more critically the relationship between civil society groups and the active participation of citizens or the constituency they claim to represent in decision-making processes. The CSP concept adds a more critical perspective on the power and politics of participation in civil society action, which leads to a set of more distinct domains in which civil society can be seen to be active and where CFA support can be discerned. Significantly it untangles what funders can expect of CSOs and of citizens, as separate levels of intervention and impact.

Importantly, the domains framework can enable the CFAs to:

- assess with greater clarity the results of CSOs within each domain, thus giving them a clearer picture of their contribution towards enhanced civil society participation;
- target funding and other support more strategically; and
- be more specific about their expectations vis-à-vis specific partners and contracts.

Sustain funding through organizational and contextual transitions

Conspicuous in many of the examples is the use of multi-pronged strategies that have evolved over time. Many CSOs working on citizenship strengthening followed up with support for advocacy efforts, while citizen participation in service delivery and advocacy efforts often go hand in hand. Efforts to build dignity and relationships of trust are nested with civil rights awareness-raising. Two evolutions are evident in many of the cases. First, there is a clear shift in contexts where CSOs emerged from a history of service delivery from a welfarist to an empowerment approach. This is evident in Uganda and Sri Lanka, with early signs in Guinea. A second and related evolution is the growth of CSOs from single actions to a presence in various arenas, moving from localized, community-level activism to broader national (advocacy) efforts (Madre Selva, Guatemala-HIVOS) or from national lobby work to community capacity-building to enhance impact (UDN, Uganda-CORDAID/HIVOS). Taking on more complex issues has required more sophisticated strategizing, new competencies and the diversifying of activities.

Overall, the four CFAs collectively support a critical and diverse portfolio of relevant work in the five countries that enables the emergence and strengthening of civil society participation in diverse manifestations. This is a highly significant contribution to development at a time in which democratic and peaceful processes of social and political change are threatened in all the countries included in the evaluation. Given the vital contribution made by the CSOs funded by the CFAs to enhance civil society participation and given the urgent challenges, the CFAs must continue the nature and focus of their support to CSOs towards this effect.

The largely positive conclusion becomes even more significant when put into wider perspective, by noting how the Dutch CFAs compare to other funding agencies. All country studies except for Guinea offer views by the partner organizations of what is concluded clearly by Mukasa et al. (2005): that many other agencies funding CSP

lack a cogent ideology and in the absence of a sustainable resource base, [so] they opportunistically shift from one issue to another due to donor dependency

and influence. ... Many of the CSOs admitted that the CFAs provide the biggest and most reliable long-term core funding to them. They in particular lauded the CFA approach to funding, which is based on the partners' strategy as opposed to project-specific funding.

Such funding support is perhaps, at times, taken for granted in the Dutch development arena. This would be a mistake – it must be valued, nurtured and reinforced.

Learn, document, share

The study revealed a relative paucity of (clear) documentation by the CFAs and CSOs on strategies that successfully promoted citizen and CSO participation. If CFAs (and partner organizations) are to make claims about 'enhancing civil society participation', then the question is on what basis such claims are made. The specific and significant methodological challenges for monitoring and evaluating social change work are increasingly recognized. Given the processual and interconnected nature of activities that enhance civil society participation, this requires due attention to qualitative approaches for capturing results and impacts. If effectiveness indicators are to be developed, then outcomes that value the processes and changes in, for example, attitudes, behaviour and knowledge become important. The CFAs should scrutinize their monitoring and evaluation of CSP work to deal better with the complexity and context-specific nature of social change processes, building capacities and processes within the CFAs and partner organizations.

Invest in participatory cultures: internally and with CSOs

Building a 'participatory culture' must receive more attention, with fieldwork revealing a need for more reflection by CSOs on their own understandings of the participation, democracy building and conflict resolution that underpin their actions. 'Participatory development' is not just about increasing the voices in decision-making but represents values, such as respectful inclusion and democracy within social movements, that qualify 'participation' and make it positive or negative. The slow, uncertain and fragile nature of progress towards enhanced 'civil society participation' is only possible with a clear vision on rights-oriented development, staying power and strategic flexibility on the part of citizens and their organizations. These qualities are also needed of the CFAs that support them. All four CFAs are viewed by CSOs as very positive funding agencies and partners. The CFAs are clearly committed to the broader endeavour of peaceful and democratic civic societies, and provide long-term core funding that sees partners and projects through difficult times and transitions. They are steadfast either in their vision of development as requiring sustained action

to redress power inequalities, or in strengthening this vision where it is not yet developed.

This can be aided if CFAs strengthen their capacity to undertake power analysis. This can help them underpin and make more consistent their policies, strategies and procedures vis-à-vis partners, paying particular attention to assumptions about social change and what can be expected of CSOs, given the challenges of their operating environment. The CFAs themselves are agents of change, which they recognize. They need to recognize their own power in-country in shaping and furthering agendas of their partner organizations and initiatives and act on this, without creating (new) dependencies and without imposing international advocacy agendas on partners. Greater clarity on this requires an internal CFA analysis of its own agency in country-focused support, reconsidering its roles vis-à-vis partners and the CSP theme.

Vis-à-vis the CSOs, all CFAs face the similar challenge – of overcoming the existing deficit of direct dialogue with partners/project staff on enhancing citizen and CSO participation based on a power analysis. This should aim to enable partners to be more (self-)critical and strategic, based on their own visions of social change and given the types of operating environment outlined here. The CFAs should also invest more in processes for enhancing participatory (organizational) culture within the CSOs they support, as a critical component for strengthening the quality of the partners' participatory action.

Overall, the experience of how NGOs seek to promote civil society participation suggests the importance of several strategic approaches by NGOs and their funders, two of which have particular relevance here. The first concerns the importance of thinking more clearly around how and where to act and of (re)conceptualizing the challenges that promoting development alternatives entails. This requires frameworks of analysis that are both critically informed and practical. Two frameworks are proposed here, both with significant potential to help NGOs close the gap between development interventions and underlying processes of development. Second, it bears repeating that historical transitions – such as those towards lived (not simply formal) citizenship – may take a long time, particularly in contexts affected by conflict and violence. In such scenarios in particular, funding flows need to be long-term, flexible and designed in ways that give local partners the time and space to continually (re)define strategies to make the most of opportunities and deal with contextual constraints. If such approaches to co-financing are diluted or disappear, then the NGOs face even tougher conditions under which to pursue social change over the long run.

NGO acronyms

ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
CALDH	Centro de Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos
CONIC	Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina
CORDAID	Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid
DENIVA	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations
HIVOS	Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries
LABE	Literacy and Adult Basic Education
MMK	Mujeres Maya Kaq'la (Mayan Women Kaq'la)
NAFSO	National Fisheries Solidarity
NOVIB	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Ontwikkelingssamenwerking (Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation)
PREDO	Plantation Rural Education and Development Organization
TDDA	Trincomalee District Development Association
UDN	Uganda Debt Network
UNIWELO	United Welfare Organization

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Producing Knowledge, Generating Alternatives? Challenges to Research-oriented NGOs in Central America and Mexico

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What do non-profit organizations whose primary role is to produce knowledge contribute to development alternatives? The question is not an idle one. As the Millennium Development Goals and the poverty agenda impress themselves ever more firmly on the criteria used to allocate international cooperation and national development budgets, research-oriented NGOs, and research activities within multi-functional NGOs, have found it increasingly difficult to secure funding. In this context, being clear on the nature, role and purpose of such NGOs is urgent, otherwise research activities in progressive NGOs will wither away, leaving the non-profit knowledge-generation field open to business-supported, more conservative and well-funded think-tanks. This urgency is both institutional (to offset an organizational demise that occurs by default rather than because of any clear strategic reasoning) and political (to avoid the further colonization of public debate and discourse by a core set of broadly neoliberal principles encoded in different policy prescriptions and conceptual arguments).¹

Clarity on the nature, role and dynamics of such organizations is also of theoretical importance. A reflection on the relationship between knowledge and development alternatives forces more careful thought on the relationships between civil society and development, among knowledge, policy and the public sphere, and on the constitution of civil society itself. Thinking in a more disaggregated manner about these relationships is itself, we argue, a contribution to reflections on the nature of development alternatives, and to our conceptualization of the relationships between non-governmental organizations and alternatives.

With these opening gambits in mind, the chapter summarizes a series of collective reflections elaborated by the authors in the course of a two-year

initiative addressing the role and evolution of NGOs engaged in knowledge generation related to environment and development in Central America and Mexico. The reflections are largely autobiographical in their inspiration, for the work underlying this chapter has revolved around analytical reconstructions of the authors' own organizations and the knowledge generation work done within them (Bebbington, 2007). Our analysis is, however, grounded in a broader theoretical reflection (see the following section) in order that it be relevant for research-oriented NGOs elsewhere.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we outline several generative concepts that underlie our reflection on research-oriented NGOs. Second, we provide a brief summary of the organizations whose experience informs the argument here. Third, we discuss the ways in which these organizations understand the relationships between knowledge, civil society and development alternatives, and in particular their approaches to the relationships between research and policy processes. Fourth, we discuss the pressures that these organizations currently face – pressures emanating from their external and internal environments. We then close discussing the types of organizational change to which these pressures have led over recent years, and the challenges that these experiences raise for thinking about the roles of knowledge-generation organizations in producing development alternatives.

Theorizing the Informal University: Concepts for Thinking about Research-oriented NGOs

In his interpretation of the relationships among politics, economy and religion in post-World War II Latin America, David Lehmann emphasizes the importance of a certain type of non-governmental organization: those that combine grassroots work with various forms of research, publication and knowledge generation (Lehmann, 1990). He suggests that such organizations played an important part in processes of democratization, largely due to their roles in broadening particular types of public sphere and placing both academic and social movement knowledge within those public spheres. Lehmann referred to such organizations as the 'informal university', not only to draw attention to the intellectual nature of their work but also to suggest that their emergence was an effect of particular political and financial pressures on the formal university during that period. At the same time, this characterization (and Lehmann's analysis) suggested that the contribution of such centres was distinct from that of universities. Their private, not-for-profit nature allowed them to do and say things, to bridge the research and public spheres, to bridge direct engagement and

knowledge production, and so on, in ways that universities simply could not. Being non-governmental held open the possibility of generating knowledge in quite different ways – ways that were embedded in particular social actors and social processes.

