

**MOVING FROM SERVICE TO EMPOWERMENT:  
AMIGOS DE LAS AMÉRICAS AND THE TRANSITION TO PARTICIPATORY  
DEVELOPMENT**

By  
Lea Alison Fox

A THESIS

Presented to the International Studies Department  
And the Honors College of the University of Oregon  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

February 2009

Copyright 2009 Lea Alison Fox

## An Abstract of the Thesis of

Lea Alison Fox for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

In the Department of International Studies to be taken June  
13, 2009**Title: MOVING FROM SERVICE TO EMPOWERMENT:  
AMIGOS DE LAS AMÉRICAS AND THE TRANSITION  
TO PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT**Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Dennis Galvan

The focus of this paper is to explore the transition to participation-based development models as exemplified by the development organization Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS). Within this transition, AMIGOS has adopted the rhetoric of participatory development, as well as a number of associated practices and methods. However, in other respects, AMIGOS has maintained a number of attitudes, policies, and practices from older development models, creating a partial shift to participatory development. This paper aims to analyze this partial transition. Specifically, this paper examines how policies and practices left over from past models of AMIGOS projects may shape, and in many cases interfere, with the participation and empowerment processes that AMIGOS intends to foster. In critically analyzing AMIGOS' attitudes, policies, and practices as they relate to the transition to participatory development, this paper seeks to contribute to AMIGOS' process of reflexive evaluation and redesign of the organization's work with Latin American communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express sincere appreciation to Professors Dennis Galvan, Ce Rosenow, and Carlos Aguirre for all of their guidance and feedback throughout this process. In addition, I would like to thank all of the wonderful people who I had the pleasure of working with during my time with Amigos de las Américas. The lessons I learned from my fellow staff members, volunteers and community members are what lies at the heart of this project. Finally, special thanks are due to my family, for all of their support and, of course, for encouraging me to work with Amigos de las Américas that very first summer.

*The experiences and views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Amigos de las Américas organization, Chapter members, or other Volunteers or Staff.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i> .....	1
I. INTRODUCTION.....	3
II. UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT.....	7
History of development	
Evolution of development models	
Shift to community-based and participation models	
III. AMIGOS DE LAS AMÉRICAS .....	24
Evolution of the organization	
Current mission and work	
As a case study	
IV. ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSITION TO PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT .....	33
Adopting rhetoric and practices	
The partial shift	
Organizations themselves must change	
V. AMIGOS DE LAS AMÉRICAS AND THE TRANSITION TO PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT .....	40
Attitudes and behaviors.....	40
Training.....	45
Project implementation.....	57
Monitoring and evaluation .....	72
VI. CONCLUSION.....	90
APPENDIX.....	93
A. Volunteer survey	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	95

## **PREFACE**

The subject of this paper has been an important part of my life since the summer of 2004. As a volunteer with Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS), I spent eight weeks in rural Panama, living and working in a small village in the hills. My experience that summer sparked my deep interests in Latin America and in international development, interests that have shaped much of my life since then. It was because of that experience that I chose to study international development through the International Studies Department at the University of Oregon. Likewise, that experience inspired me to return to AMIGOS during the summers of 2007 and 2008 as a staff member.

Thus, before beginning my analysis of AMIGOS, I feel it is important to acknowledge my deep personal connection with the organization. The opportunity to work with the organization has truly changed my life in allowing me to develop skills and a better understanding of both myself, and the world. For this reason, this analysis is in no way meant to be a negative portrayal of AMIGOS. I am a strong supporter of AMIGOS and its programs and know from my three summers with the organization that the work AMIGOS does has immense impacts on the lives of both Latin American nationals as well as the U.S. volunteers and staff members.

Rather, this paper is meant to be a constructive exploration of the community development side of AMIGOS' work. As a strong supporter of AMIGOS' programs, my goal is to analyze the organization's current work in hopes that my findings will inform AMIGOS as the organization works to continue to improve its programs.

I would also like to note that the two projects I was most recently involved in as a staff member were different from the majority of AMIGOS projects. In 2007, I worked as a Project Supervisor in Montevideo, Uruguay. In its second, and final year, the Uruguay project was an experimental semi-urban project. As a result, some of the communities I worked in had as many as 10,000 people. As AMIGOS' model of encouraging participation in development is geared primarily towards smaller communities, my experience working in the larger communities was likely not reflective of how the work plays out in smaller AMIGOS communities. In 2008, I worked as the Associate Project Director in San Pedro, Paraguay. This project was in its first year, and followed a model different from other AMIGOS projects. Rather than working on a Community-Based-Initiative (a unique project identified by each community), volunteers built ten *fogones* (brick, wood-burning stoves) in every community. This project, though beneficial to the recipients, was not as conducive to community participation as it was a household-based project rather than a community-based project. In many communities, those not receiving stoves were reluctant to participate in the project.

Thus, my most recent experiences with AMIGOS were, in a number of ways, not reflective of the majority of AMIGOS' projects. This means that my observations, as well as volunteer experiences and responses to surveys, are not necessarily applicable to other AMIGOS projects. However, I believe that in general, the aspects of AMIGOS as an organization that I analyze in this paper play a role in shaping every one of AMIGOS' projects, whether or not the effects are the same as I find them to be in this paper.

## INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is to explore the transition to participation-based development models as exemplified by the development organization Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS). Within this transition, AMIGOS has adopted the rhetoric of participatory development, as well as a number of associated practices and methods. However, in other respects, AMIGOS has maintained a number of attitudes, policies, and practices from older development models, creating a partial shift to participatory development. This paper aims to analyze this partial transition. Specifically, this paper examines how policies and practices left over from past models of AMIGOS projects may shape, and in many cases interfere, with the participation and empowerment processes that AMIGOS intends to foster.

AMIGOS' partial transition to participatory development is part of a general trend towards participation-based models in the larger field of development. Emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s, theories of participatory development marked a significant departure from previous approaches to development in that they attempted to reverse the trend of top-down development and have local people direct the process in a bottom-up approach. Practices and methods within this bottom-up development emphasize the participation and empowerment of local people.

Though controversial at first, today participatory approaches to development are part of mainstream development thought and practice. Small non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as AMIGOS, government agencies and the World Bank, have all recognized the importance of participation and have implemented the associated

practices to varying extents. These organizations now use the rhetoric of participation and empowerment, and work to involve local people in the development of their communities.

However, in recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that while organizations have embraced the rhetoric and the on-the-ground methods that align with participatory theories, other attitudes, policies and practices are maintained from older, top-down, and infrastructure based approaches. In the case of AMIGOS, methods of training, and policies and practices associated with project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation have largely remained intact despite a shift in rhetoric and project goals. The result is what some scholars and development professionals have called a cut-and-paste approach of aspects from past practices and more recent practices, or a gap between rhetoric and practice. This gap can be seen as a failure on the part of an organization to fully embrace participatory development; it is often criticized as a lip-service to the value of participation. However, a more productive, and perhaps realistic, perspective of this partial shift is that it is a reflection of the challenges inherent in the transition to participatory development. Additionally, the gap represents the reality that theories rarely play out in on-the-ground practices the way they are designed to, especially, when practices involve working with other people. As a result, it is apparent that while the theories of participatory development aim to create an alternative to development, in practice, participatory development is typically just an alternative way of doing development work.

The gap between theory and practice, and the challenges to closing the gap,

emerge from the fact that participatory development requires a fundamental reversal in the direction of development – from top-down to bottom-up. Thus, changes must not only occur in practices at the community level, but all the way up through the organization. In the rush to adopt the rhetoric of participation as it became popular, many organizations were quick to implement changes in community-level work. These changes were greatly aided by a growing wealth of information and resources on how to change on-the-ground development practices. However, very few resources have emerged to guide the shift to participatory development at other levels of organizational work. Partly, this is because participatory development is still relatively new and constantly evolving – thus, there is no agreed upon formula for a complete organizational transition. In addition, transforming practices at all levels of an organization requires fundamental and challenging adjustments down to the attitudes of those who work for the organization.

So, though organizations have adopted new methodologies for their work in communities, it is often apparent that other characteristics of these organizations shape community-level work and have the potential to inhibit participation and empowerment processes. Thus, creating the appearance of a cut-and-paste approach, or a perceived gap between rhetoric and practice.

It is important to note that as a development organization, AMIGOS is substantially different from other development organizations in that most of the development work is done by adolescents, and programs have other goals in addition to advancing community development. Thus, in attempting to more fully transition to participatory development, it may be difficult for AMIGOS to make some of the

necessary adjustments to current policies and practices without sacrificing the strengths and goals of other aspects of the organization's work. However, as a case study, AMIGOS provides clear examples of organizational attitudes and practices left over from past development models, and how these attitudes and practices can potentially interfere with participatory development efforts. In analyzing these examples, it also becomes clear that leaving behind these practices requires shifting every level of an organization to foster participatory development, and therefore requires fundamental changes in an organization's culture and work.

However, the motivation behind this analysis is not to criticize AMIGOS as an organization. Likewise, it is not the aim to negate the work that the organization does in Latin America. In not fully embracing participatory development, AMIGOS is not having a negative impact. However, there are ways that AMIGOS could work to have a deeper and more positive impact. Within the philosophy of participatory development, there is an inherent need for continual reflexivity and self-critique and evaluation in an effort to adjust theories, methods, and practices in response to challenges that arise or specific contexts (Cooke & Kothari 2001). Just as participatory development models aim to be flexible and responsive to each unique community context, the implementing organizations must also continually evaluate and adjust their work. In critically analyzing AMIGOS' attitudes, policies, and practices as they relate to the transition to participatory development, this paper seeks to contribute to AMIGOS' process of reflexive evaluation and redesign of the organization's work with Latin American communities.

## II. UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT

### **The invention of development and development discourse**

The concept of development is relatively new and began with what Arturo Escobar calls the *problematization* of poverty after WWII: the recognition of poverty and different ways of life in poorer countries as “backwards” and the desire by richer countries to “fix” poverty with economic growth (Escobar 1999). Initial “development” efforts in the 1940s and 50s focused on modernization of the economies, institutions and cultural values and practices deemed archaic by the more wealthy countries in North America and Europe. As Escobar (1999) writes: “development proceeded by creating 'abnormalities' (such as illiterate, underdeveloped, malnourished, small farmers, landless peasants) which it would later treat and reform” (p.94). The hope, as Porras (2008) explains, was for the poor regions of the world to “catch up” with industrialized and wealthier countries.

In expecting the poor regions of the world to “catch up,” initial development efforts established the Western way of life as the standard benchmark against which the situation in poor regions could be measured (Escobar 1995). In order to create the changes needed for poor countries to move closer to this benchmark, development “fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem” and established “a system of more or less universally applicable technical inventions intended to deliver some 'badly needed' goods to a 'target' population” (Escobar 1999, p. 95). It is important to note that both the “badly needed” goods and the “target” population are defined by “outsiders”, usually Western academics and professionals, who also invent the technical

means of delivering the “badly needed” goods. Development relies on outside “experts” who have the knowledge, experience, and power to decide what actions are necessary and to implement those actions.

As Escobar (1995) writes, “development has relied exclusively on one knowledge system, namely, the modern Western one. The dominance of this knowledge system has dictated the marginalization and disqualification of non-western knowledge systems” (12). In more direct terms, development discourse identifies Westerners and other “outsiders” as the source of authority and knowledge. These “outsiders” determine what development means, and what technology or tools create development. Local knowledge, especially in rural areas has no clout, and “outsider” knowledge is considered correct. In this way, as Escobar (1999) explains, “development reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed, keeping alive the premise of the third world as different and inferior” (p.96).

Thus, Escobar (1999) establishes that development is inherently top-down, paternalistic, and ethnocentric, and an historical, political and social construct. Furthermore, he writes that out of the early, infrastructure-based, development practices grew

a discursive practice that [set] the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it determines the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory, or object to emerge and be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or plan (p.94).

It is important, yet challenging, to understand development as a discourse. A discourse entails a set of values or beliefs about the world that are embodied by behavioral habits

and actions which are then promoted by institutions until the original beliefs become natural. In the case of development, ideas of “poor” and “underdeveloped” countries that need to be “fixed” by “rich” countries become embodied by behavior that transfers aid, technology and other answers to “poor” countries. These behaviors are then promoted by institutions such as the media, development organizations, governments, and schools. Through this process, the idea that there are “poor” countries that need to be “fixed” has become accepted as natural, and the behaviors associated with those ideas are largely unquestioned. As Porras (2008) writes, development discourse “makes 'natural,' 'neutral,' and 'logical' some particular, dominant approaches...it informs policies, programs, and methods and produces knowledge that legitimizes the practice of development itself.”

Clearly, understanding development as a social construct and a discourse is a challenge as to do so requires one to question the ideas that have come to structure the world. As Escobar (1995) writes, “even today most people in the West (and many parts of the Third World) have great difficulty thinking about Third World situations and people in terms other than those provided by the development discourse” (p.12). Ideas of “poor” and “underdeveloped” countries needing “rich” and “developed” countries to “fix” them permeate global society, as does the understanding that to be “fixed” countries must become as much like Western countries as possible. Since defining poverty as a problem in the 1940s, Western, “rich” countries have worked to create new ways of “fixing” poverty. Though development models and theories have changed over the years, they have rarely avoided working within the discourse as the ideas involved have become accepted as natural.

