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### Partnerships and Mandates: Power Relations Between Donor and Recipient Organizations Promoting Gender Equality in Nicaragua

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Partnerships and Mandates:

Power Relations Between Donor and Recipient Organizations Promoting

Gender Equality in Nicaragua

Honors Thesis

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Oberlin College

### **Abstract**

This research examines the funding practices of international non-governmental organizations supporting grassroots women's groups in Nicaragua. Specifically, it explores the disconnect between the theoretical ideals and organizational practices of foreign donor agencies and the "on the ground" perspectives of grassroots women's organizations regarding the best use of international development resources in promoting women's rights and empowerment in Nicaragua. This thesis investigates why this discrepancy exists and what can be done to reconcile the divide. The suggestions put forth in this work are rooted in the ideas of people in the field, specifically interviews with leaders from both international and local organizations about the relationship between the two kinds of organizations. The thesis is divided into five chapters covering a brief history of Nicaragua, Nicaraguan women's movements, the role of NGOs, key ideas from the interviews, and final conclusions.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Chapter 1: Nicaragua Then and Now

*Chico Perico killed his wife  
He chopped her into pieces and cooked her up  
Everyone who passed by could smell the stench  
But no one wanted her because she was a woman.*

*-Common nursery rhyme in Nicaragua*

The struggle for gender equality is gaining traction in many developing countries around the world including Nicaragua. Colloquialisms can say much about the values of a culture, and if the nursery rhyme above is any indication, the Nicaraguan women's movement still faces many obstacles in its fight. In addition to cultural impediments to the movement's mission, most grassroots women's organizations in Nicaragua struggle with funding their programs and paying their staff. It may seem, on the surface, that any form of financial assistance would be productive in promoting women's rights. However, it is a more complicated matter that requires an exploration of specific questions. To what extent are the theoretical ideals/organizational practices of foreign donor agencies in tune with the "on the ground" perspectives of grassroots women's organizations regarding the best use of international development resources in promoting women's rights in Nicaragua? What are the primary differences between the donors' and recipients' views, why do the differences exist, and what can be done to reconcile the divide? In my preliminary research on women's rights and empowerment in Nicaragua, I discovered a disconnect between donor and recipient interests. Through deeper research, this thesis seeks to explore the challenges underlying these power relations by examining why they occur, their prevalence, and best practices among the donor community.

My junior year at Oberlin I spent a semester traveling throughout Central America, and then spent the following summer working at an economic institute in Managua, Nicaragua where

I researched state development aid mobilization and the strings attached to this capital. I am intrigued with the many players in development funding and how the foreign actors controlling the purse strings also control dimensions of power, policy, and production in the region. The robust women's movement in Nicaragua and its long history of struggle also fascinate me. After conversing with feminist leaders from different sectors of the women's movement, it became clear that this relationship between donor and recipient is an important and under-researched topic. Whereas there is an extensive body of literature on both development theory and the women's movement in Nicaragua, little has been written about their intersection and the impact of these two spheres as they relate to external funding.

Often goals around women's rights are created by external agencies without regard for the specific cultural and historical contexts of the nation to which they are contributing resources. Local women's organizations have their own goals and agendas, and they fully understand the complex cultural challenges (such as structural violence and systemic oppression) that may impede them from reaching their goals. The purpose of my research is to examine the funding practices and ideological framework of international donor agencies working to promote gender equality and access to social, political, and economic benefits for women in Nicaragua. The questions posed by this research and the outcomes will be a valuable lens through which to view the efficacy of development assistance. Does the theory and practice espoused by foreign donor agencies meet the needs of the people? If so, what works best? If not, what is out of sync and why? How can we encourage the partners to be responsive to one another, especially for the donors to adjust in response to feedback from those working in Nicaragua?

## **Why Nicaragua**

### *Historical Overview*

What makes Nicaragua a worthy case study for examining the role of donor agencies in promoting women's empowerment in developing countries? Nicaragua is a unique country within the region because of its revolutionary history. With the exception of Cuba, it is the only country to have a successful leftist revolution. Furthermore, after the revolutionary period of the 1980s, it is the only country in Latin America to have a peaceful democratic transfer of power.

Nicaragua was effectively ruled by a family of dictators, Somoza García and his two sons, Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle, between 1936 until their overthrow in 1979. The Somozas established a military dictatorship, controlling the country through the U.S.-trained and backed National Guard. The majority of the policies instituted under the Somozas benefited large capitalist producers and the dictators themselves (their family became fabulously wealthy off government contracts). At the same time, the majority of Nicaraguans did not have access to basic education, health care services, or education.

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or the FSLN) was formally organized in Nicaragua in 1961. It was named after Augusto César Sandino, a Nicaraguan guerrilla leader who fought against US imperialism in the 1930s. During the 1960s and 1970s, the FSLN, or the Sandinistas as they were called, grew in power, and by the late 1970s they had launched a full-scale campaign against Somoza. The Sandinistas wanted to create a mixed economy, reorganize health care and education, and institute major agrarian reform. On July 7, 1979 the Sandinistas, with allies in all classes and sectors of the country, overthrew one of the most brutal dictators in Latin America. A period of reorganization commenced, and the 1980s was a period of both great hope and turmoil as a new struggle, the Contra war, began. Contra forces, with funds from the United States, staged a guerrilla war with the goal of toppling the newly formed Sandinista government. The forces were comprised of

former National Guard soldiers, disgruntled peasant farmers who were not positively affected by Sandinista policies, and others who wanted to see a return to the old order.

### *Nicaragua's Powerful Women's Movement*

In Nicaragua, as in Mexico and El Salvador, guerrilla struggle and feminism have been linked. The Nicaraguan autonomous feminist movement is the most prominent one in Central America and one of the most significant in Latin America as a whole. Feminism in Nicaragua during the nineties started to cross borders in significant ways. For example, Nicaraguan feminists were instrumental in organizing the first Central American feminist gathering in 1992 in Nicaragua and the first Latin American feminist gathering to meet in Central America in 1993 in El Salvador. They also helped found the five-country Central American Feminist Current (La Corriente Feminista Centroamericana) in 1995, which has its headquarters in Managua (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 66). This feminist movement is now influential well beyond Nicaragua's borders, with Nicaraguan activists leading conferences internationally and building networks through online forums and "ciberfeminismo." Thus, the role of foreign donors in supporting grassroots struggle in Nicaragua is not only significant within the country, but could have important implications for other nations as well.

Nicaragua also is unique because of the contradictions between its public image as progressive in the fight for women's rights and the realities seen on the ground. The country boasts some of the best legal protections for women in the region, with Law 779 outlining protections for women against domestic violence and quotas decreeing that 50 percent of all party and government positions must go to women (although World Bank (2014) statistics indicate that only 42 percent do). According to a 2012 poll, the female Chief of Police, Aminta Granera, is the most popular public figure in Nicaragua, with the First Lady, Rosario Murillo, in



second place. In fact, the power of the Nicaraguan First Lady is on par with Hillary Clinton's influence during her husband's presidency in the United States.

There are certainly powerful women in Nicaragua, but when it comes to average Nicaraguans, most women find themselves limited by cultural constraints. Nicaragua has the second highest rate of domestic violence in Latin America (after Guatemala), with one in three women reporting physical abuse, according to *Casa Alianza*, a safe house for street children and child prostitutes. According to a study published in 2000 in *Social Sciences and Medicine*, over 50 percent of married women in Leon, a city in the north, have experienced sexual, emotional or physical abuse. Of those women, 80 percent did not seek help, citing shame or fear of societal reprisal as the main reasons behind their silence (Klibanoff, 2013).

The women's movement in Nicaragua is striving to address the systematic oppression of women and originated from a specific socio-political moment: the Sandinista Revolution (Jubb, 2014). Most feminist organizations within the country were founded on Sandinista ideals, but critique the current government for its view of women's rights through a traditional Christian family value framework. Nicaragua has some of the strictest laws on paper against violence toward women, although their recent focus on mediation rather than punishment and support has decreased their effectiveness in curbing violence. While the laws paint the country as relatively progressive in the fight for women's rights, Nicaragua's rising rates of femicide, highest rate of teen pregnancy in Central America, and ban on therapeutic abortion tell another story. The country is an up and coming developing nation. As foreign investment increases in the nation and the government forges new alliances within both the Central American Free Trade Association including the Dominican Republic (CAFTA-DR) and the Bolivarian Alliance for the

Peoples of Our America (ALBA), it is important to critically assess the role of international aid in promoting or limiting the status of women.

### **Women's Movement History**

#### *Pre-Sandinista Revolution (1970s)*

In order to understand the general structure of the women's movement in Nicaragua, it is important to examine the history of the country. Although some would argue that the women's movement really began under the Somoza regime with the Ala Femenina, (the main women's group supporting Somoza) and La Nicolasa (a powerful lower-class female leader who instilled fear in her enemies) (Gonzalez, 2001), there are reasons to begin the discussion of the Nicaraguan women's movement with the Sandinista struggle. Many women who went on to be well-known activists in the fight for women's rights became politically conscious during this guerrilla movement.

Many Nicaraguan women participated in the struggle against the Somozas. When husbands and fathers left to fight, women became the heads of households, moving to cities to find work, as is the case in many nations during times of war. This disruption of traditional family life and massive entrance of women into the workforce started women on a path to community participation (Gonzalez & Kampwirth, 2001, p. 85).

Women also joined the guerrilla struggle in both combat and supporting roles, often motivated by maternalism (Gonzalez & Kampwirth, 2001, p. 95). They did not join the movement with the goal of revolutionizing gender relations. However, according to Karen Kampwirth, revolutions inadvertently can leave feminist legacies for three reasons: ideological changes, skills acquisition, and preexisting networks (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 5). Often women were treated more equally during their time as guerillas. When the revolutionary period began

after the Somozas were overthrown, many women were taken aback when male colleagues expected them to return to “normal” gender inequality. Kampwirth writes that it was “not that gender inequality was any worse than it had been, but rather that the women who had been mobilized into new ways of thinking and acting were no longer as willing to accept such inequalities as natural” (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 5).

Skills acquisition was a key component to the creation of the women’s movement. During the guerrilla struggle, women were given real responsibility and acquired important organizing skills. After the struggle, many women felt like they now had the skills and agency to create change (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 6). Preexisting networks also were critical for a powerful women’s movement to form. The feminist activists that emerged out of the Sandinista struggle had participated in or knew people in human rights organizations (both locally and internationally), radical student groups, Catholic groups influenced by Liberation theology, neighborhood defense organizations, and labor unions. These groups were used to disseminate their message and rally for the cause.

The women most likely to become feminist organizers were mid-prestige women who, like their high-prestige counterparts, had gained political consciousness and organizing skills, but, like their low-prestige counterparts, had significant grievances. They generally experienced more sexism as guerillas since they did not have the status that could buffer them from more extreme forms of sexism. After the overthrow, they had few opportunities in the new Sandinista Nicaragua since they were not asked to work in the government. This was a potent combination of past experience, lack of new opportunities, and a demand for equality (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 12).

The international context for the movement is also an important factor in its creation,

although not as critical as many would believe. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the developed world was witnessing a growing feminist movement. However, unlike the more liberal feminism of the Global North, Central American feminism was more concerned with class and less concerned with linguistics. These types of feminism were “cousins, not mothers and daughters” (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 7). This is an important distinction since many foreign donors contributing money to local women’s rights groups are coming from a “Northern” understanding of feminism, and may think that Nicaragua needs to emulate their struggle.

### *The Sandinista Revolution (1980s)*

From as early as the decade before the overthrow of the Somozas, the FSLN promised that the emancipation of women would be one of the goals of the revolution. In the early years of the revolutionary period of the 1980s, the Sandinistas accomplished legal reform, expanded access to education, nationalized health care, and created state services such as day care centers that opened new opportunities for women (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 21).

The new Sandinista government created laws designed to jointly improve women’s lives and fulfill other Sandinista objectives. New programs such as social security made people in common-law marriages eligible for benefits and the “Law of the Means of Communication” prohibited the use of women as sex objects in advertising; both served to benefit women and limit class discrimination and “capitalist excess” (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 22).

Other laws specifically targeted women, such as the Statute of Rights and Guarantees of August 1979, which declared the “absolute equality of rights and responsibilities between men and women.” This statute banned differential privileges based on a child’s legitimacy and included the right to investigate paternity. The 1982 Nurturing Law, approved by the Council of State, included mechanisms to put ideals of gender equality into practice. This law was

extremely progressive for its time, introducing equal pay for equal work, state pensions, and the right of nursing mothers to take an hour off work every day to breastfeed. It also included the scandalous requirement that all household members (including men) participate in housework and childcare. Due to this provision, the governing Junta refused to ratify the law, effectively ending the first period of gender-related laws (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 23).

