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INVISIBLE CHILDREN: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs) IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts with
Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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2016

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ABSTRACT

To what extent are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) an effective tool in primary educational development in Central America? To address this concern, this project addressed the results of several months of research in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and at the U.S. NGO headquarters, where interviews with educators, NGO workers, and citizens were conducted regarding the role of NGOs in addressing educational concerns effectively. Interviewees included: Pueblo a Pueblo, *Serving Orphans Worldwide*, U.S. Agency for International Development, Let Girl's Learn Program, and varied individuals connected with education or non-profit work in that region. My research analyzed the historical and social structures of Nicaragua and Guatemala, in terms of how these affect civil society today. It also examined NGOs' work within these societies, noting what advantages they have in making advancements in education development for marginalized children, and highlighting the failures addressed by those in the field. This study focuses primarily on determining the success – and failures – of NGOs of various sizes. The findings of this study revealed the impact of partnerships, collaborative practices, and outcome-based results in the field of primary education in Central America.

Keywords: Education, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Non-governmental Organizations, Marginalized children, Indigenous Populations

Dedicated to my family and the children of Casa Shalom, who continue to inspire me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help, knowledge, and support of so many people. I am particularly grateful to Timothy Rich, my CE/T advisor, for continually encouraging me in my research efforts and career goals, and to Dr. Keeling, my second reader for this project, for always pushing me to do even better than my best.

I would like to thank the Honors College for the many opportunities they have afforded that have allowed me to expand both my options for the future and my understanding of the world around me. I must also extend a huge thanks to the Office of Scholar Development for their continual encouragement and support in each of my scholarships and academic pursuits over the course of my collegiate career. I am extremely grateful for the financial support through the Lifetime Experience Grant (LTE) and the FUSE Grant, without which I would have been able to conduct research in both Guatemala and Nicaragua, and gain a clearer understanding of my case studies.

I would also like to thank the many individuals whom I interviewed over the course of this study. In particular, I am grateful to Casa Shalom Orphanage, *Serving Orphans Worldwide*, Michael Lisman and USAID's Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, Mrs. Karen Anderson, as well as the many individuals in the NGO and

education sector whose names will remain anonymous for the sake of this thesis. All interviews were approved by IRB prior to the beginning of the research.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family, friends, and support network through Casa Shalom and *Serving Orphans Worldwide*, without whose continual encouragement, patience, and willing assistance I never would have had the chance to pursue this project.

VITA

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Fields: English, International Affairs

Minor: Latin American Studies

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a significant role within the realm of global development. Typically not-for-profit, NGOs have played an increasingly larger part in many aspects of the civil service sector. In Central America in particular, NGOs have stepped in to help fill a gap in education at the primary level that, as literature and research will indicate, is impacted by a number of factors, including history of the region political institution, and societal structure. This research project was born out of a trip to Guatemala in 2014, when I first became aware of the pressing need for increased educational accessibility for children in rural or marginalized communities. While there, I conducted several interviews with both native Guatemalans and international NGO workers to learn more about the status of education in this developing country. Following this experience, I traveled to Nicaragua with the non-profit *Serving Orphans Worldwide*, where I conducted interviews with non-profit workers and native Nicaraguans. My interviews sought answers to two key questions: (1) What role do non-governmental organizations play in supporting education in both the community and society of Central American countries such as Nicaragua and Guatemala? (2) How are successes measured by programs established by these NGOs, and what qualitative differences are being made by such efforts? With these questions in mind, this study strives to understand more clearly which programs increase educational opportunities for children in particularly

marginalized communities, and under what conditions. In doing so, I hope to address concerns of the broader NGO community with specific questions and perceptions about their policies and programs in the field of education in Central America, with hopes that such initiatives could have possible application elsewhere.

Definition of Terms

Before progressing into the research, there are several definitions that are important to consider in order to fully comprehend how the NGO realm operates in education in Central America, particularly when analyzing case studies in Nicaragua and Guatemala. The first, of course, is the term *Non-governmental organization (NGO)* itself. As identified in “Non-governmental Organizations and Public Primary Education in Nicaragua”, NGOs are best defined as privately organized, non-coercive, not-for-profit organizations that are defined by a mission, involved in public outreach programs, and unaffiliated with the political state except through potential collaboration (Bradaschia 1). It is also important to note the name for the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, which is referred to as *MINED*. Guatemala’s Department of Education is dubbed similarly, as it is commonly referred to as *MINEDUC*. A final term that should be noted for further clarification is *partnership*, specifically as it applies in NGO work. According to Joan DeJaeghere (6), a *partnership* is a formal understanding or agreement between both parties involved that requires a strong or equal level of participation by both parties. She notes that participation is based on the following elements:

1. Use of a service such as a school,

2. Involvement through attendance and the receipt of information, implying passive acceptance,
3. Contribution of resources,
4. Consultation on particular issues,
5. Partnership through the delivery of service,
6. Implementation of delegated powers,
7. Participation in real decision-making at every stage.

One of the more important terms to address is *effectiveness* as it relates to the field of NGOs. In analyzing this field, it is important to note that evaluation of effectiveness depends on who is the evaluator, what she or he values, and whether these line up with the goals of the project leader; however, more generally, effectiveness can be framed through an assessment of outputs, outcomes, and impacts (Eliason 9). Also, it is necessary to keep in mind that the measures done by NGOs themselves are for the benefit of donors or those with vested interests. It is additionally worth drawing attention to the fact that defining effectiveness is indeed easier than measuring effectiveness under real circumstances, which can be influenced by a number of factors in addition to the programs themselves.

Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

The countries of Guatemala and Nicaragua were specifically chosen as case studies for a number of reasons. Guatemala, particularly, is comprised of a significant indigenous population living primarily in rural regions across the state, and is recognized

as one of the poorest countries in Central America, aside from Nicaragua itself (“The tormented isthmus”). The high rate of indigenous populations – primarily Maya – residing within the borders of Guatemala quite significantly affects the culture, societal conditions, and economic stability of each community. According to the Global Education Fund, indigenous children are the most disadvantaged, with less than 30 percent of poor, rural indigenous girls enrolled in school (“Guatemala”). Indeed, even an article in *The Telegraph* by UNICEF Ambassador Michael Sheen called attention proclaimed that “Guatemala is one of the worst places in the world to be a child.” With the second highest murder rate it in the world, Guatemala saw the disappearance of 848 children alone in the first two months of 2015, when the article was released, and the stories of grotesque violence and assault against children exemplifies the complexity of the social circumstances in this region, particularly for those children already on the edge of society (Sheen). Due to the challenges of educational accessibility for indigenous or rural populations, I decided to pursue research that would reveal the most effective, and ineffective, formal educational programs for marginalized children that are implemented by non-governmental organizations throughout the state.

Nicaragua, though somewhat similar to Guatemala in its comparable poverty level and crime rate, does not have the same level of indigenous populations. Rather, its current political, economic, and civic status has been directly shaped by its troubled and deeply corrupt history – the effects of which can be still be seen in the lives of average Nicaraguans. A 2015 article published by *The Guardian*, titled, “Poverty in Nicaragua drives children out of school and into the workplace,” illustrates the toll that extreme poverty in Nicaragua has taken on the educational opportunities for children residing

there. The correlation is robust. Nicaragua, which is ranked the second poorest country in the Americas after Haiti, also has approximately 500,000 children out of school, according to UNICEF, primarily because they are engaged in the workforce. Although Nicaragua signed up for the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) "road map" in 2014, which aims to "eradicate the worst forms of child labour by 2016" as a means to keep children off the streets of Nicaragua and in the schoolroom, little improvements have been noted (Lakhani, np).

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions of education in both Guatemala and Nicaragua, I traveled to both countries between June 2014 and October 2015. I also maintained regular correspondence with persons at non-profits working in both countries, and have interviewed the home offices located in various locations in the U.S., primarily in Washington, D.C.

This study, through a review of prior literature and my own efforts to acquire insight through interviews and observation, seeks to elaborate on the roles of NGOs in civil society, identify the positive and negative effects of educational programs that NGOs implement, and highlight which endeavors have been most successful according to qualitative measurements. It will focus primarily on case studies in Guatemala and Nicaragua, paying particular attention to their effect on indigenous and rural populations in marginalized situations.