### **Evolution of development models**

The first development models and the ones that established the development discourse, were top-down approaches emphasizing economic growth and infrastructure. These models, clearly within the discourse, defined development as a technical problem that could be solved by the transfer of technical knowledge from the North to the South (Parpart, Rai, and Staudt 2002, Bergdall 2000). These models emphasized industrialization, modernization and economic growth as essential. Development projects were planned by experts and implemented in the field by professional development technicians. As Bergdall (2000) writes, in “this infrastructure model: preparations were made in the form of a 'blueprint; with predetermined objectives, time tables, and implementation schedules” (p.12). Thus, early development efforts were top-down and, as explained previously, reinforced and promoted the discourse of development.

Out of these first development models, other paradigms began to evolve. New theories arose primarily out of a range of criticisms of infrastructure-based development. In general, questions arose about the goals of early development models being primarily related to economic growth. Critics called for the goals of development to shift to a focus on creating social change and meeting the basic needs of a population in a sustainable way (Veltmeyer & Petras 2000). Other criticism grew out of concern that infrastructure-based models involved the transfer of inappropriate technology that local resources and knowledge often could not support (Bergdall, 2000). Furthermore, theories originating in the global South identified such development efforts of the rich, industrialized nations as the cause of, rather than a solution to, the continued process of underdevelopment and

growing poverty in the “developing” regions of the world (Ibister 2006). Out of these concerns, and others, grew an evolution of new development theories and methods.

It is important to note that newer models of development did not completely break from the original ideas of how to “do development.” Though new paradigms of development arose out of these original models, Chambers (1995) explains that paradigms in development thinking “tend to coexist, overlap, coalesce, and separate: thinking in development needs to be 'both/and' rather than 'either/or’” (p.32). So though there are overarching contrasts between different development paradigms, many aspects of older models filter in to new models, partly as a result of the discourse of development.

In the early 1990s, ideas of development with a “human face” emerged, beginning an effort to incorporate non-economic issues into the development agenda. This shift was marked by the introduction of the United Nation’s Human Development Index (HDI) in 1993, which attempts to measure well-being by looking at life-expectancy, literacy, education, and standard of living, rather than just a country’s economy. While this model of determining a country’s level of development is better than just looking at economic factors, it can still be seen as within the development discourse; the HDI still assumes that countries are either “developed” or “underdeveloped,” and that those countries that fall in the “underdeveloped” category should strive to move into the “developed” category. Additionally, the HDI is used by development organizations to identify the problems that need to be “fixed” and to measure their success in doing so.

In addition to the introduction of the HDI, during the late 1980s and 1990s there

was a growing interest in bottom-up development and local-level analysis rather than the typical top-down analysis and implementation. Out of this new interest emerged an approach, which sought to respect local people's ability to identify and express their own needs and priorities (Staudt 2002, Veltmeyer & Petras 2000). At this point, participation- and empowerment-based models of development entered the discussion.<sup>1</sup>

### **Shift to community-based and participation models**

Chambers (1997) describes the shift towards participation- and empowerment-based models as a massive shift in priorities in the field of development: a shift “from things and infrastructure to people and capabilities” (p. 9). According to Chambers, previous development models were inherently wrong because the knowledge came from experts, embedded in the discourse of development, who were “physically, organizationally, socially, and cognitively distanced from the people and conditions they were analyzing and planning for” (p.15). As the discourse entails, “outsiders” from Western countries defined the problems and the solutions. Thus, participation models attempt to avoid the development discourse by going directly to the people affected, such as with community-based development which “places an emphasis on self-help, integration, internal development, capacity building, social solidarity, and the exercise of power to find constructive solutions to community problems” (Delgado & Staples, 2008:

---

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the emergence of empowerment models of development did not mean an end to top-down, material-based approaches. While empowerment-based models have been taken up by many small NGOs and other development organizations, bigger development agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provides funds to countries to fuel development, still focus on economic growth.

84). This method attempts to create development initiatives that fit each individual community. In participation-based models, the goal is for local people to lead the development of their own communities; local people determine the changes they would like to see and decide the way in which they will create those changes. As Chambers (1997) writes, empowerment-based development requires a new professionalism in development practices in which local knowledge, resources and energy are used and the participation of locals is encouraged. As the local people plan and implement the development work, they are able to replicate and maintain everything created, making efforts more sustainable (Kliksberg 1999). In addition, the work aims to foster empowerment and capacity building. Through involvement in the development of their communities, local people learn skills and capacities that can be used to improve other areas of their lives.

This shift to participation-based development required a new way of thinking about working with the residents of developing countries. While in past, top-down approaches to development, local people were the objects and recipients of development, in participation-based development, local people must be actors in the development of their communities. At first, these ideas of participation and empowerment in development were considered radical and ineffective. However, by the 1990s, participatory development gained recognition and support and was adopted by many individuals and organizations as the most effective, and in some ways, most politically correct, method of fostering development (Kliksberg 1999).

Today, participation and empowerment have entered the mainstream of

development thought. The World Bank identifies “empowering people to participate in development” as one of the two priorities in the fight against poverty (The World Bank 2005), and Blackburn and Holland (1998) refer to participation as the new “sacred cow” of international development agencies.

### **Participation- and empowerment-based development**

#### *Empowerment*

In facilitating participation in community development, the goal is to foster empowerment and capacity building. Thus, rather than aiming to leave behind physical infrastructure for the community, participation-based development aims to leave behind development and social change. In order to understand the delicacy required in implementing participatory development, it is important to explore some definitions of empowerment.

Rowlands (1997) defines empowerment through an analysis of different types of power. She differentiates between *power over*, which she defines as “controlling power which may be responded to with compliance, resistance or manipulation,” and *power to*, defined as “generative or productive power which creates new possibilities and actions without domination” (p. 12). Empowerment, she writes, “refers to *power to*, and it is achieved by increasing one’s ability to resist and challenge *power over*” (p.12). Thus, empowerment entails individuals gaining control over their lives. Rowlands (1997) writes that “individuals are empowered when they are able to maximize the opportunities available to them without constraints” (p. 13). In the case of community development, the

goal is for community members to become empowered to create their own development; gaining the *power to* initiate and accomplish the changes they want to see in their communities, rather than waiting for others to create change for them.

In order to define empowerment and understand its place in participatory development, it is essential to understand that empowerment is a process. As Chambers (1997) writes, “[Empowerment] is not a static condition. It is a process not a product; it is never finished. There is no 'empowerment' box that can be ticked as complete” (p.220). Furthermore, Rowlands (1997) writes that “empowerment is more than participation in decision making, it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions” (p. 14). Rappaport (1984) expands on this idea:

Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives. However, the context of the process is of infinite variety and as the process plays itself out among different people and settings, the end products will be variable and even inconsistent with one another. The inconsistency is in the ends rather than in the process; yet the form of the process will also vary (p.3).

For this reason, it is incredibly important to understand the context when one considers empowerment. In the case of development work, the context that the “outsider” needs to understand includes the social structure and customs of the society they are working in; the historical context of development they are part of; and the “outsiders” role in shaping the context. While the “outsider” is unable to change the greater historical, cultural, and societal context, the “outsider” can determine his or her role in that context. For this reason, it is crucial for “outsider’s” to understand how their behaviors and attitudes shape

their role in the larger empowerment context.

*The role of the "outsider"*

In many cases, community members are able to initiate and engage in their own processes of participation and empowerment. However, within participatory development, the philosophy is that “outsiders” can act as change agents to foster and plant the seeds for these processes. “Outsiders” can act as an external stimulus that encourages community members to begin working together to create change. After decades of top-down development initiated by governments or non-profit organizations, “the image of being a 'needy client' is often a deeply entrenched one. It causes people to look first outside of themselves for solutions to problems” (Bergdall 2003). In participatory-development, this external stimulus usually enters a community in the form of a development professional.

Rowlands (1997) writes that in participation and empowerment processes the role of the “outsider” is pivotal as the “attitudes they bring to their work and the form the work takes can have an immense positive or negative impact” (p.136). It is important to emphasize that the role of the “outsider” is not pivotal in terms of his or her presence in these processes of empowerment and participation, but rather in the “outsider's” behavior and attitudes once part of the processes. While there are generally agreed upon methods and circumstances that are believed to foster processes of participation and empowerment, the methods and processes occur within a larger societal context, which the outsider cannot change. Thus, in working to foster processes of participation and

empowerment, the only aspect of the greater context which the outsider can change is his or her role in the process; his or her attitudes and behavior. It is difficult, as Chambers points out, for the outside facilitator not to influence outcomes and processes because the transfer of their reality onto a given situation can be unintended and subconscious. In order to avoid this transfer of outsider reality, outsiders must be very aware of their own behavior and attitudes and of how the development discourse might shape them.

If “outsiders” are not conscious of the development discourse, it is very likely that their work will remain within the discourse even if it is empowerment-based. Within participatory development work, it is very easy for “outsiders” to continue to define *who* needs to participate and be empowered, *what* participation and empowerment look like, and *how* they should be created. When this is the case, the “outsider” is still defining the problem, identifying the “technology” needed to fix the problem, and then implementing the technology. If empowerment- and participation-based development efforts fall into this category, it is arguable that they are still within the discourse and that their work will not effectively foster empowerment or capacity building.

Thus, in seeking to work outside of the development discourse, empowerment-based development requires a change in the role of the “outsider,” development professional, or change agent. If empowerment and development from below is to occur, the “outsider” must avoid the “top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach that treats people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of ‘progress’” (Escobar 1999: 95). Therefore, the “outsider” must take on the difficult task of stepping outside of the discourse of development as much as

possible. As most Westerners have grown up accepting many aspects of development discourse as truth, stepping outside of the discourse and recognizing it as historical and cultural construct is difficult. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge this difficulty and recognize that it is virtually impossible to do development work completely outside of the discourse. However, the more aware the “outsider” is of the development discourse and his or her role within it as a development professional, participation-based development models can be implemented more effectively, and the discourse can be avoided as much as possible.

*Importance of facilitation rather than direction:*

Chambers (1997) explains that to step outside the development discourse, and encourage empowerment, the “outsiders” must consider whose reality counts: theirs or that of the local people they are working with. He quotes Rowe, who writes, “in all final analysis, power is the right to have your definition of reality prevail over other people’s definition of reality” (as cited in Chambers, 1997: 76). In fostering empowerment and participation, this kind of power can be a disability for the outsider. As Chambers writes, “it becomes easy and tempting to impose your reality and deny those of others...and realities of socially dominant development professions are often neither true nor right” (p. 76). Thus, “it should not be the reality of the outsider which is transferred and imposed, but the local’s reality which is expressed, built up, and shared, and their confidence and capabilities which are strengthened” (p.156). For this reason, the greatest challenge facing development workers who seek to foster participation is to let go of what their

understanding of reality tells them community development should look like; to recognize the ideas associated with development discourse as social constructions. Instead, development workers need to acknowledge and appreciate the value of the vision for community development that community members have based on their own realities.

In participatory development work, the role of the outsider needs to be one of helper and facilitator. Any role or behavior of an outsider which is more directive only interferes with the empowerment process (Chambers, 1997; Rowlands, 1997, Serrano-Garcia, 1984). Serrano-Garcia (1984) writes that a collaborative relationship between residents and outsiders is the only way in which empowerment can be fostered. This viewpoint, he writes, requires that both residents and outsiders unlearn and learn from each other. Contrary to development work defined by development discourse, Serrano-Garcia explains that outsiders must recognize that “community residents have values, knowledge, skills and behaviors different from, but not inferior to scientific ones” (p.177). It is very easy for outsiders to enter a community with preconceived notions of what will work best, based on previous experiences or beliefs. These beliefs are often so ingrained that they are considered unquestioned, or scientific truths. However, in order for community members to create their own development and establish the power to create their own change, they must discover and decide what works best for their own reality.

Thus, for participation to be fostered, it is essential that the outsider or change agent, understand his or her role in the processes of empowerment and participation. Rowlands (1997) writes that in empowerment processes, the role of the outsider is pivotal

as the “attitudes they bring to their work and the form the work takes can have an immense positive or negative impact” (p.136). It is difficult as Chambers (1997) points out, for the outside facilitator not to influence outcomes and processes because the transfer of their reality onto a given situation can be unintended and subconscious. After all, the beliefs at the heart of development discourse have become natural and unquestioned. In order to avoid this transfer of outsider reality, “outsiders” must be very aware of their own behavior and attitudes and how those behaviors and attitudes can shape the community development process. “Outsiders” must strive to step back and allow community members to lead the process in their own way.

Chambers (1997) and Fawcett, Seekins, Whang, Muiu, and Suarez de Balcazar (1984) also emphasize that the behaviors and attitudes and knowledge of the outsider need to facilitate, rather than dominate, and to encourage residents to express their own version of reality. Bergdall (2003) uses the term catalyst to explain the role of the “outsider” in facilitating participation. He explains that “effective catalysts from outside of the community don't do anything directly *for* people – they encourage people to do things on their own.” As Bergdall points out, this is much easier said than done. To be a catalyst, Bergdall explains that “outsiders” facilitate a process in which community members “build practical plans for action for mobilizing their resources and accomplishing realistic objectives.” It is essential that local residents are the primary implementers of their own plans, and that outsiders are conscious of how their presence and behavior can either facilitate or inhibit this.

