

Partnership to Empowerment: A Case Study of an International NGO and Public Schools in Belize

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Abstract: At the time of this exploratory case study, less than 50 percent of primary school teachers in Belize had any pedagogical training. The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' and students' desires, or lack thereof, for international nongovernment organization (INGO) support. In order to respect the autonomy and dignity of the four communities in the case, INGOs should continually ask beneficiaries: Do you want help? And if so, what help is needed? And afterward, what was the impact to your community? This study asked these questions in order to understand teachers' and students' desire for support from INGOs. Specifically, the study looked to understand teachers' and students' attitudes about resources, access, and equity in their public school to see what parallels and disconnects existed between stakeholder perspectives and the current INGO programs operating in their schools. Data sources comprised anonymous teacher questionnaires with seventeen teachers, semi-structured interviews with four teachers and three former students, and four follow-up focus group sessions. The study found participants desired assistance, but only perceived INGOs in a resource delivery role. The findings have implications for future INGO and public school partnerships as INGOs serve as mentors and connectors.

Keywords: International Organizations, Community Development, Empowerment, Professional Development

Introduction

International nongovernmental organizations' (INGO) models can either empower people, resulting in autonomy, or disrupt markets and systemic work, ending in dependency (Barber and Bowie 2008; Frazer 2008; Harvey and Lind 2005; Zanotti, Stephenson, and McGehee 2015). Harvey and Lind (2005, 4) emphasize the human in humanitarian assistance: "The concern is less about whether people in desperate need should be assisted, but whether the way in which they are assisted respects basic needs for autonomy, and enables people to exercise their capability for deliberation." While some critics believe INGO work should cease and be left to local community service organizations (Finn and Sarangi 2010), others such as Harvey and Lind argue that the question lies not in what or who but in how it should be done.

4 the World, a US-based INGO, has made its model "identify, collaborate, and assess" (*4 the World* 2015; see Figure 1). Robert Froom started *4 the World* in 2004 as a registered nonprofit organization. On a trip to Belize, Froom observed organizations only helping people who ascribed to their religion or met the corporate mission statement, therefore excluding some of the neediest groups. In contrast, Froom decided to go on foot to different communities and ask people to identify unmet needs. He then sought collaborators who could address these issues in a viable and sustainable manner for each specific community. *4 the World* is acutely aware that every person and every community has specific needs and desires and that these must be fully taken into account before projects are implemented and when projects are evaluated. Froom's process goal is culturally sensitive solutions and his outcome goal is community empowerment (Froom 2013).

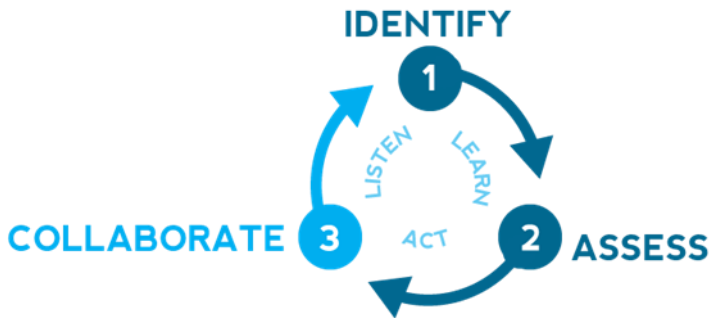


Figure 1: *4 the World's* Theory of Change Model
 Source: *4 the World* (2015)

Using the *4 the World* model, each community must determine what is best for its unique case. Because each case is unique, study findings are also particular to the case. While this case study of INGO and public school partnerships cannot be used to generalize, it can contribute to the literature on how international nongovernment organizations and public schools can work together.

Context of Case

4 the World is an INGO that “identifies and collaborates with communities across the globe to empower them to identify and solve the most pressing needs of their communities within the areas of health and education” (*4 the World* 2015, n.p.). This case study investigated four rural schools in Belize that have collaborated with *4 the World*. The four schools were physically similar with three concrete block buildings painted in the school colors shaped in a U with a courtyard in the middle. Each school had approximately one principal who also taught one grade. Teachers ranged from three to five, with some teaching multiple-grade classrooms. In these four schools, *4 the World* and other INGOs have provided books, school supplies, and technology; constructed school buildings, playgrounds, and restrooms; initiated pupil feeding programs; mended water purifying systems, roofs, and bridges; and granted secondary school scholarships. Most of the schools in this district are public but rely on private organizations for resources and financial support of the children. Historically, corruption has plagued what resources schools in developing countries receive (Heyneman 2005). At the primary school level, 51.4 percent of teachers in Belize had any pedagogical training (International Bureau of Education 2010). Under-qualified teachers might not have the power to fight the corruption nor the know-how to teach without resources. In addition to this problem in Belize, students paid tuition for secondary school. While 85 percent of children in Belize continued to secondary school (Statistical Institute of Belize 2013), that statistic did not consider the 25 percent dropout rate in primary schools (International Bureau of Education 2010). Providing resources and access to education were part of *4 the World* programming.