Between 1982-1986, as the Contra War was heating up, women involved in labor unions and other economically organized groups were increasingly insistent that the war against the Contra forces could never be won without gender equality. As more and more women entered the workforce (in 1987, there were twice as many women in the workforce as before war—384,466 women as compared to 181,900 women seven years earlier), increasing the productivity of female workers became a national priority. The Association of Rural Workers (ATC) conducted intensive research to identify the root cause of why women were, overall, less productive than men. They concluded that the double workday of women—their paid job and then unpaid work in the homes—was leading them to be less productive (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 31).

At the same time as women were demanding more rights within labor unions, the women of AMNLAE, the women's organization affiliated with the Sandinista party, accepted an increasingly subversive role within the FSLN on the grounds that the war could not be won without softening demands for gender equality in the short-term (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 30). By the close of the revolution from 1987-1990, a growing independent feminism that explicitly rejected links to parties and unions was taking root. The Sandinista project ended in defeat when the transition to electoral/liberal democratic politics resulted in a new era of conservative governments. However, the FSLN as a party remained active within this new political landscape.

Today, President Daniel Ortega, an FSLN military leader and former president during the Sandinista Revolutionary period, again rules the country.

*Post-Sandinista Revolution (1990s-Present)*

During the 1990s, under a series of neoliberal governments, public policies reinforced family relations based on an older, more hierarchical model than under the FSLN. Violeta Chamorro, the female president elected in the 1990 election, embodied this value system based on marianismo.<sup>1</sup> Doña Violeta was seen as an exemplary wife, widow, and mother; she exemplified family values. Her government employed anti-feminist strategies to take down the Sandinista machine of the past. In response to these policies, an autonomous women's movement emerged forcefully after 1990. Women had a clear challenge around which to organize (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 48).

Many institutional changes took place during the Chamorro administration. At the beginning of her term, the Sandinista Nicaraguan Social Security and Social Welfare Institute (Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar, or INSSBI) continued to exist with the same goals as under the FSLN: popular education; participatory research; and communal solutions for social programs. However, many policy changes under Chamorro affected services offered for women through the INSSBI, and eventually all social welfare activities were eliminated in 1995 when the administration took a sharp turn toward neoliberalism. Day care centers closed, support services for battered women ended, marriage counseling was suspended, and workshops to prevent domestic violence were eliminated in 1991. As women still went to the INSSBI office to seek assistance, the government workers started sending them to autonomous

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<sup>1</sup> "Marianismo" is an aspect of the female gender role in machista cultures. It is the veneration for feminine virtues like purity and moral strength based off of a concept of the Virgin Mary as the ideal woman.

women's organizations when there was no government funding to provide assistance (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 49).

During the 1990s, three branches of the women's movement began to solidify: AMNLAE, the women's organization tied to the Sandinista Part; women's secretariats attached to labor unions and professional associations; and autonomous feminist organizations (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 54). With the Sandinistas' electoral loss, many women felt that they could finally break free of the political ties that constrained them and start promoting their own agendas. Ultimately, during the Festival of the Fifty-Two Percent on the weekend of March 8, 1991, there was a public break between AMNLAE and the other branches (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 57).

Women were hit particularly hard by the transformation of the economy during the neoliberal austerity measures instituted by Chamorro, which put unions and professional associations at a disadvantage. Companies preferred to hire and keep on men because they would not have to pay for maternity leave, give breaks to nursing mothers, or worry that their employee would take off work to care for a sick family member. In such an aggressive environment, it was much more difficult for unions to demand rights for women (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 56). Therefore, the autonomous feminist movement became the leading voice of change.

The autonomous women's movement had to first decide what "autonomy" meant. After a tense period, these women decided to create a series of networks to work on different issues (sexuality, economics, environmentalism, etc.). The National Feminist Committee would be a connecting unit, and all groups that joined these networks had to support a set of demands as part of a feminist agenda. These demands included curtailing violence (domestic or otherwise), supporting gay rights, and promoting choice, or the right to choose safe abortion and

contraception. Twenty-five organizations were willing to sign on to these demands, which was significant as the political climate was hostile (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 65). Even though this structure did not endure, the individuals and organizations that participated continued to play a role in the struggle for women's rights.

These participants were instrumental in organizing the first Central American feminist gathering in 1992 in Nicaragua and the first Latin American feminist gathering to meet in Central America in 1993 in El Salvador. They also helped found the five-country Central American Feminist Current (La Corriente Feminista Centroamericana) in 1995 (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 66). This period marked the beginning of coalition building across partisan and class lines with the development of the National Women's Coalition founded in 1995 and Women's and Children's Police Stations in 1993. According to Fitzsimmons, "Nicaragua currently boasts a higher percentage of women's police officers, more women officers in the highest ranks, the most institutionalized system of women's police stations, and the most extensive police training on gendered crimes in Central America" (as cited in Kampwirth, 2004, p. 68).

In recent years, under the Sandinista President, Daniel Ortega, the government has sanctioned aggressive behavior toward feminist organizations. False accusations have been levied against feminist organizations like the Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM), which was accused by the government of 'triangulating funds.' Intimidation tactics, physical attacks, vandalism and threatening phone calls carried out by national and local-level party leaders and faithfuls have been used against feminist leaders and organizations (Jubb, 2014, p. 298). Daniel Ortega, himself, was accused of sexually abusing his step-daughter, Zoilamérica, although he was never convicted. Because of this hostile environment, there has been an outpouring of international support for feminist organizations in Nicaragua (Jubb, 2014, p. 298).



## **Methodology**

In order to better understand these realities and the funding practices and ideological framework of international donor agencies working in Nicaragua, I conducted interviews with leaders of grassroots women's organizations and networks as well as international nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations. I will be interpreting Nicaraguan women's experiences based on the information I gleaned from these interviews with individuals that work for established women's grassroots organizations--a select group of people who may not share the viewpoints of other Nicaraguan women. The majority, though not all, of my interviews took place in Managua, which narrows the scope of my research, and leads me to be cautious regarding generalizations. These interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish depending on the preference of the participant. I conducted fifteen formal interviews in all, five with representatives from international nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, six with representatives from Nicaraguan grassroots organizations and networks, and four with other activists or academics studying women's rights.

In selecting which organizations to interview, I used the snowballing method in which, after interviewing a leader of an international NGO or grassroots organization, I would ask for suggestions of other women to include in my study. This allowed me to build my sample of major participants in the women's movement as identified by the feminist activists themselves.

Each interview was semi-structured with twelve pre-determined questions tailored to foreign NGOs as well as a modified set of interview questions for women's grassroots organizations. The similarity of the questions allowed for analysis of patterns among responses. However, if the interviewee was particularly interested in discussing one aspect of their work or relations with foreign aid agencies, the interview would go in that direction and other questions

would be omitted. These interviews helped to reveal what these organizations wanted and needed from foreign donor NGOs, and if they perceived these relationships were functioning well.

Another significant portion of my research builds on the work of other academics and activists. I read scholarship from both foreign and Nicaraguan authors and draw on statistics collected by international bodies such as the United Nations and studies conducted by local economists and researchers. This body of literature helps situate my interviews into a larger academic context and demonstrate the broader importance of the issue. The thesis will be structured from a historical and comparative perspective, detailing the historical context of women's rights and empowerment organizations in Nicaragua as well as that of international NGOs. The interviews will allow for a comparative analysis of the power relations between international and local NGOs.

### *Positionality*

As a researcher, I believe that it is important not to contribute to the systems I am critiquing. I do not wish to suggest Western experience is more advanced than the ideas and knowledge of Nicaraguans. This is why my primary research was conducted in Nicaragua through interviews with grassroots women's rights organizations and Nicaraguan intellectuals, to give voice to the people whose experiences I seek to interpret. In order to be as objective as possible, while recognizing that bias is a naturally occurring human characteristic, others recommended these interviewees and I did not have a relationship with any of them before the interviews. My advisor and the Institutional Review Board also vetted the questions I asked participants (located in the appendix) in order to ensure fairness and transparency.

However, I cannot claim to be completely objective in this research. As a white college student from the United States, I have been raised in a specific cultural context that shapes my view on women's rights. The goal of my research is, on some level, to explore and unpack these views in order to be more open and receptive to the needs, as articulated by grassroots women's groups, of women in Nicaragua. By conducting interviews with individuals that represent many different viewpoints, I hope to accurately portray a variety of Nicaraguan women's perspectives.

I came into these interviews with a privileged position, which I sought to use in order to provide a platform to bring out women's voices that are routinely silenced in order to look critically at the role of international NGOs. Many of the women I spoke with addressed this advantage and spoke to the importance of exploring the power structures between grassroots and international NGOs. In the words of a follow-up e-mail from Felicita Lainez, "when it comes to these things little or nothing is thought about or discussed. I hope your research arrives in the hands of those that you talk about so that they can think to be more democratic and so that they understand us as partners."

I recognize that "women" is an extremely large and diverse group. The following chapter will explore the many intricacies and cleavages within the construct of the "Nicaraguan women's movement." I have tried to interview women's organizations that work from a variety of perspectives on a wide range of issues that affect women in different ways. I recognize that women can be oppressed or empowered on many levels. This research does not specifically focus on the intersectionality between class, race, religion, and sexual orientation since that would entail a much larger project, but it is important to note that these are important components of oppression.

## **Thesis Outline**

The following chapters will discuss the women's movement in more depth and explore findings from interviews of women's rights leaders in Nicaragua. In the second chapter, I will explore the intricacies of the current women's movement in Nicaragua. The women's movement is diverse and complicated, and this chapter will assess its various cleavages and the frames from which they work.

The third chapter will describe the NGO model and the differing opinions on its effectiveness in providing development aid, taking into consideration feminist, economic, and political perspectives. It will also outline a brief history of this model. This chapter will set the stage for the analysis in chapters four and five of the role of foreign donor agencies in supporting women in Nicaragua.

Chapters four and five will present the findings of interviews conducted in Managua, Nicaragua. These chapters will answer the original research questions: To what extent are the theoretical ideals/organizational practices of foreign donor agencies in tune with the "on the ground" perspectives of grassroots women's organizations regarding the best use of international development resources in promoting women's rights in Nicaragua? What are the primary differences between the donors' and recipients' views, why do the differences exist, and what can be done to reconcile the divide?

The final chapter discusses four main conclusions and further questions to explore. Although this study is specifically focused on Nicaragua, the results of the research can provide important information for development work in other developing nations. This thesis will look at one specific issue—women's access to social, political, and economic benefits in Nicaragua—and attempt to reveal the complex factors that influence both the donor side and the recipient side of international aid aimed at gender equity. The goal of this research is to illuminate best

practices in providing meaningful and sustainable assistance, through local empowerment, structural change, and mechanisms for enduring social justice.

## Chapter 2: Nicaraguan Women's Movements

The current model of society imposed by those with power in Nicaragua has generated profound inequalities. These inequalities are exacerbated when looking at the conditions of women. Women are increasingly exploited in paid and non-paid labor; maternal mortality rates are rising; violence against women is becoming more common and cruel; women are increasingly pushed to the margins of extreme poverty as they, in a great number of cases, are the only ones responsible for sustaining themselves and their families; and the exclusion of women from decision-making processes at all levels creates a vicious cycle of stagnation (Envío Team, 2002).

Women's groups continue to fight for rights and empowerment in Nicaragua despite this hostile climate and the overwhelming challenges. Nevertheless, these groups' efforts are not always coordinated and united. Referring to the actions of women's groups as one movement is simpler and more accessible for outsiders and often strategically advantageous for insiders. However, it is important to carefully examine this concept. Organizations focused on women's empowerment, rights, and social services are incredibly diverse. Each group views its own priorities, ideas, and strategies as the most comprehensive and reflective of truth (Heumann, 2014, p. 345). Believe it or not, women do not form a natural, unitary interest group.

While the movement is multifaceted, many grassroots women's organizations play off of this idea that they are united in order to gain recognition and funding from international players. In fact, defining what the ideals should be for all women in Nicaragua is a goal in and of itself for many organizations. In a shifting middle ground space, defined by Conklin and Graham (1995) as "a political space, an arena of intercultural communication, exchange, and joint

political action,” there are serious implications for defining the women’s rights agenda in the country (Conklin & Graham, 1995, p. 696).

Social networks and nongovernmental organizations generally engage in social action that is grounded in a core set of values. Because of different beliefs and socioeconomic conditions, women’s groups work from distinct frameworks. Some women’s groups, often those in rural areas, engage in social action because of their conservative, feminine values. These groups often rally against poverty and see the mother’s fight for economic empowerment as fulfilling her traditional caregiving role by attempting to support her family, whereas feminist women’s groups hope to dismantle the idea that there is only one role for women. Feminist groups generally focus on abortion rights and/or sexual rights. Even groups that identify as feminist disagree over the right focus of the movement and correct ideological framework.