*Criticism of participation-based development*

Within participation-based development, development scholars have identified ways in which efforts to foster participation actually remain within the development discourse. The most common criticism is that those who implement participatory development are not conscious of the complexities of power in development work; they are not aware of the discourse and how their work relates to it (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Hickey & Mohan 2004). As Hickey and Mohan (2004) write, “participatory development has failed to engage with issues of power and politics and has become a technical approach to development” (p.3). Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that participatory development has a potential for tyranny, which they define as the “illegitimate or unjust use of power” (p.4). They point out that the “outsider's” attempt to foster participatory development is still justified by development discourse:

There must be recognition that participatory development does not have a reified existence 'out there', but is constructed by a cadre of development professionals, be they academics, practitioners or policymakers, whose ability to create and sustain this discourse is indicative of the power they possess (p.15).

This statement highlights the fact that though the ideas and rhetoric of participatory development have become popular, and are promoted as positive and just ways of doing development work, participatory development still involves an imbalance of power between local people and “outsiders.” Cooke and Kothari (2001) clarify that the potential tyranny does not directly stem from the behavior of the development professionals but,

rather, is the result of the pervasiveness of the discourse of development. As Cooke and Kothari (2001) write, “participatory development's tyrannical potential is systemic, and not merely a matter of how the practitioner operates or the specificities of the techniques and tools employed” (p. 4). Thus, simply following the instructions to step back and facilitate, and to let local people direct the development process, as Chambers (1997) advises, does not mean that “outsiders” are truly avoiding the hierarchy of power established by development discourse; instead, they remain within it.

In bringing participatory development into this critical, and rather negative light, Cooke and Kothari (2001) do suggest a way towards a more positive form of participatory development; a way derived from the original philosophy of participatory development itself. They write: “within the orthodoxy, there is an espousal of ongoing self-critical epistemological awareness,” which is considered an “intrinsic facet of [participatory development] itself” (p.4). Thus, Cooke and Kothari emphasize that the initial aim behind participatory development was for it to be flexible and, unlike infrastructure-based development, continually evolving in response to problems or specific contexts. For this reason, they call on participatory development practitioners to engage in this continual evolution: to be critical of their work and to constantly readjust in effort to avoid unjust use of power.

Though Cooke and Kothari's criticism of participatory development is not part of the mainstream view of development, their perspective is valuable in analyzing current participatory development practices. Not only does their perspective point out the ways in which participatory development continues to work within the power inequality inherent

to the development discourse, it also stresses the need for organizations and individuals to critically and reflexively examine this inequality and the way that it is created and maintained. Rather than a negative task, evaluating and adjusting participatory development should be seen as a positive and necessary process. Thus, in evaluating AMIGOS in its implementation of participatory development, the goal is to foster the initial stages of this reflexive and critical analysis, of the organization as a whole, and of the individuals involved. Though participatory development will likely always fall somewhere within the development discourse, there are ways in which development professionals and organizations can work to minimize the impact of the discourse.

### **III. AMIGOS DE LAS AMÉRICAS**

#### **Evolution of the organization**

As a development organization, Amigos de las Américas (AMIGOS) has in many ways followed the evolution of development theories in designing and implementing its programs. AMIGOS projects began with a focus on providing aid to Latin American countries. For the first AMIGOS project, in 1965, young volunteers administered vaccines in response to the growing polio epidemic in Honduras. Similar projects, with a focus on vaccinations, continued until the 1980s. At the same time, AMIGOS began projects that focused on community sanitation and health promotion. Following an aid- and infrastructure-based model of development, AMIGOS volunteers built latrines and water storage tanks and distributed thousands of toothbrushes. In more recent years, projects have evolved again to reflect ideas from participatory development. Projects now focus on skill-building of local youth and aim to respond to the needs and priorities of host communities ([www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org)). Throughout this evolution of programs, AMIGOS has always been a youth centered organization. All of the volunteers and project staff working in the field each summer are young high school and college students.

According to Guy Bevil, the founder of AMIGOS, it was never the intention to start a new organization in 1965. Rather, the organizers were focused on sending youth to Latin America that first summer, and the organization grew from there. Today, approximately 750 young people participate in AMIGOS each summer, joining a group of over 20,000 AMIGOS alumni. The AMIGOS website features a quote from Bevil that

highlights the original philosophy behind AMIGOS' work:

Though we live in a world of instant satellite communications, we have not learned to live in peace with our neighbors. Our hope is to offer this opportunity to more young people, who as a result, will develop life-long commitments to a world of understanding, brotherhood, and peace. This is our greatest product, and it is best demonstrated in the lives of our veteran volunteers ([www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org)).

This quote emphasizes the importance of what volunteers learn from the summer experience in Latin America. Bevil also brings up the idea of living in peace with other countries, which is important in considering the origins of AMIGOS. The first AMIGOS project was, after all, in 1965, at the height of the Cold War and the tensions that created between the US and Latin America.

#### *Current mission and work*

The current mission of AMIGOS is three-tiered: “AMIGOS builds partnerships to empower young leaders, advance community development and strengthen multicultural understanding in the Américas .” Within this mission, AMIGOS identifies core values that include:

- Leadership by youth
- Health and safety of our Volunteers and Project Staff
- Respect in all of our relationships
- High quality programs developed with and relevant to the communities we serve
- Programs that transform both youth and communities ([www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org)).

Thus, in the programs that AMIGOS runs in Latin America, the organization strives to do

many things, including, but not limited to, facilitating community development. This paper will primarily focus on the community development aspect of AMIGOS' programs.

The format of AMIGOS' programs in Latin America is a blend of programs which offer high school students experiences abroad, and community-based development programs. In this blend, AMIGOS provides a unique opportunity for US youth and offers a new kind of community development model: one led by youth rather than adults. Currently, AMIGOS works in fourteen project areas in six Latin American countries. Each project is run in country by three Senior Project Staff members and approximately four to seven Project Supervisors who manage between forty and sixty volunteers. All Project Staff are former volunteers and typically are in their early twenties. Thus, AMIGOS projects offer unparalleled leadership opportunities for young people as college students are responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating community-development and volunteer programs in Latin American communities.

Volunteers are also challenged during their participation in AMIGOS' programs. Partnered with one or two others, volunteers are placed in communities where they live for five to eight weeks with a host family. As Project Supervisors only visit each community once a week, volunteers are given a substantial amount of independence and responsibility in facilitating project implementation at the community level. In all projects other than the projects in Paraguay<sup>2</sup>, volunteers facilitate what AMIGOS calls the Community-Based Initiative (CBI) process. The CBI process is meant to be carried out in collaboration with community members, especially community youth. The stages

---

<sup>2</sup> In Paraguay, AMIGOS projects involve the construction of latrines or stoves for individual families.

of this process are as follows:

- *Phase 1* – Teambuilding and tone-setting
- *Phase 2* – Community Service Project visioning and identification
- *Phase 3* – Proposal development and action plan
- *Phase 4* – Project implementation
- *Phase 5* – Participatory evaluation of project  
([www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org))

In all phases of the CBI process, volunteers are encouraged to have local youth co-facilitate the process and the implementation of the project. While AMIGOS tells volunteers that projects don't need to be construction based, the majority of projects do end up having a construction component. Projects range from construction of community gardens to the renovation or construction of schools, clinics and other community facilities such as playgrounds and soccer fields. Volunteers are encouraged to ensure that the dialog with and involvement of community members is inclusive and thorough so as to ensure that community members own the process.<sup>3</sup>

With this model, AMIGOS strives to use the power of youth-to-youth connections. According to AMIGOS literature, the young age of volunteers allows them to work with communities at a different level than an adult development professional would. Volunteers are able to connect with community members, especially youth at a more day-to-day level. In living with community members, volunteers develop deep understandings of local life and culture and close relationships with members of their

---

<sup>3</sup> This emphasis on involvement of community members is found in the CBI training for volunteers, which is part of the AMIGOS Core Curriculum.

community, especially the youth. Thus, the idea behind AMIGOS' youth-education focused projects is that volunteers can partner with local youth with whom they have developed connections, in order to co-facilitate community development. In working with local youth, volunteers are able to motivate and inspire people their own age in a peer-to-peer education model ([www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org)).

Community members often express an appreciation for the way in which the young volunteers are able to work with community youth. During the 2008 project in San Pedro, Paraguay, one school principal told me that the most powerful aspect of having AMIGOS volunteers in his community was “the way that the volunteers made the youth more dynamic and set a positive example for them. The volunteers showed the youth that kids their age can take initiative, go away from home, and bring positive change if they just have the courage to do it” (Munos). Seeing people their own age engaging in creating community change is inspiring for many local community youth. In this way, volunteers are often able to foster new participation and empowerment in community youth simply by living and working in the community. However, just because volunteers are young and working with community youth does not eliminate the tendency for their behavior and attitudes to fall within the development discourse. As will be discussed, there are some challenges that AMIGOS faces in training these young volunteers to positively and effectively facilitate community change with local youth.

*Beyond community development*

As explained above, AMIGOS' mission and values are much broader in focus than merely fostering community development. Unlike other development organizations, AMIGOS is primarily a summer experience for US high school students. As an organization pursuing development, the high-school experience component presents two general challenges: (1) the short time period in which projects occur (5-8 weeks) and (2), the fact that the development workers are adolescents with often minimal Spanish skills and little-to-no experience with development work.

Additionally, it is important to consider that there are multiple focuses to AMIGOS work, as the AMIGOS mission is three-fold, with only one part aimed at fostering community change and development. The other two parts of the AMIGOS mission statement – fostering multicultural understanding and leadership development – are arguably the strongest parts of the programs offered by AMIGOS. Compared to other abroad experiences available to young people in the US, AMIGOS programs provide full immersion into another culture and way of life, and truly push volunteers to grow as individuals. Ultimately, it is the cultural immersion and the relationships with community members that volunteers value the most.

The strength of the cultural immersion and relationship building aspect of the AMIGOS' programs is very evident in volunteer responses to a survey I administered during the 2008 project in San Pedro, Paraguay. Before leaving for their communities, volunteers were asked to explain their reasons for wanting to participate in an AMIGOS program. Upon completion of the project, volunteers were then asked to answer the same

question, based on their volunteer experience. Trends in volunteer responses changed in the following ways:

- Prior to the volunteer experience, 73% of volunteers said they wanted to do AMIGOS to volunteer, help others, or have an impact. After the experience, this number decreased to 25%.
- Prior to the volunteer experience, 40% of volunteers mentioned cultural immersion and relationships with community members as reasons for participating in AMIGOS. After the experience, this number increased to 80%.<sup>4</sup>

These responses clearly show that the most powerful part of the AMIGOS volunteer experience is the cultural immersion and the relationships that volunteers develop with community members. In contrast, though volunteers initially sign up for AMIGOS with community service in mind, this aspect of the experience is not ultimately the most significant. In the written responses to this question, it is apparent that though the cultural immersion experience was most positive aspect of the project, volunteers still appreciate the community development work. As one volunteer wrote after the community experience: “I wanted to immediately, directly, personally make a difference in people's lives and improve their living conditions. That's still what I would write about my experience, but I think the cross-cultural part is more valuable now” (Opinion Survey). The results of these surveys show that in considering the implementation of community development work in AMIGOS projects, it is important to consider the strengths of the other parts of the programs as well.

Thus, in analyzing AMIGOS’ transition to participatory development, it is crucial to acknowledge a few questions: (1) Is it possible to fully embrace participatory methods

---

<sup>4</sup> Based on responses of 40 volunteers to opinion survey administered by author. For survey methods please see Appendix A.

while still maintaining the strength of the services and experiences currently provided to youth participants from the US? And, (2) In the AMIGOS mission, how much of a priority is community development in comparison to cultural exchange and leadership development?

### **AMIGOS as a case study**

As a case study about community development organizations, AMIGOS is clearly a unique, and in some ways, strange example. AMIGOS programs are unique both as community development programs and as abroad experiences for high school students. On one hand, the nature of the organization's programs creates inherent limitations to fully adopting participatory methods of development. On the other hand, perhaps given the mission and goals of AMIGOS, it is not necessary for AMIGOS to more fully implement participatory development.

Keeping these two factors in mind, AMIGOS does provide an interesting case study of the ways in which an organization's policies and practices can shape participatory development work at the community level. In the part of the organization's work that does focus on community development, AMIGOS exemplifies the nature of the challenges that face organizations aiming to make the transition to participatory development.

As stated in the preface, it is not the aim to negate the positive impacts that AMIGOS has on participants' lives. AMIGOS offers life-changing experiences for US youth, and Latin American community members thoroughly enjoy sharing their lives with the volunteers. Additionally, the AMIGOS programs offer unmatched experiences

for high school students in hands-on community development work. Whereas other experiences for high school students in Latin America focus on service and aid to communities, through AMIGOS, volunteers live and work with community members.

