

NGOs: fragmented dreams

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Southern NGOs: a background to the crisis

It is difficult to discuss the role of development NGOs without first acknowledging some personal feelings and motives.¹ Some twenty years ago, many socially and politically committed Peruvian professionals decided to set up NGOs as instruments to bring about the democratic transformation of a society that is characterised by profound socio-economic inequality and political exclusion. We sought to establish a new democratic order and a new society, one based on justice and equality, and geared towards meeting the interests of the poor and exploited of Peru.

Today, as NGOs confront problems of identity and of survival, we need to take stock. What is it that keeps us founder-members still working in the NGO sector? What roles do or should NGOs play today? What type of discourse, scenario, and inspiration can NGOs offer the up-and-coming generations of development professionals? What challenging new ideas might open up different directions for NGOs?

The overwhelmingly negative situation has led many development professionals to opt out and abandon their commitment to the NGOs. By far the most important factor has been the relatively poor salaries, but working conditions have also become increasingly demanding and uncomfortable. At the subjective level, we feel we are swimming against the tide. And while often it is not even clear in which direction we should be heading, we have the distinct impression that our progress is slowing down. In some regions, Peru among them, our vulnerability and isolation became very intense as NGOs were caught in the crossfire between

terrorism and State repression. And now there is a growing feeling of unease that we are alone and unsupported.

Assuming that those of us who have remained in the NGO sector are not here simply as a result of inertia or incompetence, we nevertheless need to re-think our role at the start of the new millennium. There is no logical reason why the turn of the calendar should change our views, but it serves as a useful pretext for taking a fresh look at the future.

At this point, we need to define the scope of our reflections and clarify what we mean by the term 'NGO', given the plethora of institutions that describe themselves as such. Probably readers of this volume will not require a very detailed definition of development NGOs. We know who we are. We are talking about institutions that came into being during the last thirty years, and were born in the search for ways to work alongside and support the most disadvantaged members of society: the poor and their organisations. We have used different terms to identify the poor over the years, depending on our own way of seeing things and on the language of the day: 'the exploited', 'the oppressed', 'the marginalised'. Today we are increasingly aware that the poor are 'excluded' from power or wealth. Driven by political and ethical commitment, our mission was to help to improve the living conditions of the poor, to strengthen them as social actors (if not social classes), and to play a part in the utopian and radical transformation of a world that is based on structural injustice.

We trust that this broad definition of development NGOs is precise enough to show where we are coming from. However, we would add our perception that NGOs are not only losing their role as radical social critics, and their capacity to put forward broad alternatives. They are also, perhaps more seriously, losing their ability to respond to and take political initiatives. Equally worrying is the loss of the flexibility and audacity that will be required in the search for new ways of achieving new goals. The passage of time has rendered us — some more than others — conservative and often uninspired. This situation is not peculiar to NGOs in Peru: numerous workshops, conferences, and research findings suggest that there is widespread self-questioning within the NGO sector and a search for new horizons.²

Finally, a critical element in the context in which NGOs are evolving is the role of international and multilateral agencies that work for the development of 'Third World' countries. In some cases, the need to accommodate ourselves to their agenda has resulted in or reinforced the trend towards the loss of autonomy, initiative, and flexibility referred to above. NGOs have 'accidentally on purpose' been absorbed into the

flourishing 'aid industry', in which the logic of development *projects* takes precedence over that of development *strategies*. The bureaucratisation of NGOs and cuts in external funding have left us struggling to survive and compete in a tight marketplace. All this has conspired to foster not only our subordination in terms of ideology, but also our financial dependence on the outside.