In order to respect the autonomy and dignity of these four communities, INGOs should continually ask beneficiaries: *Do you want help?* And if so, *what help is needed?* And afterward, *what was the impact to your community?* The purpose of this study was to ask these questions in order to understand teachers’ and students’ desire for support from INGOs. Specifically, the study looked to understand teachers’ and students’ attitudes about INGOs, resources, and equity in their public school to see what parallels and disconnects existed between stakeholder perspectives and the current *4 the World* support programs operating in their schools.

Few studies on INGO community development actually speak with beneficiaries as a data source. According to the World Bank’s influential *Voices of the Poor*, “Poor people often report

that besides being rude and forceful, NGO staffs are poor listeners. Surprisingly, poor people report that some NGOs are largely irrelevant, self-serving, limited in their outreach, and corrupt, although to a much lesser extent than the state” (Narayan-Parker et al. 2000, 8). Between 1996 and 2008, most NGO performance studies utilized the executive director and NGO documents as the sources of data. Beneficiaries were among the least utilized (Kareithi and Lund 2012). Typically, fewer studies interview rural communities in developing countries because the cost of coordination and travel are beyond the scope of the researcher’s budget or time. For example, it takes more coordination, money, and time to interview teachers from four schools spread across the countryside than four schools in the same city as the airport. Social media and smart phones may bridge this gap in the future (Dillon 2012). To date, there are fewer studies that listen to beneficiaries as participants than INGO staff. This case study begins to address the discrepancy in the research literature. The research questions that guided the study are: 1) What, if any, assistance do teachers and students desire from INGOs?; 2) How do teachers and students perceive INGO assistance in four Belizean public schools?; and 3) What are the policy implications of the *4 the World* model?

The purpose of the study was to understand the specific desire for support from INGOs in these four schools. Research in educational development must be completed in context to be reliable because context determines results (Malhotra and Schuler 2005). This study contributes the context of rural Belize to the body of literature on INGO and public school partnerships.

Literature Review

Mainstream and alternative development scholars agree that participation of beneficiaries is paramount to success in development practice (Islam and Morgan 2012; Kamat 2003; Narayan-Parker et al. 2000). However, theorists disagree on the role of INGOs in community development. Mainstream theorists focus on INGO as intermediary between international donor agencies, such as the World Bank, and communities in need with the outcome of resource mobilization. Alternative theorists focus on INGO as change agent, organizing communities for political advocacy with the outcome of changing systems of inequity. Development with a social justice lens involves educating people on politics and their rights (Kamat 2003).

Kamat (2003) blames international donor agencies’ policies to donate directly to non-member training organizations and not organizations of community membership for the shifted perception of INGOs as apolitical trainers of specific economic skills. Freire (1970) offers another explanation for this: systemic oppression. Systemic change is either not conceived as possible or is not desired from Western organizations. Freire (1970, 159) advises leaders to act dialogically: “Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress.” Freire further instructs leaders in the art of empowerment by claiming true dialogue requires love and humility.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment theory and community development theory inform each other and are situated within the field of international development, which served as the framework for this study. First, empowerment theory explains the importance of beneficiary participation by giving beneficiaries a voice in the development process. Second, empowerment theory emphasizes the bottom-up community development approach to international development. Community development is also a grassroots effort that supports communities in identifying needs and implementing solutions in a collective way, as contrasted to welfare (Gilchrist 2004) or to top-down foreign aid by donor governments. More than two decades ago, Friedmann (1992) asserted that top down development had failed and called for grassroots development to truly empower communities and alleviate poverty. However, this call continues to be debated (McCloskey 2012).

Empowerment theory claims that building human capacity empowers people to be in control of their own lives (Beske 2014; Sen 1999; Luttrell et al. 2009). With empowerment theory, the goal is for INGOs to become unnecessary as communities continue sustainable development. In Barber and Bowie's (2008, 752) words, INGO staffs "work themselves out of a job." For this study, empowerment is the goal of community development and is defined by Luttrell et al. (2009, 21) as a "progression that helps people gain control over their own lives and increases the capacity of people to act on issues that they themselves define as important." The following conceptual framework is based on Laverack's (2006) literature review finding nine domains of community empowerment, Rowlands' (1997) four dimensions of power, and Luttrell et al.'s (2009) definition of empowerment.



