

Beyond Good Intentions

Unintentional Underdevelopment

Systemic Impact of the NGO Model in Nicaragua

2009 Fellowship Field Report

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Solidarity:
*Nothing Will Ever Change in the Third World
if Nothing Changes Here*

1981 Conference Theme
Catholic Committee against Hunger and for
Development (CCFD)

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Abstract

Can domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) affect structural change to benefit the poor they claim to represent through their projects, organizing or advocacy efforts in the current funding structure? Using interviews conducted with stakeholders in a wide variety of Nicaraguan NGOs and domestic advocacy networks, this field report attempts to answer these questions in the Nicaraguan context as a generalizable case study. Due to the perverse effects of donor funding, the studied NGOs seem unable to pursue meaningful projects aimed at social change, pushed instead towards social service and competition with one another and the neoliberal state. Similarly, despite significant efforts, they are incapable of organizing autonomous grassroots organizations or the downward accountability links required for effective and representative advocacy. NGOs in Nicaragua may be in many ways actually *unintentionally underdeveloping* Nicaragua by undermining the capacities of the state to provide essential social services associated with “development” and reducing the viability of organic, downwardly accountable grassroots organizations in the new NGO funding culture. Combined, this poses a major threat to the creation of an organic civil society that can advocate for and *define* a wholly Nicaraguan vision of “development” – one free of donor ideology and interests passed through the current funding structure.

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Abbreviations

AIDH	<i>Asociación Integral para los Derechos Humanos</i> Comprehensive Association for Human Rights
BGI	Beyond Good Intentions
CENIDH	<i>Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos</i> Nicaraguan Human Rights Center
CIPRES	<i>Centro para la Promoción, la Integración, y el Desarrollo Rural y Social</i> Center for Rural and Social Promotion, Integration, and Development
CPDH	<i>Centro Permanente de Derechos Humanos</i> Permanent Human Rights Center
CC	<i>Coordinadora Civil</i> Civil Coordinator
CODENI	<i>La Federación Coordinadora Nicaragüense de Organismos No Gubernamentales que trabaja con la Niñez y la Adolescencia</i> Nicaraguan Coordinating Federation of NGOs that work with Children and Adolescents
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
FEDICAMP	<i>Federación para el Desarrollo Integral Entre Campesinos y Campesinas</i> Federation for the Full Development of Peasant Men and Women of Nicaragua
FSLN	<i>Frente sandinista de liberación nacional</i> Sandinista National Liberation Front
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IFI	International financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRI	International Republican Institute (US)
INPRHU	<i>Instituto para la Promoción Humana</i> Institute for Human Promotion
IPADE	<i>Instituto para el Desarrollo y la Democracia</i> Institute for Development and Democracy
IXCHEN	Centro de Mujeres IXCHEN
KEPA	Service Centre for Development Cooperation
MCN	<i>Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense</i> Nicaraguan Communal Movement
MINSAL	<i>Ministerio de Salud</i> Ministry of Health (Nicaragua)
NED	National Endowment for Democracy (US)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PLC	<i>Partido liberal constitucionalista</i> , Constitutional Liberal Party
RNDDL	<i>Red Nicaragüense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local</i> Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policy
TESIS	<i>Asociación de Trabajadores para la Educación, Salud, e Integración Social</i> Association of Workers for Education, Health, and Social Integration
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

In Nicaragua my goal was to answer two fundamental questions: Do NGO projects affect the structural causes of poverty? If not, can NGOs advocate for structural changes to benefit the poor they intend to represent? Part I introduces the Nicaraguan context in which I attempt to answer these looming questions, which are then addressed in parts II and III, respectively. The systemic and long-term implications are then addressed in part IV while emerging solutions are profiled in part V.

Taking on the “Elephant in the Room”: Systemic Issues in the NGO Model

This report aims to make a compelling case for focusing BGI’s camera lens on the “elephant in the room”: the systemic and inherent weaknesses in the international aid & NGO *model* of development. Too often “aid efficacy” is reduced to comparing how efficiently NGOs can spend each dollar donated. Though they go further, BGI’s previous films still hesitate to ask the critical questions: What are the systemic causes of poverty? Are NGOs actually affecting change at the root or are they only addressing the symptoms? Even worse, are they blurring the fundamental causes and grim reality of poverty from the public – and donor’s - eye through a deluge of “success stories”?

For BGI’s mission to improve international aid, the current approach of limiting the focus to the NGO level of the aid chain unnecessarily and artificially limits the depth and impact of the critique that can be highlighted through the films. Rather than challenging viewers to carefully reconsider the common notion that aid, on the whole, is working and will lead to long-term development, the shallow focus implies that reform needs (and can) only happen at the *bottom* of the aid chain, in the NGOs themselves. It sets the vast political, economic, and social contexts that surround NGOs aside as if they were given and immutable, not the social constructs they actually are. By expanding the scope to include the *system* of aid and its long-term impacts, the critiques raised by the films can begin to drive the demand for a complete reworking of a system whose internal contradictions have limited its ability to fundamentally change the plight of the poor at a global scale against the rising tides of unfavorable political and economic policies.

Perhaps twenty years ago such a viewpoint on aid would be considered radical, but today even popular films are engaging more fundamental questions of development: capitalism, trans-national corporate exploitation, poverty, and the legacy of colonialism.¹ Similarly, the academy is overflowing with scathing critiques of aid, neoliberalism, “free trade,” and NGOs. Efforts to sum up the literature and data on the efficacy of aid can show at best mixed results with more than ample room for improvement at a systemic scale (but also at the NGO level).² Thus the time has never been more appropriate for investigative filmmaking to look at aid as a system and ask the most penetrating questions. To do anything less would be a tragic missed opportunity.

The case study NGOs described in this report could be broken down into areas of work and their methods of service delivery compared and evaluated. Or a film could ask, for example, whether the innovative networks of *promotores* are replicable (or already exist) in other countries and if they can be the “next big thing” in development, like microfinance and social entrepreneurship today. Neither would be useless, but considering these NGOs as isolated case studies entirely misses the bigger point:

Is *this* really development?

¹ Among others, 2009 saw the release - to wide audiences in theaters - of *Capitalism: A Love Story*, *The End of Poverty*, *Crude*, and *Sweet Crude*, all of which tackle such themes with a very critical lens.

² A particularly sweeping review can be found in Riddell, *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?*

Limits to the NGO Model in Nicaragua

In their efforts – rhetorically, and in good will – to *make* systemic change, NGOs in Nicaragua are actually *quelling* dissent, through the same mechanism Smith found in his work in Columbia nearly two decades ago: co-optation and redirection of the middle-class activists into NGO administration and service provision to the masses.³ In Nicaragua, this co-optation has dug deeper and now affects grassroots community organizers who must seek funding to organize in the new NGO-accustomed society.

Even more dangerously, NGOs increasingly replace state services and relieve the government of responsibilities. This eliminates demand and redirects funding for institutional development of state services and may thus pose a serious threat to the nation’s development in the long-term. Combined, these two effects of the “NGO-ization”⁴ of Nicaragua may lead to a form of “cyclic underdevelopment” where the state is perpetually enfeebled and the public unable to independently organize en masse to define the path of their own country’s development.

Objectives

In Nicaragua my goal, as described in the introduction, was to understand the systemic impact of NGOs on Nicaragua’s long-term development. To do this, I aimed to seek out and profile NGOs working towards social *change* over social *service*; that is NGOs attempting to change the *structural* causes of underdevelopment at both the political as well as grassroots levels instead of simply providing services that make poverty and underdevelopment slightly more bearable. For example, rather than simply replacing the responsibilities generally attributed to a developed government in a parallel “vertical” structure, an organization working for social change might advocate and organize for or provide the technical and financial assistance for the improvement of government services in a “horizontal” structure. This distinction is inherently and deliberately hazy, but becomes clearer with an example from the sample of NGOs studied: whereas IXCHEN was directly providing women’s health services to temporarily fill a service gap in the government system, TESIS was working to strengthen the capacity of the government health system to care for women and the CC was actively lobbying for more funding for public health services to fill that gap *permanently*.

Seeking out systemic problems with aid was never part of the initial objectives of the fellowship, which was much narrower: to seek out “innovative methods” used by individual NGOs in Nicaragua that could be featured in short film-based case studies. Rather, the newly widened objective was sparked from academic readings and courses in the United States and was cemented by firsthand observation in the field.

Indeed, the two NGO contacts BGI intended for me to meet, Ashoka and Amigos de las Americas were both well-known international NGOs following very fashionable models: social entrepreneurship and international volunteerism, respectively. However, these organizations had practically no discernible ties to the wider civil society, government, and advocacy and were not even major service providers in comparison to the national NGOs I decided to study. Thus I met with neither as I quickly became interested in developing an understanding of the NGO system as a *whole* in Nicaragua and the part NGOs play in “civil society” and long-term development.

³ Smith, *More Than Altruism*, 1990, p.278

⁴ *Span.* “ONG-ización” This is a common term among NGOs interviewed to describe the 1990 NGO explosion among NGOs in Nicaragua.

Methods

The information gathered during the field study was drawn primarily from interviews with NGOs, local contacts, local press, and NGO publications and websites. Interviews were conducted with leadership, staff, and recipients of a total of 16 domestic NGOs and NGO advocacy networks and one international network in 29 meetings and field visits over the course of nine weeks, from 7/2/09 to 9/2/09.

Sample Selection

Broadly defined, these organizations included four NGO advocacy networks, one community organizing NGO, three human rights NGOs, one democracy-building NGO, one environmental conservation NGO, five infrastructure-focused NGOs, and two health-focused NGOs. However, as will be shown, these categories are highly porous – “mission drift” has led to many NGOs that operate in nearly every category.

The sample NGOs were, broadly speaking, selected in accordance with the objectives described above, but with specific attention given to finding NGOs with a variety of methods of achieving their definition of social change. A comparison of their varying methods and objectives can be seen in Appendix A. Similarly, a sort of “control” group was selected of NGOs that had very little stated interest in systemic, structural change or advocacy – i.e. “social change.” These mainly provided infrastructure support to rural communities and were generally uninterested in political issues. These NGOs provided a critical counterpoint to the more political NGOs, thus better representing the wide range of NGOs operating in Nicaragua; some of which are highly political and some who stay far away from politics.

Several sources of information were used to find the NGOs in the sample since no databases exist that accurately represent the whole of Nicaraguan NGOs. Only three NGOs were easily found via the US solidarity group NicaNet’s website: CENIDH, CIPRES, and Centro Humboldt. A fourth NGO, with US volunteers was also found via the internet: Asofenix. The remaining 13 NGOs were found through recommendations from these first four NGOs, local press coverage, and local contacts (including the family I stayed with).

While this lacks the rigor of a random or otherwise representative sample, it would have been logistically nearly impossible to find, classify, and then methodically select from the whole body of NGOs working in Nicaragua (which likely number in the hundreds). However, on a qualitative level, the NGOs selected actually provide a very good picture of Nicaraguan civil society: the NGOs in the sample work in 25 of the 26 categories (only lacking church-affiliated work) listed by the CC as the major areas of work of its hundreds of member organizations.⁵ My extensive discussions with various members of civil society and my own informal survey of the local media also showed that my sample included most of the largest and (ostensibly) most influential groups – those that got media attention and seemed to be most well-known. This was a natural result of the way the NGOs were found in the first place, but it did not completely cut out small-scale groups – three out of the thirteen service-provision NGOs studied had less than 30 staff members and were generally only focused on one region. The remainder ranged from 30 to 200, typically with a near-national reach.

⁵ Coordinadora Civil para la Emergencia y la Reconstrucción, *Convirtiendo la Tragedia del Mitch en una Oportunidad para el Desarrollo Humano y Sostenible de Nicaragua*, 1999, p.14. The 26 major areas listed are: “preventative and curative physical and psychosocial health, formal and informal education, environment, economy, children, adolescents and youths, community development and promotion, women’s attention and empowerment, sexuality, local governance, housing, rural and urban credit, microenterprises, cooperatives, human rights, research, communication, foreign debt, commerce, cultural promotion, churches, and clergy work.” There were 320 organizations in 1999 and there are now over 600.

Interviews

Interviews were generally first held formally with upper level staff (typically the director) first in main offices and then followed by field visits and informal interviews with field staff and recipients when time and scheduling allowed and it was of interest.⁶ These interviews were generally relatively unstructured, though I tended to prepare and ask similar basic questions to each NGO along with questions tailored to their specific work and to address points of confusion. The minimal structure and very open-ended questions were intended to allow NGO representatives to emphasize points that were most important to their work – something that gave me a better idea of their ideology and priorities.

Audio/visual recording was avoided in an effort to allow NGO representatives to speak more freely, so instead I took notes of main talking points and especially important quotes. In retrospect, this was likely a minor mistake, and one that future research should avoid, at least for Nicaragua – many Nicaraguans were surprised that I did *not* record conversations as it was apparently quite expected and normal.

Terminology

Throughout this report, for simplicity I will refer to *both* the four NGO advocacy organizations/networks (CC, RNDDL, CODENI, KEPA) and the 13 service provision NGOs as simply the “studied NGOs,” even though these two groups have substantial differences and some organizations refer to themselves with other terms. I will occasionally specify which group I am referring to explicitly: the “advocacy organizations/networks” or the “service-provision NGOs.” Thus unless otherwise specified, the “studied NGOs” refers to *all* 17 organizations studied.

Anonymity

All directly identifiable personal information has been removed from this public version of the report to protect the anonymity of interviewees, though they were retained for internal organizational use.

⁶ See “Circumstances of Meeting & Sources of Information” section of table in Appendix A for more details.

I. Understanding the Nicaraguan Context

An Organized Past: Nicaraguan Civil Society 1978-Present

Nicaragua's civil society today is an important, although radically transformed and skeletal, representation of its extremely cohesive past. The popular Sandinista revolution of 1978-1979 is the clearest starting point for developing an appreciation for the lasting Nicaraguan spirit of volunteerism and collective action. The movement to overthrow the oppressive forty-year Somoza dictatorship coalesced through underground community organizations, which coordinated nationwide acts of mass civil disobedience, including general strikes with 90% participation.⁷ These acts of defiance soon escalated to armed insurrections as the military began to use lethal force to quell the populace's growing unrest. Despite the overwhelming odds, the united opposition finally overthrew Somoza's regime in 1979 and replaced it with the Sandinista (FSLN) government. This collective action on its own would be impressive, but it was the achievements to follow that demonstrate Nicaragua's exceptional social cohesion best.

The early years of the Sandinista government continued the spirit of massive citizen participation and volunteerism. The grassroots base of the FSLN allowed them to embark on a number of massive social ventures with a very low cost through volunteers.

During the National Literacy Crusade of 1980, 60,000 educated young people volunteered to leave school for five months to travel to the most remote, poorest parts of the country and teach literacy. A full 25,000 more went into the most destitute corners of the cities to do the same. All were trained as literacy teachers beforehand in a massive effort that was actually made comparatively easy due to the extensive grassroots networks already established. This crusade raised the national literacy rate to more than 87% from less than 50% in only five months.⁸ While the literacy crusade was the most prominent example of Sandinista-era volunteerism, the health *brigadistas* was no less impressive.

This massive volunteer "health brigade" of young volunteers, numbering over 70,000 in total at its peak, was mobilized to inoculate the country and provide popular primary health education.⁹ By 1983, the efforts of the *brigadistas* had resulted in a reduction in infant diarrhea, mountain leprosy, and malaria by 75, 60, and 50 percent, respectively. Infant mortality had reduced to 90.1 per thousand from 121 per thousand in 1978-1979. In the same short time span, life expectancy jumped from 52.2 to 57.6 years.¹⁰ (MCN has attempted to continue this tradition and was recently awarded the U.N. medal for its 20,000+ volunteer-strong primary health brigades.¹¹)

Other achievements in social services were similarly progressive, with expanded spending on public education, healthcare, low-interest loans, cooperative assistance, subsidized basic food, public works, and other investments in "human capital" and the poor. Nearly all of these social advances occurred in the first half of the decade. After the US embargo in 1985 and the escalation of funding and training supplied to the Contras, the war and diminished trade revenue curtailed economic growth while public spending on social services was radically redirected towards military expenditures, thus reversing much of the human progress made and forcing a default on the promises of the revolution.¹² –

⁷ Walker, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle*, p.36

⁸ Walker, p.124.

⁹ Walker, p.48.

¹⁰ Walker, p.122.

¹¹ El Nuevo Diario, "Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense recibe Premio de Población 2009," <http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/nacionales/41160> 2/24/09

¹² Walker, p.50

Origins of NGOs in Nicaragua

NGOs as a widespread phenomenon are relatively new to Nicaragua, and owe their birth primarily to neoliberalism and the corresponding global tide of privatization. They were practically non-existent prior to the outbreak of the US-funded Contra war during the 1980s. (Before the late 1970s, only INPRHU and some small faith-based missionary groups operated in Nicaragua.) During the war they emerged in small numbers as clandestine mechanisms for foreign donors to take sides in the divisive conflict¹³ and as a means to reduce the power and ability of the FSLN government to fulfill its social welfare promises.¹⁴ This changed radically in 1990, when the neoliberal (conservative, free-market focused) government of Violeta Chamorro won the popular election on a platform of peace and reconciliation. While the war was successfully ended, within a short time, funding for entire branches of government had been severed, with social services taking the largest cut, as part of “austerity measures” mandated by the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Basic services, such as healthcare, education, and utilities were widely privatized. Public schools and health clinics remained, but were fee-driven, putting them out of the reach of the poorest Nicaraguans.

In this social service vacuum, NGOs exploded onto the scene with the support of the international donor community, which favored channeling aid through the civil society in accordance with neoliberal distrust of the state.¹⁵ The vast majority of NGOs working in Nicaragua formed in the early 1990s, with an unsurprisingly large number starting exactly that year, 1990. These NGOs often consisted of disenchanting and unemployed public employees who wanted a new way to contribute to society after being forced out of the state after neoliberal reforms.¹⁶ The most dramatic case is the agriculture-focused CIPRES, which was an actual entire *department* of the Sandinista government until the 1990 election, when it simply moved offices and transitioned to NGO funding. It actually maintained many of the same international donors, which, instead of providing bilateral funding to the state to support CIPRES programs, began to give directly to CIPRES. Its leadership, goals, and methods remain mostly unchanged from the 1980s government department.¹⁷

The massive surge of NGOs in the 1990s has continued to the current day, with NGOs garnering 60% of the international aid to Nicaragua,¹⁸ partially due to increasing international tension with the administration of the current president, Daniel Ortega, which is widely blamed for diminished bilateral donations to the government.

