

An Assessment of the Impact of Community Participation and Empowerment through Non-Governmental Organisations and International Volunteering on Local Communities.

The case of Honduras Child Alliance in El Porvenir, Honduras.



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Abstract

The concept of development has always been very contested from the years of its first appearance in the international political agenda in the post-war period, but the core idea embedded in the term has always been one about positive change in people's lives.

For decades, the meaning of development and the related different recipes to achieve it have changed according to the current mainstream political and economic agendas. However, starting from the 1980s, developing countries and later on the international forum, came to realise that those previous approaches to development, particularly the ones focused on economic growth as the only path to achieve development, had failed in meeting the expectations and in solving the problems that developing countries were facing. Thus, new and alternative approaches on development started to emerge in the development discourse.

The main idea at the core of these alternative approaches was that there is not one single solution to development problems that can be applied unconditionally to every circumstance, and that every people and communities have different development needs to be fulfilled at their own pace. Furthermore, it has been recognised that development does not have to be brought upon people by professionals and experts, but the path towards it should be rather found in the knowledge and values of local communities.

It is in this context that Non-Governmental Organisations gained popularity in the development process and among rural communities for they represented grassroots and bottom-up ideas of development. Through the introduction of new concepts and approaches such as community participation, empowerment and non-formal education, NGOs have been at the forefront of innovation in the development discourse and became the symbol of development done with the people rather than for the people.

Honduras Child Alliance is one such NGO, which believes in alternative approaches to development and put them in practice in the community of El Porvenir, Honduras. The Organisation's main focus are the children of the community, but over the years has also undertaken activities which involved the community to a greater extent.

In the end, NGOs and alternative development approaches are perceived as successful in bringing about development by local communities and by the international forum. However, there are still some critical issues and unintended consequences to be considered so that development processes can truly achieve positive change in people's lives.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Preamble

This thesis aims to analyse the role and the impact of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), called Honduras Child Alliance (HCA), which is working in the small local community of El Porvenir in Honduras. By taking this Organisation as a case study, the main goal is to have an analytical understanding of the various types of activities and intervention strategies implemented by the NGO and the degree of participation of the community in the latter, as well as how the NGO's activities contribute to meeting the community's needs and enhancing the community's capabilities to manage its own development, through its empowerment.

The personal interest in these topics stemmed during the first year of my master's degree in Global Refugee Studies and piqued during my internship period of four months working for the Organisation mentioned above. Even if the main topics touched during the regular lectures over the year were mostly about international migrations and refugees, we came across issues of development in several occasions. Particularly, definitions and approaches to development, and related issues about poverty, have been studied as one of the biggest and most influential reasons for people to migrate and leave their home. Furthermore, another recurrent topic was about Non-Governmental Organisation, whose work have often been seen and analysed under a critical lens, arguing that NGOs are dogmatically seen as doing good, although past and recent experiences have proven that it is not the case. From this point of view, I developed a great interest in the study of NGOs and their possible positive and negative effect on the people and communities they choose to help.

The topic of the next chapter will be a general background to development interventions in developing countries, going through a brief history of the development perspectives that lead to the development theory chosen for this study. Then, a brief description and history of NGOs will be presented. The chapter also introduces the research problem and the related research questions upon which this thesis is based. In the end, a brief description of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Development in Historical Perspective

As for other concepts in modern development studies, the concept of development itself is still slippery and contested, and it still has no agreed single meaning. It is used to denote positive change or progress but can also mean organic growth and evolution. "Developing" refers to activities that

may bring about positive change, while “developed” implies a value of judgement, a standard to which things can be compared. To this day, underdeveloped or developing countries have the task to reach the standard that the already developed countries represent.

Modernisation

Until relatively recently, development was seen by Western countries mainly in economic terms and the emphasis was on economic growth rather than distribution (Pieterse, 2001). This idea characterised the development discourse during the post-war period, which was influenced mainly by neoclassical economics and liberal political theory, and “modernisation” theory was the dominant development theory (Pieterse, 2001). Modernisation theory states that poor countries needed to achieve economic growth and free themselves from “traditional” social and cultural impediments. The benefits of this economic growth would eventually trickle down from the rich to the poor section of the population (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Modernisation theory postulated, in a very linear way, that the only possible development path could be achievable through Western capitalist democracy. This theory is no longer part of the development discourse and the idea of trickle-down theory has been abandoned by today’s mainstream economic development models advocates, such as the World Bank (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Dependency

Opposed to this approach, “dependency” theory originated from the work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA). Influenced by Marxism, this theory constructs a new concept of “underdevelopment” as a process rather than as absence of development (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). This thesis challenges the modernisation theory in claiming that poor countries were not poor because they had not been given access to modernity, but they had been actively underdeveloped by historical processes of colonisation and by the imposition of unequal terms of trade by rich countries (Pieterse, 2001). In this context development would not be possible for poor countries that are trapped in this unfair global system ruled by Western capitalist countries (Lewis and Kanji, 2009; Pieterse, 2001). The only way out, according to dependency theorists, is a large-scale structural change that would allow poor countries to build their own autonomous development. For many advocates of this theory, the most viable answer to underdevelopment was revolution, rather than economic growth (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

By the 1980s, modernisation and dependency theories were the two main, if not only, theories of development. They surely had some interesting points of view and insights in the development

discourse, but more and more people working directly in the development field started to express the necessity for new and more pragmatic ideas. Particularly those working for development agencies such as NGOs became frustrated by the abstraction of the academic discourse (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

In this setting, the emergence of post-modernism thinking had helped criticising both theories as too linear and unsuitable to explaining complex and diverse patterns of historical change (Pieterse, 2001). It had also helped to draw attention to the importance of social and cultural diversity, the primacy of localised experiences, the roles played by resistance movements and the colonial roots of the development discourse (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

The vacuum created by the theoretical impasse between those two main theories, left space for new and more pragmatic mainstream and alternative development theories, destined to dominate the development landscape from the 1990s up to today (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). These theories recognised the need to link development ideas to more real-world experiences, policy and practice, some focusing more on grassroots initiatives, some on broader processes of political economy and institutions (Lewis and Kanji, 2009; Pieterse, 2001).

Neoliberalism

One of these theories is the well-known neoliberalism, whose focus was mainly on individualism and markets. The main expression of this approach had been the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank on poor countries as part of loan conditionality, requiring them to open to international market and forcing drastic cutbacks in public expenditure and social services (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). These policies were focused on market-based reforms and on the reduction of the role of the state. Through the 1990s neoliberalism became the mainstream development theory and NGOs were given more consideration and resources (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). They were seen mainly as service providers, but also important as advocates in making national policies more responsive to citizens in developing countries. Sadly, as many NGOs have proven, the SAPs had placed the biggest burden on the poorest people and ended up increasing poverty (Pieterse, 2001).

As a result, UN agencies had then started to call for increased funds for basic social services, such as health and education. One response was the introduction by the UNDP of the new concept of “human development” (Pieterse, 2001; Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). This concept helped to broaden ideas about poverty and development so to include both material and non-material

elements. It stems from the work of Amartya Sen and his “capability approach” (Sen, 1999), which imagined development not anymore as economic growth but rather in terms of the capacity of individuals to make choices that allow them to improve their quality of life. That included a stronger focus on aspects such as political freedom and equal opportunities (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000).

More recently, the neoliberal paradigm shifted from the laissez-faire approach to a stronger recognition of the need for effective government or “governance”, with the aim of structural reforms of economic growth models that could benefit the poor to a greater degree. Neoliberalism was also characterised by a component of “managerialism”, that is the ideological reliance on technical problem solving, with an increased emphasis on organisational technologies for increasing effectiveness (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Post-development

During the 1990s a new perspective emerged, which suggested that development was a restrictive and controlling discourse used by rich countries to extend their power over the poor ones rather than a solution to the problem of global poverty and inequality (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). It stems from the Foucauldian concept of power and shows how the concept of “empowerment” promoted by development agencies could serve as a means to control poor people, hide local power structures and reduce political problems to technical ones that needed technical solutions (Escobar, 1995; Pieterse, 2001). However, some post-development writers such as Escobar (1995), argued that new social movements could have an emancipatory power to build local strategies to development.

In this perspective, NGOs are seen as agents carrying out the agenda of modernisation and serving the interests of the aid industry at the expense of local communities (Pieterse, 2001). Temple (1997, in Lewis & Kanji, 2009) further identifies NGOs as “Trojan horses” which brings Western capitalist values into communities based on different values. He views NGOs in contrast with social movement which are seen as true representatives of local interests.

Post-development could be very helpful in providing new insights in the development discourse, but it has also been criticised, particularly for the way it romanticises the local.

1.3 NGOs and Development

In the 1980s NGOs started to attract the attention of the development community for several reasons. For Western donors NGOs provided an alternative and more flexible channel for funding

that could also offer a stronger implementation at the local level and potentially grassroots participation (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Pieterse, 2001). NGOs were thought to embody “a philosophy that recognises the centrality of people in development policies” (Cernea, 1988). They were thought to foster local participation, since they were more locally rooted organisations, closer to marginalised people. Many also thought that NGOs were normally working at lower costs, given their voluntary nature. Furthermore, NGOs were seen as the perfect environment to experiment and innovate with alternative ideas and approaches to development, such as participation, gender, environment and empowerment (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Pieterse, 2001).

From the 1990s, NGOs started to be thought as a part of the emerging concept of civil society. In this paradigm development outcomes depend on a balanced relationship between the State, the Market and the third sector (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). The latter, through community organising and policy advocacy has to contrast possible excesses of the State and the Market in the name of public interests. In this period, NGOs started to be seen less as a quick fix or a “magic bullet” (Vivian, 1994), because many NGOs failed to live up to expectations.

However, much of the writings about development NGOs during this period still tended to portray quite a positive picture of the work done by NGOs and it was often presented by people directly involved with the NGOs’ world (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). This material proved itself very helpful in highlighting the importance of NGOs’ work in the field of development. The greatest limitation of this kind of literature was that it was more descriptive rather than analytical, thus NGOs were associated more with development practice rather than theory (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). Consequently, it is of crucial importance for the purpose of this paper to link the study of NGOs to theoretical ideas about development.

1.4 Research Problem

As an alternative development approach has started to become increasingly popular in the development discourse in many developing countries, several new concepts, such participation and empowerment, started to be taken into consideration by many development NGOs. These concepts, also termed buzzwords because ambiguous and hard to define (Cornwall & Brock, 2005, Lewis & Kanji, 2009), shaped the way we see development interventions today, and are increasingly focused on the idea that the poor must be able to contribute to the design and implementation of a more suitable kind of development interventions, which would bring more benefits to their lives. As a consequence, rather than passive recipients, they started to be recognised more as active

participants to the development discourse, thanks to the valuable insights they possess about both their situation and the possible actions to undertake in order to produce change. Thus, ideas of participation and empowerment, give the poor a chance to have a voice in their own development. According to this view, many programmes and projects have been designed with the goal of giving power to the poor and marginalised for managing their own development. They would do so by building their capabilities and involving them in the programme design and implementation as a way to empowering them, so they could own the development process.

