

NGOs and uneven development: geographies of development intervention

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Abstract: Much research on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in international development has been case-study-based, with questions about the broader geographies of NGO intervention rarely asked. This paper explores the factors that drive such NGO geographies and considers how they relate to the uneven geographies of poverty and livelihood produced under contemporary processes of capitalist expansion and contraction. Explanations of NGO presence and absence must of necessity be historicized and contextualized, and particular attention should be paid to the influences of the politics and political economy of aid and development, the geographies of religious, political and other social institutions, the transnational networks in which these institutions are often embedded, and the social networks and life histories of NGO professionals and allies. The resulting geographies of intervention pattern the uneven ways in which NGOs become involved in reworking places and livelihoods, though this reworking is also structured by the dynamics of political economy. The paper closes by drawing out implications for geographical research on NGOs, as well as for efforts to theorize the relationships between intentional development interventions and immanent processes of political economic change, and their effects on inequality and unevenness.

Key words: NGOs, development geography, uneven development, transnational networks, livelihood, poverty, Latin America.

I Introduction

Of the many meanings of 'development' the distinction between 'development as an immanent and unintentional process' and 'development as an intentional activity' is

particularly important (Cowen and Shenton, 1998: 50).¹ 'Immanent' development refers to processes of structural, political economic change, such as the expansion of capitalism, while 'intentional' development is the stuff of international aid: public and other agencies implementing 'development' projects, programmes and policies with specific ends. This distinction has since been used to locate different types and conceptions of participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), to stake out analytical agendas for development geography (Hart, 2001; Bebbington, 2003), and to explore the conditions under which progressive forms of livelihood and place transformation might be possible (Perreault, 2003).

In this paper, I use the distinction to lay out a framework for analysing the geographies of development intervention aimed at poverty reduction, with specific reference to the interventions of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Three analytical moves lie at the core of this project. The first is to trace the uneven geographies of poverty and livelihood under conditions of capitalist expansion and contraction, explaining how these are produced.² The second is to trace and explain the emergence of uneven geographies of intentional (in this case NGO) intervention. The third is to analyse the interactions between these geographically uneven processes of immanent and intentional development.³ Two of these interactions assume particular salience in the discussion here. The first is the extent to which patterns of intervention are themselves products of underlying processes of immanent development. Some critical approaches treat interventions as more or less directly linked to the workings of political economy, aimed at fostering the further consolidation of national and global capitalisms (e.g., see Cammack, 2003; Arellana-López and Petras, 1994). Instead, this paper suggests that there can be slippage in this relationship and that such slippage has geographical consequences. The second is the extent to which these interventions rework the effects of capitalist expansion and contraction in particular places and for particular people. While economic geographies of regional policy and uneven development in the UK have worked somewhat in this way (Massey, 1984; 2001), development geographers have gone less far. Only rarely have they analysed how and why patterns of intervention vary across space, or the ways in which these broader patterns of intervention are related to more immanent forms and processes of development.⁴

In order to focus the discussion, the paper is specifically concerned to address the geographies and effects of NGO interventions aimed at enhancing livelihoods and reducing poverty in rural areas. While the illustrative material is drawn from Latin America, and in particular the Peruvian and Bolivian Andes, the argument is intended to have broader purchase among development geographers. Indeed, the paper begins with a discussion of geographers' research on the international development activities of NGOs. The third section elaborates concepts underlying the paper's approach to the geographies of nongovernmental development interventions. Particular attention is paid to: the links between political economy, poverty and economic viability; the ways in which NGOs are embedded in global networks and transnational aid chains; and the notion of a geography of nongovernmental development interventions. The fourth section refers to recent research on the nature and effects of transnational nongovernmental aid chains in Peru and Bolivia. Though not intended to turn the text into an empirical paper, this research helps ground some of the broader points being argued. It considers how the framework can orient an analysis of the geography of nongovernmental development interventions: of their

distribution across space, and of the ways in which NGO activities affect the production and reworking of places and, in particular, the livelihoods of people living in those places. The penultimate section then focuses specifically on ways in which immanent political economies of development and patterns of intervention are related, and the closing section suggests implications for development geography.

II Geographers among NGOs⁵

Geographers have become increasingly interested in international development NGOs (McIlwaine, 1998a), albeit somewhat more tardily than some other disciplines (Bebbington, 2002).⁶ This interest reflects NGOs' increased importance as an empirical phenomenon (Mercer, 2002), but it also reflects more normative hopes that they might be potential sources of development alternatives (Gibson-Graham and Ruccio, 2001: 175–78; Whatmore and Thorne, 2004: 240–47). Such hopes echo earlier discussions in development studies that suggested NGOs would (or could) foster forms of development that would be more empowering, more human and more sustainable (Fisher, 1993; 1998) – a position stated perhaps most explicitly in the special supplement of *World Development* in 1987 entitled 'Development alternatives: the challenge for NGOs' (Drabek, 1987).

Much of this growing body of human geographical research on NGOs has been case-study-based – looking at specific organizations or specific places in which organizations work. This work has been productive. On a normative level it has encouraged more cautious enthusiasm about NGOs, with various authors sharing Mohan's (2002) conclusions about the 'disappointments of civil society'. Analytically the work shows that the presence of NGOs, and the financial, knowledge and other flows that this presence implies, is part of the production and reproduction of place (Mohan, 2002: 134; Bebbington, 2000; see also Escobar, 2001). Geographical research has also illuminated the interscalar processes that affect the forms taken by social movements, NGOs and community development in particular locations (e.g., Perreault, 2003). Cultural and political ecological research has likewise shown how the presence of NGOs can influence the policies and practices of environmental protection (Price, 1994; Young, 2001), patterns of agricultural land use (Keese, 1998) and somewhat broader processes of landscape change. Indeed, the term 'NGO landscape' has been used to refer to these institutionally modified forms of landscape change (Sundberg, 1998). Such modifications may not be those sought after by the NGO, as often they derive from NGO *misperceptions* of the nature of the relationship between people and the environment (Sundberg, 1998). Either way, the result is to affect processes of place-making.