Of course, such non-profit research centres also exist in countries where political and financial pressures are not so intense (Stone, 2002; Stone and Denham, 2004; Maxwell and Stone, 2004), suggesting that their emergence is due not only to the constraints on universities. However, many such centres are linked closely to political parties, interest groups or government departments, and/or exist largely as consultancies. Such linkages serve as a source of both financial support and political legitimacy, but also raise questions such as how best to theorize about these non-profit research centres. While the tendency is to refer to them as civil society organizations, this may not be the most helpful way to conceptualize (for example) a think-tank that draws the majority of its financial support from the UK's Department for International Development, that is closely linked to the UK Labour Party or that is funded primarily by US-based energy companies. While not describing the situation of the organizations writing this chapter, these hypothetical examples suggest that it is not enough to say that we are simply civil society organizations or think-tanks. Rather, we need to think much more carefully about the sources of our legitimacy – not in order to make normative judgements about our work, but in order to be clearer about our role, and the relationships and sources of legitimacy that we must nurture carefully. Too often non-profits presume they are legitimate due to their non-profit and 'civil society' status. Yet, as the literature is clear, such claims are simply not enough (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Hulme and Edwards, 1997).

Indeed, the special case of research-oriented NGOs is helpful for thinking about civil society – and, in turn, reflecting on these analytical approaches to civil society helps illuminate potential roles of research-oriented organizations. Here we outline two distinct approaches, one viewing civil society in associative terms, the second seeing it as 'the arena ... in which ideological hegemony is contested' (Lewis, 2002: 572). The associationalist approach views civil society as the arena of association between the household and the state, a 'third sector' which can supply services that neither state nor market can (e.g. Salamon and Anheier, 1997). In this reading, knowledge-generating NGOs might be viewed as sources of research, consulting, advice and publication, but understood in their terms of their function rather than in terms of the political project of which they are a part. This latter emphasis instead characterizes a second approach, which has roots in both Gramsci (1971) and Habermas (1984). Here, civil society is understood as the arena in which ideas and discourses become hegemonic, serving to stabilize and

naturalize capitalist systems of production and exchange. Notwithstanding their hegemonic status, these ideas can be challenged and upset. Indeed, for post-Marxism and post-structuralism, this was the lens through which Latin American social movements had to be understood (Alvarez et al., 1998). It was not simply that the role of a social movement was to build counter-hegemonic ideas (around development, democracy or human rights); rather this was the very definition of a social movement. Movements were vectors of these counter-hegemonic tendencies. Given that knowledge is central to both hegemony and counter-hegemony, in this interpretation, research-oriented NGOs would have to be understood in terms of their positioning with either hegemonic (mainstream) or counter-hegemonic (alternative) tendencies.

A second, related, axis around which we have ordered our thinking derives from recent work by Evelina Dagnino and colleagues (2006). Rather than use a language of state, market and civil society to help locate the niche and roles of particular (non-governmental) actors in fostering inclusion and democracy, they suggest that it is more helpful to consider their relationship to larger political projects that cut across the spheres of state and civil society. They identify three such meta-projects in contemporary Latin America: a neoliberal (or neoliberal-deepening) project, a direct democracy (or democracy-deepening) project, and an authoritarian project. The advantage of such a framework is that it avoids the issue of whether or not an organization is an NGO or a social movement (etc.), and asks instead that an organization's essence be identified in terms of what it stands for and contributes to. This approach may also be helpful given that the ways in which other actors relate to an organization probably depend more on its relationship to distinct projects rather than on its relative purity as a civil society, market or state actor. Furthermore, for the particular case of knowledge generation, actors might deliberately interact with others whose political projects are quite distinct in order that the knowledge produced is as legitimate and evidence-based as possible.

A drawback of Dagnino et al.'s characterization, however, is that it may be too blunt to accommodate the different hybrids that exist in the region. Some of these hybrids might simply be – in Dagnino's et al.'s language – instances of 'perverse convergence' in which a neoliberal project appears to open scope for participation but in practice does so in a way that further undermines the concepts of universal rights and social justice. Others, however, may not be perverse, and may involve serious attempts to explore ways in which markets can be used (and governed) so as to allocate resources to foster greater social inclusion. Indeed, a second drawback of the framework is the tendency to associate the participatory democratic project with political practices, and the neoliberal project with

market-based practices. Yet there are evidently projects – both globally and in the region – that are based on economic models that afford an important role for markets while also fostering inclusion either directly (through addressing who has access to these markets) or indirectly (through addressing the quality of growth that market development delivers). Such hybrids have different origins, often depending on the institutional context in which they have been elaborated. Some have grown out of the institutional and informational turn in economics, some from efforts to refashion socialist and social-democratic political projects so that they allow markets to play a bigger role in resource allocation and the creation of opportunities; some are based in real-world exigencies encountered by left-of-centre political projects when they assume positions of political power and need to manage resource scarcity and fiscal constraints. Whether referred to as the post-Washington Consensus (Fine, 2001, 1999), the Third Way (Giddens, 1998), or some other epithet, such efforts at hybridizing aspects of both neoliberalism's commitment to the role of markets and social democracies' commitment to the importance of governing markets so that they are less exclusive, are present in projects in contexts as diverse as Lula's Brazil, the Concertación's Chile, New Labour's Britain or even the World Bank's *World Development Report* of 2006 on Equity. Hybrids such as these offer a fourth political project to add to Dagnino et al.'s trinity. This schema can help not only to locate our organizations but also to shed light on their role and niche in the region.

A final axis for thinking about the work, nature and niche of organizations such as ours comes from understandings of the linkages between research/policy and research/social change. Diane Stone (2002) suggests three main types of explanation used to explore obstacles to research-policy linkages: supply-side explanations (which suggest that the main problem is to do with problems in the quality, usefulness and communication of research); demand-side explanations (suggesting that the main problems are to do with lack of political will or the lack of technical ability among policymakers to use research-based knowledge); and embeddedness explanations (suggesting that the main problems are related to weak links between research centres and the social actors that drive policy change). These three explanations might well be related to two broad approaches to research-policy linkages: approaches that can be characterized as the 'short route' from research to policy and the 'long route' (Bebbington and Barrientos, 2005). Supply- and demand-side explanations of the obstacles to research-policy linkages imply that once the related problems are resolved, then research should become relevant to and influential in policy formation. Therefore supply- and demand-side explanations hold open the possibility and desirability of following a *short route* from researchers to policymakers – a route in which

researchers, their ideas and their publications have a direct influence on policy. Conversely, embeddedness explanations suggest that for research to influence policy, it is important that research centres embed themselves in particular social actors who will then take the knowledge that the centres produce (knowledge made more relevant through this process of becoming embedded) and use it both in their own practices and in their efforts to influence policy: a *longer route* from research to policy.

The two routes have different institutional implications for research centres. The short route suggests a more rapid, less costly and a more elitist and technocratic approach to research-policy linkages, while also implying that research-centre legitimacy would be derived primarily from the professional quality of their staff and their work, as well as from personal linkages with policymakers and policy framers. The long route suggests a slower, more expensive process and perhaps one that requires more grassroots-oriented political commitments. In following the longer route, research centres would seek legitimacy primarily from the quality and depth of their relationships with social-change actors, and from the ways in which this embeddedness affected the research process. How a knowledge generating organization places itself with respect to the short- and long-route options will influence the types of internal capacity and external relationships it feels are most important to strengthen, the ways in which it structures itself institutionally and geographically, how it claims legitimacy for the work that it does, and quite possibly the larger political project within which it locates itself. With these conceptual axes in mind, then – namely, sources of legitimacy, positioning vis-à-vis larger political and development projects, and approaches to research-policy linkages – we discuss the organizations whose experiences drive the reflections presented in this chapter.

The Case Study Organizations

While the organizations whose experiences underlie this reflection are all non-governmental, they are non-governmental in different ways and to different degrees. Likewise the balance between research, knowledge generation and development intervention varies among them. Also, the extent to which environment and development is central to their work varies. In some cases (e.g. PRISMA and GEA) it runs through all their work; in others (e.g. Nitlapán and FLACSO) it is a programme within a wider suite of research themes, and so in these cases our collective reflection involved the parts of the organization involved in rural and environmentally related work. How might we, then, map our organizations?

At one extreme is the Group for Environmental Studies (Grupo de

Estudios Ambientales, GEA AC, Mexico), an organization that, while it takes knowledge generation seriously, has done so from the basis of a strong engagement in social-change and development activities. At the other extreme are organizations whose work is very largely research-oriented. This position is most apparent in Nitlapán (Nicaragua) and PRISMA (Programa Salvadoreño de Investigación sobre Desarrollo y Medio Ambiente). PRISMA is a free-standing NGO; Nitlapán functions in a similar way to PRISMA, but in formal terms is an administratively independent institute within the Universidad CentroAmericana (UCA) in Managua, a university owned by the Company of Jesús and with a presence through much of Central America.

Located between these two extremes we have two other types of organization. One is much more akin to or linked to a university organization. The Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences (FLACSO–Guatemala) is an autonomous graduate school that combines research, teaching, extension and outreach. While created under the auspices of UNESCO and governed, ultimately, by its fifteen member states, it functions to a considerable degree as an NGO. It combines research, outreach and efforts to influence policy and public debate, has considerable autonomy in devising strategy, and depends in large measure on international agencies for its activities. However, it is neither as autonomous nor as purely research-oriented as is Nitlapán. The Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán is a public university one of whose roles is to contribute to development of the Yucatán. PROTROPICO, however, is a programme created within the university with the express purpose of linking research and community development processes and allowing more participatory and also policy-oriented forms of knowledge generation related to natural resource management and development. With time, however, PROTROPICO has become increasingly autonomous of the university. It too depends on external funding for its work and is not governed by formal university rules and practices.

