Reinventing International NGOs:
A View from the Dutch Co-financing System

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The international aid chain has been successfully integrated into the neo-liberal development paradigm. Despite lip service to 'ownership', bottom-up and rights-based approaches to poverty alleviation, policies, instruments and outcomes are almost exclusively determined outside the domain of the poor and excluded themselves. Macroeconomics are dominant, outcomes only valid if quantifiable, and structural causes of poverty and exclusion are left intact. For international ODA-funded NGOs, pressure to align with the mainstream agenda is such that they and their local partners risk losing any claim to an 'alternative' development agenda.

In such a context, it is time to reinvent the system. In this chapter, we will show how our organization, ICCO (Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation), a Dutch co-funding organization working with more than one thousand local partners in eighty countries, is trying to do just that. The chapter first gives a brief description of developments in international debates on development. We draw attention to the depoliticization of development thought and practice, as well as the introduction of neoliberal policies of privatization and market instruments in the development architecture both in general and more specifically in the Dutch co-funding programme. We will try to identify the most important implications of these changes, for the work of Dutch international NGOs (INGOs), for the activities of their non-governmental partners overseas and for their joint ability to contribute effectively to the fight against exclusion and poverty. Lastly, we will describe how in the face of these different pressures, our own organization in introducing substantial changes to its strategies and ways of working, changes that aim to ensure our possibilities for making a difference for the poor and excluded.

The Development Context of the 1980s and 1990s

Successive so-called development decades have brought about much less in terms of economic growth of poor countries (and even less in diminishing the gap between rich and poor within those countries) than had been expected. In itself, this perception was less important for policy development than the debt crisis and near collapse of the international economic system at the beginning of the 1980s. One direct consequence of the Mexican default was the strengthening of the role of the World Bank and the IMF: the 'Washington consensus' became the leading development paradigm and neo-liberal policies the standard recipe. Many donor countries followed this lead, and aligned themselves with this process, which included a widespread use of standardized policies that favoured a focus on macroeconomic management, the liberalization and broadening of markets and the imposition of various conditionalities on debtor countries. Meanwhile in many debtor countries, 'structural adjustment' became a byword for social hardship and deterioration in the already grave position of the traditionally poor and excluded.

Many (but certainly not all) non-governmental development organizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, with their roots in the politically effervescent 1960s, defined their programmes and the ideals that drove them in terms that were either alternative to, or in direct opposition to, state policies. Societal transformation, human rights and social justice were key elements in their projects. Dutch co-funding organizations, with roots also in the 1960s, favoured working relations with local NGOs that strove to identify and combat the structural causes of poverty rather than merely the symptoms of it. This self-definition made for difficult and sometimes problematic relationships with governments and the state. However, on the whole, the international donor organizations generally regarded NGOs as marginal actors in development processes. They were seen as useful in providing services and emergency aid (where states could not or would not) and as a political nuisance when denouncing human rights abuses.

The first experiments with 'structural adjustment' came with a new recognition among policymakers of the practical advantages of development-oriented NGOs. A prime consideration in the neoliberal adjustment agenda was to diminish the role of the state in favour of the market. Investment in education, health and other services was cut to the bone. However, the need for 'social safety nets' was recognized, particularly after the first symptoms of social unrest endangering political stability – for instance, in Venezuela in 1991. As it was necessary to avoid bringing the state back in, the local NGO sector was seen as a useful alternative to deliver basic social services, especially to those sectors of the population hardest hit by 'adjustment' measures. Over the years, many of the established NGOs – sometimes

after heated debates on the risks of 'co-optation' – accepted the new roles assigned to them. They assumed these new roles would offer opportunities to influence social policies, but also accepted them for practical reasons, in particular the access to increasing levels of funding. Furthermore, where NGOs did not agree to assume these roles, international donors did not hesitate to establish their own NGOs, as was the case, for example, in El Salvador after the peace agreements of Esquipulas. New arrivals on the scene also included NGOs founded by civil servants who had lost their jobs in the downsizing of the state.

The international donor community assigned quite large amounts of finance to this 'sector'. Some did this directly, as in the case of the Interamerican Development Bank's very substantial programme for micro-credit channelled to local NGOs. Others donors, such as many European bilateral agencies, channelled resources indirectly through their own national non-governmental co-funding organizations.

The 1990s can be described as a high point in the involvement of development NGOs in executing (but not designing) national social policies, such as they were. Political sensitivity in relation to local NGOs had lessened: their numbers had multiplied, the sector was much more heterogeneous and many had become cautious and pragmatic in their public statements of intent. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the disappearance of any political alternative to liberal market-oriented democracies strengthened a tendency to assume apolitical and practical social tasks. For many development NGOs (especially in Latin America and Asia) increased resources and access to new generations of well-trained professionals (who no longer looked to the 'downsized' state for employment) meant growth and professionalization. To consolidate their place in the system, these NGOs also tended to dedicate time and resources not only to strengthening their own organizations, but also to creating national – and sometimes international – networks and other structures to improve coordination, strengthen advocacy and learning abilities, and to defend their specific interests as a sector.

At the end of that decade, dominant thinking about the state changed again. The Washington Consensus came under increasing attack from respectable critics such as Joseph Stiglitz – former chief economist of the World Bank. It had become clear that markets either could not or would not solve many underlying social and economic problems in developing countries and that political instability resulting from an increase in the numbers of people excluded from any gain in economic growth was a real threat in many countries. It had also become clear that markets needed certain guarantees that only a functioning state could provide. 'Good governance' became an important – if only vaguely defined – concept, but attention was also growing for the role of civil society as an autonomous

actor and as a countervailing power. Participation by civil society organizations in, and contribution to, various international conferences organized by the UN (e.g. Cairo, Copenhagen and later others) further heightened this public profile.

All this said, counter-currents were also at work. The high visibility of NGOs in developing countries now in many cases turned against them. While in earlier years, critical debates had centred on their political identity and agenda, public criticism now concentrated on their management of the resources channelled through them, the lack of evidence regarding their effectiveness, and their own questionable transparency and accountability. By accepting a role of substituting for state responsibilities, many NGOs had subsumed some of their original ideals and aspirations in the process of elaborating their own pragmatic responses to the changes in their societies and in the development debate. It became clear that many of them, as a consequence, faced a serious identity crisis.

We may therefore conclude that the position, tasks and responsibilities of non-governmental development organizations have changed substantially over the years. From being a marginal actor with a distinctive analysis of poverty and exclusion, mainly in opposition to the state in the 1960s and 1970s, they now represent a significant sector in terms of resources and service responsibilities. For many of them, the cost of this evolution has been high in terms of dependence and dependence-generated pragmatism, and a weakening of their relationships with their target groups. For many, this evolution is problematic and represents a challenge to define their *raison d'être* anew.

The Dutch Co-funding Programme between 1965 and 2000

Until a few years ago, the ministry in charge of Dutch development cooperation and four development organizations (CORDAID, HIVOS, ICCO, NOVIB) shared responsibility for the Dutch co-funding programme. The co-funding programme, now in existence for forty years, started out as a partnership, based on an agreement reached in 1965. This recognized that combating international poverty was a moral responsibility for state and civil society organizations alike. These four organizations were recognized as representing the main sectors of Dutch society – CORDAID was Catholic, ICCO Protestant, HIVOS humanist and NOVIB 'secular'. This societal representation and support was understood to be a mainstay of a system that depended on public – taxpayer – support.

In the mid-1960s, the Netherlands was at last emerging from a post-war reconstruction phase in the aftermath of occupation and the destruction of

the productive infrastructure that had occurred during the Second World War. In response to international debates on poverty in the first UN 'development decade' of the 1960s, nearly all political parties supported a decision to assign – initially modest – budgets to the newly created post of Minister for International Cooperation. Dutch development aid was to aim at fostering economic independence and eradicating extreme poverty. The start-up of a bilateral aid initiative was slow, but the government moved to involve a broad segment of Dutch society in the endeavour. In this vein, one of the first programmes to be launched was the co-funding programme.

In the mid-1970s the picture changed quite rapidly. The four development organizations had shown success in building partnerships with local organizations to deliver aid, especially in the fields of health and education, in a variety of flexible and effective ways. They had assumed as their target group the 'poorest of the poor' and defined interventions aimed at 'structural' poverty eradication. Their central strategy was to support local initiatives and work in partnership with local organizations. Although this approach sometimes caused political tensions, government also came to see the advantages of a non-official aid channel in the rapidly growing number of countries under authoritarian rule (making bilateral relationships politically undesirable or impossible). Funding for the programme grew and the mandate was broadened.

The framework for this cooperation was called the Programme Funding Agreement: it established a generous level of lump-sum funding over four-year periods (indexed to the country's economic growth rate), delegated responsibilities for policy- and decision-making on projects to the agencies themselves and even left them to decide on exactly how the ODA funding allocated to the programme would be distributed among them. Next to yearly reporting, the main instrument for oversight was a system of programme evaluations, in which joint teams (from the ministry and the agencies) would study the development of the programme, its instruments and policies and the interaction between the parties. It was accepted – not always with good grace by either side – that the evaluations would also look at official government policies in their relationship to INGO policies. When introducing this new working relationship in 1980, the then Minister for Development encouraged the four main agencies to actively seek the same sharing of responsibilities for the programme with their local partners overseas.

The rapid growth of ODA funding assigned to the INGOs can be illustrated in the case of ICCO: in 1973, total ODA assigned to ICCO was Nfl.22 million, while in 1990 this had grown to nearly Nfl.120 million. This growth also reflected public perception of the work of non-governmental

organizations. Parliament and the press were largely uncritical, and the press reserved most of its attention for the bilateral programmes of the ministry.

This situation changed markedly at the end of the 1980s. A spate of very critical analyses appeared in the media, not only on the effectiveness of aid in general, but also specifically questioning the results of the NGOs' efforts. The Dutch agencies were relatively unprepared for this critical debate on their activities, accustomed as they were to being seen as dependable, committed and legitimized both by their constituencies and their local, Southern partners. The level of public debate obliged the four co-funding agencies to launch a wide-ranging independent review of their own performance. The report of this review, the *Impact Study*, presented in 1991, constituted a substantial let-down compared to the claims and ambitions that the agencies had formulated for themselves and their constituencies. The central conclusion was 'there are no complete failures nor complete successes'. The study recommended, among other things, more cost-consciousness, more research and evaluation of results and more inter-agency cooperation.

This review led to substantial changes in all four agencies, not only in their policies (which became more focused and explicit in terms of aims and outcomes) but especially within the organizations themselves. Ambitious reorganizations were launched, internal work processes were standardized, evaluation and measurement instruments developed (which entailed defining in much more detail targets and goals), and professionalization became the catchword. To a large degree, these measures helped in regaining lost ground. The Ministry for Development Cooperation adopted a policy paper on civil society which defined it as an autonomous actor with which the state needed to interact. Cooperation between the ministry and the main INGOs was still quite intensive, especially in relation to the bilateral regional programmes, most of whose content was actually devised in cooperation with the main agencies. This level of interaction lessened substantially (without immediate consequences for the co-funding programme) when in the mid-1990s the ministry decided to decentralize most regional policy and decision-making to the Dutch embassies in the main partner countries.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc brought about substantial changes in public perceptions of development cooperation. Although (in the Netherlands) it was never very explicit, the East–West divide was an important element driving the debate on international commitment to continuing development aid. With the East–West confrontation now apparently out of the way, the international debate of the beginning of the 1990s on the effectiveness of aid constituted the political springboard to review existing development policy and arrangements. A contributing factor was also the widespread perception that development aid was, on the whole, not delivering on its promises.

With neoliberal, free-market thinking dominating the political spectrum in the Netherlands, right-of-centre politicians sought to reformulate the aims of Dutch development in order to align them with the Netherlands' own political and economic interests and lobbied for more private-sector involvement. In other cases they simply proposed abolishing development aid altogether. Many other commentators also questioned the need for the level of commitment that had, from the beginning of the 1970s, constituted a political consensus bordering on dogma – namely that the country would adhere to the UN standard of making available 0.7 per cent of net national income for development aid.

Dutch government had rewarded the agencies for their efforts to implement the recommendations of the Impact Study with an increase in funding available to them (to 10 per cent of ODA, up from the previous 7 per cent). However, public debate on their role and functions did not diminish. New objections were raised, among them that the four original co-funding agencies constituted a privileged and exclusive cartel and that they represented 'special interests'. In 1999 a new government coalition decided to launch an inter-ministerial review (under the direct oversight of the prime minister's office) of the state's relationship with the co-funding agencies. This study concluded that the co-funding system needed to be opened up to more competition (with funds being allocated on the basis of results), that ODA-funded NGO programmes needed to be more aligned with official Dutch development policies, and that agencies should be obliged to coordinate wherever possible with existing bilateral programmes. It also recommended much more direct ministerial control of the co-funding programme as such.

In a parallel development, the Dutch public, traditionally quite generous in their voluntary contributions to a host of good causes, now developed a more 'do it yourself' approach to development: a wide variety of local groups no longer limited themselves to fund-raising, but also tended increasingly to insist on delivering aid directly. This trend can be seen as both part of a general loss of trust in existing institutions (visible in Dutch society at the end of the 1990s) and as a sign of continuing social commitment.

Although the then Minister for Development Cooperation, the social democrat Evelien Herfkens, was hesitant to accept all the recommendations of the inter-ministerial review immediately, she did decide to open up the co-funding programme partially by including two additional organizations in the system. She also advised the agencies that, for the new funding period starting in 2002, they would need to present much more detailed work plans as a condition for funding.

Meanwhile, ministry personnel were already preparing for a more comprehensive overhaul of the system, in line with the recommendations

of the inter-ministerial review. ODA funding for the programme was to be based on the results of a tendering procedure which would be open to a wide range of (Dutch) organizations. Entry criteria were defined and a very ambitious and demanding format was prepared for presenting work plans. Systems were developed to determine the merits of proposals and measurement of outcomes – again, exclusively quantifiable – and, especially, to enable the ministry to monitor the work of the organizations receiving grants. This new system was officially launched by the new Christian Democrat minister Agnes van Aardenne. For the period starting in 2007, tenders were to be presented by mid-2006.

In 2006, our organization, together with 115 other Dutch organizations, tendered for access to government development funding. On average, each organization submitted some *two kilogrammes* of written material detailing, among others, what the results of their work would be in 2010. Of these, 58 applications were accepted for funding for a total of 11 per cent of the Dutch ODA budget (increasing tenfold the number of participants in the programme). For the fiscal year 2007, these organizations were to receive a total of €500 million (US$650 million).

The co-funding programme had started out as a partnership between state and civil society based on shared objectives and trust. Today, in the wake of a wave of social and economic changes in the country following the introduction of free-market liberalization since the 1990s, the programme can best be described as a system of governmental subcontracting of extraordinary bureaucratic complexity and high transaction costs, with accountability rules stipulating outcomes that are only acceptable if quantifiable.

