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## **NGO geographies, livelihood geographies and the “non-viable” poor in the Andes**

Anthony Bebbington  
Department of Geography  
University of Colorado at Boulder  
CO 80303

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### **Introduction**

At a recent workshop to discuss the productive role of the small farm sector in Andean America, participants were asked whether they were broadly optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the peasantry.<sup>1</sup> The balance of opinion in the group – which included distinguished rural researchers from the region and representatives from government, non-governmental and international organizations – was pessimistic. Twice as many participants declared themselves pessimistic rather than optimistic as they looked to the future of the Andean peasantry. The general sense was that a significant portion of the indigenous small farm sector – in which poverty and extreme poverty are concentrated in the region (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 1994) – is, in purely economic terms at least, not viable in the current macroeconomic context.

This immediately raises the question of whether such a situation can be reversed – and viability induced - through external intervention. This question speaks directly to the strategies and concerns of NGOs (among others). This is especially so for those committed above all to rural development who have typically identified with the very poorest and whose mission statements increasingly emphasize the goal of poverty reduction. The ability of NGOs to respond to these challenges is all the more important in those contexts, such as Bolivia and significant parts of Perú, where the state has such limited administrative and financial capacity to address questions of rural viability and chronic poverty. Under such conditions, the creation of rural

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<sup>1</sup> The workshop “*El rol productivo del sector campesino andino en una era de la liberalización*” was organized by PIEB-IIED and Cedla-KIT, and took place in La Paz, Bolivia on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of February, 2003. The author moderated the event.

viability must necessarily involve non-governmental actors (of various types) – simply put, government alone cannot respond to the challenge.

Yet it remains at best an open question as to whether the nongovernmental sector can indeed respond to these challenges – as discussions of NGO performance (Edwards and Hulme, 1995) have already noted. In this paper, I want to suggest that beyond questions of performance (important as they are), there are other factors that reduce the likelihood of NGOs responding to these problems of non-viability and chronic poverty. These factors have to do with the very logics by which the nongovernmental aid chain functions. For quite understandable (intended and inadvertent) reasons, these logics drive patterns of intervention that are based less on a prior analysis of poverty dynamics than they are on other calculations.

The bulk of the paper aims to address this theme of aid chain functioning by asking the simple question of what drives the geographies of NGO intervention and how these geographies relate to the geographies of poverty in the Andes. It argues that an adequate explanation of these geographies requires attention to the politics of aid, the political economy of development in the Andes, the geographies of religious, political and other social institutions, and finally, but critically, the life histories of people working within the nongovernmental sector. The geography of poverty and livelihoods also influences these interventions, but ultimately as a secondary set of factors.

## **Introducing concepts**

### ***NGOs as transnational networks***

During much of the 1980s, work on NGOs tended to associate NGO with the notion of development alternatives. By and large NGOs were seen as the source of a development that would be more empowering, more human, more sustainable. This is apparent in many publications and fora, perhaps most clearly in the special issue of *World Development* in 1987 called “*Development alternatives: the challenge for NGOs*” (Gordon Drabek, 1987). Since then, research has - *a grosso modo* - moved along two paths. On the one hand has been that work which continues this tendency of relatively uncritical celebration of the potential of non-governmental organizations (e.g. Fisher, 1998), social movements and civil society more broadly (e.g. Alvarez and Escobar, 1992; Alvarez et al., 1998). On the other hand has been a growing body of work quite critical of NGOs, in Latin America and elsewhere. This work has raised questions about their performance, accountability and transparency, and the politics underlying their operations (e.g. Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Hulme and Edwards, 1997; MacDonald, 1997; Smillie various).

Much of this NGO research shares a conceptual-methodological commitment I which NGOs are understood as organizations, and in which the organization is the unit of analysis. This seems logical: these are after all nongovernmental *organizations*. However, this particular view of conceptual boundaries appears to have other effects that may be less constructive. *Inter alia*, it has meant that we often: continue to conceptualize NGOs as “Northern” or “Southern;” make an assumed separation between NGOs and governments, in order to then be able to talk of inter-organizational collaboration; and fail to analyze NGOs in terms of the institutions and

social structures of which they are a part. This conceptual commitment has had consequences that are both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, it has meant that little is still known about the social networks out of which NGOs emerged and through which non-governmental action occurs. Likewise it means we are relatively ill-informed about the ways in which NGO interventions relate to more deeply embedded social and institutional processes. It has also meant that research on NGOs is full of case studies, with far less research on the overall structure of non-governmental aid and, for the purposes of this paper, very little on the geographies of this aid and how they relate to other geographies (of poverty, institutions etc.).