Globalisation and the one-thought world: *la pensée unique*³

We cannot fully understand the crisis of NGOs without some reflection on the global context in which we are working. Without a doubt, our environment is characterised by a form of globalisation that is based on the increased speed with which the free market operates; or, to put it another way, the speed and the freedom with which capital, merchandise, and information can circulate. However, if this type of globalisation was the only significant factor in the equation, we would simply be experiencing an accelerated phase in the expansion of capitalism, and not a situation that is qualitatively different.⁴ But the advancing tide of globalisation has brought with it what has been called the *pensée unique*, or the one-thought world. This proposed universal mindset which we have imported, whether by choice or not, along with the neo-liberal development model, has not helped to galvanise us as people or as nations. Rather, this imported ideology has weighed our theoretical, epistemological, and ethical anchors, and left us to drift on the tides of a globalised sea. In the words of the Chilean political analyst Norbert Lechner, '[I]nterpretive codes are crumbling and, as a result, we perceive reality as disorder on a large scale' (Lechner 1998).

We must of course recognise that it is not only the NGOs who have been affected by this crisis and the loss of direction that characterises the contemporary scene. So too have political parties, which have come to symbolise a decadent political order. Likewise, the nation-state which, having retreated from its social responsibilities and weakened the mechanisms and institutions of democratic politics, is now attempting to address the problems of inequality and social discontent by falling back on authoritarianism in various guises. This holds true also for governments that have been legitimised by the formal electoral process and 'delegative democracy' (O'Donnell 1992).

Fragmented dreams and division

This type of globalisation and universal thinking has affected NGOs, as well as the people and social organisation they work with. We invite our readers to seek the origins of this crisis in the actors themselves. In this case, to look within our NGOs and in the mindsets of those with whom we work, to understand the nature of the crisis and to find paths out of it. The fragmentation we have referred to is apparent, for example, in the gulf that separates the recognition of the importance for development of ethics, values, culture, ethnicity, and gender from practices and projects which are shaped by and often serve the logic of neo-liberalism. The award of a well-deserved Nobel Prize for Economics to Amartya Sen has brought attention to the role of ethics and values in development. But there is a risk of such considerations becoming just another rhetorical fad or optional extra, rather than the very basis for human development. NGOs have in the past championed other fashionable concepts and causes such as ‘sustainable development’, ‘citizenship’, ‘civil society’, ‘gender equity’, ‘youth opportunity’, and ‘consensus building’, but often they fail to establish the links between them in a global strategy of change. While important, these aspects of development are neutralised and even distorted, unless they are linked with genuine social processes that have a perspective that goes beyond short-term or sectoral concerns.

It is remarkable that almost all the NGOs use the same terminology: ‘participatory democracy’, ‘local development’, ‘citizen participation’, and ‘human rights’. However, there are grounds for fearing that schemes and approaches are being adopted — more in practice than as a matter of theoretical conviction — which in effect restrict participatory democracy and citizenship simply to participation at the micro-level in processes and programmes to combat poverty and other effects of structural adjustment. Hence, there is a tendency to regard any successful poverty-relief programme at the micro-level as ‘local development’. The concept of local development thus loses any relation to envisaging and working towards other, more holistic and more human, forms of development.

All of which brings us to the unavoidable question of how we relate people’s specific concrete problems and needs to general concerns for human development and democracy. In this globalised, fragmented world we must look for the *public spaces* in which particular interests come together in the ‘common good’. This, we believe, can happen only in the political arena. However, NGOs have consciously or unconsciously adopted approaches to development and anti-poverty efforts that are

based on a limited — often negative — concept of what politics is about. Furthermore, some even seek to reduce popular political expression to the very minimum, simply in order to achieve their project objectives. We therefore need to ask ourselves why NGOs have disengaged from politics, and to look for ways to restore a political perspective both to development and to our own commitment to the well-being of ordinary people in countries like Peru.

Democracy and development: two halves of a single whole

The Argentinean political analyst, José Aricó, said some years ago that ‘we are unable to find a way out [of the crisis] because we are captives of the very terms in which the crisis is defined. We reason from within it, and it is the crisis that imposes a horizon on our ability to see.’ And it has become increasingly clear that the misnamed (neo-)liberal model, or Washington Consensus, has imposed on us not merely a set of economic measures, set out in the IMF’s ‘letters of intent’ to which our countries must subscribe should they not wish to forgo the chance to increase their debts, but also a particular vision of development and politics, which leaves the former to the market and reduces politics to almost trivial matters.