In order to fully understand the situation of education of NGOs in these two case studies, there are first a number of considerations that must be taken into account. The next section of this project will seek to do just that through exploration of the current literature regarding NGO involvement in education in Central America. In an effort to

more fully understand the role and impact of NGOs in education in this region, I will specifically analyze literature regarding the state of global and regional education – or lack thereof. I will then examine the history and political climate of Guatemala and Nicaragua, as well as the educational situation in both countries. After establishing the current state of education within these two countries, I will incorporate literature specifically related to NGO involvement in the region, looking at both the acknowledged pros and cons of NGOs in education. By addressing the factors influencing education, the role that NGOs play within this sector, and the successes and failures of these organizations, both scholars and NGOs alike can better comprehend just what adjustments to their programs will prove more sustainable and beneficial for the children in dire need of education.

After establishing the current and previous dialogue concerning the roles of NGOs in Central American, I will then explain the methodology of my research and illuminate my own findings via my experiences and interviews over the course of this study. Juxtaposing these two course levels of analysis will allow for deeper understanding of both the scholarly and community-based perceptions of NGOs and their effectiveness in this part of the civil sector.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Review of the Literature

An exploration of the NGO literature applicable to this region found NGOs to be an increasingly important player in filling the educational gap in civil society. Overall, there was relatively little academic work on literature specifically concerning educational NGOs or non-profits in education within Guatemala or Nicaragua, compared to the vast pool of literature concentrated on general NGOs. For this particular topic, the majority of the literature reviewed was available in four genres: (1) historical information on education in Guatemala, (2) historical education on education in Nicaragua, (3) history of NGOs in Education in Central America, and (4) broader literature over NGOs in Education for marginalized youth. Though there were relatively few that related directly to the topic at hand in Guatemala or Nicaragua, the majority of the review is derived from the information provided over a range of academic works covering the state of education over this region. This literature review is thus organized according to the broader scope of education and shifts to the specific case of NGOs in education in the two countries. Throughout the literature, while many larger NGOs simply serve to provide necessary classroom resources, a rising number of grassroots NGOs in education have striven to integrate greater bottom-up initiatives in an effort to integrate community involvement in the education of the local children. Most sources seem to suggest that such bottom-up

movements have been more successful, albeit on a smaller scale. While acknowledging the importance of NGOs in education in this region, many sources also call attention to the fact that there are limitations to the extent that NGO can hope to impact these societies. In addition to cultural, linguistic, and ideological differences that may encumber implementation without proper collaboration, NGOs also face difficulties regarding the economic, political, and social status of the country in which they are involved. With little support or organization on the part of the government, NGOs often find themselves in competition with other NGOs or, worse still, actively working to soften the effects of a corrupt regime upon the most marginalized. With these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, how might such NGOs ensure effective initiatives, if at all?

Primary Education: A Broad Outlook

According to Article 26 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every child has a right to education (United Nations). Elementary education, as is also particularly noted, should be compulsory. Education is acknowledged as a direct means of economic and social improvement, enabling children to break a cyclical state of poverty and ensure a better quality of life for their futures. In fact, on a global scale, increased education for both boys and girls has been directly linked to economic benefits in terms of higher wages, greater agricultural productivity, and faster economic growth, in addition to increased health benefits and women's empowerment, according to a 2005 report by the Council on Foreign Relations (Sperling). The reverse is often true: lack of education also has extremely negative ramifications. According to Fernando Reimers, there is a documented association between poverty and educational attainment in Latin

America (n.p.). Despite the benefits associated with increased education, evidence strongly suggests that children within Latin America do not partake in this right as frequently as children in many other developing and developed states. As of 2011, the global numbers are daunting, with the total number of children not in school peaking at 67 million (Lederer). These telling numbers are contributed to by many of the states within Latin America itself. Though Haiti has the lowest literacy rates in the region in the 60 percent range, the status of the other states within Central America remain particularly low as well. According to the CIA World Factbook, the literacy rate for Guatemala is listed as 81.5 percent, the literacy rate for Honduras is listed as 88.5 percent, the literacy rate for Nicaragua is listed as 82.8 percent, the literacy rate in Costa Rica is noted to be 97.8 percent, and the literacy rate El Salvador is listed as 88 percent. The literacy rate for Belize is not listed. For further context, the literacy rate in Mexico is noted to be 95.1 percent (CIA Factbook). Though the differences in percentages do not ostensibly demonstrate the stark differences in literacy rates, it is worth noting that both Nicaragua and Guatemala have considerably lower literacy rates. Not only are the numbers lower than the majority of their neighbor-states, but they do not distinguish the vast margins when examining the literacy of indigenous or extremely impoverished cities that are often overlooked for such surveys. Of course, literacy rates are not the only indicators of education, and, as the next few sections will indicate, it is vital that every type of educational measurement is taken into consideration.

Education in Latin America

Those in primary school within countries in Latin America and the Caribbean do not rank significantly better than those numbers on the global spectrum. In a Regional Report in 2012 completed via an initiative by UNICEF and the United Nations' Organization for Education, Science and Culture Institute for Statistics (UIS), there were 6.5 million girls and boys who did not attend school. Reasons included a lack of accessibility to the location of regional schools, the inability of the families to afford the fees and supplies for said schools, and concerns about whether cultural norms allowed participation. Of that statistic, 2.9 million boys and girls of primary education age are not attending primary or secondary education facilities because "they never enter primary school, they enter late, or have attended for a restricted period of time and have dropped out without completing that school level" ("Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children"). Of course, such statistics do not account for children not registered at birth, nor do they indicate the incredible gender disparity, as is particularly seen in both Guatemala and Nicaragua. This is also the case in many Southeast Asian and African countries, where girls are regularly excluded from attending even primary school because of the preference parents often give to boys. In fact, according to the book *Poor Economics*, parents' belief in the S-shape as it applies to education, or the belief that the educational benefits are only seen after several years of schooling, often results in parents choosing which children are likely to succeed. Indeed, they note that across the globe, where educational retention continues to be a problem, that:

The belief in the S-shape means that unless parents are unwilling to treat their children differently from one another, it makes sense for them to put all their

educational eggs in the basket of the child they perceive to be the most promising, making sure that she gets enough education, rather than spreading the investment evenly across all their children. (Banerjee and Duflo 88).

Not only are some children excluded from the benefit of an education, but records concerning what children are in – or out – of school are not documented. Indeed, governmental accounts of this issue prove evasive, if not non-existent, due to the fact that many communities or governments do not wish to relinquish information that could reflect negatively. Due to this, there is not an exact tally of the number of girls that are excluded in this manner. As noted by Annababette Wils, Yijie Zhao, and Ash Hartwell in “Looking Below the Surface: Reaching the Out-of-school Children,” “International datasets on education compiled by UIS and the World Bank provide virtually no statistical information about regions [of education districts] within countries” (2). Statistics, then, can only offer partial insight on this issue, foregoing qualitative analysis while offering quantitative sets for easier comparative study.

Education in Guatemala: An Overview

To examine the effectiveness of NGOs in education more fully, it is first necessary to understand the impact of the state of education in each country. Guatemala’s history of education – or lack thereof – can be most ostensibly attributed to the effects of over-encroaching foreign intervention (most significantly by the U.S.) and violence among citizens and gangs throughout the state. Just twenty years ago, Guatemala underwent one of the bloodiest wars of its history, instigating the death or disappearance of more than 70,000 indigenous persons. Facing these arguably more

pressing obstacles throughout much of their history, education in this area often took the backburner. As noted in the article “Guatemala on the Brink,” by Anita Isaacs:

Guatemala’s Mayan population bears the scars of historical exclusion and repression and still suffers most acutely from the devastating social and political effects of the armed conflict. Years of counterinsurgency warfare left communities and incipient forms of social organization devastated. Mayans came out of the war poorer than ever, with their leadership ranks decimated and their communities divided against themselves (120).

According to her research, the poverty, distrust and fear between the peoples of Guatemala and the government itself continue to impact efforts made towards progression in the civil service even today. An instance of such a failed attempt at improving the state of education via collaboration between the government was the PRONADE program attempted after the peace accords. According to Jacob A. Carter, author of “Beyond PRONADE: NGOs and the Education Sector in Guatemala,” this small scale educational pilot program was originally termed the Kaqchikel word *Saq’be*, which means “Path of Light.” Later, it became Guatemala’s National Program of Self-Managed Schools for Educational Development (PRONADE). PRONADE schools were unique in that they attempted to incorporate “local parents and village leaders that took direct responsibility for the hiring, firing, and issuance of payment to teachers with government funding” (19). Though many of the participants had never had traditional roles in education, they were provided with training and referred to the Educational Service Institutions (comprised of NGOs and private companies) as consultants. Their responsibilities included:

- (1) identify educational needs in the communities they serve;
- (2) organize and assist COEDUCAs in obtaining legal status;
- (3) provide financial/administrative training for the COEDUCAs;
- (4) provide teacher development courses on “active learning” pedagogical methodologies as well as multigrade and multilingual classroom practices;
- (5) maintain updated information on the schools and students tutelage.