However, there are some issues to consider, such as to what extent this involvement can lead to empowerment, to what degree the development process is actually shaped and owned by the poor and marginalised, and to what extent such efforts are building capabilities for the poor to meet their own development needs. Furthermore, because the Organisation under study relies heavily on the employment of international volunteers as basic work force, the positive and negative impacts of this aspect will be addressed and analysed as a key feature in the critical assessment on the general impact of HCA on the community.

1.5 Objective of the Study

The main objective of this research is to understand NGOs' activities efforts in a local community through the study and analysis of the activities implemented, the approach to development, the community members participation in the design and implementation of such activities, the presence of short-term international volunteers, the impact of all the above on the needs of the community itself. This study stems from a very personal interest in contributing to a greater understanding of the role of NGOs in the development of poor local communities.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What kind of NGO is Honduras Child Alliance and what kind of activities have been undertaken throughout the years in El Porvenir?
2. To what extent the activities undertaken by HCA meet the perceived basic needs of the community?
3. To what extent participation of the children in the programme and community members in the activities of HCA contributes to their empowerment?
4. What is the impact of international short-term volunteers on the activities undertaken by HCA and consequently on the community?

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter one is an introductory chapter and it provides a general overview of the context within which this thesis has been done. It starts with the reasons why I have decided to analyse the topic of the study and where the personal interest stemmed from. It then continues through a discussion about how the concept of development has changed through the years from the post-war period up to today in order to understand the development paradigm chosen for this study. In the end the research problem is stated, followed by the related research questions.

Chapter two explains the theoretical framework for this study. It starts by a brief discussion about NGOs and the related concepts and definitions. It then presents a discussion about alternative development as the main theoretical background through which most current NGOs undertake their development efforts. Throughout this discussion, some key concepts related to the alternative development paradigm are explained. Participation is used to analyse the stakeholders' involvement in the activities undertaken by the NGO under study. Empowerment is used to analyse the results of community participation and the impact that this involvement could have on the development of the community and its members. In the end, a brief explanation about non-formal education is presented as an important part of the alternative development approach used by the NGO in planning and implementing its programme.

Chapter three introduces the methodology employed to collect and analyse the data needed for the research. Basically, the methodology used in this study refers to a qualitative and abductive approach. In the chapter, all the challenges encountered during the collection of data are highlighted.

Chapter four presents an overview of the particular context within which the study has been done. First a brief description and some interesting statistics about the country Honduras, followed by a narrower description of the community of El Porvenir, where the NGO is set. Then I proceed by presenting the NGO itself and all the kind of programmes and activities undertaken by the Organisation in the community.

Chapter 5 assesses how the NGO's activities respond to the community's basic needs, how the children and the community members participate in the design and implementation of these activities and how this can eventually result in the empowerment of all the stakeholders involved. The second part of the chapter consists in an assessment of the impact of short-term volunteers can have on the children and on the community in general.

Chapter six is the conclusion. It presents a summary of the findings, concluding remarks, recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Defining NGOs

The concept of NGO became widely popular in the last two decades and attracted the attention of academics, policy makers and development workers. The origins of the term can be found in the history of the United Nations, when the UN charter drawn up in 1945 and the designation “non-governmental organisation” was given consultative status in UN activities as international non-state organisation (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). The term NGO is often linked with other terms such “non-profit”, “voluntary” and “civil society”. Another important distinction is between grassroots or membership NGOs, composed by people getting together in order to further their own interests, and intermediary NGOs, made up of people working on behalf or in support of another marginalised group (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). The term has also been used to describe both international organisations and organisations working in developing countries contexts.

A very useful way of approaching the discourse on NGOs is to see them as part of what has been called the third sector or “Civil Society”. The basic idea is that the world’s institution can be divided three ways: State, Market and a third sector that can be identified as “non-profit”, “voluntary” or “non-governmental”, as stated before. This third sector is then both a group of organisations and a social space between government and market. NGOs can consequently be seen as a sub-group of a wider family (Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Salamon and Anheier (1992) argued that most definitions of the concept of NGO have been either *legal* (focusing on the type of formal registration and status of the organisation in different country contexts), *economic* (looking at the source of the organisation’s resources) or *functional* (based on the type of activities the organisation undertakes). These definitions are only partial, so they developed a structural/operational definition, based on the features of the organisation.

A civil society organisation is therefore: *formal* (the organisation is institutionalised to a certain degree); *private* (institutionally separated from the state); *non-profit distributing* (if profit is created, it is redistributed within the organisation); *self-governing* (able to manage its own affairs); *voluntary* (volunteer staff, but also just the founders/directors) (Salamon and Anheier, 1992).

We can distinguish NGOs from other third sector organisation using a narrow and concise definition provided by Vakil (1997, in Lewis & Kanji, 2009) and based on the above-mentioned

structural/operational definition. He states that NGOs are “self-governing, private, non-profit organisations that are geared to improving the quality of life for disadvantaged people”.

For the purpose of this paper I am going to use this last definition as the most appropriate to describe the work of the kind of NGO I will study and analyse in the end of this study, conscious that the concept is very broad and opened to different interpretations.

The role of NGOs

There have been many attempts of classifying different types of NGOs, but the simplest and most efficient has been developed by Lewis (2001) and it classifies NGOs according to the main sets of activities they undertake. NGOs can be: *implementers*, *catalysts* and *partners*.

The implementer NGOs are concerned with the mobilisation of resources to provide goods and services to people who need them. The services provided may vary from healthcare to education, emergency relief and human rights (Lewis, 2001). This role is very important simply because, in developing countries, a range of basic services is often of inadequate quality or unavailable to part of the population (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As neoliberal development policies have emphasised a decreasing role of the state in service providing, NGOs have stepped in to fill the gaps (Lewis, 2001).

Some argued for a stronger role of NGOs as service providers because they are believed to have a set of organisational advantages, such as flexibility, commitment and cost-effectiveness (Lewis, 2001, Mitlin et al., 2006). However, it would be better not to generalise, as not all NGOs have proved themselves to be highly effective. Robinson and White (1997) found that NGOs service delivery was frequently characterised by lack of quality control, limited sustainability, poor coordination and general amateurism.

The catalysts NGOs focus mainly on inspiring, facilitating or contributing to improved thinking and action to promote change (Lewis, 2001). This focus can be directed at individuals or groups in local communities.

Partner NGOs reflect the trend to work together with governments, donors, and the private sector in joint activities and projects. NGOs can also partner together and with communities to develop and strengthen capabilities (Lewis, 2001).

It is rare that a particular NGO is confined to only one of these roles and often they engage in all three types of activities. NGOs can shift from one to another as context and opportunities change over time.

Evolution of NGOs

Most NGOs are born as small organisation, when an individual or a group of people with similar interests and idea come together to make a change, and over time they grow to became larger and more complex organisations (Lewis, 2001; Lewis and Kanji, 2009).

Thus, in order to grasp the impact that local NGOs can have on a community, it might be helpful to analyse how NGOs can develop over time, due to internal changes or external factors. To do that we can use Korten's conceptualisation of NGOs' evolutionary process in generational terms (Korten, 1987).

In the first generation, the first priority of the NGO is to address immediate needs, mostly through relief work (Korten, 1987). In the second generation, the NGO's focus shift to longer-term initiatives, such as building small, self-reliant local development projects. In this phase, the NGO may experience a stronger influence from other agencies and donors (Korten, 1987). In the third generation, the NGO become more concerned in growing a stronger influence on the wider institutional and policy context through advocacy (Korten, 1987). In the fourth generation, NGOs become more closely linked to wider social movements, with the goal of producing long-term structural change, combining local action with initiatives at a national or global level (Korten, 1987).

Again, NGOs have proven that usually they can belong to more than one generation at the same time and that the evolutionary process is not always linear, but Korten's scheme is still useful for the purpose of this paper. It will help identifying the type of organisation in the case study.

2.2 Alternative development

According to Mitlin et al. (2006) NGOs were born as alternatives. Alternatives to governmental programmes in which people can have a voice and participate in their own development. Alternatives because they create a safe space where people are free to propose and implement alternative ideas, practices and forms of participation.

The term alternative development does not represent a single theory, but a bundle of approaches and perspectives which, influenced by postmodernism, share the idea that there is no generalised answers and solutions to development problems. Alternative development approaches try to link theory and practice, challenge top-down development policies and engage in a useful way with relationships of power and inequality (Friedmann, 1992, in Lewis and Kanji, 2009; Mitlin et al., 2006). The main idea is that marginalised communities could take autonomous action and control over the

environment they live in through grassroots work, community organising and collective action (Mitlin et al., 2006; Pieterse, 2001). This approach was anchored to anthropological and sociological ideas of the importance of the recognition of people's everyday experiences, practices and strategies in order to understand social change (Pieterse, 2001). Renewed interest was put on indigenous knowledge, sustainability and social movements.

These alternatives challenged the mainstream economic thinking and focused once again on the need of more grassroots, bottom-up approaches rather than technocratic top-down initiatives (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Mitlin et al., 2006). As stated before, NGOs were already interested in new ideas of participation and empowerment in their engagement with local communities. In fact, NGOs came to be seen as the main agent of alternative development approaches. As a matter of fact, most NGOs claim that their programmes embody development strategies accordingly to the alternative development paradigm.

However, alternative development approaches were not only concerned with project processes or local-level initiatives, but also in linking local action with national and structural change (Mitlin et al., 2006). Korten (1987) argued that NGOs could contribute to empowerment within political processes which link grassroots initiatives, broader social movements and political organisation, in order to build a so called "people-centred development".

Moreover, as part of this renewed emphasis on politics and development, during the 1990s there has been a resurgence of interest in development and rights, since the first UN World Conference on Human Rights in 1968 (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Pieterse, 2001). This was possible thanks to several changes at the international level in terms of new legal rights frameworks and as an outcome of the efforts of activists and movements in claiming social justice. Some NGOs have advocated rights-based approaches to development. This kind of rights-based approaches is useful in linking poverty reduction to issues of citizenship, law and accountability and in building a stronger focus on protecting the rights of the most vulnerable (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As a result, development NGOs understood the need for increased transparency, recognition of power relations and they also understood the importance of seeing people as citizens rather than passive beneficiaries.

Throughout the 1990s, ideas related to alternative development, such as participation and empowerment, entered the mainstream discourse on development.

