

NGOs, Development, the State, and people in Manu.

A practical guide for local development.

Prepared for the CREES Foundation by
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Brief

The aim of this report is to provide the CREES organisation with an account of the perspectives of local people in the Manu sub-region with which will serve as a foundation of knowledge when planning projects within the region. This report was commissioned by Quinn Meyer and Armando Valdez in May 2008. All views expressed in this report are those of local people unless otherwise stated. The recommendations I make and the statements I declare are tempered with my own personal experience from a local and international development perspective. With that in mind this report speaks with a truly unique voice and one which should be recognised. However it does not represent everyone, no work of this nature can, this should also be noted. Used well and this will influence policy, used badly and it will be skim read and passed over. That choice lies with you, the reader.

Introduction

My perspective, to paraphrase Kautsky¹, is that one cannot look at development by addressing one single issue, it is an organism and must be recognised as such. People, plants, animals, they are all part of the same organism. This organism firstly needs to be acknowledged, and secondly needs to be addressed in the correct manner. This is a multidisciplinary approach. The compartmentalisation of modern academia is a major barrier to rural development issues. Looking at problems from a medical, botanical or anthropological perspective has the effect of only giving part of the story. Addressing any issues in this vein can lead to the exacerbation of other problems elsewhere. A narrowly focused investment in development, such as through tourism or education singly, can have no effect unless it is framed in the wider context of holistic development. Continuing with education; the problem is that an educator will look to solve problems from an education perspective. They have no tools to do much else, and their systems of assessment of their performance are totally based within their specialist area. They do not have the requisite skills to think outside their frame of reference without risking embarrassment and failure. This means that most don't.

In short, development must be objectified as a single, all encompassing organism, actors within development of an area such as Manu must be mindful that what happens to one part affects the others.

If you can conceive the Earth as a single biome, and the rainforest is an ecosystem within that which influences the whole why not apply the same reasoning to development. Place humans, and the environment together – yes, you may say that the difference is that humans have free will, but is that any more or less predictable than our weather patterns?

A narrow view is only relevant in the laboratory where variables need to be controlled, outside the lab no tangible, just goals are served by individualising.

¹ From the 1983 book of Karl Kautsky edited and translated by Patrick Goode.

CREES in Salvacion

Within the town of Salvacion, of the thirty-four people we interviewed, one of the questions was “Can you identify any NGOs operating in the area?”. Eight knew who CREES were and of these four could identify clearly what CREES did. The reason they could identify CREES was through business associations, a family member in employment, or from contact with a project collaborator. The low awareness may be down to one of two reasons; one, they do not think of CREES as an NGO, they think of it as something else, or two, they do actually not know what CREES do. In comparison DRIS was identified by 26 people, and 11 of these could give an accurate description of what they did. This was mainly because DRIS had worked with them on their property with their ‘bio-huertos’ project. The other common reason DRIS was mentioned was that they have an office in the middle of Salvacion. In Shintuya nobody identified CREES as an organisation that work in the area.

Tourism College

In the tourism ‘Instituto’ of Salvacion we were able to witness the Principal selecting students to come across to the MLC for work experience. Nobody volunteered and finally two had to be selected from the class. It seemed like it was more a chore than an opportunity, the students cited the fact that they had heard from previous students that they spent their time in the kitchen and helping out around the centre, rather than in the ‘field’. I didn’t even realise the student volunteer wasn’t part of the CREES staff in the three days I spent at the MLC as they were working as much as the regular staff over these three days.

With a little management and structure this opportunity could provide a vital part of the young students training and give a great boost to CREES and the CREES brand in years to come, as has happened with TRC (Tambopata Research Centre). However at the moment this project is doing more harm to the reputation of CREES than good.