The theoretical consequences are perhaps more far-reaching. The emphasis on the organization as the unit of analysis has meant that discussions of NGOs have continued to be plagued by the vexed and ultimately unanswerable question of “what is an NGO?” and haunted by endless typologies of types of NGOs which.<sup>2</sup> Yet if this question of “what is an NGO?” were reframed as “what are NGOs a case of?” a different type of reflection might become possible, suggesting differing ways of understanding what happens within NGO projects, where it happens, and the types of impact these projects may have on rural poverty. For the purpose of this paper I suggest that NGOs can be understood as forms of transnational collective action that occur within political economic contexts that partly structure but do not determine those forms of collective action. Underlying that collective action are a range of social networks – each embedded in a variety of institutions. These social networks, and the actors that constitute them, help determine the form and substance of NGO intervention. Understanding how these networks emerge over time might then illuminate the factors that influence how far NGO interventions respond to existing livelihood and poverty dynamics and above all, for the purposes of this conference, the dynamics of the sorts of chronic poverty in which are enmeshed many of those Andean households now deemed economically unviable by many commentators (e.g. IDB, 1996; van Niekerk, 1997).

### ***NGO geographies or “where does the money go to?”***

If the poverty impacts of rural development interventions depends in large measure on where financial resources flow to, then it is potentially fruitful to ask the simple questions “why did the money go here and not there?” or “why is NGO A working where it is working and not somewhere else?” These questions can be asked at a range of scales: among countries; among regions within a country; among micro-regions within a region; among communities within a micro-region; and among households within a village. At each level there are patterns of nongovernmental presence and absence which are important in determining final patterns of impact on poverty.

The paper therefore employs the notion of “NGO geographies” to help focus attention on these questions for the specific case of NGOs. Indeed, I will suggest that the ways in which these geographies are generated has much to do with sorts of networks discussed in the prior section – that there is a relationship between the structure (or if you will geography) of these networks and the geography of NGOs and

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that my own work has done this too – see the attempt to form typologies in Farrington and Bebbington (1993) and the discussion of inter-organizational relationships in Bebbington and Farrington (1993).

nongovernmental resource flows. I will also suggest that pursuing such a line of enquiry might be quite fruitful for thinking about development in theoretical terms, and also for thinking about the links between poverty reduction and development.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, one helpful starting point is the observation that development has two meanings that are often confused but which need to be kept distinct: namely the idea of development as the expansion of capitalism *and* of development as intentional interventions (projects) aimed at pursuing certain ends (c.f. Cowen and Shenton, 1996). The idea here is that it is helpful to think spatially about these two forms of development and their implications for the creation and reduction of poverty. Clearly the political economy of contemporary capitalism is critical in explaining patterns of poverty; yet in foreign aid, many of the instruments for addressing this poverty (such as NGO support programs) revolve supporting specific organizations, to intervene in specific places on the backdrop of this broader geography of poverty. Understanding how the geographies of those interventions are generated (at the different scales noted above) and how these relate to the geographies of poverty produced under prevailing political economic conditions offers the prospect of a better understanding of how those interventions might ultimately affect patterns of poverty. This takes us to the final part of this conceptual introduction.

### ***Livelihoods, viability and chronic poverty***

The notion that some households might be “viable,” and others not, however disagreeable in normative terms, is very much part of contemporary discussions of the peasantry in South America.<sup>4</sup> The concept is used to refer to the economic competitiveness of small farm households, and more specifically of their farming practices. Many authors and agencies (and most of the participants in the workshop referred to earlier) have argued that within the current macroeconomic context, very many production units within the small farm sector – in particular the poorest families, with the least assets – are not competitive, and stand little chance of ever becoming so. As such they are considered unviable.

Almost by definition those agricultural households deemed unviable include some of the poorest of the poor – and certainly many of those chronic poor who “experience significant capability deprivations for a period of five years or more” (Hulme and Shepherd, 2003: 4). The very poorest of these – the aged, infirm and very young – are relatively immobile, confined to rural spaces. They have very limited potential to respond creatively to the situation and to develop other, less agrarian livelihoods. Others households (generally the less [usually and churning] poor, and who possess somewhat more human and financial capital) respond to the constraints on the viability of their agricultural base by building spatially complex and mobile strategies, ranging from the combination of on and off-farm activities (Reardon et al, 2001) to periodic migration which in some countries has become increasingly international character (Martinez, 2003; Jokisch, 2001). These livelihoods often become

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<sup>3</sup> I am quite aware, though, that this paper merely begins to frame this line of enquiry. It is very far from fully delivering on its promise.

<sup>4</sup> For Bolivia, see IDB, 1996 and van Niekerk, 1997; for Chile, see Sotomayor, 1994, Namdar-Irani and Quezada, 1994, Kay, 2002; for Colombia see Forero, 2002; for Perú see Escobál, 2001, 2003; for Ecuador see Martínez, 2003. More generally, and though using a different terminology, see Reardon et al., 2001.

multilocal, working across non-contiguous spaces while most development interventions continue to be spatially focused.

The notion of “geography” can also be helpfully deployed to think about these themes of poverty and livelihood. In the preceding section we suggested one of these ways – namely the spatial distribution of poverty at a variety of scales (the topic of poverty maps), and the attempt to explain the factors that drive this geography. A second sense in which the notion of geography can also be helpful is in highlighting the spatial complexity of many contemporary livelihood strategies, as they reach across different locations.