They also offered bilingual training for those working with indigenous students. For the most part, the program was regarded as successful with over 450,000 students in over 4600 schools; yet, by 2007 it was terminated due to suspicion that it was a means to “enhance state capacity” (20). With the conclusion of the program, a shift away from any partnership between NGOs and the government began, instead seeing a rise of smaller, grassroots initiatives as more distrust of the government accumulated.

The government, too, strayed away from the goals established shortly after the peace accords. Indeed, according to the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, though Article 89 of the National Education Law of the Guatemalan Constitution mandates that education will receive no less than 35 percent of revenue of general government allocations, actual government spending on education using approximately 17 percent on an annual basis, a smaller allocation than both Honduras and El Salvador.

For rural and indigenous citizens throughout Guatemala, the lack of educational investment is evident. As noted in “Pedagogical mentorship, indigenous settings, and rural education: Perspectives from Guatemalan teachers,” prior to 2012, elementary school teachers were not even required to attend university before entering teaching. This of course only perpetuates a circular issue in which Guatemala consistently has one of the

lowest educational achievement indicators and educational investment rates in Latin America (de la Garza, 2). As previously noted, Guatemala has one of the worst literacy rates in accordance with the rates provided by the CIA World Factbook. Then, according to an UNESCO report, the Guatemalan literacy rate stands at a mere 68.5 percent. Of these percentages, it is essential to realize that rural and indigenous citizens are most directly affected, with between 70 and 80 percent dropping out of school and only 3 in 10 indigenous students finishing even primary school (de la Garza, 6).

The case for indigenous girls in Guatemala is considerably worse than even their male counterparts. According to a United Nations Population Fund conducted in 2013, many girls find their futures constrained by such discrimination. Sonia Delfina Cho Tun, an interviewee from the Chitixl community even noted, “In my village girls do not have access to information nor education. There isn’t a local high school. We only get to study to sixth grade. Mostly girls marry at age 15, not knowing what their future holds for them and their children” (Targeted News Service). Without an education, and limited access to occupations outside of traditional weaving or homemaking, girls of indigenous roots are unable to access the same levels of economic opportunity as those with greater access in the less rural regions. Seemingly, girls in this region are forced to tread a delicate line between cultural expectations and educational and financial enhancement.

This assertion is confirmed in Lindsey Musen’s article “The State of Education for Indigenous Girls in Rural Guatemala.” She argues that throughout Guatemalan history, there has been a shift from assimilationist education to multi-cultural, though many parents view teacher practices and course material as assimilation (2). For many parents, specifically of Mayan descent, the concept of assimilation remains a cultural

barrier to education. Indigenous girls are particularly likely to drop out of school at a younger age in order to carry out the tasks assigned to them by their mothers, including: domestic tasks, upbringing younger children, animal husbandry, craftwork, and agricultural labor. According to Meike Heckt, such tasks are viewed as means for children to attain “working skills” and a “sense of responsibility,” through practical approaches and imitating adults. As children are typically expected to take on the tasks with no assistance by the age of fifteen, attending a school that they cannot afford often becomes second priority; however, this is not the only cultural barrier. Heckt also notes that indigenous parents have very few expectations for formal education, and have several hesitations concerning sending their children to school. For many, there is concern that mingling with other schoolchildren will cause them to acquire harmful influences and bad attitudes, while still others are concerned about the safety of their children in traversing to the schools, paying for the uniforms, fees and supplies, and the possibility of the loss of culture. Though these startling statistics do not take into account all the cultural, financial or familial reasons for educational barriers, they do reveal the unique socioeconomic barriers existing in this highly indigenous and rural region.

Education in Nicaragua: An Overview

Though it does not claim a highly indigenous population, the case of education in Nicaragua in many ways does not greatly differ from that of Guatemala. If anything, their numbers indicate poorer educational retention, a problem substantially significant among impoverished families who view the opportunity costs of attending school too great. Like Guatemala, much of Nicaragua’s population would be classified as impoverished,

especially those in more rural regions. The state of the civil society in Nicaragua, which extends to education, could most logically be attributed to the current administration under the leadership of the former Sandinista revolutionary leader, Daniel Ortega, and the internal strife created by the conflict between the Contras and Sandinistas (FSLN) throughout the 1980s. According to Robert F. Arnove and Anthony Dewees in their article “Education and Revolutionary Transformation in Nicaragua,” the frequent changes in regimes also poses a difficulty in attempting to implement successful education initiatives, largely because each regime that obtains power is likely to overturn any progression or program implemented by previous (often opposing regimes). Surprisingly, the implementation of the violent FSLN regime is credited with the newer path of educational development, setting forth the following guidelines for educational policy:

1. The emergence of the great majority of the people formerly dispossessed and socially excluded, as the active protagonists of their own education,
2. The elimination of illiteracy and the introduction of adult education as priority tasks of the revolution,
3. The linking of the educational process with creative and productive work as an educational principle, leading to educational innovation and promoting the scientific and technical fields,
4. The transformation and realignment of the education system as a whole, so as to bring it into line with the new economic and social model (Arnové 94).

Though the policies may have initially been well-intentioned, Arnove and Dewees continue by noting: “it would be totally unprecedented if in the Nicaraguan education system, in the brief period of 10 years, had been able to make a substantial contribution to

achieving the outlined goals” (95). As might be expected in a country shaken by revolution and counter-revolution, this lofty change consistently lagged behind the economic and political changes. Not only that, but the recruitment and training of teachers and revision of curriculum would have taken years before any outcomes could be seen. Though a national literacy program prompted 406,056 Nicaraguans to learn to read and write, critics noted that these educational efforts further exacerbated tensions with Nicaragua’s own indigenous population, who saw the program as a means of indoctrination (Arnove and Dewees 98).

Upon Ortega’s first election in 1984, he initially encouraged the expansion of social and educational agendas similar to what was initiated in the early 1980s as a method of creating stronger national unity in the early years of his presidency. Indeed, the Sandinistas even launched an expansive literacy program in an attempt to yield a functional level of literacy within the state (The Council on Interracial Books for Children 418). With the end of the FSLN regime, however, the program ceased to operate. Because of its short timespan, the Contras quickly deconstructed progress made by this program. According to Stephen John Stedman in his book, *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, “the rate of illiteracy was higher in 1996 than it had been in 1981” (Stedman 374). Upon Ortega’s unprecedented reelection in 2011, however, educational standards remain low. Though schooling in both primary school and high school is free and mandatory, numbers have not soared as expected. Without schools in nearby zones, children in Nicaragua often cannot make the trek required to attend classes, nor can the families afford the supplies or fees necessary to attend. As a World Bank article announced, “with the secondary school fee per child at 10 córdobas a

month, families with 6 or more children could easily be required to pay half of their family income towards school fees” (“Youth Education and Development Issues in Nicaragua”). As was the case in Guatemala, this lack of educational retention in Nicaragua creates one of the lowest literacy rates in the region at only 66.5 percent according to the aforementioned study.

Role of NGOs in Education: An Overview

Due to this rising gap in education and these seemingly impenetrable barriers, NGOs have been increasingly active in striving to ensure this fundamental right. Though a UN Charter first coined ‘non-governmental organization’ in 1945, a rise in NGOs in Latin America only emerged with democratization in the past twenty years, as they began to take on a more critical role with multinational donors and massive governmental funds. And yet, the tendency to rely on the aid of NGOs was one born out of the trials of the WWII era, when outside assistance was often necessary for the continuance of stable civil services. Though intended to be short-term fill-ins for needed services, it is clear that their presence has continued to make a lasting impression on the civil sector of society throughout much of the developing world. In the realm of education, the role of NGOs varies. Professor Adil Najam of Boston University specifically offers a means to analyze the relationship between the government and the third sector in his article “The Four-C’s of Third Sector-Government Relations: Cooperation, Confrontation, Complementarity, and Co-optation.” In this piece, he notes that the Four C’s should be used as a means for both analyzing such relationships as well as serving as a guide for necessary governmental interactions in this sector. These points include:

1. Seeking similar ends with similar means;
2. Seeking dissimilar ends with dissimilar means;
3. Seeking similar ends but preferring dissimilar means;
4. Preferring similar means (11-12).