To escape from this political, theoretical, ethical, and cultural impasse, we would like to explore two central considerations, democracy and development, and to establish a necessary relationship between them. Our intention is not to offer a theoretical essay, but we hope to show how the current divide within our NGOs between research, lobbying, and consultancy work on the one hand, and promotional and educational work with social actors on the other, derives from our limited and disjointed understanding of the processes of democracy and development. Such an understanding serves the neo-liberal world project. We argue that we need to treat democracy and development as two halves of the same whole, two aspects of a single theoretical concept and process. We will then draw on these notions to suggest a possible fertile starting point for finding a way out of our crisis.

Human development

The development model that underpins the Washington Consensus and has been imposed on the world by multilateral agencies such as the IMF

and the World Bank has been criticised by many analysts and even by some of its creators.⁵ Denis Goulet has criticised the *reductionist* nature of the model, which measures development only in terms of macro-economic concerns and indicators. In Latin America, Manfred Max-Neef introduced the concept of *development on a human scale*. Amartya Sen, who now speaks to a worldwide audience, has argued the importance and the role of values and ethics in development. The UNDP, along with its *Human Development Reports*, has also played a significant part in encouraging critical appraisal of the model. The criticisms and alternative approaches offered by these and many other analysts have created a fertile basis for the search for solutions to the crisis in which we are trapped. This is not to suggest, however, that our critical analysis or theoretical apparatus have any automatic or straightforward solutions to offer.

There is a danger awaiting us in the way that we approach our critique of the prevailing model of development. The critique that has been developed over the last twenty years has profoundly human origins, inspired by the recognition of the tremendous suffering, poverty, injustice, and marginalisation that is generated by this model of development. This view has led to the emergence of social movements on a world-wide scale, one of the most important of which is the present Jubilee 2000 Campaign for the reduction or forgiveness of the unjust burden of foreign debt that is borne by the poorest countries.

However, we do not all draw the same conclusions from this critique. Many strategies designed to soften the impact of the neo-liberal model of development focus solely on its *effects*, not on the causes inherent in it. We need to ask ourselves whether NGO strategies are also limited to combating effects without identifying and addressing the causes of poverty. For example, it is possible to criticise the narrowness of the neo-liberal model and its exclusive focus on macro-economic indicators, and to include other issues relating to the social dimensions (income, health, food, education), or gender, or the environment – but still remain within the framework of the same model. In this what we might term ‘neo-structuralist’ approach, ethical considerations and human values serve to correct the defects of the neo-liberal model, but not to criticise the model itself. As Aricó noted, we are still caught within the terms in which the crisis is defined.

Many NGOs, especially those that started out with socialist or Marxist leanings, have often been very cautious and restrained in their critiques of neo-liberalism, because of the loss of their own ideological footing and paradigms, particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Other NGOs

(the minority) have maintained a radically critical discourse, but in practice their work on the ground has also been confined to attempts to alleviate the effects of the model. As we see it, in neither case have NGOs succeeded in identifying where to start in order to develop a critical, holistic, and practice-based analysis. The problem of finding a starting point that is both profoundly and radically critical *and* innovative is not exclusive to NGOs. Left-wing political parties, as well as other parties and political movements working for social change, appear to be similarly paralysed, caught between the urgent need to alleviate poverty and the need to find new ways forward. We may indeed ask whether the ‘Third Way’ is not just another example of an attempt to find a better way of dealing with the effects of the neo-liberal model, rather than searching for a different approach altogether.