Many, though not all, of the organizations that identify with feminism are a part of the Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM), which requires its members to work toward certain feminist goals such as the right to choose an abortion and LGBTQ rights. The MAM utilizes the “rights-based approach” to structure its political claims, detailed in this chapter. Many researchers in the field identify grassroots women’s rights work as either in line with the MAM or part of the wider movement, which encompasses feminine organizations as well.

### **Law 779**

Before delving into the cleavages within the “movement,” it is important to understand the latest milestone and challenge for many women’s groups in Nicaragua and the history that led to its creation. Violence against women is a concern for most groups and activists fighting for women’s well-being. While this chapter explores the diversity of the women’s movement, Law 779, the “Comprehensive Law against Violence toward Women,” seeks to simplify and diminish

the complex cultural, historical and socio-economic oppressions Nicaraguan women face and the variety of concerns they hold.

Law 779 was passed unanimously by the National Assembly in June of 2012. It appeared revolutionary in its progressive scope, providing the FSLN government an excellent showcase law. The first article reads

The object of this law is to act against the violence exercised against women with the purpose of protecting women's human rights and guaranteeing them a life free of violence that favors their development and wellbeing in accordance with the principles of equality and nondiscrimination; and establish comprehensive protection measures to prevent, punish, and eradicate violence and provide assistance to women victims of violence, promoting changes in the sociocultural and patriarchal patterns that underpin the relations of power (as cited in Solís, 2013, p. 6).

However, only one year and three months after it was enacted, the law was reformed unanimously to include many changes, the most significant being voluntary mediation, a condition many activists claim endangers women.

Why the change, and why does it matter for women in Nicaragua? To begin, it is important to contextualize this law within the broader thirty-year history of the women's movement. The demand for a law like this emerged early during the revolutionary period of the 1980s (Solís, 2013, p. 1). Article 36 was the government's concession, which states "[A]ll individuals have the right to respect for their physical, psychic, and moral integrity. No one shall be subjected to tortures, procedures, punishments, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments" (as cited in Solís, 2013, p. 3). This article was the concrete and immediate result of a push from



women in open forums held by the government, although it does not specifically address violence against women.

In order to focus the national conversation on violence based on gender, the Network of Women Against Violence organized a national network of petition centers in 1994 to demand that Nicaragua ratify the Organization of American States (OAS)-sponsored Belem do Para Convention, which “proclaimed that states in the Americas were obliged to prevent, punish, and eradicate all forms of violence against women” (Delgado, 2003). They won their fight, and the penal code was revised in 1996. The new laws fell short because they did not address violence committed by ex-partners or include punishment for economic violence in which men prevented women from working or studying or appropriated the woman’s salary or belongings (Solís, 2013, p. 5).

In 2010, the María Elena Cuadra Movement of Women’s Workers, a respected organization fighting for female workers’ rights, along with a number of other organizations, presented a bill to the National Assembly that would eventually lead to Law 779. The Supreme Court sent its own law addressing violence against women to the Assembly, and in 2012 a law that was altered to incorporate the best parts of both bills was passed. However, the Assembly soon forced a revision of the law because of pressure from many important political players. The most important of these actors was the Catholic Church hierarchy, who argued that Law 779 was an attack on the family and religious values. This revision added the option of voluntary mediation, which gave women the opportunity to meet with a neutral third-party and the perpetrator of violence in order to resolve their “dispute” without taking legal action. This clause was added in order to “safeguard family unity” and put the power of regulating the law directly

into the President's hands. President Ortega then created FSLN Family Cabinets to mediate these cases (Solís, 2013, p. 8).

Women's rights groups were dismayed by the change since they had fought to ban mediation from the original law under the premise that the power dynamics between victim and perpetrator made mediation impracticable. In order to play an adequate role in any mediation process, the woman would need to be in a situation of empowerment, but this has not been the case in the mediation experiences of Nicaraguan women. Thirty percent of femicides committed in the country in 2012 followed initial mediation between the murdered and his victim. It also "privatizes justice" by placing the responsibility of resolving problems that should be assumed by the state on the woman even though all other violence cases are clearly in the realm of state action (Solis, 2013, p. 11).

Furthermore, judges and prosecuting attorneys are not adequately trained in mediation that focuses on the protection of rights for both parties. While mediation is voluntary, there is ample evidence that the police at Special Police Stations for Women are encouraging women to use mediation through pressure from the President and his "pro-family" stance. Women also might be pressured by their abusers to mediate. While awareness around violence against women has certainly advanced in Nicaragua, investigations show that one in every three Nicaraguans with a spouse have experienced physical, psychological, or sexual violence and the viciousness of the murder of women has been increasing in recent years (Solis, 2013, p. 17).

On top of mediation, last year on July 31<sup>st</sup>, Ortega used a Presidential decree to change the regulation of Law 779, which fundamentally altered the law itself. Legally, the regulatory procedures to carry out a law cannot fundamentally alter the law. Women's groups are outraged at this illegal move that substantially modified the law even though the Vice President of the

Supreme Court in Nicaragua affirmed that the regulation complied with the Belem do Pará Convention to prevent, sanction, and eradicate violence against women in Latin America. The new *Reglamento*, changes the law in many ways including the scope of femicide from something that can occur in both the public and private spheres to solely an act that can be committed in the private sphere by a partner. It also establishes “Family Counseling” structures, which are meant to facilitate discussion between involved parties in order to find “compromises and plans for family growth, based in communication, respect, mutual support, and love”<sup>2</sup> (Banco Central de Nicaragua, 2014, pp. 6263-6264).

The Autonomous Women’s Movement published a statement against this change on August 14<sup>th</sup>, which read, "Ortega, through the National Assembly, changed the purpose of the law, reformed the crime of femicide, reduced the scope of the crime, gave functions to structures that are not legally valid ... which puts the life and integrity of women at greater risk”<sup>3</sup> (Envío Team, 2014). The statement goes on to attack the Ortega system which they see as instituting a Napoleonic-style Code whereby women’s lives are controlled by the father, brother, husband, or, in this case, the authoritarian state.

### **Rural vs. urban cleavage**

The women most negatively affected by the addition of voluntary mediation and the new regulation measures for Law 779 are those living in rural areas, who generally face much harder conditions. They are often in more extreme levels of poverty, face higher levels of domestic abuse, are more isolated physically, and have fewer options for rising out of oppressive situations.

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<sup>2</sup> Translation is my own

<sup>3</sup> Translation is my own

For these reasons, campesinas', or female peasant farmers', access to land titles is a priority. Since these women do not generally earn a salary, without land titles they have no personal assets. If they need to escape an abusive or oppressive relationship, they have few options if they have no property to their name. These land titles not only act as a safety net, but also can be one step in a process of empowerment. Surveys conducted as part of a psychological study in rural Nicaragua reveal that land ownership and organizational participation among women correlate to more progressive gender ideology, and in turn, women's power and control within marital relationship, individual levels of agency, and subjective well-being (Grabe, 2011, p. 233).

However, land titles alone are not enough. While resources may provide the material conditions through which inequalities are produced, cultural ideology plays a critical role in how they are sustained. For this reason, empowering women requires a contextualized understanding of power in different dimension, and land titles for women may act as a catalyst to empowerment rather than the final objective (Grabe, 2011, p. 243). This may serve as a stepping-stone toward a deeper ideological change in women's self-image, which is an important shift since, according to research, "ideology is as important as income in household bargaining" (Bradshaw, 2013, p. 92).

Even though women living in rural areas generally present more need, much of the funding from international NGOs goes toward established women's organizations based in the capital. These organizations are more connected to international networks since they have access to the language and resources to foster these connections.

According to Bradshaw (2013), being "urban" contributes to different ideologies, both for men and women. Women living in urban environments also have more opportunities for economic autonomy and generally see paid work as bringing independence from men and

opportunity for self-development (Bradshaw, 2013, p. 92). There are more legal, health, and support networks and resources in urban areas. Women in cities also have access to more and better education, which can foster a change in ideology and lead to better opportunities.

### **Competing Frameworks in the Women's Movement**

Silke Heumann, a respected researcher who examines the relationship between gender and development, identified three main frameworks for analyzing the dimensions of the women's movement in Nicaragua based on in-depth interviews with women's rights activists. These include a dominant poverty framework that many organizations endorse which emphasizes women as victims of economic and social marginalization, a less prevalent autonomy frame that emphasizes women's rights to abortions and the least influential personal-political frame that is endorsed by sexual rights activists (Heumann, 2014).

#### *Poverty Framework*

The dominant poverty framework has emerged out of a legacy of Sandinismo.<sup>4</sup> Women's rights advocates and women's groups within this ideological base work from a Sandinista-specific discourse on social justice and social change. These ideas are rooted in a primary class-based identity, a hierarchy of rights that comes with that identity, and a notion that the state is a privileged site of power and social change (Heumann, 2014, p. 334). This discourse derives from the Sandinista understanding of the "poor," regarding women's oppression as part of the general problems of economic and social marginalization. Women are seen as a particularly vulnerable group among the poor population, which is oppressed by economic systems.

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<sup>4</sup> Sandinismo has strong and pervasive roots in Nicaragua. This ideology, named after the great war hero, Augusto César Sandino, combines anti-imperialism with the idea that the poor, specifically rural population is powerful and deserves access to high quality education and health services.

The poverty framework emphasizes the need for protectionist state policies that would create economic opportunities for women. Oppression is also defined as a problem rooted in the machista culture and connected to the lack of education and socio-economic inequality in both urban and rural areas (Heumann, 2014, p. 335). Within this discourse, women's lack of sexual and reproductive autonomy is seen as a health issue based in the common assumption that women are victims. Abortion is considered legitimate in so far as the woman's story aligns with the dominant narrative of male violence. Rather than focusing on the right to abortion, they stress the prevention of abortion. This needs-based approach generally sees sexual preference as a private issue instead of an object of political struggle. While most groups that fall under this needs-based umbrella are not hostile to homosexuality, by defining sexual orientation as something private and optional rather than political and collective, this thinking creates a clear value hierarchy where LGBTQ rights are subordinate to other objectives.

State-run agencies operate within this framework, as it does not challenge the established patriarchal system. Organizations are charged with looking after and providing for women in poverty alleviation programs such as conditional cash transfers. Many studies have shown that these programs do not lead to social empowerment and may even strip women of some of their autonomy and decision-making power as they dictate what is right for these women's children and how to use their time (Bradshaw & Viquez, 2008, p. 841).

Some organizations that adhere to this poverty-based ideology believe that there is a distinction between "legitimate" demands for women's rights and feminist demands. According to groups like AMNLAE, the women's branch of the FSLN, "it's a reality that feminist movements only exist in capitalist countries, countries without a revolution" (as quoted in Heumann, 2014, p. 338). There are many studies that conclude self-identified feminists represent

a minority within the women's movement and that most Nicaraguans are not supportive of abortion and sexual rights (Bradshaw et. al., 2008; Castillo & Wilson, 2007; Heumann, 2014). These openly "feminist" organizations are also more common in urban areas. Feminism is seen by many as the lone territory and/or luxury of middle class Managuan woman. Many rural women feel uncomfortable with the word, thinking that being a feminist entails either being a lesbian or morally loose, and they do not want to be associated as either in their community (Ana Marcela and Aynn Setright interviews).

#### *Autonomy Framework*

A less prevalent autonomy frame within Nicaragua endorsed by self identified feminists and abortion rights activists identifies women's oppression as a byproduct of a patriarchal system. For these activists, the right to say no to sex and have access to safe and legal abortions are symbolic of women's self-determination and autonomy and unequivocally linked to their emancipation (Heumann, 2014, p. 335). The majority of these activists strongly-identify as feminists and focus on the gendered aspect of women's oppression. The public expression of absolute support for abortion is the dividing line between this frame and the rest of the women's movement (Heumann, 2014, p. 340).

Among these feminist activists, the dominant view around sexual rights, especially sexual orientation, is that it is a matter of principle for feminists, but not a priority. The struggle for sexual rights is framed as much narrower than the feminism that this framework endorses. In the same way that Sandinista rhetoric frame the women's movement within a larger quest for social justice, these self-identified feminists portray the feminist movement as "an open space concerned with overall social justice and social change, as opposed to their framing of sexual

rights activists, who were cast as only looking after their own interests” (Heumann, 2014, p. 341).