Civil society is not, though, spatially homogenous (McIlwaine, 1998a; 1998b), and so NGOs are not likely to be implicated in place-making processes everywhere: nor is this imbrication likely to take the same forms across different NGOs and different locations. Furthermore, the effects of this presence will vary according to ongoing processes of immanent development which also vary across the locations in which NGOs work. Put differently, these place and landscape changing effects vary across space and contribute to unevenness in patterns of local development. Yet the analysis of how NGOs and their interventions are distributed across space, or of how

this distribution influences broader patterns of development is far less common. As Mercer comments, 'the spatialization of NGO activity and impact remains largely ignored despite growing evidence that NGOs are serving to "pluralize," particular places and spaces at the expense of others' (2002: 13). There are exceptions, of course. Mercer (1999) herself has pointed to the geographical unevenness of NGO influence on state-society relations in Tanzania. Price (1999) has mapped the uneven presence of NGOs at an international scale, showing significant concentration of NGOs in Latin America while also demonstrating that NGO presence is unequal across countries within the continent. Casual observation suggests that this presence is just as uneven within countries, yet there have been few serious attempts to map unevenness at this scale (but see Hurtado *et al.*, 1997). While this unevenness is often commented on, such commentary frequently focuses on criticizing the tendency of NGOs (and other agencies) to stay close to tarmac roads, or more generally close to larger cities so that their staff can return home each night (cf. Chambers, 1983). Mercer (2002: 13) refers to '[t]he proliferation of NGOs and civil societies in urban over rural spaces' and 'the tendency for NGOs and civil societies to be stronger in "development hotspots".' While there is likely truth in such critical observations, there are many other dimensions of unevenness in NGO activity, and quite probably many sociohistorical and political economic factors driving this unevenness. Understanding the factors that drive this unevenness, and those that lead to uneven NGO effects on immanent political economic processes in these different locations, calls for contextualized and historicized accounts of the interactions between immanent and intentional development.

Taken together, these observations echo recent calls for greater specificity in analysing NGOs (Igoe, 2003) – what should be studied is 'actually existing civil society' (Mohan, 2002), not just the civil society that is presumed to exist (Mercer, 2002). This does not merely imply doing more ethnography of development organizations (as has also been called for in recent years).⁷ It also implies more analytical and empirical care in exploring and explaining sources of variation across space, and resisting the normative temptation to be either gratuitously critical or excessively optimistic about NGOs.

III Concepts for the study of nongovernmental intervention: the case of rural poverty reduction

1 Unpacking the organization: NGOs and transnational networks

Since NGOs were hailed as a source of development alternatives (Drabek, 1987), research has *a grosso modo* moved along two paths. On the one hand there has been that work which continues the relatively uncritical celebration of the potential of nongovernmental organizations (e.g., Fisher, 1998; Clark, 1991; see discussions in Mercer, 2002; Jordan and van Tuijl, 2000). On the other hand there has been a growing body of work that is sceptical of NGOs. 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).

Regardless of its position, though, much of this NGO research shares a conceptual-methodological commitment in which NGOs are understood as organizations, and

in which the organization constitutes the unit of analysis. This seems logical: these are after all nongovernmental *organizations*. However, this particular view of conceptual boundaries brings limitations. *Inter alia*, it has meant that studies often: continue to conceptualize NGOs as 'Northern' or 'Southern' (Mohan, 2002); make an assumed separation between NGOs and governments, in order then to talk of interorganizational collaboration; and, above all, fail to analyse NGOs in terms of the institutions and social structures of which they are a part and which are frequently transnational in nature.

This conceptual commitment has had empirical and theoretical consequences. Empirically, it has meant that still little is known about the social and institutional networks out of which NGOs emerged and through which nongovernmental action occurs, or about the ways in which NGO interventions relate to more deeply embedded social and institutional processes. It has also meant that research on NGOs (not only in geography) is dominated by case studies, with far less research on the overall structure of nongovernmental 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.).⁸ The theoretical consequences are more far-reaching. The emphasis on the organization as the unit of analysis has meant that discussions of NGOs continue to be plagued by the vexed and ultimately unanswerable question of 'what is an NGO?' and haunted by endless typologies.⁹ While some of these typologies help clarify functional differences, they are less helpful in any explanatory sense – they don't help explain why NGOs emerge, why they do what they do and where, and why certain ideas underlie their actions.

If the question of 'what is an NGO?' were reframed as 'what are NGOs a case of?' a different type of reflection might become possible, one which may go further in explaining what happens within NGO projects, where it happens, and the types of impact these projects may have on rural poverty. One such reframing is to consider NGOs as the organized face of more deeply seated, networked forms of social action. That is, these networks of people (and ideas, institutions and things) are already pursuing strategic goals and create NGOs in order to further these strategies and do things that cannot be done through existing institutions and networks. Activities benefiting from the existence of a formal, legal organization might include applying for financial resources, employing staff, gaining legal recognition and presence in deliberative fora, etc. If that is so, then NGOs need always to be understood in terms of these networks and their longer-standing histories and geographies.