With these notions in mind we can lay out the strategy and core arguments of the paper, simple as they are. The strategy of the paper is to trace how the geographies of NGO rural development intervention are generated in the high Andes of Perú and Bolivia. It will suggest that these geographies are not generated on the basis of any analysis of the geography of poverty, and far less chronic poverty. It will also suggest that there are forces that tend to divert these interventions away from a focus on the more chronically poor. Furthermore, it will suggest that NGOs rarely if ever consider the complex, multi-local geographies of many Andean livelihoods, working instead with spatially bound interventions. In short, there is a mismatch between the geographies of intervention and the geographies of livelihood and poverty, a mismatch that means that interventions rarely accommodate the strategies that *some* of the poor elaborate that

### **The research, in brief**

The argument in this paper draws on three separate studies of NGOs, rural development and poverty alleviation in which I have been involved over the last decade. The first (Bebbington and Thiele, 1993) was primarily based on fifteen case studies of NGO approaches to agricultural and rural development in five Andean countries. The second was an evaluation of the effects of the Swedish NGO support program in Bolivia (Bebbington and Kopp, 1994), based on nine short case studies. The third study, and the one I will refer to in this paper, was a study of the livelihood and poverty effects of rural development interventions implemented by NGOs in highland Perú and Bolivia, and supported through the NGO co-financing program of the Netherlands (Bebbington, Hinojosa and Rojas, 2002). The focus was on interventions that emphasized productive and natural resource components. The research also studied the nature and history of relationships within the so-called “aid chains” that linked NGOs in the Netherlands, Perú and Bolivia.

The study was based on an analysis of aid chains linking 3 Dutch nongovernmental co-financing agencies (CFAs) with 7 Andean NGOs. Research was conducted in 25 communities (including 6 control communities) across seven municipalities in the highland departments of Cusco, La Paz, Potosí and Chuquisaca. It involved in-depth interviews with some 110 families, 131 community focus groups, other key informant interviews, focus groups with NGO staff and in-depth interviews with NGO Directors and senior staff.

This focus on the Netherlands is important because the Dutch Co-Financing Agencies (Novib, Icco, Cordaid [formerly Cebemo and Balance] and Hivos) have been an

especially significant source of foreign aid for NGOs in these two countries, as suggested in Tables 1 and 2 for the case of Perú. Indeed, in the late 1990s three of the four most important nongovernmental sources of support for Peruvian NGOs have been from the Netherlands – and if this was the case for the late 1990s, it was even more so during the 1980s and early 90s. The results of the study are also potentially significant because they were based on an analysis of some of the largest and best known rural development NGOs in within Peru and Bolivia. These cases were: Ccaijo, Arariwa and IAA in Cusco; IPTK and ACLO in Chuquisaca-Potosí; Cipca and Qhana in La Paz. In much less depth (and on the basis of key informant interviews only) the study also considered experiences of Desco, Cepes and Cidiag in Perú. Map1 denotes the locations of the interventions analyzed: Andahuaylillas, Calca and Yanaoca in the highlands of Cusco, for the cases of Ccaijo, Arariwa and Iaa respectively; Ravelo and Sopachuy in Potosí-Chuquisaca for the cases of IPTK and ACLO; and Lajo and Ayo Ayo in the altiplano of La Paz, for the cases of Qhana and Cipca respectively.

**Table 1: Source of finance for Peruvian NGOs by country of origin (US\$ millions)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>
USA	12.31	10.68
Netherlands	6.90	5.72
Germany	4.53	3.94
Spain	2.87	3.12
Switzerland	2.34	2.11
Canada	2.28	1.35
European Union	1.17	0.74

Source: Valderrama and Negrón, 2001.

**Table 2: Source of NGO finance for Peruvian NGOs by country of origin (US\$ millions)**

<b>Donor NGO</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>% total private funds to NGOs</b>
Bilance	Netherlands	1.96	1.64	9.0
Eze	Germany	1.82	1.73	8.9
Icco	Netherlands	1.62	1.48	7.8
Novib	Netherlands	1.36	0.83	5.5
LWF	Switzerland	0.86	1.17	5.1

Source: Valderrama and Negrón, 2001.

**Map 1: Case study locations**



## **Geographies of intervention, poverty and livelihood**

### ***Regional geographies***

An early question posed in this research was simply to ask how the funds channeled through these networks of relationships were distributed regionally: where did the money go? This was far from straightforward, but the data in Table 3 shows the broad distribution of funds among organizations located in different departments in each of Perú and Bolivia. The largest amounts go to supra-regional organizations: these are primarily NGOs based in either Lima or La Paz and who work in several regions (for instance, Cipa in our sample), and national networks of NGOs. Following this, the data suggests that aid flows are concentrated in certain departments: in Peru, Cusco stands out, and in Bolivia Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Potosí and La Paz (Table 3).

