How do they Interact? An Examination of Volunteerism and Social Service Participation in Peru

Relations between NGOs and Peruvian Communities

Kausha Luna

Biehl International Research Fellowship

International Global Studies, Sewanee: The University of the South

Abstract

Since the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century economic, political, and social relations have been dictated by interstate interaction. However, the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have seen the emergence of a new sphere of interaction. This new sphere is the global society, a space in which exchanges transcend state borders across the globe. This society has become a dominant force in Peru’s economic, political, and social development. The global society has manifested itself in Peru in the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international volunteers. This study focuses on the dynamics of the relationships between the incoming global society and the Peruvian communities which they work with. Ultimately, the dynamics of these relations vary given various factors: level of trust, ability to close cultural gaps, and inclusion of the native Peruvian communities. Given these factors, the most advantageous relationships (high levels of trust, bridged cultural gaps, and high levels of inclusion) have proved to be the relations that result in truly sustainable development. Formal and informal interviews of NGO heads and volunteers and Peruvian community members revealed that optimal development is achieved when the relationship between the incoming global society and the hosting national society is a balanced partnership.
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Introduction

The growing trend of globalization is heightening attention to a growing phenomenon: the global civil society. This pattern of political, economical and social interconnectedness has created an increased awareness of the needs of others. Consequently, states, non-state actors, and individuals have begun participating in international volunteering and service. For example, in 1961, the United States’ Congress approved the legislation for the Peace Corps, which continues to send volunteers all over the world today (Peace Corps). In 2003, the Center of Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis completed an assessment of civic service worldwide. The findings show that out of 210 civic service programs 124 were international programs. Out of the 124 international programs, 38 were sponsored by organizations in the United States. Excluding the Peace Corps, “all of US-based programs were operated by nonprofit organizations” (McBride, Benitez, & Sherraden, 2003). A survey conducted in 2005 shows a similar trend, the majority of US international programs sending volunteers abroad are run by non-governmental organizations (Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2007). Furthermore, individuals have taken up the responsibility to extend a ‘helping hand’ to communities all around the world. Interaction across borders is no longer restricted to state to state relations. This is highlighted in the heart of the ancient Incan Empire of Cusco, Peru. The Peace Corps is not active in the region of Cusco given the
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high presence of NGOs. According to SUNARP\(^1\) there are forty-eight official NGOs in the Cusco region, alone. The outside world has made its presence felt in the Cusco region not only through governmental channels, but also through the global society.

Walking the streets of Cusco city, where most of the offices of NGOs can be found, one can easily find foreigners- tourists and residents alike. If one were to ask ten people their reason for travel, four of those people would provide volunteering and service work as an explanation. Many language schools and tourist agencies have began to attach civic service as an additional component to their programs: “voluntourism”. The concepts of volunteering and service work and the global civil society have been studied extensively by programs like the Center for Social Development of Washington University in St. Louis and The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. However, the scope of these studies have been limited to the “Western” understanding of these concepts, a hyper individualized conception of relationships-one individual helping another individual. Research on this subject has largely failed to study the understanding of these concepts by nationals from developing countries, which often have more “collectivist” societies. It is vital, in a growing global civil society, to consider the manner in which participation (the interaction between NGOs and host country’s nationals) in volunteerism and civic service is executed trans-culturally, and to know its potential effects. Acknowledging the high presence of NGOs and foreign volunteers in

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Peruvian communities and a lack of research with a perspective from Peruvian nationals, my researched highlights Peruvian perspectives on the dynamics of the relationships held between NGOS and international volunteers and Peruvian communities.

**The Development of the “International Volunteering and Service” Phenomenon**

This increasingly popular trend of crossing borders to help thy neighbor, using the rhetoric of its origin, can be traced back to the missions of the colonial period (Elrichs, 2002). The Spaniards sailed to the Americas with not just flags as their symbol of conquest; in their hands they carried the Bible, as justification of their flag. Since the late fifteenth century the concept of service abroad has been attached with a Eurocentric, Western, superiority complex. The missions were charged with saving the savages from their pagan lifestyles. In Peru, this led to the destruction of the Inca’s Ceque system\(^2\) an integral part to not only Inca religious practices but also political structure. The foreign presence was clearly a detriment to this ancient civilization. Nevertheless, the foreign presence did bring about some positive outcomes; for example, the introduction of new technology. And in some more successful scenarios, a syncretism of the two cultures occurred. Today, when you walk into the main cathedral of Cusco it is very evident in the