### *Personal-is-Political Framework*

The least influential framework is a personal-is-political frame, which is endorsed by feminist sexual rights activists. These activists are often also abortion rights activists, but emphasize the need to work on abortion from a more bottom-up and personal perspective. The personal and emotional are seen as crucial arenas of power and therefore important in the quest for social transformation. They point out that both men and women are oppressed by heteronormative standards, and resent the idea that their struggle is narrow or not political. Within this camp, both gender and sexuality become ways to conceptualize oppression and inequalities that are connected to issues of social justice. They believe that changes in legal and institutional frameworks can only lead to effective change if accompanied by transformation of the personal, private, and intimate spheres—a transformation that they argue will benefit everyone, not just the queer community (Heumann, 2014, pp. 342-343).

### **Rights-Based Approach**

Within these competing frameworks, organizations choose to use different political strategies to make demands. One such strategy is the ‘rights-based approach’ (Bradshaw, 2006; Miller et al., 2005). This thematic umbrella has encompassed some of the most effective organizing over the past 25 years. Organizations that focus on fighting violence against women and for sexual and reproductive rights often use a rights-based approach (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1329). There are different interpretations of this approach. Some say that this method alone, which rallies around women’s rights, may not necessarily question unequal power relations and



promote empowerment. Others believe that this focus puts power relations explicitly at the center of analysis (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1330).

The MAM has made use of the rights-based approach for years. For example, in 2004, when therapeutic abortion was initially under threat, the MAM wrote press releases stating that in countermanding therapeutic abortion, the Nicaraguan government would become “violator of rights” and asking “where are women’s and children’s rights in this country?” (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1332). Today the MAM still uses the rhetoric of rights as can be seen in their slogan, “Exigí todos tus derechos” (“I demanded all of your rights”) (<http://www.movimientoautonomodemujeres.org/>).

However, the rights-based approach is not a label the movement itself would use to describe its work. MAM representatives explained this language of rights through reference to a changing national context and shifts in individuals rather than a particular common agenda (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1332). Puntos de Encuentro, another well-respected feminist network in Nicaragua, also utilizes a rights-based approach. However, they too, did not describe this language as a conceptual entry point for the organization’s work (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1336). This is important because it demonstrates that these organizations are cognizant of the value of homegrown thoughts and actions. They are wary of transforming their approach based on foreign suggestions.

The critics of the rights-based approach believe it reflects the institutionalization and professionalization of the women’s movements. In their eyes, the NGOization of the women’s movement has led to depolitization and weaker claims (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1330). They view the rights-based approach as a foreign political strategy that detracts from the indigenous empowerment work in Nicaragua. Others believe that both rights and empowerment need to be

addressed explicitly, as they are not synonymous, but rather complementary concepts (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1337). According to one feminist thinker, rights should be seen as the "lowest rung on the empowerment ladder" (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1338).

The organizations that utilize this language of rights do not see it as a way to "domesticate international rights," but rather a way to "make up for the shortcomings of non-compliance with rights in daily life by evoking a set of (other) rights" (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1334). The rights-based approach can also add legitimacy to women's claims and help these groups secure financing (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1335). The rights-based approach uses a language that international players recognize and can understand. It is direct and accessible, unlike some of the feminist discourse other groups choose to utilize. It is also political and punchy unlike the more basic claims of many groups operating outside of Managua, which are less part of an articulated program and more based on perceived local need, focusing on local actors rather than the national government (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 1334). However, does that mean it is the right language for every organization? Does it resonate with the women represented by these groups? These points are key in my research as they relate to the nuances of how grassroots organizations work with international NGOs.

My study is focused on understanding the power dynamics between international NGOs and grassroots women's organizations in Nicaragua. These questions of goals and language are important to understand in conjunction with the development of an international women's rights movement and growing system of international nongovernmental organizations providing funding to grassroots organizations. The next chapter examines international development work through multiple lenses. It describes a brief history of the global NGO movement, different types of NGOs, critiques of development aid, and the gendered burden of development.

### Chapter 3: International NGOs

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are not a new concept. The first international NGOs (INGOs) were founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the Anti-Slavery Society (1839) and the International Red Cross (1864). The number of NGOs in the world dramatically increased in the 1980s and 1990s with the advent of structural adjustment programs in developing nations, and by 2000, it was estimated that NGOs dispersed between twelve and fifteen billion dollars per year (Edwards & Fowler, 2002). By 2010, in some parts of the world, the NGO sector had become more powerful than the state itself (Bernal & Grewal, 2014). These organizations are now well-established players in the aid arena.

This research specifically examines the funding practices and ideological frameworks of INGOs working to promote women's rights and access to benefits in Nicaragua. In order to understand these practices and frameworks, their work must be contextualized within the broader lens of development theory. This chapter will focus on the history and current structure of the development NGO model, while taking into consideration feminist, economic, and political perspectives.

#### **Relevant Theories**

'Development theory' emerged in the late 1950s to address how colonial and ex-colonial states could achieve national economic growth in a changing international environment (Leys, 1996, p. 7). The original goal of development was economic growth. The agent of managing and achieving this growth was assumed to be the state, and the means of development were macro-economic policy instruments. These assumptions were enshrined into practice as development theory evolved. However, development theorists such as Colin Leys expound that the assumptions upon which development theory has rested since the 1950s no longer hold true. He,

along with many other modern development theorists, believes that leaders must look at a broader, more historical, and more explicitly political landscape in order to construct relevant theories of development for today's globalized societies (Leys, 1996). These theorists understand the complex interactions between the local and international, political and social contexts.

One factor that has dramatically changed over time is the proliferation of actors in the aid arena. Now, the state is not the only relevant agent; aid is distributed by numerous national and international players. These include foreign governments, individual donors, intergovernmental bodies like the United Nations, international nongovernmental organizations, local nongovernmental organizations, networks, and community organizations.

Today, the theorizing around NGOs is deeply connected to the state-society relationship within a new neoliberal context, characterized by deregulation, the withdrawal of the state, and private initiative. Scholars fall into either the classical liberal theory or the poststructuralist camp. Theorizations under the classical liberal umbrella make a "clear distinction between private and public, civil society and state, with boundaries between the nation-state and what is outside it" (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 5). They argue for NGOs as "'transnational civil society' (Batliwala & Brown, 2006, p. 2), as a 'new paradigm of civil society' (Stromquist, 2002), or as a 'sub-species of civil society organization' (Pierce & Eade, 2000, p. 12)" (as cited in Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 5).

Poststructuralism arose as a reaction against the structuralist movement and their claims to "scientific objectivity" and "universality." The poststructuralist approach to the state, "relies on contested state boundaries, transnational connections forged through the globalization of finance and corporations, ambiguous and dynamic constructions of public and private, and a more Foucauldian idea of governmentality that sees continuities between the state and civil

society” (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 5). This approach recognizes the overlaps and tensions between the state and civil society as well as the influence of international players in a globalized world. I will use this lens to focus on the specific practices of NGOs and analyze the power dynamics at play between donors and clients. However, I am not wed to the poststructuralist approach, and, in fact, my culture-specific analysis will counter some of the ideas espoused by this theory.

My research is not only guided by the poststructuralist approach, but also based in the theoretical ideas of economists such as William Easterly. He is skeptical of many trends in foreign aid. He is especially critical of economist Jeffery Sachs, a prominent thinker in the aid arena. Sachs is a proponent of huge top-down aid projects designed to fix several of a country’s ills at once through a universal set of prescriptions. He has published books on his ideas and was instrumental in designing the UN’s Millennium Development Goals.

Easterly suspects that Sachs ideas about top-down, save-the-poor missions are ultimately modern reincarnations of the development theory of the 1950s. He distinguishes two types of foreign aid donors: “Planners,” or those who believe in top-down large-scale plans for developing nations; and “Searchers,” or those who look for bottom-up solutions to specific societal needs. Easterly believes that Searchers are more realistic in their focus on piecemeal intervention policies (Easterly, 2006). He claims that the lack of individual rights (political and economic) prevents the poor from implementing spontaneous bottom-up solutions to development problems. This idea is especially relevant in my research on grassroots women’s organizations in Nicaragua. However, I believe that marginalized groups are already creating bottom-up solutions to development problems, but those with power are not listening. Listening,

connecting, and working in solidarity with grassroots organizations is the key to creating lasting, culturally relevant change.

### **Defining the players**

This research focuses on the relationship between foreign donors and grassroots groups. Within both of these sectors there are many different kinds of organizations. For the purpose of this research, these organizations will generally be referred to as NGOs. However, within this broad category, there are networks, which connect and unite many smaller non-profits and NGOs working toward similar objectives. These include funds and foundations, which are organizations created to administer or manage a sum of money contributed for a specific purpose, and not-for-profit organizations, which by definition, use profits to re-invest in the organization rather than distributing profits between the shareholders and the owners of the organization.

There are many contending definitions of NGO, but the definition that I will work from in this research is that NGOs are voluntary, social value-driven organizations that are institutional and generally professional (Kaldor, 2003, p. 86). They also are known as civil society organizations and may have ties to governments, but are officially autonomous. These include voluntary associations, charities, foundations, and professional societies. NGOs are powerful because they are a recognized form of public engagement that is understandable to states, donors, other NGOs, and the wider public (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 9).

According to Mary Kaldor (2003), there are different forms of NGOs, such as solidaristic versus mutual-benefit NGOs. Solidaristic NGOs, or organizations that depend on outside funding, often have a membership base of committed middle-class individuals. These organizations do not represent the poor or oppressed even though their staff care about these marginalized groups. These solidaristic NGOs are contrasted with mutual benefit organizations

that form for the mutual benefit of all members, such as trade unions. These seem to be a dying breed, as many mutual benefit bodies have been replaced by solidaristic NGOs under neoliberal economic policies (Kaldor, 2003, p. 91).

Within these categories, there are funder NGOs that are outsiders to a community and national NGOs rooted in the local environment. In this thesis, these will be referred to as international NGOs versus local NGOs, but this distinction is not always clear. For example, some international organizations have offices within Nicaragua, such as Hivos International, where they employ local staff and coordinate with grassroots organizations. Alternatively, some organizations that started as local efforts have grown to have an international scope such as the Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres. Each organization has a unique relationship with the others, and examining the networks between these groups is an important part of understanding power dynamics.

Northern NGOs that are closer to the centers of power and funding, that emphasize service provision, that are solidaristic rather than mutual benefit, and that are more formal and hierarchical, have come to dominate the NGO scene (Kaldor, 2003, p. 92). This is, in part, because of support from northern governments for NGOs. Even though NGOs do not have formal ties to governments, often governments provide aid through international NGOs because they generally garner more public trust and have established relationships with grassroots organizations in local communities. For example, some of Hivos International's primary donors are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and the European Union. Governments tend to prefer to deal with formally organized professional organizations, and are biased toward NGOs from their own country (Kaldor, 2003, p. 92). It is not surprising, then, to learn that Hivos is a well-established NGO based in the Netherlands.

**Effectiveness of NGOs**

The scholarship on the effectiveness of NGOs remains divided. There is a substantial body of literature that supports NGOs as important vehicles for development aid. Academics and policy makers who champion this view believe that nongovernmental organizations allow grassroots groups a platform for voicing their concerns, provide a way to empower communities, and sustainably build from the work of social movements (Bhatia, 2000; Fowler, 1991; Mehra, 1997). These ideas resonate with many, especially given the immense number of NGOs in the world today, with over 1.5 million in the United States alone (Humanrights.gov, 2012). NGOs can provide an important alternative to development projects conducted through governments and are often more willing to serve marginalized communities since they are not faced with the same political pressures.

Those critical of NGOs point out that they also present many challenges to social change and empowerment. Much of the recent research on this subject suggests that NGOs are best understood as agents or results of neoliberalism and structural adjustment programs (Grewal, 2005; Kamat, 2004). Some experts in the field claim that NGOs expand globalization processes (Schuller, 2007) and reduce local power (Feldman, 1997). Others examine NGOs as they are “caught up in relations with funding sources, governments, and neoliberal processes that create a double bind for NGOs, situated between the powerful forces dominating them and the disenfranchised communities they intend to serve” (as cited in Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 4). Because of the wishes of powerful donors, NGOs may have to abandon some aspects of their mission in order to receive funding.

Most research on the development and structure of NGOs focuses on their work in relation to development aid—specifically service provision and poverty reduction. In fact,



poverty reduction has “become the overarching goal of international development ” (Groves & Hinton, 2004, p. 3), with plans such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) eclipsing other programs. However, poverty reduction cannot be examined as an isolated issue. Women living in extreme poverty often have the added burden of being discriminated against because of their gender, and more attention is now being paid to the intersectionality between class and gender.

### **Gendered Burden of Development**

There is a growing body of literature on the way in which development aid, both through NGOs and other organizations, affects women and includes or excludes specific perspectives. In the 1970s and 1980s, many feminist academics started discussing women’s roles in economic development. Ester Boserup was the first to investigate what happens to women in the process of economic and social growth in developing nations in her work, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (1970). Her work inspired the UN Decade of Women and paved the way to analysis on the gendered burden of development. Boserup's text evaluated how work was divided between men and women, the types of jobs that constituted productive work, the type of education women needed to enhance development, and argued that women's contributions were important to national economic growth. In the 1980s, feminist scholars, Lourdes Benería and Gita Sen, offered an interesting critique of Boserup’s work. Since then, many more academics have examined women’s role in development and studied how to address the needs and desires of poor women, specifically.