This case study of AMIGOS is not aimed at criticizing the organization and its work. Rather, the goal is to explore the ways in which AMIGOS has embraced participatory development and how those efforts might be limited by some of the practices and policies of the organization. These practices and policies are often a reflection of the challenges to the organizational transition to participatory development, and are not unique to AMIGOS but, rather, faced by many organizations in the field. However, the response to these challenges will be unique in the case of AMIGOS: some of the practices and policies can be changed but some are necessary to the maintenance of the current strengths of AMIGOS programs.

## IV. ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSITION TO PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

### Adopting rhetoric and practices

In general, the theories of participation in development have made their way into most development organizations. The rhetoric of participation and community-based development is written into project documents and policies and implemented in different ways to development practices. AMIGOS' projects, for instance are described as “collaborative efforts between youth participants, a vigorous network of Pan-American partner agencies, and the local knowledge and experience of our host communities” (2007 Annual Report). Phrases such as “capacity building,” “youth involvement,” “civic engagement,” and “Asset-Based Community Development” can be found throughout AMIGOS documents. The AMIGOS organizational values include ideas such as the importance of making projects relevant to the communities served. And in training literature, AMIGOS identifies the need for volunteers to understand theories of participation-based development and the importance of focusing on capacity building versus physical outcomes.

In addition, as explained previously, AMIGOS has introduced new methods of implementing projects that align with participatory approaches. Primarily, this shift is seen through the Community-Based Initiative (CBI) process. As the website explains,

Community based initiatives are the foundation of AMIGOS' projects in Latin America... CBI is the completion of a project *by the host community*, rather than for the host community by our Volunteers. Amigos Volunteers are merely facilitators and catalysts for positive change (www.amigoslink.org).

Volunteers are trained to involve community members in deciding a project for the community, filling out any necessary forms, raising funds, and completing the project. In comparison to the AMIGOS projects which focus on latrine or stove building, CBI projects definitely involve community members at a new level.

Within CBI projects, there has also been an increased focus on empowering community youth. In all project areas, community youth attend at least one training or *encuentro* and AMIGOS encourages all staff and volunteers to strive for youth participation and leadership in all aspects of the project. The goal is for these youth counterparts to be involved at all levels of the project and to help organize the logistics for the volunteers' stay in community. In addition, AMIGOS project tracking documents ask volunteers and staff to track the number of youth participants in all program related activities.

### **The partial shift**

The new participatory rhetoric and other steps such as AMIGOS has taken to implement participatory approaches in development work are important and represent a significant shift from previous community work done by the organization. However, other aspects of AMIGOS projects have not made as significant a shift away from previous approaches to development. According to Bergdall (2003) this partial shift and gap between rhetoric and practice is common: “in regards to packaging their products and programs, there is a strong tendency [for development organizations] to co-opt new sexy language... without substantially changing practices that perpetuate the professional-

client relationship.” As previously explained, the transition to participatory development requires profound changes in the way that outside organizations work with communities. Fostering empowerment and participation processes while stepping as far outside of development discourse as possible is sensitive work. It is not just the work at the community level that must foster these processes; the policies and attitudes in an organization's headquarters must as well. As Chambers (1998) writes, merely writing participation into organization documents and implementing some new practices, does not necessarily lead to ideal participatory development. These initial steps do not necessarily guarantee that outsider work in community is avoiding the development discourse or redefining power relationships. Instead, the changes need to extend throughout the organization, impacting organizational culture, rhetoric, practices, and procedures at all levels.

Proponents of participatory development often point to the work of government bureaucracies for examples of development practices so steeped in set procedures and hierarchical operations that they are inherently anti-participatory. However, Blackburn (1998) points out that non-governmental development organizations also fall into the same problems, despite the rhetoric of participation and empowerment that fills their literature. While adopting the rhetoric of participation and empowerment and developing new on-the-ground practices that strive to foster bottom-up and people focused development, most organizations maintain many of the practices that were established during previous eras of development work and theory. The majority of organizations continue to follow strict time lines and focus on clear, measurable targets and outcomes –

practices that are typically at odds with the philosophical basis of participatory development.

This partial transition, or gap between rhetoric and practice, is strongly criticized by some development scholars. For instance, Blackburn (1998) argues: “To dangle the carrot of participation on the one hand, while continuing to apply the stick, on the other, by maintaining a strict control over resources, time, procedures, as well as the methods and criteria of evaluation, is plainly unacceptable” (169). Aspects of this accusation can be seen in the work of AMIGOS. While AMIGOS increasingly emphasizes community collaboration and participation, the organization continues to control the resources and time allocated to communities, and continues to determine the methods of project implementation and evaluation. Thus, while the organization's rhetoric aligns with the original philosophy behind participatory development, which calls for community members to direct all aspects of a project, the reality of the work in community is that much of the development work is still in the hands of the “outsiders.” This gap between rhetoric and practice is not unique to AMIGOS. As exemplified by Blackburn's comments above, the result of this gap is that many development scholars accuse organizations of abusing power through the rhetoric of participatory development.

In this way, participatory methods are often stuck on to development work as an appendage, rather than fully implemented throughout an organization's work. Though the language, and some of the suggest practices of participatory development are adopted, most organizations have maintained what Gaventa (1998) describes as “standardized, bureaucratic procedures which often inhibit more flexible, innovative practices” (161).

### **Organizations themselves must change**

According to Leurs (1998), this partial shift towards participatory development occurs because the message seems to be that participation-based development is something for the field – for community-level work – and therefore does not apply to the organizations initiating the work. In response to the popularization of participatory development, organizations such as AMIGOS have changed the way in which they talk about and implement work in communities. Meanwhile, organizations often maintain policies and practices at higher levels of the organization. In response to this, many development professionals and scholars have called for organizations themselves to change. As Chambers (1998) writes, with previous, aid-based methods of development, “it was the local people who had to change. Now the imperative has been reversed. The finger points back to [development professionals]...the quality of development depends on what sort of people [they] are and what [they] do” (xvi). In previous models of development, success implied that local people - or the "subjects" of the development had to change their ways. With participation-based development, as Chambers points out, success requires the "outsiders" to change. Echoing Chambers' ideas, Blackburn (1998) explains that the challenge to truly embracing participatory development lies in organizations transforming themselves. Furthermore, Gaventa explains that “participation and empowerment have little meaning unless implementing organizations, together with partners and donors, are prepared to revision the program systems and procedures which often interfere with rather than facilitate participatory processes of development” (161).

Thus, the next step for organizations to embrace participatory development is to make changes at all levels of the organization, rather than just in the field.

Transforming an organization comes with immense challenges. As Blackburn and Holland (1998) write,

It is one thing to direct resources to facilitate participatory planning...it is quite another to question and begin to change the often rigidly hierarchical and risk-averse management structures to implement over the long term. If participatory approaches are, however, to have a lasting impact, institutions keen to implement them in the field must be prepared to examine how their own systems of organization can be made flexible enough to let participation in (p. 3).

In order for outside organizations to truly foster participation and empowerment in development processes, participatory approaches must stretch up throughout the organization.

It is important to note that this organizational transformation is not something that can happen instantaneously. As Hagmann, Chuman and Murwira (1998) write,

the institutionalization of participatory approaches into a hierarchically structured organization is a highly complex intervention that must be considered with medium- to long-term objective. It requires major reorientation of planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation systems for which high commitment from all staffing is imperative (p. 56).

In this way, it is not just that organizations have failed to make simple, quick changes in policies and practices, but rather, that the changes needed are significant and will take time to implement. Furthermore, these changes are part of a process, which means that organizations need to keep evaluating and redesigning all aspects of the organization in effort to move farther away from the discourse of development and closer to participatory models.

The aim of this paper is to assist AMIGOS in this process of evaluation and redesign in effort to move the organization's community work closer to participatory development models. The next section will begin this process by evaluating a handful of AMIGOS' policies and practices and their relation to participatory development and then suggesting some possibilities for redesign.

## **V. AMIGOS DE LAS AMÉRICAS AND THE TRANSITION TO PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT**

As explained above, policies, practices and other aspects of development work left over from previous development approaches can shape, and in some cases inhibit, community-level efforts towards participatory development. This section will explore some of these interfering policies, practices and attitudes, as reflected in the work of AMIGOS. Interfering characteristics of AMIGOS' work are deeply interconnected but for the purposes of this paper will be organized into the following four general categories:

- Attitudes and Behavior
- Training
- Project Implementation
- Evaluation and Monitoring

In exploring each of these categories, the aim is to shed light on the impacts these areas of development work can have on efforts to foster participation and empowerment.

Additionally, it is important to recognize the challenges to making the changes necessary for organizations to truly institutionalize participation. Some of these challenges are relatively inherent to the work of a development organization and will be difficult to overcome. However, there are ways in which organizations such as AMIGOS can work to ensure that they are interfering with participatory processes as little as possible.

### **Attitudes and Behaviors**

Of all the changes required by organizations to most effectively foster participation and empowerment, Chambers (1998) argues that the most crucial area of change is that of personal attitudes and behaviors. Haggmann, Chuma and Murwira

(1998) also found through a series of case studies that a change in the attitudes of development organization staff towards community members is the key determinant for success of participatory development approaches. As explained previously, the transition to participatory development requires “outsiders” to facilitate, rather than direct the development process. In the case of AMIGOS, this change in the role of the “outsider” has been adopted into the organization's rhetoric and some of the trainings volunteers and staff receive, as well as implemented into practice through the CBI process. However, in order for volunteers and staff members to be positive “outsiders,” they need to understand *why* it is important for them to facilitate rather than direct; this requires training that fosters both awareness of, and changes in, attitudes about development work. In addition, the same attitude awareness and changes need to occur in higher levels of the organization. The need for attitudes of development workers to change is an overarching issue and must be addressed not only individually, but also as it relates to the organizational practices and policies that will be explored later.

Chambers explains: “participation is about how people interact. Dominating behavior inhibits participation. Democratic behavior to enable and empower encourages it. For those with power and authority to adopt non-dominating, empowering behavior almost always entails personal change” (xv). Blackburn and Holland (1998) expand on this concept in writing that in order to foster participation and empowerment, development professionals must begin with themselves. They explain that the first step in understanding one's role as a change agent in the development process is understanding that “the way we act, and more particularly, the behavior we display and the attitudes we

hold, have a profound effect on...those with whom we work, be they poor villagers, office colleagues or funders” (5).

In order for an outsider to develop consciousness of his or her role in the participatory development process, it is fundamental that the outsider understands concepts related to the discourse of development and power. As explained previously, if outsiders are not conscious of the development discourse, it is likely that their work will remain within the discourse even if it is based on participation. The reality is that despite the best intentions of NGOs, practitioners, and community members, the discourse of development “splashes and permeates all interactions in the field” (Porrás). This is largely because any type of development work rests fundamentally on the foundation of the discourse of development. Understanding development as a discourse and the role that outsider development workers typically play in maintaining and institutionalizing the discourse is challenging. It requires reconstruction of beliefs, attitudes and world views that are, in many ways, ingrained in US society. As explained previously, ideas that divide “poor” countries and “rich” countries and see “rich” countries as having the tools, technology and knowledge necessary to help the “poor” countries, remain relatively unquestioned and natural in today's world. Though it may be impossible to completely rid the work of an outside development organization of the discourse of development, in order to adopt participatory approaches, work in communities must step as far outside the discourse as possible. This requires a keen awareness of the development discourse and how the work of the outsider plays into it.

Central to a consciousness of the role of the outsider in development discourse is

an understanding of power, and of Chambers' (p.39) question, "Whose reality counts?" As Cooke and Kotharie (2001) write, to truly foster participation in development, outsiders need a deeper understanding of the dynamics of power in a development project. Outsiders must recognize the power that is connected with their role as a development worker. They must be aware of how their culture, past experiences, and knowledge may make it difficult to accept as equal, and learn from the knowledge and experience of community members, and to therefore foster legitimate participation and empowerment.

Deconstructing these ideas is difficult for anyone, let alone the 16 and 17 year-old volunteers that AMIGOS trains. It requires a certain openness and ability to question that which one has always considered a natural part of the world around them. While the ability to be critical of society may be more difficult for young people, there may be some ways in which AMIGOS' adolescent volunteers might be more able to adjust to new ways of thinking about the work they do in Latin America. Unlike development professionals who work for other organizations, volunteers are fresh to development work. As volunteers have never done community-level work before, AMIGOS perhaps has an advantage in some ways, as volunteers can begin by learning more positive and participatory ways to work in communities, without having to unlearn previous methods. If training and the volunteer experience are designed effectively, volunteers could learn participatory methods right of the bat. As all AMIGOS Project Staff members, and most International Office staff began as volunteers, fostering the development of the right outsider attitudes and behaviors could also lead to innovative changes at all levels of the

organization in the future.