\(^2\) The Ceque System is a group of imaginary lines that connect the shrines and religious monuments of Cusco and the Cusco valley. This system served to create and organize the religious space of the empire. These lines also served to create social order as the most important lines were maintained by the higher social classes, and the lines of lesser importance were maintained by families of a lower social class (Bauer 1998).
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most important lines were maintained by the higher social classes, and the lines of lesser importance were maintained by families of a lower social class (Bauer 1998).
art, as you can find a *cuy*\(^3\) in the place of bread in a painting of the Lord’s Supper. This spectrum of effects (negative and positive) on the ‘host’ culture was a predecessor to the many other multifaceted relations with the outside world that Peru would come to experience. Today, religion continues to be a driving force for service abroad. In the *Voluntas* International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, Julia Berger observes that RNGOs\(^4\) are resurging within the first decade of the twenty-first century (Berger, 2003).

The dynamics of the colonial period continued in the form of neocolonialism. While the creation of the UN in 1945 “spoke to the interdependence of nations and their impact on one another signaling a value of equality among nations and a global responsibility to alleviate poverty” there was still a clear chasm between the developed and underdeveloped countries (Daftary and McBride, 2005). Consequently, as the Global North forged forward, it developed international development agencies that went forth to ‘rescue’ the Global South that had been left behind. For example, the Peace Corp, established in 1961, started its program in Peru in 1962. It was with programs such as the Peace Corp that volunteer and service work became truly global. It was in the second half of the twentieth century that NGOs emerged with international volunteer programs (Listi, Salamon, and Sokolowski, 2003). It was also at this time when it was realized that “top, down bureaucratic development programs” were not achieving their goals. This resulted in an increased demand for greater local control (Daftary and McBride, 2005).

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\(^3\) In the Inca and contemporary Peruvian culture *cuy*, guinea pig, is reserved for special meals. During the festivals in the month of July and the Christmas season *cuy* is prepared.

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Consequently, a shift occurred in developmental efforts in which the dynamics of the relationship went from one of working for to one of working with (Daftary and McBride, 2005). It is this new pattern that those whom were interviewed sought to be implemented in the Peruvian communities.

**Understanding the Setting**

In the United States, the name of the game is “every man for himself”. It is important to realize that this is not the game everyone plays. There are a plethora of cultures; therefore, each culture will fall in a different place within the individualist or collectivist spectrum. The ability to recognize where in the spectrum a culture falls helps one to “recognize, understand and anticipate attitudes in different cultures” (On-line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad- University of the Pacific).

Within an individualist society there is a heightened identification with self. This means that an individual’s needs and interests will be fulfilled before that of the group. These societies value independence and self-reliance. Given this emphasis on the individual, individuals separate themselves psychologically and emotionally. To be a part of the group is not essential for one’s identity or success, thus, one may or may not choose to join a group (On-line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad- University of the Pacific). In contrast, in a collectivist society the identity of the individual depends on being part of the group. The success and well-being of the group ensures the survival of the individual. Also, differing from an individualist society are the values stressed within a collectivist culture: “harmony and interdependence of group members” (On-line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad- University of the Pacific). In a collectivist
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within a collectivist culture: “harmony and interdependence of group members” (On-line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad- University of the Pacific). In a collectivist
society one is able to identify a more shared psychology and an emotional closeness within the group members. Another characteristic of a collectivist society, rooted from the closeness of the group, is the distance created towards non-group members.

Like much of Latin America, Peru is very much a collectivist society. This has been true since the ancient times of the Inca Empire. The Incan society was maintained by the tradition of reciprocity. This concept of reciprocity manifests itself in two different ways: *ayni* and *minca*. *Ayni* is the rule of reciprocity; this rule creates a condition in which families of one village exchange labor. If neighbor A helps neighbor B, then neighbor B understands that if in the future neighbor A needs help he has an obligation to help said neighbor. This system emphasizes family to family reciprocity. Meanwhile, the *minca* system focuses more on the communal level. In this system a family gives to the community because the survival of the whole ensures the survival of the group members. This system is exemplified in the construction of infrastructure. It is ancient traditions such as the *ayni* and *minca* systems that still frame the Peruvian understanding of serving others. Therefore, as one examines the Peruvian culture, it looks a lot more different than what one may be accustomed to see.