Focal Points: Case Study Trends with Far-reaching Implications

Among the dozens of possible trends to highlight in film-based case studies, the following are arguably the most critical. These focus on contemporary critiques that are currently debated in development literature and among the NGOs themselves, and thus they are the most relevant and informative topics for audiences interested in development, particularly in university classrooms.

¹³ Smith, p.238.

¹⁴ Smith, p.203.

¹⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 78.

¹⁶ Sergio Aguirre, *El Nuevo Diario*, “ONG compiten contra Consejos,” 8/3/07

¹⁷ Interview with administrator, CIPRES

¹⁸ *La Prensa*, “Ipade: Obtener fondos internacionales fue difícil en 2009,” 12/18/09. In the first half of 2009, international aid distributed to private sources (NGOs) was \$297 million, while aid directly to the government was \$200 million.

The analyses provided for these trends are a first interpretation and form a jumping-off point for deeper investigation. Each subtopic stands alone, but together they form a more powerful, deep-rooted critique of the international aid model structure in which the NGOs in Nicaragua operate. NGOs cannot affect the structural causes of poverty and inequality but may actually *maintain* the unequal distribution of power and wealth and *reduce* the institutional capacity of the state. With genuinely “good intentions,” NGOs attempt to soothe the violence of poverty, but are unable, due to their institutional structure and funding, to actually prevent its *perpetuation*.

II. NGOs in Service of the Status Quo: the Effects of Funding

A. What is Fundable? Donor Priorities and Mission Drift

The fastest way to understand the purpose and scope of an NGO is also often the most misleading: the “mission statement” (or the “vision,” “objectives,” or “goals,” depending on the NGO in question). It is typically a broad, sweeping, and inspiring claim, such as the conclusion of the vision of CPDH: “...the *overcoming* of poverty now and for future generations” or INPRHU’s objective of contributing to the “transformation of *social structures*” and the “empowerment of all.” (Emphasis added.) Based on nothing else, it would be reasonable to assume that these organizations were clearly working towards those goals – thus addressing the structural causes of poverty, inequity, and underdevelopment. Yet what’s the reality? In Nicaragua, visions of long-term structural change like these litter publications and remain in on the tip of every NGO staff member’s tongue but the actual work often falls short due to the realities of funding and organizational survival. The implications of this reality are stark: **NGOs are mostly unable to affect structural causes of poverty and inequality in any direct way through their donor-funded projects.**

Mission Drift and NGO Survival

In a general sense, NGOs choose projects based on three fundamental criteria, in order of importance:

- 1) They can secure funding for it.
- 2) It fits within their mission.
- 3) It appears reasonably effective and feasible.

This simple set of criteria explains the behavior of the NGOs studied in Nicaragua extremely well. Funding is the absolutely crucial element for institutional survival; NGO staff’s incomes depend on it. Assessing the methods and projects undertaken by the studied NGOs reveals that the second two criteria only play a role in deciding between projects that are *fundable*. Thus when the NGO’s mission or the NGO staff’s opinion of the efficacy of a project come into conflict with fundability, it is not surprising that it is the mission and the efficacy of the project that lose. This leads to the phenomenon of “mission drift”: NGOs taking on projects that are far removed from their stated goals, methods, and strengths as a means of institutional survival. Since funders are generally predisposed to short-term, quantitative service-delivery type projects, this is the kind of work NGOs “drift” towards, often in spite of their own better judgment and beliefs, let alone their missions.

Examples of this internal conflict were not difficult to find in Nicaragua. Although identifying “mission drift” is inherently a subjective affair, out of the 13 service-provision NGOs¹⁹ I identify six that feature a significant dichotomy between mission rhetoric and project reality:

¹⁹ The four advocacy networks studied are not as relevant to this discussion – any mission drift they experience is of a very different kind and takes the shape more of what policies they advocate for.

- **CENIDH & CPDH:** Both feature an emphasis on popular education, public participation in politics, and policy impact, but in practice focus mainly on providing legal services and prosecuting interpersonal human rights abuses.
- **INPRHU:** Emphasizes a rights-based approach to long-term development and structural change, but tends to provide mostly basic services: microcredit and agricultural assistance.
- **IPADE:** The main component of their work is election monitoring and polling, which is what they are best known throughout Nicaragua and recognized abroad for. They are *the* primary (and often sole) source of election information and monitoring. This work, combined with popular education for public participation in politics and social research forms the bulk of their projects (16/18 in 2006²⁰). Yet despite the specialization and recognition in that field, they simultaneously work on sustainable development projects such as agriculture and infrastructure. What is more curious is that these are not even in the same regions where they are executing their democracy-focused projects – these are completely independent and radically different projects far outside IPADE’s traditional specialty. In my interview, IPADE’s representative actually seemed to address both aspects of their work – democracy and sustainable development – similarly, spending nearly equal time discussing both.²¹ Budget information would be needed to verify this, but it would not be surprising to see that sustainable development work is an increasingly large part of their work.
- **Centro Humboldt:** They are recognized both domestically and internationally for the main thrust of their work: environmental conservation. They have a strong voice in the media and assist in training other civil society organizations and government agencies with regard to environmental concerns and disaster preparedness. They organize, train, monitor environmental concerns, produce scientific studies, and lobby. However, like IPADE, they also seem to practically “dabble” in a completely different work with sustainable development, such as agricultural training. But perhaps most far removed – and difficult to make sense of – is one of their newest initiatives: well construction.
- **IXCHEN:** As discussed below, they spend far more resources on their medical services even though their mission is much broader, focused on women’s rights education and mobilization.

All of these organizations *do* perform the popular education, community organizing, etc. work that is more directly in line with their social change rhetoric. But the point is that these goals get consistently pushed to the side to make room for basic social services. An upper-level representative from IXCHEN in particular was very clear about the issue: there is just more money available for social services (in this case IXCHEN’s medical care) and thus it forms a bigger part of their operation.²² Yet this is not preferable – NGO representatives know and understand the structural causes of poverty and inequity are not solved by the palliative social service projects their organizations drift towards. This knowledge (such as criticisms of the effects of neoliberal government policies on human capital) is all over their publications, websites, and came up over and over in my interviews. For example, the representative from IXCHEN was very adamant that their organization’s education and popular mobilization was, by far, the most important aspect of their work, yet they were unable to do more of it due to a lack of funding. They noted that the funding for medical services was actually what kept the NGO afloat and provided even a limited ability to provide educational and organizational support to communities. This is not surprising as it is, after all, NGO representatives like these who write the lofty mission rhetoric in the first place.

²⁰ IPADE, *Perfil Institucional*, 2006.

²¹ Interview with administrator, IPADE.

²² Interview with administrator, IXCHEN.

B. Foreign Funding & “Uncivil” Society

Scarcity and Survival: The Costs of Cooperation

It is no secret that the funding market for NGOs is fierce, volatile, and unreliable. Many NGO representatives complained of donor volatility, funding priorities, or an overall lack of funding.²³ With the exception of AIDH (which was actually seeking funding), all the NGOs studied were dependent on foreign funding for their very existence. Thus set in this context of scarcity, it is unsurprising that there is a marked lack of cooperation between most NGOs except for advocacy, as discussed below in section D. It is only the NGOs that operate in completely different spheres that can – quite literally – *afford* to cooperate on projects and share information and skills. NGOs working in the same domain on the other hand are rife with rivalries that inhibit any cooperation whatsoever.

Only four out of the thirteen NGOs (the four advocacy networks are excluded since they cooperate by definition), when asked, said they had any direct cooperation with any other NGOs (not just the studied groups) aside from through advocacy networks. Even the cooperation of these four was limited to information sharing and training; none stated they had any joint projects.²⁴ As expected, this cooperation only occurred *between* NGO categories: CENIDH, a human rights NGO, provides legal advising/training to TESIS and IXCHEN, both NGOs focused on health, while Centro Humboldt, an environmentally focused NGO provides environmental issues education/training to CENIDH and reportedly other NGOs (none in my sample other than CENIDH reported receiving assistance, but it was implied by Centro Humboldt staff). In contrast, NGOs operating within the same category were adamantly non-cooperative or even outright hostile towards one another, such as CENIDH and CPDH, profiled below in section C.

Parallel Structures & Waste: The Costs of Competition

The NGOs in the sample provide a wide range of services to the Nicaraguan public, but it is doubtful that competition is making them more efficient and more effective as advocates of “free-market funding” would claim. Instead of consolidating, specializing, and forming economies of scale, competition has pushed NGOs to begin to take on a wide range of disparate projects – mission drift – and inhibited cooperation and consolidation out of fear for institutional survival. This has in turn led to the development of a number of parallel institutions, providing the same services with the same methods and for the same objectives. These are not only wasteful – the capital required per project to create and manage two projects in the same category (and often the same region) is far less than the cost to create and manage just one project – but it results in fractured services for the recipients, who must negotiate scattered and unreliable webs of NGOs to find even basic assistance.²⁵ These parallel structures and fractured services were extremely prevalent in even *within* my small sample. Out of the 13 service-provision NGOs, a full 11 had at least one major aspect of their work (objective and associated methods – see Appendix A) that was extremely similar to that of another NGO in the sample:

²³ Interviews with advisor from CC; administrator, IXCHEN; administrator MCN-Leon; administrator, TESIS.

²⁴ I define a “joint project” as one where two or more NGOs integrate and cooperate on a project, with the final credit and recognition going to both NGOs.

²⁵ For similar results in Mozambique, see Pfieffer, “International NGOs and primary health care in Mozambique: the need for a new model of collaboration,” *Social Science & Medicine* 56 (2003) 725–738.

- **CENIDH, CPDH, and AIDH:** *Exactly* the same objectives and methods to prosecute, promote, and monitor human rights abuses. Their only difference is political ideologies, as will be shown in section C.
- **IPADE & Centro Humboldt:** Practically identical disaster preparedness, environmental awareness, and conservation objectives and methods.
- **CIPRES, INPRHU, and FEDICAMP:** Very similar sustainable agriculture technology, training, and support for rural farmers, including environmentally friendly techniques and microloans.
- **IXCHEN and TESIS:** Have practically identical ideology, objectives, and popular education methods for promoting women’s health and rights.

This lists only the clearest comparisons. Primarily due to mission drift, most NGOs work in multiple “categories”, making them at once difficult to define and putting them in competition with a number of other NGOs. The table in Appendix A shows the similarities more thoroughly.

NGOs and the Government: Funding as an Obstacle to Horizontal Cooperation

The vast majority of the representatives from the 13 service-provision NGOs studied believed it was, in the long term, the government’s responsibility to provide basic social services to its citizens (often including the services the NGO itself provides now). All four of the advocacy networks studied, of which most of these NGOs take part, believed the same. Yet with the typical disconnect between rhetoric and reality, only three NGOs had any significant service-delivery cooperation with the government – and these are still far from full horizontal delivery mechanisms, an example of which is shown in Figure 1 below. Three more (for a total of seven different NGOs out of the thirteen) provide



Figure 1. Horizontal Aid Structure

some kind of training to government agencies.

The stated reason for this non-cooperation was consistently government incompetence. One NGO director went so far as to say that working with the government was simply a “waste of time” although he simultaneously stated that he believed the government should be the people’s first resource. Thus from a practical point of view he said that his NGO had to intervene when the government was not doing its job.²⁶ This was a consistent opinion among NGO staff, the implications of which will be discussed in section F.

What lies beneath these sorts of statement is the funding reality: it is highly unlikely that NGOs could get funding for projects that were fully devoted to strengthening the government’s own capacities for service delivery. Donors typically require direct accountability and quantifiable results – which they worry may get muddled or lost in horizontal arrangements with governments. Perhaps more intrinsically, empowering the government goes against thirty

²⁶ Interview with administrator, La Fundación Masaya Contra La Pobreza, Masaya, 7/08/09

years of neoliberal emphasis on NGOs as a countervailing force to check state power.²⁷ This may be of decreasing relevance in the future due to changes in the international discourse, with more and more agencies and NGOs talking about institutional development, capacity building, and horizontal structures, but my research shows that this discourse has not (yet) changed the reality in Nicaragua.

Examples of Cooperation

In general, NGO-government cooperation appeared limited at best, though with some significant efforts. None of the NGOs studied (or any others I have heard of) employ fully horizontal delivery mechanisms or partnerships. All seven of the NGOs with some cooperation (either training or service-delivery) with government institutions still perform the bulk of their work totally independently. Thus while the examples noted below are an excellent start, there remains *much* room for improvement.

As summarized in the table in Appendix A,

- **MCN** works with the government to train massive “health brigades” of volunteers to go into communities to teach about preventative and primary health.
- **INPRHU** actively trains local government agencies to be more responsive to citizen participation through workshops.²⁸ Also provides agronomists and other technicians to government’s “Zero Hunger Program” (*Programa Hambre Cero*).²⁹
- **Asofenix** coordinates its infrastructure work with the local government and occasionally actually receives funding from the local government to complete projects in a sort of “sub-contracting.” This was very unique, but not typical for most NGOs or even for Asofenix itself, which typically works independently and had a very low opinion of government competence.³⁰
- **Centro Humboldt** provides training to government agencies and officials about environmental issues.
- **IXCHEN** trains government agencies (such as the police) on women’s rights and health issues

One example with delving into more detail here is **TESIS**, which has the most integrated model of government cooperation of the NGOs studied. They explicitly reject the idea of providing health or education services themselves when asked, believing strongly that it is the government’s responsibility to provide these services.³¹ To this end, while their focus is limited to women’s health and street children’s education, they have actually had major successes training government agencies.

TESIS has a long relationship with prostitutes in various parts of Managua, providing popular education materials about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and women’s rights, distributing free condoms, and organizing support groups and workshops. However, in addition to this service-provision, TESIS has made strong efforts to educate the government’s ministry of health (MINSA) health workers in four of the seven urban clinics to destigmatize prostitutes (who are widely viewed as “dirty” and doing the work by choice and with pleasure, rather than a lack of options).³² They also bring IXCHEN doctors to the women, in an attempt to make the women more comfortable with the notion of

²⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 78.

²⁸ Martha Regina Rios, *Concertación de Actores Locales para el Desarrollo Integral del Municipio de Totogalpa*, RNDDL, 2004.

²⁹ Interview with administrator, INPRHU, Managua, 8/04/09

³⁰ Interview with administrator and international volunteers, Asofenix, Managua/San Zapote, 7/30/09.

³¹ Interview with administrators, TESIS, Managua, 7/22/09.

³² Interview with administrator, Managua, 7/29/09.

seeing doctors, who have historically been very rude and demeaning to prostitutes, even to the point of refusing services.³³ Talking with various recipients of TESIS's aid, it was enlightening to see that the biggest help (in their opinion) was actually being able to go to MINSA clinics for treatment without fear of mistreatment by prejudiced doctors.³⁴ On the other hand, the women also did greatly appreciate the free condoms and information about STDs, though they noted that they already knew a lot about women's rights before TESIS's work.³⁵ This is clearly a very notable first step in horizontal government cooperation and institution-building, but this is still only one small NGO working on a very limited range of issues.

Problems with Vertical Aid Structures

Some might argue that there is no problem in this situation – indeed, what is wrong as long as the people are getting the services they need, regardless of the source? Yet this ignores the long-term impacts of this kind of service provision which may well lead to perpetual government ineptitude and underdevelopment, which is discussed more in depth in section F below. However, even in the nearer term, these parallel vertical delivery mechanisms are wasting resources in much the same way as competing NGOs.

Furthermore, the idea that NGOs should – or will need to - perpetually provide services is tantamount to dismissing even the most basic concept of the end goal of “development”: a functioning government that is accountable to its citizens and provides basic services in exchange for its legitimacy to govern and enforce laws. Unlike the government, NGOs are almost entirely *unaccountable* to their recipients. For example, while citizens can make demands and hold local government accountable for poor or unequal services at the polls (or in the streets), they can only plead with an NGO whose accountability to donors restricts their ability to respond.

As government services decrease in both quality and quantity as increasing aid goes to NGOs, Nicaraguan confidence in their government – a key requisite for a functioning democracy – decreases.³⁶ This is extremely dangerous in a country where satisfaction with the state of democracy is abysmally low.³⁷ From this realization that the government is incompetent and unable to fulfill even basic responsibilities comes the creation of an alternative to the state: the NGO. These sentiments of government incompetence and the need to circumvent it are rampant in Nicaragua, and the vicious cycle of underdevelopment produced from this is further elaborated in section F below.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Interview with beneficiary women, Unknown street, Managua, 7/29/09.

³⁵ Interview with beneficiary women, Elite Night Club, Managua, 7/29/09.

³⁶ See DFID, “How to Work with Civil Society”, accessed 1/19/09,

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/dfidwork/workwithcs/cs-how-to-work-understand2.asp>

³⁷ IPADE, *Sondeo de Opinión Sobre el Estado de la Democracia en Nicaragua*, March 2005, p.10. In this public opinion study, 79% of Nicaraguans are only “slightly” or “not at all” satisfied with “the [State of] Democracy” in Nicaragua. Only 18% said they were “somewhat” or “very” satisfied, and 3% did not respond. 850 Nicaraguans were surveyed, giving a +/- 4% margin of error.

III. Legitimacy and Accountability: Advocating for the Constituency

C. Weak Ties: NGOs as “Civil Society”

One of the primary goals of foreign aid has been the strengthening of “civil society,” despite the elusiveness of a definition of the concept. It is widely regarded as “central to development and poverty eradication,”³⁸ thus explaining its almost ubiquitous usage in the rhetoric of the NGOs studied. Though many other organizations, such as social movements, unions, and cooperatives are typically considered part of civil society, the primary method of strengthening civil society by foreign donors has been to fund NGOs, which have accountability mechanisms and typically non-controversial political stances which are required by most donor governments and private foundations.³⁹

Yet is this strategy working? Are NGOs forming the space “located between the state, the private sector and the family or household, where society debates and negotiates matters of common concern and organises to regulate public affairs,”⁴⁰ as the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) defines civil society? Or is the competition for foreign funding and the *disproportionate* voice given to the NGOs (which are only one part of civil society) with more funding undermining the cohesive, downwardly accountable, and participatory nature that are integral parts of the vibrant civil society donors and NGOs themselves envision?