The question was then posed, how can this distribution be explained and in particular how did it relate to the policy commitments (of poverty reduction and civil society strengthening) underlying the co-financing program and the mission statements of many of the organizations involved. While each of the departments showing a concentration of funds exhibits important concentrations of poverty, there are other departments that are equally as poor or even poorer. In Perú, for instance, Huancavelica and Apurímac are at least as poor as Cusco, and in Bolivia Oruro and Potosí are at least as poor as Cochabamba. Ex ante analysis of poverty concentrations does not, then, appear to be determining the flows of resources whose ostensible primary purpose is to reduce poverty (GOM, 1995). Explanations lay elsewhere.

**Table 3: Distribution of Dutch NGO support between 1990 and 1999 by department, Perú and Bolivia (Millions of Florins)**

PERU		BOLIVIA	
Arequipa	1.5	Beni	0.4
Ayacucho	2.9	Chuquisaca	7.6
Cajamarca	3.2	Cochabamba	17.9
Cusco	8.3	La Paz	3.5
Ica	1.7	Oruro	0.9
Junin	1.7	Potosí	6.9
La Libertad	1.1	Santa Cruz	0.6
Puno	3.3	Tarija	2.6
Supraregional	35.0	Supraregional	30.0
Total	58.9	Total	70.1

Source: de Morrée and Nuijhuis, 2000: background study for the project

### ***Regional concentrations***

One step in explaining these regional concentrations of CFA flows is to recognize that these overall patterns reflect regional foci of specific CFAs. More specifically, the concentration in Cusco is largely explained by the presence of Cordaid (previously Bilance and Cebemo) partners, that in Potosí-Chuquisaca by the presence of a Novib partner, and that in Puno by a set of Icco partners. Likewise the concentrations in supraregional organizations is largely explained by the almost inevitably privileged access that Lima and La Paz based NGOs have to the CFA officials who necessarily must pass through and spend significant parts of short visits in these capitals. It is also explained by the policy of investing significant support in a small number of more strategic partners and cross-regional NGO networks (each of whom are almost always based in capital cities). In the following paragraphs, we explore how some of these concentrations (se Map 1) emerged.

#### *Cordaid in Cusco*

Cordaid is a Roman Catholic organization, and as a result – especially in its earlier years – networks linked to the Church, and to Christian Democracy, influenced the ways in which Cordaid (then Cebemo) and its partners found each other. In the 1970s Cusco was an important center of Liberation Theology in Perú (and more generally of the left). By the 1970s, Jesuits and Dominicans sympathetic to Liberation Theology had established NGOs there and the bishop of Cusco gave full support to social justice and development programs linked to the diocese. Yet by the time the bishop died, the global Catholic Church had already become much more conservative. The Vatican appointed a new bishop who was far less committed to such programs. As a result more radical activists and workers left diocesan social justice teams, going to work in more liberal dioceses or deciding to form independent NGOs to continue the work begun through the church.



From an early time, and through these church networks, Cebemo began to support these initiatives and quite soon was channeling significant resources to a handful of organizations in Cusco linked in one way or another to the Jesuits, Dominicans or former social team of the bishopric. This geographic concentration then became somewhat self-reinforcing. Program officer visits necessarily required significant periods of time in Cusco to sustain partnerships. This clearly influenced the possibility of making links with other NGOs, and over the years other partners (not all Catholic now) have been added in Cusco. Indeed, the CFA had a conscious strategy of concentrating its support in Cusco in order to reduce the transaction costs or sustaining its partnerships. Further strengthening this orientation, Cusco was also a center of Dutch bilateral aid in the late 1970s and 80s – so much so that one NGO worker commented “we were all Dutch.” Cordaid later hired one of these previously Cusco based Dutch professional to be an officer for Perú.

### *Icco in Puno*

Icco is a protestant organization, but unlike the case of Cordaid political and personal networks rather than religious institutions that have structured the ways in which resources have flowed from Icco to the region. As Icco began building a program in Peru, it relied quite heavily on suggestions from Dutch academics who had been working and living in Peru under a program of support to develop the social sciences at the Catholic University of Peru. For various reasons to do with these academics’ own networks, these suggestions focused particularly on NGOs and professionals linked to certain political groupings within the Peruvian left. Coupled with the then Icco program officers own commitments this led to a partner portfolio closely linked to a particular political party: this structured Icco aid flows in Perú into the mid 1980s.

A subsequent program officer deliberately aimed to break this concentration, and in the process a new cluster of partnerships emerged, focused on the department of Puno. These partnerships offered a proposal consonant with Icco’s own emerging policy of supporting agroecological approaches to rural development, but in many regards what led Icco to these proposals, and to deciding to support them, was that one of their main authors was a Dutch professional living in Puno who many years before had trained with and become a friend of the Icco program officer for rural development. The result of this was that Icco began almost a decade long commitment to supporting Puno based agroecology NGOs organized in a consortium. By 2000 this experiment had clearly failed, and Icco was finalizing its withdrawal. Most of the NGOs involved were in the process of disappearing.