The other intermediary grouping is of NGOs that emerged as networks or inter-organizational forums that had the explicit objective of fostering public debate with a view to influencing policy. The Network for Sustainable Development (RDS, Red de Desarrollo Sostenible) also emerged under the auspices of a UN initiative (UNDP in this case) to broaden information availability on environment and development. While it continues to emphasize information exchange and policy influence, with time it has assumed the dynamics of a free-standing NGO combining development and information exchange. The Forum for Sustainable Development (Foro Chiapas) similarly emerged to foster exchange and debate among organizations, academics and political actors in Chiapas, Mexico, but with time it has become an NGO combining development projects and research activity.

Among them, then, these case-study organizations represent different ways of trying to be a private, non-profit organization that generates knowledge with a view to influencing action, public debate and policy. These different models, while complicating simple comparisons, allow us to reflect more systematically on the prospects for knowledge generation for alternative development from the position of non-governmental organizations.

Theorizing the Relationships between Knowledge, Civil Society and Development

Each of our institutions would think of itself as a civil society organization, though in somewhat distinct ways. These visions have also taken us towards differing views on the relationships between our work, knowledge production and development. In this section we outline these views. As will be apparent, they have different implications for the ways in which our institutions need to seek legitimacy. Whatever the case, it is clear that it is not enough for us to seek legitimacy simply by claiming to be civil society groups, and in practice it is probably the case that our legitimacy derives more from the quality and effects of the knowledge we produce than from our social location. We return to this later.

In practice the concept of civil society that is most prevalent in the ways in which we understand ourselves has been the associationalist one. We have viewed ourselves as civil society organizations because we are neither government nor profit-oriented organizations. The irony here, of course, is that – at least in terms of intellectual lineage – this places us in a tradition that has tended to be more conservative than we would want to think of ourselves as being. Indeed, for most of us, our earlier years were characterized by a more Gramscian sense of our place in civil society than have been our later years. The origins of our institutions were diverse: some inhered in a determination to be alternative, and to demonstrate that it was possible to build different ways of producing knowledge with campesinos (GEA); others inhered in the effort to produce knowledge that, though not organically linked to the FMLN, certainly sought to challenge right-wing views of what El Salvador was and should be (PRISMA); others (Foro Chiapas) came from a commitment to challenge authoritarian approaches to governing Chiapas, and to build on the spaces opened up by Zapatismo in Chiapas while (as in PRISMA's case) having no organic link to this movement; and others derived from a commitment to contribute to the liberating elements of Sandinismo (Nitlapán). Common to most of our origins was a commitment to build – or to facilitate the building of – knowledge that would challenge public debate and contribute to some

This commitment was made all the more complex by the historical moment in which many of us emerged. With the exception of FLACSO and GEA, we are all creatures and creations of the 1990s, a period of paradigmatic crisis in development and politics which was every bit as real in Mexico and Central America as it was in Northern academic and political worlds. As a result, our efforts to build alternatives were themselves challenged by a relative lack of guiding concepts – we had to build these ourselves. This is apparent in some of our work. For instance, Nitlapán's efforts to understand the dynamics of the peasant economy reflect the lack of a clear *ex ante* view on the merits of peasant production and organization (Maldidier and Marchetti, 1996); PRISMA's early (and some of its continuing) work in El Salvador reflected a conscious effort to connect discussion in El Salvador with international debates on environment and development, as a first step towards rethinking foundational concepts for an alternative Salvadoran development; by the 1980s GEA was similarly trying to elaborate with others a conceptual (and practical) base from which sustainable forest management under *campesino* control could be imagined. The more general point is that in order to challenge public debate we first had to do preliminary work in rethinking concepts for imagining development and politics.

Perhaps we and our financial supporters underestimated the challenge implied by an agenda such as this, and so with time we became part drawn, part pushed, towards more applied forms of knowledge production. Whatever the case, and while some of our knowledge production work is still oriented towards destabilizing core ideas in public debates and opening up alternative ways of thinking about development, there is also a sense in which our approach to the links between knowledge and development has become less ambitious. Albeit for some of us more than others, this change has led us to an approach that focuses more on generating knowledge for problem solving: knowledge to resolve problems in marketing chains, to generate agroecologically sound production options, to inform land-use plans and so on. In the following section we explore some of the factors that have pushed us in this direction.

Whatever the case, we believe that this role is a legitimate one, and certainly there is very great demand for us to play this role – a demand that comes from communities, peasant organizations, other NGOs, local governments. However, this change in the balance of our orientation – which is one that happened by default more than because of any conscious strategic decision – has slowly moved us towards that niche which is defined as civil society because it provides a service (in this case a knowledge service) that other organizations of the state or the market are not providing. We doubt how far this knowledge feeds into wider public and political discussions in ways that may lead people to reframe the problem of development and

democracy in our societies. Moreover, the change in orientation itself takes some of the alternative edge off the very concept of civil society in our societies. That is, to the extent that we define ourselves as civil society, and what we do is increasingly to provide services, our very form of existing and operating contributes to the idea that civil society is a domain of service provision, not of contestation over hegemony. By default (again) we have steadily assumed roles that seem to project an associationalist, gap-filling understanding of civil society, not a Gramscian one.

Whether in producing knowledge that might contribute to public debate, or knowledge that solves problems of development and livelihood, what is evident is that much of our legitimacy as organizations comes from the *quality* of the knowledge we produce. While there are different metrics of quality depending on the type of knowledge, and the social relationship within which it is being produced, we cannot get away from this issue of quality. There is a clear resonance here with earlier debates on NGOs and development at the 1994 Manchester NGO conference (see Edwards's chapter in this book; Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Hulme and Edwards, 1997). One of the important messages of that conference was that the legitimacy of NGOs derived as much from their performance – the quality of what they did and delivered – as it did from the mechanisms of accountability linking them to other social actors and ensuring transparency of their actions (Edwards and Hulme, 1995).

If we look at our own knowledge-generation work, we can see efforts to build each of these sources of legitimacy. Some of us emphasize quality more than accountability, and others accountability over quality, and, while the precise meanings of these terms may vary among us, we each broadly understand accountability in terms of our relationship to social organizations, and quality in terms of the depth, nuance and internal coherence of the knowledge we produce. In the following section we reflect on the challenges we face in protecting each of these sources of legitimacy. Here we would merely comment that they are not completely substitutable one for the other (indeed, the extent to which they are at all substitutable is not great). That is, there is a relatively high baseline of quality below which we cannot fall – when oriented towards problem-solving, the knowledge we produce must indeed solve problems, whether these are *campesino* production problems or local authorities' planning problems. When oriented towards public and policy debate, this knowledge must be minimally innovative; it cannot simply recycle what is already known and that which has already been said. Achieving these levels of quality is vital, but is a great challenge for organizations with no core funding (see below). Likewise, if we turn into pure think-tanks, doing commissioned and consulting work, we lose the legitimacy that comes from being a civil society actor (with either

meaning of the term). In many ways we become a pseudo-market, pseudo-government, or pseudo-political party actor. That is, the knowledge we produce becomes entirely demand driven, and thus – almost by definition – loses any hope of being counter-hegemonic.

Challenges to Research-oriented NGOs

As we reflect on the challenges that our organizations face, some are similar to the generic challenges facing NGOs seeking development alternatives, others are peculiar to the case of knowledge-generating and research-oriented NGOs. We comment on each in turn, paying special attention to our specific challenges as knowledge-generating NGOs concerned with incidence.

The generic challenges

While it sounds mercantile to begin with such a statement, there is absolutely no doubt that the main challenge of our organizations is a financial and resource mobilization one. By and large the issue is not that we cannot mobilize resources in order to continue being organizations. The consulting and short-term studies option offers this means of providing jobs to our staff and development services to clients (who in this financing model tend to become those who pay for the services more than the social organizations receiving them). In this sense, fulfilling the associationalist role of a civil society actor is not so very hard. The problem is to mobilize resources that allow us to play a civil society role in the Gramscian sense that permeates the argument of this book – the role of challenging orthodoxies and building alternatives.

In most of the agencies that historically supported the cultivation of alternatives in Central America and Mexico, a view of development as being synonymous with poverty reduction (and, note, a notion of poverty reduction that is more traditional than that even of World Bank documents such as the *World Development Reports* of 2000/2001 and 2006) has become increasingly hegemonic. The reasons for this are as much external (the pressure from the governments that transfer co-financing resources to them) as they are internal (the rise of a certain pragmatic institutional agenda inside these agencies). Whatever their source, they have translated into reduced funding for knowledge-generation activities in Central America and Mexico. Agencies offer several reasons for this reduction. First, if development finance is to be concentrated on poverty, then with the exceptions of Honduras and Nicaragua, Central America and Mexico are no longer priorities for most agencies, in spite of official figures establishing the existence of 50

to 72 million poor in Mexico. Second, the poverty impacts of knowledge generation are hard to discern, and it is far more appropriate therefore to fund projects that *do* things rather than people that *think and analyse* things. Implicitly, the message is that these agencies are no longer interested in alternatives, because poverty reduction is so self-evidently the right emphasis for aid that there is no alternative required. Furthermore, the assumption seems to be that the practice of poverty reduction is already understood, and can be dealt with independently of redistribution – an issue to be left to national political processes, not international cooperation.

All our organizations have experienced the effects of this. Some have been able to handle it better than others. Because of their university status or links, FLACSO and PROTROPICO have been most able to absorb this pressure – public funding and course fees for teaching offers them some financial base, and also it seems that increasingly universities have more legitimacy with certain funders than do research NGOs. After these two, PRISMA and GEA have been the next most resilient. Though these two, PRISMA and GEA have been the next most resilient. Though two completely different organizations – the one a think-tank, the other a *campesinista* group of thinking activists – the sources of their resilience are similar. Each shares a strong institutional culture regarding how they must and will operate. PRISMA insists that its work is programmatically funded or not funded at all; GEA's members' collective commitment to their political project generates massive (Chayanovian) subsidies to the organization. These commitments have helped each organization find its way through, and retain some knowledge-generating work. The remainder of our organizations – Nitlapán, Foro, RDS – have seen their work slowly but surely slip into a projectized, semi-consulting mode with serious (and negative) consequences for their ability to produce analytical or strategic knowledge oriented towards alternatives.