Manu Learning Centre (facility)

The MLC is an incredible concept, which will stand the test of time. The problem is one of awareness. The MLC/CREES needs to find a way of publicising the centre and the work that goes on there. The best place to start is with local people. They know of it’s presence but little else and need to be made aware of the centres purpose and value and relevance to their lives. This should be achieved through the projects implemented by CREES/MLC

Ecology Club

This is an important part of CREES remit to assist in local education. The club is vital to maintaining a ‘non-political’ link to political institutions. With the recent addition of a Newsletter from the school, CREES abounds in good press. CREES should take this opportunity to strengthen ties in Salvacion with the school and bring this good

press to the attention of the UK/USA market – especially with regard to marketing to schools. I am also aware of a radio programme though it was not clear what link this had to the Ecology Club or to CREES.

I suggest forming a ‘council’ comprised of young people from Salvacion which presides over, or has a say in matters concerning their future; such as management of local areas and the MNP. Additionally involving the club members in the bio-garden, and let them come and work on the garden 1 day a week. If this has not already been done. Whilst the activities of the Ecology Club benefits both sides, it will always be a success.

Environmental Education

Please re-read my opening paragraphs about the organism of development. I see the environmental education agenda as possessing much potential yet in it’s current form of implementation it is narrow in focus. The premise that children will learn about the environment and this will influence their parents is highly unlikely from the conversations we had with parents in Salvacion. This follows a trend in NGOs and development of ‘herding’ towards the latest concept, be it, entrepreneurship, female empowerment, environmental education, etc. It is much easier for an NGO to agree to collaborate on a project when all the other NGOs in the area have agreed to it. Evidence for this is seen in Manu as most of the same actors seem to collaborate on all the projects. What you might find happening is that this ‘herd mentality’ may reassure everyone that they are doing the right thing (to avoid another Kosnipata), however the fact that there is no significant changes or risk involved means that the results are small and often insignificant.

I am not objecting to links and project collaborations with any other NGO, however we need to devise our own goals based on our own knowledge from the region. Not agreeing with other projects because they include the latest buzz word on the Peruvian development agenda. NB. Sustainable is a buzz word.

Local Government

The local government, is the real dictator of development in the region and is tightly linked to NGOs by its ability to enable or disable their operations within the sub-region. Every NGO that works in Manu, and I talked with them all, engage in projects that coincide with the opinions of those within the local government. There are no NGOs realising projects that are ‘contra’ to the local government. This is an noteworthy observation. This is not a result of chance, when you see that the only areas that the NGOs work are in the voids left by the local government. Over the sub- region as a whole, this has the effect of co-legitimising the operations of all the actors, the NGOs and the local government together, leaving out the local people. It is this crowd dynamic which tells you that if so many legitimate institutions are prioritising a certain cause, then it must be the most important cause. Yet at no point along the development agenda were the ordinary local people consulted. There are positives; that all the institutions are working together in harmony in the

region, with no wasteful overlaps is one. However the negatives - that none of the actors are addressing the real needs of the people in the area – are the most significant every time.

The situation is that there is no political or diplomatic space for NGOs to negotiate with local government. There is no space for them to object, vote or contribute opinions to the official development plan of the area, thus continuing the present situation – which is to clarify – is the failings to provide the basic needs of the ordinary people.

“Out of the vast range of human social capacities – possible ways in which social life could be lived – State activities, more or less forcibly ‘encourage’ some, whilst suppressing, marginalising, eroding, and undermining others. Schooling for instance comes to stand for education, Policing for order, Voting for political participation. Fundamental social classifications like age and gender, are enshrined in law, embedded in institutions, routinized in administrative procedures and symbolised in rituals of the state. Certain forms of activity are given the official seal of approval, others are situated beyond the pale” (p4. Corrigan, Sayer & Aylmer, 1985)

Centrally state agencies attempt to give unitary and unifying expression to what in reality, are multifaceted and differential historical experiences of groups within society, denying their particularity.

Conclusions

There is a vacancy for a truly independent NGO in the region. One which works closely with the people and advocates proper development through knowledge and a response to needs. This NGO needs to work alongside and critique the operations of the government in a transparent and honest way. It needs to represent the voice of civil society, however not ‘be’ the voice. CREES may not be that NGO however it should aim to take the lead within the region by incorporating provisions into its work that take into account this need for self-critique, transparency and to think of development in a holistic manner.

Bibliography

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