What Has Happened to Us?

Distortions

Proponents of the dominant development model point to the fact that, over the last decade, many developing countries have experienced respectable economic growth. Yet, despite the substantial changes in the international development architecture, aid instruments, alignment, commitment to development goals and substantially increased research on aid effectiveness, the disheartening reality is that economic growth is rarely benefiting the poor. Recent research by the IMF's own Independent Evaluation Office for sub-Saharan Africa once again confirmed this situation (IMF/IEO, 2007). The explanation for the general ineffectiveness of measures to eradicate poverty resides at least partly in the fact that the international donor community does not acknowledge that poverty and exclusion are rooted in complex societal and political realities that official aid policies do not

address. Many of these structural causes have, over the years, been well documented in the UNDP *Human Development Reports*. Examples of this include the 2005 *HDR* chapter on inequality and the 2006 report describing the problems of politics behind access to water (UNDP, 2005, 2006). Similarly, there is a wide range of studies – including research done in Northern countries (Rupasingha and Goetz, 2003) – that refer to the social and political determinants of structural poverty, and there are some hopeful signs that the neglect of these political dimensions could be changing (for example, the IMF has recently designated as its chief economist professor Simon Johnson, who at MIT has explored the political roots of poverty; *The Economist*, 2007).

Development NGOs that in the past worked to identify, understand and combat these 'structural' causes in their own societies have in many cases been effectively marginalized or have opted for mainstream programmes that provide them with institutional stability. For their Northern non-governmental donors, the increasing demands that their back-donors make on their policies and working practices have lessened their willingness to venture into disputed areas of intervention. These back donor demands are increasingly passed on to the NGOs' local partner organizations. This effectively limits the scope of their programmes to the policies of their donor.

System demands, centring on accountability and originating from back donors, absorb an ever greater portion of Southern partner resources. Especially in Africa, where in many countries substantial percentages of social service delivery is NGO-based and well-trained human resources are scarce, these demands are clearly distorting and disproportionate.

Insistence, within the system, on 'results' (and accepting by and large as results only 'what can be counted') is a powerful distorting factor, in that it leads organizations to 'safe' areas of intervention and sometimes to abandon their primary target groups where no significant material gain is to be expected. A case in point would be those organizations that, joining the apparently successful trend for micro-credit schemes (for which a vast amount of development funding is available), choose target groups with more chances of success (i.e. not the poorest segments of society).

Another distorting effect of these NGO funding policies is that they stimulate competition among agencies, generating the desire (and perhaps the need) to be the best performer in delivering quantifiable results. This leads agencies to emphasize their own public relations and 'plant the flag', maintain project-type interventions specifying concrete outcomes (and sometimes overstating them afterwards), and to steer away from multi-actor initiatives and innovations where they will be less visible and where outcomes are more uncertain – this despite recognition of the need for more cooperation to upscale successful strategies and stimulate innovation.

Paradoxes

Many of the changes described above come together to define a 'development chain' involving civil society organizations that, in size, organization, strategies and working practices, is quite different from the chain that existed at the end of the 1970s. At one glance, it would seem that the chain has evolved in ways that are positive for NGOs, both North and South. If they were once considered to be marginal actors, now there is public recognition of the importance of civil society; if once deemed a political nuisance when they talked about human rights issues, now they are the object of extensive cooperation and transfers of resources. However, these changes have been accompanied by a series of paradoxes over the last twenty-five years.

Although certain basic original concepts such as 'cooperation' (not 'aid'), 'partnership' and 'participation' (by the target groups) are still common currency, the reality is that the aid chain is dominated by top-down blue-print approaches, donor micro-management of development initiatives and 'upward accountability'. Despite much use (and the proven validity) of the concept of local 'ownership' as a precondition for the relevance and sustainability of development initiatives, there is in fact ever less 'local ownership' to be found. Another and related casualty has been partnership. Indeed, in the field of international NGO cooperation, partnership was a central concept: the notion that both parties, sharing values and ideals, worked together as autonomous entities within their own societies to bring about change. While of course true equality was seldom achieved, the notion of partnership at least defined a common horizon for which to strive. Under the present rules of the game, it is clear that this is no longer the case, as ever more detailed back-donor requirements are simply transmitted to local organizations, and agencies tend to treat their local counterparts as subcontractors to implement work which the agencies have already committed themselves to implement as part of their agreements with their back donors. Donors willing to be accountable to their local partners and their target groups (on their policies and mechanisms, for example) are few and far between.

The second paradox resulting from these trends is that, despite a general consensus existing in most democracies on the intrinsic value of an active civil society, over the past years, most governments and multilateral institutions have been doing much to bring development NGOs under control, either to pacify civil tensions and neutralize potential political opposition or to consolidate a system of outsourcing and quasi-privatization. In many developing countries, this has led governments to pass legislation on the sector, often combining access to resources from national budgets with limits on the freedom of movement of NGOs and attempts to bring them

under fiscal control. (Such legislation is also sometimes blatantly designed to enable governments to skim off percentages of resource flows.) This tendency has been strengthened within many countries, using the 'war on terror' to introduce legislation limiting NGO freedom to engage in human rights issues (and sometimes without even the pretence of legislation to that end – see Alan Fowler's chapter in this volume).

In the case of the Netherlands, this trend also holds true, despite official policy recognizing the autonomous nature of civil society organizations in development and accepting that one of the central goals of the co-funding programme is 'strengthening civil society'. Government demands that NGOs align their work with official Dutch aid policy, pressure on upward accountability and the trend to stimulate competition between non-governmental organizations in their access to ODA funding are together redefining this sector as an additional aid channel. The relationship is defined by government as one in which the Dutch government is effectively subcontracting NGOs to perform services that the government itself is unable to undertake, and to do this on terms wholly defined by the state. (In effect, the ministry recognizes this utilitarian approach to the whole chain by stating that, in its view, the co-funding agencies work 'through' their local counterparts, instead of 'with' them.)

A third paradox can be found in the market-driven introduction of competition in the system. It is widely accepted that one of the weaknesses of the NGO sector is the dispersion of scarce resources, leading to many small-scale and usually ineffective and/or unsustainable interventions. Project-type interventions, limited in time and scope, and planned and executed by individual organizations, still constitute the majority of INGO funding decisions. At the same time in the Dutch system, the number of NGOs with access to ODA funding has multiplied tenfold, and the assignation system more or less actively discourages them from working together or even sharing information.

Finally, we have the problem of knowledge and learning in development practice. It is useful to point to the contradictory effects, in the present system, of the increased emphasis on accountability. Assignation of funding in the Dutch system is based largely on the prediction of outcomes and results and accompanied by a formalized and demanding protocol for monitoring on these and other aspects. Two important consequences are being disregarded. First, the tension that already exists between research for accountability and research for learning (leading to evident distortions) will now be increased as short-term rewards for coming up with success stories will be greater than for critical analyses. Second, no rational basis has been devised to understand, much less to manage the costs and benefits of, this very heavy accountability burden, especially at a local level.

Summary

These trends would be acceptable if the aid chain could, under these arrangements, deliver on its original intentions – namely, to produce results showing a structural improvement in the position of the poor. However, studies of aid policies and practices, including those of the Dutch government, demonstrate that they are not. In one recent study by the official Policy Review Unit (IOB), implementation in bilateral programmes of the so-called sector-wide approach is criticized for its exclusive attention to national sectoral policies of the receiving country and for disregarding outcomes at the local level: 'Target groups have literally disappeared from view', the report concludes. The same study concludes that monitoring of development programmes is mainly for management purposes rather than for learning (IOB, 2006).

We have shown that changes in the dominant system are quickly transferred to ODA-funded non-governmental organizations. If organizations such as ICCO want to maintain their original ambitions to contribute to structural change in society and in the conditions that generate poverty and exclusion, that part of the system which they still control clearly needs to be reinvented.

Reinventing the System in ICCO: Aiming for Change

Reinventing the system and making it work for ICCO and its partners essentially means reinventing ICCO itself. It necessitates that ICCO rethink its vision on the relationship with 'the South': who are our partners in the South and how are they really involved in policymaking and priority setting within ICCO? This 'reinvention' of ICCO centres around two main areas of change:

1. By 2010 ICCO will have changed from a Dutch co-financing organization working in fifty countries in the South into an international network organization.
2. Changing the *dynamics* of North–South cooperation for it to become relevant to grassroots communities, in addressing the structural causes of poverty, involving new actors and being legitimate in Southern countries and in the Netherlands.

Both areas of change require a change in present power relations.

The challenges to our policies and working practices became progressively clearer between 2003 and 2004. Exchanges with key partners in our network as well as with independent researchers confirmed that answers needed to be found if the credibility of our intentions was to be maintained.

A series of intensive consultations was organized in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These involved both important local partners and independent local experts. Local experiences with and expectations of international development policies were examined. Participants were presented with and invited to comment on an analysis prepared by ICCO on the European context. Certain basic elements of consensus were identified in that process. It was obvious that, to increase relevance and sustainability, decision-making on policies needed to be much more rooted in local contexts (to offset a trend towards 'one-size-fits-all' policies) and also needed to increase the involvement of (organizations of) the target groups themselves. At the same time, it was necessary to find responses to fragmentation of resources (increasingly characteristic of NGO initiatives both in the North and in the South), and the existing disincentives to collaboration that derive from competition for access to resources. There was also clear consensus on the need to adapt to a globalizing environment.

To respond to all this, it was also clear that we had to redefine our role and functions. It had become evident that working practices and instruments were largely determined by ICCO in its role as funder (while availability of monetary resources was not always the key problem it may have been in the past). At the same time, demands from our partners for other services (such as support for their lobby and advocacy efforts, for brokering new partnerships with other actors, or for increasing investment in learning and capacity-strengthening) could not always be met.

Before starting the preparations for a new programme submission to the Dutch government, a small internal working group developed a first sketch of specific answers to these challenges. In 2006, this sketch was submitted for internal debate within our organization and discussed with a group of independent international experts. In the consultations with partners and staff, the ideas for the future received rather mixed responses; conversely the international experts often concurred with the underlying analysis, though also formulated some important reservations, pointing to, among other things, the existence of vested interests in maintaining the status quo. The results of all these consultations and debates were such that the ICCO board decided to go ahead, subject to certain issues (such as the need for dialogue with Dutch government to ensure that choices to be made would not limit the organization's eligibility to the co-funding programme).

The changes we will be introducing in the system as a result of this process can be divided into two broad categories: our place in the international aid chain and our roles and tasks in that system. We take each in turn. Some aspects of these two areas concern changes that are also under way in various forms and guises in a number of other European NGOs. Truly devolving power (instead of relocating or decentralizing) is, we

feel, a far more significant and radical change than most currently being considered within international aid, and is the one that might make the most persuasive claim to being alternative. To a considerable extent, this decision to devolve power drives our whole programme of renewal.

ICCO as an International Network Organization

In 1977 and in 1979 ICCO organized two consultations (called 'reverse consortia') with partners from the South. The main question at the time was how to reverse the then dominant North–South power relation. Interesting at the time was the conclusion from Southern partners that the time was not yet ripe for such moves. Since then ICCO has 'muddled through' its policy vis-à-vis its southern partners. Key aspects of this partnership policy included an emphasis on institutional and long-term support to provide partners a maximum of freedom within 'the system', consultations with partners on policy changes, and respecting partners' room to manoeuvre and tailor programmes to the specific context in which they work. The latter policy meant that ICCO, contrary to the trend, did not open field offices in Southern countries. It remained at a distance, working from its head office in Utrecht.

The process we started in 2005 opened up once again this discussion with partners on power-sharing and devolution. The main conviction driving this discussion is that Southern civil society has gained strength and is now in a better position to steer its own process of change in the direction it wants to take, while international donor organizations are now lagging behind in adapting their support strategies to this new context. Since 1980, ICCO has worked with three main intervention strategies: direct poverty allevia-tion, the strengthening of southern civil societies, and lobby and advocacy on policy. These are still valid domains in which to work, but partner organizations in the South now need to be able to share responsibility for policy choices and priority setting with organizations such as ICCO.

A second argument for change in the relations between ICCO and its Southern partners is the certainty that many Southern partners and local communities are integrating rapidly into the contemporary world of information sharing, rapid communications and networking for knowledge and new ideas. ICCO should facilitate this integration by offering its global network of over 800 Southern partners, its international networks such as the World Council of Churches, ACT Development, and Aprodev, as well as its contacts with universities and international institutions such as the European Union.

At present ICCO is developing and testing a new model that is based on establishing about twelve regional councils in Latin America,

Africa and Asia, as well as the formation of an international council. In the regional councils, 'representatives' of important sectors of civil society are elected from the region. These representatives are well informed about the regional and local context, and are highly motivated and creative personalities with no vested interests in existing partner organizations or services provided by the system. The main functions of these regional councils – which will be supported by teams of professional staff – will be to develop new and context-specific regional policies, devise strategies, and engage new actors in the development process. Funding decisions will also be made at the level of the councils. Within the international council, representatives of regional councils as well as independent, international members are elected and have similar functions to members of the regional councils. A Dutch supervisory council ensures that there is cohesion and coherence in the system and that decision-making, priority-setting and control over financial resources are conducted in a proper way. Small and effective regional working organizations and an international working organization will implement the policies and priorities.

A major hurdle for ICCO is to achieve this change within the boundaries of present overhead costs (12.5 per cent of total programme funds) and with the active engagement of the present staff in the Netherlands. To clear this hurdle, ICCO has to resolve a paradox. A key factor for success in this process of change is the active support of the present stakeholders, among them the present staff of ICCO. Yet, the model for renewal foresees a much smaller number of staff in Utrecht than there is at present. We are therefore asking some of the present staff to support the process by actively seeking new opportunities outside ICCO. We now foresee a gradual process of more or less natural staff reduction. In the first few years, Dutch ICCO staff may play a role in some of the regional working organizations. Some others will be asked to work on new roles in the international working organization. For a significant number of present staff, however, these changes will mean that they will indeed be requested to pursue their career elsewhere.

An important question for ICCO has been whether this change fits within Dutch government criteria on the co-funding programme. ICCO has received indications from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that this might be the case, and the ministry does indeed view the relation between Dutch organizations and their Southern counterparts as a major area that requires innovations that will allow Southern civil society organizations a larger say in the way resources should be allocated. The ministry has requested the Radboud University, one of the universities participating in the IS-Academy, to conduct comparative research on examples of such changes in relations between Northern and Southern organizations and ICCO's process of change has been chosen as one of the three or four models to be studied.

At the moment of writing it is unclear whether the recent handover to a new governing coalition will have any implications for ICCO's agenda.