A second challenge – which is related to this financial pressure – has been to manage ourselves as organizations in such a way that there is coherence between what we argue to be our ideological and theoretical commitment, our ways of organizing ourselves internally, and the nature of our external relationships. Parts of this observation are distributed through different parts of this chapter – in the following paragraphs we simply bring together the parts and explain the core of the challenge.

In organizational terms, the challenge here is to find congruence between our political model, our institutional model and our financial model. In an ideal world, we would move from the first to the third of these, our financial model being functional to our political commitments (of being Gramscian civil society actors). In the real world, and in particular over the last five years, struggles with our financial model have determined everything else – our institutional model has been a retrofit to our financial reality, and to

a considerable degree our political model has fallen away from this calculus, like a mission statement hovering above and largely unconnected to our everyday practices.

This problem has been more severe for some of our organizations than others, though is real in all of them. The package of financing that we are able to compose determines the time horizons of our research, the types of contract we can offer to our staff, our salary and pensions conditions, and our ability to manage human resources strategically. For instance, the more our financial model is dominated by short-term funding streams the less we can engage in strategic research – for otherwise the risk is that we will start, but never finish it. Likewise, a model dominated by shorter-term funding requires contractual conditions that make it harder to hold staff. Young staff are typically on three- to six-month contracts with relatively low pay, and other opportunities attract all but the academically purist, most stubborn and ideologically most committed. Nor can we compensate for this with staff development except in those few (valuable) cases in which we are able to develop links to international universities that allow us to send these young staff for postgraduate training. Meanwhile for the other end of our staff profile, most of our organizations make no contribution to pensions or health care. This makes us ever less attractive to those of our staff who are older – but who, for the same reason of maturity, have more knowledge of managing knowledge production, and more contacts in the political and public spheres in which we aim to intervene. These very abilities make it easier for them to find better paid positions elsewhere or close their careers doing high-end consulting work.

It is not only that our financial model makes it harder to retain and develop research staff. It is also that it leads us towards the very same sort of neoliberal human resource management model we claim to work against. This weakens both our external legitimacy – as it subjects us to criticisms of practising what we preach against – and our internal coherence – as it generates serious internal tensions among staff of different ages, on different types of contract. Those of us who have been better able to manage these tensions have done so either because of a strong institutional culture, or because of strong models of leadership. Shared institutional cultures can lead us to solutions in which the collectivity bears the costs of the financial model, and so enjoys very similar work conditions; and in other circumstances they drive an ethic of overwork that helps compensate for resource constraints (but in doing so increases staff burnout). Such cultures are not, however, immaculately and spontaneously conceived: their existence is a result of diligent, deliberate and strategic cultivation since our early years. They cannot therefore be quickly invoked from nothing in order to save an otherwise dire financial and institutional situation.

Strong leadership can help deal with these pressures through two main avenues. First, among us there are cases where the strength of a leader or leaders has given us greater negotiating power with our financing agencies, helping gain longer-term, programmatic funding streams. These leaders inspire external subsidies to the institution. Second, we can identify cases where a strong leader so embodied an institutional culture that, though perhaps not existing in all of us, forced us by example to make the same commitments to the institution as did these leaders. Such leaders inspire internal subsidies to the institution. The problem with the subsidy of leadership is that, embodied as it is in one person, it can be easily lost when that person leaves or dies. There are among us several cases of this. Particularly severe is the case (which is perhaps the norm) in which the leader inspired *both* external and internal subsidies. On leaving, they take some of our external legitimacy (and contacts) with them, and leave a heart-sized hole in the cultural fabric of the institution.

The specific challenges

Perhaps the most important challenge we face specifically as research- and knowledge-generating organizations relates to the quality of our product. While product quality is a problem for all NGOs, the market for development ideas is a far tighter one than is that for development projects. Also, we would venture, the very nature of hegemony means that the possibility of breaking into, upsetting and changing the course of public and policy debate is far more circumscribed than the possibility of innovating in a location-specific development project. In this context, the quality of the knowledge and proposals we produce is of the greatest importance: and the more counter-hegemonic the goal, the longer the time required to build both the evidence base and the relations necessary to disseminate and legitimize this evidence. Yet producing such high-quality, evidence-based, strategic knowledge requires high-quality people and resources that allow sustained research *programmes* rather than short-term research consultancies of a few months or so, or small pieces of research hidden away in what are otherwise action-oriented projects. The increasing pressure on our financial base makes each of these ever more difficult. Staff retention is a particularly serious problem. High-quality thinkers are in relatively short supply, and – particularly as they get older and need to think of retirement – many of them have moved into better-paid public-sector, international or consultancy positions. Perhaps the most significant case of this is Nitlapán, but it is not the only case. That these people make this decision is entirely understandable. However, the effect is to weaken the human capital of our organizations, and thus the quality of the strategic knowledge we produce. By the same token, it is very difficult to produce destabilizing forms of

knowledge if those who do research have constantly to complement their income with consulting, and have research funding that reaches only several months ahead.

Another challenge that is somewhat more specific to NGOs such as ours also has to do with how we affect policy and public debate. For each of us, this is an explicit part of our mission and objectives, though we pursue the goal in different ways. The short and long routes to incidence are present in each of our organizations, though combined in different ways. These combinations also suggest the need to nuance this distinction and to add to it a notion of scale, as we discuss below.

There are two main long routes to incidence in our work. One is the link with students – which is central to PROTROPICO's and FLACSO's way of working. PROTROPICO aims to train students who will then become professionals working in the Yucatan. The hope is that these persons will bring to their professional work more participatory and systems-based understandings of the links between development and the environment. FLACSO aims to do much the same at a wider geographical scale – indeed FLACSO's students return to positions not only in Guatemala but throughout Mesoamerica, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and Chile. In each case, the notion is that policy can be changed not only through engaging in policy framing and formation, but also through influencing the technocracies that manage policy. The goal is to change the human capital that makes those technocracies function and thus influence policy through its implementation. The challenge in this case is that there is a long delay before such incidence becomes apparent, and in neither FLACSO nor PROTROPICO do we have a documented sense of how far the training of students has actually influenced either bureaucratic practice or policy implementation in the region.

The second long route is that which occurs through other social actors, primarily social movements and social organizations. In the past, several of us attempted to build links with national movements. Nitlapán, for instance, engaged with the National Farmers and Livestock Producers Union (UNAG), with a view to the movement carrying forward ideas in their own engagement with the Nicaraguan government. In practice, however, this has been difficult, and over time, to the extent that we support other social actors with knowledge generation activities, we do so at a sub-national level only. Foro has worked with coffee organizations in Chiapas, and now works mostly with social organizations and communities that have been displaced by environmental conflicts; GEA works with peasant organizations in Guerrerro; PRISMA collaborates with forestry cooperatives and local governments, and so on. These relationships with more thematically and geographically focused organizations have proven easier to manage than ones

with more diffuse social movements. At best, however, they lead only to local and regional, or commodity-specific, influence. They rarely influence broader public debate. Indeed, the more general point here is that it has proven very difficult to sustain a social basis from which to do more basic and strategic research aimed at influencing policy and national debate. The organizations we work with have more immediate and pragmatic concerns, and our work becomes drawn towards applied activities aimed at addressing these concerns. Sometimes, along the way, more strategic issues arise and we can take these to policy debates – but by and large these are by-products of more applied work, and not the prime concerns of the organizations we interact with.

We have all tried the short route – direct to policymakers and policy working groups – to a greater or lesser extent. The advantages of this route – given our financial constraints – are that it is less resource-intensive, and does not require that we have regular or permanent presence outside the capital city. That said, it is a route that still consumes resources. Building the relationships necessary to get to the policy table takes time, and requires repeated participation in a range of events. Perhaps the most serious drawback of this route, however – at least in the ways in which we have practised it to date – is that it tends to hinge on personal relationships built up with a small number of technocrats or political appointees inside government. These contacts are then the vehicle for allowing us to bring our knowledge to policy discussions. Yet the rate of staff turnover in our governments falls far short of the Weberian ideal (and itself reflects another limitation of this route – namely that, failing significant political change, such individuals themselves have limited room to manoeuvre within government). Thus it is that on repeated occasions we have built these relationships only to see the persons removed from their government positions for bureaucratic or political reasons. Once that happens our access has been closed and we have to start again.

Our collective experience also suggests another route to policy influence with which several of us have experimented. This has involved efforts to create what Andolina has termed new ‘counter-public’ (Andolina, 2003: 733) spheres in which novel debates on development and democracy might occur. Andolina was referring to debates made possible by new local assemblies created by indigenous movements. In a similar way several of us have been directly involved in attempts to create networks of organizations – mostly NGOs, but also some social organizations and occasionally public sector organizations – whose purpose is not simply to exchange information but also to create visible arenas that might allow new debates on development and environment to occur. Indeed one of us – Foro Chiapas – was created specifically for this precise purpose. For its part, RDS soon moved into this

role, and has served as an arena allowing public debates on issues that the Honduran press has refused to cover (because of its ideological commitments and forms of political control). GEA has repeatedly tried to do something similar in Mexico, leading the creation of networks and platforms intended to make community forestry and themes such as bio-safety and GMOs more visible within Mexican public policy debate; and in Guatemala FLACSO uses its privileged institutional position to support (albeit more specific) debates on issues of public importance.

The greatest challenge to this strategy has been the difficulty of sustaining such counter-public spaces over time. At an institutional level it has proven impossible to mobilize resources that would support us (Foro and RDS) to play the role of creating and nurturing these spaces. And at a practical level, pressure of work has repeatedly impinged on these spaces, and with time levels of participation fall. The tendency, repeatedly, has been for these spaces to wither away, or for organizations created in order to embody such spaces to turn into one more development NGO.