While this section’s scope is limited to the NGO-level of the development of this civil society, section IV will dig deeper to uncover the effects of this phenomenon on the public and its implications for structural change and development.

Whose Interests? Politicization, Division, and Disproportionate Representation through Funding

As shown in section B above, funding divides NGOs. It forces them to compete and tailor themselves to fit their work within donor interests, or they simply will not find funding and the staff will be out of work. This competition for scarce funding resources in itself hinders cooperation between NGOs working in the same categories of work (and thereby accessing the same donors), but it *cannot* fully explain the complex, deep-seated, and fundamentally *political* divisions between NGOs. Rather, this animosity is generated by conflicting donor interests which shape the political tendencies of the NGOs and put them at odds with one another on ideological grounds.

This in itself is not necessarily problematic, as it is unrealistic - and indeed undesirable - for civil society to have homogenous political tendencies. However, if civil society is meant to be an organic part of a functioning democracy, its organizations (such as NGOs) should *theoretically* represent the public’s views roughly in proportion to public support. NGOs thus should *not* represent primarily their donor’s views in proportion to funding. Yet that is ostensibly exactly what is occurring in Nicaragua’s NGO-dominated civil society, showing the fundamental limits of the NGO model as a means to strengthen civil society.

CENIDH vs. CPDH

The most viciously divided in my sample and the most representative of the effects of politicization and funding on cooperation and representation of the constituency were undoubtedly CENIDH and CPDH, both human rights NGOs with nearly identical objectives and methods, but very different funding sources. I had extensive conversations with representatives from both NGOs about their counterpart, in which accusations of politicization and bias formed the fundamental critiques and

³⁸ Riddell, *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?*, p.301.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ DFID, “How to work with Civil Society.” A relatively typical definition of civil society. See also Riddell, p. 302.

rationale for not cooperating. (It is worth noting that in spite of the evident disrespect for one another, the two NGOs do claim to have a professional relationship, but they admit that they rarely cooperate in the prosecution of human rights abuses, and have no joint education ventures⁴¹, despite their almost identical methods and goals.) Their divisions and political tendencies are largely explained by their differing funding sources, not their differing constituencies. This calls into question whose interests they represent, and whether their influential voices are proportionately representing their constituencies.

Though they claim to be “apolitical,” CPDH claims that CENIDH has liberal “FSLN tendencies”⁴² while CENIDH claims that CPDH has a conservative bias towards the PLC.⁴³ These are both strong accusations, but not unfounded. CENIDH was actually founded by members of the FSLN, though it has since distanced itself and is very critical of the current FSLN government. CPDH on the other hand was almost exclusively funded by the United States (which adamantly supported Somoza and later the PLC) throughout the Contra war, though they claim they have since diversified its funding sources.⁴⁴ Despite this claim, *all* of their projects for 2008 were funded by USAID or government-funded affiliates.⁴⁵ Yet why have these NGOs been politicized in the first place?

Funding plays a crucial role in this divisiveness, with the political beliefs of donors coming into conflict, especially after the 1979 revolution and Contra war of the 1980s which put US and UK donors, whose governments supported the Contras in direct opposition with European and Canadian donors, whose governments supported (at least subtly) the FSLN government.⁴⁶ It was in this contested environment that CPDH grew dependent on US funding and began to tacitly follow US political ideologies. They provided many of the scathing documentation of FSLN human rights violations but practically ignored Contra human rights violations,⁴⁷ which they claimed were far lower in comparison.⁴⁸ This fits in perfectly with the claims President Reagan used repeatedly to justify the illegal funding of the Contras, but stands in stark contrast to other accounts by human rights organizations which show the Contras as the much greater violator.⁴⁹ That CPDH staff, volunteers, and publications still claim otherwise against the consensus of history shows a steadfast conviction to the beliefs of its longtime primary donor: the US. This brings to light a more fundamental question: is the conflict between CENIDH and CPDH based on different constituencies or simply different donors? Whose interests are represented by NGOs when they serve as civil society actors?

It is actually very unlikely that CPDH and CENIDH have radically different constituencies: they both serve poor and working class populations that lack access to normal legal services and have a strong presence nationally, reaching across regional political differences. Thus these constituencies should mostly have a similar distribution and average set of interests and priorities. Therefore if CENIDH and CPDH were really advocating for their constituencies, they would likely advocate for the

⁴¹ Interview with administrator, CPDH.

⁴² Ibid; promoter/volunteer, CPDH.

⁴³ Interviews with administrator and field staff/educator, CENIDH

⁴⁴ Interview with administrator, CPDH.

⁴⁵ CPDH, “Proyectos Ejecutados en el 2008,”

<http://www.cpdh.org.ni/Pdf/ProyectosEjecutados2008/proyectosEjecutados2008.pdf>. Aside from USAID, the only other funders were the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), both private organizations founded (under Reagan) and funded by the US government.

⁴⁶ Smith, p. 202

⁴⁷ Based on an informal survey of eight newsletters CPDH had available on their website (<http://www.cpdh.org.ni/Publicaciones.aspx>) when accessed on 1/19/09.

⁴⁸ Interview with administrator, CPDH; promoter/volunteer, CPDH

⁴⁹ Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Nicaragua: Reagan, Rhetoric, and Reality*. New York, Americas Watch, 1985. Cited in Walker, p.201.

same things – and indeed in large part the rhetoric and content of their educational materials are *indistinguishable*. But CPDH does not work with the CC, while CENIDH does, and they do not cooperate with one another. Is this borne out of some real ideological conflict, a vast difference in the interests of their recipient constituencies, or is this just *donor politics*? For the CC, this implies that even NGOs with promoter networks are unlikely to be really able to be responsive and form that “bridge” to the public they claim to represent as their constituency.

Culture of Funding: Upward-Dependent “Community Organizations” and Organizers

NGOs often *create* community organizations as (theoretically) independent “grassroots” groups to manage the NGO’s project implementations and serve as intermediaries between the community and the NGO. They are now standard practice for “participatory development” projects and are viewed as part of the greater enhancement of civil society.⁵⁰ However, talking to community leaders, I found that they act more or less like subsidiaries to the NGOs, precisely due to their dependence on funding and technical assistance. This *top-down* mode of community organizing creates an upward dependence that is antithetical to the very notion of a strong, independent, and indigenous “civil society.” While not at all useless, these organizations do not appear to have the organic roots that will allow them to perpetuate without a continuous “injection”⁵¹ of funds from the NGOs that created them, nor do they hold great potential to serve as permanent and responsive advocates for the poor.

The Changing Face of Organizing in the New Culture of Funding

NGO efforts have actually fundamentally changed the way Nicaraguans think about organizing. Whereas prior to 1990 community organizations were (reputedly, more research is needed) largely unfunded and correspondingly institutionally simple and based on voluntarism, today funding is seen as a necessary component of organizing. Community leaders continually spoke of “funding” and typically a *lack* of it that hinders their ability to complete the “projects” & workshops their communities desire.⁵² Other NGO staff⁵³ and community leaders⁵⁴ said that funding was necessary for organizing and education since people simply “won’t come if you don’t have food and a good space”⁵⁵ for the meeting or workshop. Yet this was not always the case; particularly in the years leading up to the 1979 revolution, community organization was extremely strong and yet *unfunded* part of the social fabric of Nicaragua. Ironically, today NGO leaders dream aloud of freeing themselves of funding - a long-term goal that will be discussed in section V. The implications of this new upward dependence and lack of autonomy among grassroots organizations are serious for a worldwide development model pushing the need for a strong and independent civil society.

⁵⁰ See Ebrahim, *NGOs and Organizational Change*, p.27 for discussion of “participatory development” discourse in Indian NGOs.

⁵¹ Riddell, *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?*, p. 281. Riddell notes that most NGO projects are unsustainable without continued NGO financial support.

⁵² Interviews with volunteer community organizer, MCN-Leon; administrator, Chinandega Regional Network of CC; volunteer/promoter, CPDH; administrator, Matagalpa Network of CC.

⁵³ Interview with field staff/educator CENIDH.

⁵⁴ Interview with leader of an unnamed women’s education/support group on the verge of becoming an NGO in Carazo. The need for these logistical fees was a main reason her group was actively now seeking funding. When asked about the disadvantages of this conversion from a grassroots organization to an NGO, she said that it was simply necessary. Furthermore, she wanted to begin to provide medical services due to the inadequacy of MINSA, another funding-dependent activity.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Contradiction of Top-down Organizing

Even more fundamentally, it is possible that the entire *concept* of outside organizations mandating the creation of “grassroots” organizations is itself oxymoronic. It may well work if it builds on the foundations of existing community organizations, such as in FEDICAMP’s model,⁵⁶ or it may never “catch” root in the community, as in the case of Asofenix, whose representatives complained of great difficulty organizing the community and getting them to work together with other communities to even share the cost of a well⁵⁷ – a relatively modest mediation goal for a community organization.

Upward Dependence in Promoter Networks

The upward dependency of these “community organizations” is similarly observed in the “promoter networks” of many of the NGOs studied. These volunteer “promoters” from varying communities form the critical link between the NGOs and their “constituency.” They have the potential to instill some downward accountability for the NGOs and should, ideally and theoretically, be able to function as educators, leaders, and resources in their communities without external assistance, thus building a more integrated civil society. Yet this independence and permanence is tenuous at best. IXCHEN’s own publication admits that its promoter network “requires external financial resources” and laments that for two years funding for their promoter network cut out, leading some promoters to be “recruited by other organizations.”⁵⁸ Though their training may be permanent, it is uncertain how much impact they can have without funding from an NGO, despite IXCHEN’s hopes that they will continue to “defend women’s rights against whatever injustice”⁵⁹ regardless of funding.

These promoters are, even after their initial training, dependent on their NGOs for educational materials and often the logistical costs of holding workshops (e.g. food, room rental). One of IXCHEN’s administrators noted specifically that without enticing visuals – in this case a set of vinyl posters – the women participating in the preventative health workshops led by promoters simply would not feel “valued” and would not “learn as well.”⁶⁰ Thus, even among theoretically independent promoters, there is a distinct *upward dependence* on NGOs for these community organizations, which places in question their power as grassroots “civil society” and their institutional sustainability over the long-term.

Defining “Upward Dependence”

It is important to qualify “upward dependence” for promoters and community organizations as it is distinctly different than the upward dependence of NGOs to donors. Unlike NGOs, the livelihood of promoters is not affected by funding so they are *not* dependent on funding as individuals, but rather as organizers. Thus while their work is limited to what is fundable, they are *theoretically* more free to be critical of it. In interviews however, there was nothing but positive feedback about the programs from promoters, except for the complaints of a lack of funding noted above. It is unclear whether or not the

⁵⁶ Interview with administrator, FEDICAMP, 7/10/09. FEDICAMP is an NGO made up of a federation of pre-existing community organizations. Each organization operates relatively independently and has very active volunteers from each community managing the project implementations and interacting with NGO staff.

⁵⁷ Interview with international volunteers, Asofenix, 8/20/09.

⁵⁸ IXCHEN, *Memoria*, 2000, p.6. The publication states there has been no funding for two years prior to publication, but during the time of my fieldwork they had regained funding. Thus I know they were without funding anywhere between two and ten years, though I got the impression it was closer to two.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Interview with administrator, IXCHEN.

promoters are biased to report more positively in order to keep themselves in good standing with the NGOs, as the position of promoter seemed to be of respect and esteem in communities.

Efficacy of “Promoter Networks” to Forge Downward Accountability and Legitimize Advocacy

Downward accountability is crucial for an organization like the CC, which claims to represent all Nicaraguans via its network of NGOs. Yet, as discussed in Section D, there is a crucial accountability gap in this chain. Theoretically, promoter networks can bridge that gap, connecting NGOs more directly to recipients, aggregating their preferences, and relaying that information, to some extent, to the top. This is *critical* for organizations like the CC which claim to represent the public’s views. Yet this assumes that NGOs are accountable to promoter, a relationship that is not institutionalized, though may likely exist to a limited extent.⁶¹ Figure 2 illustrates the accountability chain, with the questionable downward accountability of NGOs on their promoters circled. Evaluating the relationships in the rest of the figure: strong downward accountability in typical NGOs without promoters is generally totally

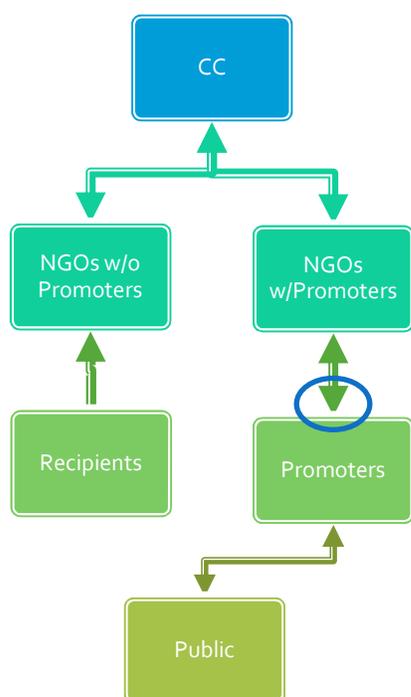


Figure 2. Accountability Relationships in CC Network

absent in favor of upward accountability to donors, the upward accountability of promoters on NGOs has been explained above, the CC is dependent on NGOs for the legitimacy and expertise they give the network, and finally NGOs are accountable to the CC to maintain their membership, which offers them a way to have greater influence on policies and means to show donors they are in some way “cooperating” to create a cohesive “civil society.” To this end, all NGOs studied that are parts of NGO networks proudly display these memberships in their publications and on their websites. Finally, the more questionable accountability of NGOs to promoters and promoters to communities are discussed below.

NGO Accountability to Promoters

No NGO with promoter networks I studied had a formal accountability mechanism to promoters that I could discern.⁶² NGOs with promoters viewed them as a way to expand their “reach” without paying more staff and simultaneously connecting better to the communities.⁶³ Accountability to promoters was never brought up even as a concept by representatives when discussing the benefits of promoters. This does not conclusively imply that no accountability exists – indeed it is likely that some informal social mechanism exists whereby promoters make minor demands on the NGOs – something that warrants more investigation.

⁶¹ See Ebrahim, *NGOs and Organizational Change*, p.145 for a discussion of limited voluntary downward accountability in Indian NGOs

⁶² These NGOs are MCN, CENIDH, CPDH, IXCHEN, IPADE, INPRHU, and TESIS

⁶³ Interviews with administrator, CENIDH; IXCHEN, *Memoria*, p.6.

However, the level of accountability of any such informal mechanism is a far cry from elected representation by members – a typical structure in other organizations of civil society (unions, cooperatives, etc.). Furthermore, it is unlikely that any such mechanism is able to reliably *transmit preferences* about topics beyond the immediate scope of the NGO's work to the NGO staff in anything but the most general way since the focus of the entire NGO-promoter relationship is on the management of service-provision and popular education, which seem to dominate any communication between NGOs and promoters.

Without an institutionalized mechanism to aggregate this information and be held accountable to their constituency, how can these NGOs legitimately serve as *advocates* for the communities they serve? The validity of the promoter network as a direct connection to the public from the CC via NGOs is thus very limited – though it is certainly better than nothing.

Promoters and the Community

Unlike NGO accountability to promoters, promoter accountability to the communities they represent (and thus the general public) is either institutionalized in the form of preexisting community organizations from which promoters are often drawn or based on the fact that the community can, in theory, hold the promoter somewhat accountable if they disagree with his or her actions by refusing to cooperate, which would invalidate their usefulness to the NGO. What is less clear, and based only on *speculation*, is whether or not the corresponding power that access to and a relationship with an NGO confers may unbalance community dynamics, increasing the sort of “uncivil society” DFID warns of⁶⁴ on a smaller scale. However, I did *not* find evidence of this during my fieldwork, but it would be an area of further investigation – it would require more in-depth and private interviews with whole communities.

Consequences for Civil Society and Advocacy

The demonstrated limitations of the NGO model to foster an organic, independent, and sustainable form of organization that resembles a civil society (as we conceive the term) means that many of the studied NGOs' and donors' lofty rhetoric about “community organizing” fail to meet the realities of their work, much like the dichotomy between their mission statements and projects. Thus while representatives of 10 NGOs⁶⁵ stated that they believed citizens should demand their rights from the government, the strategies they are using (top-down creation of promoter networks and community organizations) are not clearly transforming the political landscape. The organizations designed to empower the poor are still largely unable to advocate for their constituencies and “participate in public politics” (a universal ideal in Nicaraguan NGO discourse) without the support of those above them: the NGOs. As a natural outgrowth of this reality, Nicaraguan NGOs thus try to advocate *on behalf* of the poor. They use these upwardly-accountable and dependent “grassroots” organizations to legitimize this advocacy. This is all done with the best of intentions, but whose interests are they really advocating for? Whose idea of “development” is fulfilled by this arrangement?

⁶⁴ DFID, “Strengthening Uncivil Society”, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/dfidwork/workwithcs/cs-how-to-work-understand2.asp>, accessed 1/10/10.

⁶⁵ See Appendix A for the exact NGOs. Only 11/17 NGOs were actually asked this question directly, but from the rhetoric of the other 6, it would be reasonable to assume most would similarly agree based on the universal ideal of “citizen participation in politics” which directly implies citizens making demands on policymakers.

D. Limits to NGO Advocacy

If the case studies in part II are any indication, Nicaraguan NGOs are typically hard-pressed to cooperate with either one another or the government and are pushed towards short-term, quantitative, and decidedly “social service”-type projects by donor preferences. The lack of cooperation and coordination clearly limits their ability to significantly improve government services and institutional capacities through horizontal mechanisms while the emphasis on social service diminishes their ability to provoke the change “from below” that might be achieved through more active organizing and popular education. Their attempts to create organic “grassroots” organizations that can give the poor a means to advocate for themselves are similarly limited by the culture of funding and the inherent contradiction of attempting to create a grassroots civil society from above.

To circumvent these limitations, many Nicaraguan NGOs – including 40% of the sample - attempt to influence policy at a higher level through active lobbying. Ironically, it is only in these advocacy efforts that the NGOs have a significant level of collaboration, which they achieve through memberships in advocacy networks. While they are able to muster impressive numbers of both NGO members and “people represented,” the NGO advocacy efforts appear to have had only limited success, due both to the external political context and the internal accountability deficits, organizational limitations, and donor politics. Furthermore, it is woefully unclear that this advocacy arrangement is democratic, responsive, or even representative of the interests of the poor “constituencies” of the NGOs, despite the best intentions of NGO staff.