### *Strategic triangles: Novib, priests and activists in Bolivia*

One of Novib’s three largest partners in Bolivia is the Instituto Politécnico Tomás Katari, and the significant concentration of CFA resource flows to the departments of Potosí and Chuquisaca is explained by IPTK’s own focus on these areas. Although this is a chronically poor area by any standards (e.g. Bebbington, 1998) the reason for this focus are not, however, primarily related to poverty analysis. Rather, during the dictatorship of the 1970s, Jesuit priests and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR)<sup>5</sup> had identified the area of Ocuri (near Ravelo in Map 1) as part of a “strategic

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<sup>5</sup> The MIR still exists as a mainstream political party. In the 1970s it was persecuted and illegal.

triangle”<sup>6</sup> from which it might be possible to build a social movement linking miners and peasants, and capable of toppling the dictatorship. Central to this strategy was a young MIR activist, supported by the Jesuits and who would be based in Ocuri. The Jesuits persuaded Novib to support that initial organizing work. Shortly afterwards, IPTK was formed by the activist and has been a Novib partner ever since, becoming one of the largest rural development NGOs in Bolivia.

A structurally similar set of relations – though with, perhaps, many more chance factors at play – explains another of Novib’s long standing partnerships in Bolivia. In this case, Dutch Augustinian priests in Cochabamba worked with a number of young leaders, some of whom they sent to the Netherlands for further training. Through this process one of them made contact with and ultimately developed friendships with Novib staff. Once again, this personal relationship ultimately translated into an inter-organizational one as Novib began to support the NGO the person created. The relationship went on to last two decades, ending in the mid 1990s (the NGO no longer exists). While this is not the only explanation of the very significant concentration of CFA resources in Cochabamba, Novib certainly channeled large volumes of resources not only to this NGO but also to 3 other organizations that the NGO also helped create.

In each of these cases, initial contacts were made via other networks and resource flows were eventually agreed in order to support particular political projects linked to development intervention. By and large, each case has also led to relatively disappointing impacts on rural poverty (Cherrett et al., 1994; Alemán et al., 1999; Bebbington et al., 2002).

### *Novib in Perú*

Novib’s principal rural development counterparts in Perú each find their origins in the government of Juan Alvarado Velasco (1969-1974). In an effort to build a sort of military led social democracy (modeled on Yugoslavia to a considerable extent), the Velasco government experimented with a range of collective production programs in urban and rural areas. In the countryside, the centerpieces of these reforms were land reform, the creation of cooperative enterprises and a program of social mobilization to foster popular participation in these reforms. This experiment received significant support from Dutch bilateral aid, and Perú had been relatively awash with Dutch development professionals. When the Velasco government unraveled in the mid 1970s, many of the Peruvian professionals who had worked within it left government, some going on to create or join NGOs that would continue the same experiment. At the same time, Novib was just beginning its program in Perú, and made contact with these emerging NGOs via some of the Dutch professionals who had been working in Perú under the bilateral program. Novib ended up anchoring its program in a number of these post-Velasco NGOs and (as in Bolivia) the partnerships established in the 1970s (with CNA, Cedep and Cidiag) still constitute the core of Novib’s rural development funding.

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<sup>6</sup> The triangle would link Ocuri, the mines of Siglo 20 and La Paz.

### *Intra-regional geographies*

Just as prior analysis of poverty dynamics did not explain the overall regional geography of CFA-NGO aid flows, nor was there much evidence that the within-region geographies of intervention devised by individual NGOs were based on such analysis. Put another way, their choice of which micro-regions, watersheds, or communities in which to work often seemed to be based on other factors. Once again, the areas of intervention were poor, but not always the poorest, and the actual, if not the spoken, criteria for selecting such areas were not based on poverty analysis.

While it is hard to generalize about how decisions were made in different NGOs to work in specific localities and communities, it seems reasonable to say that in most cases these decisions had a lot to do with the same networks that helped lead to the initial links between the NGOs and the CFAs. To give a few examples:

- The links between Cordaid and the Peruvian NGO Ccaijo owed a great deal to the fact that both are Roman Catholic organizations. More specifically Ccaijo is linked to the Company of Jesus (the Jesuits), and hence not surprisingly its overall zone of intervention is defined by the area for which the Jesuit parish based in Andahuaylillas is responsible. Some, but not all, communities where it worked were selected on the basis of relationships established through the parish.
- The links between Icco and IAA grew out of party political groupings within the Peruvian left. These same convictions have meant that a centerpiece of IAA's strategy is to provide direct support to the departmental peasant federation of Cusco. The areas in which IAA's rural development interventions are concentrated are communities in which the federation has a strong presence, and where some of its leaders are based.
- IPTK emerged linked to the MIR in Bolivia. When later the MIR split, IPTK identified with the party Movimiento Bolivia Libre (MBL) and much of its work in Potosí-Chuquisaca has aimed to strengthen the presence of MBL there. To some degree (and to many observers) IPTK's work seems oriented to communities where MBL has a stronger presence. Indeed, the member of our research conducting field work in Ravelo commented that if other NGOs' interventions were by and large oriented towards "los viables" (viable households), IPTK's were oriented towards "los leales" (loyal households) – i.e. those who maintained their loyalty to MBL.
- Novib's relationship with Cidiag grew out of relationships established in the context of Dutch support to the reformist government of Velasco. By the same token, it was also networks with peasant leaders dating from its staff's former involvement in the Velasco government that led the NGO to concentrate its work in the area of Sihuas, Ancash.