“Alternative development tends to be practice oriented rather than theoretically inclined. Alternative development travels under many aliases – appropriate development, participatory development, people-centred development, human-scale development, people’s self-development, autonomous development, holistic development; and many elements relevant to alternative development are developed, not under the banner of alternative development but under specific headings, such as participation, participatory action research, grassroots movements, NGOs, empowerment, conscientisation, democratisation, human rights etc. Such dispersion does not facilitate generating a coherent body of theory” (Pieterse, 2001; p.81)

However, through a more encompassing definition of alternative development it is possible to overcome this last critique. According to Nerfin (1977, in Mweene, 2006), alternative development: “is geared to meeting human needs, both material and non-material, it stems from the heart of society, which defines its values and its future, realises conditions for self-management and participation in decision-making, and it’s based on the premise that each society relies primarily on its own strength and resources, and on its own members and environment”.

Participation

As we have seen before, alternative development approaches claimed the need for new ways to address poverty and challenge unequal relationships and structures. They critique mainstream, top-down, modernisation-type approaches to the promotion of capitalist development and they represent an attempt to move away from the pessimism and revolutionary ideas of dependency theory (Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Mitlin et al., 2006; Pieterse, 2001).

One of the concepts introduced by alternative development advocates is “participation”: that is the need to build a central role in decision-making processes for ordinary people, in opposition with them being acted upon by outsiders in the name of development (Mikkelsen, 2005). Participatory development introduces the idea that people themselves are experts about their own problems, therefore they should be involved in the process of finding the appropriate solutions and strategies.

Local people have been rarely involved in the design and management of development projects, and they have been often seen as passive beneficiaries of such interventions. According to Chambers (2004) and other writers (Mikkelsen, 2005; White, 1995) the main idea was to create conditions for people to imagine and then enact solutions to development issues by drawing from

their own knowledge and experience. Chambers identifies three different uses of the term participation (Chambers, 2002 in Mikkelsen, 2005). The first one is used as a *cosmetic label*. This happens when donor agencies and governments require participatory approaches, while, actually, a traditional top-down approach is being used. The second one describes a *co-opting practice*, to mobilise local labour and reduce costs. This way communities contribute to projects developed by external experts with their own time and resources, and with some outside assistance. In Chamber's words this means that "they" (local people) participate in "our" (government, international agencies, NGOs) project. The third is used to describe an "*empowering process*" which enables local people to take control and to make their own decisions, that means "we" participate in "their" project and not the opposite. "It implies a commitment to equity, empowering the marginalised, excluded and deprived" (Chambers, 2004).

In 1995, White developed a conceptual framework for thinking about participation. She identifies four forms based on "who participates" and "at what level". The first one is *nominal*: is often used by more powerful actors to give legitimacy to development plans, although often with a tokenistic purpose. The second one is *instrumental*: it sees community participation as a means to achieve a particular goal, that often is the efficient use of the skills and knowledge of community members in project implementation. The third one is *representative*: it involves giving community members a voice in the decision-making and implementation process of projects and activities that affects them. For the more powerful it increases the chances of their intervention to be more sustainable; for the less powerful it may offer a chance to express their own interests. The fourth one is *transformative*: it results in the empowerment of those involved and in the consequent change of structures and institution that lead to marginalisation and exclusion (White, 1995).

However, even if the concept of participation has gained popularity in the development discourse throughout the last three decades, and participatory approaches have been recognised and mainstreamed as fundamental in the process of achieving development, there is still the necessity to listen to different critical insights into the strength and weaknesses of participatory development discourse.

One critique is based on the fact that sometimes there is an insensitivity regarding access and equity (Cornwall, 2002, in Mikkelsen 2005), particularly in regard to specific categories, like children and women (Gujit & Shah, 1998, in Mikkelsen, 2005). In the words of Green, "participation, while now part of a standard toolkit... may in practice replicate existing social division... and exclude poorer

and marginalised groups, including women” (Green, 2002, in Mikkelsen, 2005, p. 77). When participation becomes part of the standard toolkit, it is easy to forget to check possible sensitivities involved for the target group/participants. Several development agencies, including NGOs, sometimes commit the mistake of imposing the use of participatory approaches against the wishes of the people (Mikkelsen, 2005). Chambers warns of the danger of picturing participation “as good regardless of who participates or who gains” (Chambers, 2004).

Participation is also often advocated for the recognition of the value of local people’s knowledge and its potential contribution to development. However, it may not solve many of the core causes of poverty (Mikkelsen, 2005). In fact, participation might be seen as the acquisition and manipulation of a new “planning knowledge” rather than the incorporation of people’s knowledge (Mosse, 2001, in Mikkelsen, 2005). Some writers go as far as to define participation as a “new tyranny” (Cooke and Kothari, 2000 in Mikkelsen, 2005), which means that “the well-intentioned promotion of empowerment and ownership through local participation and take-over of the external expert’s role as change agent is a refined and accelerating – yet unconscious – process for colonising the life worlds of villagers” (Mikkelsen, 2005). According to Rahnema, participatory methods and conscientisation are simply new and more subtle forms of manipulation (Rahnema, 1992, in Mikkelsen, 2005). Rahnema questions if participatory approaches have succeeded in bringing about new forms of people’s power. Instead, he suggests that there are indications that the way many activists interpreted their mission contributed to de-valuing traditional knowledge (Rahnema, 1992, in Mikkelsen, 2005). He asks if these methods such conscientisation (Freire, 1974, in Rowlands, 1996) and participation are really helpful in stopping the processes of domination and manipulation.

Critics of participatory approaches argue that there is tendency to idealise the “community” and danger of confusing between social and geographical communities (Mikkelsen, 2005). Others warn of the danger of identifying communities as homogeneous and unified population with which developers and researchers can interact with no problems (Nelson & Wright, 1995, in Mikkelsen, 2005).

Part of the critique of participation focus on the central role of NGOs. It is argued that there is a risk that the idea that NGOs are more participative could become dogmatic (Chambers, 2004; Mikkelsen, 2005). In fact, NGOs have very different understandings of what participation means and what are the best ways to achieve it. MacDonald’s (1995, in Mikkelsen, 2005) showed that NGOs

have contributed to marginalise and de-politicise participation. Participatory methods have been proven to sometimes ensure the promotion of dominant power's interests, rather than actually empowering the poor.

The limitation of project-level participation through agency structures are being increasingly recognised (McGee, 2002, in Mikkelsen, 2005). Sometimes, going against the initial intentions, imported structures and tools for participation may in fact replicate existing social division and exclude marginalised groups.

Participation in projects is still the most usual form of promoting participation. Yet, further empirical evidence and analysis is needed of whether and how the structure of participatory projects include, protect and secure the interests of poor people, and of what are the connections between participation of the poor and furthering their social and economic good (Mikkelsen, 2005). This will require deeper analysis on successful participatory projects that focus on process, power dynamics, and patterns of exclusion and inclusion. This could be done by process documentation of consensus-building and decision-making within communities.

Empowerment

Related to the concept of participation and very important as well in the alternative development discourse, is the concept of "empowerment". The main idea is that poverty is considered more as an outcome of unequal power relations, rather than a simple lack of material resources.

The concept is central in Friedmann's (1992, in Lewis & Kanji, 2009) work on alternative development theory and practice. He worked on ideas of power and stated that people capacity to think and act on their own was impeded by their incorporation into unequal power relations. He identifies three kinds of power: *social* (access to information and skills, participation in social organisation, financial resources); *political* (access by individual household members to decision-making processes, in groups or singularly); *psychological* (self-confident behaviour). He argued that to achieve a form of alternative development that goes beyond material well-being, progress in all kind of power was necessary (Friedmann 1992, in Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

Finding a definitive and comprehensive definition of empowerment is still challenging, but we can narrow it down to the most relevant for this study. The first one originates from Western social work and identifies empowerment as "a tool for understanding how the situation of poor and marginalised people could be changed through processes of personal development, in order to

cause a shift from thinking to action” (Rowlands, 1996). This definition became popular because it suited the idea that development was better achievable through personal change rather than structural change.

The meaning of empowerment can change according to one’s interpretation of power. Conventionally, definitions of empowerment focused more on the access to political and economic decision-making processes by individual actors. Within the generative interpretation of power, empowerment also includes access to intangible decision-making processes, through which people become aware of their own interests and of how these interact with the interests of others, in order to be more involved in the decision-making process and to be able to actually influence those decisions.

Feminist interpretations of power lead to a further development in the definition of empowerment, since they go beyond formal and institutional definitions of power and incorporate the idea of “the personal as political” (Rowlands, 1996). It is then very important to understand the dynamics of oppression, because these hinder the capacity of less powerful groups to be involved in formal and informal decision-making. Empowerment must entail challenging negative social constructions, so that the people affected come start to understand that they have the capacity and the right to act and have influence (Rowlands, 1996).

As stated above, the idea of empowerment is increasingly used as a tool for understanding what is needed to change the situation of poor and marginalised people. Empowerment is then seen as a process, which involves a shift from insight to action. McWhirter defines empowerment as:

“The process by which people, organisations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community”. (McWhirter, 1991, in Rowlands, 1996, p.88)

She makes a useful distinction between “the situation of empowerment”, where all four of these conditions are met, and “an empowering situation”, where one or more of the conditions exist or are being developed, but where the full requirements are not present (McWhirter, 1991, in Rowlands,

1996). Through all these definitions runs the theme of understanding, that is “if you understand your situation, you are more likely to act to do something about it” (Rowlands, 1996).

The concept of “collective action” is also introduced. McWhirter’s clearly states that taking action does not mean gaining the power to dominate others and, as stated before, that empowerment must be used in the context of oppression, since one of the main goals is to remove the existence and effects of unjust inequalities (Ward & Mullender, 1991, in Rowlands, 1996). Empowerment can be focused on a local level, like villages or neighbourhood, linking people in similar situations through education, support, or social action groups and network building. On the other hand, on a larger scale, it can take place through community organisation, social planning, and policy development (Parsons, 1991, in Rowlands, 1996).

The definitions of empowerment used in education, counselling, and social work, although developed through work in industrialised countries, are similar to Freire’s concept of conscientisation, whose main focus is on individuals becoming actors in their own lives and developing a “critical consciousness”, that entails an understanding of their circumstances and the social environment that leads to action (Freire, 1974, in Rowlands, 1996). In practice, much empowerment work involves forms of group work. The role of the outside professional in this context becomes one of helper and facilitator. Anything more directive is seen as interfering with the empowerment of the people concerned, hence facilitation skills need to be subtle in order to be effective.

Batliwala (1993, in Rowlands, 1996) highlights a complicated aspect of empowerment that has a strong influence on many agencies and NGOs working in development. In fact, although the most powerful agencies are preoccupied with showing immediate results, empowerment can be incredibly slow. As a matter of fact, the process of improving the levels of confidence and self-esteem among poor and marginalised people so that they will have better tools and abilities to take charge of their own needs inevitably takes long time. It is a process for each individual to do at her or his own pace. For this reason, many empowerment-focused programmes end up working only with people who have already a degree of self-confidence and often fail to engage with the poorest and most marginalised (Rowlands, 1996).