He is not alone in his belief that there must be a solid interrelationship with the local government in order for NGOs to function most effectively. Indeed, Bradaschia takes the argument one step further, noting that NGOs not only need liaisons with the government, but also with other NGOs in the sector – whether unilateral or multilateral. Rather than list three types of relations, she limits it to three ‘C’s,’ including: (1) Communication, (2) Coordination, and (3) Collaboration (79). Yet, despite positive assertions that greater communication would benefit NGOs and citizens alike, there has been little attempt for such collaboration since the 1990s. Today, the some 25,000 NGOs in Latin America typically build schools, pay teachers’ salaries, offer scholarships for marginalized children, and increasingly provide supplies and teaching materials without proper coordination, causing a redundancy of services or donated items. Others offer more community-based civil society structures to promote education locally, which require less communication regarding donations, but would nonetheless greatly improve the function of NGO operations in the field of education (Bradaschia 3).

One such small NGO with experience in several of these grassroots services is the multilateral non-profit Pueblo a Pueblo, which operates in both Washington, D.C. and Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala. Focusing specifically on programs in literacy, health and community sustainability, Pueblo a Pueblo advocates a need for collaborative training with community members to ensure the continued sustainability of these services. In

relation to education specifically, Pueblo a Pueblo offers two services: (1) Primary Education Scholarships, which helps to alleviate financial pressures of local families by providing supplies, gym shoes and uniforms, as well as access to checkups and emergency care at a local clinic, and (2) Pathways to Literacy, which assists schools with the preparation and maintenance of child-friendly libraries and the acquisition of materials to further literacy skills among primary age students. Rosemary Trent, the Executive Director at Pueblo a Pueblo noted in an interview that: “We really do have a core strength. We don’t profess to do anything and everything. For us, it’s kind of second nature what we do on the ground. We always talk about trickling down for these kind of efforts, but it is also about trickling up” (Brown). In this way, Trent reveals the hands-on nature of the programs they have sought to implement.

The initiatives of other NGOs in such Central American states as Nicaragua and Guatemala are no exception. In fact, Nicaragua has been classified as “NGO’d” by many locals, with over 588 registered in the country (Bradaschia 29) and nearly 300 registered in Guatemala, offering a wide range of educational services and donations, or combinations thereof (Council on Foundation). To fully understand and address the topic of educational NGOs in this region, it is first necessary to consider their tumultuous pasts, both of which are strewn with human rights grievances and stark civil society gaps.

Observing a need for educational development for students has become particularly significant with the increased promotion of neoliberal ideas. In his article, “Lessons for human rights advocacy: Education and the limits of political liberalism,” John Lewis indicates that education is not only a human right, but “the key to creating, applying, and spreading new ideas and technologies which... promote[s] sustained levels

of growth” (96). As is suggested in both this article and the Declaration of Human Rights itself, education in this region, then, must be regarded as a right, an investment for the stability of each state, and means to alleviate the poverty that has plagued much of this region for decades.

“Effectiveness” of NGOs in Education

As has been previously noted, there are many factors that may influence the success of NGOs, and myriad ways in which to measure such success. Due to this seemingly unnecessary complexity, deeming a NGO ‘effective’ or ‘ineffective’ is not so black and white. Yet, despite the subjectivity and difficulty of assigning such labels, it is nonetheless beneficial, if not necessary, to examine both the recognizable pros and cons of NGOs in the education sector.

Generally speaking, NGOs have had various positive impacts on educational retention and student success in many regions in Central America, as indicated by years in school, technical skills acquired, as well as job and economic stability upon graduation. Indeed, though numbers remain relatively low throughout the region, trends have indicated that literacy and overall education have been rising, even if only minimally so. The majority of readings and research on the subject commend NGOs for three major roles. The first is their ability to reach the target peoples through more grassroots approaches, especially in geographically, socially, or economically inaccessible areas. Second, as many NGOs operate on a smaller level, they also have a greater capacity for experimentation and innovation, as there are not as many bureaucratic hoops to navigate. And last, those NGOs whose workers operate primarily in

their region of operation or location of services also have the advantage of close links with the community, where fortified relationships allow them the trust need to “fill the gap” of social inequity. These characteristics are not merely assigned to NGOs operating within Central America. The ability to work on the ground level by these NGOs can be seen across several regions as one of their greatest attributes as a non-state actor. In Carrie Meyer’s book *The Economics and Politics of NGOs in Latin America*, she touches on the concept that despite their proclaimed disassociation with government work, and their reputation for promoting local participation, man regard this type of perception of NGOs as a “mythology,” as is revealed via the critiques of NGOs who instead deem them as “intermediaries... top down, [and] non-participatory” (Meyers 49). Despite these claims, Meyers argues that these concerns are nothing more than a misunderstanding, and that NGOs have long maintained alliances with the government and their international donors. Not only that, but to make such critiques altogether foregoes the successes that NGOs have achieved in spite of the difficult conditions in which many work. According to Meyers, NGOs should generally be considered more successful than the public sector, and thus prove to be the better option for the people despite the historical associations of NGOs (50).

Jeffrey Sachs, a well-known economist from Columbia University, has also been a strong proponent of foreign assistance in development, affirming that the work of NGOs and outside investment could prove metamorphic for the communities in which they operate. The solution to some of the world’s greatest problems, he asserts, can be solved with increased attention to foreign assistance. Though many of his arguments center around the idea of increased monetary and technological donations, his article,

“From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals,” highlights that fact that there must be a shift from the Millennium Development Goals proposed by the United Nations to more sustainable methods for long-lasting developmental improvement. Specifically, he notes: “The SDGs should therefore pose goals and challenges for all countries – not what the rich should do for the poor, but what all countries together should do for the global wellbeing of this generation and those to come” (Sachs). Known for his optimism regarding the possibility of development, Sachs has called attention to the need for greater use of foreign assistance and foreign aid as a means to implement positive change within countries that have fallen behind economically. Particularly, he addresses four ways in which the MDGs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should ensure greater successes in development – educational or otherwise.

First, SDGs should include intermediate objectives and milestones that the MDGs lack. Second, in order for SDGs to be constructed accurately, it is vital that governments “consciously invest in real-time reporting system... [so that] SDGs... [can] produce reliable data with no more than a yearly, if not quarterly, timelag” (Sachs). This, he believes, will strengthen programs through advocacy, feedback, and real-time management, which many lack due to inefficiency, lack of record keeping or lack of transparency. His third suggestion is that the private sector be more involved, though he also notes that this should be done cautiously, as many large companies lobby for policies that are antagonistic to sustainable development. This is particularly relevant to Guatemala, whose development was at best staggered by the over-encroachment of the United Fruit Company in local politics and the ownership of indigenous land. His last,

perhaps more vague, condition for SDG success – and thus the success of all foreign assistance – is worldwide societal investment in their initiatives. He argues that a mere investment of 2-3% of global income properly invested could be transformative in the countries that suffer most from poverty (Sachs). According to much of his work, Sachs affirms that sustainable development initiatives are in fact the only means by which to achieve successful development among the poorest countries. And just as SDGs are the surest means to stave further poverty and violence and promote greater education retention and health, NGOs are called upon to assist in achieving them, working in coordination with locals and governmental departments. Through such efforts, NGOs cannot only assist in meeting goals that will sustain in local communities, but are able to help staunch progressively vicious cycles.

Indeed, a separate, but related argument noted by Bradaschia in her article “Non-governmental Organizations and Public Primary Education in Nicaragua” indicated that NGOs not only operate to fulfill a temporary role through these features, but frequently serve as ‘policy entrepreneurs.’ While they begin with provision of services and goods, they may then implement other means of empowerment, advocacy, innovation, and then begin to monitor the situation once issues have improved. Clark Taylor, in his book *Seeds of Freedom: Liberating Education in Guatemala*, also indicates that education itself acts as an agent of change of society. He claims that the newly literate are “no longer mere spectators, they uncross their arms . . . and demand intervention. No longer satisfied to watch, they want to participate” (Taylor). In this way, NGOs within education in Guatemala or Nicaragua especially help to pave the way for a more outspoken, involved, and informed citizens. Indeed, even Carrie Meyers, in her aforementioned work, calls

attention to the fact that increased communication and participation can work to “enhance both the political and the economic environment by strengthening the foundations of democracy in civil society and controlling opportunism” (Meyers 138). In this way, educational NGOs not only afford individual children the hands-on and personalized attention to better their socioeconomic standing and livelihood, but the political efficacy of the entire community.