*So what so far?*

These and the cases discussed in the previous section are, of course, anecdotes, case studies. But are they just that? What is striking across the cases studied in this research (and likewise in our earlier work looking at links between Swedish NGOs and those in Bolivia), is that structurally similar stories abound. From them we can perhaps glean the following.

First, the ways in which aid flows in the non-governmental sector emerge have a great deal to do with the structure of other social relationship that map back onto other institutional forms. In these cases, links between NGOs and CFAs that have ultimately translated into long standing partnerships emerged because of relationships mediated by the social and geographical structure of: the Catholic church, and orders within it;<sup>7</sup> parties political tendencies within the left of both Peru and Bolivia; networks built up through the presence of Dutch people in the Andes, and of Peruvian and Bolivian people in the Netherlands; and networks and links made possible by the Dutch bilateral programme and by Dutch-Peruvian inter-university programs.

Likewise within Peru and Bolivia, the links between NGOs and certain spaces of intervention are themselves mediated by relationships and solidarities that have origins beyond the NGO or its mission statement, deriving instead from Church programs, political affinities, prior professional experiences etc.

In all of this, personal contacts count for a lot. As one influential commentator in Bolivia noted: “the professional, personal and ethical background of the project official is very important . . . . the agencies’ officials are the people who define agency policy in the country.” But those personal contacts are not accidental, and have a great deal to do with the institutions and social networks within which people and program officers are embedded.<sup>8</sup> Personal contacts help control for risk, and the more they derive from other shared institutional and other affiliations, then the more this is the case (Box 1).

#### **Box 1**

##### **Program officers and partner selection**

The personal networks of individual CFA program officers have a significant influence over partner selection. But furthermore, these networks are in turn (and in large measure) an effect of the program officer’s earlier involvement in other programs linking the Netherlands and the Andes. The following case, which refers to a CFA program officer whom we shall call Willem (this is not his/her real name) is an illustration of this.

In the 1970s Willem had lived and worked for a short time in Peru, and from the late 1980s to mid 1990s worked as a CFA program officer for Peru. In that period he began 6 new partnerships for his CFA (plus two networks). Each of the six new partnerships (which we will call A, B, C, D E and F) grew out of Willem’s personal relationships:

Case A was an NGO whose Director was recommended by the CFA’s in-country service. The director was a former employee of Cencira (an agency linked to Velasco’s agrarian reform program) and was also a close friend of a common Dutch acquaintance (Cencira had been supported by the Dutch bilateral program). These references were both reliable ones and “...so we became friends very quickly.”

Case B was also directed by an ex-Cencira official, friends with the same Dutch person, and also a friend of Willem. The NGO was endorsed

<sup>7</sup> By the same token, the geographical distribution of the largest part of Swedish NGO funding to Bolivia reflected the geography of the Free Swedish Mission in Bolivia (a Swedish evangelical Church) which in turn reflected the historical geography of missionary work within this church during the twentieth century (Bebington and Kopp, 1994; Gustaffson, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> C.f. Granovetter, 1985 on the strength of weak ties in labor markets.

by the Director in Case A, and so it was again easy to fund it until several years later the in-country service organization recommended ending the relationship because the NGO's work was becoming quite politicized.

Case C was an organization run by a priest who had previously lived in the Netherlands as a refugee following threats from Sendero Luminoso

Cases D, E, and F were each based in the region where Willem had lived and worked in the 1970s. His personal relationships from that time linked him directly with one of these cases, and indirectly with the other two.

Finding reliable partners was, for Willem (and all program officers, we would suggest), a difficult challenge. Lack of information and time increased the risks of making a bad decision. In such a context, Willem relied heavily on the relationships of trust that he already had, in order to increase the information at his disposal, and reduce the risk that he might back a "bad" partner.

Source: interviews

Of course none of this is especially surprising but it does call attention to the fact that partnerships within these aid chains that ultimately lead to a geography of resource flows are based on a multitude of relationships and calculations. As such the geography of resource flows owes a great deal to the geography of these relationships and the institutions within which they are embedded. Indeed, it seems to derive far more from these geographies than from ex-ante appraisals of the geographies of poverty and livelihoods.

Just as significant is that these geographies are long lasting: put another way, there is considerable path dependency within the CFA-NGO aid chain. This is not the place to explore the factors that drive this path dependency, but once established relationships last a long time, and resource flows follow these relationships. This complicates any ex-post effort to introduce into these programmes other criteria – such as, for instance, poverty and livelihood analysis – for selecting areas of intervention. Such analysis might well lead to the prioritization of other areas of intervention, the identification of new strategies, and the conclusion that different partners might be more appropriate. Yet if relationships and flows have been so sticky in the past, there is good reason to expect they will also be in the future.