As mentioned before, in the context of development, while individual empowerment is one ingredient in achieving empowerment at the collective and institutional levels, concentration on individuals alone is not enough (Rowlands, 1996; Sen, 1999). Changes are needed in the collective

abilities of individuals to take charge of identifying and meeting their own needs. At the same time, it is important to realise that the effectiveness of such group activity rests also on the individual empowerment of at least some people. Professionals involved in such empowerment work should always ask how the development intervention is affecting the various aspects of the lives of the people directly involved. A monitoring and evaluation process that reflects the empowerment process is essential. Qualitative indicators are central to the evaluation of empowerment.

In sum, whatever definition it is used, it gives importance to process. Empowerment implies a movement through developmental stages that include becoming aware of the power dynamics in one's life, developing skills and capacity for greater control, and exercising that control to make changes, either individually or in cooperation with other people in the community.

Non-formal education

In the past decades it has been acknowledged that school based on formal education curriculum cannot provide quality basic education for all. Since the World Education Forum in 2000, the global progress towards meeting the Education for All (EFA) goals, has been significant, in particular regarding enrolment rates and gender parity at the primary school level (Yanusaga, 2014). However, there were still “57 million primary-age children out of school worldwide in 2011 and 69 million young adolescents not attending primary nor secondary school due to several and often combined disadvantages, such as poverty, rural location, gender, disability or social discrimination” (UNDP, 2014). Moreover, particularly in developing countries, specific groups of children are excluded by the formal education system itself. So, in order to meet the EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), new approaches to education and development are needed.

Non- formal education is one of them. It is characterised by a high degree of flexibility and openness to change and innovation in the organisation, pedagogy and delivery methods. It can be helpful in meeting diverse and context-specific learning needs of the children, adolescents and adults (Yanusaga, 2014).

In the last two decades, non-formal education has been criticised for it involved small-scale, short-term programmes with limited funding, which could limit the impact and sustainability of such programmes, and undermine their quality and effectiveness (Yanusaga, 2014). As a result, non-formal education was considered as inferior to the formal sector. However, nowadays the EFA and MDGs have created renewed interest in non-formal education for several reasons. First, non-formal education is a wide concept and different approaches can be applied to specific learning needs of

individuals and groups who are marginalised or deserved special attention (UNDP, 2014; Yanusaga, 2014). Although formal education continues to be a very important tool for providing basic education, the non-formal one has the capacity to reach those individuals who have no access to formal education or for various reasons are not able to complete the full cycle of formal education. Second, there is an increasing recognition that non-formal education could be an important additional tool for developing human capabilities, improve social cohesion and create responsible future citizens (UNDP, 2014; Yanusaga, 2014). Third, it has been argued that the provision of alternative learning opportunities for the individuals that partially or completely skip basic formal education cycles, could eventually contribute to a higher social productivity and a greater individual empowerment and economic growth (UNDP, 2014; Yanusaga, 2014).

“For many children and young people who experience educational exclusion, non-formal education is an important means to acquiring knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for further learning, better well-being and improved livelihoods. Every out-of-school child and adolescent is unique, affected by interrelated factors of exclusion, such as poverty, geographical location, social status and gender bias, and their profiles changes over time as those factors evolves, together with other conditions such as age, family situation and related national policies. Hence, non-formal education can target specific population groups facing educational marginalisation as well as specific geographical locations in which educational challenges persist.” (Yanusaga, 2014, p.16)

Nongovernmental organizations have been and continue to be at the forefront of innovation in the development field. NGO efforts in education, and more specifically in non-formal education, demonstrate the advantages of linking non-formal education methods and approaches to a wide range of development initiatives. In many countries, NGOs have taken an increased responsibility for broader aspects of community development and improvements, and have become major providers of health, education and in some instances, direct services in these fields. As a result, NGOs have evolved a number of innovative approaches through systems that are sometimes parallel and, almost always complementary to the services offered by government agencies. The end result is programs which are owned and implemented by program beneficiaries, which is a product of their involvement in the process, of growing self-confidence and of development of skills and technical information.

3. Methodology

As stated before the aim of this thesis is to analyse the role and the impact of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), called Honduras Child Alliance (HCA), which is working in the small local community of El Porvenir in Honduras. By taking this Organisation as a case study, the main goal is to have an analytical understanding of the various types of activities and intervention strategies implemented by the NGO and the degree of participation of the community in the latter, as well as how the NGO's activities contribute to meeting the community's needs and enhancing the community's capabilities to manage its own development, through its empowerment.

3.1 Research design

In order to do so I have decided to use a qualitative approach to this study. "Qualitative research is characterised by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis" (Patton & Cochran, 2002). The most interesting feature of qualitative methods is that they are entangled with the assumption that the world is always changing, dynamic and constructed by cultural, economic, social and political processes. (Limb & Dwyer, 2001, in Mweene, 2006).

This perspective is in line with the alternative development approach chosen for this study, which states that there is not only one single standard recipe for development which could be suitable for all societies in such a heterogeneous world.

Moreover, the study is a combination of deductive and inductive approach. Deductive because, in the beginning, theories informed empirical data collection. Furthermore, the explorative nature of my qualitative study generated some different perspectives to existing theory, thereby depicting induction.

3.2 Data collection methods

There are various data collections techniques that are used in qualitative methodologies. First, there are interviews. Second, there are surveys, which go less in depth, but they allow for a greater inclusion of larger target groups. Third, there is participant observation and finally there are interpretations and analysis of a variety of texts. The techniques used for this paper will be explained in the next paragraph.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews generally have a sequence of themes to be covered and through the use of open-ended questions. The advantages of using this kind of interviews is that the researchers are quite free to change the sequence of the questions and they might also be able to ask follow-up questions according the specific answers of the interviewee. However, in this particular study I could not perform the interviews in person, and that is why the interviews were conducted through the delivery of a Word document where the interviewee could find all the space needed to answer the questions. Being fully aware of the limitations of this method, I found myself forced to proceed this way because of issues of time and distance from the community when designing the interviews. This approach helped me gain some precious insights, but I know that I could have had more data if the interviews were conducted by myself vis-à-vis the interviewee.

The respondents for these interviews consist mostly in community members, the majority of which involved with the Organisation to various degrees. In total I received answers from six members of the community. I also conducted an interview with the director of the NGO.

As I stated before there have been some limitations, such as the short amount of time and the fact that I couldn't personally conduct the interviews, but also limitations derived from difficulties in writing in a grammatically sound Spanish by most of the interviewees and a great difficulty in answering the question with a critical mind, sometimes even settling for one-word answers. Another important limitation about these interviews is that some of the interviewees, either because they are involved in the work in the Organisation by different degrees or because they may have interests in the presence of the Organisation in the community for different reasons, might not have answered completely honestly, either because afraid of the consequences of their critiques, or simply because unaware of the possible negative aspects of the work of HCA in the community. However, eventually, these answers helped me have a better insight on some of the issues I brought about in this study.

Qualitative Surveys

In this study, alongside semi-structured interviews, I have designed two different sets of qualitative surveys: one for the children in the programme and one for the parents of such children. I did so for different reasons. The first and main one was to have a wide yet concise understanding of the perception of the target group of the activities of the Organisation in which they are involved. The second is related to the size of the target group, which is considerably larger than the community

members one, hence more complicated to conduct interviews with. The third is still related to the same limitations I encountered for the interviews, namely issues of time and the fact that I couldn't conduct the surveys myself. Last but not least, these surveys have been in themselves a way to include the target group in the evaluation and programming of the activities of HCA in the community.

All the interviews and surveys were specified to have an academical purpose. Furthermore, the interviewees have been informed that all the data gathered could have been confidential, according to the interviewee's preference.

Direct observation

This was targeted at the daily life and work of the Organisation and the volunteers in the community, including the children's livelihood conditions, and at the opinions of community members about HCA. Furthermore, this particular thesis is very much based on a personal working experience for an NGO in a developing country context, so direct observation has been a central tool to gather information and data for conducting this research.

Text analysis

Alongside the vast and relevant literature considered for conducting this research, particularly for building the theoretical chapter of the thesis, a few other texts have been read and analysed in order to gather more useful information. Mikkelsen (1995) acknowledges the importance of secondary data sources and states that it is crucial in research and development to allocate some time for further documentary studies as they help getting a better insight of the issues under study. Among these secondary data sources used for this thesis, there are several UN reports about Central America and Honduras, in regard to issues of poverty, development and education. In addition, a few reports by Honduras Child Alliance and the official website of the Organisation have been thoroughly studied. Finally, a survey conducted by a previous volunteer for HCA, regarding the motivation that encouraged the volunteers working for the Organisation at that time to embark on such powerful experience (Flanagan, 2016).

Limitations

Considering that I have been an employee of Honduras Child Alliance this might have affected my perception of things and so the reliability of the study. I might have been taking some things for granted and might have made personal assumptions around what I know about the programmes and activities of Honduras Child Alliance. However, I tried my best not to commit these kind of

mistakes, yet it is not easy to keep a total detachment and objectivity for I have been deeply involved in the work of the Organisation for four months.

3.3 Summary

This chapter has discussed qualitative methodology as the design used for this thesis. Semi-structured interviews, surveys, direct observation and text analysis have been explained as methods used during data collection. And finally, the strengths and weaknesses of each of these methods and some general limitations encountered throughout the research process have been highlighted.

4. Context

4.1 Honduras

Honduras is a lower middle-income country with a per capita income of U.S. \$1,190 and a population of 7.5 million (UNDP, 2014). It stands out, historically, as one of the slowest-growing and poorest countries in Latin America. Honduras has among the worst social indicators in Latin America, particularly lagging in educational quality (World Bank, 2014). On average Honduras spend much more on public education than other Latin American countries, nevertheless higher spending has not resulted in superior educational outcomes. Honduras has registered steady improvements in key education indicators, but key shortcomings remain in terms of completion rates, secondary education coverage and quality of education. Data indicates a national illiteracy rate of 17.5%, and a higher rate among the rural population, at 25.9%. The coverage rate of children (5-18 years of age) is 59.1% out of 2.8 million children and 6% of children between 5 and 12 years of age are out of school (UNICEF, 2014). The World Bank 2007 Public Expenditure Review identifies the most prominent quality and efficiency problems in the Honduran educational system including low teacher attendance, shortened class days, and high grade-repetition rates (World Bank, 2014).