Such an account was seen most recently with the case of Emelin, a fifteen-year-old indigenous girl from Guatemala who was invited to speak at the “Every Woman Every Child” program at the United Nations, recently turned to the non-profit initiative Let Girls Lead for education on self-esteem, human rights, community organizing and public speaking. With their assistance, she were finally able to gain the attention the local government had formerly denied, prompting them to sign into legislation a new municipal policy to fund education and healthcare efforts for girls (Cole). Let Girls Lead, the USAID initiative which was designed to advocate education and health rights for girls and women, is just one example of a larger program that achieved success through the involvement of local interests.

Aside from the benefits NGOs possess when working with local communities, it is just as important to note that those communities actually rely on NGOs to maintain educational opportunities for the local children. An interview noted in Leila Bradaschia’s work revealed that educators in Nicaragua view NGOs as “indispensable” (75). This is likely due to the fact that while MINED and MINEDUC are responsible for providing water, the structure and (usually) teachers’ salaries, NGOs help to provide the other necessary services without which student success would be impossible. Take, for

instance, the NGO Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, which operates in both Nicaragua and Guatemala, and has cared for over 17,900 orphans by providing a secure environment in which to grow, in addition to a quality education. By ensuring such basic necessities for human development, these children, many without another means of livelihood or education, are given the chance for a semi-normal, productive life. Their means of demonstrating success do not solely rely on numerical achievements (though those are revealed), but also illustrate the yearly qualitative successes, and tracks the successes of those who have gone through the orphanage into their adulthood. Thus, through both tracking these qualitative metrics and building positive relationships with local citizens, such NGOs are able to prove the real impact of their programs and develop lasting partnerships with community members that will work to sustain the initiatives in the future, thereby instigating a virtuous cycle for the community rather than a viscous one. Doing so affords investors a more illustrative and comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the NGO overall. At the same time, these services illustrate how the NGOs continue to fill a gap in civil services, without replacing the entire public sector itself.

“Ineffectiveness” of NGOs in Education

In contrast to those who assert that NGOs offer a unique and pivotal service to the education sector, still others offer argument against the use of NGOs as an alternative means of civic development. The most prominent argument in this camp of literature regarding NGOs, however, is the lack of evidence for the progress they make. Though operating as a non-governmental organization inherently means functioning outside the

reach of governmental control, it has continually been noted that this also creates a lack of accountability on the part of NGOs (except to their donors). The deficiency of transparency in the relationships between NGOs and other actors in the educational field is a cause for great concern of many scholars, who speculate that this could lead NGOs to operate for mere statistical boosts, which do not necessarily demonstrate the real impact on the intended society. Unfortunately, many of the larger NGOs seem to fall in the category of publishing numbers to indicate success, focusing on the measurement of their activities or input rather than the results of their contributions. Not only is the publication of such quantifiable data unhelpful for the overall aim and effect of the NGO, but it cannot claim the same insight as the more substantive or qualitative data. Because of this, one of the primary issues in defining effectiveness is due simply to the fact that donors, activists, recipients, and workers themselves consider it differently. With so many different perceptions of the meaning of the word and ways of interpreting it, it is oft difficult to determine an agreed-upon definition of the correct measure.

Even Plan-International, one such renowned international NGO that emphasizes child protection, economic security, and education, has a very specific idea of effectiveness. One cannot deny that the work that Plan-International does is beneficial; however, indications of its success and “effectiveness” are most notably offered through numerical representation and focus primarily on front-ended input, namely in the number of teachers trained, students who receive scholarships, and school services offered. In Guatemala, for example, Plan-International supports 2,492 children through scholarships, 1,151 teachers through training, and even 354 school governments. In Nicaragua, some 538 schoolteachers were trained, while they were also able to afford access to secondary

education to 233 adolescents living in rural Nicaragua. Though the numbers give a quantifiable sense of their achievement, it does not offer a clear indication of the impact upon the lives of the children, the need, or the eventual outcome of the invested funds. In essence, only providing these numbers continually begs the question: What is the outcome of these numbers?

Among the major critiques of the work of NGOs and of foreign aid in general in reference to the lack of accountability is the renowned economist, William Easterly. While he has written much concerning his perception of the ineffectiveness of foreign assistance, including the books titled, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* and *The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights*, his article "The Ideology of Development," blatantly addresses the issues he recognizes with attempts to "develop" poorer countries. Indeed, he notes: "The failed ideologies of the last century have come to an end. But a new one has risen to take their place. It is the ideology of Development – and it promises a solution to all the world's ill. But like Communism, Fascism, and the others before it, Developmentalism is a dangerous and deadly failure" (Easterly 3). According to him, those who seek to help "develop" other states seem to do so with little regard for the wishes of the people living within them, and history has proven that such ideology has had a "dismal record of helping any country actually develop" (34). Arguing with the principles that Jeffrey Sachs offers in his praise of increased foreign assistance, Easterly contests that there are a great deal many more factors that influence the failure of aid in solving the world's problems. Particularly, he draws attention to the idea that:

Problems with economics... help explain why aid often goes astray. Large-scale plans to deliver scientific solutions do nothing to fix these problems. Large bureaucracies such as the UN and World Bank have virtually no accountability for the results of their own programmes. Local government bureaucracies such as the UN and World Bank have virtually no accountability for the results of their own programmes. Local government bureaucracies in poor countries have equally well documented problems with incentives and lack of accountability (health workers and teachers that do not show up, missing textbooks, drugs out of stock at health clinics). (Easterly)

Yet, framing much of his critique of foreign assistance on the top-down model, Easterly interestingly does not offer insight regarding smaller grass-roots models as a means of implementing change or filtrating aid. Like much of the argument against NGO or aid work, his studies have found that it is the top-down general donations that serve only to worsen the corruption found in many of these developing states, particularly in the case of education, which is often ignored or forgotten.

Another set of arguments revolves around not what the NGOs are doing, but instead what they fail to do. Similar to several other texts in this field of literature, the article, "NGO Partnerships in Education: A Framework of Opportunities and Obstacles" argues that many NGOs are ineffective simply because "they fail to inculcate an appropriate level of involvement" (DeJaeghere 8). NGOs without grassroots initiatives are not usually aware of issues of participation and do not aim to develop effective processes. Rather paradoxically, though increased access and more integrated

participation with the local community might be considered a strength, lack of adequate involvement could be equally as detrimental to the mission of that NGO. Thus, she reveals a clear distinction between smaller hands-on NGOs and the larger top-down NGOs models. An interview detailed by Bradaschia confirmed this attitude towards NGOs specifically operating within Nicaragua. In 2006, before Ortega's Administration, a municipal delegate of the Ministry of Education stated: "The work of NGOs is excellent in one aspect and with fault in another because sometimes they come and say I want to do this and this in this and that school...I wish they would ask me what I want done, and where, rather than deciding for themselves... I am the expert, not the NGO" (84). With larger NGOs, communities are regarded as lacking the capacities to contribute to such tasks as policies or management, and are thus excluded in the procedural or technical decisions that will ultimately ensure the sustenance of the programs.

One other significant argument against NGOs was brought to light by Joan DeJaeghere. In her aforementioned article, she notes that while some NGOs are successful in one project or region, they lack the ability to replicate the success in the same way in other parts of the world. Locally based initiatives must take into account the political climate, local conditions, as well as interest and participation (DeJaeghere 19). NGOs who do not consider these factors and do not have a local connection are thus ineffective in their long-term goals, risking a high cost in financial and human resources. James Petras, in his article, "Imperialism and NGOs in Latin America," further affirms this idea, criticizing that even the "successes" of NGOs "affect only a small fraction of the total poor and succeed only to the degree that others cannot enter the same market. ... The frequent violent mass outburst that take place in regions of micro-enterprise suggest

that the ideology is not hegemonic and the NGOs have not yet displaced independent class movements” (Petras). It is significant to note that this is even applicable to the cases of Nicaragua and Guatemala. Guatemala, comprised of a heavily indigenous population, has clearly different needs in their education system than their Nicaraguan counterparts. Specifically, there has been a recognized need for inter-cultural, bilingual education in Guatemala in order to reach the out-of-school children who are not familiar with Spanish. As implied by Luiz Enrique López in a report at the Seventh Meeting of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee of the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2001, “the involvement of native people in the management of education, as well as in the planning and administration of these programs contribute to the improvement of the quality of this pedagogical effort” (Schwartzman). While Nicaragua itself faces many of the same instances of poverty and lack of accessibility, Guatemala faces the great obstacle of adequately including the some 22 different ethnic groups within its borders, thereby setting a distinct cultural challenge from international NGOs within the state.