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Community Empowerment
Source: Adapted from Laverack (2006), Luttrell et al. (2009), and Rowlands (1997)

Critics of empowerment theory claim that imposing a Western interpretation of development on impoverished people in developing countries misses the actuality of empowerment (Finn and Sarangi 2010; c. f. Beske 2014). Another criticism is that INGOs do not have the capacity to empower communities because they are accountable to donors rather than beneficiaries (Brunt and McCourt 2012). Similarly, donors may tie funds directly to programs halting community decision making of fund allocation (Barber and Bowie 2008; Kamat 2003). Even if INGOs do not reach the ideal of empowerment, empirical evidence suggests that organizations that include beneficiary participation are more efficient and effective than those that do not (HAP 2010; McCloskey 2012). And, as previously discussed, the question is not whether or not to help but how to provide help (Harvey and Lind 2005). Empowerment theory integrated with community development serves as the most justifiable framework we currently possess for international development.

Methods

This study is a qualitative exploratory case study (see Creswell 2012; Yin 2009). The aim was to talk with participants who received services from *4 the World*, a US-based INGO, about the needs, wants, and opinions of community members in rural Belize.

Participant and Site Selection

While *4 the World* has a large geographic reach, the majority of the current programs take place in Central America. I chose to study the country with the most school partnerships ($n = 12$) because that country has a longer history and broader context of working with *4 the World*. Of the twelve schools, the Minister of Education identified four schools as being in the most need at the beginning of *4 the World's* partnership. These communities are in the rural jungle area, far from the capital, and far from the tourist-destination coastal cities. Because the four communities have been identified as the most in need, *4 the World* had spent the most time and completed more projects with these schools. This provided a richer context to discover participant perceptions of INGO support. Participants included seventeen teachers and three former student scholarship recipients from the four schools who have received support directly from INGOs. Four of the teachers also served as the school principal. Subjects were recruited through a multiple-step process of emails and then face-to-face. For the interviews, participants included teachers who had worked with *4 the World*. Finally, follow-up questionnaires and focus groups were conducted over a two year period.

Data Sources and Collection Process

Data sources comprised of anonymous teacher questionnaires, semi-structured one-on-one interviews with teachers and student scholarship recipients, and follow-up focus group sessions.

Teacher Questionnaires

All teachers were given an anonymous open-ended questionnaire at the beginning and end of the study in order to determine attitudes about resources, access, and equity in their schools as well as attitudes about *4 the World* programs. The questionnaires also asked teachers to evaluate the support and resources for teaching literacy and technology from their government and from INGOs. The questionnaires concluded by asking teachers to describe how INGOs could better support teaching and learning at their school.

Interviews

Four current primary school teachers and three former student scholarship recipients were chosen for interviews because of their experience working with *4 the World*. The intention of the interview was to understand how outside help was viewed, ranging from positive to negative. The researcher asked how INGOs in Belize could collaborate with marginalized populations to support teachers and students in public schools and then specifically if the INGO programs in their schools were viewed as helpful, necessary, and desired. Interviews were semi-structured to allow participants to share information as needed while at the same time allowing the researcher to focus on targeted research questions. Interviews took place face-to-face on site.

Focus Groups

The researcher conducted on-site focus group sessions the following two years to continue to gain insight and understanding into the public private partnership of this case. Only three teacher focus group sessions were able to be completed due to time restraints and principal turnover. The discussions centered on what the teachers had identified the previous year and what had resulted since that time. Teacher focus groups were audio recorded. For the scholarship recipients, a synchronous focus group conversation was held over social media as they no longer lived in the same village.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings and handwritten answers from questionnaires were transcribed verbatim and analyzed with both open coding and a priori coding (Yin 2009). Artifacts and field notes were used to provide context and triangulation. The researcher open coded searching for answers to the three research questions. Since the study sought to understand how the teachers and students perceived INGO assistance and viewed the participants as experts, the researcher first looked for themes in vivo (Creswell 2012). Four overarching mutually exclusive categories were created based on this round: financial needs, social issues, positive perceptions, and negative perceptions (Braun and Clarke 2006). The researcher reread the data a third time color coding according to the four categories. To ensure trustworthiness, a peer audit was completed by graduate students in a qualitative methods class (Yin 2009). Pairs of graduate students coded one participant’s verbatim transcript and the collective questionnaire responses based on these four categories plus a fifth category deemed *other*, to keep in the spirit of open coding and to code in an exhaustive manner. Graduate students were orally given a list of operational definitions as displayed below.