4.2 El Porvenir

El Porvenir, literally translated “the future”, is a little municipality on the north cost of Honduras, 25 km from the third biggest city, La Ceiba. The community is overlooking the Caribbean Sea and it is just south of mountains with tropical waterfalls and cloud forests. However, as beautiful as this whole setting might look, statistics show that more than half of the Honduran population is 18 years old or younger and more than half of the citizens live beneath the United Nations defined international poverty level of \$1.25 USD per day (INE, 2013). In the community of El Porvenir, of almost 24,000 inhabitants, more than half are under the age of 20. The coverage of primary school education is 95% but the illiteracy rate is still 11% and 46% of the population still lives under the poverty line (INE, 2013).

4.3 Honduras Child Alliance

Honduras Child Alliance is a small NGO, operating in El Porvenir, Atlántida, Honduras since 2009. It was founded by Eve Horowitz (USA), who is now Executive Director and coordinates the recruiting and placement of international volunteers. The NGO also have a Board of Directors, composed by long term private donors, previous volunteers and project managers. The NGO works mainly

through the involvement of international volunteers and it is solely funded by private donations, through the official website.

Honduras Child Alliance, as the name states quite clearly, focuses its attention on the needs of children and youth in Honduras and particularly in El Porvenir. According to the director the initial aim of the organisation was to support education and improve the quality of life for the children of the community. The intention was to “reinforce the children’s basic academic skills while mentoring opportunities and exercises in critical thinking and creative problem solving” (HCA, 2017). The goal was “to help children grow to be engaged and accountable citizens of their community who will play an active role in addressing the social and economic problems that plague their village and their country” (HCA, 2017).

From the moment HCA was founded it has undergone a significant growth and its programmes have consequently developed. During the years, the Organisation has managed to rent and acquire three buildings in three different locations in order to be able to reach a wide portion of the community. It has also bought a house and rented another to host the volunteers.

The main project, started in April 2010, is the Porvenir English Program (PEP), which provides free English classes for elementary-age students in the community. The children who attended the free classes are mainly elementary age and in grades 1 to 6. There is a morning session and/or an afternoon session for three days a week at three different locations around the community for a total of four groups of students. The main focuses of this class are English, Computer skills, Spanish Literacy, and healthy living. The Organisation follows an English curriculum developed and updated by project managers, volunteers and sometimes by external partners like teachers and social workers. The focus is on conversational English while also incorporating art and games and promoting teamwork and social skills. The computer and tablet session of the classes helps the children developing basic computer skills, like using the mouse and the keyboard, and learning basic word processing. The Spanish literacy part is essential to give students an opportunity to practice some of the concepts that they have been taught in school. The main activities are interactive reading, creative story writing, and using art to practice literacy comprehension (HCA, 2017).

PEP Adultos (adults in Spanish) is a class for adults, starting from 18 years old, and is taught by HCA volunteers four times each week and offers evening classes for beginner, intermediate and

advanced students. The emphasis is on conversational English which would be helpful regarding employment and advanced education (HCA, 2017).

As the children in the PEP have gotten older, there has been an interest and a need for a teen class. This new program began in January of 2016. For ages 12-16, the aim of this class is to help the teenagers of El Porvenir advance their English ability regarding speaking and comprehension. For the students who are in “colegio” (high school), the objective is to practice the vocabulary and the grammar that they are learning in school, and for those who are not in “colegio”, it helps them continue with the English that they have previously learned in the PEP classes. The students are encouraged to use their English in a practical way, to develop teamwork and social skills, and in order to be more advantaged when it comes to looking for jobs or starting higher educations. (HCA, 2017).

“Early childhood is the easiest time to learn a new language” (HCA, 2017), and that’s why HCA volunteers are also involved with the public kindergarden in El Centro. Their goal is to give an extra hand in the teaching of basic English vocabulary and basic conversation skills, often through songs, activities, games and art projects, yet always following the curriculum used by their teacher.

As the Honduran school year runs from February to early November, HCA came up with the Vacation Activities Program (VAP), which keep the children busy during November, December and January while they are on school break. VAP provides daily educational activities through games and projects designed to reinforce math, reading, writing and English skills. The volunteers also introduce computers and science activities and provide creative opportunities through art, drama and music. Sports are quite popular too and, although football rules in Honduras, the children do enjoy the opportunity to try new games. The Vacation Activities Program operates morning and afternoon sessions in the three locations and reaches about 100 children (HCA, 2017).

Many of the children who attend the programmes in El Porvenir experience food insecurity. Although they are not starving, they often arrive in class hungry or having eaten only poor-quality food (soda, chips, etc.). Many families in El Porvenir live beneath the United Nations poverty line defined as \$2 USD per day or less. Their diets are typically high in refined carbohydrates and are cooked with low quality fats (mantequilla), salt and MSG (monosodium glutamate). (HCA, 2017)

The Healthy Snack Program was specifically started in January of 2014 to serve children attending the PEP 2 class, located in a remote area of the community near the pineapple fields. Many of these children come from extremely poor families and experience daily food insecurity. The reality though is that many children in each of the three locations are arriving hungry, hence, in early 2015, the program expanded. From there the Organisation has been attempting to provide healthy snacks to all the students (HCA, 2017).

Recently, has started a new programme, called “Study Buddies”, which aims to improve both Honduran and International volunteers’ bilingual abilities. This programme has been implemented also in order to support disadvantaged youth in strengthening their educational capacities. The Honduran volunteers (tutors) are selected from the Porvenir English Programme (PEP) for teens and adults. Half of the money goes to the tutor and half in a scholarship fund (HCA, 2017).

HCA has also partnered with an American school, as part of the LUV (Level Up Village) project. The project consisted in a one-to-one exchange between the students of HCA’s programme and the student of the American school, regarding real life problems, like pollution and water crisis, and how to solve them creatively. Everything supported by the exchange of videos and messages between the students (HCA, 2017).

Honduras Child Alliance also offer a project that provides a variety of healthy living programs to children in El Porvenir. Each year, for one week in February and one week in March, HCA volunteers pause the regular programs and spend two weeks assisting two teams from Canada who bring dentists and hygienists to treat children in the community (HCA, 2017).

At last, HCA partnered with an Organisation called Soles4Souls. With the help of the Bomberos (firefighters in Spanish) they collected shoes and re-distributed them to the children in the poorest area of El Porvenir.

5. Analysis

5.1 Participation and empowerment in El Porvenir

This chapter discusses the impact of Honduras Child Alliance intervention in El Porvenir. Specifically, this chapter attempts to show how the presence of HCA in the community has contributed in improving the people's living conditions. Furthermore, it tries to analyse the degree of participation of the community members and other stakeholders in the development process. Additionally, the chapter studies to what extent the intervention of HCA in the community has shaped how the people of the community see themselves, more as active members of society, who take responsibilities for their own needs, rather than passive recipients of development. Thus, this chapter address the impact of HCA activities in meeting the people of El Porvenir basic needs and the contribution to the empowerment of the people in the community.

5.2 HCA's response to El Porvenir's basic needs

This chapter begins with the assumption that basic needs are unique from society to society, hence they might differ according to different situations. As a matter of fact, basic needs depend on social, political, economic and even geographical circumstances. Consequently, NGOs should be aware that basic needs in a particular setting need a deep and specific understanding of what those needs mean for the local people. Hence, the programmes and activities by NGOs should be designed in accordance. The question is whether these activities are implemented as a response to the local community's basic needs and if those needs are agreed upon by the local people themselves.

Through personal investigation, surveys conducted in the community and the voices of some community members involved in the work of the organisation, the main problems and basic needs of the community have been identified. These needs, according to the answers given in the interviews and surveys, are usually educational needs. The majority of the interviewees in fact stresses the importance of HCA initiatives in terms of educational support to the kids, but also to the adults of the community. However, a key characteristic of HCA's programmes is that it tries to deal with those needs which emerged after the basic needs of the community had been defined. Doing so requires a continuous awareness of the poor's current livelihood conditions. In this regard, most of the interviewees also pointed out the critical importance of HCA's Healthy Snack programme, as it is recognised by both the Organisation and the community, that there is a great need of healthy and nutritional food for several of the children living in El Porvenir and participating to the classes. Another important need pointed out by some of the members of the community and

particularly by the children relates to safety issues. Consequently, the classes organised by the NGO aim to give the children the feeling to be in a safe place, where they can be around other kids and they can somehow be more protected by the external environment. The classes keep them busy so that they are less inclined to engage in dangerous activities, usually initiated by older kids. Furthermore, some of the interviewees also praised the occasional projects that HCA has undertaken throughout the years, such as a dental healthcare project which takes place once a year and a project in partnership with another Organisation called Soles4Souls, whose goal is to collect and distribute shoes to the children in poor local communities. One further example has been the commitment by the Organisation to the building of several toilets in the most poor and marginalised areas of the community.

As it has been demonstrated, through the recognition of those basic needs as contextual to the reality of El Porvenir, HCA integrate the opinions of the community in its intervention. As a matter of fact, the planning and design of NGOs activities are often based on the needs identified by the people in the community. For this reason, as mentioned in the theory chapter, NGOs are sometimes referred to as grassroots organisations and are also related to bottom-up development approaches. NGOs are in fact more likely to receive funding when they implement initiatives which represent more closely the basic need of the community in which they work, as well as to be more accepted and integrated in the community itself.

As we stated in the theoretical chapter, the growing popularity of NGOs can be related to the belief that the financial support they get from donors is more directly devolved to the target group, while through governmental structures only a small part of this support actually reaches its final beneficiary. This is very true in the case of Honduras Child Alliance, which is a private NGO and therefore it is connected neither with the US Government nor with Honduran one. This topic could be also subject of critiques, but it is not the purpose of this study.

The community members who answered to the survey did acknowledge that HCA activities do respond to their needs. However, it is not yet clear if HCA's sensitivity about the basic needs of the community of El Porvenir is actually inspired by the people themselves or is a result of the NGO general conformity to the people's needs, as argued above, still requires attention. This will be the focus of the next section.

5.3 Stakeholder participation in HCA's activities and empowerment

As we have seen, HCA seems to be dealing in an appropriate manner with the target community's basic needs El Porvenir. As argued before, the activities undertaken by the Organisation meet, among others, children's health, education, food and clothing needs, and it does so with an apparently appropriate intervention strategy as discussed in earlier chapters. What still needs to be addressed, is the degree of participation of the stakeholders in the design and implementation of HCA's activities in the community.

Stakeholders in a development programme are people or groups of people or institutions/structures who affect or are affected by the outcomes of particular development interventions. In this case, it was clear, based on personal experience, interviews and also through the interpretation of programme descriptions on the organisation website, that members of the community, including the children in the programme, the parents, the Honduran volunteers constitute the key stakeholders of HCA's activities. Hence, they all participate in one way or another in the activities of HCA. The extent of this participation is diverse, and it is based on the particular interests of the various stakeholders.