Continuing along the same line of thought, in the aforementioned article, “Imperialism and NGOs in Latin America,” Petras even goes so far as to say that NGOs in Latin America are not only ineffective, but detrimental to civil society and the local people they aim to help, unlike prior claims that NGOs increase political efficacy and investment. According to his study, NGOs only work to depoliticize certain sectors of society, rarely committing to defend issues that might interfere with funding from neoliberal governments. In essence, he asserts that despite claims made otherwise, non-governmental organizations are *not* non-governmental in this region, as they continue to

receive funds from overseas governments or work as private subcontractors of local governments. In this way, the collaboration encouraged by both Bradaschia and Najam is seen by some as an overextension of neoliberal control. Similar to the larger argument that NGOs are not transparent enough in their activities and their results, he contests: “Their programs are not as accountable to the local people as to overseas donors. In that sense NGOs undermine democracy by officials to create dependence on non-elected, overseas officials and their locally anointed officials” (Petras). Because they focus primarily on “projects rather than movements,” Petras ascertains that NGOs inherently can only help individuals to exist within the pre-existing conditions of the social construct, not to reconstruct such conditions. According to a CECADE (Centro de Capacitación y Desarrollo) promoter noted in the article “A Mixed Blessing: The NGO Boom in Latin America,” “it has been difficult to break with the paternalistic mentality. The people expect us to arrange everything. They still feel like the project is not theirs” (McDonald). Despite the fact that many of these NGOs promote equality and support community involvement, breaking the barrier is often made all the more difficult due to the fact that they are staffed by middle-class professionals in a hierarchical setting. While many have since been acknowledged for their attempts at remedying the faults that stagnate the development of their mission, the barrier continues to persist between NGOs and the local community, and thereby make their efforts ineffective, inefficient, or even detrimental to those they seek to assist.

Gaps in the Literature

In measuring the successes versus the failures of NGOs in education, scholars' answers greatly differ. To explain this, it is first important to note that because there are no definitive measures of success of NGOs, there exists a clear gap in the way in which NGO success or failure is determined, dependent primarily on the individual judge and their relation to the said NGO. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that judgments are formed on the basis of the proposed goals of the NGO and its donors, rather than the needs of the community. Though the article "Non-formal basic education as a development priority: Evidence from Nicaragua" by Sudhanshu Handa, et. al discusses the effects of adult education groups in Nicaragua, the authors indicate the sense of "grey literature" commonly found when analyzing NGO work in education, noting that "hard evidence on performance and impacts is virtually non-existent for these programs" (Handa 513). As such, this literature suggests that there is a lack of a clear indication of NGOs success, which can ultimately lead to a loss of trust by donors or investors. It is also possible that whatever information is available for analysis is positively skewed, particularly if it is provided by the non-profit themselves, who are reliant on donors for the continuance of many programs.

As will be indicated in interviews conducted with those in the realm of NGOs, it is also feasible that any information provided by government is not completely accurate, either, and should be considered with a grain of salt. In the cases of Nicaragua and Guatemala, information or records are not easy to locate, particularly with the seemingly continual installation of a new administration. Because records regarding the education sector are difficult to track, it is necessary to also collect data on the state of education or

NGOs involved via other means that have not yet been established, making available information murky at best.

A report by Jane Nelson, however, suggests that despite this hole in the understanding of the effectiveness of NGOs and the difficulty of attaining reliable data, there are three broad mechanisms through which NGOs can be analyzed for accountability. These include: “legal or regulatory mechanisms (driven by government), ‘civic’ mechanisms (driven by stakeholders), self-regulatory or voluntary mechanisms (driven by NGOs themselves, either individuals or through NGO networks or professional/ membership associations)” (Nelson 22). According to her studies, these mechanisms are not mutually exclusive, nor are the divisions rigid; however, they do offer a venue through which NGOs can be influenced and examined. Such ‘civic’ mechanisms, for example, also include participatory and consultative mechanisms through which NGOs can be required to include stakeholders in different aspects of operations, monitoring, evaluating and reporting processes. These stakeholders would aim to provide a “check” on each step in NGO programs or procedures in order to ensure that each action is a transparent and sustainable one. In this way, the informational dilemma concerning NGOs should be slightly mitigated.

In order to fully contextualize the data for the specific cases in Nicaragua and Guatemala, I conducted my own research in both countries with those of experience in the NGO or education sector. In interviews and observations recorded over the course of this study, I sought a clearer understanding of the positive and negative attributes of NGOs working in education within a highly stratified population according to the perception of those deeply vested in the field. In the next section of this work, I will

specify the particulars of my research methods during these experiences so as to offer greater validity to this study, and to highlight the various contributors to the information collected over the course of this project.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

I took several different approaches to acquire insight regarding the current state of primary education, as well as programs that are currently being implemented in both Guatemala and Nicaragua during both my research trips. It is first important to note, however, that such steps were taken to accumulate qualitative results through semi-structured interviews spoken in both English and Spanish, rather than quantitative datasets. To achieve this, questions were designed to be broad, and stimulate a variety of answers. A few of these included:

1. “What are the benefits of education for children in these regions particularly?”
2. “Please explain to me goals of your institution and the programs you have initiated to promote education.”
3. “What are some successes you have seen with these types of initiatives, and how do you typically gauge them?”

(A full list of these questions can be found in the appendix.) Though the questions were structured the same for each interviewee, topics were primarily directed by the interviewees themselves, so each interview often covered a myriad varied concerns according to their own station and relation to the situation. Additionally, while interviews with the base offices were more formal and took place in office spaces in one sitting, those in Guatemala and Nicaragua were much more casual in nature, and occurred on-

the-job while making rounds on the orphanages. Observations I have made during these interviews and throughout my time working among Guatemalan and Nicaraguan citizens are based on their own experiences, opinions, and belief systems. Via these interviews, I collected the common threads in responses, which allowed for a clearer interpretation of the situation for many marginalized groups. (This insight could not have been collected through any other means.)

My trip to Guatemala in the summer of 2014 consisted of living and working at Casa Shalom Orphanage in San Lucas, Guatemala, close to the old capitol of Antigua. Throughout my time in Guatemala, my research centered mainly on holding informal meetings with the directors of Casa Shalom Orphanage, as well as several of the house mothers residing on site, and with community leaders who are actively invested in the education of the children at Casa Shalom and in the local communities. Interviewees included such individuals as Jessica Hanson (Casa Shalom orphanage director), Jenny Smith (Casa Shalom child sponsorship program director), Melissa Jefferson (missionary teacher), Karen Anderson (former missionary in Central America) and Karla Reyes (Guatemalan primary school teacher) and other individuals whose occupations will be mentioned briefly in description of their interview, but whose names have been omitted. Some names have been altered to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, per their request. Other means of obtaining information about the education system in Guatemala included research from an observational standpoint, noting in particular the ages, levels, and subjects of the students I tutored on a day-to-day basis.

My trip to Nicaragua took place in October of 2015, when I traveled to two orphanages, Hogar Agape and New Life Nicaragua, with the non-profit *Serving Orphans*

Worldwide as part of an Awareness Tour about the role the organization plays in assisting orphans around the globe. My research in Nicaragua lasted only a week, and thus was conducted in a more expedited fashion than my efforts in Guatemala. Specifically, I conducted interviews (both formal and informal, as aforementioned) with representatives from the non-profit *Serving Orphans Worldwide*, including Ms. Karen Anderson (missions director), and Jenny Wallace (Assistant to COO and office manager), as well as one of the directors of the orphanage New Life Nicaragua, whose name I omit as requested by the individual. In combination with the orphanage report conducted by *Serving Orphans Worldwide*, these offered a greater understanding of the accountability and emphasis placed on education initiatives by both the non-profit associated institutions, and the government, according to locals.

Data Analysis and Verification

Having conducted several interviews with myriad individuals from Nicaragua and Guatemala, and NGOs within the field of education, along with my collection of observational notes, I was then able to analyze my data more thoroughly. Methods for this data analysis included: (1) reviewing interview transcripts, field notes, and email interviews; (2) categorically coding data; (3) noting common ideas in data collected. Validity was established by: (1) completing member checks in the field with both NGO workers and citizens of Nicaragua and Guatemala, (2) by comparisons of reports issued by multiple NGOs and the education departments of both Nicaragua and Guatemala, and (3) triangulation of my own data, including the interviews, emails, and notes recorded on site.