Benería’s and Sen’s ideas are foundational in feminist academic circles. They propose that in order to understand the possibilities and limits of development plans, it is necessary to examine the interaction of class formation in gender relations. In order to do this, one must

understand the concepts of capital accumulation and reproduction (Benería & Sen, 1982, p. 157). They give attention to the variations that exist between women of different classes. The authors argue that class is at least as important for the women's social position as the fact that they are women. Class also defines relationships among women themselves (Benería & Sen, 1982, p. 162). Finally, they propose that while there is a clear distinction between biological reproduction and daily family maintenance, "biological reproduction and the controls exercised over women's sexuality and reproduction activities in most societies have resulted in the reduction of women's mobility, and in their concentration in the household as the primary area of their activity" (Benería & Sen, 1982, p. 166). Thus, when women are able to engage in production outside the household, they are burdened with a double work-day—inside and outside the domestic sphere.

Prior to their article, developmentalist interest in the problems of women in the developing world (as articulated by international agencies and nongovernmental organizations) was primarily motivated by a perception that women were instrumental to programs focused on population control, food production, and the provision of other basic needs. Large-scale development programs were interested in making women more efficient as food producers, cooks and nutritionists, water carriers, and child bearers. They did not question the existing sexual division of labor, nor call for its elimination (Benería & Sen, 1982, pp. 158-159).

In reality, many social policies and poverty alleviation programs aimed at women actually lead to an increase in women's daily workload. By exploiting women's unpaid community care labor, NGOs and state-led programs entrench established gender roles and responsibilities. They also reinforce the neoliberal ideal of self-sufficiency in women's everyday lives and individual responsibility for hardships (Neumann, 2013). Therefore, effort is required

not only to put an end to the ideological and statistical underestimation of women's work, but also to deal with the implications of this double work-day (Benería & Sen, 1982, p. 167).

Many programs supported through NGOs specifically target economic empowerment. However, women who experience oppression, whether through physical or mental abuse or because they are constrained in other ways, “speak of economic deprivation, but also of social and political dimensions, including their exclusion from participation in society, their lack of self-esteem, and their sense that they lack autonomy” (Pickup, Williams, & Sweetman, 2001, p. 24).

Women's rights and empowerment advocates have increasingly turned to the NGO model to express their demands and gain money for their causes. The number of NGOs that specifically focus on gender issues globally exploded in the 1990s as women's organizations increasingly conducted single-issue campaigns and attempted to bring women's issues into the mainstream by linking them to broader, already-accepted frameworks such as human rights and population pressures. In 1975, the first world conference on women's rights was held in Mexico City, which was followed by many more in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) (Kaldor, 2003, p. 87). In fact, the United Nations termed 1975 to 1985 the Women's Decade.

The intersection between gender, class and power is an important consideration for development aid, specifically NGO-focused conversation. NGOs are not just vehicles for serving or empowering women, but “are themselves fields of gendered struggles over power, resources, and status” (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 301). Determining which NGOs have access to an audience, and therefore funding, has much to do with class. In fact, middle class women are, arguably, the main beneficiaries of the NGO sector, in Nicaragua and elsewhere, and the NGO

boom has created a group of skilled, organized, and professional middle-class women leaders in the country (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 307).

Many scholars have analyzed the relationship between feminism and NGOs. Sabine Lang and Sonia Alvarez articulate the idea of the *shift* from collective and political women's movements to professionalized bureaucracies. Lang (2007) posits NGOization as a move from movements to projects and Alvarez (1998) argues that this movement has led to "increased professionalization and specialization of significant sectors of feminist movements" (Alvarez, 1998, p. 295). Recent theorizations discuss the rise of NGOs in the global South and its negative implications for development. For example, Tsikata (2009) characterizes NGOization "by the lack of a mass base, connection and accountability; donor dependence; and substitution of NGOs for civil society and mass movements; the prioritization of a professional technocratic approach over politics because NGOs cannot be overtly political or partisan; and a short-term project-based approach and the favouring of magic bullets over long-range broad agendas in the struggle for women's rights and gender equality" (Tsikata, 2009, p. 186).

Writers and Nagar (2006) take this argument one step further by denouncing NGOs as organizations that prevent all feminist oppositional politics. Rather than critiquing the development apparatus, they believe that feminists have been coopted by it and become antipolitical. According to Arundhati Roy (2004), "The NGOization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-5 job. With a few perks thrown in" (Roy, 2004, p. 45).

Institutionalization can certainly lead to the depoliticization and cooptation of social movements' discourse and social practices. However, NGOs are not uniform structures and the way actors use them and are affected by them changes based on the socio-economic context. By

saying that all NGOs are a certain way, these authors strip those that work within these structures of their agency. Bernal and Grewal (2014) agree. They contend that these critiques of NGOization rest on three pillars of critical theory: critiques of the development apparatus, critiques of feminist affiliations with the neoliberal and patriarchal state, and critiques of the institutionalization of women's studies (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 225). They argue that these criticisms fail to recognize the "inherent divisions, inequalities, and blind spots of past women's movements, such as their reliance on women as stable subjects with shared experiences of patriarchy" (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 228) or the fact that "some NGOs transgress boundaries and produce new kinds of political engagements" (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 232). Instead of contrasting NGOs to women's movements, it is important to historicize and contextualize their work (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 244). Not all NGOs have the same origin story. Some continue to promote a radical agenda or one that may not encompass all their goals, but makes sense to the women they serve and support. For example, some of the grassroots organizations I interviewed were NGOs, but they started as women's groups, networks, and movements. They became NGOs out of financial necessity, but have remained true to their missions. While I am using a poststructuralist approach to examine NGO structures, I also recognize that there are spaces of resistance within the powerful neoliberal corporate paradigm.

### **Conclusion**

The scholarship discussed in this chapter raises relevant concerns about professionalization, the gendered burden of development, and the strength of Western development ideologies, which are critiqued for stripping grassroots women's movements in developing nations of their progressive political agendas. Even though I see many structural issues with NGOs, I also recognize that NGOs serve a critical role in managing resources and

acting as agents of change. Whether or not they serve as a positive or negative force for development, I will be working from the assumption that NGOs are embedded in specific social and power contexts.

The work of this thesis is not to dissect the implications of “NGOization,” but rather to explore the power dynamics between international NGOs and the grassroots organizations (GRO) or community-based organizations (CBO) that they fund. The following chapters will explore ways to strengthen these relationships and reveal hierarchical power dynamics and their implications rather than debate the relative merits and hindrances to the NGO model.

The following chapter will delve into the relationships between international NGOs and grassroots organizations based on opinions and examples gleaned from interviews with members of women’s organizations at all levels. Chapter 4 will examine the funding practices of these organizations, patterns of concerns that emerged, and suggestions to combat these challenges.

#### Chapter 4: Interviews with Leaders in the Women's Movement

Often in academic research oppressed populations such as “the poor” or “women” are treated as heterogeneous entities that do not know what they need or how to achieve their goals. Even in progressive circles they are seen as needing assistance from Western governments or donors to craft their ideas and fulfill their aims. However, as many activists will tell you, allyship is all about listening to communities and learning how they perceive their struggles and how they wish to be supported. Solidarity should be the goal of development work, in which partners work with marginalized communities, in this case women, to understand the layers and interconnectedness of oppression and mutually support liberation and empowerment.

Through interviews with people holding positions in both grassroots organizations and international NGOs, I was able to hear opinions on how they view their work and its broader impact. These interviews covered everything from what they saw as the principal obstacles women face in Nicaragua to the logistics of obtaining financing and the evaluation process. By comparing and contrasting the responses of members of grassroots organizations to those from international organizations, I am able to better understand general trends in the two communities.

Generally, I found that international organizations were much more focused on the macro-level of the women's movement, which makes sense given their position. For the most part, women in these organizations spoke of their role as funders and connectors, linking grassroots organizations with each other and with the larger women's movement. Grassroots organizations, alternatively, spoke about their specific cultural context and needs that were not being met. They discussed local linkages and networks that were often not facilitated by an international organization, but were, rather, Nicaraguan movements.

The previous chapters discussed the many nuances among these groups, and interview responses within the grassroots organizations reflect the urban/rural cleavage and the competing frameworks (the dominant poverty framework, the less prevalent autonomy framework, and the least influential personal-is-political framework). There also were themes that emerged that were similar across both sets of organizations such as funding struggles and the need for better, more open dialogue between parties. This chapter will discuss many of these themes.

### **The Women**

I interviewed a total of fifteen people. Eleven of these interviews were particularly informative and I have used quotes from them in this chapter. The women that provided them fell into three main categories: representatives of international nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, representatives of Nicaraguan grassroots organizations and networks, and academics studying women's rights.

Out of those eleven, five did an excellent job of articulating the sentiments of the others. These included two women from international organizations working in Managua, two grassroots organization leaders whose groups have rural reach, and one woman working at an international organization, and (uniquely) also a member of local feminist groups.

Montserrat Fernandez is the Coordinator of the Central American and Mexican region for CAFOD, a Catholic NGO based in the UK. The organization is not specifically a women's organization and has many campaigns including tackling climate change, fighting HIV and AIDS, and promoting Fairtrade products. Fernandez is Spanish, but she came to Nicaragua during the Sandinista revolution and has been there ever since. Before working for CAFOD, she worked for three grassroots women's organizations in Managua. While she is not from Nicaragua originally, she understands the importance of learning and respecting cultural context



and many of the issues facing grassroots organizations. Furthermore, because CAFOD is a religious organization, it has much more donor stability and less political influence, so it is better able to build close, lasting relationships with local organizations.

Tamara Dávila, a well-educated Managuan, worked for the Fund for the Equality of Genders and Sexual and Reproductive Rights (FED) in Nicaragua. This fund was a part of HIVOS International, an international NGO with many focus-areas based in the Netherlands. During my time talking with Dávila, she mentioned the fact that HIVOS might terminate operations in Nicaragua soon. Indeed, the FED no longer receives funding, and she now works for the Center for Research and Social Educational Action (CIASSES), a private organization for research and analysis of education and social policies.

Indira Garmendia works in the programs office of the Central American Women's Fund (FCAM). She helps coordinate the youth programs by deciding how much financial support each organization will receive and writing reports for donors. Even though she works for an international NGO, she is relatively critical of the power model between international organizations and grassroots organization. Outside of her work with FCAM, she works with multiple grassroots women's organizations. It is important to remember that people participate in activities outside of their job, and both work and social/political/personal choices influence their beliefs.

Felicita Lainez is the founder of FUNDECOM, a grassroots organization with connections to multiple rural communities. Lainez is from a rural community and started FUNDECOM to support women facing domestic abuse in her area. She told me a story about meeting with her first foreign donor. She had just bought a little office space, but it had nothing inside it. She rented a computer to put in the office to make it look more professional, but she

had no idea how to use it, so the whole time she was meeting with this donor she was terrified that the donor would ask her to use the computer and her pretense would be exposed. Now FUNDECOM has built a new office on the outskirts of Managua, and they just opened a guest house in March of 2015 to help finance their women's shelters. Lainez was critical of the lack of support for rural women from the international community and spoke of the many issues with the funding that is provided.

Lastly, I spoke with Martha Munguía. She is the director and founder of the Centro Acción Ya. Munguía is a psychologist who has spent many years working with feminist groups and organizations. She saw a need that was not being met by the state, so she founded the center in Estelí, a municipality in the north of the country that is known for coffee and tobacco production. This organization was the first shelter in the area for women facing domestic violence. Now there are two centers—one in Estelí and one in Managua. Munguía spoke about the lack of support and antagonism from the government.

The work of this research is to distill common themes and sentiments from these interviews as well as explore the nuances and many complex realities these women face. One pattern that became clear in my research was the many underlying linkages between these organizations—both grassroots and international. Many of the women working for international organizations worked for grassroots groups beforehand. Because of this staff overlap and the relatively small number of women's organizations in general, the Managua-based organizations are close to one another. However, rural organizations are often excluded from this club.

### **Choosing Partners**

One clear reality articulated by all of these women is that power matters, which is why building healthy, enduring relationships between international NGOs and grassroots women's

organizations is important. The women I interviewed shared many views on how to make aid more effective and relationships between international NGOs and grassroots women's organizations stronger and healthier. There is no simple solution to how to strengthen these relationships or end discrimination against women. According to Tamara Dávila of Hivos International, "the situations are complex and nuanced because women are complex and nuanced."