Changing the Dynamic of North–South Cooperation

The 'marketization of aid', the competition for public and private funding, the need to gain a public profile and the pressure to show concrete results have together led to a situation of atomization and fragmentation, both in the North and in the South. The net result of this is a centralization in the North and in decision-making in the North or in Northern institutions located in the South.

In an attempt to reverse this trend, ICCO is doing several things. First of all it formed an alliance with five other Dutch organizations and agreed on one joint business plan for the coming four years. Second, ICCO is introducing a programmatic approach to funding in which Southern organizations are encouraged to co-operate and complement each other based on a shared vision and on shared strategies. Together they would work on commonly defined and tangible objectives. An example of such an endeavour is a programme involving some twelve Central American organizations aiming at the creation of a safe environment and development opportunities for young people in that region. The condition that ICCO lays down, however, is that the approach must be *inclusive*, involving partners and non-partners of ICCO, traditional development NGOs, as well as new actors such as the private sector, as well as local governments and others who have the means and influence to achieve a *real* change.

The regional councils and regional working organizations will play a major role in the creation of regional and national programmes. First of all they will select which (thematic) areas should take priority and offer the best chances for effective transformation. Second, the regional councils will have the role of ensuring collaboration and promoting value-added or synergy between programmes – for instance, the 'Youth and Violence' programme in Central America mentioned above will be strengthened if and when a job opportunities programme is related to it. A third function of the regional councils will be actively to promote and enable exchange of knowledge and information both within the region as well as with other regions. The object would be to contribute to strengthening capacities at the level of the organizations themselves, but especially at institutional level – that is, building up disposition and abilities necessary for more collaborative programmes.

For the regional councils and the programmatic approach to be successful, present power dynamics must be transformed. Over the years, Southern partner organizations have developed good working relations with ICCO

(or at least with individual ICCO desk officers). For many of them, the shift in ICCO's *modus operandi* will have serious consequences. Their future funding will depend on their willingness and ability to co-operate with others, to discuss and agree with others the direction of change processes in their area of work, to work with new actors and to come up with new and creative ideas that sometimes involve risks. It will no longer be their *power* (based on their strong relation with ICCO and other donors) that is important, but their ability to *influence* other stakeholders in the process for change. This transformation from depending on power to active influencing is a profound change which among some partners is already generating insecurity and resistance. Others, however, see this transformation as an opportunity for real change.

Can the System be Reinvented?

Development aid has come under considerable pressure in recent years. Once, especially during the 1970s, the Netherlands was regarded as a pioneer in various domains of international affairs such as human rights, international law and development aid. It was one of the first countries to comply with the UN target of reserving at least 0.7 per cent of net national income for development efforts. Meanwhile some of our experts and motivated politicians – such as Tinbergen and Pronk – played key roles in the international debate on poverty. Dutch society at large was not only aware but also proud of this record. Nowadays, however, international affairs move into the political agenda only when issues of migration and asylum are at stake. Development aid is even less relevant politically.

Development aid organizations, in particular the larger or more visible of them, have a distinct credibility problem. Several scandals regarding the high salaries of directors of aid organizations and stories in the press about the lack of (tangible) results of development aid have proven sufficient to strengthen doubts about the entire sector. Meanwhile, big development institutions have had little success in reaching out to the public, in particular to young people. In short, development institutions are no longer seen as dynamic, flexible and well-equipped to address the issues at stake.

It should therefore not be surprising that in recent years both the general public and representatives of certain right-of-centre political parties have asked whether development aid is still relevant in today's world. The question as to whether the present aid budget, set at 0.7 per cent of GDP, should be maintained is raised with monotonous regularity.

Responses from the development sector to these criticisms have been largely defensive. Using studies, evaluations and audits, the sector tried to

'prove' that everything was more or less in order and that development aid institutions can in fact be trusted. Meanwhile, no real introspection is taking place, perhaps out of the (not entirely unfounded) fear that this would fuel the· critics of development aid or would further erode funding support. Another serious handicap for real public debate is the absence of clear alternatives to present arrangements and policies. Indeed, one significant effort of several organizations to start a serious debate on some of these issues, such as the problems arising from the erosion of trust in the system, quickly fizzled out, as a result, among other things, of discrepancies from within the sector itself and because it was presented while the government was studying the applications for the period starting 2007. The development sector very much looks like a rabbit caught in the glare of the headlamps of an approaching car.

There is a conviction among many *individuals* active in the sector that change is necessary and indeed inevitable. Some people fear that if reform is not undertaken from within the system, sooner or later the sector will be confronted with changes forced upon it from outside. At an *institutional* level, however, it is much more difficult to discuss reform. Vested interests might be harmed. The responses to ICCO's initiative will be diverse and it is quite likely that some organizations will feel that ICCO is opening up a Pandora's box. Given the standard reactions from the right in the political spectrum there are concerns that once the box is opened, the political debate will spiral out of control. However, there are also clear indications, now that the dust raised by the recent tendering procedure begins to settle, that an open and constructive debate *could* now be opened to address the very real distortions that exist within the current aid system.

A major question is, of course, whether ICCO will be able to reinvent itself. In a way, we could compare the effort to Baron von Munchausen's attempt to hoist himself out of the swamp by his own bootstraps. We realize there are no guarantees for success, but we are confident we will be able to change ourselves. In this effort, we have the help and support of an International Advisory Group consisting of respected international and Dutch individuals who know the 'system' well. Above all we are certain that there is no way back if we want to continue our work and stay relevant. It is also time for everybody inside and outside the sector to realize that development aid is an investment in a world full of uncertainties. As in the business sector, starting a new company with new ideas is no guarantee of success. Some 30 per cent of new business initiatives do not survive the first year. Development aid can only stay relevant and successful if it starts to accept risks as the necessary investment for renewal and real innovation.

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12

Transforming or Conforming?
NGOs Training Health Promoters and the Dominant
Paradigm of the Development Industry in Bolivia

Katie S. Bristow

Since the end of World War II NGOs have played a central role in development assistance, with many taking a radical stance, challenging the dominant view (Eade, 2000; Hailey, 1999). In the 1980s and 1990s NGOs received substantial funding from national and international governmental organizations (IGOs). This, in part, was a consequence of reduced financial support from private sources during this period but also due to recognition by IGOs of the role that NGOs can play in achieving their agendas. It was argued that, through their ability to provide cost-effective welfare services and encourage citizenship, democracy and the creation of social capital, NGOs could play an important role in strengthening key components of what some term the New Policy Agenda (NPA) (Robinson, 1993; Edwards and Hulme, 1995). Midway through the present decade, the 'Golden Age' of international government funding for NGOs may be in decline as IGOs move to partnership agreements with a selected few (Agg, 2006). Whatever the case, IGOs continue to impose their agenda for international development, whether on NGOs with partnership agreements or on those striving for such agreements. Rather than challenge this agenda by implementing alternative approaches, most NGOs find themselves and their policies drawn in and subsumed to those of government funders (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Edwards and Hulme, 2000; Pearce, 2000).

The reasons NGOs appear to have moved – consciously or unconsciously – towards a pro-market (neoliberal) and technology-orientated agenda of the IGOs are complex. This chapter argues that this move can be explained by four types of factor: ideological/philosophical, politico-economic, socio-cultural and pragmatic. These factors are, furthermore, interlocking, as illustrated in the following scenario. If an NGO's ideology leads it to refuse

to align itself with the NPA, this could lead to a reduction of financial support (a political economic factor). The organization may then need to make a pragmatic decision to reduce the number of its staff, which in turn will affect the services it can offer. For example, cutting back on learning support in training for women health promoters who already lack education may compound the socio-cultural factors that have already put these rural/indigenous women at a disadvantage.

The chapter will argue that the mesh of factors are part of the conscious and unconscious strategies used by social groups, in this case relating to different health systems, to maintain, promote and defend their specific world-view, knowledge and practice. A theoretical framework will be used to explore how power to influence is made relative using Gramsci's (Gramsci, 1971) conscious hegemonic strategies together with Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1989) unconscious mechanisms of habitus and field.

The framework will be applied to two NGOs in Bolivia, 'CÓDIGO' Bolivia and World Vision's PDA in Santivañez (Programa de Desarrollo del Area, Area Development Programme), and their training and management of community health promoters. The prevention and treatment of diarrhoeal diseases have been chosen as the foci or tracer issues for the study. Diarrhoeal diseases are one of the five main causes of death in children under 5 and as such they are included in WHO's and UNICEF's Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) strategy. The reduction in the number of children who die from diarrhoeal disease is also an important intervention to address child mortality, MDG (Millennium Development Goal) four.

The NGOs CÓDIGO and PDA have been chosen because they take different stances in their approaches to health and development issues. CÓDIGO aims to challenge or transform the neoliberal development model that was dominant in Bolivia at the time of research, while PDA appeared to conform to this same model. To compare these two organizations, the chapter proceeds as follows. It opens with a brief description of the current development paradigm and analysis of different conceptual models of health and health care, in particular the biomedical, social and Andean models. This includes revealing how the biomedical model – using the IMCI strategy – has taken centre stage and supports broader global socio-economic goals and therefore the current development paradigm. The next section will discuss the ways in which the current development paradigm subsumes and weakens approaches that might hinder its pro-market, technical orientation. From this platform, I discuss examples of the ways in which both CÓDIGO and PDA are affected by the current approach to development, and the mesh of factors that influence this process. To elucidate the processes at work, the section also discusses the cases of two health promoters, Carolena and Felipe, who work with these organizations. The final section gives an

explanation of the relative power of CÓDIGO and PDA to influence the knowledge and practice of their health promoters.

The Current Development Paradigm

This chapter takes the position that the current socio-economic development model espoused by the International Development Community (IDC), in particular the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), is essentially neoliberal with an emphasis on science and technology. That is, despite acknowledgements of the value of other forms of development, in practice a pro-market Western scientific agenda dominates based on ideas of progress arising from the Enlightenment (Powell and Geoghegan, 2006; Bourdieu, 1998). A specific case in point is the relationship of biomedicine to other models of health.

Biomedical model of health

'Biomedicine' as a concept and in its practice has evolved along a similar path to other forms of Western knowledge (Burke, 2000). It is possible to use Hippocrates (460–360 BC), not as the start of medical practice, but certainly as a pivotal point in its history (Carr, 1997; Kiple, 1993). Biomedicine's evolutionary process has, then, taken it away from Ancient Greece, to the Middle Ages and the Middle East, before returning to Europe and the influence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment periods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The term 'medicine' means the 'art of healing' and is based on a wide range of natural sciences but especially biology (Wiseman, 2004). The prefixes 'bio', 'Western' or 'modern' are often added to 'medicine' to distinguish this form of medical practice from others. I prefer the term 'biomedicine' as it is no longer solely practised in Europe or the Western hemisphere, and Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine also have modern-day forms (Scrimshaw, 2006).

Indigenous medical models

Indigenous medicine refers to medical practice and concepts of health and illness relating to specific cultures and/or ethnic groups. Indigenous medicine is more commonly known as 'traditional medicine'; this is to contrast it with so called modern medicine (biomedicine). In fact all medical systems are indigenous, but some, such as biomedicine, Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine, are now practised beyond their original socio-cultural contexts (Scrimshaw, 2006).

Andean medicine is the indigenous medical system of the Aymara and Quechua people of the Andean Region in South America, of which high-

land Bolivia is a part. Like all aspects of Andean culture, health cannot be understood without understanding the cosmovision of which it is an integral part. Communal, symbolic, ritual and reciprocal practices link individuals and families to the wider social organization of the community, nature and the gods (Allen, 1988). Human and animal disease, or problems with the productive capacity of the land, signify a break somewhere within this cyclical relationship and a world no longer in harmony (Quiroga, 1997; Carrizo, 1993).

Social model

The social model of health proposes that various layers of socio-economic factors and conditions affect or determine health. These determinants include affordable food, education, employment, environment, health care, housing, income, sanitation and clean water, and transport. In order to improve health, all these factors need to be addressed both with the individual and across different socio-economic policies (Povall, 2005; Whitehead, 1995).

Indeed this understanding of health is at the heart of the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health: 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity' (PAHO, 2002; Povall, 2005). However, as in the way neoliberalism dominates the current development model, biomedicine overshadows this more holistic approach to health.

Biomedicine as central to the dominant development paradigm

It is possible to argue that there is a clear historical trajectory linking European culture, especially its knowledge and world-view, to current approaches to social and politico-economic development. Europe's colonial endeavours since at least the fifteenth century have been influential in defining the politico-economic and social structures of many nation-states worldwide. This influence includes a biomedical approach to the development of national health-care systems – systems that, it must be said, tended to be for the use of the colonializers rather than the indigenous population (Powell and Geoghegan, 2006; Cammack, 2002; Burke, 2000; Bergesen and Lunde, 1999; WHO, 2000). The next section explores this claim further by demonstrating how health-care initiatives, such as Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI), are also used to support a neoliberal approach to development.

To establish IMCI's link with neoliberalism it is necessary to go to the post-colonial era, the newly independent states' development of their health-care services and the Alma Ata Declaration in 1978 'Health for All by the Year 2000', through universal primary health care (PHC) (Morely et al., 1983).

The fledgling PHC systems initiated after the Alma Ata declaration in these new nation-states were allowed little opportunity to develop. This was because PHC implementation coincided with a period of oil crisis, which led to a subsequent downturn in the global economy and crisis, which led to a subsequent downturn in the global economy and large national debts incurred by most of these countries. From the 1980s onwards many countries were required by the World Bank and IMF to follow the pro-market structural adjustment programmes (SAP) and more latterly the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) to help address national debt. PRSPs were developed to provide at least some opportunity for national and international agencies to address the need for welfare services in the context of debt-reduction measures (Cornia et al., 1987; Marshall and Woodroffe, 2001).

An important consequence of these measures in the 1990s was the change in primary health care from the idea of 'health for all' as universal health coverage to what the WHO calls 'the "new universalism" – high quality delivery of essential care, defined mostly by the criterion of cost-effectiveness, for everyone, rather than all possible care for the whole population or only the simplest and most basic care for the poor' (WHO, 2000: 5). In other words, selective health care relating to the most cost-effective interventions for specific health issues or populations. IMCI is an example of this approach as it targets the five main causes of death in children under 5 – malaria, measles, respiratory infections, diarrhoea and malnutrition (WHO, 2001). Linked to these strategies was the endorsement by a UN Summit in September 2000 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a group of eight targets to be achieved by 2015 (World Bank, 2003; WHO, 2000). IMCI is seen as an important strategy for achieving MDG target four – reduction of child mortality by two-thirds by 2015 (World Bank, 2002).