## **Community level intervention strategies and poverty impacts**

### ***Demanding poverty impacts and distorting poverty interventions***

Bringing down the scale one step further, we can also talk of a geography of intervention within communities. Ultimately, resources go (in differentiated amounts) to some households and not others, some fields, not others and so on.

At this level, we encountered somewhat more use of some form of poverty analysis to think about interventions, albeit often limited to the preparation of relatively static and descriptive village diagnostics. That said, only one of the NGOs had an intervention strategy that was deliberately and specifically differentiated according to poverty strata and different agricultural strategies (subsistence, market oriented). The remainder had a packet of interventions that different groups in the communities appropriated in their own particular ways and according to their abilities and needs.

Beyond this, more striking were two common (and related) tendencies across the cases. On the one hand, the greater pressure to demonstrate material impact on poverty that all the actors involved felt (NGOs felt this pressure from CFAs, CFAs from the Dutch government) had led to an increasing orientation *away from* the poorest of the poor, the chronically poor if we wish, and towards already more viable farming families. The reasoning for such a shift was perfectly understandable: these better off families (still poor within the greater scheme of things) are more able to take risks, absorb new technologies, and combine them with other assets. As such they will show impact more quickly.<sup>9</sup>

This progressive orientation toward the viable middle-peasantry (who are likely *occasionally* and *never* poor, to use Hulme and Shepherd's schema, 2003) has – in almost all cases – also come with a reduction in the number of families and communities that are targeted by interventions. There seem to be two factors here. First, the shift in focus towards more viable farmers has also come with a shift towards the introduction of slightly more expensive innovations: feed stalls, improved cattle, sprinkler irrigation systems, cultivated pasture conversion etc. Second, for some of these NGOs this has happened at a time when overall budgets are under pressure, from the Netherlands and elsewhere. The combined effect of these factors is to concentrate interventions in a smaller number of households. While of course there is always the possibility of further dissemination of NGO introduced innovations beyond this small group of beneficiaries, this has hardly ever happened because poorer families have been unable to incorporate, or afford, the types of technology being worked with.

### ***Invisible livelihoods***

Recent research (Reardon et al., 2001; Escobál, 2001, 2003; Durston, 2000, Martinez, 2003) has emphasized the extent to which off-farm and non-agricultural activities constitute an increasingly important part of rural livelihoods in the Andes, and provide a very important share of monetary income, though this seems to be less the case for the very poorest (the chronic poor) who apparently often lack the assets they need (human capital, cash) to move into other activities (Escobal, 2003). Yet the interventions of most of the NGOs studied here continue to emphasize support to those forms of agricultural production that are characteristic of the almost never poor. Indeed, their interventions show a remarkable similarity, combining the introduction of technologies (greenhouses, seeds, irrigation, cattle, feedstalls, pastures), erosion control, resource and water management, group organization, links to local government and (generally via partnerships with other related NGOs) credit support to assist in technology adoption.

The irony here is of course double. First, the livelihood strategies of the usually, churning and occasionally poor are largely overlooked in these interventions. Here we see virtually no support to assist migrants, to develop labor market skills or contacts for people before they migrate, to improve the terms of local labor

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<sup>9</sup> Note, exactly the same reasoning underlies the FAO's food security program, and even efforts to surpass it for the case of Latin America (see FAO, 2002; FAORLC, 2003).

contracts<sup>10</sup>. Nor were their efforts to support the provision, or increased quality, of secondary education even though the search for such education constituted one of the primary explanations for the way in which very many people interviewed composed their livelihoods. And second, while the chronic poor do seem still more dependent on agriculture, the thrust of interventions was to support a quite different sort of peasant farming.

Some of the explanation for this are related to the points mentioned earlier – the pressure to seek impact and in some cases reduce coverage. But another set of factors also relate to the general lack of knowledge of contemporary livelihood trends in the areas in which the NGOs are working. This knowledge gap derives in considerable measure from the decline of socio-economic research on rural issues in the region, and particularly research funded by the CFAs. In such a context – where little new knowledge is being generated, and so older conceptions of the peasantry are not really being challenged – then intervention strategies appear to change very little. Indeed, there is a very real sense that professionals who work in the CFA-NGO aid chain continue to interpret the rural economy and design interventions on the basis of theories of peasant economy in which they were trained as students.

### ***Livelihood strategies and poverty impacts***

As at the macro and regional levels, so at the intra-community level it therefore appears – in these cases at least – that the forces driving the geographies of intervention are not determined by an a priori reflection on poverty and livelihood dynamics. Furthermore, in some cases they are determined by incentives that progressively take interventions away from a chronic poverty focus. If this is so then it would be inappropriate, perhaps, to expect that interventions have had much impact on poverty. To describe and analyze these poverty impacts, the study used an earlier analytical framework (Bebbington, 1999; further information on the methods and approach can be found in Bebbington et al., 2002).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the poverty impacts of NGO interventions were greater where there was more convergence between the intervention strategy and household livelihood strategies. Aggregating quite broadly the research identified three such livelihood strategies. First, were those strategies that continued to emphasize subsistence agriculture in contexts of progressive demographic increase and pressure on natural resources and overall asset scarcity. These were, by and large, the strategies of the very poorest (including the chronically poor). In these households, intervention had very little impact.