Conclusions

If ‘development alternatives’ are to be more than simple rallying cries, they require substance and content. This content must come from somewhere. While the everyday practice and experiential knowledge of social-movement actors might be one source of such knowledge, it cannot possibly be the only source. To become a counter-discourse with teeth, this everyday knowledge needs to be synthesized, systematized and given coherence. It also has to be linked with analytical knowledge of the contexts within which everyday practices occur – contexts which, while they impinge on people’s life, are in many cases analytically inaccessible to them. Alternatives only stand a chance if they can both adapt to and change contexts, and for each of these requirements organized knowledge of those contexts is essential.

If this knowledge has to be produced, there are two implications. Somebody has to produce it, and somebody has to cover the costs associated with its production. Apart from maverick reformists here and there (Fox, 1996), government will not produce such knowledge *even if* bureaucratic pressures allowed for some space to do so. Likewise with aid agencies, non-profit and public sector alike – the bureaucratic pressures on their generally highly competent and trained staff mean that their practical capacity to think strategically about themselves, let alone about broader social processes, remains weak. So, realistically the only two bodies that might produce this knowledge are universities and non-profit organizations with research and analytical capacity.

In Central America and Mexico universities continue to be very weak. They lack budget to cover research, and more seriously still, perhaps, they lack the embeddedness in everyday social (movement) practices that might inform the production of knowledge for alternatives. Of course, there are exceptions here and there: FLACSO and PROTROPICO, in their different ways, demonstrate university efforts to become more embedded. However, the panorama is such that universities will not play this embedded knowledge-producing role, at least not alone or in the form in which they currently exist. Indeed, FLACSO and PROTROPICO each suggest that in order to become more embedded, universities need to incorporate elements of the non-governmental model into their own way of being and operating.

Non-profit research centres have different sets of strengths and weaknesses. Their greatest strength, arguably, is that their private status allows them greater flexibility in engaging with social actors in this knowledge-producing endeavour, as well as in mobilizing resources to support it. Their greatest weakness is that they have few or no core resources of their own. During the years of civil war (from Nicaragua through to Chiapas), as well as the first years after civil war began to wind down (essentially the 1980s and up to the latter 1990s), a suite of agencies, above all in Europe though also in North America, saw the importance of such non-profit production of strategic knowledge for alternative development. When development was about transformation, when it was more about redistribution than about targeted poverty reduction, agencies seemed to see an important role for these centres of knowledge production. However, since the late 1990s this has changed and international cooperation has appeared less interested in cooperating either with anything that is not a development project offering material, measurable impacts on poverty or with any actions that are deemed as occurring outside formal democratic processes. This shift in cooperation has been generally prejudicial to Latin America, and particularly so to organizations such as ours. It has meant that we have had to spend more time mobilizing resources, and engaging in activities less than consistent with the visions upon which we were founded.

The pressure to chase resources also has the effect of pulling our organizations away from social movements, with the possible exception again of GEA, whose geographical structure and strong institutional culture militate against such a trend. This is not to say that our organizations all had strong links with such movements in the first place, but with time whatever relationship there was has weakened. Several factors are at play here. First, and importantly, the weakening of movements themselves makes such links progressively more difficult and resource-consuming, precisely at a time when resources are less available. Second, and related, social organizations are far less able and willing to commit time and people to work with us

in generating strategic, hegemony-challenging knowledge (as opposed to applied, problem-solving knowledge). While their leaders generally see the need for such knowledge, internal dynamics militate against any significant commitment of resources to such an endeavour. Third, the time that institute staff members have to spend chasing resources, completing consultancies and cultivating the relationships that might ensure future resource flows means – in a finite world – less time for building movement relationships. As a result, while a number of our organizations prefer the long route from knowledge to policy incidence, it is not clear that we can demonstrate that we have followed this route, or – in cases where there are elements of this – whether the route has in fact led to any such incidence. In practice we have gone the short route.

These same pressures – drawing us away from movements and other social bases, and forcing us to spend more time chasing money – have also challenged the extent to which we are accountable to society. While we all sustain relationships – some more organic than others – with social organizations, the extent to which we are able to make ourselves accountable to them has declined over time. Increasingly – again echoing Hulme and Edwards (1997) – our accountability has shifted towards those agencies that fund our increasingly short term projects and away from the social actors with whose counter-hegemonic concerns we hope to identify. *Ipsa facto*, the extent to which societal accountability is a source of legitimacy for our work has also weakened.

All this has implications for how we are located vis-à-vis Dagnino et al.'s (2006) three political projects, and the fourth hybrid that we have added to them. If asked, we – as individuals and as institutions – would all identify with the direct democracy/democracy-deepening project. Yet our practices seem to contribute at least as much to a neoliberal project. We have become, to different degrees, actors operating in a funding market and – out of necessity – accepting its rules of operation. We have – to different degrees – introduced some of these market principles within the functioning of our own organizations. And, to the extent that our links with movements have become weaker, we contribute progressively less to strengthening, either directly or with the knowledge that we produce, the actors that would carry forward a democracy-deepening project in our countries. The situation is not completely depressing – we have links with progressive mayors, forest cooperatives, peasant organizations, migrant organizations and youth networks – but the challenge not to fall into what Dagnino et al. (2006) might deem the trap of perverse convergence is ever present. Indeed, it can become a source of stress within our organizations.

Looking at the trends in our countries – increasing levels of organized everyday violence and delinquency, deepening exclusion (especially of youth

and indigenous campesinos), continuing inequality, environmental destruction that, especially in Central America really does threaten the bases of our countries' sustainability – it is difficult to believe that there is not a continuing need to imagine, and build analytical, careful, alternative models of development, environment and social change in our region. It would be perverse to say that poverty is not a serious problem in our region, but it is not necessarily the most serious development problem, and it is certainly not the only problem. Now, more than ever, sustainable development is far more than poverty reduction; but we are frighteningly far from having alternative models that might inch us towards that sustainability. Knowledge for those models has to be elaborated by someone. The questions for the wider community of international cooperation (in particular our traditional supporters) are therefore: if not us, then who? If not from you, then from where? These questions need to be answered with searching honesty, not with easy, policy-honed sound bites.

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Anxieties and Affirmations: NGO–Donor Partnerships for Social Transformation

Mary Racelis

'We did it! We really did it!' Poor people's triumphant cries, accompanied by exuberant shouts and excited laughter, are music to the ears of seasoned community organizers. Whether the years of struggle have yielded land titles, piped water, adequately serviced health centres, a bridge to the national highway, traditional instruments for local performers, or jailed an abusive village official, the realization by once powerless people that collective action really works is a heady experience indeed.

Years of grassroots involvement, however, have also taught NGO organizers and their community partners that the euphoria may be short-lived. Valuable as these small-scale successes are, especially when multiplied across marginalized rural and urban communities, failure to institutionalize forms of community empowerment in larger government or donor systems and to make them part of social policy may only reinforce entrenched inequalities of asset and power distribution.

Further complicating the problem is globalization. Power stakes are rising as small farmers find themselves competing with commercial importers of onions, garlic or vegetables, or as urban workers in the informal manufacturing economy discover that the cheap recycled rubber-tyre footwear products are no price match for more fashionable and only slightly more expensive running shoes from China. Add to this foreign and local investors gobbling up large tracts of agricultural and coastal land for golf courses or beach resorts, or city governments evicting thousands of slum dwellers to make way for yet another shopping mall. Where national elites were once the focal points for negotiation and leverage, they may now represent only one set of links in a chain of decisions formulated a world away.

These are the kinds of threats to daily livelihood and culture that propel

grassroots groups to protest openly and take action. Such pressures likewise guide NGOs facilitating community analysis and helping victims turn small-scale actions into demands for longer-term institutional and political reforms. When potential sufferers can directly link a global intervention to an imminent threat on the ground, the stage is set for tackling *both* the 'small d' of development, representative of everyday living and the effects of distorting hegemonic processes, and the 'big D' of donor agency development interventions. (Introduction, this volume).

This chapter examines ways in which Philippine NGOs and their partner People's Organizations (POs) have broadened and protected democratic spaces through mobilizing, taking action and engaging in advocacy for social reform, structural change and the redefinition of donor priorities and operational modes. After a review of development challenges faced by NGOs, the discussion features three mini-cases illustrative of both small and large d/Development processes. One account examines Naga City slum upgrading activities in the Bicol region of Southern Luzon. The two others focus on activities centred in Metro Manila but which affect NGO/PO activities nationwide

Carving Out and Protecting Democratic Space

Political scientist Joel Rocamora (2005) has commented on how minuscule civil society advocacy seems when 'measured against "need", against scandalous poverty, and the greed and incompetence of the Philippine political elite'. Yet as the Marcos dictatorship years (1972–86) have shown, the option of armed struggle brought devastatingly high costs in lives, in creating deep fissures in Philippine society, and in threatening the very survival of democracy. Rocamora concludes that the more hopeful path lies in strong and effective advocacy towards reshaping Philippine democracy for social justice and political reform (2005: 127–8).

Poverty, inequality, powerlessness and unsustainable development

The Philippine population in 2005 was estimated at 85.2 million (Racelis et al., 2005: xvii) and expected to reach 111.5 million by 2020 (Asian Development Bank 2005, quoting projections of the National Statistical Coordination Board). Some 5,000 births occur daily among women 18–45, yielding a population growth rate of 2.36 per cent. The Philippines is thus a young society with a median age of 21. Children under 18 made up 43 per cent, or 33 million, of the population in 2000 (Racelis et al., 2005: 143).