Understanding Inter-NGO Advocacy Cooperation

Most of the NGOs studied were part of national and international advocacy networks, through which they unified their advocacy efforts. The four advocacy networks studied, the CC, RNDDL, CODENI, and KEPA) were only a few of the numerous advocacy and “coordination” network organizations operating in Nicaragua. Each of the studied networks do however exemplify broader categories: the CC is the biggest overarching national umbrella network – it claims to be *the* voice for civil society - while the RNDDL is one of many regional networks that compose the middle level of the CC, CODENI is one of many *issue-specific* networks (it focuses on children’s rights, while others focus on women, indigenous people, small farmers, etc.) and KEPA is a typical international advocacy organization that connects Nicaraguan struggles to global advocacy efforts.

To better understand how these networks claim to advocate for their “constituency,” CODENI’s “Investment Campaign” is a prototypical example to explore. The goal of their current campaign is to get more of the national budget devoted to children (in terms of education, health, etc.). Representatives of the different NGO members of CODENI, including many I interviewed (INPRHU, IPADE, among others) meet on a monthly basis to plan events, such as the launch of this campaign. For this event in particular, each representative promised to ask a number of children involved in their programs to come to a publicity event where they would be interviewed by reporters about their needs – for example, how poor the condition of their school is.⁶⁶ This is a very normal example of the function of these NGO advocacy networks – the different member NGOs draw on their recipient bases for support during advocacy campaigns, whether for marches, signatures, or publicity.

Limitations of the Policy Impact of NGO Advocacy

The Coordinadora Civil (CC) in many ways represents the essential paradox of the “civil society” built by NGOs with foreign funding: it tends to be relatively incapable of changing public

⁶⁶ I observed one of the meetings of CODENI NGO representatives on 8/06/09, about a month before the launch. I briefly interviewed a number of the NGO representatives afterwards, who are listed in Appendix B.

policies. Ostensibly, as the biggest network of NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs – including unions, “social movements,” etc.) in Nicaragua, they *should* be the most likely organization to have a serious impact on public policies that affect development. They are considered – and, perhaps more importantly, consider themselves - to be *the* “voice” of civil society by the media and most NGOs. They are regularly interviewed by the popular press for their opinions on different political and economic developments, and the vast majority (but with important exceptions discussed later) of NGOs and other CSOs count themselves as members of the CC. Yet despite incomparable assets and credentials, the CC has had very little success influencing policy in its history.⁶⁷ There are a number of weaknesses of the CC approach that may be the limiting the policy success of its model and its ability to accurately advocate for the poor: a fundamental major *accountability gap* to the populace it claims to represent, an inherent inability to *sustain* mobilizations and exert real *pressure* on the government, and a “political” appearance which repels many NGOs. Separating the rhetoric and theories from this reality in a film-based case study would have the potential for an immense impact.

External Factors

There are multiple external factors, mostly beyond the CC’s control that may have limited its impact: international financial institution (IFI) restrictions on budget reallocation, nearly a decade of Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) administrations,⁶⁸ and its relative infancy as an organization. International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment loan restrictions have historically pushed for reduced public spending, which is in contradiction, explicitly or implicitly, to the reforms suggested by nearly every CC proposal. The CC was not silent on these issues however. They formed an international campaign, “The Nicaragua That We Want,” against the “poverty reduction plan” conditions integrated into the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt cancellation program, but it fell on deaf ears domestically and internationally.⁶⁹ Given the limited freedom imposed by IMF restrictions on governments and the massive international scale of the HIPC initiative, the result is not surprising. The decade of conservative PLC control also seriously undermined efforts to pass CC proposals, which are largely progressive reforms, into policy. Finally, it was not until the 2004 HIPC campaign that the CC started to receive significant popular recognition through the media and corresponding national prominence.⁷⁰ Thus it could be that their inability to push through major policy changes was a result only of their immaturity as an organization, and that they are just now reaching the critical mass for policy impact. These are undoubtedly contributing factors, but to stop here would overlook more serious structural impediments and weaknesses inherent to the CC’s model of advocacy.

Strength of Coordinadora Civil: From the Constituency or the Donors?

At first glance, the CC’s primary strength is perhaps its sheer numbers: over 600 NGOs and CSOs are represented under its umbrella and each NGO’s large recipient base in the public *nominally* supports its actions. When the coordinator (*vocera*; *lit.* “spokeswoman” but functionally the head of the organization) speaks to the media on behalf of the CC, she claims to represent *all* of Nicaraguan civil society. Indeed, when the CC organizes marches they can regularly draw tens of thousands of citizens into the streets (in a country with a population of only five million). This is a force to be reckoned with – and the government clearly recognizes their influence so much that they risk political capital and public

⁶⁷ Interview with former administrator, CC.

⁶⁸ Due to a twist of semantic history, the PLC is actually the “conservative” party by Western nomenclature.

⁶⁹ Interview with former administrator, CC.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

opinion through attempts to harass the CC both legislatively and physically.⁷¹ But what exactly is the source of its influence, and what is the mechanism through which it is exerted, beyond the simplistic member count?

Is it due to the mass number of Nicaraguans they represent and influence, and if so, why has this not led to significant changes in government policies? By the same mechanisms of limited downward accountability described above in section C above and elaborated below, it is unlikely that this is actually a very strong asset. Perhaps more accurately, it may be that the mass number of NGOs actually adds strength to the CC not through the citizens they (indirectly) represent, but the NGOs international influence and national control of resources. The NGOs, after all, control 60% of the aid that enters the country⁷² and hold a great deal of influence over how the international community views the priorities for the 40% that goes to the government – and how they view the government itself.

In this vein, the member NGOs of the CC and the CC itself aim – and seemingly succeed – to shape the international (donor) community's opinion on Nicaraguan development issues and the Nicaraguan government. Their transnational advocacy efforts and publications monitoring government activities and successes (or more often, failures) are very influential internationally as they are some of the only sources of ground-level data. Six of the seventeen organizations studied stated this kind of “monitoring” or social research as a primary goal, and produce multiple major publications annually profiling human rights abuses (often by the government), environmental abuses (again critical of government policies), election fairness, public opinion, and more. This is a massive boost to the CC's strength, as it is able to rally international support and (theoretically) put pressure on the government through international actors as well as influence donor priorities and policies towards all aid given to the country, not just the 60% given to NGOs.

This clearly needs more analysis – something an investigative film may be able to do - but one thing emerges relatively clearly: the CC's strength is probably *not* found in some kind of democratic representation of citizens, but rather their international and national prominence and influence, based on their indirect control of aid and relationships with donors – whose interests that *may* be far removed from the CC's “constituency.”

Accountability Gap & Diverging Interests

If the CC is to fulfill its goal to be the “voice of civil society” it has to successfully show that a) it can articulate the *voice* of “civil society” in some responsive, representative, and ideally democratic manner and that b) this civil society it is “representing” is *itself* responsive, representative, and ideally democratic. This draws our focus to two levels in Figure 2 above:

- a) The relationship between the CC and the NGOs and other CSOs; the CC must be accountable and responsive to the demands of the NGOs
- b) The levels below the NGOs that connect them to the constituencies; these NGOs must be accountable and responsive to the demands of the citizens.

It is quite clear from section C above that b) is unfortunately a weak connection at best. There are no strong downward accountability mechanisms in the NGO model that would allow for such democratic representation. This is true especially in those NGOs that engage in pure service-provision without promoter networks. NGO representatives may well know the community's political beliefs and opinions, but they also clearly may pay no attention and advocate for what *they* think is the best for the community's development. This problem is especially aggravated by the class and education disparity between the NGO staff and their recipients. NGO staff I interviewed were college educated, middle-

⁷¹ Interview with administrator, CC; La Prensa, “Orteguistas atacan a representantes de la sociedad civil”.

⁷² La Prensa, “Ipade: Obtener fondos internacionales fue difícil en 2009”.

class, and typically from cities. They *do* have endless sympathy and compassion for those they help, but they seemed (this is qualitative generalization based on dozens of interviews) to be quite sure that they “knew best”; in other words, they were subtly *paternalistic*. This was (not surprisingly) most blatant with the NGO volunteers from developed countries.⁷³ It fits with the broad literature on NGOs which make pointed critiques of this attitude of foreign aid workers, both nationals and internationals.⁷⁴ This subtle paternalism may mean that NGO advocates will support policies and strategies that are (perhaps) academically more “sound,” but not *necessarily* what their constituency really desires.

A simple example would be the rural farmer: he or she may be highly supportive of the government’s “Zero Hunger Program” (*Programa Hambre Cero*) to distribute livestock and seeds to rural farmers. NGO staff, who are better educated in development issues and hold a very different perspective, largely side with the Nicaraguan and international media and call this program “populist and shortsighted.” You and I may also agree with this notion. This program is widely criticized as a means to simply buy votes and will do almost nothing to cure systemic food security issues. Yet if NGO staff decide to advocate *against* this program (which they widely do) then are they aggregating the preferences of their constituency, or are they inserting their own opinions of development into their advocacy? Is this a responsive civil society? Thus, without an institutionalized mechanism for downward accountability, there is every reason for NGO staff to do what they think is “best” irrespective of their constituency’s actual beliefs.

The above example is an absolutely crucial point. In fact, IPADE reports that most rural farmers *do* realize that the *Programa Hambre Cero* is fundamentally flawed and politicized.⁷⁵ However, not all do – in fact I met an entire cooperative that was highly supportive of government initiatives like *Hambre Cero* and the “Zero Interest Program” (*Programa Usura Cero*).⁷⁶ It may be that the NGOs do know what is “best” for the poor – they are experts. But then they cannot legitimately *claim* to “represent” the poor the way they currently do, but rather they can officially assume their *de facto* status as expert advisors on development issues. They can *advise* true civil society organizations (CSOs), such as cooperatives and unions, which are member-supported and only accountable to their members.

Without prompting, one of the CC’s own ex-coordinators mentioned to me that this accountability gap – wherein NGOs have no real imperative to consult the constituency they claim to represent, is *fundamentally undemocratic* and needs to be improved. As mentioned earlier, his personal long-term vision was a CC made of independent community member-supported organizations – completely free of donors. He stated quite frankly that this system was the best the CC could manage for the time being in *this system* and said it was a significant improvement over the advocacy networks in most countries in Central America, but it was far from perfect.

Sporadic Mobilization

The CC, unlike a typical independent social movement organization, simply cannot sustain mobilizations nor can it engage in most acts of civil disobedience that characterize most such mobilizations due to donor restrictions. Its most powerful tool, the march, is extremely costly and can only be deployed sparingly due to a lack of funds. The volatility of donor funds available furthermore makes it difficult to sustain a movement; like IXCHEN’s smaller movement for women’s rights which

⁷³ Interview with international volunteers, Asofenix, 7/30/09.

⁷⁴ For just one example, see Pfeiffer, “International NGOs and primary health care in Mozambique: the need for a new model of collaboration.”

⁷⁵ This was in an article published within the last two years in *El Nuevo Diario*, but it could not be located on the online archive.

⁷⁶ Interview with COMAXZA cooperative in Pueblo Nuevo, recipient of CIPRES, 8/11/09.

they admitted was extremely difficult to maintain when funding dropped out for two years.⁷⁷ This seriously limits their ability to put the kind of sustained, threatening pressure on the government that may push their policy proposals through.

Internal Political Strife

Many NGOs do not want to participate in CC due to either conflicting political viewpoints (CPDH, MCN) or a desire to simply stay out of politics (Asofenix, FEDICAMP, etc.). This is because the CC is seen as leftist,⁷⁸ and associated (loosely) with the MRS center-left party due to former CC staff that used the CC as an important preparation for their political careers.⁷⁹ While the CC attempts to distance itself from political parties, “partisanship,” and “polarization” this has been proven to be very difficult. Thus can an organization advocate for policy and avoid politics?

How can civil society be unified when they receive funding from so many different foreign donors with so many different priorities? These priorities often conflict in times of international tension, like the Contra war in the 1980s, when US and European/Canadian donors were in polar opposition over the FSLN government.⁸⁰ Thus NGOs end up reflecting these conflicting donor priorities, exemplified in the case of CENIDH and CPDH’s above, rather than a general pro-poor policy platform which all NGOs studied would – more or less – agree with based on their uncannily similar development and rights rhetoric.

Thus while the definition of “civil society” is itself a subject of wide-ranging debate, by most definitions and understandings, the ability of the CC to foster the growth of Nicaraguan civil society is seriously inhibited by its lack of accountability, inability to sustain pressure, and the divisive effects of funding that cleave its membership. Taken together, these limitations suggest that the CC does not form a representative voice for the poor that can advocate for structural change in Nicaragua.

IV. Implications

E. Dissent Management: Institutionalizing the Status Quo

In their own words, funding is both a blessing and a curse for NGOs and social change activists in Nicaragua. Reversing twenty years of institutionalization and the accompanying acculturation to the NGO model of organizing and advocacy is an upward struggle few community organizers and organizations try to climb. The “culture of funding” referred to above in section C that has created a generation of upward-dependent organizations and organizers institutionalizes their struggles and restricts their dynamism and independence. What is left is a hollow shell of Nicaragua’s organized past that is firmly dependent on donors whose interests do not always coincide with those of the Nicaraguans and a generation of organizers whose ability to affect structural change is highly limited. This is dissent management in its most pure form, intentional or not.

The effect is not limited to the (typically) poor community organizers themselves, but also the middle class dissidents whose energies are redirected from political struggle for structural change to NGO administration for minor service. This effect is clear when observing the demographics of the NGO staff, their personal histories, and their personal rhetoric and beliefs or even the origins of the NGOs themselves. Many NGO staff members come from significant positions in or were active

⁷⁷ IXCHEN, *Memoria*, 2000 p.6

⁷⁸ Interviews with administrator, CPDH; administrator Asofenix.

⁷⁹ Ibid; Interview with former administrator, CC.

⁸⁰ Smith, p. 202

supporters of the 1979 revolution and subsequent FSLN government⁸¹. Entire NGOs like CIPRES and CENIDH were formed from highly active FSLN members or government officials following the 1990 electoral loss. The rhetoric of these NGOs and their staff is still to this day radical – they advocate in broad terms for a return to many of the social welfare policies that characterized the FSLN government of the 1980s. Yet they no longer aim to mobilize acts of sustained mass civil disobedience or political mobilization. These are impossible in the NGO-donor structure. Today their energies are consumed managing projects, writing grant proposals, and providing the social services that donors fund to keep their jobs.

The patterns of this dissent management via NGOs in Nicaragua exactly parallels what Smith found in his study of Colombian NGOs almost two decades prior and its implication is identical: the “system maintenance” of the current political and economic structures.⁸² Despite their rhetoric, NGOs cannot and likely were never *intended* to change the structural arrangements that cause systemic poverty and inequality. Instead, they actively contribute to the reinforcement of the status quo and the absorption of dissent. In the meantime, they provide some meager services that hide the systemic and structural violence underpinning poverty and may actually perpetuate institutional underdevelopment.

F. Cyclic Underdevelopment: Perpetuating NGOs by Enfeebling States

Long-term Visions: NGO Views on Poverty, Development, and the Role of the State

When asked personally, NGO representatives would always agree that, in the long-term, NGOs should not provide basic services such as health and education – these are the responsibilities of the state. Further, the more rights-focused NGOs like the CC specifically stressed that there is a popular lack of understanding among the Nicaraguan people that when the government provides something – like a road – it is “not a *gift* but rather the fulfillment of a *responsibility*” that they have to the people.⁸³ There was a popular sentiment among the rights-focused NGOs which listed public participation in politics as a goal that the people of Nicaragua must organize and learn to *demand* their rights from the government. Correspondingly, a focus of many of their workshops is to educate citizen leaders of their rights of participation and the need to do so.

Yet this popular sentiment in civil society – echoed nationally by the CC and others – is juxtaposed with a shrinking neoliberal state and a burgeoning NGO service-provision sector. How can this be reconciled, and what are the consequences?

NGO representatives are not ignorant of this irony – but have divergent views and, at times would prefer to ignore the elephant in the room. An administrator of the CC, stated that in the long-term, as governability is improved and more aid is channeled through the government (and less aid is needed), NGOs will *naturally* begin to disappear, just as they naturally sprouted in 1990 with the change to the neoliberal system.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Though I do not know the personal histories of all those I interviewed, an advisor to the CC, an administrator of CIPRES, and an administrator from the Fundación Masaya Contra La Pobreza were all heavily involved in the revolution and/or FSLN government.

⁸² Smith, p.267.

⁸³ Interviews with advisor, CC; administrator, MCN-Leon.

⁸⁴ Interview with administrator, CC.

On the other hand, one of IXCHEN's administrators did not see the process as one that would occur quite so organically. Their organization, IXCHEN, provides critical women's healthcare, filling in a gap in the government health agency's (MINSAs) services.