However, it is also important to note that all literature that discusses adjusting the “outsider's” understanding of their role is aimed at development professionals who have been involved previously in development work. For this reason, speaking to young AMIGOS volunteers about their role will require a different approach than that of Chambers, as volunteers have little to no experience in development work. Additionally, young people have less experience in the world on which to develop a critical perspective on the socially and historically constructed systems of ideas that structure the world around them. Understanding development discourse and the associated ideas requires a deconstruction of beliefs that permeate Western society and divide the world into “rich” and “poor”, and “helpers” and “helpless,” and is thus, a challenge. In fact, it is ideas that derive from development discourse that often motivate volunteers to participate in AMIGOS. For instance, in the survey I administered to volunteers in Paraguay, I asked the question: why do you want to participate in AMIGOS? One volunteer referred to wanting to “help poor people better their lives” (Opinion Survey), while another wrote quite simply: “I want to save the world” (Opinion Survey). When I asked volunteers how they explained to family members and friends what they would be doing that summer, 75% of them mentioned ideas of serving and helping or giving communities physical deliverables. These responses show that volunteers are motivated in the first place to participate in AMIGOS because of ideas related to development discourse, and in a time when “helping the less-fortunate” is known to bulk up any college or scholarship application, these beliefs will be hard to deconstruct. Thus, trainings that encourage

volunteers to step outside of development discourse will require a new approach geared specifically at adolescents.

Changes in attitudes and behaviors of the outsider are, as stated previously, a fundamental and overarching area of change in the transition to participatory development work. The attitude and behavior the development worker play a direct role in whether participation and capacity building are fostered or inhibited, and to what extent. However, as the most fundamental and necessary change in the transition to participatory development, adjusting attitudes is also the most challenging. For most organizations, including AMIGOS, adjusting volunteer and staff attitudes about development work will result mainly from changes in training and the fostering of learning during the community experience. While “outsiders” can be told to act in certain ways, it is much more effective for them to truly understand the reasons for those behaviors, and to therefore develop the behaviors on their own.

## **Training**

In many ways, AMIGOS has done a good job of bringing the ideas and rhetoric of positive community development and participatory development into trainings. This is especially evident in a number of the learning objectives for volunteer training:

- Objective 5: Volunteers will be familiar with the positive community development methodologies promoted in AMIGOS and be prepared to utilize these approaches in the summer projects and community based initiatives.
- Objective 6: Volunteers will understand that the success of a community based initiative depends on the process, not the outcome.
- Objective 7: Volunteers will recognize their primary role as partner & catalyst for change in working with community members.
- Objective 13: Volunteers will understand the importance of using local culture to

- maximize their summer projects.
- Objective 15: Volunteers will be aware that flexibility in personal expectations of their community, project and AMIGOS experience is imperative.<sup>5</sup>

These learning objectives reflect an understanding on the part of AMIGOS of the the need for volunteers to understand the work they are doing and what their role should be in it. To respond to these learning objectives, AMIGOS has added a number of new activities to volunteer training. However, these activities often reflect a focus on rhetoric without fully exploring the theories behind participatory development and what they mean in relation to work at the community level. Though activities bring up the larger ideas and give volunteers broad instructions for behavior in community and project implementation, a thorough explanation of why these ideas and the resulting behaviors are important is often left out. In many ways these activities fail to develop true understanding of concepts that are fundamental for volunteers to adjust their attitudes and behaviors as “outsiders” in participatory community development work.

*Short-comings to participatory development trainings*

The challenges that AMIGOS' training program faces in truly fostering understanding of participatory development are faced across the field of development. In the transition to participatory development, Leurs (1998) argues that there is an “urgent need” for development practitioners to rethink the approach to participation-based development training. He outlines the following short-comings, all of which apply in some way to AMIGOS' trainings:

---

<sup>5</sup> These objectives are listed in the AMIGOS training Core Curriculum.

1. Most training is short term

Training for AMIGOS volunteers is relatively brief, especially in terms of the amount of time spent on ideas related to the role of the volunteers in fostering participation and empowerment. All AMIGOS volunteers are required to complete training for the summer experience and there are two ways to do so. First, volunteers can attend training through one of AMIGOS' regional chapters. Chapters are run by AMIGOS alumni and/or interested parents or community members and provide training that typically occurs about once a week and lasts 7 or 8 months leading up to the summer departure for Latin America. The second option is for volunteers to attend an intensive Correspondent Volunteer training that occurs the week before departure to Latin America. Both training opportunities cover the same training curriculum designed by the International Office. All volunteers then receive 2-3 days of training provided by project staff while in the project area.

Similarly, staff training is very quick, lasting between 4 and 9 days depending on the staff position. The short length of staff training is due to the fact that all staff are brought together for training in Texas. As a result, there is a limit to the length of time that staff members can be asked to leave their lives at home.

2. Most training concentrates on methods, rather than behaviors, attitudes and principles

The AMIGOS training curriculum for volunteers focuses primarily on preparing for the experience abroad and methods of implementing a project. A large portion of the

training focuses on the latter as the young volunteers must be prepared for the experience of living in a small rural community in Latin America for 8 weeks. This portion of the training covers subjects such as culture shock, homesickness and physical health.

As outlined above, a number of AMIGOS' learning objectives for volunteers reflect areas of knowledge and understanding that, if addressed correctly in trainings, are in line with the understandings deemed necessary for volunteers to be positive outsiders in participatory development. However, in relation to these learning objectives, trainings tend to focus on methods, rather than behavior, attitudes and principles. Volunteers read and discuss a number of articles that look at the role of “outsiders.” There are also a few well-designed activities which aim to have volunteers consider how they should work with community members to implement projects. To this end, volunteers are given a number of tools and methods often used in participatory development, such as: community mapping, community walking tours, seasonal calendars, and appreciative inquiry. In addition, volunteers are given instructions on how to be a positive outsider in the facilitation of the CBI process and in encouraging community participation in the project. These instructions, outlined on a training handout, include:

- DON'T do things for people, DO help them do it for themselves
- DON'T define priority needs based on your own North American values and perspectives, DO help people analyze and define the problem and define their own needs.
- DON'T assume people should do things the way we do them in the USA. What works for us may not work for them. DO respect local values, traditions and ingenuity. Treat them as building blocks, not impediments.
- DON'T assume a leadership style based on an authoritative, forceful approach. DO assume a leadership style that promotes the concept that when the task is done, the people say, “We did it ourselves.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> This list is part of a handout given to volunteers in the AMIGOS training Core Curriculum.

Clearly, these “Do's and Don'ts” for AMIGOS volunteers reflect the ideas of a positive outsider, change agent or catalyst in the participatory development process. However, while these instructions are given to volunteers, along with the tools and methods mentioned above, there is still a gap in the AMIGOS training and experience that is found, according to Leurs, in most development organizations: the philosophy and ideas behind these instructions and tools are not fully explained so as to foster volunteer and staff understanding of these concepts. While volunteers may be able to memorize the “Do's and Don'ts,” there is little in the trainings to help them truly internalize and understand why the list includes what it does.

Similarly, topics covered in staff trainings are primarily focused on project implementation. As staff teams are in charge of 40-60 young volunteers during the summer, there are a lot of health and safety policies to learn as well as skills for supervising young adults. In addition, project staff members are responsible for all project implementation in regards to budget, materials purchase, training of volunteers, collaboration with host communities, placement of volunteers in host communities, and monitoring and evaluation. These activities, as well as beginning to plan aspects of the summer take up the majority of the time at trainings. For the staff training in 2008, staff members were given a few articles on the positive role of the outsider and on participation- and empowerment-based development. However, the articles were never discussed.

3. Most trainings are considered a “one-off” exercise, rather than an ongoing process

By “one-off”, Leurs refers to the idea that most trainings are considered a one-time experience or course to be completed, after which the volunteer or development professional will be fully prepared to foster participation and empowerment. However, as discussed previously, fostering participation and empowerment in community development requires outsiders to adjust their attitudes and behaviors in relation to their work with community members, which is a challenging process. For this reason, trainings in the area of participatory development need to be considered an ongoing process. There is no exam or list of activities that can automatically prepare an outsider to perfectly foster participation and empowerment. Instead, training should be considered a long-term process that needs to combine knowledge acquisition with experience.

In the case of AMIGOS, training is not only short term, but also ends for volunteers as soon as they arrive in their communities. There is no system for volunteers to process the concepts they learned during training as they experience community development work first-hand in community. As volunteers are typically overwhelmed by the reality of living in a community totally different from anything they've ever experienced, away from everyone they know, most volunteers don't necessarily process the ideas from training on their own.

Fostering a process of experiential learning for volunteers, would give them the opportunity to really understand and internalize the lessons learned from their AMIGOS experience. At the end of the Paraguay 2008 project, the post-experience survey asked

volunteers how they would explain the experience to family and friends back home. In response, 25% of volunteers wrote that they didn't know how to explain it. "There is no possible way," wrote one volunteer. "It won't even scratch the surface." Another wrote: "I don't think I can put it into words. I still need to figure out what this experience meant to me" (Opinion Survey). These responses show that volunteers are often unable to articulate what they learned about themselves and the world during their time in community. In all three years of my involvement with AMIGOS, the primary concern expressed by volunteers prior to returning home was that they would lose grasp of everything they had learned. In not helping volunteers internalize the lessons learned and be able to articulate them, AMIGOS is diminishing the potential for volunteers to deconstruct beliefs associated with development discourse during the summer experience. Unless learning is fostered during the community experience, volunteers will likely maintain the same understanding of development as they had upon entering the community.

In response to these shortcomings, Leurs (1998) provides two suggestions for improving trainings. First, trainings should emphasize the role of the "outsider" as a facilitator of the development process. Second, he suggests that participants should be critically involved in the development of their own training. To this end, participants should be required to critically analyze their own experience in the development process throughout every stage of training and work in communities. In general, Leurs argues that a new approach needs to concentrate "much more on the principles of participatory learning methods as opposed to the means" (125). If outsiders understand the rationale

for interacting with community members in a particular way, they will not only be more likely to do so, but will also do so more effectively.

As a result of these shortcomings in trainings, I have observed that while volunteers and staff are often able to repeat ideas related to participatory development, they are not always able to explain why these ideas are important or how they should play out in community work. In the survey I administered prior to the community experience in Paraguay, volunteers were asked how they envisioned working with community members. Some volunteers showed no recollection of the need to collaborate emphasized by AMIGOS during training. One volunteer wrote: “I came here not expecting any help from community members on the project” (Opinion Survey). Other volunteers' answers reflected some of the ideas from training. One volunteer wrote that she expected to work “side by side with community members. I would definitely prefer to work with the community and the Paraguayan youth, rather than burst into their community trying to 'lead' them in something by myself, or even with my partner” (Opinion Survey). Another demonstrated some understanding of the need for volunteers to let community members lead the process: “I really want to work with the community on our projects (since there's no way just 2 or 3 people could handle all this). I think the biggest challenge is to be active and constructive without being bossy or overbearing. I will try very hard to always remember they know their town best” (Opinion Survey)

However, while the majority of volunteers indicated that they knew they should collaborate with community members on projects, most responses focused on the need to work with community members on project construction. Only five volunteers out of forty

mentioned anything about soliciting community input and only four provided an explanation of how they would make an effort to involve community members. So while volunteers seem to know that they should work with community members on projects, they are often unsure of how to do so. As a Project Supervisor in Uruguay in 2007, I oversaw projects in four communities. In every community, the volunteers I worked with simply expected the community members to show up and participate voluntarily. Based on the training they received, they were unprepared to figure out how to solicit community input and participation if it wasn't already there.

In this way, it is my observation that the content of AMIGOS' trainings can act as an obstacle to fostering participatory development at the community level. In light of Leurs' recommendations, and based on the nature of AMIGOS' projects, the following adjustments to trainings are suggested:

*1. More focus on attitudes and philosophy of participation*

As discussed in the section on attitudes and behavior, understanding development theory and the role of the outsider in participatory development is crucial to fostering participation processes. Thus, AMIGOS needs to develop more activities that help volunteers gain awareness of their existing attitudes and begin to develop new ones. Crucial to this will be more in-depth discussion of concepts such as development discourse, as well as some of the philosophy behind participation-based development. Volunteers will ultimately be more successful as outsiders if they understand their role in the development process and are aware of how their attitudes and behaviors have the

potential to shape processes of participation and empowerment. Providing volunteers with methods, tools, and instructions is helpful, but in order for volunteers to employ them appropriately, they need to understand why they are important. As Haggmann, Chuma, and Murwira (1998) found in their case studies, attitudes cannot be changed simply by teaching outsiders to use certain participatory methods. Volunteers will ultimately be more effective if they have the right attitude, which can then shape their behavior. They will also have more of an ability to be flexible in response to the unique context of their community.

## *2. Implement systems for fostering experiential learning while in community*

As previously stated, AMIGOS trainings basically stop when volunteers depart for their communities. This limits the amount of learning that can take place while in community. Due to the challenges of understanding concepts such as development discourse, the importance of participation, and the role of the outsider in community work, the most effective way of learning is often a combination of knowledge and experience. The volunteers and younger staff members have learned the facts and can typically probably repeat memorized ideas, but a system is needed to help them internalize the ideas and connect them to what they are doing in community. They are given the basics in training but the concepts are never revisited during their work in community or connected to their experience. Training needs be a longer-term process that volunteers and staff members go through. As Haggmann, Chuma, and Murwira (1998) explain: “Without a consistent follow-up...the impact of training courses in participatory

tools is low...intensive training, support and follow up are extremely important in order to avoid these kinds of initiatives being labeled participatory simply because participation is the talk of the day” (p.55).