Income poverty and powerlessness affect large sections of the populace. Although poverty incidence among individuals dropped from 49.2 per

cent in 1985 to 36.9 per cent in 1997, by 1998 the Asian economic crisis was taking its toll. Poverty incidence in 2000 rose again to 39.5 per cent. Moreover, although poverty rates fell by 9.7 per cent from 1985 to 2000, the absolute number of poor in the same period rose by over 4 million owing in part to high population growth rates coupled with weak poverty-reduction programmes. Subjective-poverty studies conducted by Social Weather Stations (2006) are also instructive: 62 per cent of families rated themselves as poor in 2003, while 5 per cent reported having experienced hunger, or food poverty, in the previous three months. By 2004, the hunger figure had climbed to 15.7 per cent (Asian Development Bank 2005: 18, 38), and by the fourth quarter of 2006 had reached a record-breaking 19.0 per cent, or 3.3 million affected households (Mangahas, 2006a, 2006b).

Inequality emerges in persistent and growing income disparities. In 2003, the richest 10 per cent of the population commanded twenty times the share of income of the poorest 10 per cent. The richest quintile (15.3 million people) controlled over 50 per cent of total family income, compared with the bottom quintile at only 5 per cent. Nor has this pattern changed since 1985 (Schelzig, 2005: 30). To make things worse, in real terms based on 2000 prices, the average income of the poorest 30 per cent contracted by 6 per cent between 2000 and 2003 (Schelzig, 2005: 17).

Gross disparities surface in regional comparisons, with Metro Manila/National Capital Region's poverty rating having dropped to 8.7 per cent of families in 2000, compared with 66 per cent for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Metro Manila's 8.7 per cent is no cause for joy, however. Although poverty is indeed concentrated in rural areas, the low citywide average hides the glaringly high poverty incidence and hunger in densely packed urban informal settlements. Overcrowded, physically degraded neighbourhoods coupled with limited employment and basic services make poor city dwellers' anxieties all the more acute. The availability of social capital through informal neighbourhood ties alleviates somewhat their chronic insecurity and makes summary relocation extremely disruptive of existing survival strategies.

The contrasting perspectives of NGOs and government on poverty issues emerge in a perceptions study of 100 government and NGO programme staff who implement and manage poverty-reduction programmes. Over half (54 per cent) of the NGO managers felt poverty had risen somewhat or a lot over the past five years, while only one-third (34 per cent) of their government counterparts subscribed to that view. On whether poverty would worsen 'somewhat or a lot' in the coming five years, 52 per cent of NGO managers indicated agreement, compared with 38 per cent of government managers (Schelzig, 2005: 40). Clearly, government officials

are more optimistic about the prospects of reducing poverty than are civil society grassroots workers.

A wide range of NGOs contest inequitable and unsustainable development by organizing community groups, or POs, around agrarian reform; upland environmental and watershed management linked to indigenous knowledge systems; participatory disaster management; savings, micro-credit and local economy investments; women's rights and gender fairness; peace, reconciliation and community rebuilding in ex-warfare zones; child rights in the context of the Millennium Development Goals; migrant families' well-being; resisting large-scale logging, mining and fishing interests in upland and coastal communities, and undertaking advocacy campaigns around these issues. On the urban scene, NGOs help build informal settlers' resistance to forced evictions and damaging resettlement while strengthening demands for secure tenure, improved livelihood and employment, food, education, health, water, sanitation, information, transport, and pro-poor policies. This usually calls for pressuring local and national officials to recognize and prioritize poor people's needs and preferences in keeping with the latter's proposals for reform and achievement of their rights.

Evidence of NGO-PO successes appear in the significant legislation enacted by the Philippine Congress in the last decade of the twentieth century. Notable examples have been agrarian reform (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, 1988), urban land reform (Urban Development and Housing Act, 1992), women's rights (Anti-Rape Law, 1997), ancestral domain claims (Indigenous People's Rights Act, 1997), environmental protection (National Integrated Protected Areas System, 1992) and local government decentralization (Local Government Code, 1992). The early years of the twenty-first century have offered more limited options. Congress in 2001-03 passed only three bills of national importance that had been championed by civil society, and even then, as in the case of the party list and overseas voting bills, 'they get mangled beyond recognition' (Rocamora, 2005: 128). This pattern of reduced social legislation may, however, be a product of the most pressing reforms having already been addressed. The declining number of NGOs in legislative advocacy may also have contributed to the trend.

NGOs have dealt with the realities of legislative activism over the years by developing networks for intense and effective lobbying. They have learned how to make contact with legislators, often through personal or school ties, or by deliberately seeking out the more progressive legislators. The congressional technical working groups, in which knowledgeable academics, NGOs and POs are invited to participate, give the latter groups an opportunity to insert their principles and language into proposed legislation. 'Crossover' civil society leaders who have joined the government help assess developments in governance and work out with civil society

ways of influencing the outcomes of policies and procedures towards social and political reform.

As Rocamora (2005: 128) points out, however:

The context for advocacy in the Philippines may seem difficult, but compared to neighboring countries with authoritarian single-party rulers, maybe we should count our blessings. What makes advocacy difficult in the Philippines is not often outright repression. It is at once the permeability and resilience of elite rule. There are all kinds of room for advocacy: in Congress, in the bureaucracy, in local government. But the system has seemingly inexhaustible capacity for side-stepping, postponing, somehow preventing change.

The Emergence of NGOs and POs

NGOs in modern guise emerged with full force on the Philippine scene during the Marcos dictatorship years from 1972 to 1986. Many drew their inspiration from Social Democratic ('Socdem') principles. Some were linked to the Radical Left National Democratic Front ('Natdems'), while others remained politically unaligned. An especially prickly thorn in Marcos's side came from the organizations focusing on human rights violations, like Task Force Detainees of the Philippines. This was in part because they maintained close contact with international human rights groups which could exert some leverage on their own governments (Silliman and Noble, 1998: 33). All vigorously opposed the Marcos dictatorship but took varying positions on how to confront the underlying structures of society that were keeping millions of Filipinos poor and powerless.

Despite growing repression through summary detention, torture and 'salvaging' (clandestine disappearances with summary execution) of individuals or groups seen as opposing the regime, NGOs avidly organized rural and urban poor communities for self-realization and action to redress poverty and social injustice. The assassination of political opposition leader Benigno Aquino in 1983 further galvanized NGOs and public opposition to Marcos's authoritarian regime. As Silliman and Noble (1998: 17) point out,

In contrast to a state that systematically violated human rights and failed to improve the condition of the poor, the motivating principle of Philippine civil society as it materialized in the 1970s and 1980s was the right of Filipinos to both civil liberties and an equitable distribution of the society's resources. Out of the collective actions of Philippine citizens there emerged a sense of solidarity and community.

For many NGOs, support in the 1960s and 1970s came from progressive Catholic bishops' attention to human rights, the theology of liberation, the formation of Basic Christian Communities espousing strong community organizing and the social teachings of papal encyclicals on development, justice and peace. The Church's protective umbrella, along with that of

the Protestant churches, reinforced the capacity and determination of many NGO workers to resist the closing down of political spaces for democratic action. Later, the Catholic bishops, alarmed at the infiltration of NDF community organizers in their midst, and worse still, the political shift into Radical Left circles of a few priests and nuns, began to distance themselves from NGOs.

As martial law dragged on, the government took advantage of these developments by raiding Catholic premises, arresting and detaining suspected Communists. International donor flows to civil society increased correspondingly. Even the business community entered the fray in the mid-1980s, angered by the Aquino killing and alarmed at the looming economic crisis. These birthing decades established NGOs on a trajectory of increasingly stronger confrontation with government in the 'Parliament of the Streets', where diverse and often conflicting groups coalesced to topple the regime. Sociologist Constantino-David comments (1998: 35-6):

There was a frenzy of activity, and coalition building was the name of the game, even among NGOs and POs that had tried to shun outright political involvement. In the midst of almost daily rallies and demonstrations, organizing work expanded and more NGOs and POs were formed. Development NGOs and networks actively participated in the protest movement, largely through mass actions. Those who were already identified with specific ideological forces and had overlapping leadership generally followed the splits and turns of the anti-dictatorship struggle [which now] took center stage.

The snap elections called by an overconfident Marcos for early 1986 spawned NGO responses ranging from voter education and clean elections campaigns, to support for Corazon Aquino's candidacy or outright election boycotts. Organized civil disobedience followed reports of massive cheating and election-related violence. The attempted coup led by Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) and military and defence leaders Fidel V. Ramos and Juan Ponce-Enrile was teetering dangerously when Cardinal Jaime Sin called on people to converge on the highway between the two military camps to protect the 'rebels'.

And so began the People Power Revolution of February 1986. Also known as EDSA I, this defining event represented the culmination of painstaking, multi-sectoral civil society organizing over many years. More than a million Filipinos massed on the national highway to stop the tanks from attacking the rebel-held military camps. Groups kneeling on the concrete roadway reciting the rosary, nuns offering flowers to the tank commanders, ordinary citizens making and distributing sandwiches and water to the massed protesters - all this has become part of the extraordinary history of People Power. After four fateful days, ordinary people suffused with a

sense of collective power toppled the fourteen-year dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in a non-violent uprising, forcing his family and close cronies out of Malacanang Palace into exile.

The democratic space opened up by President Corazon C. Aquino generated a virtual explosion of NGOs throughout the country. Bilateral donors, like CIDA (Canada), USAID, CEBEMO (the Netherlands) and others, showed their elation at the return of democracy and its NGO champions through significant funding (Racelis, 2000: 159). Perhaps it was the exciting drama of a courageous, well organized, and non-violent citizenry out on the streets and determined to oust a dictator that attracted their support for at least another decade.

The writers of the 1987 Philippine Constitution recognized the outstanding roles played by NGOs and POs in mobilizing the peaceful overthrow of a dictator. Articles II and XIII stipulate that

The State shall encourage non-governmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation.

The State shall respect the role of independent people's organizations to enable the people to pursue and protect, within the democratic framework, their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means.

The right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable participation at all levels of social, political and economic decision-making shall not be abridged. The State shall, by law, facilitate the establishment of adequate consultation mechanisms.