Interviewees were in agreement that NGOs, rather than the state, are changing the culture of female oppression in the country. Many expressed the importance of autonomy from government influence, including Martha Munguía, from the Centro Acción Ya. She discussed how women's organizations have been historically persecuted for their work, with the government in some ways determining which organizations could receive funds from foreign donors and which could not. Today, there is a divide between women's groups that value open dialogue with the government and those that do not wish to engage. Some grassroots organizations believe the government is too corrupt and have felt too bullied and alienated to work with them. Others believe that despite the government's antagonistic position, it is important to involve them in the process of change—share data and reports, meet about laws and strategies, etc. For them, the government needs to be part of the solution. International organizations are more prone to fund these organizations, which tend to be larger, urban, and less radical, because they do not seem threatening. Both approaches are valid and can affect change in different ways, and more radical approaches should not be punished for their position.

International organizations might also choose to work with the government instead of working with grassroots women's organizations. For example, The Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECID), a body directed through the Spanish

embassy in Nicaragua, works with the Nicaraguan government to require staff organizing gender-neutral programs to discuss gender issues. Still others believe that there is not just one formula. Sometimes organizations should work with the government, and sometimes solely with civil society depending on the specific situation (María Rosa Renzi, UNDP/UNIFEM). Overall, few grassroots organizations are focused predominantly on legal changes since they often do not view the government as an agency of change. Local groups tend to concentrate their efforts on research, protecting abused women, and changing the culture through education.

### **Role of International NGOs**

At the beginning of interviews with international organizations, I asked the interviewees to describe their work and what they think the role of their organization is in supporting women in Nicaragua. There were comments such as those offered by Tamara Dávila of Hivos International: “Our goals are contributing to the projects of civil society women’s organizations; fortifying institutional success by putting on talks, capacity building in administrative offices, and promoting exchange between women’s groups; participating in international women’s rights events; being able to react to spur-of-the-moment activities like the march against the ban on therapeutic abortion; having a thorough and fair evaluation progress; and conducting research and institutional investigations.” According to her, the Fund for the Equality of Genders and Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Nicaragua (FED) has a technical position. The grassroots women’s organizations are the ones doing the work on the ground, but the FED is there to support and finance projects and link organizations to one another.

This seems like a good deal for both the donor and the recipient. However, issues arise when the expectations of organizations (like Hivos International) do not reflect local realities. In order to make the walk match the talk, effective international NGOs seek to employ individuals

who are thoughtful, intelligent, and aware of the cultural context. According to Montserrat Fernandez, the Central American coordinator of the Catholic NGO, CAFOD, “the better you know the area in which you are working, the more potential for doing good you will have, so you need to work with organizations that understand the landscape. Don’t try to substitute what is already available. Instead, look to local sources for information.” María Rosa Renzi of UNIFEM echoed this sentiment when referring to staff. She believes that international actors “should work with local personnel in order to understand the specific cultural context better and build local capacity. The benefit goes both ways.” Unfortunately, these “local staff” are often middle-class Managuans who also do not understand rural realities or poor urban realities. They can communicate well with international funders and write detailed reports, but they still end up alienating the women they serve.

The mindset of the staff also matters in creating healthy relationships with local organizations. Many organizations carry out their work from an “implementation of projects” perspective, which is inherently hierarchical and shifts focus from relationships to projects. Most of the leaders I spoke with work from a “partnership” perspective. The idea of partnership originated from the solidarity movement which values listening and learning from one another in order to achieve communal liberation. This approach strives to shape decisions and inspire mutual respect, something that many grassroots organizations noted was sorely lacking among international donor NGOs. While partnership is a wonderful sentiment on paper, the realities of partnership are difficult to navigate. In order to best serve together, international organizations need to always be aware of changing cultural contexts, funding realities, and how to promote and support sustainability and open dialogue.

### **Cultural Context**

One of the most important factors in building lasting and meaningful relationships in communities is mindfulness around cultural context. Part of this awareness develops by looking at a country through a historical lens. Montserrat Fernandez of CAFOD, explained that NGOs in Nicaragua have a unique history because they were born out of a traumatic historical moment. In the 1980s, during the Sandinista revolutionary period, there were many base community organizations, but few NGOs. In the 1990s, there was a vast and rapid reduction of the state, and NGOs emerged to fill the social voids left. Many former Sandinista government workers started NGOs, and now there are thousands of NGOs (as compared to about twenty-five during the Sandinista period).

Fernandez believes that the Revolution was a big step for women in Nicaragua, but that even though the importance of women's rights has gained more traction in Nicaragua than other Central American countries, "women here have more in common than they do different which shouldn't be the case." Across age and class lines, women are generally repressed by the predominant machista culture. It is not possible to thoroughly understand the situation by reading about it. In order to truly relate to the nuanced situation and tensions women face, one must spend time living in the country with the partner communities. According to Fernandez, "[W]hen I arrived in Nicaragua in the 1980s, I was part of the solidarity movement. Now I work for a professional international NGO, but I'm working from the same ideals of the solidarity movement. This background is important for understanding that cultural change happens slowly." This is why grassroots organizations and local staff from the partner communities are often better able to serve the needs and desires of women.

Local staff understand that changes on the micro level are still extremely important since that is how larger change happens. Indira Garmendia, a young Nicaraguan feminist who works

for the Central American Women's Fund (FCAM), cited the example of a teacher talking about preventing adolescent pregnancies in a rural high school. While this may seem inconsequential to some international organizations, this is a huge step forward. She went on to state the following:

*There are thousands of contexts women are coming from. Read what you are asking of organizations and make sure it actually makes sense in the context they are working from. Numbers and concrete statistics are not always reflective of the situation on the ground, so, therefore, are not always the best units to work from. Many international organizations want to hear concrete numerical results, or the change of a law, but change, especially when talking about cultural and societal norms, takes time. A success for a local organization might not seem like a success for an international organization. For example, if a woman leaves a rural village and starts working on the street in a city, that might not seem like a good thing. However, if that woman is escaping a conservative, oppressive, and abusive situation in the campo, than her new situation is liberating. It is critical to understand individual context.*

Within this idea of being aware of cultural context, it is important to understand local political and social structures in order to affect change. Aynn Setright, the Academic Director of the Nicaragua SIT Study Abroad program, worked in a rural community with internally displaced war refugees during the 1980s. Originally, her work focused on organizing economic opportunities for women within their traditional roles such as soap making, clothes-making, and baking. However, eventually, the women decided that they were needed in other areas. After Hurricane Joan wreaked havoc in the country in October of 1988, women started helping in concrete block-production, crossing traditional gender boundaries. This allowed for organic discussions about women's work within their specific social context. These women were not

ready to talk about abortion and were frightened by the Autonomous Women's Movement that was gaining prominence in other parts of the country. This community viewed the larger movement as too radical. Certain terms and topics were shrouded in fear, like the word feminism today in many rural communities, but the women did want to discuss empowerment in other terms that were more meaningful and manageable for them.

Ana Mendeta, a researcher studying the position of rural women in Nicaragua, talked about the need to meet people where they were. For many women they do not want to work with "feminist" organizations because, for them, "feminists" are man-hating, morally "loose" lesbians (a problem many feminists also face in the United States). This does not mean that organizations should shirk their feminist identity, but forming personal relationships and having open dialogue should be a priority. For many rural women, land tenure rights are more relevant than LGBTQ rights, for example, so the best way to support these communities is to work on these issues along with empowerment and education.

For international organizations, the best way to support these communities is by developing partnerships with well-established, trusted, groups (maybe not NGOs) in the communities, and visiting these groups as often as the budget allows to learn their cultural context and needs as articulated by them. According to Garmendia of FCAM, international NGOs should visit their partners to see "how people talk, what is the community dynamic, how is the group treated by the community. It is also possible to witness subtle successes within the organization if you get to know the group. For example, if you visit a youth organization and talk to a young woman who is very reserved at the beginning of the year, and then at the end of the year you see that she has opened up and feels confident to share her ideas and ask questions, that is empowerment. That is success." Changing the metrics of "success" frees organizations to



focus on goals, such as empowerment, that are harder to measure, but, ultimately more important to creating sustainable cultural changes.

Flexibility is also a key component of cultural sensitivity and awareness. Goals should shift based on the needs of the community, and international organizations should act as resources for organizations seeking to revamp their outreach-strategies. For example, Garmendia explained that FCAM's "programs and the programs of the organizations we fund can change from year to year, which is important. It is not a coincidence that right now a lot of organizations are working on preventing teen pregnancies since the rates in Nicaragua are extremely high."

### **The Money**

No matter what the specific programs or issues may be, funding is important. Over the past decade, a new trend has emerged of international organizations acting as intermediaries between donors (which can be foundations, people, or countries) and grassroots organizations. This severely cuts into funding for base organizations since the international organizations are also competing for funds. Much of the funding from original donors goes to covering these NGO's own costs such as campaigns, projects, salaries, and advertising. They take a big cut before giving a portion to grassroots organizations that had historically had direct cooperation with bilateral donors according to Martha Munguía of Acción Ya.

These new intermediaries limit the efficacy of local organizations since they often implement more strict regulations and provide less funding. Instead of spending more on flashy ads aimed at Western audiences or replicating the work of local organizations, international organizations should consider focusing on facilitating cooperation. This facilitation might take the form of coordinating and funding opportunities for south-south dialogue as suggested by

researcher, Ana Mendeta, and professor and study abroad director, Aynn Setright, or regional workshops and idea shares. I will discuss this idea at more length in the following chapter.

Another problem that limits organizations' effectiveness is when international NGOs fund programs that do not take into consideration need. Many of the grants that grassroots organizations can apply for through these larger organizations are for one- or two-year-long projects. Many individuals from local organizations including Martha Juarez of Puntos de Encuentro and Luz Marina Torrez of the Eighth of March Women's Collective (CM8M), spoke of the need for more time to actually effect change and the importance of long-term financing. Unfortunately, project-based, one-time financing is still the norm among the international aid community. Hivos International, for example, still has this model even though it has been proven much less effective than long-term funding.

Many scholars and innovators have discussed the pitfalls of this model. Marty Cagan discusses it in relation to entrepreneurial product development, but his analysis rings true for aid as well. He lists three fatal flaws with the project-based funding model, which I have translated into relevant language: (1) Creating lasting change does not come from a series of rapid projects, but rather forming lasting relationships, which comes with continuity of investment, but also continuity of the team. (2) Very often in innovative grassroots organizing, initial ideas may not be quite right, but if the groups change direction somewhat, they can reach a larger audience or connect in a new way. However, with project-based funding, the consequence is that this sort of "pivot" is effectively discouraged. (3) Most likely the groups applying for funding do not actually know if they should be pursuing the project. Even though they might pretend otherwise with a well-crafted grant proposal, the truth is this might not be the best use of funds (Cagan, 2011).

Projects are often not what grassroots organizations need to promote change. Instead, many grassroots organizations spoke of the need to fund less “sexy” items like transportation, internet, electricity, materials such as soap and towels for women’s shelters, and salaries for staff. Luz Marina Torrez of CM8M and Felicita Lainez of FUNDECOM both expressed the need to pay their staff, and in the words of Torrez, “[E]mpowerment doesn’t require money, everything else does.” Indira Garmendia of FCAM also spoke of this issue when she confessed, “[M]oney is important as much as we do not like to admit it. I helped found a feminist organization, and we were determined to do our work without outside financial assistance, but we soon realized that in order to have an impact, you need to have some money to work with. Outside financing is especially key in Nicaragua, since we are such a poor country. Women's groups can't raise their own funds from their membership base because everyone is trying to put food on the table. Every dollar is important.”

This is why FCAM uses a different model. In their youth program, once an organization or group has been accepted, they do not have to re-apply for funding each year. They will receive annual funds until: (a) they have matured enough and no longer rely on FCAM financing; (b) they have not advanced at all after 5 years; or (c) they are not using the money wisely or appropriately. This model understands that it is virtually impossible to achieve an organization's goals in one year, especially with youth who are developmentally vulnerable and need time to mature. Organizations also need time to grow and learn how to secure other funds. FCAM is more like a school where these organizations learn how to run an organization. This is a model that respectfully and effectively promotes success.

Financial and organizational capacity is important components of organizational health. In order for an organization to achieve its goals, it needs to not only pay staff adequately, but

also work with employees to make certain people are not experiencing burn-out and are still excited and motivated by the mission of the organization. This involves dedicating funds to the maintenance of the organization that may not produce concrete “results,” but is essential to long-term success.