Codes	Category	Operational Definition
Pink	Social justice issues	Political comments about power, access, equality, equity, relationships, race, gender, or culture
Green	Material resources	Tangible materials, tangible resources, things that can be purchased with money
Yellow	Positive perception	Positive attitude, judgment, evaluation, or statement about help from outside agencies
Blue	Negative perceptions	Negative attitude, judgment, evaluation, or statement about help received or lack of help received when wanted from outside agencies
Orange	Other statements of interest	Anything else that is interesting, stands out, answers one of the research questions or both

Figure 3: Open Coding Operational Definitions for Data Analysis

Secondly, the researcher coded a priori according to my conceptual framework (Creswell 2012). The researcher synthesized Laverack’s (2006) nine domains of community empowerment and an adapted version of Rowlands’ (1997) forms of empowerment so that the domains represented actions of community development. The ninth domain, *control over the organization*, was merged with the outcome of *control over own lives* in the conceptual framework as both were

considered desired outcomes and not actions. Within the scope of the three year project, control over the organization was seen as a tangible step within the outcome of control over own lives.

The data was analyzed within each context first and then holistically (Yin 2009). The same graduate students who open coded also performed a peer audit using the color codes and number codes in Figure 4. After collecting the peer audit data, each coded statement was sorted into a matrix to make sure codes were consistent, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive. To ensure the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the study, all IRB protocol was followed. Credibility was achieved through triangulation, researcher reflexivity journal, and peer review (Creswell 2012).

Color code	<i>A priori</i> categories	<i>A priori</i> codes numbered
Pink	Challenge power	1) Creates an equitable relationship with outside agents
		2) Increases problem assessment capacities
		3) Enhances the ability to “ask why”
Green	Access to opportunities	4) Improves resource mobilization
		5) Strengthens links to other organizations and people
Yellow	Solidarity	6) Improves participation
		7) Develops local leadership
		8) Builds empowering organizational structures

Figure 4: A Priori Coding for Data Analysis
 Note: Adapted from Rowlands (1997) and Lavarack (2006)

Findings

Through open and a priori coding processes, two themes emerged for question one, three themes for question two, and two themes for question three. The themes are discussed within the context of *4 the World* programs, specifically regarding the tensions between dependency mentality and empowerment.

What Assistance Do Teachers and Students Desire from INGOs?

Data revealed two themes for research question one: financial needs and social issues. The data were categorized for research question one into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. When asked what the community needed, participants noted financial needs on the questionnaires and in the interviews at the greatest frequency. See Table 1 for a summary of findings.

Table 1: Summary of Findings for Research Question One

Financial need	Social issue
Technology	Student support services/ESL
Instructional supplies for teachers	Domestic violence
School supplies for students	Parent participation in schools
First aid/healthcare clinics	Lack of student motivation
Scholarships	
Pupil feeding programs (lunch)	
More teachers	
Training for teachers	

Five of seven interviewees listed supplies or scholarships for education as the number one need of the community: i.e., “material school stuff,” “always need resources,” and “money for education.” The perceived lack of resources created problems in education in terms of access and quality. Participants reported that many families did not have the finances to pay tuition for

schooling, so the free government primary school was the highest level of attainment. A former scholarship recipient commented in the interview, “The reason that they don’t go to ... high school—most of them stop at primary school—it’s just because their parents don’t have the money to send them to a higher school. And I would say that’s the most important thing that we need in our village.” The data showed access to secondary school for many students required scholarships from within and outside of the community and access to post-secondary school was rare, even with government assistance or outside scholarships. This corroborates statistics distributed by the Belize Statistical Institute for the country (Statistical Institute of Belize 2013). As is true in many countries, the free primary education provided by the government is not of equal quality across districts. Participants stated that the government provided one teacher per brick-and-mortar classroom. Many teachers in the study taught more than one grade because of the minimal number of classrooms. At all four schools, the only technology available to students was provided by *4 the World*.

Nonacademic resources, such as food and clean water, also affect student learning. Participants stated that the government provided a feeding program for students in the largest urban city but not in the rural district. Teachers at Macal and Azeem recognized the need for pupil feeding programs but the teachers at Grove Creek identified his pupils as farming families that grow their own food and do not come to school hungry (pseudonyms were used for participant and school names). This finding demonstrated the differences in subcultures even among the same geopolitical area and illustrated the importance of context in the data analysis process.

The two participants that named social issues as the greatest educational need of the community were both teachers at the school with the most resources relative to the other three schools in the case study. The male teacher identified the dropout rate as the biggest problem. A higher percentage of boys than girls drop out of high school in this rural district (Statistical Institute of Belize 2013). A male teacher stated, “A lot of children, they drop out of high school. Um, I notice the language, since this is a Spanish community, language, the English language [instruction], it also seems harder to a lot of them. I believe if the schools would offer more [ESL] programs, it would benefit the children coming to school.” When asked what the community needed, the female teacher identified domestic abuse as the biggest problem. A female teacher answered, “Young adults need to be educated about abuse, family abuse. That’s one of the major problems in my community. Females being abused by their husband.” This teacher described community organizations that gave vocational training to women as helping this problem of domestic abuse. Both participants noted education, namely student programs or targeted training, as the solution to the social problems identified.