These networks are frequently international in reach. This is certainly so once they become involved with international aid, as so many poverty reduction and civil society strengthening networks do. Indeed, much intentional development by NGOs is only possible because of such aid relations. This is not at all to suggest (as some commentators unfairly do) that NGOs are merely part of an international jet set, unrooted in their own societies, and existing off the resources of international aid. Yet it is to say that they are almost always part of an international network of relationships that go up to make what might be called an aid chain – networks linked to international aid and cooperation, and channelling funds and other resources and information for the purpose of fostering social change. These international networks in which NGOs are embedded, and which sustain NGOs, make it difficult to talk glibly of Northern and Southern NGOs as discrete entities (Mohan, 2002).

In social network terms, such aid chains can be understood both as relationships among organizations (e.g., Northern Ministries of Development Cooperation, Northern NGOs, Southern NGOs and rural people's organizations), and also as relationships among individuals working within and through these organizations. Furthermore, given the human agency and political commitments involved, *some* of these aid chains (and certainly those discussed below) can be understood as specifically *transnational* networks (cf. Radcliffe, 2001; Perreault, 2003; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). People within them identify with different points (North and South) along the network, may often have worked and lived at these different points, and continue to move through them. The depth of commitment that many actors in these networks feel to the strategic goals of the network is itself partly a reflection of the extent to which these networks are themselves embedded within deeper institutional and social networks with a longer history of fostering collective action orientated toward fostering social change.

These networks, and the actors and institutions that constitute them, help determine the geographical form and conceptual underpinnings of NGO intervention. At the same time, though, these aid chains and networks are also embedded in political economic contexts (Perreault, 2003). These contexts do not necessarily determine everything that is done through the network, but they do structure elements of these actions – including their geographical manifestations.¹⁰

2 Geographies of poverty and rural viability

If the concept of networks is helpful for understanding the emergence of social actions that aim to address rural poverty, it is also useful for thinking about the geographical forms taken by livelihood responses that people compose in response to such poverty. Put differently, the concept is helpful for understanding the processes of both immanent, and intentional, development.

Uneven and inequitable geographies of poverty and opportunity constitute one of the most appalling products of immanent development processes. This unevenness is the context in which nongovernmental interventions unfold, and indeed is often the rationale for such efforts at intentional development. Interventions are most often justified as attempts to reduce poverty and create opportunity. This framing of intervention shows no signs of changing. Over the 1990s, poverty reduction assumed an increased centrality in international development assistance (e.g., DfID, 1997; World Bank, 2001), the Millennium Development Goals place poverty reduction at their core (Hulme and Shepherd, 2003), and governments across the developing world are preparing poverty-reduction strategies (albeit at the behest of multilateral institutions). Given the continuing concentration of chronic poverty in remote rural areas (Hulme and Shepherd, 2003: 411), rural development interventions will continue to be framed as poverty-reducing initiatives.

Yet the political economy of such rural poverty, as well as of popular responses to it, may mean that targeted, poverty-reduction interventions are by themselves inadequate mechanisms for 'attacking' (World Bank, 2001) this poverty. If the 'lagging rural regions' in which such poverty is found in Europe lack the assets and connectivities needed to become economically dynamic (Amin, 2004: 57), then

lagging regions in the South may well have even fewer possibilities. This is particularly so under policy regimes that resist any significant government-led redistributive measures to help such regions (Amin, 2004). Speaking of particularly poor parts of the Ecuadorian Andes, for instance, Bretón (2003: 161) asks 'is it even reasonable to expect peasant agriculture to be economically viable', and specifically for NGOs he asks '[d]oes it make any sense to continue working with peasants if the rules of the game do not change' (Bretón, 2003: 161). Indeed, in Latin America the notion that much small farm agriculture, and indeed whole agricultural regions, might be economically nonviable is apparent in interventions coming from a range of political positions (IDB, 1996; Reardon *et al.*, 2001; Martínez, 2003). At a recent workshop on the future of peasant production in the Andean countries, two-thirds of participants (again from a range of political and ideological positions) saw few *in situ* options for the poorer sectors of the peasantry under the context of contemporary capitalist development.¹¹

Almost by definition those agricultural households deemed unviable include some of the poorest of the poor. The very poorest – the aged, infirm and very young – are relatively immobile, and sometimes confined to rural spaces (Kothari, 2002). They have severely constrained opportunities to develop other, less agrarian livelihoods. Other, not quite so poor households who possess somewhat more human and financial capital are more able to 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 to periodic migration (Reardon *et al.*, 2001). Even if they are not all transnational in character (Martínez, 2003; Jokisch, 2002; Kothari, 2002; Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001), these mobile livelihoods are spatially complex, particularly as they become multilocal, working across noncontiguous spaces.

These multilocal and mobile livelihoods are themselves responses to the unevenness of development. They reflect people's efforts to move between and, through their own livelihoods, link up the cores¹² and peripheries of their own and increasingly other societies. As they link up to these economic cores, they not only contribute to the dynamism of those favoured locations, they also indirectly link themselves into the networks and connectivities that made these regions more successful in the first place (Sheppard *et al.*, 2004: 332; Gertler, 2001). In so doing they aim to make their own livelihoods also more successful. The economic viability of both places and livelihoods thus depends on their respective connectivities to other dynamic places and livelihoods.