The community studied in this paper is perceived through two perspectives. The children in the programme and the community members, which include also parents and Honduran volunteers. Each of these shows distinct types of interests and degrees of participation in the activities of HCA. The goal of the next chapters is to understand to what degree the stakeholders participate in the activities of the Organisation and in what ways this participation of the stakeholders can lead to their empowerment.

Children in the programme

As discussed in the preceding chapters, children are the main reason why HCA was born, and all its projects initiated. Hence the active participation of children in the activities of the NGO deserves to be taken into consideration.

Generally, the children who benefit from development programmes are involved only at the level of registration/enrolment and at the level of actual participation in the activities. Thus, the majority of the children have too often been seen only as passive recipients of development, rather than actual key stakeholders in the process of designing and implementing development programmes. Children should be considered protagonists to their own development and their ideas should be

highly regarded. It is generally assumed that decisions about the welfare of the children are to be made on their behalf by adults, mostly parents or guardians, because children are young and need to be protected. This is normally justified as what is contained under the protection rights of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Mweene, 2006).

However, in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) the principle of children's right to participation is also enshrined. Article 12 part 1 of the Convention states:

“State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (UNCRC document, p.4).

“Children's participation is about children having the opportunity to express a view, influence decision-making and achieve change. It is the informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalised and those of different ages and abilities, in any matter concerning them” (Save the Children, 2013). Children's participation is an essential principle that characterise HCA way of working. HCA's vision is a “community in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation” (HCA, 2017). This right acknowledges that children and young people, especially the most marginalised are social actors in their own right and are entitled to be involved in decision-making in all matters that affect their lives, while taking into consideration their evolving capacity and best interests (Save the children, 2013). HCA works by following the principle that every child has the rights to plan, implement and monitor the programmes they are involved in. The overall goal is to improve the children's social position so that they can fully enjoy their rights and live in societies that acknowledge and respect their rights (Save the Children, 2013). Equal participation of girls and boys in the programme is definitely an advantageous starting point but it can also be a desirable outcome.

In the design phase, children and young people can be involved in developing relevant objectives and indicators that would show change in their daily lives and realisation of their rights. Furthermore, when children are familiar with project objectives and indicators, and have been actively involved in the planning process, they can play a more meaningful role in implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

As argued in the theory chapter, it can be said that participation of children and young people in development activities can contribute to their empowerment in several ways. It can contribute to their personal development and it can offer them the chance to have an active role in the achievement of positive change in their community and possibly in their own country; it can raise their awareness about rights and duties; it can also promote “children’s capacities for civic engagement, tolerance, respect for others and the inclusion of marginalised children” (Save the Children, 2013, p.2).

HCA’s ideals and goals are very much permeated with this discourse about participation and empowerment, and it is easily deducible from several statements on its official website (HCA, 2017). Their main activities are in fact designed to promote the empowerment of the children and teenagers who are involved or just participate in its programmes. HCA’s main focus is about empowering the children of the community, by first contributing to their well-being by paying attention to their basic needs, like healthy nutrition and clothing, and then by providing an alternative non-formal kind of education, which focuses on giving the children the tools to develop critical thinking and on improving their language and computer skills. This in turn will provide the children with individual instruments to cope with their personal situation, but also promoting a sense of being part of a community through teaching respect for the others and ideas of cooperation for solving problems together as a group.

These alternative forms of education surely contribute to the kids’ empowerment, particularly when the kids, as stated before, are not seen and acted upon as passive beneficiaries, and when they actively participate in their own education and development. It is also true though, that children are children, and that means they do not possess completely developed tools to understand what is best for them. Hence, in the case of an educational NGO such as HCA, it is also true that there is the need for top-down initiatives and programming, from education and development experts. That does not mean the children become excluded from the process, but that they definitely cannot manage their education by themselves. However, finding a balance between these two positions is not easy. In fact, entrust the kids with too many responsibilities can leave them with programmes and educational outcome of poor quality and not suitable to their needs, but at the same time creating only top-down initiatives and curriculum can create issues of dependence, since the kids rely completely on external help and guidance, and they don’t develop that quality of self-reliance that is very important for the kids to cope for any future issue in their lives.

In my personal experience working with the Organisation, I encountered this conflict between the aforementioned bottom-up and top-down approaches to the planning and managing of the classes on a daily basis but engaging in productive arguments always brought new insights and ideas on the table. One great example refers to the development of a discipline system for the children, in order for the class to run smoothly. In this case, the Organisation decided to involve the kids in the creation of a discipline system that could be agreed upon by both children and volunteers. Through several meetings during the classes, where children and volunteers sat in a circle and discussed about that topic, a set of rules about how to behave in class and about the consequences of bad behaviours, was decided and implemented. This is a perfect case of children's empowerment through participation, because having a voice in the matter, first had given them power over their own life, and second, it encouraged them to follow the rules they had contributed to create.

Members of the Community

As stated in the previous chapter, the first and main focus of the work of HCA in El Porvenir is on the children of the community, both the wealthier and the poorer and more marginalised ones. However, shortly after been founded in 2009, the Organisation, in the words of the Director of HCA, realised that for being accepted and for being able to work in a peaceful and supportive environment there was the need for a closer relationship with the community and with the people living in it. A greater involvement in the life of El Porvenir is what the Organisation have always promoted and pursued since its foundation. They started with small acts, such as eating at local restaurants or buying food at the local market, but they soon expanded the range of this involvement, by building relationships with the Mayor, the firefighters and local entrepreneurs, and also by providing English classes for the adult members of the community. The key to a successful involvement of HCA in the community is a two-folded process that involves participation of the Organisation in the community, and the participation of the community through its members in the activities of the Organisation.

As local community is directly or indirectly affected by the activities of HCA, the significance of local community's participation for long-term sustainable development programme has been already highlighted in the previous paragraph. When HCA first started to work in El Porvenir, the local community perceived that their involvement in the planning and implementing was scarce if non-existent. In this regard, most of the interviewees commented that they had no idea about what HCA was and what kind of work they were doing in the community. The members of the community and

the children in the programme were seldom encouraged to get involved in any decision-making process. Based on the conventional top-down approach, every initiative of decision-making, implementing and evaluating HCA's development programmes was driven and managed by the management of the Organisation, and at times by the volunteers themselves. It was evident from the answers of the interviewees that the local community merely participated in such activities unless otherwise requested, but in fact the community hardly felt that its members were encouraged and consequently included in any decision-making process.

As Chambers (1995) suggested that the lack of local community's involvement and participation in decision-making process was always challenging in the context of community-based development, the above findings confirm this by highlighting that local communities were not treated as an equal partner in the planning and development of HCA's activities. This is similar to Chamber's concept of participation as a cosmetic label and White's nominal definition of participation, where development agencies have power and entirely controlled all activities and thus the local communities were lacking in any active participation in planning and development.

There has been several issues and obstacles that impeded a successful community participation in the first years of HCA's work in El Porvenir. As stated in the theory chapter, the majority of development projects in the world is usually initiated by outsiders. They are rarely founded spontaneously by the community itself. The paternalistic roles of many development agencies and experts in the last decades have impeded on participatory development approaches, and too often they have dominated and manipulated decision-making and development processes (Botes & van Rensburg, 2000; Rahnema, 1992, in Mikkelsen, 2005). Thus, the main function of development experts, because they "know better", is to transfer their knowledge to communities that "know less". However, this has resulted in the disempowerment of the people in the community, as they are told what to do and what to think, and in the underrating of their capacity to make their own decision and determine their own priorities.

In some instances, community participation is more about selling preconceived proposal, rather than a genuine attempt to empower people to choose development approaches more suitable to their specific situation. In fact, participation processes often begin only after projects have already been designed, and consultation with the community may be simply to gain acceptance and legitimate existing decision, rather than as an attempt to understand possible outcomes and priorities. If this becomes the norm around which development initiatives are built, communities

might become dependent on the ideas and presence of these experts, which in turn may hinder participatory development by undervaluing the experience and insight of non-professionals (children in the programme and members of the community).

Often, only the wealthier and more educated groups are allowed to be partners in development initiatives, while less visible groups are left outside of this process. As a result, this might not represent the views and perspective of the broader community. Gaigher et al. (1995, in Botes and van Rensburg, 2000) mentioned that penetration of NGOs in poor community is itself an obstacle to community participation. Consequently, it remains a major challenge to include in the development process the people, who neither have the capacity nor the desire to participate.

In many development projects the “hard” issues (technological, financial, physical and material) are perceived as more important for the successful implementation of a project than the “soft” issues (community involvement, decision making procedures, organisational development capacity building and empowerment) (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000). This may be the result of the assumption that social and cultural issues are intangible and time-consuming compared to the more easily managed hard issues. However, this approach neglects that inappropriate social processes can hinder the most thoughtful development efforts (Botes & van Rensburg, 2000).

Pressure on development workers for showing immediate results may force them to take matters out of the hands of community people and handle them themselves (Galjart, 1981; Gaigher, 1992; in Botes and van Rensburg, 2000). For many, participatory development is too time-consuming and not cost-effective, because participation is always a slow and uncertain process. However, this is not always true, as there are projects that had been designed with participatory inputs in short time period (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000). If participatory methods do not work, could be because wrongly implemented or not seriously adopted. In fact, although participation involves grater costs in the designing and planning phase, it may help saving time during the implementation and evaluation stage, because people would take ownership of a project (Mikkelsen, 2005). In sum, product without process can lead to something the community doesn't want or need or cannot sustain.

Another obstacle to community participation is that members of the public do not want to get involved, because of preconceived ideas and stereotypes about foreigner and development experts, or simply a general lack of interest in the life of the community. A lack of willingness to participate

may also result from past experiences of involvement where expectations were not fulfilled (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000).

Because individual and group motivation are context-specific rather than universally definable, it is therefore not easy to formulate a single approach to community participation that could be used in different contexts and situations, and there are no quick-fix approaches in pursuing development in a participatory manner (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000). However, there are several solutions, most of them already adopted by HCA, to the above-mentioned obstacles to a successful participation of the community in the activities of the Organisation.

However, although it took time for the community of El Porvenir and its members to understand the concept and benefits of Honduras Child Alliance work in the community, all relevant stakeholders (children in the programme, parents, community members, the Organisation itself) have come to agree to a greater extent that HCA's activities were beneficial to the community in various ways. Over the years, a stronger collaboration among the stakeholders was achieved and the stakeholders significantly changed their attitudes towards the equal importance of each stakeholder's involvement in planning and development. In this regard, both a local resident and the Director of HCA commented that HCA is now encouraging all the important stakeholders to communicate and work together. In fact, people started to get more and more involved. Especially, some local community members articulated that they were gradually realising the significant role of HCA in enhancing the level of their participation and involvement in development activities. The local residents were thus gradually changing their attitudes and perceptions towards the importance of their involvement in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the level of interaction and engagement among the local residents was enhanced, as one of the interviewees commented: "We are very proud of the work that the Organisation is doing in our community, and we feel that there is a healthy and productive relationship between the Organisation and the community".