In addition to resource allotment, another difference between schools was parents’ education level. The male teacher attributed higher parental participation at his school to higher attainment of secondary schooling by his students’ parents. Three anonymous teacher questionnaires at neighboring schools asked for “support given to parents as to educational support workshops” because parents were not perceived as involved in the students’ education. The study found that not all parents and not all teachers believed that every primary student should go to secondary school. Some participants named gender inequality as the reason and some named lack of student motivation. The researcher observed tension between family/home and teachers/school as a factor in low parental involvement and student motivation.

How Do Teachers and Students Perceive INGO Assistance?

This question was answered through three themes: a) first things first: access to resources; b) worthless without relationship: partnerships and solidarity; and c) more work to do: challenging the status quo. Overall, the data showed a positive perception of INGOs. One participant exemplified the findings for this question, “*4 the World* does help empower people. They helped me.”

First Things First: Access to Resources

The study found finances as the most prominent need in the case. The study found that social issues were identified as the prominent need only at Azeem, the school with the most material resources. This suggests that access to resources to meet basic needs should be addressed as the first step in community development. Data from this study revealed that participants' had a strong perception of INGOs' work as delivery of resources or training. This perception possibly narrowed participants' responses about community needs to those needs that they perceived *4 the World* would meet, such as money and training. A participant stated, "*4 the World* organization really helps people that can't handle their economical status to keep going." Overall, participants perceived the community as in need of materials and education. Participants perceived INGOs as able to meet this need and governments as not willing or not able to meet this need. However, the data does not suggest that INGOs should freely provide supplies and education, as will be explained in the discussion section.

Less strongly, participants revealed that social issues needed to be addressed in their community. One participant pointed to the direction he felt he needed to go as a teacher and community leader: "We have to start thinking critically. Right? Politically. We have the right, there is an opportunity but very little information." A student that had volunteered with *4 the World* when a social worker traveled with the international team observed: "Everyone wanted to see the social worker. It was about the personal problems in the people in the villages." She stated that community members found this resource valuable. The data showed additional social issue concerns, such as the oppression of women and Maya peoples. One participant observed, "Many people think women shouldn't study" and a teacher observed that the curriculum did not include Maya culture.

Worthless without Relationship: Partnerships and Solidarity

This study found that giving resources and money alone is ineffective. Participants across the case held positive perceptions of organization representatives that visited communities in person and built relationships with beneficiaries. Context, connection, and conversation seemed to matter. Resources given out of context were perceived as inefficient and ineffective. While in Belize, the researcher toured a small school library painted with inviting colors of green and yellow with homemade book shelves full of mismatched textbooks shipped from the US. The participant explained that the government mandated certain texts for each grade. While these US textbooks were not completely useless to teachers, donation money spent on shipping could have been put to better use by purchasing teaching materials to accompany the government mandated textbook, according to this participant's view. A second teacher wanted direct contact with the INGO because of corruption: "If a representative from the USA can come to deliver our contributions directly to our school. Many organizations are making money on behalf of schools." All three scholarship recipients noted relationship as an important part of the *4 the World* scholarship program. On the questionnaire, a participant noted how tuition money alone is not enough. As first generation high school students, the scholarship recipients had many obstacles to overcome to survive through graduation. One of the scholarship recipients from the *4 the World* cohort dropped out even after receiving support from the mentor and the executive director. The graduation rate for their cohort was 75 percent relative to the national average for 2011 of 60.1 percent (Statistical Institute of Belize 2013). This suggests that mentoring is emerging as a promising practice for increasing students' school completion.

The data for participant desire for INGO and community connection were strong. Less strong was the desire for INGOs to connect subgroups within the community by building solidarity. No participants perceived INGOs as community organizers, but participants did perceive INGOs as trainers to address community unawareness. The data showed divisiveness in the community in two ways: gender and education level. Participants stated that they desired INGOs to provide

training to address both of these issues: training for young adults about domestic abuse and training for uneducated parents on participation in children’s schooling. The teacher focus groups discussed how the teachers performed duties outside of academics to help the school improve but the parents did not help with repairs or improvements that were needed. For example: Participant 1 stated: “And if all the people would think the way we think, then this village would be—” while Participant 2 agreed, “Different. Yeah.” The student focus group, however, discussed how the community would come together when *4 the World* would lead an improvement project. The students and the teachers seemed to hold different views of community participation.

More work to do: Challenging the status quo. Participants gave examples of how INGOs, including but not limited to *4 the World*, have promoted empowerment in the community in each of Laverack’s (2006) domains. Of interest in light of the research questions was the perception of need still remaining in all domains (See Table 2.1 and Table 2.2).