Second were those strategies that reflected an already existing process of agrarian accumulation – households on the path to capitalized family farming. In general, such strategies were far more apparent in areas and among households with good physical and social access to well-developed product markets. These strategies were concentrated in the middle and upper peasantry (not surprisingly), and were those that were best able to incorporate the types of technological innovation proposed by the NGOs. These were, then, the households among whom there was far greater impact.

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<sup>10</sup> There was one important and successful exception here, the case of Arariwa which helped renegotiate the labor conditions for young rural youth who worked as carriers for tour groups of Cusco based travel agencies.

The costs of these innovations, however, precluded any significant spread to other and poorer farmers.

Third were livelihood strategies of the types emphasized by Reardon et al. (2001) in which households increasingly incorporate non-farm income generation. In our cases, this non-farm income was rarely generated in-situ, and instead involved periodic migration. In areas closer to cities this migration might be weekly (or even, in some cases and for certain types of labor market, just for weekends); in areas further from labor markets, migration was for considerably longer periods. In these cases too, the poverty impact of intervention was very limited, in large measure because such livelihoods remained scarcely visible to the NGOs involved.

What also became evident was that at the core of very many household strategies – across all strata – was the struggle to gain access to secondary education. Households appeared to make other asset management and work organization decisions functional to this goal. The range of strategies people had devised to do this was remarkable, but the goal was the same. Yet the theme of secondary education never arose in the intervention strategies of the NGOs, so focused as they were on a notion of rural as agricultural, and thus on the development of assets directly linked to agricultural production. In a very real way, the intervention strategies of the aid chain, and the livelihood strategies of the chronic, usually and churning poor, passed like ships in the starlit Andean night.

## **Conclusions**

The viability discussion, harsh as it is, forces careful reflection on the extent to which interventions to foster agricultural productivity – interventions which have been the centerpiece of rural development strategies for over three decades - offer much prospect for the reduction of chronic rural poverty. Indeed, some have suggested that to continue prioritizing agriculture is to condemn the rural poor to yet longer periods of poverty (Reardon et al., 2001). The research reported here likewise suggests that, in the areas of study, such interventions have done little to affect poverty dynamics and have tended to favor families already in a process of agrarian capitalization. They have not offered options for those poorest families unable to incorporate the technologies introduced from the outside. Nor have they responded to the strategies through which poor people have attempted to respond to the lack of agricultural exit paths from poverty. These strategies revolve around accessing education (in particular secondary education) and periodic migration.

While it would be easy to take such findings and point an accusatory finger at the NGOs involved, this would be to ignore the ways in which the logic of the aid chain tends to drive such outcomes. Here the factors are many. Much is made of the way in which the demand for impact (ultimately emanating from government offices that fund NGO support programs) distorts NGO intervention, and this study shows clearly that these demands have indeed induced interventions that are both oriented to somewhat wealthier farmers and that are also concentrated in fewer families (both tendencies reducing potential poverty impacts). However, other factors are also at play. An important one of these is path dependency in the aid chain. Many partnerships between funders and NGOs have a long history and find their origins in discussions that were not primarily based on poverty. In many cases these original



relationships were inspired by shared concerns for human rights, democracy struggles, social democracy and collective production. Furthermore, they were mediated by ecclesiastical institutions, political parties, and friendships and contacts (made possible through bilateral aid, periods of exile, international travel etc.) that helped create the initial bonds of trust between CFAs and NGOs. As a result, the geography of aid flows that emerged reflected the pre-existing geographies of these mediating institutions and relationships, and the geography of strategies for fostering political empowerment far more than they reflected any prior analysis of poverty dynamics.

Furthermore, the dynamics of aid have made any such analysis of poverty and livelihood dynamics increasingly difficult. The growing insistence on impact, and on “efficiency” has meant that support to research has declined dramatically. This is the case both for more strategic research conducted by specialist nongovernmental research institutes that might illuminate emerging livelihood trends at a regional level, as well as for more applied research through which development NGOs might be able to analyze how people get by in their areas of intervention. As a result NGO (and CFA) staff continue to “read” the landscape through outdated research and the theories in which they were themselves trained as students.

Seen through these lens’s, and using the idiom of this paper, it seems reasonable to argue - certainly as a hypothesis for more research – that the geographies of NGO intervention in the Andes have always diverged, but now diverge even more than they once did, from the geographies of poverty and livelihood in the region. Furthermore, the relative stasis of these geographies of intervention contrast with the changing geographies of livelihoods in the region. Under these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that NGO interventions have little impact on poverty, and especially on chronic poverty.

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