In order to triangulate my data, I read and reread my notes and interviews to formulate connective ideas throughout the varied interviews. In addition to the similarities found in the interviews, I also separated any significant deviations in assertions made by these interviewees. With these similarities and differences drawn from the data and appropriately categorized, I was then able to ascertain which categories would serve as guiding topics throughout the writing and research process, including: NGOs, indigenous and rural communities, successes and limitations of NGOs, and situational factors in both countries. As these were recurring points of conversation throughout the interviews, I organized the information according to those frames of thought, attempting to draw conclusions based on similar or dissimilar comments of the interviewees. The method of triangulation serves to strengthen the conclusions made in the research.

Privacy Considerations

It is important to note that many of the names within this document have been changed or removed altogether to respect the privacy of those I have interviewed, per their request. In addition, out of gratitude for the many individuals who took the time for interviews, I intend to make copies of this research available to those who expressed interest in the final outcome. All interviews were conducted with the approval of the International Review Board (IRB).

CHAPTER 4

REFLECTIONS ON NGOs IN EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

In observations made and interviews transcribed over the course of this research experience, it has become increasingly clear that NGOs play a pivotal, if not irreplaceable, role in education within both Guatemala and Nicaragua. Clouded by pasts filled with corruption and violence, both states continue to suffer from civil society sectors that are severely lacking, particularly for the poor and rural in Nicaragua and the marginalized indigenous communities in Guatemala. Indeed, it was in a conversation concerning Guatemala's indigenous children with Casa Shalom Orphanage's Director, Jessica Hanson, that the term "invisible children" was born. When Guatemalan parents cannot afford to register their children at birth or birth their children in their own homes – as is often the case with indigenous families – the state does not recognize them as Guatemalan citizens and they are often barred from attending public schools, voting, or even obtaining professional jobs. Thus, the children are considered "invisible" to the state, Hanson noted, and are not afforded the benefits that attending school would provide them.

And, yet, even for those who are able to attend school, the quality of the education seems to pose a problem. According to an interview with Karla Reyes, who works as a teacher in Guatemala, "public schools out of the city are the worst, with no committed teachers, no facilities, no equipment, and too traditional teaching. Besides this there are

cultural issues including the belief that girls shouldn't study and that kids should be working" (Reyes). Her statement alone touches on several of the primary issues facing education in this region. Yet, she is not alone in her assertions regarding the deplorable state of education in Guatemala. Melissa Jefferson, who served as a tutor at Casa Shalom Orphanage, and a teacher at a nearby "dump school" for the homeless children that reside and work there, added to this, stating:

From what I have seen, education is not very important. If the kids finish 5th grade, that is doing really well. One of our students from the dump did not pass 4th grade, and her mom let her drop out of school. There do not seem to be any laws to say that kids must attend school.
(Jefferson)

Certainly, their observations hold true throughout most of each country, with exception in the more elite communities. Even Bradaschia, in her previously mentioned dissertation, notes that "Parents are not always interested in sending their children to school...Parents do not see the need for education" (Bradaschia 57). Sadly, it is this communal lack of interest in education that hinders many non-profits and NGOs in their mission to expand educational opportunities in regions of severe neglect. Without the support of the community, or perhaps due to the distrust of the community, NGOs without local ties cannot make a lasting impact. Jessica Hanson, who has lived and worked in Guatemala for over ten years, expands on this idea, stating:

In most regions in Guatemala, there is no one ensuring that children attend school. *If* a school is available (if!) in the region a child lives in, it is entirely up to the parents to make sure he or she attends. There is zero

enforcement of truancy laws on the part of the Guatemalan government. Parents themselves are often poorly educated – if at all – and many do not see the need for their children to attend school. Instead, they send their children to work to help provide for the family. (Hanson)

It is in part this parental uncertainty about large outside organizations and leerness about the school system itself that there has been a push towards grassroots movements in NGO operations, which allow for their own input to be taken into account regarding curriculum and academic structure. Michael Lisman, an Education Advisor at the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean at the United State Agency for International Development (USAID), spoke on this issue during an interview conducted in August of 2015, noting that, interestingly, USAID’s mission has put them in the unique position of working themselves out of a job (Lisman). This simply means that with the conclusion of their partnership with local NGOs or businesses, USAID’s goal would have been to create a sustainable, community-based program so that at some point their services would be deemed no longer necessary, and would instead be run by locals, who have key insight about the situation, and offer more long lasting benefits for the children and community alike.

In order to bolster the effect of the education that children receive, however, there is also a need for a shift in classroom structure. One of the directors at New Life Nicaragua (one of the orphanages I had the chance to visit while traveling with the non-profit *Serving Orphans Worldwide*) indicated that another significant issue that children face when they are able to attend school is that they are not provided with a quality education during the short time that many do spend in school, which is only a mere 4

hours in Nicaragua on a daily basis. On top of that government corruption consistently proves a detriment to the improvement of education for many in the country, but particularly those already limited by their social or economic situations. For instance, she even noted that the Nicaraguan government, in an effort to boost the literacy rate of the state, has been known to pass out certificates of literacy to those who had only attended school for a short amount of time, many of whom were not actually literate. In her interview, she revealed that it is clear that even with small NGOs or non-profits, better coordination with both the government, particularly MINED in Nicaragua, and local communities can be a delicate balance to maintain.

In Guatemala, many of those interviewed remarked that not only is there a need for greater educational retention and quality in rural areas, and increased transparency of all NGOs who work in this sector, there are several other issues that NGOs must address in their role as “policy entrepreneurs.” Of particular importance, the issues of sexual abuse and teen pregnancy should be addressed. Though a law was passed in 2015 forbidding girls marrying until the age of 18 (where it had formerly been 14), the statistics of teen (and even child) pregnancy in Guatemala remain daunting, a fact that causes many girls to drop out of school. The topics of sex and sexual abuse (often committed by family members) remain taboo, which only allow violations to continue. As was noted in an earlier interview, that the young female rape victim to come to Casa Shalom was two-years-old, and was absolutely terrified of being around men due to the abuse. In addition to emotional and sexual abuse, many parents operate with the belief that girls do not need an education other than that which they obtain from their mothers. Hanson also notes: “Guatemalan parents in rural areas must receive training to combat

the mentality that an education is optional! They need to know why making the sacrifice to send their boys and their girls to school is the best way to provide a good future for their children” (Hanson). In order to increase retention and offer the essential skills like reading, writing, and math that many children need to achieve to improve their economic opportunity, not only do NGOs need to attempt address several of the overarching social and cultural issues that work to hinder education specifically within rural or indigenous communities. Though not ostensibly associated with education, the exposure to such violations at such a young age is traumatizing, and certain to hinder that child’s development or enrollment in school (particularly in the cases of pregnancies).

And yet, despite the many obstacles NGOs face in creating a positive learning environment for children who would otherwise have little exposure to the realm of education, NGOs remain the most feasible solution to this otherwise widening gap in civil society. According to assertions made by NGO workers and native residents alike, NGOs and non-profit institutions offer an alternative solution for those on the outskirts of society. This realization was a topic of particularly importance to Mr. Michael Lisman, according to our aforementioned interview. He relayed to me that such understanding about the importance of education and the success of the NGO realm is critical for future development of the community and country:

Education is key. It serves as a basic building block and a stimulant for economic growth. In fact, there is data showing a direct correlation when GDP goes up to when test scores increase over a certain time span. In the long run, it could also lead to more stability in societal and political issues as more voters become educated and increasingly involved. (Lisman)

Mr. Lisman is not alone in his belief. Despite the many cultural, economic, and political beliefs that instigate many of the problems that both Karla Reyes and Melissa Jefferson note in their interviews, they would also agree that education is the surest way to eradicate much of the poverty and violence prevalent in states such as Nicaragua and Guatemala.

It is fair to say that improvements should be implemented to better manage the increasing resources and services brought in by NGOs, but many agree that there have indeed been improvements due to such efforts. In fact, Jessica Hanson, in an email interview conducted in 2016, cited several cases of children that had undergone programs sponsored by NGOs and are now on the path towards more economically stable and personally fulfilling futures. The first of the children she mentions, Colim, age 17, is enrolled in a private diversificado program where she is studying to be a flight attendant, a dream she's had since she was 9. Yet, Colim's story is a complex one, like so many of the children who come to Casa Shalom, as Hanson indicates:

Colim came to Casa Shalom just over 10 years ago, on Christmas Day, when her mother, a drug dealer, was murdered in a drug deal gone bad.

Colim witnessed her mother and younger sibling being murdered and has suffered from PTSD and nightmares ever since. She first started attending school when she came to Casa Shalom and she has proven herself to be a dedicated, outstanding pupil.” (Hanson)

Colim is not the only positive story she has seen unfold. She also addresses the success of Edwin (age 19) who is Casa Shalom's oldest resident and is currently attending university, majoring in International Relations, with the goal of entering politics after

graduation. Like Colim, he also had not attended school prior to coming to Shalom, but improved dramatically with the help of this non-profit organization.