The Organisation has in fact demonstrated an awareness of their status of outsider to the beneficiary community and the potential impact of their involvement and so it is aware, through the voice of its Executive Director, that a deeper involvement in the life of the community and its members is necessary. Yet, this involvement, as mentioned in the theory chapter, should not be acted upon the community, with initiatives designed and implemented exclusively by the

Organisation. HCA has also demonstrated to respect the community's local contribution as manifested in their knowledge, skills and potential.

Throughout the years, the Organisation has also become good facilitator and catalyst of development (Freire, 1974, in Rowlands, 1996; Lewis, 2001) that assists and stimulate community-based initiatives and challenge practices which hinder people releasing their own initiatives and realise their own ideals. It has promoted co-decision making in defining needs and goals and in designing programmes and initiatives, even if, in the words of one of the interviewee, more could be done, for example by "organising more meeting with the community members, the children and the parents, in order to explain better about the activities of the Organisation in the community and to encourage them in participating to a greater degree in the planning and implementation of such activities", all because, in her words, "the people of the community are the ones who knows better about their own situation".

Selective participatory practices can be avoided when development workers seek out different sets of interests, rather than listening only to a few community leaders and prominent figures. It is very important that the Organisation also communicate both the programme's successes and failures, the latter sometimes being more informative.

The Organisation has also proven to believe in the spirit of "Buen Vivir" (a Latin American concept that include values such as solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity and collective unity), which is also a key necessity for the organisation to promote participation of the community (HCA, 2017). HCA listens to the community members, especially the more vulnerable, less vocals and marginalised groups and guard against the domination of some interest groups. It acknowledges that process-related "soft issues" are as important as product-related "hard issues" such as lack of funding and shortage of volunteers, even if at times these "hard issues" require greater attention to the detriment of "soft issues".

Empower the community to equally enjoy the results of development through active processes where the beneficiaries influence the direction of development initiatives rather than merely receive a share of benefits in a passive manner, is, as stated several times in the preceding chapters, one of the main goals of Honduras Child Alliance.

Such greater involvement of community members in the activities of HCA was in fact considered as a main ingredient of social empowerment of the local community. At the same time, both the

community members and the Organisation's management constantly highlighted the significance of local community involvement in sustaining development activities and resources. This change was clearly experienced by most of the stakeholders as the major difference from the early years of HCA's involvement in the community. Furthermore, it can be argued that a greater involvement of the local community in the management and planning of HCA's activities could be able to raise its collective voice and opinion on decision-making process. As such, political empowerment can also be enhanced, thanks to the involvement of the Organisation in the community.

The significant shift from passive participation in the first years of HCA's presence in the community, to a far more active involvement in this whole process of planning and implementing of HCA's activities after a few years seems to have allowed the local community to understand the importance of taking more responsibilities in the management of the town. Also, it increased the level self-esteem and community pride among the community members and the children, as most interviewees suggested that the locals believe that participating in the work of the Organisation is a good thing to do, and they are proud to be working with HCA, and they want to put something back into the community. Furthermore, the enhanced local community members' involvement in the process of planning and implementing of HCA's programmes in El Porvenir was strongly correlated with an increased level of perceived empowerment among the community members.

Some of the interviewees show that economic gains derived from the presence of HCA in the community are an important factor, but they also realise that the goals of the Organisation are much more related to social and psychological empowerment, rather than on economic growth. As one interviewee stated: "...well, economic benefits or gains like employment opportunity would be an important aspect for the local's involvement, but I realise, the self-esteem and pride of your own community would be much more important".

Such statement is contrary to modernisation and neoliberalist theories which highlight that empowerment is achieved when local community gains economic benefits from development practices and consequently perceive that economic empowerment was the turning point to enhance. It is noteworthy that the economic empowerment was perceived through the value of time instead of monetary rewards in the case of El Porvenir. In my personal experience, I have heard many locals expressing their pride about promoting the food and leisure aspects of El Porvenir. There is also a popular phrase that explains this attitude, and that is, "you're now on El Porvenir time" which means everything slow down, people relax and let the day unfold. Although traditional

meaning of economic empowerment was not visible in the form of financial distributions and the increase of income by the community involvement, other three dimensions of empowerment, enhanced throughout the HCA's activities implementation positively influence on local community's involvement in HCA's programmes in El Porvenir.

5.5 The impact of short-term volunteers on the community

The goal of this chapter is to obtain a general understanding of the impact of short-term volunteering on a developing community, that would be applicable to a specific case, like Honduras Child Alliance in El Porvenir. I am going to analyse point by point all the possible outcomes of short-term volunteers that I encountered during my stay, considering the role of the Organisation, the position of the volunteers and the perspective of the local community.

First of all, the lengths of short-term volunteer placements are a key factor regarding the benefits brought to the host community. In fact, the involvement of short-term volunteers in the design and implementation of development activities might hinder the efficiency of the NGO's programme, because of the lack of continuity in the NGO's staff and consequently of methods and ideas. Sometimes it can be argued that these volunteering experiences in developing countries seem tailored more for the volunteers' personal growth rather than for contributing to the development of the host community. Yet, volunteers usually come back from these experiences with new skills and insights and a general feeling of self-improvement. Many also think they had a strong positive impact on the community and on the children.

Second, teaching is a job full of responsibilities and that needs specific training and knowledge. However, many thinks that young western volunteers in developing countries have little knowledge or experience and lack of skills, capacity and time to get involved with the locals (Palacios 2010). Furthermore, international volunteering can reduce development only as an act of "doing", with the risk of objectifying the host communities as the "benefit-receiving other" (Ingram, 2010), thus perpetuating colonial attitudes of "us" and "them". Consequently, NGOs can't afford to supply underqualified volunteers to underdeveloped communities. Hence, they need to consider the different aspects involved within volunteering, in particular the volunteers' qualifications, their suitability to the tasks and their motivations.

When talking to other volunteers, I found out that the main motivation for young individuals from Western countries to undertake non-paid work with the aim of alleviating poverty or improving education of some groups in society are strongly related to concepts of global solidarity and

humanitarianism (Wearing, 2001 in Butcher and Smith, 2010) and usually stems from “the willingness and ability of citizens to give their time, out of a sense of solidarity and without expectation of monetary reward” (UN Volunteers, 2005; p.6). However, over time, the main motivation for volunteering has developed from an idea of pure philanthropy to an idea of reciprocity.

Today’s volunteers seem to be moved from other reason than just altruism like personal growth, social aspects, the acquisition of particular skills and professional development (Forsythe, 2011; p.9). This is also a central theme in the survey conducted with previous volunteers from Honduras Child Alliance and in many conversations I had personally at the time I was working for the Organisation. When asked what was the reason that brought them to volunteer in Honduras, the main answer could easily have been the same for any other tourist in the world, that is the eagerness to experience a new culture and live in a beautiful place, in order to take a break from normal life. The second main answer relates to the possibility of including the experience in the personal curriculum, for the benefit of a possible future career. In the background, all the interviewees have expressed that altruistic feeling of helping people in need, but most of the time this answer came only after other reasons, evidently prioritised by the volunteers.

This focus on personal gain rather than benefitting others in need, is the main reason for the recent expansion of volunteering industry, where internships, gap-year programmes and generally volunteer projects abroad are often more tailored to the requests of the individual volunteer than to provide the skills and capabilities that the local community actually needs. Placement of international volunteers can be understood as a supply-based model (Lecomte, 2014), prioritizing volunteers over the community. Thus, critics have focused their attention on how those limitations have a serious impact on local development projects. Too often there is a non-sufficient knowledge of what the local community really needs from both the organisation and the volunteers.

Quite often, young and inexperienced volunteers are asked to complete tasks, such as teaching, which would require much more qualification in Western societies. This way short-term volunteers can “get a level of experience and decision-making which they would not get at home, but [are] also doing things in other people’s hospitals and schools that would never be allowed at home” (Brown, 2003). This gap between the host’s expectations and the volunteer’s actual contributions represents an obstacle for both and it might generate tension and conflict within the community. In this sense, only one out of six community members interviewed for this study, have critically answered the

questions about the presence of international volunteers. She states that the Organisation should be more careful in hiring young, unskilled volunteers because “even if the willingness to help is very admirable, sometimes they do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to work with and teach to children” (Interview, my translation)

Another important factor is that, considering the setting where NGOs work, volunteers should have some experience in living abroad and they should be able to cope with the culture shock without hindering their ability to work in that particular context. Furthermore, the Organisation should consider the importance of the language barrier and how much this could impact the efficiency of the work of the volunteer in the community. From the beginning, host-volunteer exchanges are challenged by these cultural differences, particularly during the first few weeks of the volunteer’s stay, and they might significantly interfere with the volunteer’s physical and emotional capabilities. So, it is not surprising that unprepared and inexperienced volunteers need more time to adapt, learn new skills, like how to handle a classroom or how to build infrastructures, and become efficient, particularly while struggling with the possible cultural shock mentioned above (Lecomte, 2014).

Volunteers can also have a negative effect on the local culture during their stay, particularly if they come from wealthy countries. This can be explained through the “demonstration effect” (Guttentag, 2009; p.547), a process by which a “host culture is impacted when volunteers draw attention to their lifestyles and items of wealth” (Guttentag, 2009; p.547). Even if this can be seen as an indirect but efficient way to inspire positive change, in reality, it is usually counterproductive, and concerns both local adults and children. Local inhabitants may try to imitate consumption patterns outside their financial range or indulge in inappropriate behaviour such as drinking and smoking (Simpson, 2004 in Guttentag, 2009). This process is completely against the alternative development paradigm that the Organisation always tried to follow, in that, instead of the management and the volunteers understanding the importance and the value of local knowledge and insights, the opposite process might result in the disempowerment of the people of the community. Therefore, it is important to not harm the host community by preparing the volunteers before they arrive and start working.

The above-mentioned culture barriers can represent a great obstacle particularly when the volunteer’s work directly affects children in schools and orphanages. When asked, volunteers often assume that they have affected people in a positive way, or they believe they “had a good short-term effect on the children”, and that “perhaps in the long-term having [the volunteers] there was better than nothing” (Barkham, 2006). However, it is essential to be aware of the importance of

children's education towards development, and of how entrusting young unskilled volunteers with it might jeopardize their potential and impede their empowerment. Honduras Child Alliance has hired short-term volunteers during the years, sometimes even only for a few weeks, but, when asked about the issue, the director explained that there are some periods during the year when the number of volunteers is greatly insufficient to carry on all the activities undertaken by the Organisation so that it is almost necessary to embrace the philosophy of anything is better than nothing. However, when stressed about the possible negative consequences of this approach, the director proved to be very aware of the circumstances and stated that in some situations it is essential to find a practical balance between what is considered as good practice and the complicated reality of managing an NGO in a developing country.