At this point a very dangerous cycle begins to become apparent. If women "demand" IXCHEN instead of demanding improvements to MINSA's women's healthcare, and international funding is increasingly finding its way to NGOs like IXCHEN, in response to what *demand* and with what *resources* will MINSA improve itself? This hypothetical cycle is depicted in the diagram below:

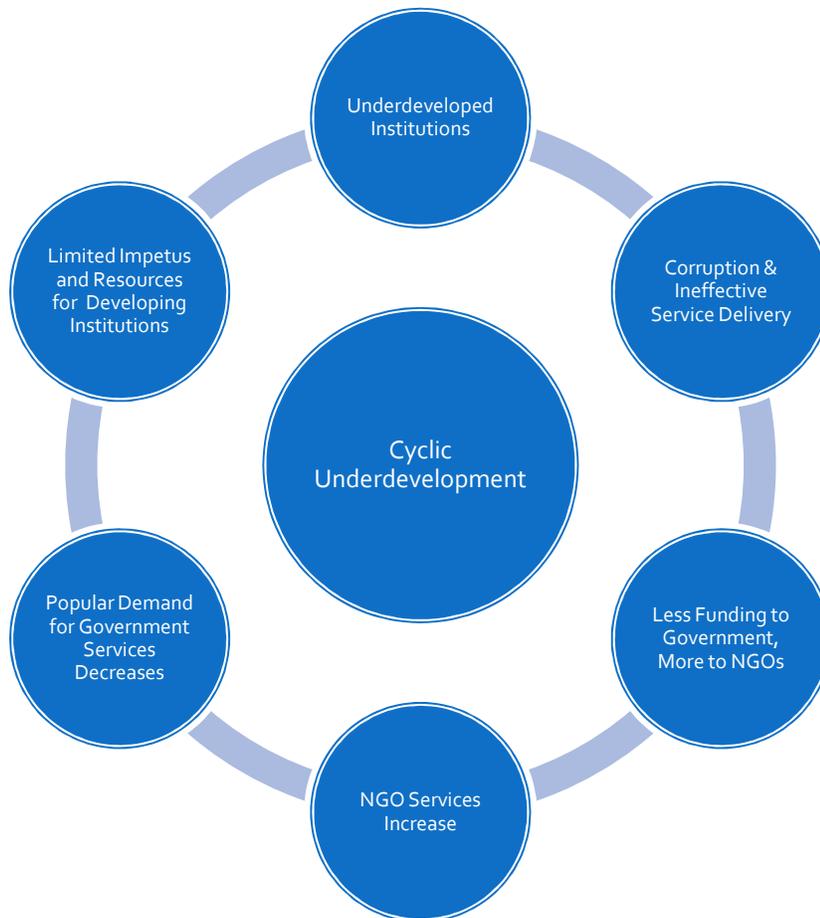


Figure 3. Cyclic Underdevelopment of Institutions via NGO Service Replacement

Cyclic Underdevelopment

When I mentioned this hypothesis to IXCHEN's administrator, they admitted readily (and with apparent resignation) that NGOs providing care like IXCHEN simply "will not resolve" the deficiencies of the government's healthcare system, but that (at this point they smiled again) NGOs like IXCHEN are at least a way to "alleviate" the current symptoms. However, when asked about her long-term vision of Nicaragua's healthcare system, their response was that without a doubt the government should provide *quality* universal healthcare (they technically already have universal healthcare, but of abysmal quality).⁸⁵ Now the question becomes critical: *are NGOs contributing to institutional development, or are they indirectly standing in the way?* This question goes far beyond just healthcare – it must be considered for development as a whole.

The example of IXCHEN and healthcare was only one of any number of government services that are currently being overtaken by NGOs. These quite possibly contribute to the long-term underdevelopment of Nicaragua in spite of their apparent short-term rewards. It may well be possible to serve both needs: saving lives today and protecting those of tomorrow through horizontal structures that contribute day by day to the strengthening of the government services instead of their obsolescence.

V. Rethinking the NGO Development Model

Some of the most impressive successes I heard of during my fieldwork were *unfunded*. In Chinandega, a group of students with the local network of the CC mobilized 120 students to collect 44,000 signatures in four days to combat a proposed privatization of the local water service without a single penny of funding.⁸⁶ They won. In a poor *barrio* in León, a community gathered signatures and put pressure on the electricity company to not raise rates to an unaffordable level.⁸⁷ The rates stayed low. In 1992, a mass mobilization of students called *La lucha por el 6% para las Universidades* demanded that the government to guarantee 6% of its budget would go to universities after massive cuts following neoliberal reforms.⁸⁸ The law was passed. Again, this was an organic action of Nicaraguans, not a NGO-funded project. Increased funding for education is a high priority of the CC, yet it has been historically unable to secure approval of policies even close to the magnitude of the *lucha por el 6%*, likely for many of the reasons described in section D above.

After twenty years of increasing dependence on funding, NGOs in Nicaragua that attempt to advocate for change like the CC and MCN are actively trying to rid themselves of their dependence on foreign funding, which they see as "volatile" and damaging to their ability to form a powerful and sustained movement.⁸⁹ A former administrator of the CC described that the CC of the future would ideally be an association of community organizations made up entirely of volunteers, independent of foreign funding. This would rid the CC of its current accountability gaps that are, in the administrator's own words, fundamentally "undemocratic."⁹⁰ MCN has turned its focus to mass community fundraising (such as the selling of *bonos comunitarios* – scrips that contribute to the pool of money to send people from the community to marches even if the buyer him/herself cannot go) which has radically driven down costs for things like marches – which now require only \$0.50 per person in foreign funding,

⁸⁵ Interview with administrator, IXCHEN.

⁸⁶ Interview with youth activist, Chinandega Network of CC, 8/8/09.

⁸⁷ Interview with volunteer community organizer, MCN-León.

⁸⁸ Envío, "La lucha por el 6% para las Universidades," <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/745>, accessed 1/19/10.

⁸⁹ Interview with advisor, CC, 8/31/09.

⁹⁰ Interview with former administrator, CC, 8/20/09.

compared to the nearly \$6 that typical NGOs requires.⁹¹ The full completion of these goals of self-sufficiency or deinstitutionalization and a return to full voluntarism are a long way off and are difficult to achieve, but their looming presence in Nicaraguan history gives hope that they may be possible once again.

In the nearer term and on a global scale, it becomes clear that most of the flaws in the current development model of NGOs originate here, in the donor countries. The way we fund, what we fund, and who we fund have extremely profound impacts on what happens in recipient countries and has the potential to radically change the entire culture of nations. These are problems with the *model* of development, not with individual NGOs. What NGOs can do within the constraints of the funding system is limited at best. While this does not absolve them of all responsibility for the failures of aid, it forces us to point a much more penetrating eye at the system of development rather than merely its products: NGOs that cannot affect the structural causes of poverty and inequality. Change can be incremental, but it must be systemic. The entire funding system of NGOs - which results from the fusion of politics and aid - has shown itself totally incompatible with true human development in Nicaragua.

Conclusions: Unintentional Underdevelopment?

What is “development” in the first place? Who decides for whom? What characterizes a “developed” country? Simply choosing per capita gross domestic product (GDP) as an indicator or even the Human Development Index (HDI) does not adequately characterize the many facets and opinions of development. The United States is always referred to as developed yet it still fails to guarantee basic healthcare services to all citizens like all other developed countries. Yet this does not mean the United States is not “developed”; indeed it arguably reflects the unique spirit of the public. Thus development is, perhaps, in the eye of the beholder and can only be defined by the people of the country themselves.

However, despite this inherent subjectivity, some basic definitions of development typically would include – with the United States as the odd exception – the provision of basic security, a minimum standard of income, universal education and healthcare, elected representation, and rule of law as some of the basic services a developed country might provide for its citizens. This fits well with the ideals of the NGO representatives I spoke to, as discussed above.

This leaves us with two fundamental options for defining development: 1) it can actually only be defined by the people undergoing the development themselves or 2) it includes a government that more or less provides those services with good quality. Using these as evaluative tools for the work of NGOs to “develop” Nicaragua, what do we find?

In order to define development for themselves as 1) suggests, Nicaraguans must have an organic and powerful grassroots civil society that can advocate for and *define* the development interests of the public. Yet NGOs do not seem to foster more than a superficial funding culture and upward-dependent “grassroots.” Even more systematically, NGOs quell dissent, removing even the possibility for a fully open debate about what constitutes development. And simultaneously, NGOs are quite likely undermining the state and contributing to a form of “cyclic underdevelopment” which leaves little hope that the government will improve its ability to provide even those basic services 2) suggests as indicators of development adequately – at least not without a major restructuring of donor practices.

This implies NGOs may well be doing much worse than just falling short on their rhetoric – they may be falling short of *any* concept of “development.” This is not caused by a lack of good intentions

⁹¹ Interview with administrator, MCN, 8/26/09. Note that the \$6 was their figure and has been unsubstantiated elsewhere.

among NGOs but rather is the perverse effect of the politicized funding system in which NGOs operate. It is this *system* of aid - where funding is a vicious market where the most shortsighted project with the most upward accountability wins the grant - that keeps it from affecting structural and systemic change for the poor - either directly through their projects and advocacy or indirectly through their organizing and "empowerment." This result implores us to look less at individual NGOs on the ground and instead reflect on the system we have created in the developed world and ask:

Is *this* really the best we can do?

*"...it is asserted that there is a pressing moral imperative to provide aid now, deploying it in ways which will help meet the immediate and urgent needs of poor people... Yet, it is quite possible that **more deaths could be prevented by targeting aid to address and help ease the systemic problems constraining the pace of poverty reduction.**"*

Roger C. Riddell
Does Foreign Aid Really Work?
p.379

Appendix A: Studied NGOs at a Glance

What follows is an attempt to tabulate the immense number of variables separating and uniting the different NGOs studied in a visual form that can be used to get an understanding of the research circumstances, methods, objectives, and beliefs of the NGOs studied. The answers to these “indicators” were reconstructed from interviews, NGO publications, and websites, *not* structured interviews or surveys. They are thus not complete, and require the qualitative analysis presented above.

The percentage in the “%Yes of Asked and Applicable” column can provide a quick overview of the prevalence of NGOs that responded or stated that the statement in the left column is true.

However, the “%Yes of Asked and Applicable” (see definition below) is subject to significant fluctuation based on the number of NGOs asked, but qualitative study typically allows for interpretation of the missing data. Despite these limitations, they can provide an overall picture of the NGOs studied and allow for easy cross-comparison where the data is mostly complete.

Following the summary tables are detailed tables showing the responses to each indicator broken down by NGO.

Key:

NES: Not Exactly Stated – May or may not be true, but was not explicitly stated or asked. No conclusion can be drawn.

N/A: Indicator Not Applicable to the NGO in question.

%Yes of Asked & Applicable: Percentage of NGOs for which the indicator was found to be **true** out of the total number of NGOs for which the indicator was clear (not NES) *and* applicable (not N/A). Due to the unstructured nature of the interviews, there are many indicators for which the answer for that NGO is *unclear* (NES).

%Asked of Applicable: Percentage of NGOs *asked or that clearly stated the answer* to this indicator. This shows the **completeness** of the result of the “% Yes of Asked & Applicable.” Where this falls below 50%, it is **red**, indicating data is very unsuited to generalization and must be looked at much more qualitatively.

	%Yes of Asked & Applicable	%Asked of Applicable	# Yes	# No	# N/A	# NES	other
Indicator							
Basic Information							
Founded							
Nicaraguan Origin			16	1			
Nicaraguan Director			16	1			
Staff							
Domestic Volunteers							
Int'l Volunteers							
No. of Member NGOs							
No. of Offices							
Primary Region/Regional Coverage (if known)							
Circumstances of Meeting & Sources of Information							
Met in Main Office	93	100	14	1	2	0	
Met in Regional Office	14	100	2	12	3	0	
Field Visit/Workshop Observation	50	94	8	7	1	0	1
Informal Impromptu Meeting	12	100	2	15	0	0	
Met with Director	71	100	12	5	0	0	
Met with Mid-level Administrators/Regional Directors	35	100	6	11	0	0	
Met with Field Staff	29	100	5	12	0	0	
Met with							
Volunteers/Promoters/Community Leaders	41	100	7	10	0	0	
Met with Member Representatives	83	100	5	1	11	0	
Met with Recipients	47	88	8	7	0	0	2
Met with Former Staff	6	100	1	16	0	0	
Spanish Used for Interview(s)	94	100	16	1	0	0	
English Used for Interview(s)	12	100	2	15	0	0	
Website	82	94	14	2	0	0	1
Informational Materials Collected	76	100	13	4	0	0	
Funding & Technical Assistance							
Stated they Reject Grants w/Unfavorable Conditions	33	100	3	6	8	0	0
US Gov't & Subsidiaries (USAID, NED, IRI, etc.)	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
US Private (Church, OXFAM, etc)	0	100		17	0	0	0
EU/CA Donors (Generally Gov't Funded/Related)	41	100	7	10	0	0	0
Member/Community Funding	6	88	1	14	0	0	2
Side Business/Service Income	12	94	2	14	0	0	1
Receives Institutional Training from Int'l Donors	12	12	2		0	0	?

	%Yes of Asked & Applicable	%Asked of Applicable	# Yes	# No	# N/A	# NES	other
Domestic Relations							
Integrated Projects w/Gov't Plans &/or Subcontracted	23	100	3	10	4	0	0
Trains Gov't Agencies	24	71	4	8	0	0	5
State's Responsibility for Basic Services	80	76	12	1	0	2	2
Gov't Incompetence Obstacle to Cooperation	50	86	6	6	3	2	
Informally Associated w/Political Party	18	100	3	14	0	0	0
Observed Political Tendency	29	100	5	12	0	0	0
Partners w/existing Community Org.	18	100	3	14	0	0	0
Preferred Self-categorization							
"Social Movement"	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
"NGO"	53	100	9	8	0	0	0
"Platform/Space for Communication/Coordination"	18	100	3	14	0	0	0
"Bridge [from Donors to Communities]"	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
Stated Primary Goals							
Policy Impact	59	100	10	7	0	0	0
Community Organizing	29	100	5	12	0	0	0
Public Participation in Politics	29	100	5	12	0	0	0
Monitoring & Public Awareness	35	94	6	10	0	0	1
Social Issues Research/Publication	53	100	9	8	0	0	0
Poverty Reduction	53	100	9	8	0	0	0
Food Security	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
Environmental Conservation	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
Capacity Building of Civil Society/Other NGOs	47	94	8	8	0	0	1
Preventative Health Education	18	100	3	14	0	0	0
Health Services	24	100	4	13	0	0	0
Disaster Preparation/Prevention	18	94	3	13	0	0	1
					0	0	
Policy Impact Methods							
Demonstrations/Marches	18	100	3	14	0	0	0
Lobbying/Policy Proposals	41	100	7	10	0	0	0
Signature Gathering	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
Election Monitoring	12	100	2	15	0	0	0

	%Yes of Asked & Applicable	%Asked of Applicable	# Yes	# No	# N/A	# NES	other
Education Methods							
Popular Literature Distribution	29	94	5	11	0	0	1
Legal Representation/Advising	29	100	5	12	0	0	0
Civil Society Workshops	53	94	9	7	0	0	1
Popular (Citizen) Workshops	71	100	12	5	0	0	0
							0
Organizing Methods							
Creation of Community Organizations	29	100	5	12	0	0	0
Network of Promoters	41	88	7	8	0	0	2
Sustainable Development Methods							
Microloans (NGO Managed)	6	100	1	16	0	0	0
Microloans (Community Managed)	24	100	4	13	0	0	0
Infrastructure/Water Systems	29	100	5	12	0	0	0
Community Seed Banks	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
Community Reforestation	6	100	1	16	0	0	0
Education/Training Topics							
Public Participation in Local Policy (CDMs, etc.)	65	94	11	5	0	0	1
Women/Children's Rights	53	94	9	7	0	0	1
Sustainable Agriculture Techniques	29	100	5	12	0	0	0
Forest Management	24	100	4	13	0	0	0
Inter-NGO Cooperation							
Part of CC	53	100	9	8	0	0	0
<i>Not</i> Part of CC to Avoid Appearing "Political"	6	100	1	16	0	0	0
<i>Not</i> Part of CC due to Differing Political Views	12	100	2	15	0	0	0
Assist/Receive Assistance From other NGOs	47	100	8	9	0	0	0
<i>Joint</i> Projects w/other NGOs	0	100	0	17	0	0	0
Notably Similar NGOs Exist in Nicaragua	59	100	10	7	0	0	0

	%Yes of Asked & Applicable	%Asked of Applicable	# Yes	# No	# N/A	# NES	other
Reported Views on Development - Agreed that:							
NGOs Help where Gov't is Incapable	100	35	6	0	0	11	0
Neoliberal Policies Are a Major Challenge to Development	75	47	6	2	0	9	0
Citizens Should to <i>Demand</i> Rights From Gov't	63	65	10	1	0	1	5
Reported Obstacles							
Gov't Repression/Restrictions	40	63	4	6	1	6	
Donor Volatility	67	19	2	1	1	13	
Donor Priorities	25	25	1	3	1	12	
Donor Reporting Requirements	25	25	1	3	1	12	
Lack of Funding	20	25	1	3	1	11	1
Difficulty Organizing Recipient Community	20	45	1	4	6	6	
Community Reactions - Interviewed Recipients Felt:							
More Confident	100	41	7	0	0	10	
They Learned a Lot	100	41	7	0	0	10	
More "Voice" on Gov't Policies	100	6	1	0	1	15	
Benefitted from Materials/Service Provision	100	46	6	0	4	7	
NGO "Delivered" on Promises	100	15	2	0	4	11	

	NGO Networks				Organizing	Human Rights			Democracy
	CC	CODENI	RNDDL	KEPA	MCN	CENIDH	CPDH	AIDH	IPADE
Domestic Relations									
Integrated Projects w/Gov't Plans &/or Subcontracted	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes				
Trains Gov't Agencies				?		?	?		?
State's Responsibility for Basic Services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NES	?
Gov't Incompetence Obstacle to Cooperation	No	No	No	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	No	Yes
Informally Associated w/Political Party	MRS				FSLN				
Observed Political Tendency	Left				Left	Left	Right		
Partners w/existing Community Org.	Yes								
Preferred Self-categorization									
"Social Movement"	Informally				Yes				
"NGO"						Yes	Yes		Yes
"Platform/Space for Communication/Coordination"	Yes	Yes	Yes						
"Bridge [from Donors to Communities]"									
Stated Primary Goals									
Policy Impact	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Public Participation in Politics			Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes
Monitoring & Public Awareness	Yes	Yes	?			Yes	Yes		Yes
Social Issues Research/Publication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Poverty Reduction	Yes		Yes		Yes				Yes
Food Security									
Environmental Conservation									Yes
Capacity Building of Civil Society/Other NGOs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		X?
Preventative Health Education					Yes				
Health Services									Yes
Disaster Preparation/Prevention	Origin.								Yes
Policy Impact Methods									
Demonstrations/Marches	Yes	Yes			Yes				
Lobbying/Policy Proposals	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		
Signature Gathering	Yes				Yes				
Election Monitoring									Yes
Education Methods									
Popular Literature Distribution						Yes	Yes		Yes
Legal Representation/Advising						Yes	Yes		
Civil Society Workshops	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Popular (Citizen) Workshops					Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Organizing Methods									
Creation of Community Organizations					Yes				
Network of Promoters					Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Community Organizing					Yes	Yes	Yes		
Citizens Should to Demand Rights From Gov't	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NES	NES