Democracy for development

Our critique needs to approach this issue from a different perspective. As mentioned earlier, ethical principles, cultural values, and concern for the quality of life should not be seen as ‘optional extras’, serving merely to counteract the negative effects of the prevailing model. They should be the starting point for a human and holistic approach to — rather than model of — development. Amartya Sen and many others have shown that we need to understand development as the development of the human person, his or her *freely* determined needs and capacities. It should be remembered that the human person — the starting point and also the subject of human development — creates himself or herself as a person in society, in relationships with others, in and with the community. Hence human development also means the development of society.

We do not intend to embark on a review of the various approaches to human development. The authors mentioned above argue their case quite clearly in their own writings. What is vital, and this takes us to the second concept, that of *democracy*, is that the human person and the societies in which the person exists must of necessity be the very *subject* of development, not merely an object or reference point in our analysis and evaluation of differing approaches to development.

Sen defines human development as the development of the capacities of the human person, capacities that must be *freely* determined. We must underline the critical importance of this definition and everything that flows from it. No one can decide what human development is to mean for someone else. And no society or culture can dictate the perspectives or

values of another society. People's role in development should not be limited to participating in decisions about how to address the effects of a given development model. They must be free to choose what development they want, both as individuals and as communities, two dimensions of our identities that are in constant interaction and tension. The means by which this free determination is achieved is essentially the exercise of democratic political activity.

The reader will probably need little convincing in order to agree that the 'democratic' systems with which we are familiar do not deliver real power (*cratos*) into the hands of the people (*demos*), power of the sort that allows them freely to determine the type of development they want. In the first place, our democratic systems are based above all on nation-states, which are themselves now greatly weakened in their capacity to shape the direction of development within their own frontiers. Second, there are increasing signs that the majority — the poor and marginalised — no longer expect the democratic system to provide them with solutions to their problems and basic aspirations. It is no coincidence that the number of authoritarian governments — both elected and otherwise — has increased as the desire to participate in politics has diminished. People are choosing to opt out of politics rather than to participate — choosing the exit rather than attempting to voice their concerns (Hirschman 1982). They prefer to delegate political responsibility, rather than elect people who are able to represent their interests (O'Donnell 1992). The most worrying aspect of this trend towards depoliticisation and the decline of representative democracy is that it is not simply a reflection of the 'backwardness' of developing countries, but is also now apparent even in the developed world.

In many of the poorer countries, most of them former colonies, this divorce between democracy and human development and well-being also has a historical dimension. In the case of Peru, for example, we find that since becoming an independent republic, the country has spent more years under dictatorships and authoritarian governments than it has under democratically elected governments. The indicators of economic and social development reveal that progress is more closely associated with authoritarian government than it has been with democracy. Popular support in Peru for the overtly authoritarian Fujimori government and current developments in Ecuador and Venezuela, a country with a more substantial democratic tradition, suggest that these countries are moving in the same direction: towards authoritarianism and the concentration of power.

From what has been said above, we can surely now draw some preliminary conclusions. On the one hand, if we understand development to mean the development of the person and his or her *freely* determined capacities, then we can conclude that democracy and development are inseparable. Consequently, we cannot pursue development and leave democracy until later, as the Fujimori government argues. Nor can we try to establish a democratic system without linking these efforts to the development process, which seems to be the thinking embodied in the political groups opposed to the authoritarian government in Peru.

On the other hand, if we also recognise that the political mechanisms required for individuals and peoples to exercise freedom of choice (i.e. democratic political systems) have been profoundly weakened, then we can conclude that our strategies for achieving human development must focus on building forms of democracy — participative and representative — that are closely associated with the processes of development. Here again, we find serious limitations in the ways in which many NGOs are approaching the task of strengthening both the democratic system and political and social actors. Simply put, often the programmes and projects that are explicitly designed to strengthen democracy are not based on a critical analysis of the democratic political system itself. Instead, they tend to limit their action to the formal aspects of democracy, which, while important, are not the core of the problem. Hence we find numerous attempts, especially directed towards women, to *build citizenship*, to allow them to exercise their civil and political rights. Such programmes are aimed at redressing the substantial gender imbalance of those registered to vote and generally promoting *citizenship* or civic participation.