The Health Nutrition and Population department of the World Bank directly links IMCI to PRSPs. As an example, Dr Hans Troedsson, Director of Child and Adolescent Health and Development at the WHO, addressed child mortality at a World Bank consultation, called 'Monitoring HNP (Health Nutrition Population) Goals using the PRSP Framework'. Dr Troedsson described the way the IMCI strategy can be employed to address MDGs relating to child mortality within the context of the PRSP framework. He noted that the PRSP provides an opportunity to improve child health because (i) determinants and indicators in the PRSP can have a major effect on country priorities; and (ii) focusing on the implementation of a limited set of effective interventions will lead to achievement of the MDG for child mortality (Troedsson, 2001: slide 38).

To address child mortality, he argues, PRSPs will need to include health

and other relevant policies to develop the capacity of the health system to respond appropriately. Such appropriate responses would include health interventions, such as good nutrition, clean water or oral rehydration solution, that reach the target population, children under 5. The IMCI strategy and its selected interventions are deemed the effective way forward for achieving a reduction in child mortality and therefore MDG target four.

To summarize the argument so far, the current paradigm of socio-economic development practised by the IDC is by and large based on neoliberal ideas, science and technology. It was also proposed that European cultures and scientific knowledge have had a significant influence on the evolution of this paradigm, especially in relation to Europe's colonial past. Biomedicine and interventions such as IMCI clearly have many of their roots in Europe and are principal components of the current development paradigm (Powell and Geoghegan, 2006; Cammack, 2002; Burke, 2000; Wiseman, 2004; McGrath, 2001). Using Gramsci and Bourdieu, this chapter will now address how actors within the international development community use conscious and unconscious strategies to maintain their dominance over others.

Conscious and Unconscious Strategies of Power and Influence

As discussed earlier, the model of development that the IDC seeks to promote is essentially neoliberal with an emphasis on science and technology. Gramsci argues that influence is not exerted through outright dominance but by the consent of the other groups to the dominant group's perspective.

> Indeed the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspapers and associations – which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially manipulated. (Gramsci, 1971: note 49)

The elite, in Gramsci's view, will also compromise and sacrifice if necessary and will attempt to maintain the equilibrium as long as it does not interfere with the overall direction of their cultural and economic project.

> [I]n other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential. (Gramsci, 1971: 161)

The conscious use of consensus and compromise to gain support can be seen in the ways in which the Bank and IMF responded to strenuous criticism of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s. These

responses, as embodied in the subsequent compromise approaches of the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), supposedly offer a more human face of development (Cornia et al. 1987). Attention to social and human development issues, including health strategies such as the IMCI, are now components of the neoliberal project to improve the economies of low- to middle-income countries and thereby the global market (Troedsson, 2004).

Consensus and compromise can also be detected in the way that NGOs are arguably losing their radical edge in order to gain financial support and recognition from the main development players such as the World Bank and other multilateral and bilateral agencies (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). This phenomenon of consensus and compromise in the face of power has been termed 'subsumation' by some (Cammack, 2002; Kothari and Minogue, 2002). It is a process in which ostensibly alternative approaches to development, such as participation, gender and ethnodevelopment, are taken over and domesticated to suit the neoliberal model. In biomedicine this can be seen in the way consideration of local health beliefs and practice is stressed in policy documents but is rarely followed through in practice (Bristow, 2005).

The notion of subsumation has particular importance for NGOs that train community health workers, especially in multi-ethnic and socio-economically diverse societies like Bolivia. Instead of indigenous medical knowledge and practice being actively combined with Western biomedical elements of health-care provision, these local knowledges are either subsumed or ignored. Ultimately this leads to missed opportunities to improve health-care practice. For example, in relation to diarrhoea – one of the health problems treated through IMCI – the main concern is to prevent dehydration by giving oral fluids. In Andean medicine mothers bathe their children in herbs, giving only small amounts of fluid orally. It is not hard to imagine that if the value of both medical systems were acknowledged in practice as well as in policy, biomedically trained health workers might be able communicate the importance of increasing oral fluids alongside bathing in herbs (Bristow, 2005; Nichter, 1988).

Domestication (subsumation) is an aspect of a process that combines both conscious Gramscian hegemonic notions of power and influence with concomitant unconscious processes. These unconscious processes can best be explained by using Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field (Bourdieu, 1989, 1999). Habitus relates to the way the norms, actions and representations associated with a particular social group are embodied, produced and reproduced within individuals. Past experiences inform actions in the present, and, in turn, present actions anticipate without conscious effort their future outcome. In this way the character of the group is maintained

and structures are reproduced. It is an 'embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten' (Bourdieu, 1999: 111). It guides and directs individual behaviour while still giving choice, although limited to those decisions that might be consistent with the habitus of the social group.

> Agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us', a division as fundamental and as fundamentally recognized as that between the sacred and the profane. (Bourdieu, 1999: 117)

To explain how social groups, particularly dominant groups, reproduce themselves and maintain their influence, Bourdieu talks of primary and secondary habitus and of pedagogic action and authority. Primary habitus is the type into which a child is born, and learns though pedagogic action that has been authorized (pedagogic authority) by their family and class (or ethnic group) (May, 2001). Secondary habitus is developed, by pedagogic action, most notably, within schools but also through training in specialized areas such as health care.

Specialized training brings us to Bourdieu's other notion of 'field'. Field could be described as social space, a concept that is similar to physical space – divided up into regions, spaces within spaces, which are moulded by the taste and disposition of the dominant class or social group. Class itself is a field; so too are politics, education, art, health care, international development and ethnic groups, for example. These spaces, however, are 'constructed in such a way that the closer agents, groups or institutions which are situated within th[ese] space[s], the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer' (Bourdieu, 1989: 16 col. 1).

Even within fields there will be those at the centre who will be more readily recognized by their pedagogic authority and identify more closely with each other. For instance, in the field of a UK national hospital, doctors and nurses will be near the centre and have much in common. Conversely, an acupuncturist may well be employed by the same hospital but have a lot less in common with both it and its doctors and nurses and therefore less influence.

Subsumation, therefore, can be described as the unconscious and conscious cultural processes that enable one social group to influence another, in particular where different social fields overlap.

Bolivia, Social Fields, Health Care and the NGO Sector

In order to understand how subsumation might be at work in training community health workers in Bolivia, a description of the various fields involved is necessary as they pertain to Bolivian society in general and

the two case-study NGOs in particular. Bolivia, like many other Latin American countries, is in reality at least two nations in one, Andean Indian and Creole Hispanic, with distinct cultures – two coarse categories, with variation within each. Subsequently, the two have very different habitus and fields, including their health beliefs and practices. Andean Bolivia is an integrated social, physical and metaphysical whole that grows out of its history and pre-Incan past. Creole Bolivia, by and large, conforms to the ideas and practices of the neoliberal Western scientific stance that characterizes most of the development community. However, there are those who have always fallen between the two, the Mestizos. Some of these, through marriage, education or wealth, have been able to move into the Creole Bolivia, while a few have returned to their Andean roots. Yet many, the Cholos, or urban and semi-urbanized poor, are left living on the edge of both cultures with minimal opportunity to make their views known or to effect change.

Health promoters who are associated with CÓDIGO and PDA tend to be spread along an Andean/Cholo continuum depending on their proximity to the city. Two such promoters are Felipe, who is nearer to the Cholo end, and Carolena, the Andean end.

Felipe and Carolena

Felipe is a voluntary health promoter with PDA but received his training from CÓDIGO. He is 18 and lives with his mother, grandmother and younger brother in Kuturipa, a rural community located a good ninety-minute steep walk from the road and then a forty-minute bus journey to either Cochabamba or the subdistrict capital Santivañez. Family members describe themselves as subsistence farmers and pastoralists. Though they have electricity, they have no running water; and their land is very arid. The nearest potable water is an arduous forty-minute walk away.

Felipe left school after six years of primary education, but CÓDIGO inspired him to return and he has subsequently started at a SEMA (secondary school for adults), which he attends once a week. As it takes him half a day to walk there, he usually stays overnight.

Carolena was sent by another organization, INDICEP (Instituto de Investigación para Educación Popular, Research Institute for Popular Education), to be trained by CÓDIGO. She is 20, unmarried and a goatherd on her parents' smallholding in Tapacari, in the high valleys of Cochabamba. Their home is a two-hour hilly walk to the nearest small town (the district subsection of Waca Playa). If a member of the family wants to get to Cochabamba he or she has to wait for a Saturday or Monday to make the three-hour lorry or bus journey. During the dry season they can go by a different route through another small town, from which lorries

leave every day. However, during the rainy seasons the paths to this town are treacherous.

Carolena is the eldest of nine children, with three sisters and five brothers. She and her sister Maria left school before completing the primary level, as will the two younger girls. The boys, on the other hand, are expected to complete and graduate from high school.

I have placed Carolena and Felipe at different positions on the Andean/Cholo continuum even though both live in rural areas. Felipe's primary habitus arises out of a greater mixture of fields than Carolena, because living nearer to urban areas he and his family are influenced by both rural and urban social fields. This does not necessarily give him an advantage when it comes to being able to work effectively as a health promoter. To understand this we need to look at the organizations providing the opportunities to become promoters, CÓDIGO and PDA.

CÓDIGO and PDA

CÓDIGO and PDA are both NGOs working in community health and involved in training health promoters; however, there are some clear differences, especially in their relationships to the current development paradigm. A brief description of each organization and in particular how each approaches community health will demonstrate how CÓDIGO aims to challenge or transform the current view of development while PDA appears to be conforming with it. The description also demonstrates that, despite CÓDIGO's radical edge, in practice it, like PDA, also conforms.

CÓDIGO Bolivia

CÓDIGO Bolivia is one of the country programmes of CÓDIGO International, a church-based and health-related NGO based in the United States. The work in Cochabamba Bolivia was begun in the late 1980s by a Colombian couple, Dr Juan Carlos De Pedro and Mgr Roxana Velasquez. Initially, they had expected to be developing a community-health programme that largely followed the standard biomedical model recommended by WHO after Alma Ata. Once acquainted with the specific Bolivian context of ethnic diversity, inequity coupled with paternalism, and poverty, they concluded that a new approach was needed. In 1992, inspired by the work of the Brazilian radical educationalist Paulo Freire, they moved to Chirimoyo, a semi-urban community on the outskirts of Cochabamba. Using Freire's theories of 'conscientization' and 'praxis', CÓDIGO Bolivia's approach is one that aims to transform people from passive objects of somebody else's world into active subjects contributing to their own individual and collective livelihoods (Gramsci, 1971).

In conjunction with their Freirean ethos they have also developed a very clear approach to health care that they call 'integrated health', based on the social model of health (Whitehead, 1995). Health is regarded as part of the wider socio-cultural, politico–economic context at all levels of society – local, national and international. CÓDIGO describes its approach as a 'systemic ecological healthgenic' model. This concept is intended to emphasize healthy people rather than disease, and to be participatory, democratic and sustainable. Within this, they attempt to address a range of interrelated issues: basic health care and prevention, including the use of traditional and local medicines as well as Western biomedicine; income generation; organic agriculture; protection of the environment; human rights and community law (De Pedro and Velasquez, 1992).

Implicit in this concept of health is the expectation that the health promoters will have an integrated knowledge where they are confident and conversant in both their own local health knowledge and practice and in biomedicine. Through this approach CÓDIGO also hopes to distance itself from Bolivia's national health service and other NGOs. At worst, according to CÓDIGO, the approaches of other NGOs and the public health system are reductionist, 'hospital-based pathogenic biomedical' models, focusing on the signs and symptoms of disease and not on people. Or, at best, they are 'community-based pathogenic biological' models that, while they address the social setting of health, are still biomedical and disease-focused (De Pedro and Velasquez, 1992).

CÓDIGO makes a clear distinction between its understanding of the term 'integrated' and the way it is used in IMCI programmes. It means health as an integrated part of individual and communal life, while in IMCI health is regarded precisely as what it says: 'integrated management of illnesses related to children' – for example, diarrhoea and pneumonia'. CÓDIGO's health-care and training programmes do cover some of the aspects found in IMCI, such as the management of diarrhoeal diseases, but as part of their overall work. The organization has resisted getting involved with IMCI initiatives with the SEDES (local health authority) in Cochabamba. They also wrote to CÓDIGO International stating their opposition to the organization's intention to obtain funding from IMCI programmes. This instance highlights another area of tension for CÓDIGO Bolivia. Funding, and therefore survival, is increasingly tied to the very initiatives or approaches, such as IMCI, to which CÓDIGO Bolivia is opposed.

PDA Santivañez

PDA Santivañez is involved in a range of community development projects in the subdistrict of Santivañez. It is one of six such organizations established in Cochabamba by the large international Christian NGO, World Vision. The long-term aim is that eventually the PDAs will be financially independent from World Vision, but at the time of the field research they were all fully funded by it (pers. comm., director of World Vision in Cochabamba).

The main areas of PDA's work are maternal and child health, food security and nutrition, Christian pastoral support and child sponsorship on behalf of World Vision. At one time all the PDAs in Cochabamba sent their health promoters for training with CÓDIGO. In 2003 PDA Santivañez was the only one; the rest stopped after the initial training because they felt uncomfortable with CÓDIGO's ecumenical stance. They prefer to work with organizations that are more clearly evangelical (pers. comm., director of PDA's work in Viloma and CÓDIGO staff).

Normally, the Santivañez PDA will send people for training to CÓDIGO who have been selected by their local *sindicato* (community organization). Having completed their initial training they then have to work voluntarily for the PDA, running health promotion talks with either a group of children or women once every two weeks. They are also expected to complete their CÓDIGO training and attend monthly training meetings at the PDA office in Santivañez (pers. comm., PDA doctor).

My experience of the PDA in Santivañez and interviews with the director of World Vision in Cochabamba led me to believe that their approach to community development and health care followed the standard approach used within the development community more generally. For instance, they use the monthly training meetings to reinforce a very standard biomedical approach to diarrhoeal disease and nutrition. The PDA doctor is involved in the local health authority initiative to implement the IMCI programme at a community level. Finally, PDA's sponsor, World Vision, is a large, well-established, international NGO which receives funding from USAID and other bilateral and multilateral agencies (World Vision, 2005). The director in Cochabamba made a clear statement of the type of health care World Vision practises.

> Health, we say more, let's see … clinical … no? scientific, yes! And … we are aware of how we might be able to talk about traditional medicine … maybe to know *curanderos* [the Spanish name commonly used for traditional medical practitioners] also. I say maybe, because we have not yet taken, we have not fully reviewed, reflected on this. (interview with director of World Vision in Cochabamba)

To summarize, CÓDIGO aims to be a NGO that transforms. This can be seen through its commitment to a Freirean ethos, its integrated approach to health rather than disease, and the way it has distanced itself from strategies such as IMCI. Alternatively, PDA appears to be an NGO that conforms. Through its financial dependence on World Vision it is directly linked to

the wider international development community and a Western biomedical approach to health. It has adopted the IMCI strategy and subsumed notions of socio-culturally appropriate practices.