Experiential learning could be implemented as part of the Project Supervisor's weekly visit. Volunteers could be encouraged to reflect on ideas such as: what does it mean to be 'poor', what it means for them to be doing community development work, what their role has been in the project and what community members' roles have been. In addition, Project Supervisors could help volunteers become more aware of and process any changes they are seeing in the community in terms of empowerment and capacity building. These changes are often hard to see, but it is important for volunteers to be aware of them so as to process success as capacity building. In order for this to be effective, AMIGOS will also have to increase the training given to Project Staff in the area of participatory development. Currently most Project Staff members also have a relatively limited understanding of development theories and community development work.

### *3. Develop system for identifying and rewarding positive “outsider” behavior*

A component of the experiential learning could include the development of a mechanism for recognizing and rewarding behavior that fosters participation and empowerment. At a basic level, this could involve some changes to the Volunteer Performance Evaluation. Currently, supervisors evaluate volunteers in eighteen different areas. There is one area that assesses the level to which a volunteer “solicits expertise and

involvement of community members in projects,” and another how well a volunteer “integrates fully into community life and shows appreciation for local culture” (Volunteer Performance Evaluation Form). However, there are no other categories that really address positive outsider behavior or understanding of participatory development. As these areas are established as crucial for participatory development to work, integrating them into the ways in which volunteers and staff members are evaluated as development workers would be an important move for AMIGOS to make in the transition to participatory development.

Staff performance evaluations are very similar. Both Project Supervisor and Senior Staff Evaluations only ask about one performance area related to participatory development, specifically, the level of collaboration with community members. Notably, the Senior Staff evaluation is the only one to provide any indicators as to what the evaluator might look for in assessing the level of success in that area. These indicators are good because they provide guidance as to what collaborating with community members might look like. For instance, one indicator is that the staff member “consults and considered pre-existing knowledge, technology, and resources of host communities in program development and implementation” (Senior Staff Performance Evaluation). Indicators such as this should be adapted for other performance evaluations.

## **Project Implementation**

Regardless of the rhetoric used to describe projects, the way in which projects are implemented in communities determines how participation and empowerment processes play out. Policies and practices can have a direct impact on whether participation is facilitated or inhibited.

### *Working with local communities and organizations*

While there is a wealth of literature and resources on incorporating participatory practices into the initial stages of the development process, and some common understandings about ways to foster empowerment and participation in the evaluation stage, there is very little information on the work that happens in between, or how to change organization policies to better support implementation. According to Blackburn (1998), this is because there is less understanding of how to foster and sustain participation during the day-to-day management of a project. This gap in project implementation is apparent in AMIGOS projects. While volunteers are taught to use participatory methods for the initial appraisal and early planning stages of the development process, and some during the evaluation stages, through participatory evaluation, they are given minimal methods to involving community members throughout the entire process of implementation.

In some ways, participatory processes are inhibited by the attitudes and behaviors of the community members as well. For instance, in a number of communities in Paraguay, community members expected the volunteers to do all project related work and refused to assist them or work with them. Similarly, in Uruguay in 2007, two of the

volunteers I supervised expressed that they felt “like slaves” in their community: community members expected them to work daily on the renovation of the local clinic and only one community member regularly showed up to help them. At the same time, communities often look to volunteers to direct the process and make decisions. For instance, in Paraguay, community members wanted AMIGOS representatives to decide where the *fogones* would be built in the community and were reluctant to make these decisions on their own. Thus, it is not only “outsiders” that often must adjust their expectations for how they will work with community members. In many cases, community members must also adjust their expectations in order for participation processes to occur.

As Hagmann, Chuma, and Murwira (1998) write, local community members often accept a subordinate role in community development processes because outsiders come in with a certain level of socially constructed authority. In addition, community members are often used to infrastructure-based development work in which the benefits of the work are simply delivered to them; participation is an alien concept. This creates a challenge in that community members don't necessarily know understand what is to be gained from participating in an AMIGOS project. In many AMIGOS communities, volunteers find it immensely challenging to engage community members in projects because community members simply expect the volunteers to do everything. These challenges reflect the need for volunteers to have even more training in the area of fostering participation so as to be able to adjust community member attitudes about participation. This adjustment – from community members depending on outsiders to

change their communities, to realizing that they can create change on their own – is, in itself, capacity building and the heart of empowerment.

### *Time*

The short time frame in which AMIGOS projects are implemented and success measured is one of the greatest factors that has the potential to interfere with the participatory development process. The 5-8 week projects that AMIGOS organizes are an extreme example of the typical short development project. Blackburn (1998) writes that projects implemented by most development agencies “try to do too much too quickly, failing to recognize that building up local institutions needs time and considerable personal and institutional commitment more than it needs money” (170). Furthermore, Blackburn argues that outside organizations need to commit to a region, program or policy for at least 10 years. He writes: “only in this way can it be ensured that *going participatory* does not result in pseudo-participation or manipulation” (170). A report by the World Bank echoes this need for a longer project time-frame and commitment to communities. The report states that the World Bank found the most success in communities where there was sustained support for over 20 years (World Bank. 2005). Furthermore, the report explains that in project locations where there was a focus on getting projects done as quickly as possible, qualitative goals such as capacity building were even harder to achieve. Thus, the World Bank found that the typical one-year project cycle that is used for infrastructure projects is not enough time to foster enhanced community capacity. According to the report, community-based projects have been most

successful when “they have supported indigenously matured participatory efforts or when they have provided sustained, long-term support to communities” (xiv).

The problem with short time frames is that there is pressure to achieve visible results quickly. The impact of this pressure is especially apparent in AMIGOS projects. Not only are volunteers in communities for a short period of 5-7 weeks, but AMIGOS requires that projects using AMIGOS funding must be finished during the 7-10 weeks that staff members are in the country so as to ensure completion (CBI Requirements). This short time frame drives volunteers and project staff members to push their agenda as they want to feel successful upon leaving community. Kar and Phillips (1998) observed a similar phenomenon in their case study of participatory projects in India:

The pressure of achieving set targets within a given time frame interfered with the staff's ability to internalize the new participatory approach and reorganize themselves accordingly, in particular to adopt a more concerted and integrated inter-sectoral approach. Even after the participatory approach has been up and running for 12 months, the staff remained concerned about sectional targets and time limits (62).

With such a short time frame, there isn't always time for the community to truly lead the direction of the work. Nor is there time for volunteers to foster participation or empowerment processes. Instead, volunteers arrive in communities with the skills they need to complete the physical aspects of projects and a vision for what they will accomplish during their short time in community, and do whatever they can to have it happen. Staff members also hold similar visions and are restricted by the same time-frame.

The impacts that this pressure has on projects, especially on the fostering of participation and empowerment processes was evident during the 2008 project in San

Pedro, Paraguay. The goal was for participation and empowerment to be fostered by AMIGOS volunteers by involving community members in a stove construction project. However, in many communities, volunteers became frustrated with the challenges of engaging the community in the work and instead resorted to working on their own to build the stoves and lead the associated educational activities because it made them feel more accomplished. The desire to complete all 10 stoves became more important than the desire to facilitate community participation in the process. This hindered the possibility for community participation and empowerment to be fostered.

This abandonment of efforts to foster community participation is exemplified by the summary of work done in one community in Paraguay. The Project Supervisor writes: “In terms of participation, there was very little support for AMIGOS volunteers. No community members showed up, so the volunteers built the *fogones* themselves” (8.000 Bertoni Close-out). In this example, it is clear that the supervisor and the volunteers felt frustrated with the lack of community involvement. However, rather than working to improve participation, they resorted to building the stoves on their own.

The results of this trend appeared in a very interesting way in the participatory evaluations facilitated at the end of the Paraguay project. Evaluative conversations were held with volunteers and community members separately. In both sessions, participants were asked to discuss negative aspects of the project, or areas that could be improved in the future. In the volunteer session, discussion focused exclusively on ways they could have been more prepared for or efficient with the construction of the *fogones*. There was no mention of a need for increased community participation (Volunteer Participatory

Evaluation 2008). In contrast, in the community member session, involving representatives from all communities, the discussion focused on how they would have liked to see more community involvement, especially from community youth. Furthermore, community members said that the volunteers didn't always ask for community help when it would have been appropriate and useful. Additionally, community members expressed frustration that they were not involved in the purchase of project materials (Evaluación Participativa 2008). It is striking that the volunteers made no mention of a need for increased community member participation, while community members emphasized that they would have liked to be more involved. This suggests that due to a lack in training, and a desire to complete the physical aspects of the project within a short time frame, AMIGOS volunteers don't necessarily reach out for community participation as much as they could.

Due to the nature of AMIGOS projects – as summer programs for high school students – it is not possible for AMIGOS volunteers to be in communities for the 10-20 years suggested by Blackburn and the World Bank. However, there are some changes that AMIGOS can make which would re-frame the way time factors into projects, and increase the possibility of participation and empowerment processes occurring.

Suggestions are as follows:

- 1. Adjust requirement that all projects using AMIGOS funds must be completed during presence of AMIGOS in the area during the summer.*

As mentioned above, currently the requirement for AMIGOS projects is that they be complete by the time AMIGOS volunteers leave the community. This gives community a

maximum of 7 weeks to plan, implement and complete a project. While this time period worked fine for previous, construction-based projects, the short, rushed time frame inhibits the participatory process. Rather than a quick-fix or a short-term effort, participatory development should be a long term process. If possible, AMIGOS should find a way to allow projects to take a longer time to complete. The volunteers' time in community could be seen as simply the inspirational foundation for the project. This would also help AMIGOS re-frame success in that instead of striving to complete a project, volunteers would strive to make sure their community had the skills and level of organization it needed to finish the project without them.

2. *Strive to work in communities multiple years in a row and measure success over a longer time period.*

There are already many communities in which AMIGOS works for multiple summers, however the work each summer is considered separate from other summers. Changing this so that projects in the same community were viewed on a continuum, and community participation and capacity building were evaluated over the long term, could greatly improve the capacity building potential of AMIGOS projects.

During the project in Paraguay, one community exemplified the potential for this longer-term perspective on projects. Towards the end of the 2008 project, community members in 6.000 Bertoni became very excited about the idea of building a dance performance hall at the school. Community members brought the idea to the AMIGOS Project Supervisor as a possibility for a future AMIGOS project. When the Project Supervisor explained that AMIGOS wouldn't have enough funds for a project that size,

the community came up with a plan: during the year leading up to the arrival of the next AMIGOS volunteers, the community's youth group would work to fundraise the money needed to complement possible AMIGOS CBI funds (6.000 Bertoni Close-Out). This plan shows the potential for AMIGOS communities to prepare for projects throughout the year leading up to the summer AMIGOS presence in the area. In this way, community members will be actively engaged in their community throughout the year, rather than just during the volunteers' stay. It is important to note that 6.000 Bertoni was, according to the Project Supervisor, "the most organized and motivated community with the most active youth that I have seen in my four summers with AMIGOS" (6.000 Bertoni Close-Out). Thus, not every community is necessarily in a place where the residents can organize themselves in their manner throughout the year. However, 6.000 Bertoni offers an example of how AMIGOS' projects could engage community members for longer than just a summer.

### *3. Expand fellowship program*

Currently, AMIGOS is in the second year of a fellowship program in which a Project Staff member lives in a project area the year prior to the summer project and then directs the summer project. During that year, the staff member interns with the local partner agency, deepening the connection with that organization, and also develops and maintains relationships with community members, including running some trainings for community youth. The potential of this program is immense as it can help to connect summer projects together and develop a longer-term, and more continuous relationship between communities and AMIGOS. If AMIGOS wants to strengthen and expand the

commitment to the communities it works with, an expansion of the fellowship program should be considered.

### *Standardization of methods*

While there is plenty of information on methods and practices to be applied at the community level to foster participation and empowerment, there is relatively little on how to implement participatory development on a larger scale, in multiple communities. Unlike infrastructure-based development, the process of participatory development needs to be unique in every community. With past models of development, organizations were able to apply one uniform method across many communities. However, as Blackburn (1998) writes, with participatory development, “the particular forms it will assume will vary according to the setting. There is no magical formula which can be universally applied. 'Perfect' participation does not exist. It is an ideal to be constantly sought, with its tools and techniques to be continuously improved” (171). For this reason, community development organizations working in multiple countries and multiple communities must strive to make sure each project area is following its own unique process. The reality is that this represents one of the biggest challenges that development organizations face. Often, the result is standardization of a formula to foster participation and empowerment processes. As participation and empowerment-based development practices have moved to the mainstream of development thought and increased in scale, their application has become increasingly routinized and uniform (Leurs, 1998)

AMIGOS offers an example of this standardization. At the basic level, projects

are implemented in over 300 communities with 700 volunteers and over 100 project staff across 6 countries in 14 project areas every summer. Thus, there are at least 300 different contexts to work in. An additional factor is that there is high turnover (every summer) of volunteers and staff members, all of whom are young and have minimal training in or understanding of development theory. In some ways, this turnover of volunteers with little development experience could help AMIGOS avoid the kind of standardization found in the work of other organizations. For organizations with less staff turnover and more experienced development workers, standardization is often attributed to staff feeling exhausted from working on many different projects for a longer period of time, or to staff applying techniques they have found successful in other areas. In contrast, AMIGOS volunteers are fresh and involved in what is usually their first community development project.