This raises issues for intentional development interventions. On the one hand, the discontinuous geographies of multilocal livelihoods stand in stark contrast to the majority of rural development interventions (especially perhaps those of NGOs), which continue to be spatially focused on contiguous areas. On the other hand, an NGO intervention itself constitutes a new form of connectivity for the area where the intervention occurs. The questions then arise: how do some areas acquire this connectivity and others not; how does the new connectivity affect the potential dynamism of that place; and relatedly, how does it affect the livelihoods of people residing, at least for part of the year, in that place? In short, do the connections and flows that come with NGO networks give people sufficient resources to rework the political economy of development and the geographies of poverty that it produces?

3 NGO geographies and uneven development

Such an analysis of actually existing civil society is necessarily historical, but must also be attentive to differences across space.

(Mohan, 2002: 135)

These discussions suggest three related themes for a geographical take on the phenomenon of NGOs. First is the concern for the uneven presence and activity of NGOs across space. The transnational and other flows of knowledge, resources, ideas, values and power that sustain and are channelled by NGOs 'touch ground' unevenly. To understand the nature of this unevenness and how it is generated is critical to understanding NGOs as a phenomenon, but also – perhaps more importantly – to understanding their place in the reproduction and change of patterns of uneven development.

In its crudest and simplest sense, a notion of 'NGO geographies' helps focus attention on the question 'why did nongovernmental resources flow here and not there?' Such a question can be asked at different scales – among countries; among regions within a country; among microregions within a region; among communities within a microregion; and among households within a village. At each scale, patterns of presence and absence will be important in determining final effects of NGO interventions. The discussion in the following section suggests that the ways in which these geographies are generated has much to do with the social networks and institutions that both underlie and precede the existence of NGOs – in other words, there is a relationship between the structure and geography of these networks and the geography of nongovernmental resource flows and interventions.

The second and third themes (which are closely related) refer to the effects of these uneven flows on people and places. At one level this could be framed as a simple evaluation question – what was the impact of a given NGO on poverty in given place? This is the stuff of many project evaluations, some of which have indeed underlain geographers' efforts to understand NGOs (Mohan, 2002). The issue at stake, however, is much more than one of impact according to the stated goals of intentional development. The presence of NGOs in a particular place hooks that place into types of global network (cf. Massey, 1991) that would otherwise not have been present there, and brings meanings, resources, forms of exercising power, notions of modernity and a whole range of other influences to bear on a place. If 'places are articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings' (Massey, 1993: 66) and 'are constituted by economic, social, cultural and political relations and flows of commodities, information and people that extend far beyond a given locality' (Mohan, 2002: 134), then the presence of NGOs becomes part of the production of place. It also becomes part of the reworking of nature-society relations, for the flows associated with NGOs and other actors intervening in rural areas can also change patterns of, ideas about and struggles over nature and resource use (Peet and Watts, 1996; Carney, 1996; Keese, 1998; Young, 2001). Place-making thus also involves the reworking of nature-society relationships.

This uneven geography of place-making occurs on a canvas where immanent processes of development also constitute places. The final effects of this intentional (NGO) development will depend on the uneven political economic – or perhaps better, political ecological – contexts into which these organizations intervene. Thus, thinking of the geography of NGOs within the context of the geography of

immanent development processes helps frame a variety of questions. How far can the geography of intervention (in this case of NGOs) be understood as derivative of broader political economic dynamics? How far are the effects of this intervention determined by the geographies of contemporary capitalisms? How far do interventions change these geographies? How far do they affect the geographies of poverty and livelihood produced in the contemporary context? Answering these questions would help better understand the dialectical relationships between immanent and intentional development, the nature of NGO intervention, and the relationships between structure and agency in development geography. With a view to grounding some of these general ideas, the following section reviews research addressing such questions.

IV Geographies of transnational nongovernmental intervention in the Andes

Transnational linkages have been critical to the emergence of the NGO sectors in Peru and Bolivia and to the funding of the many rural poverty-reduction initiatives that these NGOs have pursued since the 1960s.¹³ Relationships with the Netherlands have been particularly significant in this regard, and especially so for those NGOs with more social democratic and once socialist agendas. These linkages were critical at the origin of many of these NGOs in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and continue to be so today. Indeed, during the late 1990s three of the four most important nongovernmental sources of support for Peruvian NGOs were Dutch Co-Financing Agencies: Novib (now Dutch Oxfam), Icco and Cordaid (formerly known as Cebemo and then Balance) (Valderrama and Negrón, 2001).^{14,15}

1 Regional geographies of nongovernmental aid flows

While the largest amounts of Dutch NGO aid to the Andes during the 1990s went to NGOs and networks based in the cities of Lima and La Paz, several regional concentrations also stand out: Cusco and Puno in Peru, and in Bolivia the departments of Cochabamba, Chuquisaca and Potosí. Given that other regions of the two countries are as poor or poorer than these, *ex ante* analysis of poverty concentrations did not appear to be the primary factor determining the geographies of these resource flows even though the co-funding resources that sustained these aid chains were justified largely in terms of poverty reduction (GOM, 1995). Instead, these regional concentrations reflected historically constituted regional foci of each co-financing agency (hereon CFA). The focus in Cusco is largely explained by aid chains involving Cordaid, that in Potosí-Chuquisaca by the presence of a Novib aid chain, and that in Puno by Icco. Understanding how these CFA specific concentrations occurred was important for explaining the geography of NGO interventions. This meant reconstructing network and institutional histories, and also implied asking questions about the historical geographies of religious institutions, resistance movements, solidarity linkages and government to government cooperation, as well as those of particular individuals linked to the Dutch, Peruvian and Bolivian organizations involved.¹⁶ The following paragraphs discuss these cases briefly to illuminate some of the processes involved.

a 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 and its partners found each other. In the 1970s Cusco was an important centre of Liberation Theology in Peru (and more generally of the left). By the 1970s, Jesuits and Dominicans sympathetic to Liberation Theology had established NGOs and the bishop of Cusco gave full support to social justice-based development programmes linked to the dioceses. By the time the bishop died, the Vatican had become much more conservative and appointed a new bishop far less committed to such programmes. Social justice activists left, and went to work in more liberal dioceses or decided to form independent NGOs to continue the initiatives begun through the church.