Theoretical Aims and Actual Practice

Having identified some of the differences between the two organizations, further distinctions need to be made between the theoretical aims of the organizations and what occurs in practice. This is particularly marked for CÓDIGO, because in practice it conforms to the current development paradigm despite its claims to the contrary. This can be demonstrated in how health promoters trained by CÓDIGO, instead of integrating their different forms of health knowledge, still keep them separated. Because PDA's approach is consistent with a biomedical approach, the differences between its theory and practice have distinct implications.

Separation of different forms of health knowledge by CÓDIGO-trained health promoters

Focus group work conducted early on in my field research proved to be significant. Focus groups were carried out with some of CÓDIGO's promoters taking their second-level course. The discussion involved the promoters answering the following question:

> Where or from whom have you heard information or learned about ARIs (Acute Respiratory Infections) or ADDs (Acute Diarrhoeal Diseases) before coming to CÓDIGO?

I made sure that I used words that CÓDIGO uses in their training manuals and that are therefore familiar to the promoters. Their reply, which I noted down in my diary, was that they had never heard of ARIs or ADDs before coming to CÓDIGO. After some discussion and clarifications in Quechua (the most widely spoken Andean language), the promoters did start to talk about the traditional illnesses such as *Sipi Chupasqa*. I was somewhat surprised by this response, as, in line with CÓDIGO's stated approach, I was expecting the promoters to talk with ease and respect about their local knowledge. In fact, what I seemed to be seeing was a separation or compartmentalizing of what they knew. This was confirmed later by observing training sessions, interviews, visits to health promoters and their families, as well as by responses to the questionnaire I designed. For instance, Carolena was involved in the group research but I found out later that she frequently diagnosed and treated family members using her local knowledge.

Her young brother had bad diarrhoea last year and they went to the *posta* [local state clinic]. He was given *suero* (ORS) but it didn't help. Instead they used local plants that everyone here knows about. Also *pepa de palta* (avocado stone). (research diary, 11 August 2003)

Felipe admitted to having very little local health knowledge but eventually acknowledged that his mother Angela had considerable knowledge, which she had learnt from her grandmother.

> *Katie*   Did she learn from someone in her community or from her grandmother?
>
> *Interpreter*   Yes, her grandmother. Her grandmother treated everything, including a baby or child with constipation. She put a little bit of matchstick in and they would start.
>
> *Katie*   Where did her grandmother learn this information, here or did she go and train somewhere else?
>
> *Interpreter*   Her grandmother has always known and she does not know from where. But she [Angela] learned from her grandmother. Her grandmother was always teaching her; she'd say, 'When I die you are going to do the treating!' (interview with Felipe's mother, Angela)

Four categories of interlocking factors

Health promoters on the Andean/Cholo continuum fall within a range that either, like Carolena, have both Andean and biomedical knowledge but do not use them together, or are more like Felipe, who has access to his mother's local knowledge but is reluctant to acknowledge its importance. In both cases the two forms of knowledge are not integrated despite the theoretical aims of the health workers' training institutions.

This is because the four types of interlocking factor – ideological/philosophical, politico-economic, socio-cultural and pragmatic – make the power of a field's pedagogic authority relative in relation to other fields that might be competing with it. Put a different way, CÓDIGO's power to influence its promoters is affected by both the interlocking factors and the strength of the other fields the promoters encounter – Andean, Creole/state and other NGOs like PDA.

Philosophical/ideological

In the initial CÓDIGO training course there are two modules that could be linked together to emphasize its ideological approach to integrated health: 'Process of Health and Illness' and 'Management of Common Illnesses'. The former involves the promoters' previous knowledge and the biological, socio-cultural determinants of health and illness, while the latter addresses the prevention and treatment of diseases, such as diarrhoea. Yet in practice

they are given as two very separate courses, with the 'Managing Common Illnesses' module run along clear biomedical lines. This, I believe, is because an integrated approach is not consistent with some of the staff's evangelical beliefs and their previous biomedical training. The clinic doctor, who ran the 'Managing Common Illnesses', was also an evangelical lay preacher. When he left, the module was not changed.

A further example is that while PDA sends its promoters for training with CÓDIGO, it has endorsed the IMCI strategy. This can only compound the unintentional biomedical emphasis of the training that the promoters, such as Felipe, receive.

Politico-economic

Many NGOs secure funding through aligning themselves with current international and national strategies, such as IMCI. CÓDIGO will not do this and therefore lacks the level of financial support enjoyed by other organizations, such as PDA. CÓDIGO also excludes itself from different arenas that reduce its opportunity to influence the dominant model. For instance, by not working with the Cochabamba SEDES (local health authority) on their IMCI implementation strategy it is unable to exercise any influence over this strategy.

Socio-cultural

Age and gender are important factors in determining whether people who have undergone training with CÓDIGO are recognized as health promoters by their communities. For example, Carolena, despite her training with CÓDIGO, was not chosen by her community to work as the health promoter to organize the three-monthly visits by the nurse from the local state clinic. Instead a male with no previous training was chosen and Carolena was asked to assist him. Neither was Felipe officially recognized by his community, even though he was selected by PDA for training. This was because there were two other older male promoters present in the community.

Educational approach and achievement also have socio-cultural relevance. CÓDIGO interprets gender-sensitive and inclusive learning to mean mixed-ability groups and the use of Spanish to improve competency in the lingua franca. The consequences appear to be that men, better-educated women and first-language Spanish speakers dominate group work and plenary sessions that put others, especially rural women such as Carolena, at a disadvantage. This observation leads us to our final category: CÓDIGO has made a pragmatic decision that it did not have the resources to give sufficient support to these women.

Pragmatic

Alongside insufficient resources to address the mixed educational and linguistic needs of the promoters, CÓDIGO also has very limited capacity to provide practical experiences, assess learning and make home visits for follow-up. The consequence of this is that they cannot reinforce learning or assess what knowledge their promoters actually use in their communities.

The promoters also have to make pragmatic decisions not to attend CÓDIGO training courses because of planting or harvest seasons or special occasions such as Todos Santos (All Saints' Day). They may also be prevented from attending because of the frequent strikes and road blocks associated with the ongoing political and social unrest in the country or simply because the rains have made the roads impassable. During my year in Chirimoyo, five courses were cancelled because there were insufficient promoters.

The four categories of factor affecting the promoters' use of health knowledge interlock with each other. For instance, CÓDIGO's ideological stance leads to the political economic consequence of reduced financial support. This in turn leads to CÓDIGO making pragmatic decisions that have led to lack of support to the minimally educated non-Spanish-speaking part of the population where they work. This then compounds the socio-cultural relationships that can put rural/indigenous women at a disadvantage.

Figure 12.1   Diagrammatic representation of relationships between fields
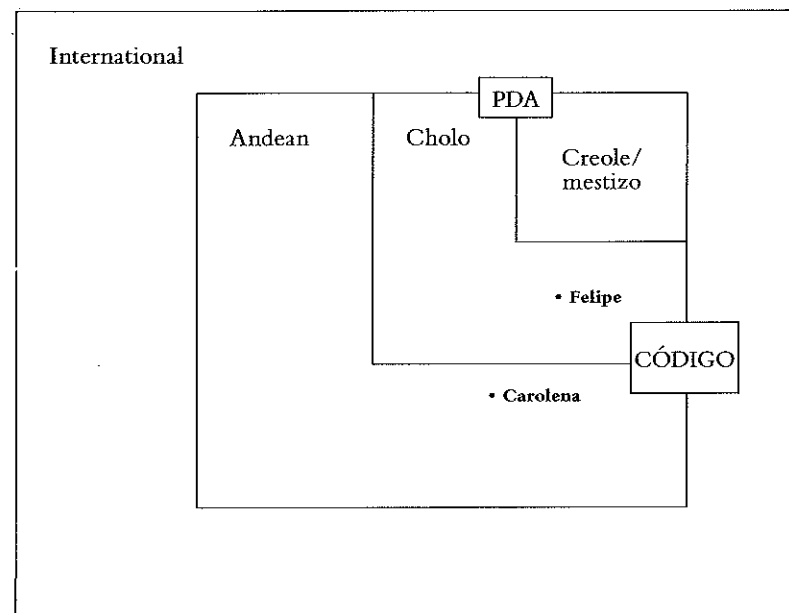
The four categories therefore work against CÓDIGO being able to produce in the health promoters it trains a secondary habitus that is stronger and more enduring than both their primary habitus and that of the Creole state system. Bourdieu talks in terms of positions within fields (Bourdieu, 1989); the closer an individual is identified with a particular group, the more their personal habitus will reflect the dominant habitus of that group. Unlike CÓDIGO's health promoters, Bourdieu's schooling was sufficiently long and effective that the primary habitus instilled in him by his poor rural parents was replaced by an enduring secondary habitus of the French intellectual elite (Webb et al., 2002).

Figure 12.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the relationships between the habitus and fields of the various social groups involved in the research as expressed through their different forms of health (medical) knowledge and practice. The outer box represents the international sphere from the perspective of the multinational and bilateral development agencies relating to Western biomedical knowledge and practice within the IDC. The next box represents the health (medical) knowledges and practices of Bolivia and within it separates the Andean and Creole representations (fields). The Cholos (urban poor) straddle both fields with their health knowledge and practice being a mixture of the two main forms. CÓDIGO and PDA are also represented. Figure 12.1 uses different shading to represent the various fields and the extent to which an individual's or an institution's habitus is influenced by their proximity to and or overlap with another field. Carolena is positioned clearly in the Andean field marking her health knowledge and practice from this field. The Creole state health system (Bolivia's national health system), despite being in the Bolivian box, is clearly continuous with the international biomedical field. Felipe is positioned in the indeterminate Cholo field that overlaps both the Andean and Creole. CÓDIGO and PDA as institutions are positioned overlapping the other fields to represent the idea that the four categories of factors make their fields weak in much the same way as the Cholo field.

In the context of their roles as health promoters, Carolena and Felipe encounter at least three or four fields: Andean, Creole, CÓDIGO and PDA. For example, Carolena's primary habitus is Andean, yet she comes into contact with both the Creole field through her assisting the male health promoter and nurse from the local clinic, and CÓDIGO's field through her participation in its training courses.

CÓDIGO's power to influence is relative while the promoters are doing its courses, but in the final instance it is not able to produce durable or consistent changes in the habitus of these promoters. It is affected not only by the constraints of the four interlocking types of factor but also by the conscious and unconscious cultural influences of the Andean and

Creole fields. When promoters like Carolena leave CÓDIGO and return home, the Andean field re-exerts its more powerful influence. In these circumstances CÓDIGO is not able to support its promoters to integrate Andean knowledge with biomedicine. Instead, the promoters' knowledge is separated into different realms, with different forms of knowledge being used at different times. Ultimately this leads to less efficient health care practices and demonstrates the limitations of CÓDIGO's ability to challenge the dominant system.

Separation of forms of health knowledge by PDA and Creole/state-trained health workers

The processes that affect the treatment of non-biomedical knowledge by fields that conform to the current development paradigm differ from those of CÓDIGO. Although the IDC, including PDA and the Creole/state health system, acknowledge that non-biomedical knowledge and practice are important, they are adapted and subsumed into a biomedical framework. The presence of the four categories of interlocking factors works to the advantage of the hegemonic processes of consensus and compromise because they help to keep both CÓDIGO's field and the general Andean field relatively weak – as such they do not have any influence outside of their own immediate contexts. This has the effect of ensuring that the cultural hegemony of the IDC is maintained.

Nevertheless the power of the dominant paradigm to reproduce its habitus is also made relative due to the presence of the interlocking factors, although to a lesser extent than for CÓDIGO. The Creole state–run clinic may exert a powerful influence on rural promoters like Carolena when they are in contact, such as during the three-monthly community visit. Yet the influence of the clinic is too infrequent and short for it to change her enduring Andean habitus. The field and habitus of Felipe are mixed, because he has had more contact with Mestizo Creole life through his proximity to urban areas and through PDA. Unless he moves into one or other of the main Andean or Creole fields via, for example, marriage or education he is likely to remain in an indeterminate Cholo field. Neither he nor others will then be able to benefit from his mother's considerable local knowledge.

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that the power of different fields to reproduce their particular habitus, is compromised by the existence of four categories of interlocking factors, which I have outlined. This is so both for NGOs that aim to challenge the dominant biomedical approaches as well as for those who conform to it. Yet, in the final instance, these interlocking factors have the effect of strengthening the hegemonic processes of consensus and compromise that has the ultimate effect of maintaining the

current dominance of neoliberal culture. This process comes at a price, as it seems to limit the effectiveness of programmes like IMCI that are central to the success of the MDGs and part of the overall approach to poverty reduction strategies (PRSPs). This is because other approaches, such as Andean beliefs and practices, are subsumed, with the result that although they may be acknowledged in theory they are not in practice. Opportunities for constructive engagement between the Andean and biomedical systems that might lead to improved health care are missed.

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13

Political Entrepreneurs or Development Agents: An NGO's Tale of Resistance and Acquiescence in Madhya Pradesh, India

Vasudha Chhotray

NGOs the world over have been regarded positively for their capacities both as 'political entrepreneurs' and as 'development agents', but there is growing cynicism over their abilities to combine these two roles.[1] As political entrepreneurs, NGOs have been known to act as catalysts of radical and transformative social change, through their association with grassroots struggle in various forms. As development agents, NGOs have increasingly become key partners of both governments and donor agencies in implementing development programmes. The definitive mainstreaming of NGOs within international development during the last two decades has entailed growing pressures on NGOs, many of which may have started out as small and informal cadre-based organizations, to compete for development funds, formalize their organizational structures and 'scale up' their work. All this seems to have compromised the inclination and ability of NGOs devoted to development to engage in acts that are radically transformative.

Such cynicism afflicts development in general, perceived as an activity or set of relations that is divorced of 'politics'. Here, politics is understood in terms of radical and transformative change or 'the discourse and struggle over the organization of human possibilities' (Held, 1984: 1). In this chapter, I will refer to this meaning as politics with a big P to distinguish it from the entire range of politics with a small p, from arbitrary interest-seeking to organized electoral party politics, all of which regularly mediate development. While it would be hard to argue that development is devoid of 'small p' politics, it has increasingly been distanced from 'big P' politics: with the result that development has been cynically viewed as contrary to social transformation and preserving of the status quo instead. It is this cynicism that explains why NGOs are viewed as ineffective agents of alternatives

in development. This is one side of the story. The other side points to the continuous attempts made by the development machinery (including states and other institutions of international development cooperation) to present development as a technocratic process that does not involve politics, a phenomenon that has been referred to as depoliticization (Ferguson, 1990; Harriss, 2001; Kamat, 2002). And yet discussions of 'depoliticization' have systematically refrained from specifying which meaning of politics is being referred to in this ostensible depoliticization project.