Table 2.1: Domains of Community Empowerment Examples and Needs

Domain	Example of empowering process	Example of need for empowerment	Domain
Improves resource mobilization	“These people here are very intelligent. And the reason most of them won’t continue going to school is the lack of finance,” explained Anna.	“They can help if a representative from the USA can come to deliver our contributions directly to our school. Many organizations are making money on behalf of schools or maybe a representative in our country is getting most of their contributions,” stated anonymous questionnaire participant.	Improves resource mobilization
Strengthens links to other organizations and people	“Needs internet as they would also be involved in the growing world of technology,” said an anonymous teacher on the questionnaire. A different teacher agreed, “4 the World, they help us by donating some computers. They [students] would need to research about, um about topics not really available in textbooks. For example, Mayan ruins and the communities and cultures about [country name]. We don’t really have resources available to us.”	“They invited us [for a soccer match], but we can’t go because there’s no transportation. . . .So we are uncommunicative.” “Isolated?” “Yeah,” said Ms. Sonia.	Strengthens links to other organizations and people
Improves participation	“All people come together and make it work and make it successful,” Manon said to describe her village.	“Me, student, and school will benefit when support is given to parents’ education on responsibilities, morals, etc.,” stated an anonymous teacher. A former student stated, “[G]ood teachers for them to be behind them [students].”	Improves participation
Develops local leadership	“How they can support is by having mentors not just sponsors but mentors because what I have noticed is that students who are being sponsored are the ones failing, do not complete assignments, are not interested in school and put no effort in class,” wrote an anonymous questionnaire participant.	“I like to have a woman as the boss for my class but not for my principal,” stated one teacher.	Develops local leadership

Table 2.2: Domains of Community Empowerment Examples and Needs Continued

Domain	Example of empowering process	Example of need for empowerment	Domain
Builds empowering organizational structures	“I like to meet different people, different cultures of people and be helpful for everyone and just bring up the group ... 4 the World was there to help me so I have to continue and give my best,” Manon said on becoming a volunteer for 4 the World	“It depends on the philosophy of the org. if they come to your town or village and recognize that you have a culture, religion, tradition then they will respect it and if there is a problem the org will solve it,” Mr. Colin stated.	Builds empowering organizational structures
Creates an equitable relationship with outside agents	“I don’t think I would have been, um how to say it, have the self-esteem to apply to a job like this. I wouldn’t have felt capable of it,” Rosa reflected in the interview.	“They [the government] have also started out a feeding program, where they do help children who are, who are poor and who don’t have a, a good meal because you know when the children are hungry it’s hard for them to concentrate during the, when you teaching. However, that program is only right now in the Capital district [pseudonym], um it hasn’t run out into the Selva district or farther yet,” Mr. Brandon explained.	Creates an equitable relationship with outside agents
Increases problem assessment capacities	“Everyone wanted to see the social worker. It was about the personal problems in the people in the villages,” Rosa said.	“With some families, ok, fifteen, are ready for a husband and ready for family life and that’s it. Well, how to say? What you see you do,” Colin said.	Increases problem assessment capacities
Enhances the ability to “ask why”	“They helped me. If I hadn’t had help from them I don’t think I would have ever achieved a higher education. I feel more confident of myself thanks to 4 the World,” said Rosa, a former scholarship recipient.	“We have to start thinking critically. Right? Politically. We have the right, there is an opportunity . . . but very little information” Colin stated about the government supplied textbooks and lack of internet.	Enhances the ability to “ask why”

The category *enhances the ability to “ask why”* was the least identified need. In discussing situations of social injustice, participants replied with “I wouldn’t be able to answer that properly” or that training or education given *to* the community was the answer as opposed to political activism from the community or policy change from the government. Participant perceptions of INGOs focused on *receiving* from INGOs not in acting alongside INGOs. One explanation for this is that participants do not presently see themselves and INGOs acting in this role. One participant shared a Belizean proverb with me, “What you see, you do.” This mirrors Markus and Nurius’ (1986) possible selves’ theory—what one sees as possible is what is possible.

What Are the Policy Implications of the 4 the World Model?

The major policy implications of the *4 the World* model of change is listening to and collaborating with beneficiaries at all stages of programs, including evaluation. The results of this study showed two roles for INGOs as they collaborated with Belizean communities to create change: Connector and Mentor. In these roles, INGOs provide support and leadership but not ownership. As

communities retain ownership of programs, evaluations must be completed at the community and not INGO level.

INGO Must Be Connector

The results of this study showed that participants valued INGOs that collaborate with the community. A participant who had volunteered with *4 the World* on a community capacity building project observed, “All people come together and make it work and make it successful.” She was referring to a fundraising event that *4 the World* had helped orchestrate for schools. *4 the World* recruited a national celebrity and community members to volunteer for the event. It wasn’t a *4 the World* event, it was the community’s event. The community retained ownership of the event by naming the event, performing at the event, working the event, and paying money to come to the event.