These church networks along with local activists linked to Peruvian Christian Democracy (some working from Lima-based NGOs) steered Cordaid¹⁷ towards a certain set of initiatives. By the early 1980s, Cordaid was channelling 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 self-reinforcing. The visits of Cordaid staff necessarily required them to spend significant periods of time in Cusco to sustain these partnerships. In the process, these partners also began to understand Cordaid better and so were able to continue capturing a significant part of Cordaid's attention. This clearly influenced the links that Cordaid made with other NGOs. On the one hand, it fostered a continuing concentration in Cusco where over the years other partners (not all Catholic now) have been added; on the other hand, it also meant that these early partners continued to occupy an important place within Cordaid's wider programme. Indeed, the CFA had a conscious strategy of concentrating its support in Cusco in order to reduce the transaction costs of sustaining its partnerships and seeking new ones. A further reinforcing factor here was the dense and multiple ties between development activists in Cusco and the Netherlands – Cusco had been a centre of Dutch bilateral aid in the late 1970s and 80s, so much so that one cusqueño activist commented 'we were all Dutch'. When Cordaid hired a professional who had previously worked in the Dutch bilateral programme in Cusco, this only further embedded itself and its programme in this network of relationships.

b Icco in Puno: Icco is a protestant organization, but in its case political and personal networks rather than religious institutions have structured the ways in which resources have flowed from Icco to the region. As Icco began building a programme in Peru, it relied heavily on suggestions from Dutch academics who had been working and living in Peru under a Dutch government-supported programme of support to develop the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Peru. Reflecting these academics' own networks, their suggestions focused particularly on NGOs and professionals linked to groups within the left in Peru. Coupled with the then Icco programme officer's own ideological commitments, this translated into a partner portfolio closely linked to particular political tendencies. This structured Icco aid flows in Peru into the mid-1980s.

A subsequent programme officer deliberately aimed (and was able) to break this concentration, and in the process a new cluster of partnerships emerged. Some of

these focused on the department of Puno. These partnerships offered a proposal consonant with Icco's own emerging interest in supporting agroecological approaches to rural development, but in many regards what led Icco to Puno was that one of the authors of the proposal was a Dutch professional by then settled in Puno. Years before he had trained with and become a friend of the Icco programme officer for rural development. This chance link led to an almost decade-long commitment to supporting Puno-based agroecology NGOs. By 2000 this experiment had failed, and Icco was finalizing its withdrawal. Most of the NGOs involved were in the process of disappearing.

Icco's history reveals the considerable influence that the personal and political loyalties and social networks of individual programme officers have had on partner selection. These networks are not autonomous or accidental – they reflect previous forms and moments of Dutch foreign aid (in this case via academic and training programmes) and the broad political economic principles that governed them at the time. While these do not determine actors' networks (nor how they later use them), they do structure them.

c 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 largely explained by IPTK's own focus on these areas. Although this is a chronically poor area by any standards, the reasons for this geographical focus are not related primarily to poverty analysis. Rather, during the dictatorship of the 1970s, Jesuit priests and the Bolivian Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR)¹⁸ had identified the area of Ocuri (near Ravelo in Map 1) as part of a 'strategic triangle' 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 with ties to Ocuri. The Jesuits persuaded Novib to support that initial organizing work. Shortly afterwards, the activist formed IPTK, and the organization has been a Novib partner ever since, becoming one of the largest rural development NGOs in Bolivia.

A structurally similar set of relations – though perhaps with 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 leader made contact with and ultimately befriended Novib staff. Once again, this personal relationship ultimately translated into an interorganizational one as Novib began to support the NGO that the leader later 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 channelled large volumes of resources to this NGO and three other organizations that the NGO helped create.¹⁹

In each of these cases, initial contacts were made via church and political 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; Bebbington *et al.*, 2002).

d Path dependency, agency and power in nongovernmental aid chains: The forms taken by aid flows in the nongovernmental sector have much to do with the structure of underlying social and institutional relationships. In these cases, long-standing partnerships between NGOs and CFAs originated in relationships mediated by the social and geographical structures of: the Catholic church, and orders within it;²⁰ political tendencies within the Peruvian and Bolivian left; networks built up through the presence of Dutch professionals and activists in the Andes, and of Peruvian and Bolivian activists in the Netherlands; and networks and links made possible by Dutch bilateral and Dutch-Peruvian interuniversity programmes. 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 programmes, political affinities and prior professional experiences.

In this process of network building, personal contacts are vital – particularly so when they are also embedded in deeper institutional commitments. ‘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’, noted one observer in Bolivia. Yet those officials’ personal contacts are not accidental, and have a great deal to do with the institutions, social networks, histories and political economic contexts within which they are embedded.²¹

This raises the question of how to understand the role of human agency in driving the geographical forms taken by these aid chains. While quotations in the previous paragraph suggest considerable scope for agency, programme officers and critical intermediaries had more scope to exercise their personal preferences in the earlier formative years of these aid chains than have more recent programme officers. As both Northern and Andean NGOs have become more institutionalized over time, the actions of people within the aid chains have become increasingly governed by organizational rules. Furthermore, newer officials have often been selected because they and their own social networks are in line with established practices and institutional commitments.