By 1995 some 3,000–5,000 registered development NGOs were employing a total of 100,000 staff. Most of them were small, with annual operating budgets averaging \$80,000. The bulk of their funding came from bilateral donors and international NGOs, like the Ford Foundation, the Asia Foundation, Oxfam, CARE and Save the Children, supplemented by multilateral agencies (UN Development Programme, UNICEF, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank), government, other Philippine NGOs, and churches. Government regulations on foreign funding were flexible. Only multilateral and bilateral funding for NGOs had to go through the government, for which a simple authorization from the National Economic Development Authority sufficed (Asian Development Bank, 1999: 8).

International NGO donors could deal directly with their Philippine partners, no government clearances being required. Recognizing their uneasy dependency on foreign funding, however, many NGOs supplemented their incomes through alternative modes. They generated funds from training fees, domestic donations, loans, parallel business ventures, and contracts for services in partnership with government and multilateral institutions, like the United Nations, Asian Development Bank and World Bank.

NGOs became independent entities, including those that had operated under the umbrella protection of the churches. Although many NGO leaders continued to maintain friendly relations with church social action groups and progressive bishops, the larger number of conservative bishops still smarting from 'being used' by the Radical Left, distanced themselves from NGOs. Basic Christian Communities with strong community organizing and empowerment features now became Basic Ecclesiastical Communities, limiting themselves mainly to prayer, spiritual matters and welfare support to destitute community members.

Meanwhile, NGO leaders began moving, gingerly at first, into government. Yet, as Constantino-David (1998: 36) assessed the NGO scene, 'The deep-seated strains and the lack of a coherent vision produced a tenuous unity that would eventually splinter in the post-Marcos era.' In the closing days of the Ramos administration (1992–98), political scientists Silliman and Noble (1998: 178) summarized NGO roles and contributions this way:

First is the *vibrant public discourse*, both within NGO circles, as divergent opinions are fashioned into some kind of workable consensus, and outside them, when the NGO community must make its views heard and get them adopted by often reluctant partners. Second, NGOs are attempting to *redefine the content of politics*. Topics that would once have been deemed inappropriate for legislation – rape, other violence against women, the rights of indigenous people – have become subjects of debate and successful parliamentary legislation. Third, civil society is becoming *progressively institutionalized*. Coalitions are structured for greater permanence, while NGOs learn good management and financial practices and professionalize their staff.

Critical collaboration or cooptation? the NGO/PO scene today

Gone with the turn of the century are the heady days of NGOs capturing the high moral ground of public action. Critical assessments lament their moving away from basic principles, like accountability derived from their altruistic cast, their bias in favor of the poor and marginalized, and their championing of democracy:

[T]he halo of saintliness around NGOs has disappeared, eroded by, among others, the persistence of fly-by-night NGOs, the failure of NGOs to deliver on promises to their various constituencies, alleged corruption, various controversies... and the political partisanship of high profile NGO personalities because of their identification with a certain administration.

... Ironically, erosion of its moral position is due to the widespread adoption ('cooptation') of the NGO concept by mainstream society, thus making NGOs the victims of their own success. Today, there is an NGO for every persuasion [reflecting]... the broad (and often, conflicting) diversity of interests found in Philippine society, from the most crooked to the most altruistic, thus making it difficult for NGOs to continue their claim of being the 'conscience of society' or 'guardians of the guardian'. (Association of Foundations, 2005: 2)

This kind of soul-searching is taking place in every nook and cranny of the archipelago where NGOs are engaged in organizing poor and marginalized people, helping transform poorly functioning local government bureaucracies and processes into more constituent-friendly and poverty-reducing institutions, or engaging in national-level advocacy around a host of issues. Successes and failures are identified in regular monitoring sessions that generate revised strategies and tactics, and renewed enthusiasm for the organization's mandate. Donor partners seeking to assess their support to an NGO often require formal evaluations, but in recent years have begun agreeing to NGOs engaging in a self-diagnostic exercise to rectify identified weaknesses and chart new courses.

Despite the growing number of positive NGO engagements with government, the former continue to adhere to the long-standing principle of critical collaboration. This implies their readiness to work with governments that are serious about people's empowerment, while maintaining the critical or critical-collaboration stance mandated by their watchdog function.

The role of NGOs in promoting empowerment has been recognized by several multilateral institutions, among them the Asian Development Bank. Together with the World Bank, it has been in the forefront of highlighting NGO contributions and promoting them among governments. In order to further that cause, however, the Asian Development Bank has emphasized the need to rethink its own internal organization and procedures.

Retooling the Asian Development Bank for partnering with NGOs

To advocate more realistically the importance of forging active partnerships with NGOs for development and poverty transformation, the Asian Development Bank commissioned a study (Asian Development Bank, 1999: 66-71). The ensuing report made numerous recommendations and emphasized the importance for Bank and NGO officials of clarifying at the outset mutual roles, interests, and expectations. Subsequent actions have seen most of these prescriptions put in place with the assistance of a Task Force on Nongovernment Organizations. In 2001 the initially low-level NGO desk was transformed into the NGO and Civil Society Center under the Regional and Sustainable Development Department with responsibilities to gain first-hand knowledge of and experience with NGOs, engage NGOs in a continuing dialogue, and improve Asian Development Bank's institutional capacity to interact proactively with NGOs. The Center forms part of the Bank's NGO Cooperation Network, with 'anchors' from the Bank's operational departments, Resident Missions, and Representative Offices. It also facilitates monitoring and evaluation of Bank projects by NGOs as a regular feature of Bank operations (Asian Development Bank, 2007a, 2007b).

The changes that have taken place in the Asian Development Bank as regards NGO/PO efforts illustrate the efficacy of decades-long NGO advocacy. The same kind of determined push has led to reformed donor institutions. For some academic intellectuals to dismiss NGO/PO efforts, therefore, as inconsequential for social transformation because they do not appear to be making a significant dent in global hegemonic arrangements is not only inaccurate, but naive. They *are* making a dent; but other sectors also have to do their share in solidarity with active community movements. Indeed, some NGOs have suggested that if academic researchers studying NGOs were more regularly exposed to the work on the ground and had direct day-to-day experience of community processes, instead of promoting the typically critical academic stance, funding partners might be less inclined to withdraw support from NGOs today!

Disembedding: From Local to Global and Back

Three mini case studies follow, illustrating variations on d/D phenomena. I have selected them because as an academic-NGO activist researching the civil society scene, I followed or was involved in the events as they unfolded. Each case describes how NGOs and POs are transforming local efforts into events and processes affecting national and even international situations, and effecting changes in donor operations and outlooks. The transformational sequence of local to national to global to national back to local is also generating new responses to on-the-ground activities, affecting community institutions and actions as well as donor preferences. This embedding/disembedding process approximates the notion of globalization 'as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990: 64).

Changing the rules

Case 1: Community initiatives for donor-government policy reform in a community-managed slum upgrading micro-drainage project. Stakeholders: Naga City Urban Poor Federations, Inc. (NCUPFI), Naga City Government, World Bank, Japan Social Development Fund, Community Organization of the Philippines Enterprise Foundation (COPE), and Philippine Support Services Agency (PhilSSA).

Faced with the prospect of a long-awaited community infrastructure upgrading scheme in Naga City through a pending World Bank-Japan Social Development Fund grant, the Naga City Urban Poor Federation, Inc. (NCUPFI) in 2004 examined carefully the terms of reference proposed

for its participation. Public-private construction partnerships between local government (LGUs) and NGO/POs were still rare on the Philippine development scene; community groups were apprehensive about engaging with the city on the project. Extensive discussion facilitated by COPE organizers convinced NCUPFI to take on the project, but on one condition: the latter would exercise major control over project planning and implementation. To accomplish this, NCUPFI designated COPE, the partner NGO involved in their struggles since 1985, to be the contracted implementing agency.

In those twenty years of community organizing, Naga City's urban poor had mastered the non-violent, demand approach to gaining victories. Their triumphs included secure land tenure on abandoned railroad tracks long appropriated as residential sites or in alternative resettlement areas. They now had electricity and potable water, along with organized leadership structures. Moreover, they had succeeded in getting local legislation passed, notably the People Empowerment Ordinance of 1995, affirming their participation rights in governance. This Ordinance also created the Naga City NGO/PO Council, which enabled them to engage systematically in policy reform.

The proposed Naga City community micro-drainage project was envisioned as forging a dynamic new relationship between the NCUPFI, the city government and the World Bank. Three poor barangays (urban neighbourhood communities) were to benefit from the rehabilitation and de-clogging of existing canals, and the construction of micro-drainage systems. The People's Organizations that made up the community-generated Federation insisted from the outset that as on-site residents, *they* were most qualified to determine the layout of the new sewerage and drainage canal network. This meant that any technical support provided by government must defer to the communities' local knowledge and preferences, and not the other way around.

With COPE as its partner implementing agency and adviser, NCUPFI worked out a technical training programme that brought in volunteer professionals eager to transfer the needed knowledge and skills to local residents. Thus, by the time the drainage project began, the community had already acquired a good grasp of the technical processes, adding greatly to their self-confidence.

In due course, both the Naga City government and the World Bank concurred with NCUPFI's position that COPE should initiate and manage the bidding process for the technical consultants. COPE subsequently chose local contractors willing to work in a participatory way that would enable the people to learn by doing. As a result, a relationship that might have been based on the 'outside expert' syndrome became agreeably collaborative.

The engineers and other technical staff showed respect for community ideas, preferences and queries; the POs, in turn, felt comfortable working with them. When it later emerged that certain technical recommendations had to take precedence over the residents' own choices, the latter deferred gracefully. Experience had convinced them they could trust the technical staff.

The next contentious issue arose when the World Bank informed the informal settler households and COPE that the residents would be expected to pay modest user-fees for services. The NCUPFI protested that its poor constituents already lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Why should they be expected to draw from their meagre incomes to pay for infrastructure services when rich neighbourhoods seemed to receive these automatically and without user-fee requirements!