However, though volunteers may not have any models for success from previous community development experiences, they have a model for success that they develop during training. Based on this limited experience, in order to prepare volunteers and staff to foster community development, AMIGOS must provide somewhat of a formula to follow. Volunteers and staff are trained thoroughly in the CBI process, described previously: gather community members together, decide on a project, fill out required forms, work with project staff and community members to obtain funds and materials, complete project with community members before departure. Though this sequence in itself is rather abstract and not necessarily an interference to participation, what makes it formulaic and standardized is that it must occur on a strict timeline. For instance,

proposals are typically due by the second week of the volunteers' stay in community, which rushes the decision making process. Additionally, the formula assumes that community participation will either already exist or be easy to solicit. These factors can be problematic because every community will engage in the CBI process in a different way and at a different pace. When volunteers and communities are rushed to turn in a proposal, it is often the case that volunteers don't take the time to involve as many community members as possible in the process. As a result, volunteers often find it hard to solicit more participation later in the project because community members were not necessarily involved in deciding the nature of the project.

For instance, in one of the communities I supervised in Uruguay in 2007, the first community members to be involved represented a small sub-community of three families within the larger community. It was these community members who decided on the project and submitted the proposal. As the project progressed, volunteers found it impossible to involve other members of the community because it was not something that anyone outside of the initial three families felt connected to. In this way, rushing the first part of the process directly inhibited the fostering of participation later in the project. At the end of the Paraguay 2008 project, volunteers expressed frustration with the need to solicit community member involvement so quickly at the beginning of the project. In their Participatory Evaluation, volunteers told project staff that in future years, AMIGOS should only work in communities that are already organized so as to facilitate the need to decide a project with community input so quickly (Volunteer Participatory Evaluation 2008).

Another contributing factor to the standardization of AMIGOS projects is a relatively inflexible budget. Project budgets are set by the International Office in Houston based on past spending in the project area, nature of the project area, and other factors. In order to move money from one category to another, project staff must get permission from the International Office. Due to the number of communities, the short time frame, and the relatively small budget that AMIGOS has for community projects, staff members typically give volunteers and community members a spending limit. In an ideal participatory development approach, budgets would not be rigid or pre-set. If community members are truly leading the process then it is difficult to plan ahead for what will be needed as it will depend on what community members identify as needs and how project staff decide to respond to those needs. Rigid budgets do not allow for the “unplanned requirements of participatory projects” (IDS Workshop). In addition, when volunteers and community members are given a spending limit, they often develop the community project to meet that spending limit exactly. Thus, the project is geared towards getting the most money out of AMIGOS rather than focusing only on the interests of the community.

A CBI process that aims to complete physical and quantifiable goals, especially when rushed and within a strict budget, can interfere with fostering participatory development. As Cooke and Kothari (2001) write, “participatory practices carried out ritualistically...turn out to be manipulative” (p.1). Formulaic approaches to participation are also less responsive to the local cultural reality and according to Hailey (2001) can be seen as a means of imposing external control. After all, if participatory approaches are formulaic, they arguably remain inside the discourse of development: outsiders are still

determining the ultimate goal (a physical project) and the tools to accomplish it (the CBI process).

In order to ensure the greatest potential for fostering participation and empowerment, participatory development approaches must avoid standardization. Research done by Hailey (2001) found that success in fostering participatory development “resulted from understandings of, and responses to, the needs of the local communities,” and that “closeness to communities arose not from application of the well-known formulaic approaches to participation – indeed, they were conspicuous by their absence” (p.10). While a process such as the CBI process does encourage community participation in a way that infrastructure-based projects often do not, when the process is applied in a formulaic manner, it loses its potential for fostering lasting social impacts and capacity building because community members are not truly leading the process. Rather, in many ways, volunteers end up pulling community members through the process.

Clearly, avoiding standardization is a challenge for AMIGOS. Due to the number of communities worked in, the short nature of the projects, and the inexperience in development of volunteers and staff members, it will be difficult for AMIGOS to completely avoid a formulaic approach. However, the following suggestions may help the organization to move away from a formula and towards a more participatory approach:

- 1. Increase focus in training on the attitudes of the volunteers and staff members as outside development workers and the larger theories and philosophy behind*

*participatory development.*

As explained previously, training for AMIGOS volunteers focuses more on methods and tools than on the attitudes and philosophies of participatory development. AMIGOS volunteers and staff are given a formula to follow in communities resulting in routinization. If AMIGOS volunteers and staff are given more training in the area of attitude towards development, they will be able to be more flexible and adjust their methods to reflect the nature of each community. If AMIGOS volunteers understand the philosophy of participation and have developed positive attitudes as outsiders, they will be able to facilitate each unique community through its own development process.

2. *Increase flexibility in project implementation by decreasing the role of money in shaping community projects.*

Due to the nature of AMIGOS projects, it will be difficult to make the budget more flexible. Project funds are not only there for community projects but also for volunteer and staff transportation, staff lodging, in country trainings and health and safety. Thus, there is not a lot of room for flexibility, as money can't be pulled from those categories to be put towards community projects. In addition, project staff members who manage the budgets are typically young and new to budget management. For this reason, the International Office works to make the budget process as simple as possible.

However, there are ways in which community projects could be altered to decrease the role of money in shaping them. If CBI projects were to move away from physical, construction-based projects and towards lower-budget and social development projects, the rigidity of the budget would contribute less to routinization of community work.

For instance, one community during the 2008 project in San Pedro, Paraguay developed a bracelet-making project in addition to the stove building. Community youth learned how to make bracelets and then worked together to sell them. The project had low initial costs, and in fact could have had no initial costs if the youth involved had contributed funds for the initial materials purchase. In the end, this was aspect of the AMIGOS project that volunteers and community members felt most proud of. It had more of a capacity-building potential and was not tied to physical or construction-based deliverables. If AMIGOS were to move towards projects such as this instead of projects such as school renovations, there would be more room for the local cultural reality to impact the CBI process and there would be more potential for true capacity building. There would also be an increased potential for sustainability as the projects would be less dependent on monetary resources.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

### *Targets and goals*

One of the most fundamental aspects of community development work left over from previous models is the continued use of tangibly quantifiable targets. In previous, infrastructure based development approaches, the use of physical targets was effective and appropriate because project success was based on the number of physical deliverables established in communities. However, in participation and empowerment-based developments, the goals are intangible, with organizations working to foster capacity building and social change. These types of goals are, clearly, much more difficult to measure, and according to Haggmann, Chuma and Murwira (1998) an effective system has not yet been developed.

In a study on the effectiveness of community-based development projects, the World Bank found that one of the greatest weaknesses was that the “Bank's project monitoring and evaluation systems do not allow systemic assessment of the capacity-enhancing impact of [community-driven development] interventions.” Furthermore, the study explains that “It is often assumed that meeting the quantitative goals will automatically fulfill the qualitative goals – for example, holding a certain number of training courses is expected to enhance capacity.” The problem with maintaining this tangibly quantitative measurement of success is that this frames the work that both outsiders and community members do. All individuals involved in a development project want to feel successful. As a result, if success is defined in terms of tangible and physical accomplishments, that is what people will work towards. In an ideal model of

participatory development, there should be no planned product; instead it should be an ongoing process with uncertain outcomes.

It is important to note that the problem with this system of measuring success does not lie in the fact that results are quantifiable. Rather, it is *what* is measured that is problematic. Quantifiable measures of intangible success related to capacity building and empowerment could be developed. In fact, at this point, the best alternative is a system that allows for recognition of intangible and qualitative accomplishments that can then be documented in a quantifiable way.

#### *Capacity in numbers*

AMIGOS clearly demonstrates how organizations may change the way they work in communities, but remain stuck in the targets and measurements of success from past models. Accomplishments from the 2008 projects are articulated in much the same way as project accomplishments from 1965, despite the dramatic shift in rhetoric and deliverables. The website lists the number of immunizations administered and latrines constructed, and then lists the number of health education sessions conducted and community groups formed. Though there is a shift in the types of deliverables, the accomplishments are still tied to tangible results, reflecting a continued use of practices from past models ([www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org)).

The focus on tangible and easily-measurable success is also reflected in the project results which AMIGOS publishes at the end of each summer. The 2008 project results list accomplishments in the following order: Overall Participation, Home

Improvement Projects, and Community Capacity Building. The Overall Participation category lists the total numbers of AMIGOS volunteers, staff members, communities and Latin American youth who participated in AMIGOS projects that year. The Home Improvement Projects category lists the number of projects such as latrines, stoves, and family gardens constructed during the project year. Finally, the Community Capacity Building category lists accomplishments as follows:

- 4,752 Hours of educational workshops held with children and young people (50,433 participants)
- 900 Hours of education workshops held with adults (20,423 participants)
- 592 Hours of English-as-a-Second-Language classes (2,423 participants)
- 572 Hours of activities to support community groups held, such as planning for CBIs (7,807 participants)
- 717 Community Fundraisers (28,963 participants)
- 5 Community groups formed (203 participants)
- 23 Cultural expositions (6,191 participants)<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, the type of deliverables listed under Community Capacity Building show a marked difference from previous deliverables in that they are more people-focused and don't represent physical infrastructure left behind by AMIGOS. However, this list aligns with the weakness identified by the World Bank. Statistics about the total number of hours of educational workshops, number of community fundraisers and number of participants overall do not convey any information about whether any capacity building actually occurred, and if so, what kind of capacity building. In listing these statistics under the heading Community Capacity Building, AMIGOS is assuming that having achieved tangible goals – people participating in community workshops or fundraisers – intangible goals related to capacity building and empowerment have also been achieved.

---

<sup>7</sup> These numbers listed at [www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org).

However, the numbers provide no information about what really occurred in relation to capacity building. For instance, though the numbers provide information about how many community members attended a meeting, there is no information about who led the meeting or who participated in the meeting. A meeting led by the volunteers in which community members barely speak is very different in terms of capacity building from a meeting in which a few or all community members participate. In not asking volunteers and staff to be aware of what is occurring in the community beyond how many individuals attend events and activities, AMIGOS is limiting volunteer and staff ability to recognize capacity building success.

It is important to note the process by which the statistics listed above regarding community capacity building are compiled. Volunteers are required to fill out project tracking forms of all the work done in their communities. Under the capacity building section, volunteers are required to fill out information about they type of activity held, topics covered, location, number of hours, and number of individuals attending and co-facilitating. Project Supervisors look over this form weekly to determine what progress volunteers have accomplished on their project. At the end of the project, the results from all communities are compiled, and then sent to the International Office where statistics for all project areas are pulled together. Thus, at every level of the project, progress is measured by the number of physical construction projects completed or people in attendance at events and activities. While the activities listed by AMIGOS under community capacity building are activities that could potentially develop community capacity and foster participation and empowerment, simply counting the number of

activities or physical impacts does not convey anything about capacity building actually occurring.

As an AMIGOS volunteer in Panama in 2004, I personally witnessed the potential for capacity building during and AMIGOS project. For my CBI, I worked with local youth in my community to renovate a community center. During the first weeks of the project, holding a meeting to plan this project was strange for the youth and often took a lot of encouragement on my part. However, as the project progressed, the youth became more engaged and began to participate more in both planning and implementation. Towards the end of the project, the local youth began organizing and running their own meetings, and my presence became virtually unnecessary. This process of increased participation was so gradual that as a volunteer, I wasn't aware of it happening. It wasn't until my host-mother pointed out the change that I noticed it: she told me that before my arrival in the community, the youth never had meetings or worked together on anything. Only then did I realize that some capacity building had occurred. In the years since my summer in that community, I have heard reports that the youth there are still active and still working to create change in their community.

Based on this experience, I firmly believe that the AMIGOS model can foster capacity building and empowerment, especially in local youth. However, there is no system established in which volunteers are encouraged to be aware of and document this type of development. Likewise, AMIGOS never uses data of this type to measure success in communities. Not only does this limit the ability for AMIGOS to understand exactly what impact the community development work is having, it also impacts the way in

which volunteers work in communities. After all, if the measurement of success is related to a count of tangible impacts, the focus of the work will be on creating those tangible impacts. In effort to feel successful, and fill up their project tracking forms, volunteers strive to write down as many activities as possible, and supervisors push them to do so. The work becomes completely focused on delivering as many different tangibly quantifiable activities as possible, rather than the quality of the activities or the capacity building potential of them. Volunteers end up delivering “capacity-building” activities in the same way that latrines or other infrastructure-based projects were delivered in the past (and are still delivered). In addition, the idea that “more is better” is fostered, when in reality, one activity in which community members have truly meaningful participation has more of an impact than five activities in which community members have minimal participation and engagement.

This focus on creating tangible impacts is apparent in volunteer responses to the post-experience survey in Paraguay. When asked which of their accomplishments they were most proud of, the most common answer was the construction of the *fogones*. In total, 50% of volunteers mentioned this tangible deliverable as their greatest accomplishment over the summer. Only four volunteers mentioned anything about community participation or empowerment. However, these answers are important in that they suggest the possibility of some empowerment occurring. One volunteer wrote: “I am most proud of how me and my partners were able to alleviate a little bit of the timidness of the youth” (Opinion Survey). This comment hints at some recognition on behalf of this volunteer that some social change occurred in the community. However, this observation

was never recorded on any AMIGOS documents because AMIGOS does not solicit this kind of information.