These limits on agency make aid chains appear quite path-dependent. This path dependency operates at two levels. The more general is in the *types* of Peruvian and Bolivian NGOs participating in these aid chains. That is, aid chains are much more likely to include NGOs that are embedded in certain types of institution and network, or which are located in those geographical locations where CFAs already have established relationships. The more specific path dependency is that certain NGO-CFA partnerships have lasted for over two and three decades, and the longer they last the harder they are to break. The detailed reasons for this go beyond the scope of this discussion, but one factor appears to be that the longer the relationship lasts the stronger the Andean NGO becomes in negotiating the relationship with CFA programme officers. While there is less turnover among senior NGO staff, CFA programme officers change more often. This has two effects. Programme officers who negotiated earlier relationships with NGOs assume more senior positions in the CFA, giving the NGO access to power within the CFA should newer programme officers begin to suggest they want to change the terms of the relationships between CFA and NGO. Secondly, new programme officers tend to be younger and more inexperienced than NGO senior staff, and are often out-argued by the NGO when partnerships come up for renewal.

It is therefore not at all the case that Northern NGO officials have all the power to exercise agency in these aid chains, except when the power to be exercised is one endorsed by senior management in the Northern NGO and demanded by Northern governments, as discussed in the next section (see also Igoe, 2003; Mohan, 2002; Fowler, 1998).

2 Microgeographies of intervention and livelihood

The articulation of intentional NGO development and immanent development is partly patterned by such factors driving the unevenness of the aid chain across regions. It is also patterned by the uneven geographies of intervention among and within villages. Detailed exploration of this unevenness is again beyond the scope of this paper (but see Bebbington *et al.*, 2002; Zoomers, 1998). However, a few general comments merit making.

First, even at this quite local level transnational factors are likely still to play a role (cf. Perreault, 2003). In the research discussed in the previous section, this was clear from two tendencies that were apparent across different aid chains. The first relates to the increased pressures on all involved in international aid with some degree of public funding to demonstrate impacts on poverty (see also Hulme and Shepherd, 2003). These pressures are exercised through hierarchies of power directly linked to degrees of financial dependence: Dutch NGOs felt pressure from the Dutch government, the Andean NGOs from Dutch NGOs, and in some cases communities from NGOs. Showing poverty impact had become increasingly important in arguing the case for continued funding. Ironically, this had led to a trend *away from* focusing on the chronically poor and towards already more viable farming families. The reasoning for such a shift was that these better-off families were more able to take risks, absorb new technologies and combine them with other assets. As such, they would probably show impact more quickly.²²

This progressive orientation toward viable, middle-peasants had also led to a reduction in the number of families and communities supported by NGOs, for two reasons. First, the shift in focus towards more viable farmers has also come with a shift towards the introduction of more expensive innovations: feed stalls, improved cattle, sprinkler irrigation systems, cultivated pasture conversion, etc. Secondly, for some of these NGOs this has happened at a time when overall budgets are under pressure as their (Dutch and other) funding agencies cut back their own levels of support (see below). The combined effect of these factors has been to concentrate interventions in a smaller number of households. Furthermore, this concentration tended to be among households that were, if not the wealthiest, at least already on a path of agrarian accumulation within the context of underlying processes of capitalist development in these regions. They tended to have better physical and social access to product markets, and were better able to incorporate the types of technological innovation proposed by the NGOs.

The other main livelihood response of the rural poor to contemporary processes of immanent development has been to incorporate more nonfarm sources of income (Escobál, 2001; Zoomers, 1998).²³ Yet such responses remain far less visible to actors within these aid chains. Instruments for working with migrants and multilocation livelihood strategies remain very underdeveloped, and the nature of such

livelihoods poorly understood. The relative 'invisibility' of such strategies is not limited to this case: it has also been noted among other nongovernmental aid chains (Zoomers, 1998) as well as among other rural development interventions across Latin America (Reardon *et al.*, 2001; Escobál, 2001; Martínez, 2003).

Whether the unevenness of nongovernmental interventions aggravates or not the inequalities of immanent development in the Andes and elsewhere remains an open question. It is, however, a critical one to ask, both for the agencies involved in intentional development and for those researchers concerned to understand the interactions among intentional and immanent development. At the very least it seems clear that interventions affect the human geographies of immanent development – livelihoods and places are different from what they would have been in the absence of intervention. How (and where) they are different depends upon a range of commitments, affiliations and ideas underlying the working of aid chains. That said, the political economy of immanent development continues to be critical in the determination of these geographies.

V Political economy of aid and NGO geographies

This focus on networks, institutions and livelihoods ought not to divert attention from a broadly stated notion of political economy (cf. Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987), for both the livelihood and NGO geographies discussed here are structured (if not determined) by the wider politics of aid and political economy of development. Rural livelihood strategies – and the spatial forms they take – reflect the geographies of capitalist expansion and contraction in the Andes. Centres of capitalized family farming have been in areas linked to expanding commodity markets (for instance dairy-product markets in La Paz). Long-distance, circular migration has been towards new economic frontiers in the humid tropical lowlands (linked to the coffee, coca and gold economies in the Peruvian cases, and colonist agriculture, coca and hydrocarbons in the Bolivian case): rhythms of migrations reflect these pulses of capitalist expansion, as well as their ebbs and flows. Urban migration reflects the overall bias of capital investment in Peru and Bolivia, and more specifically the urban centres around which the tourist economy has grown. At the same time, the politics of food aid (leading to cheap imports of wheat flour) have systematically disadvantaged Andean agriculture. The combined effects of this bias and the emerging geographies of capitalist expansion in the Andes are palpably evident in the viability pressures on small farm production.