What we would criticise in many of these programmes is their apparent failure to recognise that the system of representative democracy that we imported with our constitutions when we gained independence is not the product of inclusive or unifying social and economic processes. A modern political model was superimposed upon a pre-modern market and society. We must therefore recognise that in countries such as our own, where life is so precarious, a solid citizenship must be the result of the social and political practices of the people themselves, rather than the result of laws and rules. If we forget this relationship between democracy and the social processes that are actually at work, we risk building a democracy whose citizens are fragile abstractions, with no connection to the human development process that we are proposing.

In a recent conference, the town planner and councillor of Barcelona, Jordi Borja, described an incident that illustrates our point. Residents in a predominantly working-class neighbourhood of Barcelona organised to oppose the building of a recreation centre for elderly people. According to Borja, the local community rejected the idea of having 'old people in our neighbourhood'. As Borja pointed out, this action was 'civic participation', but participation with a clearly anti-democratic content. This anecdote serves to emphasise the importance of ensuring that our efforts to build a democratic political system do not take place in isolation from the processes of human development, processes which have technical dimensions but which are also about ethics. The basic issue is the political content and direction of the democracy we are putting forward.

Where might we find a solution?

We have tried to establish a theoretical and practical relationship between human development and democratic politics, arguing that human, freely determined development can only be arrived at through democratic political activity. If this is so, we want to ask how and where such political practices can emerge. From our experience we believe that the key is in the social actors themselves, particularly the popular organisations and their leaders.

We assume that readers who are familiar with grassroots organisations will be aware that so far the reference to the 'individual and/or social actor' has been at a level of generalisation and abstraction. Such abstraction and generalisation lends itself to all forms of exaggerated and misleading simplifications. Indeed, there are studies and analyses of these actors that depict contradictory realities and perspectives. Some observers consider that collective organisations have fulfilled their historical role, that political and development processes are now the exclusive domain of the individual, and that political activity is reduced to little more than the *marketing* of policy proposals which politicians offer to the public via the mass media. This political 'market' is analysed in the same way as other markets, using surveys, opinion polls, and ratings.

This kind of assessment of social organisations may be very useful for the purposes of those NGO professionals who prioritise methodological and quantitative research, or who offer their consulting services to government entities and multilateral agencies, or who lobby at the

national or international level. Seen from this perspective, the only area in which social organisation has any role to play is in the processes of ensuring basic survival. These processes are seen as important for humanitarian reasons, but are of little relevance as far as political activity is concerned, that is, activities in which the aim is to gain access to public decision making, i.e. to power. The organisations therefore have no place in political activity through which the interests of the individual can be aligned with the country's overall interests, and through which consensus, common interest, and the 'common good' are constructed.

The opposite stance, equally at odds with reality, is taken by those who champion various forms of 'popular protagonism' and stubbornly maintain that social actors have the capacity, almost in and of themselves, to resolve the crisis. This point of view is one that may appeal more to those who experienced the powerful social and class movements of previous decades. However, the optimism inherent in this approach encourages a tendency to exaggerate the benevolence of social actors and their practices. Often such exaggerated optimism tends to deify the people, disregarding their weaknesses and the negative impact that poverty — profound and persistent poverty — is having on the actors themselves and on their vision and the collective consciousness.

We do not share the view that people living in persistent poverty and great deprivation are unable to aspire to anything more than survival. Everyday experience shows that 'post-material interests' (Inglehart 1997) can indeed form part of the aspirations and concerns of the poor. However, it is also true that the widespread and prolonged crisis and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, plus the injustice that this gap reveals, have a negative impact on social actors, on their self-esteem, their desire for progress and their willingness to engage in politics. Poverty in itself has never dignified, ennobled, or motivated anyone: quite the opposite. Poverty and injustice dehumanise, discourage, and demobilise. This demobilisation is intensified by the *universal* discourse of the one-thought world that accompanies the neo-liberal model. According to that discourse, success and development are the fruit of individual effort, of individual competitiveness. Furthermore, it is also true that the social actors in a defeated society have never been the protagonists of historical change. Thus, we need to identify the places and conditions that will allow us to overcome the negative impacts of the crisis.