I would argue that it is necessary, perhaps imperative, to do so for two reasons. First of all, the depoliticization discourse is a discourse of denial for projecting development as free of 'small p' politics even in the face of overwhelming, everyday, indeed public knowledge to the contrary. For example, which junior government official or contractor, responsible for implementing a rural development project in India, can credibly claim that locally powerful interests do not join hands with local project officials to influence project resources? Second, however, and more seriously, the depoliticization of development discourse is impoverished by its limitedness, for it shuns 'big P' politics. So when a social movement like the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) launches into a prolonged protest against the construction of a major hydroelectric dam, it is regarded (by the 'pro-development' camp) to be 'anti-development'. In the same vein, some NGOs in India that might have confronted the state on contentious issues to do with bringing about social transformation have had to face difficult consequences. In this process, what is often forgotten is that development agencies – both from the government and from NGOs – regularly encounter politics, in its 'big P' and 'small p' forms.

It is this entanglement that forms the context for my story: of an NGO working among tribals in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. But before I can proceed, some key points need to be made by way of setting out the context. All have to do with rejecting different types of binaries that have come to dominate development debates, none of which is particularly helpful in appreciating the potential of NGOs in development. The first is drawn between the state and civil society, with NGOs being regarded as shorthand for civil society. Donors are especially guilty of this because identifying NGOs as symbolic civil society actors presents manifold opportunities for them to set up development project funding in support of their objectives, say democratization or participatory development (Igoe, 2003). However, NGOs are 'neither synonymous' nor 'entirely congruent with civil society' and their place within the latter development (Igoe, 2003). However, NGOs are 'neither synonymous' nor must be treated 'carefully', 'historically' and 'relationally' (Bebbington and
Moreover, a simple state–civil society dichotomy actually between the two, especially

in the developing world (Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2001). Viewed from a Gramscian perspective, it becomes possible to appreciate that the state and civil society share a dialectical relationship, where the civil society can serve both to reinforce hegemony and to foster counter-hegemonic struggle (Gramsci, 1971).

The second binary that I will not use is between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' development, mainly because it is no longer clear what exactly these terms refer to (Pieterse, 1998). Besides, upon problematizing the idea of 'alternative' development, it becomes evident that NGOs are often accused of not promoting alternatives to 'big D' development or immanent and intentional development that requires clear and concrete interventions (Cowen and Shenton, 1996; Introduction, this volume). However, not enough attention is paid to the attempts by some NGOs to provide alternatives to 'little d' development or immanent development that refers to the social, economic and political processes underlying capitalist development. The third binary I will discard concerns power as a zero-sum process where the dominant act continually to oppress the subordinate and the latter are understood as victims in unidimensional terms. Anthropological research, notably by Scott (1985, 1990) and many others subsequently, has revealed the complicated interface between domination and resistance that characterizes all social interactions (see Masaki, 2004).

And through the course of this chapter, I will reject yet another binary – that drawn between the roles of NGOs as political entrepreneurs and as development agents – for it seriously limits consideration of their potential. NGOs are uniquely positioned in the interface between governments at different levels (both elected representatives and bureaucrats), local communities and foreign donors. Using case study evidence, I will argue that NGOs that seek to be effective in meeting their development objectives need not, indeed cannot, be *either* political entrepreneurs *or* development agents. I will show how, over an entire decade, one central Indian NGO has been able to combine development work regarded as legitimate by the state with practices resisting state action in development in general. In the process, I will demonstrate how and why the 'depoliticization' of development is not always a successful state project with predictable consequences. The chapter will reveal that the NGO's seemingly dual stance was itself unreal, as resistance and acquiescence were interwoven with one another in subtle ways. It will focus on key factors – of composition, location, legislation, organizational interrelationships and politics – all of which contributed to this NGO's local power and effectiveness. It will conclude with general implications concerning the nature of, and also limits to, NGO power. My evidence here derives from qualitative research undertaken during a two-month stay with the NGO in 2000, involving interviews with a broad

range of stakeholders and local documentary sources. Proxy names are used to protect anonymity.

The Making of an NGO

The proliferation and composition of the 'NGO universe' in India has been competently described elsewhere (Sen, 1999; Kamat, 2002). By and large, NGO activity in development and relief work has been received favourably by the state, and indeed explicitly encouraged. But, simultaneously, NGOs that have adopted a politically confrontational stand against state policies, institutions or actors have typically been disassociated from the state's development agenda, and occasionally repressed. The Seventh Plan document of the Government of India even defined NGOs as 'politically neutral development organizations that would help the government in its rural development programmes' (cited in Sen, 1999: 342).

The organization that forms the subject of my study started its association with Bagli *tehsil* (block) in Dewas district in south-west Madhya Pradesh in 1992. Dewas is a dryland district and contains striking regional disparities between its plateau (*ghaat-upar*) and valley (*ghaat-neeche*) portions as divided by the Narmada river. Non-tribal upper castes in the relatively fertile and irrigated plateau portions dominate the district's politics and political economy. The valley areas, however, have been marked by decades of resource degradation and political marginalization (Shah et al., 1998). Large tribal pockets comprising the Bhil and Bhilala tribes are interspersed with an exploitative non-tribal majority. The roots of this enduring conflict lie in the post-independence settlement process, when the Forest Department took over administration of forest areas, thus dispossessing tribals of their lands. While most tribals in Bagli's 100–village belt were compensated with small plots, these lands are largely dry and of poor quality. Poor tribals practise a combination of rainfed agriculture, wage labour and an annual routine of tortuous migration to the plateau areas during the long, dry summer.

The choice of Bagli as an area of work by our NGO was a considered one. None of the organization's eight founding members had resided or worked in this *tehsil*, or anywhere in Dewas district, prior to their arrival in 1992. They were a group of friends who had met at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, known for its left-oriented political thinking. All group members are from 'high castes'; most come from middle–class families and a few from more affluent backgrounds with important political connections. They are educated and English-speaking, while conversant in Hindi, the main regional language. Nearly all had full-time academic careers before they decided to start work that allowed them to engage more directly in

pursuit of their beliefs. The social backgrounds of group members would prove to be consequential in the course of their interactions with the local people of Bagli, as with government functionaries at senior levels.

The group sought to work in Bagli because it represented long periods of political and economic marginalization, which had in turn produced official disinterest in the region and, simultaneously, the marked absence of popular mobilization. Group members wanted to build a 'peoples' organization' that would engage in grassroots work and advocacy. The formation, thus, of a 'critical mass within policy making, so that marginalized tribal areas would get the benefit of increased state intervention and public investment' was central to the stated discourse of the group, and of the organization it eventually formed. It specifically wanted to promote local natural resource management, which it believed would offer a lasting solution to chronic resource poverty. Its overarching aim would be to increase local awareness of the laws of the state and constitutionally prescribed rights. In terms of ideology, the group professed an explicit belief in development, and, equally importantly, in the state as the principal guarantor of rights. This belief was certainly in 'big D' development, in concrete interventions, but importantly also in 'little d' development, given its understanding and recognition of underlying or immanent processes of development (see Introduction). Theirs was an ideology of 'positive engagement', with the state, its policies, institutions and actors – one prominent member denounced anti–state activism as easier than 'serious development work'. Not entirely aware of what was to follow, the group registered itself as an NGO, and set up a makeshift office in Bagli town, using the personal savings of its members. The NGO was called Samaj Pragati Sahyog (in Hindi, 'Support for Social Progress'), henceforth referred to as SPS.

Acquaintance with Neelpura Village: Setting Up Home Base

Local curiosity about the newly formed SPS only increased when group members attempted to acquaint themselves with Bagli and the *ghaat-neeche* (valley) villages. Group members recounted how local officials and politicians based in Bagli, a small market town, were distinctly unfriendly. According to the group, they were most perplexed because SPS, unlike other NGOs in the district, was not there to implement any particular development project. The lack of a clearly spelt–out role also aroused incomprehension on the part of villagers during SPS's initial forays, on motorcycles, into the *ghaat-neeche* village belt. Soon enough, group members decided to concentrate their attention on one small village, conveniently located close to the main

road, and comprising almost entirely the Bhilala and Korku tribes, a village called Neelpura. This decision may have been motivated by convenience at the time, but quickly became vital to the identity of SPS in the region, and, initially, to its very survival. The socio-economic characteristics of Neelpura closely matched SPS's idea of a 'base village'. It is almost uniformly poor, with most tribals owning lands between 1 and 3 acres in size and dry. A handful of farmers own more than 6 acres and only three out of the hundred-odd households in the village are presently landless. This relatively egalitarian pattern of land ownership follows from government distribution of similar land plots to the new migrants, nearly a century ago. Neelpura is also relatively homogenous socially, since caste-based social polarization is conspicuously missing in this predominantly tribal village.

SPS's quest for local contacts within Neelpura to facilitate initial dialogues soon revealed the nature of power relationships in this seemingly unstratified village. Mahbub Khan, a Muslim landowner with more than 30 acres of land, was economically dominant, his social clout evident in his near exclusive engagement of hired labour and cultivation of a second irrigated crop. Politically, however, Mahbub remained reclusive, and a Bhilala family that had long performed functions of tax collection and dispute resolution assumed the title of *Patel* or village headman. The Patels were respected within the village, and the family's patriarch traditionally acted as the sarpanch of the village panchayat, which in turn was practically defunct (panchayats are three-tier locally elected bodies at the district, block and village levels.). Shortly before the 73rd constitutional amendment (granting constitutional recognition to panchayats), Neelpura was unfortunately paired with its large non-tribal neighbour Bhimpura. Lakhan Singh, a landless though politically connected individual from Neelpura, became sarpanch. Singh was friendly with other sarpanches in *ghaat-neeche* and with politicians at the Bagli *tehsil* office.

Of all three 'power-holders' Singh was most hospitable to SPS group members, perceiving them to be potential allies in the village's development prospects. This was logical given how SPS members repeatedly asked villagers to tell them of their problems. In doing so, they created expectations of solutions, and soon enough the NGO slid into its intended role of 'developer'. It earned greater familiarity in Neelpura, whose residents began referring to it as *sanstha* (Hindi for 'organization'). As the scarcity of water was the key problem, SPS offered to dig wells on people's private lands, and build water-conservation structures like earthen bunds and field ponds. SPS soon received funds from the Government of India under different central government schemes for the purpose. Although initially sceptical of SPS's offers of 'free wells' (due to bitter memories of a loan scheme in the 1970s that had led to government 'harassment'

for repayment), most people in the village soon agreed to have their old wells deepened or new wells dug.

These development activities by SPS constituted an important moment in its relationship with the people of Neelpura. Working on the individual lands of people in this small village allowed SPS to come into close contact with their families. It was not long before group members were engaged in personal acts of help to villagers. By 1995, SPS had come a long way. It had a base village from where to begin its task of building a 'people's organization', and it was acquiring a clear role for itself in relation to development work in the area. As evident in its well-digging initiative, SPS also had no qualms about extending a highly 'individualized' approach to development through beneficiary creation. And, as the following events will illustrate, it did not view this approach as necessarily antithetical to the formation of collective solidarities, as has been suggested by some authors (Kamat, 2002).

A Troubled Period: Confrontation, Resistance and Development

During its implementation of the well-digging and water-conservation projects in Neelpura, SPS stumbled upon two types of exploitative practice in the region. These revealed the nexus of domination by anti-tribal forces in the *ghaat-neeche* area. It detected that the overall wage structure, especially for public works, in this tribal belt was not in keeping with the equal minimum wage laws of the country enacted in 1948. Both large farmers and panchayat sarpanches (acting through contractors), who engaged labourers for the execution of construction works, perpetuated this injustice. SPS also discovered that land records of poor tribals throughout the *ghaat-neeche* had not been updated in accordance with the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code of 1950, and essential information, such as correct rates for land transactions, was being kept out of their hands by the local revenue bureaucracy. This included both the village *patwari* as well as the subdistrict magistrate of the revenue division, who stood to gain monetarily from such malpractices. Emboldened by the absence of challenge, these junior state officials had also acquired near autocratic status locally.

Despite its infancy in the area and the nature of the backlash any protest would invite, SPS chose to confront the perpetrators of such exploitation. First of all, it insisted on paying equal minimum wages to all labourers hired on its development projects, an unprecedented act that upset old wage relations in the area. At one stroke, SPS had made enemies of large farmers, sarpanches and contractors in *ghaat-neeche*. Although some sarpanches like

Lakhan Singh in Neelpura were tribal, this was predominantly an anti-tribal coalition. A minor though not insignificant detail is the alienation that SPS suffered in its own little base, as it had angered its principal ally, Singh, and also Khan, the richest landowner. Even as these developments brought SPS into public scrutiny beyond *ghaat-neeche*, it went further and contacted the District Collector with a proposal to organize a 'land records camp' in order to rectify the appalling records situation. The most senior official of the district lent her support to SPS, and in January 2005 such a camp was organized in Neelpura village. It was a huge success, with more than 13,000 tribals travelling far to attend, and the district collectorate backed it with two additional camps.

The turn of events described here constituted a vital moment in the evolution of this NGO. It marked the beginning of antagonistic relationships with junior officials (like the subdivisional magistrate), whose vested interests suffered following SPS's intervention, but more favourable relationships with senior district- and state-level officials, who had no such interests at stake. Moreover, SPS communicated easily with elite and influential members of the Indian Administrative Service, aided by the social mobility that an 'English' education and privileged upbringing can bring in India. While these constituted important explanations for events, the most important was SPS's successful emphasis on the idea of the state as the guarantor of rights, and therefore of the need to uphold legislation that no civil servant could possibly disregard in public.

This episode reiterated SPS's engagement with immanent development processes and its willingness to challenge the exclusionary forms of political rule that commonly characterize state functioning. But, interestingly, it had done so without deviating from the legitimate framework of state laws and exposed the intricate politics of exploitation that impeded the development of the *ghaat-neeche* region (both within the *ghaat-neeche* and the *ghaat-upar* regions through the subordination of the tribal population). This conveyed how regular development work mandated by the state rested on critical political issues like the disregard of law (that codifies important rights) and abuse of authority. And yet, following the contradictory nature of the state, there are simultaneously existing laws like the Charitable Trusts Act of 1950 which apply to voluntary organizations, and state that

> The achievement of a political purpose, in the sense of arousing in the people the desire, and instilling into them an imperative need to demand changes in the structures of the administration and the mechanism by which they are governed ... is not a charitable purpose as being one 'for the advancement of any other object of general public utility within section 9(4) of the Act'. (cited in Kamat, 2002: 56)

This clearly illustrates the use of law by the state to act as an instrument of depoliticization (of 'big P' politics), and, but for the fact that SPS had discovered malpractices in relation to *existing* law, it too may have been in trouble with its funding agencies, notably CAPART (Council for Promotion of Rural Arts and Technology). Equally important was its location in *ghaat-neeche*, the site of subordinate politics within the district, as opposed to *ghaat-upar*, where SPS may have found it a lot harder to campaign for change. Greater political stakes embedded in the long history of non-tribal and upper-caste domination would have meant lesser space for tolerance of opposition, a point conceded by both SPS and district government officials whom I met.