### **Sustainability and Dialogue**

One of the major issues grassroots and international organizations face is sustainability. The donor-recipient model is a tenuous one, and many international NGOs are pulling out of Nicaragua because it appears to be much more advanced in supporting and protecting women than other nations. Because funding has decreased and continues to decrease for many organizations, the most critical issue they are facing is how to sustain their work. Grassroots organizations are now seeking new, innovative revenue streams. For example, FUNDECOM just opened a guest house on a major tourist route to help pay for its women’s shelters since they no longer have steady, reliable outside funding. They know the importance of diversifying revenue streams so as to be buffered from outside economic decisions and manipulation.

Whichever methods individual organizations identify for maintaining viability, the well being of partnerships with international organizations remains dependent on open dialogue and respect. When international NGOs act in ways that are not cognizant of local realities, it is because of a lack of open dialogue. When they want to see hard numbers and fund projects that do not meet the needs of women, there is a lack of open dialogue. When these large organizations do not listen to the requests and ideas of local actors, there is a lack of respect. In the words of one grassroots leader, “We need more democracy! They talk a lot about participation and democracy, but end up making unilateral decisions. What is partnership?!”

In order to have effective, healthy, and lasting relationships between partners, there need to be permanent spaces for dialogue. Agencies, multilateral donors, bilateral donors, grassroots organizations, and individual women need to exchange ideas and be able to comment on what they need and want. Whatever conclusions arise should be based in respect for the dignity and intelligence of the other party.

The next chapter will take the ideas presented by interviewees and synthesize them into four main conclusions that come from a Nicaraguan context but that can be understood as productive in building healthy relationships between international organizations and grassroots organizations in many different cultural contexts. These ideas include the need to change the way international organizations approach aid from a “manager” mindset to a “facilitator” mindset; the need for international organizations to use their power and access to influence governments in ways that grassroots organizations cannot; the need for grassroots organizations to have more autonomy to use funding for items or projects that they want and need; and the need to understand the intersectionality of oppressions.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

This research seeks to determine the extent to which the theoretical ideals and organizational practices of foreign NGOs are in tune with the perspectives of grassroots women's organizations. It explores the primary differences between the donors' and recipients' views, why these differences exist, and what may be done to reconcile the divide. The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the power relations between these types of organizations and propose four concrete changes to create healthier, more equal relationships.

The world is a complex place. Concepts do not fit into neat boxes when they relate to human beings because we are self-interested and complicated creatures. This research, while identifying key areas for change, also highlights the layers and complexity of a movement that is often simplified, both by those outside the experience and by those within it. Often Nicaraguan leaders of women's organizations promote their goals as if they are the most essential goals within a broad, united movement. This strategic essentialism, to use a term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Wolff, 2007), helps women gain funding from foreign donors by presenting their movement as united and straightforward. In reality, however, there are numerous different objectives within this movement because, unfortunately, women are oppressed in many ways.

This chapter will highlight some of the challenges and successes of women's organizations in Nicaragua from chapter two, provide a brief recap on the structure and theory behind NGOs from chapter three, delineate four suggested steps to create better relationships between international NGOs and grassroots organizations, and present ideas for future research.

### **Challenges and Successes**

I asked each interviewee to discuss the challenges women face in Nicaragua and the successes women's organizations have achieved. Almost every person, regardless of the type of

organization s(he) represented, spoke about the machista culture being a major obstacle to women's rights and empowerment work. This mentality allows for and cultivates discrimination against women. Most women also talked about widespread violence against women and the need to combat femicide and sexual and physical abuse. This alignment of views makes sense considering violence against women is not a very polarizing issue in the women's rights community. Everyone agrees that this problem needs to be addressed.

Most women also spoke about the problem of impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence or discrimination. Monserrat Fernandez from CAFOD, along with others, spoke of the allegations that President Ortega sexually abused his stepdaughter, who is now the leader of a civic group that is dedicated to defending the rights of gays and lesbians. Many perpetrators of violence go unpunished, and even though Law 779 seems to denounce this oppression, the law is often not enforced.

María Rosa Renzi from the United Nations Development Program and Felicita Lainez from FUNDECOS spoke of the lack of both feminist and general education for women. This limits opportunities, and many women end up in exploitive jobs or completely dependent on men due to this educational and economic cycle. There are also cultural obligations that define women's role as subservient to men. Many communities do not recognize women apart from their connection to men, especially in rural areas.

Some women are stigmatized because of factors above and beyond their gender, and this intersectionality of oppressions leads to an even more difficult and complicated situation. For example, according to Indira Garmendia at the Central American Women's Fund (FCAM), there is a stigma against young women who lead or participate in "organizing." They face personal challenges from their communities who often view their actions as disrespectful to their families.

The intersection between poverty, especially rural poverty, and gender discrimination also creates unique challenges for women, including inadequate access to transportation, health, and safety services. Felicita Lainez at FUNDECOM claims that these limitations can in turn endanger the lives of women in abusive or otherwise high-risk situations.

There are challenges specific to Nicaragua that limit women's freedom and access to resources. For one, the dialogue between the state and active, controversial women's organizations is closed. This makes it difficult to address concerns and reform policies designed to be more inclusive and equitable. The ban on all forms of abortion has been a major setback and puts the lives of women at risk. Adolescent pregnancies are remarkably common in the country, and are on the rise for girls less than fourteen years of age.

Despite all these challenges, groups working for women's rights and empowerment have made significant gains in Nicaragua. The country is in a better place than many, if not most, countries in the region partially because of the Revolution which allowed for conversations about gender equality to gain traction earlier than in other countries. Also, Nicaragua has increasing participation of women in the political arena. According to World Bank statistics, women hold 42 percent of seats in national parliaments (World Bank, 2014). However, in the words of Carme Clavel from AECID, "the number of women in positions of power is high, but that doesn't really trickle down."

Unfortunately, most of the successes women have experienced in Nicaragua have not led to substantive, positive change. For example, more women are entering the workplace, but their work is still often exploitive. Law 779 is another example of this problem. While it is a good law on paper, it is often not enforced or selectively enforced. However, because the law exists, the government achieves higher rankings in international reports on human rights and gender



equality, such as the fact that Nicaragua is ranked the 10<sup>th</sup> best country for women in the 2013 Global Gender Gap Report (Domfeh, Rees, Shannon, & Walton, 2013). This makes the government less willing to work toward attaining real equality since it already appear to be doing well on the international stage.

Women's situations have certainly improved in Nicaragua over time but there is still much to be done. Luckily, there are dedicated organizations and groups that are working tirelessly to change the culture of oppression in the country. In order to have the greatest impact, the power dynamics between these organizations need to change in some key ways. Before exploring these changes, it is necessary to reexamine the structure and theory behind international NGOS and development aid more generally.

### **The Structure of NGOS**

The non-governmental organizational structure is a well-established vehicle for providing aid in most places of the world. The NGO model can be understood within a neoliberal context in Nicaragua, since these kinds of organizations proliferated in the 1990s to help fill societal needs that emerged with structural adjustment programs. NGOs are defined as voluntary, social value-driven organizations that are institutional and generally professional (Kaldor, 2003, p. 86). They may have ties to governments, but are officially autonomous and can be powerful forces since they are a recognized form of public engagement that is understandable to states, donors, other NGOs, and the wider public (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 9).

NGOs in Nicaragua are generally solidaristic, meaning that they depend on outside funding, often have a membership base of committed middle-class individuals, and do not represent the poor or oppressed even though their staff care about these marginalized groups.

Also, NGOs are not uniform bodies. The way they are created and operate depends on their specific socio-economic context and the goals and beliefs of the staff running them.

Institutionalization can certainly lead to the depoliticization and cooptation of social movements' discourse and social practices as was discussed in chapter three, but the idea that all NGOs are "bad" fails to recognize the diversity of NGOs and strips its directors and staff members of their agency. While the bureaucratization that is inherent in the NGO model does make change a slower, more cumbersome process, it is not an excuse for inaction. This thesis works from the assumption that the idea of international aid being transferred through international NGOs to grassroots organizations is relatively entrenched. There is a growing marketplace for aid provision, and NGOs are important actors within this market.

As NGOs appear to be here to stay, rather than focusing on their negative qualities, it seems to be more valuable to offer suggestions for ways to work within the limitations of international NGOs to create more positive results for women in Nicaragua. NGOs can act altruistically, but are also self-interested, and these changes would provide winning results for both parties. Ultimately, success in promoting women's empowerment and rights is good for both kinds of organizations.

I use a poststructuralist approach in my analysis of NGOs, recognizing the overlaps and tensions between the state and civil society and the influence of international players in a globalized world. Poststructuralism, in this context, posits that interactions are not just top-down, but rather complex and ever-changing and only understood through our own interpretations. Therefore, international organizations should constantly evaluate their position and influence in relation to the organizations they fund and the Nicaraguan government, with listening being the top priority. Listening is the key to productive and effective aid solutions, which is why I

propose that international organizations take on a “facilitator” rather than a “manager” role in relation to grassroots organizations.

Strands of theory from many disparate fields influence the following suggestions on how development aid can best be targeted and effective ways to construct and implement agendas. This research combines teachings from the fields of leadership development, international relations, economics, and cultural studies/sociology. These theories include ideas about facilitation from organizational leadership literature, the Boomerang Pattern developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998) in reference to human rights violations, William Easterly’s (2006) ideas on best aid strategies; and the idea of intersectionality proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993).

#### **Four Suggestions for Change**

##### *Facilitation Rather than Management*

After considering the structure of international NGOs and the specific problems facing women in Nicaragua, it is clear that an insider perspective (local knowledge) is necessary to create lasting, culturally sensitive change. International organizations generally have more power and funding than grassroots organizations, and sometimes these groups conflate power and money with knowledge and effectiveness. Often international organizations will take on the role of manager, which is defined as “the person responsible for planning and directing the work of a group of individuals, monitoring their work, and taking corrective action when necessary” (Reh, 2015). This is the standard model. International organizations will distribute funds for projects, evaluate the grassroots women’s organizations’ progress throughout the grant period, and, if they are not using the funds “wisely,” the NGO will cut their funding. The U.S. branch of United Way works from this model. The United Way conducts large fundraising campaigns within regions and then splits their pool of funds across approved human service organizations. The projects

they support are held to clearly defined standards, and if organizations stray from these standards, they lose their designated funding.

Instead of this hierarchical model, I propose NGOs take on a facilitator role. A facilitator is defined as “one that helps to bring about an outcome (such as learning, productivity, or communication) by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance, guidance, or supervision” (Merriam-Webster staff, 2015). In the organizational leadership and conflict resolution communities, there has been much written about how to be an effective facilitator, but these ideas have not been discussed in a development aid context. Authors such as Karakusevic (2011) and Margaret (2009) portray a good facilitator as one who asks the right questions and gives people space to brainstorm in community to develop strategies and solutions.

This is exactly what international NGOs should be doing with grassroots organizations. This change in mentality forces NGOs to come to the table ready to learn instead of ready to lead. It still leaves room for the international community to play an important role in the fight for women’s rights and empowerment in Nicaragua based on their skills. It allows for outsiders to offer ideas, but only after deep engagement and listening. This shift in the idea of what it means to “serve” and “aid” allows for partnership rhetoric to align with partnership action, a missing step according to many grassroots group leaders.

Facilitation also requires understanding where people are and what they need. International organizations should think about the written expectations they have of grassroots groups and whether or not they are reasonable. Small gains in women’s lives are big steps forward, but can be minimalized by international agencies insensitive to cultural context.

The facilitation framework is fundamental to affecting the next three changes: using political power to pressure the government; funding actual needs; and understanding the

importance of intersectionality. The framework also is universally relevant. In general, international NGOs or other large funding agencies will benefit from approaching foreign aid from a facilitator stance and changing the managerial language of their structures and grants requirements to reflect this shift. For example, instead of posting grant opportunities and forcing grassroots organizations to craft their project proposals to fit into the narrow definitions created by the international organizations, these larger bodies may start by asking what it is that the grassroots organizations need and then create aid opportunities based on that conversation. This will allow them to focus their energies on where they can make the biggest difference, such as pressuring the government to better support Nicaraguan women.

### *Pressuring Governments*

Interview responses and research supports the contention that the Nicaraguan government is not apathetic to the needs of most grassroots women's organizations, but actually hostile toward them. Martha Munguía of the Centro Acción Ya spoke of the importance of stable, sustainable financing from the state as a way of becoming less reliant on foreign aid. She said that this is not possible in the current climate, since her organization and many others openly criticize the government.

In order for substantial advancements to be made, the government needs to realize the importance of gender equality and support this fight, both financially and rhetorically. Most grassroots women's organizations (with the exception of a few key players like the Movement for Working and Unemployed Women called the "María Elena Cuadra" movement) do not have access to governmental organizations. Even though grassroots organizations may not have much international or even national reach, they can affect lasting change within their communities as they are best equipped to understand the area. In order to fully utilize the capabilities and skills

of both local and international players, I propose that international organizations use their connections and power to pressure the Nicaraguan government to truly promote and support women's rights and empowerment.