The emergence of ‘public spaces’

In spite of the obvious weaknesses and contradictions that exist in the popular social sectors with which we work, it is to them that we must look for new approaches and strategies. While they have lost ground in the neo-liberal globalisation process, these sectors and their organisations nevertheless possess a valuable wealth of experience, values, and wisdom that we must draw upon. In particular, we believe that recent experiences of consensus building among diverse social organisations may offer the beginnings of socio-political processes that lead to rebuilding democratic forms of political action aiming at integral development. We are calling these experiences of co-ordination for consensus building ‘*public spaces*’.

Two caveats are necessary. First, these emerging experiences of broad-based consensus building have attracted a lot of attention and raised considerable expectations, especially at the local level where local governments are playing a central role. The concrete successes, often in the form of local development plans and above all in participatory approaches to the alleviation of poverty, have generated considerable enthusiasm. We can well understand this enthusiasm and the need to see success and encouragement amid the desolate landscape of defeat and retreat in which we are working. But this has also led observers to exaggerate the solidity and obscure the weaknesses of the political and social processes and actors concerned. Excessive enthusiasm may lead to discouragement, and in fact we have seen how fragile many of these ventures have been, virtually collapsing and disappearing simply with a change of municipal authority.

We also need to point out that by ‘*public space*’ we are referring to the specific experience of interaction among the social actors.⁶ We prefer ‘*public space*’ to ‘*consensus building*’, because the latter is used almost exclusively to refer to planning processes organised in conjunction with municipal authorities. As we understand it, the term ‘*public space*’ encompasses a much wider range of scenarios and activities, in which actors with diverse and even conflicting interests and characteristics interact not only with a view to dealing with their particular problems but also to building common interests.

Therefore, our definition of ‘*public space*’ refers to more than just urban scenarios — parks and meeting halls — for meetings and get-togethers, as used by urban planners. In an urban context, common spaces of this kind are certainly important for creating identities and establishing

a sense of belonging. However, our definition of ‘public space’, while incorporating a geographical or neighbourhood component, refers more to the political processes and to the way actors participate in them.

Another aspect of this notion of ‘public space’ derives from an interest in and a concern about communication, language, and the creation of common meanings and discourse. Communication is a central and perhaps neglected feature of modern-day democratic politics, and hence we are interested in the role and type of communication that takes place within the ‘public spaces’ that we wish to observe and consolidate. However our interest is in understanding the particular nature of the relationships, dynamics, and communication that exist among social organisations within the ‘public space’, and among individuals within their organisations.

Development-oriented political culture

We been studying these ‘public spaces’ from the viewpoint of concern about the crisis faced by the NGOs and other actors in the poor world. We wish to assess the potential of these ‘public spaces’ for linking up the processes of democratisation and development that are based on individuals in society, and the crossroads between liberalism and communitarianism. We are concentrating on these ‘public spaces’ because we have a sense that within them will be found approaches and strategies that will enable us to emerge from our present crisis.

The first way in which we can find out more about such experiences is through direct contact, as many NGOs are doing. However, this is not enough by itself, and there is a danger of either ascribing too much value to what we observe or of being over-critical when we witness any difficulties, complications, or failures – and thus overlooking anything that offers potential or can be remedied.