However, even in *ghaat-neeche* SPS experienced considerable resistance. A powerful sarpanch from a village neighbouring to Neelpura took umbrage at the fact that SPS had initiated the deepening of the main tank there, on a show of written support by other members of the panchayat and ordinary residents, but without his 'permission'. He galvanized thirty other discontented sarpanches and, with the help of the local Congress MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly), took a delegation to the Chief Minister (of the ruling Congress party at the time) to complain that the NGO was 'corrupt ... bypassed panchayats and misappropriated their money' and should be 'removed'. This reaction was interesting and a testimony to pro-panchayat decentralization initiatives under way in Madhya Pradesh, which had greatly bolstered the confidence of sarpanches. These allegations lacked credibility and SPS reacted by pursuing a vigorous policy of image building as a transparent organization that worked in the popular interest. The local press further dramatized these unprecedented developments. The situation was ultimately resolved through the appointment of an 'inquiry committee' headed by the district-level panchayat (a clever ploy by the state bureaucracy to assuage angry sarpanches). The committee, however, acquitted SPS of the charges and publicly commended it for its 'good work'.

SPS gained tremendously from public approval by the highest elected authority in the district. Its local opponents realized that 'the luxury of direct confrontation' against SPS was one that they could no longer afford (Scott, 1990), although private confrontations between individual sarpanches and members of SPS ensued on a number of occasions. From being an 'outsider' to the region, SPS was clearly an ascendant power due to its successful strategy of development, legality and positive engagement with the state, particularly through dialogue with panchayat raj institutions. At a time when the ruling Congress leadership in Madhya Pradesh was emphatic on decentralization to panchayats, SPS seemed to have stumbled upon the right language for creating necessary local institutional space.

Formal Agent of the State: Doing Development Daily

Recognition from the state government came soon, and in the summer of 1995 SPS was invited by the Dewas district administration to become a Project Implementing Agency (PIA) for watershed development projects (under the central Ministry of Rural Development's programme) in the *ghaat-neeche* villages. SPS's selection as a PIA for a state-funded and managed development programme was particularly significant for two reasons. First, it showed that the NGO's resistance to certain types of state practices did not preclude its appointment as a formal agent of a premier state development programme. It showed that there were no definite boundaries between NGOs that implement development projects using government money and those that resist state practices. Second, it brought about the extension of the state's watershed development intervention to the impoverished and politically subordinate *ghaat-neeche* area in the very first year of the programme, even as the district administration experienced pressures for allocating watershed projects to electorally important villages in the *ghaat-upar* area.

The selection of *ghaat-neeche* villages, and of SPS as PIA, highlights the presence of a distinct political process that translated popular mobilization by an NGO into greater involvement with the state's development agenda. In this respect, moreover, SPS's confrontationist trajectory exposed the limitations of the state's depoliticization discourse by revealing the intricate connections between development and politics with a small p (of vested-interest-seeking). But, more importantly, its pro-active role as an agency of politics with a capital P, whereby it overturned unfair wage relations and updated land records, actually paved the way for a more substantial role in state-led development. Depoliticization clearly was not a 'successful' state project with predictable consequences, although the lack of success proved to be in the state's own interest. The marked improvement in condition of a large number of people in the *ghaat-neeche* as a result of SPS-led initiatives could only have restored their faith in a state, otherwise known to them mainly through its horrific acts of exploitation and abuse of authority.

As the PIA of Neelpura watershed project, SPS was in a vastly different position from other PIAs, as the village and its intrapersonal dynamics were extremely familiar to it. It did not need to 'facilitate' the creation of a watershed committee through a 'consensual' process in a public gathering, as other PIAs were advised to do by the national watershed guidelines of 1994. On the other hand, it chose to have a clear say in committee formation on the grounds that it was responsible for creating an 'effective cadre of leaders' that would be able to take 'contentious decisions'. The committee was formed and two prominent members of the Patel family, by now very friendly with SPS, became its chairman and secretary. Both Lakhan Singh

and Mahbub Khan stayed away from these new developments. The style of committee formation set the tone for a flexible and non-procedural interpretation of project management, and SPS did not bother with regular committee meetings, recording minutes and so on, claiming that decision-making worked best in the 'natural' rhythm of village life. In its daily administration of the watershed project, SPS tried to create a political culture of 'genuine devolution' and 'demystification' of technical project management by training local committee members in a range of skills.

This discourse, however, had an unflattering underbelly. By the time the project was under way, there was a small constituency (predictably including Khan and Singh) within Neelpura that thought SPS had deliberately adopted a divisive policy in the village in order to build a support base for itself. The widespread perception was that SPS was there to stay. The physical embodiment of this came in 1998, when SPS received a large grant from CAPART to establish a 'field station' about 1 kilometre away from Neelpura. SPS's growing physical presence no doubt had an increasing impact on the formation of local consciousness and the mobilization of local identities. There were growing allegiances for and against the NGO: so while members of the watershed committee in Neelpura formed its core support, others outside the village resented it bitterly. A good example was the sarpanch of the Bhimpura–Neelpura panchayat, a rich non-tribal landlord from Bhimpura, who was among those accusing SPS of trying to influence the outcome of the 2000 panchayat election by propping up favoured candidates (mostly using unsubstantiated claims). SPS adopted a relatively non-confrontationist stand here, quite distinct from its reactions in the earlier phase. Its strategy gradually gave way to a more sanguine discourse of 'partnership' with the panchayats, so that individual opponents like the new Bhimpura sarpanch could appear to stand isolated in their bickering. In a manner strangely similar to the influential institutions of international development cooperation, SPS's new and positive message of partnership reeked of a rosy confidence that only secure power holders can afford.

Common Property Resource Agreement: Using Law to Effect Local Rights within a Project Framework

One case of explicit intervention by SPS in its capacity as PIA of Neelpura watershed project merits special mention, for it reveals a remarkable act of political entrepreneurship to facilitate the material and symbolic overturning of local power relations within the legitimate project framework. This involved rectifying a highly inequitable arrangement of access to the only common water source in the village. SPS was well aware that the

use of this *naala* (stream) had been improperly appropriated by a small group of upstream farmers, Mahbub Khan in particular, who drew waters continuously through *naardas* (underground channels) and, daringly, even from the surface itself through the use of through electric pump sets and diesel engines. With several farmers siphoning off waters upstream, those downstream had practically no access to running water or the opportunity to recharge their wells. Village livestock were the worst affected, since the *naala* ran dry after the rainy season.

Watershed project works included treatment of the *naala*'s catchment, but SPS realized that under the existing arrangement a rich upstream minority would corner the likely benefits. It resolved not to go ahead with project activities until the arrangement had been overturned. It is clear that SPS was attempting to intervene in a highly contentious area, which other project agencies may have disregarded, but one which had actually been specified within its role as a PIA. The guiding Ministry of Rural Development's policy framework emphasizes common property resources. So, interpreting the powers accorded to it within this policy to the fullest, SPS went ahead and mobilized popular opinion in the village to formulate a collective agreement to regulate the use of *naala* waters. In consequence, 139 farmers from Neelpura and adjacent villages signed a written resolution, which in translation from Hindi reads as follows:

> It is decided by consent [*sarvasammati*] that nobody will ever draw water from the naala using a *naarda*. Those farmers who have wells will also not draw water from the *naala* using pumps. Those farmers who do not have wells have agreed to draw water from the *naala* on a limited basis according to rules. After the water in the *naala* stops flowing, nobody will draw water from it, irrespective of whether they have wells or not. This water will be kept for cattle only. *All villagers* agree to this resolution [stress added].

Mahbub Khan protested vehemently, but under the weight of collective opinion and the NGO's vigilant stand had to block the underground channels with cement, along with the other farmers. Those who had water in their wells or lands on which wells could be dug had to remove pumps from the *naala*. SPS even constructed additional wells wherever necessary, free of any contributions from the farmers. The *naala* agreement was a matter of tremendous pride for SPS, and it mediated every detail of it. In the initial days after the agreement, enthused villagers set up a system of rotation to monitor the *naala* against possible violators at night. SPS claims that the agreement benefited everyone, although those with lands upstream were at a greater advantage than the rest.

Mahbub Khan went to court over the agreement, claiming 'easementary rights' over the *naala*, under the Indian Easementary Act of 1882. The Act's principal clause allows a single user or group of users exclusive or predominant

use over a village resource, on the basis of 'long use or prescription', on the grounds that this use has been peaceable, open and uninterrupted for at least thirty years, as an easement and over a resource that is not owned by anyone in particular. SPS fought back, claiming that none of these grounds was valid. It offered convincing reasons – the *naala* was actually owned by the government, which in 1993 had issued an order prohibiting villagers to refrain from its use, and Mahbub himself had claimed right of use for the last seventeen years only. Mahbub was reprimanded for going to court with 'unclean hands' and his appeal for 'easementary right' was struck down. This had the effect of upholding the *naala* agreement and effectively altered the local field of power. Mahbub Khan was dealt a clear blow, symbolic and material, and SPS once again established itself as a proactive agency of change.

Scaling Up Development and Scaling Up Politics

SPS has energetically scaled up its development work, and, from a couple of villages in Bagli *tehsil* in the mid-1990s, it now implements a range of development projects in forty villages spread over three *tehsils* in Dewas and adjoining Khargone district, with further plans for expansion. Its staff strength exceeds one hundred and it has constructed new and impressive offices in Bagli. The main focus of its projects continues to be related to watershed development and drought-proofing, and the funding agencies include the state government, CAPART (an old supporter of SPS) and, more recently, the American India Foundation. It has also developed an 'Agricultural Programme' spread over forty-five villages, and an initiative for micro-finance through women's self-help groups is rapidly growing.

In all these projects, SPS is emphatic on transparency and has initiated regular public meetings or *jan-sunvaayis* (literally translated from Hindi as 'hearing of the people'). A typical or *jan-sunvaayi* involves a large public gathering in the village, attended by grassroots workers of SPS and frequently its founding members. They apprise the public of the project's progress and financial status and answer questions from the audience. SPS hopes that this exercise will promote a culture of accountability among local bodies in the region. This method of accountability is in tune with the idea of 'social audit' in the panchayat *gram sabha* promoted by the state.

In addition, SPS has adopted a much more proactive strategy to contribute to the 'real' empowerment of panchayat institutions. It seeks to create a 'cadre of local leaders from amongst those who are committed to village development, but who are also from the poorer sections (tribals and women), to carry forward the panchayat process with systematic training'. These activities go beyond the scope of 'regular' development project

work and are visionary in a political sense. SPS views itself as an agent of decentralized development and intends to network with other grassroots organizations and orient them to conduct training exercises for panchayats in their regions. Its work in this area has found abundant favour with the state government.

And yet SPS has not (so far) shied away from issues that are politically contentious. It has continued to oppose the politics of state oppression of tribals, by allying itself with forces that have arisen to resist it. Bagli *tehsil*, with its forested areas, has been the site of exploitation of the tribal population by the Forest Department and, more recently, their collective mobilization against it through organizations called the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan and Adivasi Shakti Sangathan. The nadir of such exploitation came in March 2001, when the district administration authorized police firings upon tribals in a number of villages in Bagli, ostensibly to evict them from forest land which they had illegally occupied. The act was condemned widely in the popular press. According to the 'Friends of the River Narmada', a volunteer-based solidarity network, this attack was unjustified and fuelled by state animosity against the growing strength and local political influence of the tribal *sangathans*. SPS played an active part in investigating the firings, compiling a detailed report of the atrocities and supporting many tribal families that had been affected.

Unlike the earlier period in its history, when confrontation with established stakeholders was risky and support from certain quarters of the state administration untested, SPS was able to take a firm stand on critical issues without worrying about its own position. Over the decade, it had built up a popular following in the *ghaat-neeche* villages, exposed the vested interests of local opponents and marginalized them, built firm connections with the district- and state-level administrations, and embedded itself firmly in state-funded development activity. Thus, even as it championed politically thorny issues like tribal exploitation, it denounced radical politics that were delinked from positive engagement with the state and its development agenda. Its view of 'big P' politics was at no time detached from the state. Given that a large number of panchayats in the *ghaat-neeche* area are vying to collaborate with SPS for development work, it would appear that the NGO has successfully created a discourse that 'good economics can make excellent politics'.

Hegemony or Counter-hegemony

The narrative so far has described how counter-hegemonic initiatives against various forms of domination – which reflect the existing underlying characteristics of development – have underlined SPS's strategy time and again

since its arrival in the *ghaat-neeche* part of Bagli *tehsil* more than a decade ago. Through its struggle against exploitative wage practices, outdated land registrations and unfair appropriation of essential common property, SPS concretely overturned the fortunes of a dominant minority, and shattered even the 'public transcript' of their hegemony (Scott, 1990). In each case, the concerned actors suffered not just material loss but also public shaming and a sharp curtailment in their previous authority.

Simultaneously, however, SPS has rapidly gained in terms of local standing and prestige, with a visible rise in material capacity. It is acutely aware of its new position and projects itself as the 'only agency, either governmental or non-governmental, that is talking about development'. This seeming appropriation of a legitimate mandate is not surprising; it closely follows from the NGO's iteration of positive ideas of the state, as a guarantor of rights (during its early confrontations) and, subsequently, as a doer of development. While SPS may have resisted state structures or actors or processes, it never discredited the idea of the state as such, and has painstakingly moulded both its organizational practice and its discourse to complement this state idea. This has made it all the more difficult for local stakeholders to oppose SPS, which stands tall in its demonstrated conviction in all the 'good things' that the state might embody, and drastically changed the politics of the 1990s. Even the Congress MLA, which once facilitated a sarpanch-led petition to the Chief Minister for the ousting of the NGO, is seeking its support to bolster its constituency.

But what are the implications of the sort of power that this NGO is beginning to wield? I would argue that the latest phase in SPS's life history has witnessed the emergence of a new hegemonic position in *ghaat-neeche*, backed by a winning discourse, a popular base, connections with influential state officials, and a clearly charted yet expanding agenda with active fund flows. While SPS has up to now used its position to speak out in favour of subordinate interests, it will be interesting to observe the kinds of issues it takes up in the future without compromising its own critical leverage. It would be equally important to understand the kinds of subject positions that SPS is fostering as a hegemonic power in the area, among its supporters, employees as well as patrons.