	NGO Networks				Organizing	Human Rights			Democracy
	CC	CODENI	RNDDL	KEPA	MCN	CENIDH	CPDH	AIDH	IPADE
Sustainable Development Methods									
Microloans (NGO Managed)					Yes				
Microloans (Community Managed)									
Infrastructure/Water Systems									
Community Seed Banks									
Community Reforestation									
Education/Training Topics									
Public Participation in Local Policy (CDMs, etc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Women/Children's Rights	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes		
Sustainable Agriculture Techniques									Yes
Forest Management									Yes
Inter-NGO Cooperation									
Part of CC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Past	Yes			Yes
Not Part of CC to Avoid Appearing "Political"									
Not Part of CC due to Differing Political Views					Yes		Yes		
Assist/Receive Assistance From other NGOs	By Definition					Give Legal			
Joint Projects w/other NGOs									
Notably Similar NGOs Exist in Nicaragua						Identical			C. Humboldt
Reported Views on Development - Agreed that:									
NGOs Help where Gov't is Incapable	Yes	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	Yes	NES
Neoliberal Policies Are a Major Challenge to Development	Yes	NES	NES	Yes	Yes	Yes	NES	NES	NES
Reported Obstacles									
Gov't Repression/Restrictions	Yes	NES	NES	N/A	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Donor Volatility	Yes	NES	NES	N/A	Yes	NES	NES	No	NES
Donor Priorities	NES	NES	NES	N/A	NES	No	No	No	NES
Donor Reporting Requirements	NES	NES	NES	N/A	NES	No	No	No	NES
Lack of Funding	NES	NES	NES	N/A	NES	NES	Past	No	NES
Difficulty Organizing Recipient Community	N/A	N/A	NES	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	No	NES
Community Reactions - Interviewed Recipients Felt:									
More Confident	NES	NES	NES	NES	Yes	Yes	Yes	NES	NES
They Learned a Lot	NES	NES	NES	Yes	NES	Yes	Yes	NES	NES
More "Voice" on Gov't Policies	Yes	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES
Benefitted from Materials/Service Provision	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	NES	NES	NES	NES
NGO "Delivered" on Promises	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	NES	NES	NES	NES

Indicator	Sustainable Development						Health	
	C. Humboldt	CIPRES	INPRHU	FEDICAMP	F. Masaya	Asofenix	IXCHEN	TESIS
Basic Information								
Founded	1990	1990	1966	1996	2003	2001	1989	1995
Nicaraguan Origin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nicaraguan Director	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Staff	97	? (>50)	200	19	0	<10	>50	21
Domestic Volunteers	1	1	1		5		200	14+
Int'l Volunteers						Variable		
No. of Member NGOs	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
No. of Offices	6	9 (8 Coop Ctrs.)	6	1	1	1	10	2
Primary Region/Regional Coverage (if known)	Nat'l	Nat'l	Nat'l	Esteli	Masaya	Boaco	Nat'l	Managua & Puerto Cabezas
Circumstances of Meeting & Sources of Information								
Met in Main Office	Yes	Yes	Yes		N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Met in Regional Office		Yes		N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A
Field Visit/Workshop Observation	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Briefly	Yes
Informal Impromptu Meeting								
Met with Director		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Met with Mid-level Administrators/Regional Directors	Yes						Yes	
Met with Field Staff		Yes				Yes		Yes
Met with Volunteers/Promoters/Community Leaders		Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes
Met with Member Representatives	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Met with Recipients	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Briefly	Briefly	Yes
Met with Former Staff								
Spanish Used for Interview(s)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
English Used for Interview(s)						Yes		
Website	Yes	Yes	Constr.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Informational Materials Collected	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes
Funding & Technical Assistance								
Stated they Reject Grants w/Unfavorable Conditions	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES	NES
US Gov't & Subsidiaries (USAID, NED, IRI, etc.)								
US Private (Church, OXFAM, etc)			Yes					
EU/CA Donors (Generally Gov't Funded/Related)			Yes	Yes				Yes
Member/Community Funding							Limited	
Side Business/Service Income							Clinic Fees	

	Sustainable Development						Health	
	C. Humboldt	CIPRES	INPRHU	FEDICAMP	F. Masaya	Asofenix	IXCHEN	TESIS
Domestic Relations								
Integrated Projects w/Gov't Plans &/or Subcontracted	?		Yes			Yes	Limited	
Trains Gov't Agencies	Yes	Shared Advisor	Yes				Yes	Yes
State's Responsibility for Basic Services	NES	Yes	?	NES	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gov't Incompetence Obstacle to Cooperation	NES	Yes	NES	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Informally Associated w/Political Party		FSLN pre-Yes990					founded by FSLN, no longer assoc	
Observed Political Tendency	Left							
Partners w/existing Community Org.								
		Yes		Yes				
Preferred Self-categorization								
"Social Movement"								
"NGO"	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	Yes	Yes	Yes
"Platform/Space for Communication/Coordination"								
"Bridge [from Donors to Communities]"				Yes	Yes			
Stated Primary Goals								
Policy Impact	Yes	Yes					Yes	
Public Participation in Politics			Yes					
Monitoring & Public Awareness	Yes							
Social Issues Research/Publication	Yes		Yes					
Poverty Reduction		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Food Security		Yes	Yes					
Environmental Conservation	Yes							
Capacity Building of Civil Society/Other NGOs	Yes		Yes					
Preventative Health Education							Yes	Yes
Health Services	Yes		Yes				Yes	
Disaster Preparation/Prevention	Yes		Yes					
Policy Impact Methods								
Demonstrations/Marches								
Lobbying/Policy Proposals	Yes							
Signature Gathering								
Election Monitoring			Yes					
Education Methods								
Popular Literature Distribution	?						Yes	Yes
Legal Representation/Advising	Yes			Land Rights			Yes	
Civil Society Workshops	Yes		Yes					
Popular (Citizen) Workshops	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Organizing Methods								
Creation of Community Organizations		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		
Network of Promoters	?		Yes				Yes	Yes
Community Organizing		Yes			Yes			

Appendix B: NGO Profiles and Contacts

AIDH

Asociación Integral para los Derechos Humanos

Type: Spontaneous short interview at civil society workshop

Date: 8/20/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Background of Meeting:

Introduced by member of CC at civil society workshop, talked briefly.

Overview of NGO

AIDH has almost identical goals and methods as CPDH and CENIDH, but is still in its infancy. It has no paid staff and all work is conducted from private law offices or homes but is actively seeking funding to institutionalize. Currently it is a group of lawyers working pro-bono on human rights cases. Iris said she thought CENIDH and CPDH were (politically) "biased", so there was a need for a new organization.

Asofenix

Type: Field visit

Location: Managua/San Zapote

Date: 8/20/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Website: <http://asofenix.org/>

Background of Meeting:

Field visit to community where Asofenix works on infrastructure projects.

CENIDH

(Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos – **Nicaraguan Center of Human Rights**)

Meeting with Administration

Type: Main office, personal interview

Date: 7/09/09

Website: www.cenidh.org

Address: From the Texaco/Budget Car Rentals in the Montoya neighborhood, 1 ½ blocks to the south, Managua, Nicaragua

Phone: +505 2266-8940 , +505 2222-2563, +505 2268-2116, +505 2266-6262

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Background on meeting: I read of their organization on Nica Net’s website (a solidarity group in the US working for Nicaragua). I scheduled a meeting via email and we met in CENIDH’s main office in Managua.

Promoter Workshop Observation

Type: Field visit, workshop observation

Location: Pizza Roma restaurant in León.

Date: 8/12/09

Main contacts (CENIDH): Information removed for anonymity.

Promoters: Information removed for anonymity.

Overview of NGO

CENIDH, as a human rights organization, works (as stated by the administrator): “*contribuir de la disminución de la impunidad en Nicaragua*” or “**to contribute to the decrease of [legal] impunity [of human rights violators in Nicaragua]**” (words in brackets are implied, but were not explicitly stated). Their long-term goal is to greatly reduce the abuses of human rights in Nicaragua, particularly by the government. They also hope to **educate the populace so that they can properly demand their rights from the government** (more on the workshops below). They cite the fact that most citizens do not know their own rights – they do not realize that they can make a demand from the government.

Their **strategic objective:** “To defend and promote, in an integral manner, with a focus on gender and children, the real and effective Human Rights recognized in the Political Constitution of the country and the international agreements of Human Rights signed and ratified by Nicaragua.”

They were founded in 1990 by 15 Nicaraguans and one Guatemalan. They are apolitical/nonpartisan (not to say they do not challenge the government, regardless of party in power, when there is a human rights abuse) and nonreligious and are legally incorporated as a NGO by the Nicaraguan government. They have 40 paid staff in four offices: Managua (main), Estelí, Matagalpa, and Chontales. The core of

these staff are the lawyers, most of whom are young and full of energy. They also employ reporters/journalists and, of course, administrative staff.

Donors: They made a special note of the fact that the US government has *never* given any funds to their organization (not surprising). They receive the **bulk of their funding from European governments and foundations**. They mentioned in particular the governments of Switzerland and Germany.

Methods

- **Provides free legal counsel and representation to individual victims of human rights violations** (for example: people unjustly detained, people who have not received their proper compensation from employers, battered women, children, etc). The lawyers who work for CENIDH also will, as needed, accompany the victims to court – **they do not just give advice, but actually act on it.**
- **Acts as an immediate, imposing (to the violators) presence and investigate larger-scale human rights abuses – “conflicts” - throughout the country**, not only documenting them, but also publicizing them, as a means to put pressure on the government, and working with the victims to demand their rights.
- **Educates and communicates with Nicaraguans to mobilize them to know, understand, and defend their constitutional rights.** This is done through workshops, held all over the country. This widespread reach is assisted by their ***red de promotores populares “Padre César Jerez”*** (literally “network of popular promoters named after Padre César Jerez”) - of which more detail is given below - who help organize and host the workshops
- **Promotes the self-defense of human rights through the *red de promotores populares*.that act as local representatives of CENIDH** that take on cases in their community and help with the workshops. They attempt to resolve the human rights cases they are brought, but when it exceeds their capacity, they act as a liaison to send the case to the local headquarters of CENIDH where their professional, paid lawyers take on the case. The local people in the ***red de promotores*** are composed of a around **1200 knowledgeable (some college educated, but all knowledgeable about the law and human rights) volunteers in 87 parts of the country**, some who are individuals and others who are part of small community groups or NGOs themselves.
- Forms local and international alliances **with like-minded human rights groups.**
- **Create informative newsletters, reports, web posts, etc, about the situation of human rights in Nicaragua.** Their culminating piece, an annual report on the status of human rights in Nicaragua is a publication nearly 200 pages long. (I have a copy of their 2008 report, and it is also available on their website.)

Centro Humboldt

Main Office Interview

Type: Main office, interview.

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Phones (shared): (505) 2249-8922 and (505) 2250-6454

Main office address:

Barrio Costa Rica, semáforos El Colonial 2c. al oeste, 2c. al norte
Ap. Postal 768, Managua, Nicaragua

(In the Costa Rica neighborhood, from the stoplight of the El Colonial area, 2 blocks west, 2 blocks north; PO Box 768)

Website: www.humboldt.org.ni

Journalist Training Observation

Date: 8/18/09

Type: Field Visit, training observation

Location: ESKIMO Restaurant, Managua.

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Journalist contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Background on Meeting: This was a breakfast/lecture to help local journalists understand current environmental and economic issues, with a focus on Nicaragua-European Union relations. It was cosponsored by KEPA.

Overview of NGO:

NGO Category: Environmental protection with an emphasis on the impact on communities (particularly women).

Background on NGO: They were founded in 1990, like practically every major NGO here, by Nicaraguans, and consist of a total of 97 paid staff in six offices, five in Nicaragua and one satellite office in El Salvador. The main office is in Managua.

Mission: (translated) "To be an organization that promotes territorial and environmentally sustainable development with belligerence, equity, and social participation."

Vision: (translated) "The promotion of Territorial Development and Environmental Management"

Methods

In short, they said that the overall method used by Centro Humboldt (CH) is to *acompañar* (**accompany**) **the people**, both of communities and of the government, **providing the technical expertise** – and **with the communities, financial resources** – to accomplish their goal of a more **sustainable future for Nicaragua**. They mentioned repeatedly that CH cannot march up to the government and demand a change of environmental policy – it must be the affected people. Thus CH’s role is **organize the people** and **educate** them about their **rights and responsibilities** and then **assist** them to demand change from the government. They appear to **work with the government rather than trying to continually circumvent it** – a lamentable trait of many other NGOs.

An **example case** would be illustrative: Recently a plastic manufacturing company was found to be polluting a waterway – I forgot the name – and **representatives from the affected communities came to CH to seek assistance**. CH then gave them **the legal advice of their rights in the specific case** as well as set out to do **scientific investigations** of the pollution, **producing studies** that can be used by the community when demanding action from the government.

More specifically, their work is broken into **three main parts**: Sustainability, Community Development, and Local Development. I’m a bit confused since this breakdown that they verbally gave me differs somewhat from the “lines of work” described in their brochure, but I think that regardless of exact names, this is what they are doing. I will break down each below.

I. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

a. *Incidencia* (~“Impact”)

i. Education

1. Teach the people about their rights and responsibilities

a. Through **workshops, forums, meetings, and publications**

ii. Monitoring/Publicizing

1. Investigate, report, and publicize environmental concerns throughout the country

a. Act as a community resources

i. They both seek out concerns on their own as well as **respond to countless requests from communities and individuals.**

b. They publish a number of their own newsletters on a variety of concerns and themes. These are archived on the website

c. They also work through the **press** to publish articles and speak on television/radio about environmental concerns

2. Capacity building/advising

a. They hold **workshops** for **press** and **government officials** so that they are more informed about the issues – climate change etc.

b. They also act as **advisors** to the press and the government on key issues

iii. Law/Politics

1. Propose new laws and amendments

a. Linked to their monitoring/publicizing, CH works to pass new legislation by responding to community complaints.

- i. They go to the affected communities and help provide legal advice and collect signatures for new law proposals.
- ii. They then accompany community members taking the proposals to the government, or use their lobbyists.

II. TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

a. Community Development – **Bosawas Biosphere Reserve**

- i. Overall goal: Protect the reserve from further damage while enhancing the rights of the indigenous residents over their own land. There is a large pamphlet, in Spanish, with all the exact accomplishments of the project.
- ii. Project started in 1991
- iii. The reserve is mainly populated Miskito and Mayana indigenous peoples, with about 20,000 mestizos in one part. (not sure how many indigenous, but I assumed more or equal)
 1. The native population had no rights over their historical land
- iv. CH helped **organize the communities** and provide the **legal advice** needed to help the natives **demand**, and gain, a level of **autonomy** and **control** over their **land** from the **government**
- v. CH also **professionalized teachers** and **trained them in environmental conservation**. Before, the teachers in the indigenous communities were around 6th grade level, now they have completed secondary school. The **environmental education is integrated into the curriculum for the students so that the next generation is more aware of the importance of conservation**.
- vi. CH taught the communities about **sustainable agriculture**
 1. Their workshops were so effective that the **number of fires set for slash-burn agriculture** (data gathered from satellites) **in the reserve annually went from 700-900 to 0**.
 2. They also taught the communities to grow cacao and coffee for selling instead of the non-native crops that were not growing as well and destroying local ecosystems.

b. Local Development

- i. Risk Management (against natural disasters)
 1. Started in 1998 after Hurricane Mitch's wholesale devastation of Nicaragua
 2. **Working with the local government and communities**
 - a. Develop a *plan de respuestas*, which I think would translate best to **Emergency Plan**, which would be comprised of:
 - i. **Maps** of communities, with "safe" and "dangerous" zones located for each kind of disaster
 - ii. **Evacuation plan**
 - iii. I'm not sure it was explicitly mentioned, but I'm pretty sure this plan involved lots of working with the community and education.
 3. Work with the *Sistema Nacional de Prevencion de Desastres*, SINAPRED (National Disaster Prevention System), a government agency, to organize communities and prepare for natural disasters.

- i. They work with 46 of the most poor and at-risk communities around the country to develop the aforementioned plans and disaster preparedness.
 4. Part of *Mesa nacional de gestión de riesgo* or National Risk Management Table.
 - a. As far as I can remember, this is a civil-society and government “space” (figurative sense) for discussion and working together against national disasters.
 5. **Early Warning System** (*Systema de Alerta Temprana, SAT*)
 - a. In Bosawas, this system includes community radios and flood watch stations along the river that can be used to alert the community when the river is getting to high.
 - b. In the northern part of the country, this system is set up similarly (I think) but is looking for forest fires.
 6. *Escuela segura*, “Safe schools” project
 - a. Goal: **education of youth, through schools, to understand and thus minimize the damage of natural disasters.**
 - b. Methods
 - i. Develop a teachers curriculum guide
 - ii. Train teachers through workshops
 - iii. Teachers set aside one day to just teach this material
- ii. Wells
 1. Rather typical progressive infrastructure development model, started in 2000.
 - a. Build well using CH funds
 - b. Create community group that maintains the well, using a community fund that is paid for by the minor fees charged to the community members for its use.
 - i. One of the members of the group is a trained as a technician and can fix most things that go wrong.
 - ii. Another member is trained in sanitation, hygiene, etc, and helps teach the rest of the community.
 - iii. This leadership group will also ration water in the dry season so that the well doesn’t get used up too quickly.
 - c. Educate the people in the laws about water and their rights to it.
 - d. 80 built so far
 - e. Funded by Change for Children

CIPRES

Meeting with Administration

Date: 7/15/09

Type: Main office, interview.

Location: CIPRES main office, Managua

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Phone: (505) 2278-7068

Meeting with Cooperative/Recipients

Date: 8/11/09

Type: Field visit to Cooperative COMAXZA

Location: Pueblo Nuevo

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Phones (shared): (505) 2719-2445

Main office address:

Rotunda Rubén Darío, 100 mts. Abajo

Managua, Nicaragua

(From the Rubén Darío roundabout, 100 meters west)

Website: <http://www.cipres.org/>

CODENI

Main Office Interview

Date: 8/05/09

Type: Main office, interview.

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Phone: (505) 2278-7068

Background on Meeting

Met in main office to discuss the history of CODENI and how it has worked with its member NGOs and the CC.

Monthly NGO Member Meeting

Date: 8/06/09

Type: Main office, observation of meeting

NGO: CESESMA

(Centro de Servicio Educativa en Salud y Medio Ambiente, Center for Education in Health and the Environment)

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

NGO: INPRHU

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

See contacts in INPRHU section

NGO: IPADE

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

See contacts in IPADE section.