Many academics and researchers have explored the power of the international community in relation to human rights work. In *Activists Without Borders*, Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink outline the Boomerang Pattern, which indicates that if individuals (or organizations) in a country cannot effectively persuade their government to initiate change, they may still be able to activate a transnational network focused on the issue, in this case women's rights. This network can in turn influence other states and international organizations, and these other actors can exert pressure on the state at the global level (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). In Nicaragua, there are already direct relationships between international organizations and grassroots women's groups, so the middle step may not be necessary.

I asked each interviewee from a grassroots organization how they viewed their fight for women's rights and empowerment, and none of them claimed that the problems Nicaraguan women face are isolated. Every participant referred to the international context of women's rights work and believes that their local fight is part of an international movement. Most believe that there needs to be more cooperation and coordination with other local, regional, and Latin American groups, but that each player needs to focus its energies where it can be most effective. This division of labor allows grassroots women's organizations to focus on changing the culture of violence at a local level and international organizations to work on changing this culture on a national level instead of replicating the work of local groups.

*Funding Actual Needs*

This leads to the third main take-away of my research: international NGOs need to fund what really matters instead of what looks good. This is an issue for all sorts of funding relationships. For example, university campuses prefer to construct new buildings instead of repairing old ones because it gains more attention, looks flashier, and is, therefore, easier to pitch to donors. Repairing the old buildings would usually make much more financial and environmental sense, but that is not the “sexy” option. The same issue plagues the international development community.

Big projects that look slick and gain media attention are easier to sell to contributors because they are well defined and can be used as an easy measure of “success.” However, these projects often are not the most effective. One of the grassroots women’s leaders I interviewed met me in her office, which was full of old computers that had been donated as part of an international aid group’s technology campaign. Now they are collecting dust while the organization is having trouble paying their monthly internet bill.

Aside from paying for utilities, like the internet, one of the biggest financial struggles for organizations is staff salaries. This is critical, especially in a poor nation like Nicaragua, where feeding one’s family is a concern for many people. When international organizations do not consider this need, they actually contribute to gender discrimination. The idea that women should provide unpaid community care labor further entrenches established gender roles and responsibilities. Thus it is essential to promote women’s rights to equitable salaries and help pay for their work.

Felicita Lainez of FUNDECOM told me that she has been using her own money to pay for materials for the organization because money is so tight, and she is constantly worrying about how to pay her staff. In order to support women who have suffered from domestic abuse, the

organization must have a psychologist on staff, but that requires funding to pay for the position. Currently, their psychologist is working for next to nothing, but that is not a sustainable solution.

Utilities, office supplies, materials for women's shelters, and transportation are also costs that are generally relegated to second tier, even though they are what allow grassroots organizations to do their work and fulfill their missions. In addition, capacity-building and team-building activities are undervalued but critical for preventing burnout, the quiet killer of too many great non-profit and community organizations. Workshops for staff that inspire camaraderie and innovation will be hugely beneficial for long-term organizational health.

Economists such as William Easterly understand this, promoting home-grown, "effective piecemeal" approaches that start with the poor, working out their needs and how to meet them. These are the 'searchers' that I referred to in chapter three. They are concerned with what works rather than large-scale, conspicuous projects (Easterly, 2006). I propose taking this idea one step further. In my research, I find that marginalized groups are already creating bottom-up solutions to development problems, but those with power are not listening. It is time to listen.

### *Intersectionality*

Finally, I propose that international organizations work to better integrate the knowledge of intersectionality into their practices in order to foster a more holistic understanding of development. Intersectionality is defined as "the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage" (Macionis & Gerber, 2011, p. 310). Identity-based politics, in this case around the marginalization of a gender, "has been a source of strength, community, and intellectual development," for many marginalized groups. However "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the



context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1232).

In the context of this study, the intersection between gender, class, and power creates challenges for poor, rural woman. Many of the women I interviewed spoke about these layers of oppression. Women from rural communities are not only seen as “lesser” because they are women but also because they are campesinas. Often they do not have access to adequate education and health services. Rather than targeting a single area of oppression (such as gender), it is critical to address a number of sources of oppression. Instead of working mostly with middle class women’s organizations based in Managua, international organizations should seek to diversify their funding pools to better support women living in extreme poverty or otherwise further marginalized (such as indigenous women living on the Atlantic Coast, a population that is largely underserved and excluded from national women’s movements). This comes back to the importance of listening to women define themselves and speak to their own needs and desires.

### **Further Research**

This research is by no means exhaustive. Even though Nicaragua is a small country, this work did not cover the many needs and wants of women, especially rural women. I was unable to interview women living in extreme poverty about their ideas, and if I continue this research, that is certainly a top priority. This work is also very Pacific-coast biased, and in order to fairly investigate women’s rights and empowerment work in Nicaragua, we must seek input from women living on the Atlantic coast. In addition, I am interested in investigating alternative models to the NGO structure, such as social enterprises, community-based organizations, and

activist networks like Walk Out Walk On volunteers, who provide person-power for projects that are envisioned by communities (<http://walkoutwalkon.net/>).

Finally, it would be interesting to examine whether these ideas are applicable in other cultural contexts. Aynn Setright, an academic and study-abroad program director from the United States, told me she believes Latin American women's organizations could learn a great deal from discussing their tactics and actions with women's organizations from other countries in the global south, such as Middle Eastern or African women's organizations. When I mentioned this idea to one of the leaders of a grassroots organization in an interview, she did not think that those conversations would be productive. She felt that women in those countries faced different challenges than Nicaragua women and that they would learn more from conferring with other Latin American women. This raises the interesting question of what is a universal "female" experience and what is not. I believe this comparative research is necessary in order to broaden the scope of these findings.

This research has been transformative in my own life; it has taught me the importance of active listening and the role of my own privilege. I want to thank all the incredible individuals who allowed me into their communities and so vulnerably shared their hopes and concerns with a stranger. I hope that their words and ideas can inspire action and that this research, guided by their positions, will be a small step in the direction of increased empowerment and efficacy. Let us change the way we connect with others to reflect the respect we wish to foster in the world.

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**Appendix**

## Interview Subjects

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job and Organization Description</b>	<b>Type of Source</b>
1. Indira Garmendia	Programs Officer at the Central American Women's Fund (FCAM)	International NGO
2. Montserrat Fernandez	Program Officer for the Central America and Mexico team for the Catholic NGO, CAFOD	International NGO
3. Alfredo Alaniz	Director of ASOMIF, the umbrella organization for microfinance activities in Nicaragua	Grassroots Organization
4. Ana Alvarez	Research at the Economic Institute, FIDEG, conducting a one-year project on gender in Nicaragua	Academic
5. Aynn Setright	SIT Study Abroad Academic Director of Nicaragua Program	Academic
6. Carme Clavel	Coordinator of Gender Inclusion for the Spanish Agency of International Development Cooperation (AECID)	Foreign Governmental Agency
7. Felicita Lainez	Director of the Foundation for Community Development (FUNDECOM)	Grassroots Organization
8. Reyna Isabel Rodriguez	National Liaison for the Network of Women Against Violence (RMCV)	Grassroots Network
9. María Rosa Renzi	Coordinator of Regional Projects for the United Nations' Development Fund for Women	International IGO
10. Tamara Dávila	Coordinator of the Fund for Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Nicaragua, a fund of Hivos International	International NGO

11. Luz Marina Torrez	Coordinator of the 8 <sup>th</sup> of March Women's Collective (CM8M)	Grassroots Organization
12. Martha Juarez	C0-Executive Director of the Puntos de Encuentro Foundation	Grassroots Organization
13. Martha Munguía Alvarado	Director of the Center for Research Assistance to Women—Acción Ya	Grassroots Organization
14. Ana Marcela	Academic currently writing her Master's thesis on rural women's groups in Nicaragua	Academic
15. Elizabeth Dore	Professor and researcher at the University of Southampton in England	Academic

### English Version of Main Questions

#### *Interview questions for international donor agencies*

1. Would you please briefly describe your work with (your organization name)?
2. What do you see as your organization's role in supporting women in Nicaragua?
3. Why is (your organization) interested in supporting women in Nicaragua? Do you believe that the women's movement here is important to the larger movement?
4. What are the requirements for women's organizations to obtain financing from (your organization)?
5. How do you know how these women's organizations are using your funds? Is there an evaluation process? Please describe.
6. Do you think that the role of organizations like yours have changed over time? If so, in what ways?
7. To what extent is your staff made up of Nicaraguans or foreigners? How does that arrangement impact your effectiveness?
8. In your opinion, what are the major obstacles that women face in Nicaragua?
9. What are some successes of groups fighting for women's rights?
10. In your opinion, what would be the ideal relationship between international organizations and developing nations?
11. What do you think are the prospects for the organizations you fund to become self-reliant over the long or short term? What are the factors that influence these prospects?

*Interview questions for grassroots women's organizations*

1. Would you please briefly describe your work with (your organization)?
2. How was \_\_\_\_\_ started?
3. How does your work fit into the international fight for women's rights? Or are you more focused on the needs of Nicaraguan women specifically?
4. How is your organization structured? How do you make decisions about your work and projects? What do you see as your role?
5. Do you think that the role of organizations like yours have changed over time? If so, in what ways?
6. How do you obtain funding? Do you feel that this is sustainable?
7. Are there obligations for receiving your funding? Please provide some examples.
8. How do you evaluate the efficacy of your organization?
9. If money was no object what would be your organization's number one priority?
10. In your opinion, what are the major obstacles that women face in Nicaragua?
11. What are some successes of groups fighting for women's rights?
12. In your opinion, what would be the ideal relationship between international organizations and developing nations?
13. What do you think are the prospects for your organization to become self-reliant over the long or short term? What are the factors that influence these prospects?

**Spanish Version of Main Questions***Preguntas para las agencias internacionales de donantes*

1. ¿Podría por favor describir brevemente su trabajo con (nombre de su organización)?
2. ¿Cuál cree usted que es el papel de su organización en el apoyo de las mujeres en Nicaragua?
3. ¿Por qué es (su organización) interesado en el apoyo de las mujeres en Nicaragua? Cree usted que este movimiento tiene importancia afuera de Nicaragua?
4. ¿Cuáles son los requisitos de las organizaciones de mujeres para obtener financiamiento de (la organización)?
5. ¿Conoce cómo estas organizaciones de mujeres están utilizando sus fondos? ¿Hay un proceso de evaluación de su eficacia? Por favor describa.
6. ¿Cree que el papel de las organizaciones como la suya han cambiado con el tiempo? Si es así, ¿de qué manera?
7. ¿En qué medida es su personal compuesto por nicaragüenses o extranjeros? ¿Cómo afecta ese arreglo su efectividad?
8. En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los principales obstáculos que enfrentan las mujeres en Nicaragua?
9. ¿Cuáles son algunos éxitos de los grupos que luchan por los derechos de las mujeres?
10. En su opinión, ¿cuál sería la relación ideal entre las organizaciones internacionales y las naciones en vías de desarrollo?
11. ¿Cuáles cree usted que son las perspectivas de las organizaciones que proveen fondos a ser autosuficientes a largo o corto plazo? ¿Cuáles son los factores que influyen en estas perspectivas?



*Preguntas para las organizaciones de mujeres de base*

1. ¿Podría por favor describir brevemente su trabajo con (su organización)?
2. ¿Cómo empezó su organización?
3. ¿Cómo encaja su trabajo en la lucha internacional por los derechos de las mujeres? O no le importa, está enfocada en las necesidades de las mujeres en Nicaragua?
4. ¿Cómo está (su organización) estructurada? ¿Cómo hace las decisiones sobre su trabajo y proyectos? ¿Cuál cree usted que es su papel?
5. ¿Cree usted que el papel de las organizaciones como la suya ha cambiado con el tiempo? Si es así, ¿de qué manera?
6. ¿Cómo se obtiene la financiación? ¿Cree usted que esto es sostenible?
7. ¿Existen obligaciones para recibir su financiación? Por favor, proporcione algunos ejemplos.
8. ¿Cómo evalúa la eficacia de su organización?
9. Si no importara el dinero cuál sería la prioridad número uno de su organización?
10. En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los principales obstáculos que enfrentan las mujeres en Nicaragua? ¿Hay una diferencia entre mujeres rurales y mujeres urbanas? Por favor explique.
11. ¿Cuáles son algunos éxitos de los grupos que luchan por los derechos de las mujeres?
12. En su opinión, ¿cuál sería la relación ideal entre las organizaciones internacionales y organizaciones como suya?
13. ¿Cuáles cree usted que son las perspectivas de su organización para ser autosuficientes a largo o corto plazo? ¿Cuáles son los factores que influyen en estas perspectivas?