Further arguments imply that NGOs often appeal to the image of young people from the wealthy North of the world wanting to make a difference, in order to attract more volunteers and donors to their cause yet risking enhancing the stereotype that developing countries need to be helped or saved by Western civilisation: the very infamous dichotomy "us" vs "them". NGOs have to be careful not to maintain this imperialistic relationship between "benefactors and beneficiaries" (Shivji, 2007), and remember that in order to change the world, you need to understand it first.

Statistics found in Lecomte (2014) show that 21% of volunteer projects around the world focus on education and protection of vulnerable children and young people, particularly in schools and orphanages. It is unquestionable that this kind of projects involving volunteers can be beneficial to the children which are exposed to new and different cultures and receive material and emotional care. However, these possible benefits might turn into negative and unstable power relations, if unregulated and overlooked, hence hindering the impact of the volunteers' work in a community. (Lecomte, 2014). Also, the fact that children often associate volunteers with material wealth and gifts, is the practical, yet counterproductive consequence of that dichotomy between "us" and "them". On the other side the coin this dichotomy can lead to the conclusion that developing countries and communities have to adapt to the development standards decided by Western organisations and donors. This situation can also hinder the empowerment process of the community and particularly of the children in the programme, because instead of being given the tools for coping for themselves with their own personal situation, they are taught to always depend on someone else for their personal well-being.

In fact, although children are not happy to see volunteers go, they have become accustomed to this continuous turnover of white, Western volunteers (Gringos, as they are called in Central and South America). This might actually risk perpetuating the dichotomy between wealthy care givers and helpless beneficiaries and could eventually hinder the planning and the efficiency of the projects.

Nevertheless, if we follow Lough's neo-liberal point of view, it can be argued that international volunteers who decide to go working in developing countries, directly or indirectly provide different kind of resources such as funding, networks and new collaborations. Moreover, due to the voluntary nature of their involvement (i.e. they are not paid), volunteers can help realising small project at smaller costs, without weighing on the financial capacities of the organisation and of the host community. Furthermore, international volunteers, particularly in the era of social media, can help expand the network around the organisation and the community, hence creating new possibilities for transnational collaborations. This can create a virtuous cycle through which old volunteers will help the organisation and the community to get new volunteers. In the words of the director of HCA: "we believe that our diversity is our greatest strength as we welcome volunteers from many countries, from any faith, without bias about sexual orientation or ethnic background" (HCA, 2017). This view is also confirmed by the majority of the community members interviewed for this study. In fact, a common answer to the question regarding the presence of many international volunteers in the community was a positive one.

The central idea is that the presence of an international staff is seen in terms of a positive and mutual exchange of ideas and knowledge that can benefit the children and the community members. This can also foster a greater involvement and participation of the children and the community members in the planning and implementation of HCA's activities in the community. Some of the interviewees, though, have also acknowledged the more practical benefits of having volunteers from all over the world. They are in fact aware that they bring economic benefits to the community by spending money in the local shops, by attracting donations from their personal networks, and by promoting tourism in the community once they went back to their home countries.

6. Conclusions

Summing up, the main goal of this study was to assess the impact of community participation through the development work of Non-Governmental Organisations on a developing local community, the consequences of this participation on the overall empowerment of the community, and finally the impact of the employment of short-term international volunteers as the main work force of the Organisation on the NGO itself and on the target community.

This has been done first by providing a general overview of the context within which this thesis has been done. By first explaining the reasons why the decision to analyse the topic of the study was made and where the personal interest stemmed from, this introductory part continues through a discussion about how the concept of development has changed through the years from the post-war period up to today in order to understand the development paradigm chosen for this study.

The thesis has then proceeded by presenting the theoretical framework which constitute the backbone for the study. It started by a brief discussion about NGOs and the related concepts and definitions, about the role of and the evolution of NGOs in theoretical terms. It has then presented a discussion about alternative development which has been chosen as the main theoretical background through which most current NGOs undertake their development efforts. We have seen how alternative development does not represent a single theory, but rather a bundle of approaches, that share the idea that there is no generalised answers and solutions to development problems. These alternatives challenged the mainstream economic thinking and focused on the need of more grassroots, bottom-up approaches rather than technocratic top-down initiatives.

Throughout this discussion, some key concepts related to the alternative development paradigm are explained. Participation is used to analyse the stakeholders' involvement in the activities undertaken by the NGO under study. Empowerment is used to analyse the results of community participation and the impact that this involvement could have on the development of the community and its members. In the end, a brief explanation about non-formal education is presented as an important part of the alternative development approach adopted by many NGOs in planning and implementing their programmes.

After that, the methods used to collect and analyse research data are introduced. Basically, all data and techniques used relate to the qualitative research design, as the most appropriate for the purpose of this paper and the most consistent with the alternative development paradigm. In fact,

qualitative methods fit very well with the idea that the world is always changing and dynamic, which is one of the basic statements of the alternative development approach.

In order to answer the first research question about the NGO under study, an overview of the particular context within which the study has been presented. First a brief description and some interesting statistics about the country Honduras, followed by a narrower description of the community of El Porvenir, where the NGO is set. The data presented relate mostly to issues of poverty and poor-quality education. Then the NGO Honduras Child Alliance is presented, and all the kinds of programmes and activities undertaken by the Organisation in the community over the years.

The research has then proceeded by addressing the second research question. This part has shown how Honduras Child Alliance has responded to the needs perceived by the Organisation and by the community as basics. It is argued that the Organisation is in fact aware of these needs, that it is responding in an appropriate way to these needs through its activities in the community, and that the community itself in fact identifies those needs as basics, as proven by the interviewees and surveys conducted with the members of the community.

After this assessment, the focus shifts towards the third research question about issues of participation and empowerment in the community. The main stakeholder involved in the work of the Organisation are presented and they are the children in the programme and the community members (including parents and Honduran volunteers). The first paragraph focus on the children in the programme. It is stated that the concept of participation of the children in development programmes is internationally recognised, particularly through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and constitute a key element of the philosophy and operational strategy of HCA. In terms of to what extent the children participate in the design and implementation of HCA's activities, a great example of a successful participatory approach is illustrated. However, it is also recognised that most of the activities dedicated to the children still follow a top-down approach and they are delivered as preconceived packages.

Later on, a discussion about the several ways that children's participation in HCA's programmes can lead to their empowerment is presented, followed by the Organisation strategy on how to bring about this form of empowerment. This strategy entails first contributing to their well-being by paying attention to their basic needs, like healthy nutrition and clothing, and then by providing an alternative non-formal kind of education, which focuses on giving the children the tools to develop

critical thinking and on improving their language and computer skills. This in turn will provide the children with individual instruments to cope with their personal situation, but also promoting a sense of being part of a community through teaching respect for the others and ideas of cooperation for solving problems together as a group.

The following paragraph has analysed and discussed the extent to which participation of the community in the activities undertaken by the Organisation has developed over the years and how it has eventually led to the empowerment of the community and its members. It started by arguing that in the first period of HCA's involvement in El Porvenir, the community and its members have been rarely involved in the design and implementation of HCA's initiatives. Most of these initiatives were planned mainly by the management of the Organisation, using a top-down approach, thus delivered as preconceived proposals. Another obstacle encountered relates to the fact that only a small part of the community was taken into consideration as the target of HCA's interventions. Furthermore, particularly in the very beginning, the so-called "hard issues" have been given greater attention to the detriment of the "soft issues". In addition, because participatory methods are time-consuming, the process has put pressure on the Organisation for showing immediate results, ending up forcing its staff to take matters out of the hands of community people and handle them themselves. The last obstacle encountered to community participation in this first period is that members of the public initially did not want to get involved, because of stereotypes against the "Gringos" (Latin American word to address people from Europe and the US), or lack of interest in the life of the community.

However, over the years, the Organisation has grown and has started to increasingly involve the community in its initiatives. In turn, the community began to realise the role of the Organisation in El Porvenir and gradually changed its opinion about it. By challenging most of the obstacles mentioned before and building a greater awareness of the issues related to participatory methods, it contributed to the empowerment of the community and its members. Thus, the NGO interventions began to revolve more around planning with rather than for the people. In this role of facilitators of development, it has focused on encouraging and assisting people to think about their problems in their own way, rather than coming with ready-made solutions or telling people what to do. However, the way towards successful and genuine community participation and empowerment is still long and full of obstacles, that the Organisation should be aware of and face with caution.

The last part of the research answered the last research question. It has tried to demonstrate that short-term volunteers have little impact on children's educational development and generally on the community they work in. Indeed, despite the volunteers' presence, children still receive poor education from unskilled and unprepared teachers, both local and volunteer, and often have poor health care and unsanitary living conditions. The reality of short-term volunteering is that any aid provided, whether tangible or intangible, is mostly superficial compared to bigger issues at such as the education systems.

In addition, the enthusiasm for short-term international volunteering is challenged by critiques over the efficiency of the volunteers' work, in which NGOs play a significant role. This suggests that short-term volunteering is not always a mutually beneficial form of development. Organisations often assumes that "doing anything is better than nothing", but that has been proven quite inappropriate in the last years. The level of success of a volunteer placement is primarily judged on the relationship between the organisation and the host, which must be based on mutual respect and trust.

On the other hand, it is quite clear that children develop more emotional attachment and respect for volunteers that stay for longer periods. Therefore, it can be assumed that long-term volunteers will have a bigger impact on the children and they might be able to benefit them more than short-term volunteers that just come and go. While longer-term placements are undoubtedly more beneficial to the host community, these may still fail in other areas, especially regarding specific relevant skills and the overall suitability of the individual volunteer.

Finally, short-term volunteering does not seem to be very relevant when it comes to facing Honduras' long-term development problems. Although intentions might seem positive, most volunteers do not have the required knowledge of international development or skills to understand their role in the process. Though there are difficulties in the ultimate assessment of qualities and faults of volunteering processes, we can see that there is no mutual benefit within short-term volunteer placements and the community they work in, as these volunteers appear to be more of a burden than actual aid workers. Therefore, perhaps it is too early to embrace short-term volunteering as a development strategy, as it appears that the difficulties encountered in the processes surrounding it seem to hinder the host community more than help it. Eventually, sending organizations, NGOs and even universities must make international volunteers more aware of the larger implications of their participation in developing project.

In conclusion, this research does not claim to be a ground-breaking study about NGOs and how they should work in order to contribute to the development of local communities. However, through direct experiences, interviews and participant observation it has tried to give new and unique insights on how a particular NGO in a particular local context has worked over the years, and how the participatory methods, the specific activities undertaken, and the employment of international volunteers have eventually contributed to the empowerment of the community of El Porvenir and its members.

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