At the end of the study, the participants asserted that programs in the US cannot merely be copied in Belize. The teachers noticed the impact of globalization in their own classrooms in how the government was implementing education reform. One teacher astutely noted: “Because of the globalization that’s why it is happening, that our government wants us to be like the American schools but we don’t have the resources like the American schools. And that’s what is hindering the whole system. They are not making a program for Belize. They are copying from other countries.” The teachers stated that they felt pressure to modernize their school, but felt disempowered to do so. Specifically, the teachers at all of the schools felt dissatisfied with the pressure from the government to integrate technology in the classroom because the computers *4 the World* had given them were either no longer working or the internet was down. The government was promising internet connection but had not yet delivered at the conclusion of the study.

INGO Must Be Mentor

The second role for community empowerment in Belize is INGO as mentor. Mentors train mentees on needed skills but more importantly help raise mentees’ conscientiousness on social issues. The key statement from the data said: “How they can support is by having mentors not just sponsors [people who give money] but mentors because what I have noticed is that students who are being sponsored [given a free education] are the ones failing.” This statement illuminated skill building or education alone as not enough and that beneficiaries desired mentorship from INGOs. Mentoring is a promising practice for increasing students’ school completion that governments can implement as part of their own scholarship programs. Overall the policy implication is as programs remain in the ownership of the local community and provide mentorship, they hold promise for becoming more effective and sustainable.

Discussion

The findings of this study showed a desire for INGO assistance in four public schools in Belize and a need for INGO assistance in each of Laverack's (2006) nine domains of community empowerment. The question was never whether or not INGOs should help communities, but which communities desired help and *how* INGOs should help. The results of the study augment the literature on evidence-based practices with regard to the role of INGOs in community empowerment and extend the literature to include the context of rural Belize.

The data show that beneficiaries identified finances as the greatest community need and primarily perceived INGOs as financier. Additionally, beneficiaries demonstrated a need for INGOs to be change agents, which is a recurring theme in the INGO literature (Beske 2014; Pearce 2000). The literature polarizes the financial and the social roles; however, the data showed that both are possible in sequence: first *Connector* and second *Mentor*. The important implication for policy is that the INGO not be legally named as the owner of the programs. The following sections will discuss the sequencing of roles and then the ownership of programs. The article will conclude with implications for future research.

Sequencing Roles

In this study, participants who were struggling to meet their basic life needs focused their responses on food, water, and shelter. This emphasis on physiological and self-protection needs corroborates Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory. For example, participants whose schools did not have windows to keep out rain, roofs to keep out snakes, clean water to drink, or lunch for hungry children asked that INGOs donate resources to meet these needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, basic health and education needs must be filled before problem solving and lack of prejudice needs can be addressed. Therefore, it follows that policy on development delivery should first link to resources for physiological and safety needs before challenging social issues. To avoid the criticized role of development delivery (McCloskey 2012; Pearce 2000) and beneficiaries' perceptions of INGO as financier, INGOs can link communities to opportunities and can facilitate access to resources rather than directly provide technical services. The caveat to this policy implication is when survival is on the line, INGOs must first meet those basic needs even when that means dropping food and clothing onto a community (Harvey and Lind 2005).

Connect within and between Communities

Rather than simply acting as the middle person between wealthy nations' resources and impoverished communities' perceived deficits, INGOs can cultivate strategic partnerships that are mutually beneficial between communities and within communities. Through forming strategic partnerships, INGOs can inexpensively transfer resources and increase involvement of locals (Beske 2014; Islam and Morgan 2012). INGO partnerships between and within communities increase trust and motivation, which corroborates the literature on successful international volunteerism (Beske 2014; Kamat 2003; Lough 2013). Within communities, INGOs must cultivate a spirit of service where a community's assets (rather than needs) and giving (not taking) are the focus. Such partnerships may increase motivation for people to participate.

One of the challenges that arose during the study was the tension between a dependency mindset and empowerment. Participants asked for INGOs to provide financial resources. However, the literature is clear about the negative effects of INGOs giving resources to communities or delivering direct services, for example disturbing local markets and diminishing self-reliance (Frazer 2008; Islam and Morgan 2012; Zanotti, Stephenson, and McGehee 2015). When communities expressed needs and INGO knowledge conflict, relationships between communities and even well-meaning INGOs can easily turn paternalistic, with INGO theoretical and technical knowledge trumping communities' knowledge of cultural priorities and context. This can be

avoided by following Freire's (1970) call for dialogue. Side-by-side communication with participants, counting all perceptions of reality and ways of knowing as valid (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 2011), can transform paternalistic relationships to equal partnerships with the goal of liberation not the goal of conversion (Beske 2014). Such partnership utilizes INGO technical knowledge in facilitating dialogue with communities, not in facilitating resource allocation. This establishes a relational perception of INGO as link to resources and not hierarchical perception as provider of resources.