Here we offer some suggestions and preliminary comments drawn from a study currently being undertaken by a team from Centro Alternativa who have been working in the poorer neighbourhoods of the Cono Norte of Metropolitan Lima. Our study, entitled ‘Political Culture and Human Development’, began with an analysis of our situation and of various aspects of the crisis. The research team conducted interviews and focus-group discussions, along with direct observation. On the basis of this tentative and open-ended preliminary study, we formulated a series of concepts or hypotheses that continue to guide our research. If our intuitions prove to be well founded, these concepts and hypotheses may

contribute to the much-needed process of analysis both within our own institutions and together with organisations that are committed to improving the lot of the ordinary people of Peru.

We grouped our ideas into three categories and then attempted to see how these relate to one another. The first is concerned with the process of individuation and its constituent elements — how social actors perceive themselves as *individuals*; the construction of their identity as persons in relation to their community, history, and traditions; the values to which the subject subscribes, and his/her capacity to argue from the basis of these values; his/her spiritual dimension; and his/her perceptions and attitudes towards his/her civic role. The process of individuation is known to be profoundly related to the values expressed within the community and to the worldviews (or cosmovisions) offered by the environment in which s/he becomes socialised. We are aware that the particular feature of the community or organisation exercises a considerable influence, for better or worse, on the personal development of those individuals who are capable of engaging with the processes of development and democratisation.

The second category describes the vision of development. We want to identify the constituent elements of that vision and its scope; the ways in which needs, capacities, and interests are defined; the common ground that exists within the different ways of thinking, the ethical components and perceptions of time and scenarios. We want to establish whether individual or collective actors share a holistic — human — vision of development, or one that is limited to the macro-economic dimensions, personal initiative, and competitiveness. It is important to know whether the values of solidarity and trust offer a basis from which to approach development, or whether they are merely defensive survival strategies.

The third category of ideas encompasses the political perspective and the construction of ‘public spaces’. As we see it, opportunities for reconstructing the ‘public domain’ and politics exist primarily at the sub-national or regional level. We wish to analyse the relationship that exists between (more or less human and holistic) visions of development and the processes by which new forms of democratic political activity are constructed. We need to know whether social organisations and individuals see politics as being an important, indeed essential, means of achieving human development, or whether they have devolved or delegated that responsibility to others. In particular, we wish to understand the factors that lead social actors to participate in ‘public spaces’.

The approach we propose is therefore based on an acknowledgement of the vital interrelationship existing between the person or individual, the community, development, and politics. The linking up of these different elements does not represent a point of departure but, rather, a point of arrival. It relates to our very purpose as NGOs, and hence we need to identify strategies that take account of these central elements.

Ways forward

If these conceptual categories have anything to offer, it is not because they contain unusual or new ideas. Each has been the subject of much study and comment. However, and we believe this is crucial, the tendency has been to consider each category or set of ideas in isolation. When the economic and political crisis began, in the second half of the 1970s, considerable emphasis was placed on day-to-day life, the individual and his or her rights and aspirations. The intention was to restore the balance after an excessive emphasis on collective action, through forms of social organisation, trade unions, and political parties. However, this emphasis on the individual and daily life often left aside the two-way causal relationships at play in the interaction between the individual or community on the one hand, and the vision of development and politics on the other.

Similarly, many studies and evaluations that look at development are concerned with its human dimension. However, these studies often refer to the people involved almost exclusively in terms of the impact of the prevailing model of development on the quality of life of poor communities. As a result, considerable attention has been devoted to defining qualitative indicators of human development. This kind of analysis has often failed to identify the human person or the communities or society in which she or he lives, as the *subjects* and protagonists of the process, and not as an end product. There is also a tendency in human-development approaches to assume that people, their communities and society are somehow a solid and noble entity, a somewhat Rousseauesque notion. But this is not the case, at least in our urban societies that are exposed to the discourse and the universal mindset of globalisation.