International volunteering and service work are not concepts that translate naturally into a developing collectivist society. In Peru, it is not the norm for people to take a day off and volunteer in another community. It is even less likely that you will find an individual that does volunteer work weekly. A reoccurring theme in the interviews was that of Peru’s economic standing. According to the World Bank as of the year of 2009 33.5 percent of Peru’s population lived under the poverty line. The World Bank’s

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an individual that does volunteer work weekly. A reoccurring theme in the interviews was that of Peru’s economic standing. According to the World Bank as of the year of 2009 33.5 percent of Peru’s population lived under the poverty line. The World Bank’s
data for the year of 2013 shows that 23.9 percent of Peru’s population is living under the poverty line (World Bank). Peru is a developing state; it has had much economic growth at the macro level, but at the micro level- poverty still plagues the nation. One day, as I visited my host family from my semester abroad we began discussing my research. As we reached the subject as to why Peruvians do not volunteer, Carlos my host father was very straightforward “It is not that people don’t want to help, they just can’t afford to do so. The people are working to sustain their families. They are not at a place where they can look out, beyond the needs of their family. At least not yet.” (Carlos, 2014)\(^i\). It quickly became evident that economic development of the country was a determining factor to the development of volunteerism and service work within Peru. A similar understanding was reiterated by a twenty-one year old university student, Jose. Jose expressed his opinion as follows:

“It is necessary to form a group of volunteers in Peru, or here in the city of Cusco. It’s important. But you can’t, it’s because they need to work. So, the economic level or the economic system in which we live in we really need to work. So if we are going to volunteer we need to have money. At least to sustain daily costs, we have to have money to keep living...therefore; making a group of volunteers is a little difficult, because at the end everyone has a path. So it’s these paths that that the kids my age, our age, are going to look for in other options for jobs. They are not going to think in doing volunteer work. If the people are older, they also won’t, even more so because they think about having more” (Jose, 2014)\(^i\).

\(^i\) The names of participants have been changed as one of the contractual conditions for interviews was anonymity.

\(^6\) Jose is a young adult from the neighborhood Los Hermanos Ayer, on the outskirts of Cusco city. His neighborhood is stricken by extremely high levels of poverty. At an early age he entered a theater program provided by an NGO. It was his participation in the program that allowed him to leave a life of petty crimes to one of education. Today, Jose has returned to work as a theater teacher in the same NGO that sparked his interest in the subject.
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From his response one can derive that the economic pressures do not only limit adults with families but also the younger generations.

There is not a high participation in volunteering and civic work within the Peruvian society; there are, however, clues that such a movement can take root in Peru. The Peruvian society is not completely unreceptive of the need of others. Given the economic conditions, the population does what it can in the form of activist efforts. Activism may be differentiated from volunteering and civic service work by the duration of the project being executed. Activist action is characterized is considered to be a singular civic action. In Cusco some activist efforts occur in the Christmas season when clothing items are collected and delivered to the communities in the mountains where temperatures are a lot lower than in the city. Another act of activism popular in Cusco is the annual fundraiser for the hospital San Juan de Dios. These projects are isolated and sporadic, rather than continuous. It must be noted that these acts of activism are also limited by the economic environment of Peru. The donations of clothes are only made when the middle class families of the city have the luxury of giving away older garments. Similarly, donations to the clinic are only made when individuals have a few Nuevo Soles\(^7\) to spare. As I spoke with the volunteer coordinator of the Clinic she mentioned that her goal for the coming years is to finally beat Chile’s fundraising efforts (San Juan de Dios Hospital has clinics all across world). Chile is a wealthier state than Peru; according to the World Bank Chile’s GDP per capita stands at 15,452.17 USD as of 2012, while Peru’s GDP per capita is 6,795.77 USD (World Bank). The volunteer

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coordinaor stated that she hopes that as Peru’s economy continues to grow and catch up to Chile’s economy, so will the donations.

In contrast to the singularity of activism, volunteerism and civic service have a longer participation period as the projects developed require a longer timeline to be completed. It is this concept of extended civic commitment that is being introduced into Peru by the global civil society.

A Look into the Inner Workings of the New Phenomenon

The previous sections examined the “setting” into which the global civil society is entering: a collectivist society, and a developing country with little to no volunteering and service participation from within. Given these conditions, the relationship between the incoming global civil society and the Peruvian community may be examined.

The Value of Trust and Time

In a collectivist society there is a hesitation to let outsiders in. In the Peruvian context, this means when NGOs enter a community and foreign volunteers descend upon them, some friction may arise. This sense of intrusion may be heightened as a result of previously failed developmental efforts by not just other NGOs but also the government. As the daily protests on the streets of Cusco show, the people are not pleased with their governing bodies. They are frustrated with the levels of corruption and inaction within the government. A member of an indigenous community in the rainforest of Peru had
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