Conclusion: The Nature and Limits of NGO Power

In my attempt to understand SPS's trajectory in the Narmada Valley, the profound links it has carved and sustained between political entrepreneurship and development agency have been made clear throughout. It was aware of these links to begin with, as evident in its guiding objective to

direct the state's development resources to marginalized areas, and it has persevered so as not to separate them in its continuing practice, striving to create a new type of politics in its development work with the state. Its own transformation from new, even subordinate, actor to dominant player in *ghaat-neeche* development and politics is an inescapable part of the story. So how are we to understand and appraise this NGO's praxis?

Recent discussions of grassroots activity are increasingly recognizing the blurred boundaries between resistance and acquiescence, struggle and compromise, activism and development, all binaries that have typically distinguished radical social movements from NGOs. In her discussion of examples of 'powerful' NGOs in the developing world, Michael (2004) identifies two key commonalities: their interest in linking activities with 'mainstream' economic systems and their engagement with political activity. The founder of one Indian NGO, SEWA, sums up the story I have narrated in this chapter in her succinct remark that NGOs ought to pursue 'the twin strategies of struggle and development' (Michael, 2004: 40). Yet it is admittedly not easy for NGOs to do this. Kamat remarks on the difficulty of maintaining a balance between 'a struggle based organization supported largely through popular participation and nominally paid tribal cadre on the one hand, and a development organization flush with funds managed by a professional paid staff on the other' (2002: 77). In SPS's case, much of this transformation has been remarkably nuanced, mostly because it started out as an organization with a philosophy of positive engagement with the state, invoking confrontation and cooperation in alternate measure. At the same time, one wonders if the more radical elements of its strategy would not be blotted out by the constraints of a new-found hegemony with its own dynamics of subordination. My account offers some insight into perceptions of this NGO's strategies to wield local power and popularity, especially among those piqued by it.

And yet the nature of SPS's praxis perhaps offers a way forward to numerous NGOs seeking to forge transformative change without rendering themselves unsustainable. Indeed, SPS's experience reveals how engaging with both 'small d' and 'big D' development is integral to the articulation of transformative or 'big P' politics. Here, it is precisely the synergies between state and civil society, mainstream and alternative development, and dominance and resistance that matter, not their separation as is mistakenly believed. The chapter also reiterates the fallacy of depoliticization – and affirms the fundamentally political nature of development – since it is quite clear how 'small p' politics pervades development (evident through the actions of appropriation by local officials in Bagli), but also that 'big P' politics can accompany development. While senior officials were more likely to preserve a technocratic façade to development, they were also formally

bound to the idea of the state as a guarantor of rights. It was precisely this disjuncture that allowed SPS to obtain its support to orchestrate transformative development politics.

While SPS's experience cannot possibly be a blueprint for nongovernmental action, it offers some general lessons about the power of NGOs. Many of these reiterate key points made by Michael (2004) in her theorization of NGO power: the need for NGOs to 'capture' or 'protect' space, be based within 'communities', set their own 'agendas', prevent conflict, and acquire synergetic relationships with the state. Here, I present four aspects to delineate the power available to NGOs as observed in this case study.

First, NGOs have the power to effect concrete changes in local power relations, as SPS did by overturning wage relations, transforming common property access and challenging an exploitative anti-tribal coalition. This may also mean that their power can sometimes be exclusionary. Second, their power is often text-oriented. SPS relied on a correct reading of the laws and official guidelines of the Indian state to fuel its radical initiatives. NGOs do not have constitutional power and face a greater need to justify their actions within existing notions of legality. Undoubtedly, many NGOs campaign to go beyond this, for a drastic change in state laws and policies. Third, the power is performance-oriented and increasingly enacted in settings like the *jan-sunvaayi*. SPS, especially in its early days, repeatedly chose to create public events out of confrontations and chased a 'good reputation' in the local press. Quite in contrast, a district collector can simply order the closure of a road; she need not resort to a public debate on the matter. There is little consensus or legal validation of what power NGOs should have. Finally, as key episodes in this chapter – for example, the land records camp, the opportunity to work on the watershed project, and panchayat-related activities – illustrate, NGO power greatly depends on its ability to elicit government support. It is necessary to take this argument one step further. SPS's actions reveal a continuous interface not only with government officials but with key actors within 'political society', including political representatives, activists and local courts. NGOs cannot afford to limit their interactions to government officials alone; the impetus for transformation comes from their messy entanglements and struggles with political actors that impact upon the very fabric of development and society. Indeed, it is the synthesis of their roles as political entrepreneurs and development agents that holds the key to their power.

Note

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14

Is This Really the End of the Road for Gender Mainstreaming? Getting to Grips with Gender and Institutional Change

Nicholas Piálek

The Death of Gender Mainstreaming?

According to a growing consensus among development academics and practitioners, we are witnessing the death of gender mainstreaming in development (Moser, 2005; Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Oxfam GB, 2005). Not ten years after the crystallization of gender mainstreaming at the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (PfA), it is being spurned not only by those it was supposed to change but by many who sweated and toiled to breathe life into the process. In failing to create substantial change in the practice of organizations and institutions both locally and globally, gender mainstreaming has at best been labelled as ineffective and at worst as another barrier to promoting social justice on gender, the very antithesis of its original conception.

Feminists are taking stock and are trying to move on. Academics and practitioners alike have started to wander away from the ambitions of gender mainstreaming as well as the explicit focus on 'Gender and Development' (GAD) with its prioritizing of the category of 'gender' over and above the category of 'women' in development. They suggest that the process has (inadvertently or not) resulted in the depoliticization of the feminist project (Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Porter and Sweetman, 2005; Standing, 2004; Subrahmanian, 2004). Gender mainstreaming has reduced feminist action in development to a technocratic approach devoid of any political content, making it something 'diluted, denatured, depoliticised, included everywhere as an afterthought' (Cornwall et al., 2004: 1). It has led to the overuse of 'gender', resulting in "the widespread tendency in academic, policy and activist contexts to ignore women and their needs while naming, and purportedly mainstreaming, gender" (Eveline and Bacchi, 2005: 496).

Gender mainstreaming has become a process that draws attention away from tackling women's subordination rather than highlighting it. Such analyses have led to the suggestion that we should move beyond gender mainstreaming – feminists involved in development should not be diverted by the myth of institutional transformation but instead should focus on supporting grassroots feminists and go back to empowerment projects focused on 'women' (Porter and Sweetman, 2005: 5).

Such perspectives suggest that gender mainstreaming has gone the same way as so many other apparently 'alternative' approaches that have become co-opted within the mainstream of international development work. However, this chapter suggests that a more sanguine approach is required, and that this critique itself should be subject to closer appraisal. Gender mainstreaming (and those implementing and analysing it) should not lose sight of the fact that such a process is fundamentally political. Gender mainstreaming is a form of feminist politics and policy (Walby, 2005: 463) that challenges dominant modes of thinking and practice in organizations working in development. As a consequence, the question that becomes most pertinent to ask is not, 'is this the end of gender mainstreaming?', but instead, 'how are gender policies and strategies consistently silenced across a range of organizational and institutional contexts?' It was with this question in mind that I conducted a three-year research project into gender mainstreaming in development organizations, and in particular Oxfam GB.

Oxfam GB (hereafter referred to as Oxfam) formally adopted a gender policy on 16 May 1993. Prior to this formal recognition of GAD as a core aspect of development interventions, Oxfam had created a Gender and Development Unit (GADU) in 1984 to raise awareness of gender issues among staff and in the organization's activities. In one form or another, driven by feminists and gender advocates in the organization, Oxfam has over two decades of commitment to GAD approaches, with gender mainstreaming being a central concern within the organization for over a decade. As a consequence, levels of understanding and technical capacity to implement GAD approaches in development projects and programmes is good throughout the organization (Dawson, 2005: 82). However, by Oxfam's own admission, gender mainstreaming has failed to achieve as much as it should have in promoting gender within the organization's work.

Between September 2001 and May 2002 Oxfam undertook an internal review of progress in gender mainstreaming, which produced eight evaluations: institutional arrangements assessment, women's human rights evaluation, gender evaluation of the Cut the Cost Campaign, mainstreaming gender in advocacy work on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), gender and participation in Senegal, gender in humanitarian response, annual

impact report analysis, and Links evaluation (Oxfam GB, 2002). Within these reviews, Oxfam recognizes that gender is still an irregularly applied perspective in all areas of the organization. For example, the overall assessment of the reviews draws attention to a range of problems: 'gender policy is not fully enforced', the 'SCO framework does not consistently integrate a strong and explicit commitment to gender equality' and 'Oxfam does not employ sufficient staff with the necessary gender expertise to deliver high quality programmes'.

Translating Oxfam's progressive gender policy into solid practice has proven difficult and continues to be the subject of much internal research and debate (e.g. Oxfam GB, 1996, 2002, 2006; Smith, 1995; Smyth, 2005). The difficulties seem all the more perplexing given that resistance to gender mainstreaming is not significantly present within the organization. Most staff recognize the importance of gender transformative goals, not just for their instrumental value in creating broader and more sustainable solutions to poverty, but for the intrinsic value in them. This makes Oxfam a particularly interesting case study for understanding the significant challenges that face gender mainstreaming within NGOs.

Understanding Gender Mainstreaming in Oxfam GB

Gender mainstreaming faces what many bureaucrats call the problem of policy evaporation. For example, most development organizations have policies on gender as well as detailed strategies on how to include gender approaches in their work (Moser and Moser, 2005). Yet, when it comes to assessing an organization's practice, even the best recognize that gender is usually poorly incorporated into projects and programmes, if at all (Khan, 2003: 5; Kusakabe, 2005: 1). This transition from gender-rich policy to gender-poor practice is frequently cited as an example of policy evaporation, which in turn has become the focus of much academic and in-house institutional research (e.g. Derbyshire, 2002; International Labour Organization, 2002; Khan, 2003; Mukhopadhyay, 2004). This literature reveals two approaches to analysing gender mainstreaming. The first is the 'technical approach'. This approach highlights direct problems in transferring policy into practice. In seeking answers and solutions, it asks questions along the lines of 'what knowledge is lacking among staff?' or 'how much/little money is allocated to gender work?' The second is the 'political approach'. This approach focuses on more fundamental issues associated with policy evaporation. It asks questions such as, 'in what ways are staff perceived to lack knowledge and why?' and 'why is gender work seen as something separate to budget for?' The technical approach is important as it provides

specific and direct advice for institutions trying to create change and is by far the most popular form of gender mainstreaming analysis. However, its level of analysis can be simplistic, whereas the political approach draws our attention to the more deep-seated problems that underlie the silencing of gender mainstreaming across institutional contexts.

In developing this political approach for analysing how GAD approaches evaporate at the policy–practice interface, and given the apparently positive environment that Oxfam offered for gender mainstreaming, I was keen to start my research at a point where no conflict over implementing GAD approaches was visible but where policy evaporation still occurred. Drawing on Lukes's (2005: 28–9) notion of potential conflict, I labelled these points as sites of 'non-conflict' (also see Piálek, 2007). This involved developing a multi-sited ethnography, which was carried out in three phases. The first phase was conducted from June to September in 2003 when I was based in Oxfam's South American (SAM) Regional Office in Lima, Peru, working with the Regional Gender Advisor. This experience was invaluable for understanding how gender was constructed, understood, analysed and incorporated into the work of staff in the organization. The second phase was conducted from May to December in 2005 when I was based in the Oxfam head office in Oxford, UK, supporting the Lead Gender Advisor (in the Policy Team). This work enabled me to survey the array of approaches Oxfam is using – and hopes to use – to overcome the problem of gender policy evaporation in the organization. The third phase of the research was conducted from January to November 2006; it was based on my involvement in a number of key meetings, planning sessions and workshops on gender issues. Such meetings brought staff together from across the regions and allowed me to assess the similarity of experience of gender mainstreaming with the South American region.

What's Happened to Gender Mainstreaming at Oxfam?

It seems from this research that the wholesale incorporation of GAD into the organization has resulted in a situation whereby creating real change around gender has become increasingly difficult. GAD approaches have become both mainstreamed and marginalized in Oxfam: 'mainstreamed' in the sense that they have directed a process of institutional change and have, in many ways, radically altered the organizational make-up in line with GAD beliefs about development; 'marginalized' in the sense that they are almost entirely excluded from the majority of Oxfam's actual programme and project work. Mainstreaming, subverted through sites of 'non-conflict' embedded within organizational structure and discourse, has

created an organizational reality whereby gender is both appreciated as a crucial aspect of development work and, at the same time, not seen as a personal responsibility among individual staff.

For instance, 'Gender Equity' in Oxfam is one of the nine strategic goals of the organization – the GAD approach can therefore be seen to have been directly incorporated into the most formal institutional structure in Oxfam – the Strategic Change Objective (SCO) framework. Incorporating GAD into this framework serves to place gender at the core of institutional policymaking and programming. Nevertheless, the benefits of this to creating positive transformation in practice have been questionable. In creating SCO 5.1, 'gender equity', gender issues are set up as a distinct aspect of Oxfam's development work. They become pigeonholed into some projects and programmes while at the same time being ignored or forgotten about within others. SCO 5.1 develops an appreciation of GAD among staff, but its very existence also propagates the idea that gender equity is something to be planned for and achieved within specific gender projects.

To overcome this problem, part of SCO 5.1's remit is to 'mainstream gender within other SCOs'. However, the interference of SCO 5.1 in other SCOs calls into question the validity of the SCO framework. The framework is designed to categorize and separate development work to make the organization more effective at tackling poverty and the use of resources more efficient. The framework does not operate to define and then merge development issues. As a consequence, rather than the validity of the SCO framework being called into question, and the ensuing confusion that this would cause, the logic of the system prevails – 'gender equity' is an issue that must be dealt with by SCO 5.1 programmes and projects and not other SCOs. In this form, then, gender mainstreaming becomes an aberration of the system to be skirted over. The impact of this upon staff is clear. Not only does this ambiguity provide a legitimate reason not to develop a GAD approach within SCO 1–4 projects and programmes, but it actually creates an environment that encourages gender issues to be ignored by staff in order to maintain consistency in organizational practice. This situation makes it increasingly difficult for those concerned with promoting gender equity in the organization to encourage staff to deliver on the gender policy – responsibility among staff cannot be promoted or developed if the underlying structure in which GAD is embedded acts to remove anything to be formally responsible for.

Oxfam did not initiate the process of mainstreaming with the intention of marginalizing gender in the organization. Yet this is the situation in which it now finds itself. This raises a number of wider questions and issues. Is the marginalization of a GAD approach in organizations an inherent danger in the mainstreaming process? Is the removal of individual responsibility