Only through these efforts can Guatemala, Nicaragua, and similar Central American states hope to stabilize a society that has been deeply affected by conflict, violence, and political instability. Working alongside locals to note the most significant educational issues and their aspirations for their community seems to be in fact the only solution to the educational crisis in many Central American and South American states alike. In addition to working alongside locals who have a greater understanding of the needs of the community, it is vital that a means by which to consider effectiveness is implemented throughout the NGO sector. In concurrence with the ideas postulated by Mr. Lisman from USAID, it is far better to observe the long-term effects of the institution rather than short-term inputs. Like Lisman, Karen Anderson, who is a liaison with the organization *Serving Orphans Worldwide* and a former missionary in Central America from 1990-2008, noted in an interview in January of 2016 that she has witnessed many cases in the NGO sector in which children from marginalized situations with illiterate parents were able to obtain a college education. This was only possible, she is careful to note, with the on-going support of school programs. Short-term programs, she asserts, only seem to aggravate the situation many children face.

In spite of the difficulties associated with implementing effective educational programs, in their book, *Poor Economics*, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo affirm that education for children of every group is a possibility: “The good news, and it is very good news indeed, is that all the evidence we have strongly suggests that making sure that every child learns the basics well in school is not only possible, it is in fact fairly

easy, as long as one focuses on doing exactly that” (97). For states like Guatemala and Nicaragua, simply ensuring that children of all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds have the ability to go to school is of utmost importance, and is made clear by a number of NGOs in this field. The path towards absolute economic and political equality in the education system is certainly not an easy one, and yet examples such as Emelin, countless children at the many orphanages protected via *Serving Orphans Worldwide*, and other communities involved with NGOs such as Pueblo a Pueblo indicate the success that NGOs can and have had in both education and the lives of the children themselves. As Rigoberta Menchu, a renowned activist for indigenous rights in Guatemala, noted, “Humankind will not recover from its mistakes without global education” (“Guatemala”). The time is now, more than ever, to ensure that every child has the opportunity to realize his or her own educational ability. And, if NGOs truly wish to ensure this, it is clear that a shift in their efforts must take place.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Despite the complexity surrounding measurements of the effectiveness of NGOs within the realm of education in this region – as well as the sheer difficulty in implementing sustainable educational programs among a highly diverse and severely impoverished populace – there are several means to alleviate such complications. From the information that NGO literature provides, as well as the comments via interviews both in country and in NGO headquarters, there are three primary changes that would work for the betterment of the work in this sector. They include: a shift towards grassroots initiatives, the use of qualitative rather than solely quantitative data to indicate the results of NGO programs, and greater communication and collaboration between NGOs working in the same space and the government of the base country.

A shift towards grassroots, community-led efforts rather than top-down change also proved to be a continual topic of conversation in NGO literature. Such change will assist in further inclusion of the marginalized populations that had previously been excluded from the educational sector, which often leads to less retention in schools than those that are considerate of indigenous and rural needs. To build more sustainable programs that have a greater impact on these communities, it is vital that communities play an active role in their development and are eventually able to foster leadership among their own population for the continuity of the programs.

There has additionally be a call for more qualitative data to supplement the quantitative data that NGOs use to illustrate the effect of their efforts in the services in which they work. As so many of the larger NGOs rely on such quantitative data for analysis, it is often difficult to gauge what the outcome of the efforts by the NGOs. While providing these numbers may be helpful for donors, in and of themselves they do not indicate the impact of the NGO. Thus, in addition to such numbers, NGO should also work to better track the impact of their inputs. So as to better portray themselves and their real impact in these communities, NGOs should make efforts for better transparency, and to reflect the long-term impacts of the programs or services they initiate or the tangible donations they provide.

The final change that was suggested by much of the NGO literature and in interviews themselves is further communication between NGOs (both unilateral and multilateral) and the government in order to mitigate unnecessary contributions or unavoidable confusion when working with a plethora of NGOs in the same region with little oversight. Better collaboration between these bodies will help ensure that every necessary service and/or donation is considered and that every community is adequately represented.

Though these suggestions for improvement are particularly applicable to Central America, each could also be considered for other regions of the world as well where educational inequity proves to be a major issue. Several countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, face similar situations in regards to the interactions of NGOs, particularly cultural norms and gender roles in educational accessibility, as previously

noted. Thus, should NGOs choose to implement these operational changes, they would have a more positive far-reaching effect than in just one region of the world.

Considering the delicate social and cultural situations that may dictate the availability of schools in specific regions, it is obvious that each region – indeed, each country – must be analyzed through the lens of their own language, economic standing and cultural understanding. Because of this, it is oft difficult to cross-analyze the work of NGOs across a wide geographical spectrum. In the same way that studies cannot be completed without taking the aforementioned factors into consideration, NGOs cannot also hope to have success in “blanket” programs that seek to implement positive education reform across multiple states with little regard to cultural, geographical or economical differences.

In contemplating the expansion of this research, four possibilities come to mind. The first, rather obviously, is an expansion to include another country within the region that has faired better in its efforts for educational retention and literacy rates. Most notably, I would recommend a case study in Cost Rica, whose literacy rates have ranged in the 90 percentile since the 1970s. Though Costa Rica’s history differs slightly from that of Nicaragua and Guatemala, offering a insight on education programs that work in its more rural regions might prove beneficial to both highlight the stark differences in education among these geographical neighbors, as well as any changes that might be made to lessen the gap that is seen in Nicaragua and Guatemala comparatively.

The second option for further development would be the manner of analysis. As two of the more general difficulties in obtaining, or even accessing, education are poverty or indigenous roots, it might be of interest to use one or both as a control for the research.

In this way, we are better able to distinguish which factors play more heavily into determining educational accessibility. With such information at hand, NGOs and government programs will both have a deeper understanding of the changes that are necessary for improvement in the field.

It might also be of use to the NGO sector to expand the research to include specific analysis of unilateral NGOs vs. multilateral NGOs in the field. Should efforts be directed towards one specific field, or is it better still to direct resources towards a number of programs for the betterment of the community? As even more of the small, grassroots NGOs make a shift to include a number of social services outside of education, it would prove particularly beneficial to discover whether the change from one service to several will indeed assist the community, or if such expansions will detract from the services they initially strove to survive. Looking specifically at the work of NGOs in unilateral field and those who work across many sectors, NGOs can gauge whether they should expand their efforts or their concentration on one part of the civil sector.

Along the same lines of examining unilateral vs. multilateral NGOs, it would also prove both interesting and beneficial to analyze the differences in effectiveness between religiously affiliated NGOs and secular NGOs. Historically, religious NGOs have played a significant role in filling the gaps in the civil service sector; however, with the rise of globalization and the greater attention reflected on regions in the developing world, even more NGOs of a variety of origins have stepped in to fill a similar role. For the scope of this project, it may serve to strengthen understanding of the effectiveness of NGOs to also engage the pros and cons of these two types of NGOs as well.

Though much of the literature analysis and research was conducted specifically with Central America in mind, many of the same improvements to the NGO realm could be applicable in other similarly developing states globally. Of course, while cultural context must be considered on a country-basis, the concepts of increased transparency among the NGO community, increased incorporation of the local community in NGO projects, and more frequent communications between NGOs and educational sector of the government remain pivotal to the overall progression of NGO goals, specifically in the case of education. Indeed, whether in a smaller African town, a community in East Asia, other regions in South America, or in the marginalized or impoverished areas with Guatemala or Nicaragua, studies have proven that such changes for the continuance and success of NGO programs are not mere recommendations, but vital to the improvement of educational retention and increased opportunities for children on a global scale.

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Interview Questions for “Invisible Children: The Effectiveness of Non-Profits in Education in Central America”

1. Please tell me a little bit about your organization as it pertains to education, and a few of the general programs you operate in order to promote education.
2. What are the biggest concerns in trying to promote education in Latin America?
3. What has proven to be most beneficial for the children to learn?
4. In your work, have you noticed certain social groups receiving less or more education?
5. What skills and knowledge are most beneficial for children to learn in these regions?
6. Is it possible – or even feasible – to effectively promote gender equality through education in these regions? If so, what techniques can be used?
7. What are the benefits of education for children in these regions particularly?
8. What are some successes you have witnessed with the programs you have in place?
9. What are some improvements you would like to see in your programs in the future?
10. What are the long-term goals your institution has for improving education in this region?