Equally important is the relationship between NGO geographies and the political economy of aid and development. Four points merit emphasizing here. First, the period during which these networks emerged was one in which the general commitment to aid – and the specific commitment to channelling significant parts of it through the CFAs – went largely unchallenged in the Netherlands. CFAs had great latitude in choice of partners and strategies. Coupled with the agencies' steadily increasing budgets (which had to be disbursed somehow), this translated into significant autonomy being given to programme officers. In such a context it is not surprising that the networks of officials and the politico-institutional commitments of the agencies did much to drive partner choice and the resulting geographies of aid flows. That said – and this is the second point – the nature of co-financing

was related to the politics of Dutch government aid. The remarkable commitment of Dutch bilateral aid to the social democratic experiment of the government in Peru from 1969 to 1974 evidently laid the social bases for the co-financing programme to take the form it did (Wehrkamp, 1990). In the Bolivian case, the refusal of the bilateral programme to work with the dictatorial governments of the 1970s and early 1980s meant that NGOs built their own networks – networks that were deeply political, built in order to counter this dictatorship (recall the case of the ‘strategic triangle’). Thirdly, the political commitments that led CFAs and NGOs to build the networks that they did – and the larger political projects deriving from those commitments – have changed over the last decade. Just like development theory more generally, many NGOs North and South have become politically less radical and less sure of themselves, and more interested in exploring market-based (as opposed to more social and political) approaches to development. This suggests that – for both Andean and European actors – networks built in earlier periods may not have the same relevance now.

Finally, by the end of the 1990s Dutch commitments to co-financing agencies and to Latin America were changing. As the global poverty agenda within foreign aid takes its particular hold in the Netherlands, there are two clear effects. First, aid to Latin America has been reduced, on the grounds that the region is not as poor as much of Africa and South Asia. This same pattern has been played out within the co-financing agencies, and indeed across other European countries (most recently the UK). Secondly, scrutiny of co-financing agencies has increased (and, again, this is also the case beyond the Netherlands, even before 11 September 2001, and certainly since). One form that this scrutiny has taken has been to demand more evidence of impact on poverty.²⁴ These pressures change the forces structuring the emerging geographies of NGO intervention. First, much of the CFA demand for poverty impact referred to in the previous section has come as a consequence of the increased pressures the Ministry placed on the CFAs – and I have already noted how this has influenced the village-level geographies of intervention. Secondly, and more significantly, in a context where the co-financing agencies have played such an important role in NGO financing in Peru and Bolivia, the reduction in resource availability from the Netherlands and Europe more generally has significant effects on the overall funding base of Peruvian and Bolivian NGOs.²⁵ In response, NGOs have to reduce the scope of their coverage unless they find alternative sources of funding. Such alternative sources – if they exist – typically come with thematic and geographical strings attached, particularly so when the funding is from (multilaterally or bilaterally financed) government programmes that contract NGOs. Such contracting is an increasingly significant source of NGO funding in Latin America (Bebbington, 1997).

Under these arrangements the types of social networks and institutional relationships that have structured NGO interventions in the past will become progressively less important drivers of future NGO geographies, while factors typically associated with neoliberalism (government subcontracting, subsidiarity) are assuming greater significance. Meanwhile, rural livelihoods are themselves increasingly composed in response to the constraints and opportunities of neoliberalism in the Andes. In some sense it may be that geographies of intervention broadly structured by social democratic and corporatist projects (cf. Perreault, 2003) are slowly ceding to geographies derivative of neoliberal exigencies. As the underlying political economy of

development and politics of aid change, so also do the geographies of nongovernmental intervention.

VI Conclusions

Tracing the emergence of NGO geographies – at a range of scales – helps us understand the historical emergence of parts of the project of development as intervention. It makes quite clear that this project has deep roots in other struggles and other institutions – and that these roots continue to influence the geographies and strategies of these interventions. It also sheds light on the nondeterministic but very clear ways in which these interventions have themselves been influenced by the historical political economy of development in the Andes, as well as the politics surrounding aid in the Netherlands – politics which themselves are affected by more global debates on development.

The extent to which these interventions have led to change in the uneven human geographies of capitalist development in the Andes is unclear, though it is at least possible that it has accentuated certain patterns of unevenness. If anything, the main effect has been to facilitate the consolidation of certain forms of capitalist family enterprise in rural areas. Interventions have done little to reduce the exclusion of those groups systematically disadvantaged – or simply ignored – by the broader structure of development in the region.

These findings suggest that NGOs are not well ‘placed’ to make great contributions to poverty-reduction strategies nor to the ‘even-ing’ out of immanent development processes. Their geographies of intervention do not reflect the geographies of poverty and livelihood in the Andes; and their strategies of intervention do not respond to the economic and spatial dynamics of poor people’s livelihoods. More importantly, they do less and less to address the deeper processes of immanent development that produce poverty and inequality of opportunity. Perhaps most significantly, more recent demands for poverty impact may push these aid chains further away from the very poor and towards less poor families with whom it is easier to achieve demonstrable change. Indeed, while it would be easy to take such findings and point an accusatory finger at NGOs (as much research is wont to do), this would be to ignore the ways in which the logic of the aid chain tends to drive such outcomes.