NGO: CAPRI

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Website: <http://www.caprinicaragua.org/>

NGO: CECIM

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Website: <http://www.cecim-ni.org/>

Main Email: codeni@codeni.org.ni

Phones (office, shared): (505)266-1503, (505)268-1008

Main office address:

Del Canal 2 de T.V. 1c al norte, 2 1/2 c al oeste, Bolonia Casa No. 29. Código Postal: PA-104.

Website: www.codeni.org.ni

Background on Meeting

We met in the main office to observe a monthly planning meeting of around a dozen NGO members of CODENI. They were discussing the logistics for their next political issue campaign. See section D, "Understanding Inter-NGO Advocacy Cooperation." I was only able to have short discussions with the NGO members present afterwards.

Coordinadora Civil (CC)

Main Office Interview

Date: 7/20/09

Type: Main office, personal interview

Website: <http://www.ccer.org.ni/>

Address: Banpro Altamira 10 varas abajo, Casa 98, Managua, Nicaragua
(Banpro Bank in Altamira, 10 meters west, House 98)

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Phone: (505) 2278-1038, (505) 2278-5459

Observation of National Assembly of Member NGOs

Type: "Field" visit - observation

Location: IPADE Centro de Capacitación, Carreterra Masaya Km 9.5, Managua

Attendees: Nearly 600 persons, representing the majority of the Coordinador Civil network of civil society organizations.

Date: 8/8/09

Main contacts

NGO/CSO: Comunidad Indígena de Nindiriz y Dirianes (Indigenous community of Nindiriz and Dirianes)

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

NGO/CSO: Chinandega Network of CC

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

Notes: VERY good subject! Young, full of energy – he worked to organize 120 students to collect 44,000 signatures against water privatization in just four days. Also may have worked with IPADE for election monitoring.

NGO/CSO: Chinandega Network of CC

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity.

NGO/CSO: RECACH (*Red de Comunicadores Ambientalista de Chinandega* – Chinandega Network of Environmentalists) & Chinandega Network of CC

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

NGO/CSO: Comisión Ambiental (Environmental Commission)

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

NGO/CSO: Comisión Ambiental (Environmental Commission)

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Notes: Very willing to help, also took **VIDEO footage of national assembly.**

NGO/CSO: Matagalpa Network of CC?

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Notes: Very willing to help, also has video footage of Hurrican Mitch and Felix.

Interview with Former Administrator of the Coordinadora Civil

Date: 8/20/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Other contacts:

Note: She is a GREAT resource, she has been extremely receptive and set up the meeting with Ricardo for me. She was VERY willing to help with anything we needed.

Information removed for anonymity

He is NOT part of the Coordinadora, but was very friendly and explained a bit more about the political situation in Nicaragua and MRS' efforts to open the bipartisan system to a more pluralist party system.

Information removed for anonymity

Interview with Advisor

Date: 8/31/09

Location: Managua

Note: we also met on 7/08/09 but this was a more general interview in which we discussed Nicaragua's political, economic, and NGO situation.

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Background of Interview:

He would make an **excellent film subject** – he is an expert and very involved in Nicaraguan civil society issues.

Overview of NGO:

IMPORTANT NOTE: The Coordinadora Civil IS NOT AN “NGO” nor are they legally recognized as an NGO in Nicaragua. They specifically emphasize this point in their publications. They are instead a “national citizen’s platform of social movements, territorial networks, thematic networks, unions, federations, and individuals.” More simply, they refer to themselves as a **social movement or “platform”**. Their organization IS legal however, due to multiple laws that promote citizen participation and organization – particularly the *Ley de Participacion Ciudadana* (Law of Citizen Participation).

In some broader definitions, they would be considered an “NGO” simply by the literal fact that they are not part of the government. However, their role is *VERY* atypical for NGOs that I have seen or heard of, so it is important to draw this distinction. **For simplicity’s sake however, I will refer to them as an NGO in this document, but this should be seen by the reader to be merely a convenient notation.**

Background of NGO:

Foundation: Founded in 1998 after the disaster wrought by Hurricane Mitch on Nicaragua to **coordinate the reconstruction efforts of civil society and the government and move them towards a more sustainable long-term development strategy** that would prevent future disasters from causing as much damage. This transformed eventually from simply guiding the reconstruction effort to a long-term battle to shape the development strategy of the nation.

Locality: The CC is, has been, and will be for the foreseeable future Nicaraguan through and through.

Notoriety: The CC is regularly seen on television and is widely known. Just to put their work in perspective, their marches (more details on this later) draw 20,000-60,000 people from all over Nicaragua (pop 5.8 million). **That’s up to 1% of the population of Nicaragua that will actively rally for the causes of CC and its network!**

Size: **The CC itself has only EIGHT staff.** *They are the antithesis of bloated bureaucracy.* They work out of a converted house (like most local NGOs here actually) and are able to **leverage their enormous network** of civil society organizations and **volunteers** to accomplish feats of organization like the 30,000 person marches mentioned above.

Primary Donors: I have a more extensive list in one of their publications, but their most substantial, consistent donors have been (and I don’t know the acronyms): CODA International, DIAKONIA, FORUM SYD, IBIS DINMARCA, INTERMON OXFAM, IRISH AID, KEPA FINLANDIA, MS AMERICA CENTRAL, and OXFAM GB.

Comment: I was a **bit curious** at the fact that two of their lesser donors are the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. This piqued my interest because the CC has been campaigning quite harshly against the International Monetary Fund, but strangely not the World Bank or Inter-American Development Bank. Are they really less restrictive in their loans

to Nicaragua and less socially regressive in their economic policies? In any case, I am not too suspicious that this has strongly tweaked their interests, since they still rail quite hard for social programs that the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank would probably prefer privatized and/or NGOized.

Related NGOs: CC is actually a network of 600 (yes, six hundred) NGOs and civil society organizations working in Nicaragua. A partial list is on their website I'm pretty sure.

There are a few other NGO networks like CC, but as far as I knew previously and they told me, they are all more specific, smaller regional scale or more narrow thematic focus (ie network of women's rights NGOs). In fact, most all of these networks are PART of CC's network! I plan to look into these as well.

Of NGOs that I have interviewed, **Centro Humboldt** and **CENIDH** both seem to have a similar mode of operation, working to connect the people to their government. Indeed, **both actually cooperate very actively with CC and work on a number of joint campaigns.** However, both Centro Humboldt and CENIDH are a bit more focused thematically, and have more specific notions and modes of operation. CENIDH also, clearly, works for human rights, and they also have workshops for citizens to know their rights, as does Centro Humboldt. However, both also spend a large amount of time with specific cases of *denuncias*, or violations brought by citizens. **CC is at a more macro-level**, looking at overall strategies of the government and civil society as a whole. Their workshops all sound somewhat similar in terms of empowering citizens to know their rights, but CC's sound a bit more general and focused on current events and politics. However, I need to see each workshop in action.

Mission: "To articulate strengths and facilitate the development of capacity to make a political impact in the construction of a Nicaragua that is democratic, equitable, supportive, human, developed, inclusive, and sustainable." (Nearly exact translation.)

Another tagline they have on many of the publications: "*Construyendo Ciudadanía para Incidir en Políticas Públicas*" or, loosely translated, "**Empowering Citizenry to Impact Public Politics.**"

Overview: In order to truly shape and productively direct the development of Nicaragua, CC saw a need for a focused, combined approach from civil society and government. Thus CC's work in a few words is to educate the public of current issues and to gather the opinion support of the people, through civil society member organizations, to back *propuestas* (proposals) that are then presented to the government to shape development policy. **They act as a crucial bridge between the massive number of civil society organizations and the government to shape development strategies.**

I was very impressed to hear the administrator say that they are NOT the owners of the movement – the movement is composed of the *people* that are organized through them.

They stressed a few key overarching goals and strategies to me:

Empowering and educating the citizen: The administrator emphasized that CC aims to fight against political passivity, apathy, and dependency in citizens so that they will actively challenge the government to uphold their own constitutional rights.

Constitutional rights: CC works essentially to hold the government accountable to its own constitution and is very focused on the constitutional rights of the people.

Politics: By virtue of the above fact, and their own mission, they do not engage in partisan politics, but rather **recognize the right for ALL citizens, regardless of party, to have their constitutional rights upheld.**

Education and Health: The administrator essentially said that the bulk of their work is to **strengthen the government's provision of health and education services** through changes in budgeting and programs. He also mentioned infrastructure, but education and health seemed like the #1 priorities.

Main focus areas: Economy and Governability*. They aim to improve the **distribution** of government resources in the economy, as well as explore overarching development strategies that will lead to **equitable economic growth** – growth that doesn't just benefit the rich. In terms of governability, they aim to improve **transparency, respect of the constitutional and human rights** of citizens, and the **involvement and IMPACT** of citizens on the government's policies.

*I'm not sure whether it is clear from the word what this means – my impression of the definition he intended was something like this:

Pecaut identifies two basic elements of governability today: **the ability of governments to respond efficiently and legitimately to the interests of the majority;** and the fact that societies have **self-organizing capabilities** that **further their cohesion.**

Long Term Vision: When asked what would happen in the long, long term and what he saw as the future for his country in terms of civil society – ie: **will Nicaragua really continue to need/should Nicaragua have 600+ NGOs forever?** He said no, currently the NGOs are filling a void created by neoliberalism and are receiving a large amount of international funding because the current government is seen as corrupt. Thus, **as the governability is improved and more aid is channeled through the government (and less aid is needed), NGOs will naturally begin to disappear, just as they naturally sprouted in 1990 with the change to the neoliberal system.** To qualify that statement, to some extent, civil society is an essential component of a nation and will remain, thus it is only the service provision NGOs will become less needed. This was the answer I was expecting, but I was looking to see if he had another take on it. What this shows is a **genuine interest** in the **improvement of the state and the long-term reduction in NGOs providing essential services.**

Methods:

1. **CITIZEN MOBILIZATION** - To achieve **citizen participation** in politics
 - a. **Education:** Through their massive network of 600 organizations, they organize workshops, meetings, and other local events, based on **local interests. They reach 7,000-10,000 people annually with these workshops.**
 - i. *Subject Matter:* These workshops are tailored by local network organizations, but all aim to encourage citizen participation, awareness of current political issues (such as corruption or cuts of social services spending). They are also based on the current *propuesta* (proposal) for development that the civil society network, facilitated by CC, has agreed upon.

-
- i. Within these 600 are a smaller number (probably close to 20, but that's just a guess) of regional and thematic sub-networks.
 - 1. These regional and thematic sub-networks are bolstered by a network of regional **volunteer liasons**, who work to direct the member organizations and sub-networks in each region.
 - a. These **sub-networks** then coordinate with all the civil society groups working in their region or within their thematic focus to put on workshops, organize marches, and more.
 - i. These individual civil society groups then each can coordinate with the citizens involved. **These citizens can then put in their input and transmit their voices back up the chain provided by CC that otherwise would be lost.**
 - 1. **The result is a decentralized, localized structure** that allows a team of 8 staff to coordinate massive national efforts.

CPDH

Centro Permanente de Derechos Humanos

Dates: 7/21/09 (office meeting with director), 7/22/09 (field visit)

Website: <http://www.cpdh.org.ni/>

Main Office Address: Estatua de Montoya 2 cuadras al norte
Managua., Nicaragua

Phone: (505) 2266-1544, 2266-2266, 2222-3800

Email: info_cpdh@ideay.net.ni

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Meeting Circumstances: First meeting in office with administration, then separately with volunteer/promoter since he was coincidentally also there, next in field (in a 4x4) in Jocote Dulce investigating a reported human rights abuse with others from CPDH.

Background of NGO: Human rights organization, founded in 1977, critical of Somoza dictatorship abuses. Changed to be very critical of Sandinista war abuses during 1980s, though simultaneously primarily funded by the United States (the proxy war aggressor fighting against the Sandinistas). Has six regional offices, with headquarters in Managua.

Primary Donors: United States (USAID) was practically sole significant donor from 1979-1990. Since 1990 funding has diversified, with a significant amount coming from Scandinavian sources. However, a quick peek at their project summary from 2008 showed that virtually all their projects were funded by US government sources – primarily USAID, with the National Republican Institute – itself funded by the US government – funding one project. When questioned, they claimed that they still were receiving a large amount of funds from other, non-US sources.

COMPARISON WITH CENIDH: CENIDH receives zero, or almost zero, funding from the United States government. Does this imply some kind of **political decision**? Does CPDH have a **conflict of interest**? (or vice versa with CENIDH?)

Related NGOs: CENIDH – works almost identically but almost completely independently. It seems to be a useful relationship since they **represent two different political leanings** – CPDH accuses CENIDH of leaning left and vice versa. There are a few other human rights NGOs I haven't met with, including PDDH, but I haven't been able to find good contact information. **These accused political biases are well known in Nicaragua.** I would contend that CENIDH and CPDH are in a sort of subtle **competition in the media**, both attempting to take high profile cases that will boost their image. Their donors do seem quite distinct, but the certain overlap they must have would undoubtedly be a source of quiet **competition for funds.**

Objectives: (translated) Make an impact in the enjoyment of human rights through the reception of condemnations, legal advice, training, and publicity in the entire country and at an international level, to contribute to the protection and defense of the same rights.

Mission: (translated) To contribute to the guarantee of the respect of human rights in Nicaragua, through the investigation, monitoring, and accompaniment of the condemnations in legislation and public politics related with universal human rights and the training of the same theme, collaborating in the negotiated solution of conflicts as an organization of recognized credibility and ample experience.

Vision: (translated) To be the Human Rights Organization at the service of Nicaraguans with greater credibility, efficiency, and impact in the success of peaceful coexistence, the mutual respect of rights and liberties inherent to human dignity; that these are protected by the formulation and application of just laws and public policies that guarantee equal opportunities, that bring about the eradication of the impunity of crimes, and the overcoming of poverty for the present and future generations.

Methods: CPDH, like CENIDH, has a broad definition of human rights. They include “second and third generation/degree human rights.” They define second degree rights as the right to social security, to organize, to an adequate standard of living, to education and third degree rights as the right to development, peace, humanitarian assistance, clean environment, quality life, etc. Thus their focus is not just on “first degree rights” most understood as the right to Life, Liberty, and Justice (ie no torture, no slavery, due process) etc.

This must be qualified with the fact that, **while CPDH recognizes these larger societal rights, they do seem to spend the bulk of their time and resources on “first degree rights” in individual cases of things like sexual, domestic, police, and medical abuse.** An informal survey of their training materials for promoters, their recent publicity board in their office, as well as my own sightings in the news substantiates this.

COMPARISON WITH CENIDH: This is very similar – both seem to find themselves more able to secure funding and more trusted as a resource by the population if they address individual cases.

Both CENIDH and CPDH are often seen (it is often hard to tell the difference – they also both are about equally known) on the TV news denouncing some medical malpractice or awful case of domestic violence. This is thus what they are known for - their other actions, such as education about citizen participation in politics, seem to receive little to no press. Is this because they are smaller components of their work? Most likely yes, but I don’t have the budget information to say that exactly.

Methods

CPDH has three fundamental parts:

1. **PROMOTION** - Educating citizens of their rights and connecting them to resources to defend them.
 - a. **Volunteer promoter network**
 - i. Composed of 600 community volunteers. These are managed in a **pyramidal hierarchy**:
 1. CPDH Staff – provide legal advice, accompaniment to courts, and other assistance (psychological, forensic etc)

- a. Volunteer promoter “coordinators” that coordinate distinct regions/districts and help **act as intermediaries between the promoters and CPDH**. The coordinator level is comprised of more experienced promoters.
 - i. Promoters – trained by CPDH directly, they in turn **train community leaders**, and act as intermediaries between community leaders and coordinators/CPDH
 1. Community leaders – trained in human rights issues by promoters and interact directly with their community in human rights issues (note that while they are the closest to the community, the promoters, coordinators, and CPDH all also interact with the community, just not as frequently).
 - ii. I met with all levels, though in my case the community leader was also the promoter.
 - iii. Many or most are not educated, and many are already leaders in their communities
- b. **Investigating condemnations:** They use their connections in the community to investigate human rights abuses and connect them to the resources of CPDH.
 - i. **EXAMPLE:** I went with a team investigating a case in Jocote Dulce of sexual abuse where the violator had been put in jail by the police and then released without the appropriate charges. The promoter coordinator helped arrange for a lawyer and psychologist from CPDH to come out to meet with the community promoter and meet the family where the abuse happened. They talked with the family and other individuals to try to determine exactly what was happening – it appeared to be more complex than the initial report.
 1. The case began as the community promoter/leader began to hear about the case through neighbors and then met with the family themselves.
 - a. She then asked for help from the promoter coordinator.
 - i. He got help from CPDH, which will help resolve the case with the police, advocating for the family against the police negligence.
- c. **Education:** The promoter network serves both as a reporting of condemnations mechanism as well as an education mechanism. They also are able to organize workshops within the communities through the network and train leaders who then can teach their community members.
 - i. **Education topics:** Women’s rights, children’s rights, democracy (**citizen participation in public policies** – voting, organizing, etc.), etc.
 1. **EXAMPLE:** I was talking to the community leader in Jocote Dulce, who said that the workshop led by CPDH staff was essential for them to learn that there existed a local government agency – the CDM, or Municipal Development Committee that could be called upon to **demand road improvements** for the main road leading to their community. Before they thought there was nothing they could do. With the help of CPDH, they have organized and are in the process with CDM. It’s unsure how likely it is to happen, but they are hopeful.

2. DEFENSE/IMPACT

- a. Observation and Publicity: They **monitor** government and other national activities and **increase publicity about human rights abuses**.
 - i. EXAMPLE: A lot of their recent work has been against government limits of free speech, access to public records, and electoral fraud.
- b. Government proposals: **They make proposals to the government about human rights issues**. I'm not totally sure what one of these looks like – Marcos only mentioned it briefly.
- c. Make **public forums** between locals and municipal government to address concerns. Again not sure what this looks like exactly.

FEDICAMP

Date: 7/10/09

Type: Interview/Field Visit

Website: www.fedicamp.org

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Background on meeting: Contacted administrator via email and we met in the city of Ocotal, from which we went to the villages/tiny towns of La Providencia and Riito (and possibly another but I wasn't sure if it was distinct). We visited multiple sites where FEDICAMP has worked as well as other NGOs and some community associations. The interview was thus done very informally in the field as we walked and drove.