Furthermore, in these human approaches to development, there has been little attention paid to the political mechanisms that might lead to human development, the simple assumption being that the existing system of representative democracy is adequate to the task. As we have stated, this assumption is no longer valid. Analyses and programmes

aimed at reinforcing and encouraging participation in democratic processes have tended to focus only on the formal aspects of the democratic system: the rights and duties of citizens, institutions and procedures, autonomy, etc. The relationship between the democratic system and the development process is lost, as well as the idea that democracy is a tool for arriving at human development. Consequently, concern for the participation of individuals and civil-society organisations (CSOs) has focused on the rights to and mechanisms for participation in the democratic system, but not on the content and meaning of the participation that is envisaged.

In our own research and work with the people's organisations, we have been trying to understand the interrelationships between our three conceptual categories: individual/community, development, and democracy. Without going into detail, we are finding that where 'weak' individuals with low self-esteem predominate, while they are conscious of what they lack, they do not formulate interests and nor do they consider their own capacities. In such cases, the community or the social organisation is simply a means for dealing with concrete and specific issues, not a basis for development proposals or for democracy building. In weak individuals and organisations we also find a limited vision of development, a short-term perspective without clarity about the role of each actor within the development process. Similarly, where we find weak individuals and a narrow vision of development, we also find a negative vision of politics and a lack of political will. The chain of causality that links all three categories, as is so often the case, is not linear but circular. Our interest is to make the circle virtuous and not vicious.

We suggest, and there is already some evidence to support this proposition, that an approach which takes into account the interrelationships between these three conceptual categories may both contribute to a better understanding of the nature of the crisis and offer ways out of it. These issues cut across the various specialised areas within the NGOs — research, lobbying, and consultancy on the one hand, promotional and educational work on the other. They may help to build bridges, theoretical and practical, across the divide between the different areas of work and among the people working in various specialised areas, and so help to close the gap that exists between the diverse types of work that NGOs may be involved in at any one time. We are also attempting to discover how far our three broad categories can help us to develop a common agenda for the different actors who are involved with the poor and disadvantaged, especially NGOs and the international aid agencies.

Finally, our analysis and findings underline the importance of ongoing, in-depth education for everyone involved in the various processes of development and democratisation. Obviously, the complexity of these processes calls for something that goes beyond technical training. As NGOs, we need to ensure that both we ourselves and the people with whom we work have the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss such matters. In order to dedicate the necessary time and resources to education and research, we NGOs must recognise the importance of such work and make the political decisions to invest in it.

Acknowledgement

This paper was translated by Owen Beith and Deborah Eade. A copy of the Spanish original is available on request.

Notes

1 In addition to my own personal reflections, I should like to acknowledge the contributions of José López Ricci, Mariano Valderrama, and Josefina Huamán, who were kind enough to discuss the topic with me. The use made of their ideas is my sole responsibility.

2 See, for example, the studies by Mariano Valderrama: 'ONG y Concertación del Desarrollo Local en el Perú' and 'Cambio y fortalecimiento institucional de las organizaciones no gubernamentales en América Latina', Lima 1999.

3 The phrase '*pensée unique*' was coined in 1995 by Ignacio Ramonet, editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. It refers to 'the translation into ideological terms that claim to be universal of economic interests, particularly those of international capital' (Ramonet 1997: 179).

4 For example, important analysts such as Immanuel Wallerstein see globalisation as being essentially a phase

of imperialism, as did a conference held at the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi, which took as its title 'Colonialism to Globalization: Five Centuries after Vasco da Gama'. According to Goulet's report on this conference in 'What is a just economy in a globalized world?' (Working Paper, Notre Dame University, 1998), for the 95 participants, globalisation is the current form of capitalism.

5 Michel Camdessus, then Director of the IMF, speaking to the French assembly of the International Christian Union of Company Directors, remarked that 'The market cannot be left to its own logic, since economics does not lie within the domain of the technical but that of the human' (quoted in *El Comercio*, Lima, 23 May 1997).

6 In using the term 'public space', we are not referring primarily to urban spaces (Castells) or simply to the aspect of communication (Habermas), but to the different ways in which social actors of different types and with different interests interact.

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