While tracing the emergence, geographies and impacts of these nongovernmental aid chains can reveal much about the nature of ‘NGOs’, it also opens up a broader area of work for development geography. Tracing the many and complicated ways in which political economy and intervention interact with each other to produce geographies of development is a broader project that would include similar analyses of: government and multilateral interventions (cf. Lawson, 1988; Fox, 2000), social movement interventions (cf. Perreault, 2003; Radcliffe, 2001), religious institutions (Olson, 2004) and corporate investments (Bury, 2004). In some sense this is a project that takes forward an actor-based approach to political ecology (Bryant and Bailey, 1997) in several ways. It problematizes the notion of actors, understanding them always in terms of the institutional, social and scalar relations in which they are embedded; it traces the uneven geographical forms that they and their interventions take; and it explores the nondeterminate, but structuring, interactions between immanent development and intentional intervention.

The example of such an approach etched out in this paper clearly heeds the call of Cowen and Shenton (1996) to distinguish clearly and always between the two meanings of the word 'development' that they identify, but the history of nongovernmental aid chains in the Andes also suggests the need to recover a *third*, normative, meaning of development – particularly if the goal is to reverse patterns of unevenness and inequality. This is the notion that the development project ought not be about targeted poverty reduction, but rather about redistributions and transformations. Indeed, this would be to recover the meaning of development as social justice on which the relationships underpinning the aid chains discussed in this paper emerged in the first place.

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Notes

1. The term 'unintentional' is complicated. It is not used here to imply that the decisions of capitalists are not intentional, nor that a capitalist structure hovers above, and unconnected to, the daily lives of entrepreneurs and citizens. It is, though, meant to suggest that there is some structural logic that transcends these individuals' decisions.

2. This focus on capitalisms might be criticized on the grounds that it runs the risk of capitalocentrism (Gibson-Graham and Ruccio, 2001), the effect of which is to exclude discussion of both local (e.g., hybrid) and economy wide (e.g., socialist) alternatives.

3. Having raised the multiple meanings of the word 'development', using the word becomes awkward in this paper. Wherever possible it is used to refer to one of these two meanings, with explicit qualifiers attached. Where these qualifiers are not attached – for reasons of style – it ought be clear which specific meaning is being invoked.

4. An interesting exception in this regard is Lawson (1988), even if the language used was different.

5. A play on a review essay of Michael Watts subtitled 'geographers among the peasants'.

6. From here on for reasons of style I use NGO to refer to these international development NGOs. Normally NGO can refer to a far broader voluntary sector.

7. A recent example is the conference on the ethnography of aid held by the LSE and SOAS, 26–28 September 2003.

8. This case study focus may be changing. See recent interventions by Townsend (1999), Townsend *et al.* (2002) and Hickey (2002), for instance. Mercer (2002: 12–13) has recently noted another geographical problem in much NGO writing – the failure to contextualize claims about the nature of NGO capacities (and deficiencies), and the tendency to make generalized (normative) claims on the basis of a few geographically, specific cases.

9. For examples, see Clark (1991), Farrington and Bebbington (1993), Vakil (1997) and Fisher (1998).

10. Certainly not all NGOs involve transnational linkages (nor international funding flows); and not all involve collective action – especially those working as contractors for the provision of goods and services (Bebbington, 1997; Uphoff, 1993).

11. Participants included researchers, and representatives from government, nongovernmental and international organizations. 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 25 and 26 February, 2003. The author moderated the event.

12. Note that here the notion of core need not imply the national core – it is, rather, a relative term referring to those areas that are the much more economically dynamic within a given territory. Cores and peripheries in this sense are therefore relative concepts – but, to a household with few land and water resources, a regional market centre or not so distant frontier economy still seems like an economic core in comparison with their home community.

13. Indeed, during the later 1980s and 1990s, the Peruvian and Bolivian governments cut back on public investment in small farm agricultural development, leaving much of the sector to NGOs’ rural interventions.

14. The Co-Financing Agencies are NGOs who receive a significant part of their budget from the Dutch government (hence the term *co-financing*), resources they then use to support nongovernmental organizations (including community-based organizations) across the world.

15. Cordaid was created in 1999 as a merger of several Catholic organizations of which Cebemo and later Bilance were the most important in the Andes. For ease of style I use the name Cordaid to refer to the work done when it was called Cebemo and Bilance.

16. In this sense there is an analytical linkage to be made here with traditions in time geography – though, as Gregory (1985) argued, such individuated time geographies can only be adequately understood in terms of the institutions and structures that constrain and pattern them.

17. More accurately, Cebemo supported these initiatives.

18. The MIR still exists as a mainstream political party. In the 1970s it was persecuted.

19. As in the Cordaid example, this again implies that certain Andean activists are, once within the aid chain, able to steer co-financing resource flows towards other organizations, as long as the case can be made that they meet the aid chain’s criteria. This pattern – in which CFA staff depended on the recommendations of favoured, long-standing partners – was encountered various times.

20. In a different study (Bebbington and Kopp, 1995) it was found that the 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). This in turn reflected the historical geography of missionary work within this church during the twentieth century (Johansson, 1992).

21. Cf. Granovetter (1973) on the strength of weak ties in labour markets.

22. The same reasoning underlies other programmes, for instance the FAO’s food security programme (FAO, 2002). Hulme and Shepherd (2003) have noted the danger that the desire to meet the Millennium Development Goals for poverty reduction might lead agencies in general to focus on the ‘easily assisted poor’.

23. Though this seems to be less the case for the very poorest (the chronic poor) who often lack the assets they need to move into other activities (Kothari, 2002).

24. These pressures increased particularly during Evelyn Herfkens’s period as Minister for Development Cooperation. She came to the Ministry from a period as Dutch Executive Director of the World Bank.

25. Another general trend has been the increasing conservatism of the Roman Catholic Church during the current papacy. This has also had implications for the nature of church-based aid.

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