The Bank insisted, nonetheless, on its no-subsidy, fee-for-services policy. The NCUPFI then proposed an alternative scheme: the city government should pay the user-fee costs! This was justified, they insisted, because the expected rise in land values stemming from the people-generated project improvements would add to the City's coffers through increased investments, heightened land values and higher taxation rates. The people proposed their counterpart should be to pay for landfill for their individual house lots at an average payment per household of P1,500, or \$30.

They also argued that the city should take on responsibility for maintenance and add P1 million to develop other urban poor areas. In return, the community agreed to share in the costs of garbage collection at a daily household charge of P1 (2 US cents).

World Bank project staff agreed and then convinced Washington to agree. Whether the arrangement will become standard for all community-driven infrastructure projects in the Philippines remains to be seen. However, because PhilSSA, the urban NGO network that channelled the funds from the World Bank to NCUPFI, is in touch with other collaborating NGO members, the precedent set in Naga City may well be applied to them. Or, what may be institutionalized is a willingness on the part of government and the World Bank to negotiate with POs presenting alternative proposals. The outcomes may turn out to be compatible not only with community capacities but also with new orientations on the part of government and the World Bank. Overall, the project's sustainability through effective community management will be affirmed.

The three barangays extol their upgraded neighbourhoods. Having invested so much time and effort in this infrastructure improvement, the residents have voluntarily moved into community maintenance. NCUPFI-city government agreements are being implemented, and the POs express confidence that if another such project comes along they can handle it.

Progressive Naga City Mayor Jesse Robredo takes pride in the upgraded sites and their effect on increasing land values and an enhanced tax base. They symbolize his conviction that participatory governance approaches are advantageous to local administrators. As for the World Bank, its representatives enjoy the satisfaction of having brought greater flexibility into their standard practices and of knowing that they have worked out practical ways of promoting participatory community-driven development.

Forming a global NGO funding system

Case 2: The Philippine-Misereor Partnership. Stakeholders: Philippine NGOs/POs, Misereor.

Misereor, the German Catholic Bishops Fund for Development, has for many decades been a major donor to NGOs and Church Social Action groups (SAs) in the Philippines. In keeping with its worldwide re-examination of donor-recipient relations in the 1990s as well as its long experience with NGOs and SAs in the Philippines, Misereor proposed to its local grantees that they explore new and more egalitarian modes of relating to one another.

Both donor and recipients recognized that because decisions on funding NGO/SA requests were made in Aachen, Philippine development priorities were in effect being determined by Misereor officials. Conscientious German programme officers were disturbed at this hierarchical arrangement and the implicit dependency it appeared to be imposing on effective and highly motivated Filipino NGO and SA workers. The proposal from Misereor also traced its roots to the long-standing and broader NGO-donor debate on equity and trust in that relationship.

There is a sizeable amount of funding to the Philippines coming from foreign donors. A 1998 study of bilateral grant assistance revealed that in the period 1986 to 1996, P500 million (US\$10 million) was turned over annually to NGOs and POs. In 1989, 9.1 per cent of all bilateral grants went directly to NGOs (Songco, 2002, citing CODE-NGO, 1998). Aldaba et al. highlight some of the consequences:

This has created both opportunities and dangers for Philippine NGOs. While the funds facilitate significant enlargement of NGO activities, they have also distorted the pace and process of NGO development. NGOs had to devote more time in building their absorptive capacities (sometimes leading to bureaucratic structures); competition over funds has affected NGO to NGO relations; larger NGO budgets have eroded the voluntary nature and 'social change' orientation of NGOs. (Aldaba et al., 1992: i)

Numerous meetings and conferences over the years have tackled various facets of this problem in an attempt to create new and more egalitarian systems. After discussing a number of options, including opening a Misereor

office in Manila and a local decision-making consortium, an innovative institution, the Philippine Misereor Partnership (PMP) emerged. As of 2006 the PMP has fifteen subregional clusters, covering 276 NGO/Social Action grant recipients, now called 'partners'. A wide range of activities is under way, with the NGO/SAs being the action partners and Misereor the funding-support partner (Philippine-Misereor Partnership 2005).

The projects in 2006 featured wide-ranging activities:

- *Community organizing* – agrarian reform farmers, urban poor settlers, indigenous people, pastoral concerns;
- *Sectoral organizing* – informal workers, youth, women, migrants;
- *Capability building* – education, literacy, information, technical skills, out-of-school youth training, leadership, management, volunteer formation, organic farming, workshops;
- *Service provision* – legal/paralegal, agricultural extension, consulting, medical/dental, disability rehabilitation, special protection for women, children and youth;
- *Socio-economic activities* – livelihood, resource building, micro-finance, cooperatives, tenure security, land acquisition through community mortgage schemes, low-cost housing, participatory relocation for high-risk-zone residents;
- *Networking and linkaging* – government-NGOs-POs linkaging, network and federation building, PO to PO organizing;
- *Organizational development* – project development, proposal preparation, planning, management, monitoring, evaluation, participatory social mapping, natural resources management, solid waste management, agriculture and fisheries development, coastal resources management, research and documentation, participatory action research, publication;
- *Advocacy* – policy, research, sustainable agriculture, land rights, anti-mining, environment, area development, renewable energy, sanitation, alternative health, justice and peace, peace building and peace education, good governance, rural democratization, indigenous people's rights and ancestral domain claims, gender mainstreaming.

The NGO/SA leaders in each of the fifteen geographical clusters meet half-yearly, taking turns hosting the meetings. Together they identify common concerns, share experiences and clarify priorities. Leaders feed back cluster discussions to their member groups upon returning to their home communities, as well as to a three-person secretariat in Manila. The latter promotes communication and networking among the fifteen clusters. It also organizes semi-annual National Coordinating Council (NCC) meetings, with three elected representatives of the three main island regions (Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao) serving as conveners.

Strongly emphasized at the NCC meetings is 'the primacy of the cluster'. This principle affirms the sub-regional cluster's prerogative to decide on its own local or subregional priorities. The members can also opt to extend their preferences by proposing one or two programmes that the entire Partnership might want to take on. Examples of the latter are active partnership projects on the peace process, gender mainstreaming, and anti-mining action and advocacy.

Since the Germany-based Misereor programme officer participates in the NCC, at which the final decisions at the Philippine end are taken, any problems in the proposal have already been worked out by the time s/he recommends it to the Misereor board. The sub-regional composition of the NCC also forestalls attempts by 'Colonial Manila' NGO/SAs to dominate network planning.

The Misereor programme officer combines NCC participation with semi-annual field visits to various NGO/SA locations. Attending subregional meetings, listening to and discussing cluster reports of local concerns and activities at the NCC, give her a better grasp of the issues and nuances underlying programme thrusts. The debate also offers insights into the socio-political situations that affect NGO/SA operations in specific cluster areas. This gives her a distinct advantage in Germany when she has to review partner proposals and make project recommendations to the board.

Issues brought to the NCC from the clusters for discussion and review have included extending PMP membership beyond NGOs to People's Organizations (POs); seeking stronger support for grassroots organizing from social action directors, parish priests, and bishops; and clarifying the rationale for PMP participation in political protests and electoral politics. PMP nationwide programmes opposing mining and promoting peace processes in Mindanao have strongly influenced these political stances. The 2006 NCC meeting held in Mindanao, with numerous NGO/SA partner groups, six bishops and three Misereor officials from Germany in attendance, listened to the two consultants' evaluation report on the PMP and endorsed its recommendations. These generally affirmed the viability of the partnership structure.

The significance of the long consultative process for developing locally generated priorities and egalitarian relationships lies in the building of trust, not only between the donor and NGO/SA partners, but within the NGO/SA communities themselves. Some social action workers now express a greater sense of ease working with NGOs than with those bishops or parish priests who display a limited understanding of grassroots realities. Accordingly, NGOs with their secular identity and Social Action groups with their religious underpinnings have re-established ties of common cause through the PMP. Misereor's responsiveness to going beyond project fund-

ing to underwriting networking processes and partner-wide programmes developed by the NGOs and SAs has made a significant contribution to the success of the PMP.

Misereor's understanding of Philippine and developing country priorities and concerns has been profoundly affected by the Partnership. To convey to Germans the everyday meanings of development and faith, especially in relation to poverty in developing countries and equity at the global level, it periodically invites selected NGO and SA leaders to Germany. Prospects for linking Germans with ordinary Asians, Africans and Latin Americans have been greatly enhanced.

Under discussion are ways in which Philippine NGO/SAs can help Misereor affirm the partnership principle as relevant to its programmes on other continents, and possibly for other donor agencies to emulate. The PMP may, therefore, serve as a new model not only for Misereor approaches in other countries, but also in other donor foundations. Although the final decisions on funding are still made in Aachen at the insistence of the NGO/SA partners, they are based on informed tripartite discussions. Criteria for project approval are developed by the action partners, with German programme officers participating through field visits and consultative meetings.

The PMP has thus succeeded in transforming an initially unequal donor-recipient relationship into a genuine Global Partnership. Flexibility, regular interaction, on-the-ground knowledge, and mutual respect form the basis of this impressive new relationship.

Creating an NGO-controlled Filipino funding institution

Case 3: Poverty Eradication and Alleviation Certificates – PEACE Bonds. Stakeholders: CODE-NGO, Peace and Equity Foundation, Rizal Commercial Bank Corporation, RCBC Capital, Bureau of the Treasury, Department of Finance.

By the late 1990s, the love affair between external donors and NGO/POs was weakening. With the notable exception of Japan, foreign donors, who had lavished funds on NGOs/POs to support grassroots development, equity and empowerment programmes in the late 1980s and 1990s, had begun shifting their international grant-making to eastern Europe and Africa. They justified their shifting priorities on the basis of comparative need as the Philippines was considered a 'middle-level' developing country (Asian Development Bank, 1999: 56).

The NGO argument that the economists' statistical averages actually concealed massive poverty and growing economic disparities – and therefore called for continuing external support – increasingly fell on deaf ears. Many Philippine NGOs were forced to scale down their activities or even disband.