FEDICAMP at a glance:

Name is short for *Federación Integral para el Desarrollo de los Campesinos y Campesinas*, which translates to Federation for the Full Development of Peasant Men and Women of Nicaragua. **Founded** in 2002 officially by 3 people (not sure – it appears from my later notes that it might have been founded by 15), though the first joint work began in 1996. **It formed out of a collection of 11 community level associations that had existed since 1990**. They have **19 paid staff (ALL Nicaraguan) in one main office in Estelí**. The 11 communities are scattered around the northern region of Nicaragua, near Estelí, in the *Nueva Segovias*.

Important note: FEDICAMP is a collection of **independent associations**. It is NOT a typical centralized NGO. The associations are comprised of community members, and were incorporated long before FEDICAMP was created. FEDICAMP's role therefore is, as described by the administrator, a **"bridge"** for both donors and technical/educational expertise. It facilitates the sharing of knowledge between the associations through meetings **four times a year with all the representatives of the associations**. Due to this unique relationship, I will describe both what FEDICAMP does and what the associations do.

Background of the associations: I do not know about all of them, but the Association Roncalli, that I visited extensively on this field trip, was originally organized by an NGO in 1990 called *Instituto de Acción Social Juan XXXIII* (Juan the 23rd Institute of Social Action).

Goals: From their website, they are “dedicated to sustainable food production, maintaining biodiversity and creating social progress.” In more detail, their goals are to:

1. Stimulate commercialization of organic food production in the various levels of the market
2. Contribute to the development of small and medium sized businesses to benefit populations of limited resources
3. Offer legal advice to support land ownership
4. Stimulate support programs for children and teens
5. Stimulate the construction and autonomous construction of housing with priority given to women
6. Strengthen and develop community health programs

Methods:

To achieve their material goals, they “provide water collections systems, fuel efficient stoves, solar energy panels, natural horticulture methods and supplies, and the re-forestation of clear cut regions.” That is from their website. But talking with the staff and the *campesinos* (peasants), there is a lot more to FEDICAMP.

1. Infrastructure: They provide the technical expertise and supplies while the community supplies the labor for the infrastructure projects mentioned above.

2. Workshops: In cooperation with the heads of the local associations, FEDICAMP sends an expert (either staff or volunteer) to host a workshop on a multitude of issues. Below is a list (probably incomplete) list provided by one of the *campesinas* who is the *prometora* (literally “promoter”, but I think it translates better as “coordinator” – there is another *prometor* – a man – as well) of the association “Roncalli” of the *pueblo* called Riito. *La asociación Roncalli* is one of the 11 associations that make up FEDICAMP. Maria told me that, in Riito, approximately 18 women regularly come the workshops, as well as one man. For reference, the community has probably 230 females (this is including children), and she said there were probably 100 or so women. When I asked her why only 18/100 or so women came, she said that some did not have the time or the money to do some of the projects, like the *huertos* described below. I did not, unfortunately, ask why these same women did not come to the more general meetings like women’s rights. However, she did say that it wasn’t as bad as it sounded since between those 18 women, **most of the community would probably hear about the lessons learned through the dissemination to sisters, brothers, children, mothers, friends, etc.**

It should be noted that these women I met who were highly involved in the associations seemed very proud of their work.

- **Organic/Natural agriculture** – including composting, natural pesticides, *huertos*, and more. (*Huertos* are a kind of simple planter pot made of a tire filled with soil with something closing the bottom to retain water. These are used to grow extra, healthy crops such as tomatoes, herbs, peppers, etc, with less water.)
- **Women/Children’s Rights** – I got the impression that this was a big part, but did not hear any special details about their specific approach. Talking with Maria, she said that change is slow, and that the older men in the community probably aren’t going to change anytime

soon, but the effects are greatest with her children and the women. **She seemed confident that the next generation would be significantly improved by the education provided by the workshops.**

- **Environmental Conservation:** these workshops aim to improve the community's understanding of why there is such a need to protect and conserve Nicaragua's natural resources. **It is through these workshops that they got the various communities they work with to, in total, plant around 1,200,000 trees in clear-cut regions!**
- **Health:** I'm not sure exactly what health issues are stressed, but at the very least I know they have educated the communities about the importance of sanitation and the harmful effects of chemicals.

3. Community-Association level Micro-credit/finance: This was a very interesting component of FEDICAMP. Talking with one of the *campesina* directors of FEDICAMP (not paid – she is part of one of the Roncalli association and is a representative of sorts to FEDICAMP), whose name I unfortunately forgot to write down, as well as Elvin, I got an interesting picture.

Background: The associations have been, at a community level, issuing micro-loans to their own communities since 1990 (their inception). The initial fund seems to be provided by an outside NGO, which then becomes hands-off after some short period of time. In this case, with the association Roncalli, **the initial fund was \$2000 donated by the NGO Instituto de Accion Social Juan XXIII.** The fund was **self-sustaining** at that level for some time with an **18% interest rate (MUCH lower than the often near 50% that they told me some banks and other organizations charge campesinos).** This interest contributed to a **community fund.** Recently another NGO "injected" the fund with more money, but this was not to save it from collapse, but rather just to increase the level of lending available for the community.

So far all of the people who have received loans have **been able to pay back in full.** A **unique aspect of the community-level system** is that they have a **community credit committee** that decides on loans. The committee thus **knows the recipient** and can best judge his/her ability to pay the loan back.

With the **community fund** the communities have been able to **purchase a building for community workshops in town**, called a *Centro de capacitación* (Capacity Building Center) as well as a **discount pharmacy.** The pharmacy is also **self-sustaining** through a moderate profit taken on the drugs (I think she said 10-20% but I'm not positive). The community center is a large room with extra space in the back for cooking classes (sounds silly, but the director told me that it teaches the women how to cook and sell products as vendors, which apparently some don't know how to do) and other resources for the community. They also **rent the space** for local events to gain more money. The community center, pharmacy, and office for the association are all next to each other in town, just a five minute car ride or 20 minute walk from the community of Riito.

Fundación Masaya Contra La Pobreza

(The Masaya Foundation Against Poverty)

Type:

Date: 7/08/09

Location: Small rural community very close to Masaya

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Background: We met in Masaya and went out into the *campo* (countryside) where his NGO works via car. This "interview" was more of an extended discussion during the car ride and for a few minutes in the Esso gas station where we met. **I also talked, briefly, with the leaders (both women) of the Micro-businesses (bakery and farm).**

Overview of NGO

Basic information about NGO:

Founded in 2003, with full legal status granted from the Nicaraguan government in 2004, the FMCP (as I will refer to the NGO) consists, almost completely, of just a family, all of whom are **not paid anything**. The name signifies not a foundation against poverty *in* Masaya, but rather a foundation *from* Masaya fighting poverty everywhere (FMCP has legal authority to work in the whole country, though it hasn't yet used that authority). Their "headquarters" is their house. They have no political or religious affiliations.

The administrator told me that he started the NGO because he is from a rural part of Masaya himself, and grew up as a *campesino* but somehow, with multiple full scholarships, was able to achieve three undergraduate degrees, in Economics, Business, and Law. He then went on to study for his MBA in Mexico, specializing in Rural Development. Thus, after multiple years working as the National Director of Commercialization of Oil for the national company, PetroNic, as well as some (unknown) amount of time as a *guerrillero* fighting for the FSLN (National Sandanista Liberation Front, or "Sandanistas") in the 80s, he decided to come back to the *campo* and devote all his efforts to helping them. It should be noted that he mentioned he had been doing small projects independently during his years with PetroNic.

Methods

Microbusinesses for women (such as a plot of land they share the profits of and a newly built oven where they can bake bread to sell to the surrounding communities), business training, latrines, flood relief efforts, education of the people on their rights (not quite as clear the extent of this effort, but it is done through seminars), they go with the people to the government to demand their rights. They participate in the *Consejo de Desarrollo Municipal de Masaya* and also the *Consejo de Desarrollo Departamental* (Council of Municipal Development of Masaya and Council of Departmental Development). His state goal is to *empoderar* or **empower** the community members to know their rights and demand them. He wants to educate them on what is the law, and how they can use it.

Participation

The administrator stressed that while he is the president of the organization, the decisions are made by the community, for the community. While this is the *de moda* rhetoric of almost all

NGOs working with the buzz term “participatory development,” The administrator’s claim seems uniquely authentic. He describes himself as a *puente* (bridge) between the donors and the community, but he and his family do not take any of the money so it goes straight to the *campesinos*. Each community, about 20 in total, elect a representative that all-together meet twice a year with the administrator and family to discuss their next steps. His project process also is, while typical, quite authentically participatory:

- 1) The “team” of the administrator and family go to the *campo* to do *diagnosticos*, or surveys, of the people, essentially using a checklist to see what each family has.
- 2) The results are analyzed and then brought to a community meeting with a proposal, for example, for the latrines.
- 3) The community votes on the issue and it is either put into action or rejected.

The administrator describes it this way: “the *campesinos* ARE the FMCP.” He states that the difference between FMCP and the other NGOs is that the *campesinos* and the community **lead** development.

Overhead

FMCP has zero administrative costs. Right now international donors pay for projects, but all the other miscellaneous expenses are paid by the administrator himself. The administrator scoffed at the \$5000/yr salary that most NGO directors in Nicaragua earn and the 4x4s and “two-story headquarters” that they have. He emphasized over and over the importance of keeping the overhead as little as possible – this is one of his overriding goals. To this end, the administrator is currently paying \$250/mo. of his own money to keep the organization alive.

Transparency

He claimed that FMCP is renown for its fiscal transparency. I would believe it given that there really is no where for the money to go if he isn’t taking it (which I strongly, strongly, strongly doubt).

Locality/Nativity

This is completely Nicaraguan NGO. While it has the same system of international donors, the NGO was started by a Nicaraguan for his countrymen. Also, the administrator lives only a few miles (a slow commute over very poor roads) away and visits regularly the communities where they work. He is from this area, was a *campesino* himself, and thus understands their situation very well.

Long term goals/plans/visions:

The administrator wants to spread the *microempresa*, or micro-business model to other communities, and even countries. Comparing a *microempresa* to a child, he stated that when the *microempresa* can walk, they will move on to the next community. He sees the *microempresa* as an investment that will eventually become self-sustaining.

He also told me that he wants to expand to other communities all projects, and to help in this manner, he will probably start trying to bring **volunteers** from abroad to help do projects.

He also wants to start a *banco comunitariana* (community bank) that, with an initial investment of some amount of money, would be able to loan money, governed by a committee of the community, to the community members. It would again be intended to be self-sustaining after the initial investment. Interestingly, he pointed out that this is the **best kind of micro-credit** since the people of the community know best who can pay and who cannot and can benefit mutually from the same pot of money. It's a very interesting concept that should be looked into further. He said what he wants to do is very similar to another group working in Nicaragua called the **Rainbow Network**.

As of now, no one is paid, but he realizes that eventually he may need to pay a few basic staff members, but as stated before, he wants to keep these costs as low as possible.

Finally, when I asked him what happens when he dies (since he is paying so much out of pocket), he admitted that, as it is now, the organization **would die with him**. But, he wants to start a sub-organization, a "child" micro-credit (micro finance) organization that would loan to the *campesinos*, but, chartered in its mission, give a percentage of its revenue to FMCP. He wants to make it a separate entity so that it does not tarnish the good reputation of FMCP since micro-credit organizations sometimes have to confiscate things when people default on their loans, and this would give a bad reputation to FMCP.

INPRHU

Type: Main office visit

Date: 8/04/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Website: <http://www.inprhu.org/>

Background on meeting: Personal interview about basics of organization.

IPADE

Type: Main office visit

Date: 8/04/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Office Phones: (505) 2276-1772, (505) 2276-1775, 2276-1774

Main Office Address: Km 9 ½ Carreterra Masaya

Website: <http://www.ipade.org.ni/>

Background on meeting: Personal interview about basics of organization.

IXCHEN

Main Office Visit

Type: Interview, office visit

Location: Managua, main office

Date: 8/21/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Office Phone: (505) 2278-4356,, (505) 2270-8131

Main Email: ixchen@ibw.com.ni

Main Office Address: Clinica Tiscapa, ½ cuadra abajo (Tiscapa Clinic, ½ block west)

Website: None

Background on meeting: Personal interview. I also visited clinic briefly, but did not interview patients, though I have spoken with many women outside of the clinic who received services from IXCHEN (friends of the host family, members of the host family, and recipients of other NGOs).

KEPA

Type: Interview, office visit

Location: Main office, Managua

Date: 8/31/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Main Office Address: Hospital Militar, 1 cuadra al lago, 1 ½ cuerdas abajo, Bolonia, Managua
(From the Hospital Militar, 1 block north, 1 ½ blocks west, Bolonia neighborhood, Managua)

Main Office Phone: (505) 2266-3415

Website: www.kepa.fi/nicaragua

Background of Meeting

I originally met Ms. Hirvonen at the journalist training KEPA sponsored with Centro Humboldt. We met in the main office to discuss KEPA's role in Nicaragua and the donor's perspective (KEPA does not explicitly fund NGOs, but does train them and Ms. Hirvonen has an insight into Finnish donor politics).

MCN

Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense
(Nicaraguan Communal Movement)

León Office Visit

Type: Interview, office visit

Location: MCN office, León

Date: 8/13/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

León Office Address: Avenida Central, desde la Iglesia de la Merced, 1 cuadra al norte. (On Avenida Central, from the Church of Merced, 1 block north)

→ Note that this may not be how their address is officially described, though it is accurate. I wrote it based on a map, not an official publication.

Website: None

Background on meeting: Unplanned personal interview with director. (I simply walked in.)

Field Visit to Barrio Rúben Darío

Type: Field visit

Location: Barrio Rúben Darío, León (Rúben Darío neighborhood, León)

Date: 8/13/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Notes: Both are very friendly and happy to help. They have a lot of VIDEO footage of the work of MCN and speaks basic English. He is learning more and was willing to help as a guide if needed.

Background on meeting: Accompanied community organizer to his community where he is a local leader and volunteer promoter with MCN. He has been very active, managing and assisting with a number of community projects, including the construction of a *Casa Comunal* (Communal House) for community organizing meetings, preschool, and literacy training. He is an unemployed steel worker who cannot find work. He would be an **excellent** film subject.

Main Office Visit

Type: Interview, office visit

Location: MCN main office, Managua

Date: 8/26/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Main Office Address: Frente el Colegio Bautista Belen en San Judas, Managua
(Across from the school Bautista Belen in the San Judas neighborhood, Managua)

(Safety note: While did not feel unsafe, locals have told me that San Judas is one of the poorer, more dangerous areas of Managua. Caution is advised if carrying conspicuous and expensive equipment.)

Main Emails: mcng6p02@ibw.com.ni, mcninf@hotmail.com, mcninf@yahoo.es

Main Office Phone: (505) 2291-2316

Background on meeting: Personal interview about organization's history and future goals.

RNDDL

Red Nicaragüense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local
(Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development)

Type: Interview, office visit

Location: Main office, Managua

Date: 8/12/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Main Office Address: Mansión Teodolinda, 2 cuadras y 25 vrs. abajo. Casa 908.

Main Office Phone: (505) 2266-4174, (505) 2254-5363

Main Office Email: comunicacion@redlocalnicaragua.org

Website: <http://www.redlocalnicaragua.org/>

Background on meeting: Personal interview about organization's role in CC.

TESIS

Asociación de Trabajadores para la Educación, Salud, e Integración Social
Association of Workers for Education, Health, and Social Integration

Main Office Visit

Type: Interview, office visit

Location: Managua, main office

Date: 7/22/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Office Phone: (505) 2248-8272

Main Email: tesis1@turbonett.com.ni

Main Office Address: Barrio Campo Bruce, de donde fue el Cine Salinas, 1 cuadra al sur, 75 vrs. Abajo, Managua

(Campo Bruce Neighborhood, from where the Salinas cinema was, one block south, 75 meters west)

Website: None

Background on meeting: Personal interview with upper-level staff.

Field Visit to Recipients

Type: Field visit, night

Location: Managua – various streets and nightclubs.

Date: 7/29/09

Main TESIS contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Notes: Both are very friendly and happy to help.

Recipient contacts:

Name: Information removed for anonymity

Location: Elite Night Club

Role: Volunteer Promoter

Name: Information removed for anonymity

Location: Elite Night Club

Name: Information removed for anonymity

Location: Unknown other night club (mid range, not as fancy as Elite)

Notes: Said she did not go to doctors until TESIS made them more accessible (described above)

Name: Information removed for anonymity

Location: Unknown street

Role: Volunteer Promoter

Notes: VERY GOOD film subject, has very interesting personal story of struggle and is a very active promoter.

Background on meeting: Accompanied field staff on their weekly night rounds to different prostitute clubs or street locations where they distributed condoms and new informational materials on health and rights to women involved in their programs.

Other Contacts

Civil Society Workshop/Lecture at Crowne Plaza Hotel

Date: 8/20/09

Title of Lecture: "The State of Rights in Nicaragua"

Speakers: Dr. Cairo Manuel López, Dr. Alejandro Serrano, Dr. Julio López Miranda

Background on Lecture:

I was invited by a contact mentioned above affiliated with the CC. Representatives from civil society groups (predominantly NGOs) were in attendance. The lecture was held in the *most expensive* hotel in Nicaragua, Crowne Plaza. The speakers were all academics from Nicaragua specializing in development and political issues. I could not discern exactly who sponsored the event, but it appeared to be a joint effort between the CC and the FONG (*Federación de Organismos No-Gubernamentales* – Federation of NGOs) at a minimum.

Name: Information removed for anonymity

Role: Director/Founder

NGO: Unknown name, women's group in San Marcos, Department of Carazo

Notes: See footnote 54; she is very nice and is currently looking to institutionalize her organization into an NGO with funding. Very interesting example of the drive for funding!

Centro de Poder Ciudadano (CPC) in Barrio San Judas

(Center for Citizen Power in San Judas)

Date: 8/27/09

Main contacts: Information removed for anonymity

Address: Centro de Salud San Judas, ½ cuadra al lago (San Judas Health Center, ½ block north)

Background on Meeting and CPC:

I did not have an extensive interview, but rather just asked her for contact information in case we wanted to speak with her later. This is just one CPC in an entire government network, so there are many others, but this is one that seemed particularly active. These organizations are designed to act as intermediaries between communities and local government officials and promote citizen participation in politics. They are widely criticized as being clientelistic, rewarding only party supporters with government benefits. However, they make for an interesting case study on government initiatives to create a grassroots civil society from the top down – one that has the same shortcomings as the NGO initiatives: upward accountability and dependence vastly outweighing downward accountability and dependence.

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