Pay It Forward Mentoring

While the role as connector is primarily a servant leader (Greenleaf [1970] 2007), the role as mentor is an advocacy leader (Offenheiser, Holcombe, and Hopkins 1999). The change in leadership style ultimately shifts emphasis from a managerial role to a political role and shifts control from the INGO to the community members. The role of the INGO should be to identify community leaders who are making a difference and to offer these leaders the knowledge, skills, and encouragement they need to make their vision reality (Laverack 2006). To be socially sustainable, it is crucial that leadership include the diversity of the Belizean community, including indigenous people and women. If people from oppressed groups are not included, systems of oppression may just change hands rather than be eliminated (Freire 1970).

The mentor role abates critics like Finn and Sarangi (2010) who argue INGOs prescribe a Western model of participation and Brunt and McCourt (2012) that communities may lack solidarity or shared interest. Through authentic relationship, power inequalities and cultural differences fade. In this relational role, the INGO empowers leaders who in turn empower agents of change from within the community (Laverack 2006). A former scholarship recipient explained why she pays it forward as a community volunteer: "*4 the World* was there to help me so I have to continue and give my best for them to feel proud of me." These mentor/mentee relationships become socially sustainable as the mentees progress to mentor the next generation. The effect of the pay it forward mentor model is exponential, reaching generations and generations.

Ownership of Programs

As connectors and mentors, INGOs are not owners of programs. Local ownership improves sustainability of programs (Horwich, Lyon, and Bose 2011; Zanotti, Stephenson, and McGehee 2015). As local individuals, communities, or governments own the programs, the source of evidence—with respect to donor successful project implementation—should shift from NGO staff to local owners and beneficiaries. This shift is not only in line with OECD and USAID program evaluation guidelines; the shift is in line with strategies for increasing evaluation validity with appropriate levels of analysis. If a donor or researcher wants to make generalizations based on program evaluations, the researcher can achieve a larger sample by speaking to the hundreds of beneficiaries rather than the one NGO director. In addition, if one wants to make generalizations at the NGO level, then NGO staff and documents are adequate sources, but if one wants to make generalizations at the community level, then beneficiaries and artifacts produced by beneficiaries must be examined. There is a middle level where the NGO, community leaders, and beneficiaries interact—the program level. If one wants to make generalizations at the program level, then NGO and beneficiaries can be valid sources of information. This means that the source of evidence does not have to shift completely away from NGO staff and documents. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the cost of collecting data from beneficiaries is often higher than collecting data from NGO staff. Dillon (2012) explains how mobile devices may help ease the burden of data collection in remote areas by connecting the researcher and participant virtually rather than face-to-face. According to World Bank (2015) data, there are fifty-one cell phone subscriptions per 100 people in Belize. The data show that the international trend is for this number to increase yearly.

The levels of analysis in this system are semi-independent (Willingham 2012). The semi-independent nature means that each should be studied separately and implications may not apply to other levels. However, if an empirically-based theory for how the levels relate is developed, then we can make predictions based on the data that is the least costly to obtain and use the theory to make predictions. This leads to implications for future research.

Future Research and Conclusions

The findings of this study lead to more questions that need to be addressed in the future. In addition to a theory of how the levels of NGO, program, community, and beneficiary relate, more research needs to be undertaken on *INGO as connector* and *INGO as mentor* to guide evidence-based practice on developing strategic partnerships and local leadership. How INGO implement the roles of connector and mentor can create community capital leading to sustainable, empowered communities or can diminish community capital leading to reliance on INGOs and dependency mindset. More research must be done to prove the INGO dichotomy of apolitical development delivery or political social advocacy as false.

All international development work is political and all communities are interdependent. Freire (1970) said that if you do not help the oppressed, you are helping the oppressor. Feminist Carol Hanisch said in 1969, “The personal is political.” We cannot escape the power systems at the global or community level. These two roles for INGOs recognize the global interdependence at play in the modern economy. The role of connector recognizes the many assets each community possesses and respects the right for people to control their own lives. The role of mentor releases responsibility for maintaining the connections to the community leaders and places the responsibility for sustaining the community capital in the hands of the community leaders as mentors for the next generation.

As my participant said, “Change is slow.” Universal to the human experience is the need for connection, encouragement, and hope for a better tomorrow. INGOs cannot solve all of the problems in the world. INGOs cannot end poverty. INGOs cannot educate all people in the world. But, INGOs can help solve problems, INGOs can help end poverty, and INGOs can help educate the people of the world—one day at a time, one community at a time.

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