In this way, AMIGOS project tracking documents do not encourage awareness or reporting of capacity building. As mentioned, the Project Tracking form for communities does not ask anything about capacity building and participation other than the number of community members that attended events and activities. In the capacity building section of the form, there is no space for volunteers to describe how community members were involved in organizing, facilitating or participating in the activity; there is no space to describe volunteers' observations of any differences or improvements in capacity building areas; and other than attendance at events, there is no count of capacity building indicators. These systems which reflect previous approaches to development frame both the work and success in terms of tangible impacts, which contradicts participatory development theories and inhibits development processes. Participatory development requires that organizations not only change what they are delivering, but also the way in which deliverables are delivered and evaluated. This requires fundamental changes in the way that projects are designed, implemented and evaluated.

#### *Monitoring and evaluating participation*

As success for AMIGOS and other organizations is still defined in terms of tangible project results, there is very little evidence as to what, if any, social impacts the participatory development methods are having. This lack of evidence is partly the result of organizations not moving to more qualitative and intangible factors to determine

success. However, in addition to changing the way success is measured, organizations also need to change processes of monitoring and evaluation to determine whether participation or empowerment are actually occurring.

Currently, there is no effective system established for measuring participation. The quantitative measures of tangible impacts used by organizations such as AMIGOS cannot measure the success of participatory processes. Instead, participatory development needs to be evaluated by assessing intangible gains in human capacity, which represents a challenge to development organizations. Hagmann, Chuma, and Murwira (1998) point out, “aspects such as increases in self-reliance and self-organization are notoriously difficult to measure, even subjectively” (55). In addition, these intangible gains are hard to measure because they occur over longer periods of time. Typically, organizations need an idea of the results of development work in a shorter time period. Thus, in order to know whether participatory development work is effective, new systems need to be developed which allow organizations to determine what, if any, social impact is resulting from community work. Indicators to determine whether participation and empowerment are occurring need to be developed.

In the case of AMIGOS, monitoring and evaluation systems only look at the project work and results for each summer individually. Volunteers and project staff monitor the progress of the project (counting tangible accomplishments) and produce final evaluations of community-level and project area work. In recent years, AMIGOS has added questions to evaluation forms that seem to address participatory processes. For example, the Project Tracking Form asks volunteers to “describe any Community-Based

Initiatives carried out with groups within the community. Who participated? How was the project determined? Please comment on the group process with carrying out the project(s).” Similarly, the “Volunteer Experience Survey” asks the following question: “How would you describe your overall satisfaction with community member involvement in your projects? (Think about the community interest in your projects and participation of community members in your efforts).” For this question, volunteers are asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale from “excellent” to “very poor” and to then comment on the rating. While these questions are clearly designed to have volunteers provide some information about the participation of community members in projects, they do not prompt volunteers to describe any changes they noticed in community member participation over the course of the project.

The only documents about community projects that are passed along from year to year to provide some institutional memory of work in communities are the Community Profile and Community Close-Out forms. The Project Supervisor in each community fills out these forms. The Community Close-Out form also serves as the only written evaluation of the work in a community, and demonstrates the lack of focus on evaluating participation and empowerment processes. The form primarily asks about characteristics of the volunteers' experience in the community such as community acceptance, volunteer satisfaction, program related contacts, health and safety information, and housing and meal plan logistics. There is one question that asks for a summary of participatory evaluation results. However, due to the way participatory evaluations are conducted with AMIGOS, to be explained below, information in this section regarding changes in

community capacity is usually little-to-none. Thus, the only document that tracks projects in AMIGOS communities over more than one summer typically holds no information on the participatory processes occurring in the community. In many cases, AMIGOS will work in a community for multiple summers in a row, meaning that evaluation could be done over a longer period of time to determine whether the work of AMIGOS is having any lasting social impacts. However, there are no systems established to do so and AMIGOS has no information in this area.

Analyzing the community close-out forms from the Paraguay 2008 projects shows that these forms have the potential to create a longer term monitoring and fostering of empowerment and participation. Right now, the form asks open-ended questions about community members involved in the project and how volunteers worked with community members. In filling out the form, most supervisors are brief and merely list names of key community members and overall level of community involvement. However, some Project Supervisor responses go into more detail:

Daniel, Gilberto, Carlos, Maria Elba and Ishmael all participated in building almost every *fogon* in this community. Daniel and Gilberto especially became leaders in this project and really learned how to construct *fogones*. This group plus Peke, Daihana, Martha, and Andres are the core members of the youth group...Peke and Carlos lost interest in the AMIGOS program after a few weeks, but other youth were well engaged and supported the youth group projects...This youth group was successful during the volunteers' stay in community, however it is unclear at this point if the group will continue in the volunteers' absence (2.000 Fatima Close-Out).

There were always several youth present and helping with the construction. Since the volunteers have left community, the youth that helped with the construction of the *fogones* have already set out a plan to complete the construction of the rest of the *fogones* that the volunteers did not have enough time to complete (12.000 Defensores Close-Out).

The level of detail in this response provides a lot of useful information about the participation of youth in the community. Interestingly, both of these responses indicate that some capacity building occurred but both Project Supervisors express this as it impacted the construction of the *fogones* rather than as it impacted the lives of the youth. Regardless, these comments provide an important story about the communities that can (a) be used to evaluate capacity building in each of these communities and, (b) inform the next AMIGOS volunteers and staff that work in the communities of capacity building and participation that occurred in 2008 on which they can continue to build. Thus, the Community Close-Out form does have the potential to help AMIGOS analyze and track participation and empowerment processes as they occur in communities over the long term.

### ***Participatory Evaluation***

One of the evaluation tools often added to development projects when organizations adopt participatory development approaches is the participatory evaluation. The goal of this evaluation method is for community members to participate in the evaluation of their work with the organization. Ideally, participatory evaluations not only assist with evaluation of a project, they are also a capacity building tool in themselves. If facilitated correctly, community members will be able to process the work they have done and learn lessons from both the challenges and successes. In recent years, AMIGOS has implemented the use of participatory evaluations in all project areas. Typically, these evaluations are held at the community level, and then with a group of

people representing all communities in the project. However, due to the fact that success is still conceptualized by both community members and AMIGOS representatives in terms of physical deliverables, these evaluations typically reveal little information about the fostering of participation and empowerment. Instead, conversations during the evaluation, and the resulting written summaries focus on deliverables and on the overall experience of working with AMIGOS volunteers and staff. While this information is important for both community members and AMIGOS representatives to discuss, there is little conversation around the community process. In addition, participatory evaluations often reinforce quantifiable measures of success. For example, the written report from one community level participatory evaluation states the following:

The community members were happy about the project, but were frustrated that the materials arrived in the final week that the volunteers were in community. Thus, the volunteers only had time to build four *fogones* (stoves). In the future, the community would be interested in a CBI project for a community park at the school...they also want a sports field and more tree planting (Novireta Close Out Form).

In this example, it is clear that community members are more focused on tangible results of the AMIGOS presence in their community. In the larger participatory evaluation of the Paraguay 2008 project, community members also discussed how they felt let down because “AMIGOS didn’t follow through with the initial promise of *fogón* construction. Materials arrived late and all the *fogones* could not be completed” (Evaluación Participativa Paraguay 2008). However, as previously mentioned, community members also expressed frustration that they had not been involved in the project as much as they would have liked.

### *Accountability*

Part of redefining targets is determining who development professionals are accountable to. Ideally, within the philosophy of perfect participation-based development, the “outsider” should, first and foremost, be accountable to the community. The reality in most cases, however, is that “outsiders” are accountable to their organization first, and the community second (Leurs 1998). Success is ultimately defined by those development workers are accountable to, and organizations tend to have their own development agenda, which can differ from that of communities. In the case of AMIGOS, volunteers are ultimately more accountable to their Project Staff than to their community, and Project Staff is more accountable to the International Office than to local organizations or communities. Clearly, due to the fact that AMIGOS programs are primarily an abroad experience for high school students, accountability will always be primarily to the organization rather than to the communities. However, there are ways in which AMIGOS can increase accountability to the communities.

Just as field-workers are typically accountable to their organization, organizations are usually accountable to donors. Thus, in some ways, maintaining tangible measurements of success can be attributed to the need to demonstrate that meaningful work is being done with donors' money. According to Leurs (1998), donors continue to “prefer output as opposed to process orientation as physical development targets are much easier to account for than intangible processes of self and collective development” (p.132). Organizations that depend on funds from large donors or grants, are typically required to provide quantifiable evidence of success.

The case of AMIGOS is slightly different. Volunteer contributions cover 87% of project expenses and 72% of all expenses. The remaining funding comes from multiple donors and fundraising efforts. This means that AMIGOS is not significantly dependent on any large donors. The fact that most of the funding for the organization comes from individuals who are participating in the program, puts AMIGOS in a unique situation. On the one hand, AMIGOS does not necessarily lose funding from a specific donor if a project is not successful in a tangible way. On the other hand, AMIGOS' stability and success in the future requires that volunteers and community members have a positive experience. AMIGOS wants volunteers to return home having had a positive experience. In fact, the future of the organization depends on volunteers feeling successful: many new volunteers are recruited by former volunteers, and all summer project staff are individuals who enjoyed their volunteer experience enough to return to the organization. As volunteers and staff are generally used to thinking of success in tangible terms, and encouraged to by the AMIGOS process, it is challenge for AMIGOS to shift to a different form of measuring success.

### ***Re-framing success***

Thus, AMIGOS demonstrates the need for organizations to re-frame the way success is measured in participatory development projects. Part of what needs to be established in order to do so is whether participation is a means or an end in itself. Gaventa (1998) argues that it should not be a choice between one or the other, but both: “the challenge is to pursue participation as both means and ends, and to hope that each

pursuit affects the other. To work only towards participation as an ends in itself, without being able to demonstrate the impact on other conditions that affect people's lives as a result (or at least a by-product) also seems short-sighted” (165). Thus, the tangible deliverables such as physical community projects or attendance at capacity-building activities should still be counted, but AMIGOS also needs a way to determine whether qualitative and intangible capacity building objectives are being achieved. Therefore, new systems of evaluation need to be established as well; success needs to be re-framed.

The re-framing of success will only occur with changes at all levels of AMIGOS' work. In order for this shift to occur, the following changes are suggested:

1. *Foster attitude changes around what success means through training and project implementation and evaluation policies*

The attitudes of volunteers, project staff members, International Office employees, and community members need to adjust and shift away from a focus on quantifiable goals. Both outsiders and local people in the development process have been conditioned by years of previous development work to see success as quantifiable deliverables: community members often expect a number of physical projects to be delivered and outsiders strive to do so in order to feel successful. Thus, true participatory community development work will not feel successful to anyone involved unless success is re-framed to include qualitative capacity building factors.

2. *Develop criteria and indicators for monitoring and evaluating the impacts of participatory development approaches*

As discussed, the current methods of AMIGOS program monitoring and evaluation do

not assess or measure whether participation, empowerment or capacity building are occurring in a community. A system of indicators for monitoring and evaluating these social impacts of AMIGOS projects would not only help to adjust the way in which AMIGOS representatives and community members frame project success, but would also allow AMIGOS to gain an understanding of what social impact the projects are having. Creating a system of indicators means establishing a set of clues that AMIGOS representatives can look for that may reflect capacity building or empowerment. For instance, an indicator of capacity building could be the number of community members that spoke at a given community meeting, or the number of community members that initiated or organized an aspect of the project. A system could also be developed to track improvements in these areas. These indicators could provide a way for AMIGOS to track capacity building quantitatively. Additionally, it is important to redesign community tracking forms to encourage volunteers and staff to describe in qualitative terms, the changes in community participation and empowerment that they observe. By adding questions about volunteers' observations of capacity building to the forms, as well as having project staff facilitate conversations about any observed changes or advances in community capacity, volunteers, staff, community members and AMIGOS as an organization will be better able to determine what impact the work may be having.

### *3. Emphasize and improve community member involvement in evaluation*

The ideas behind participatory evaluation are good. Through participatory evaluation, community members ideally learn from the experience by discussing the challenges, successes and establishing lessons learned. This opportunity has a potential to foster

capacity building as community members can reflect on how they worked together or what they learned. Currently, there are ways in which AMIGOS can improve the participatory evaluation process. Discussion should be facilitated not just about the experience of having volunteers live in the community, but also about the process the community has gone through. In addition, Kar and Phillips (1998) argue that in evaluating project results, community members should define their own evaluation process and indicators for success. Thus, rather than AMIGOS representatives deciding what participatory evaluations look like, community members should design the evaluation process.

#### *4. Develop systems for evaluation over the long term*

Currently, project success is measured on a yearly basis. There is no long-term tracking of capacity building in communities. Thus, there is no way of really knowing whether AMIGOS is having any long-term community capacity building impacts. Tracking project results over a longer time period would not be possible in all AMIGOS communities, but there are many communities that host AMIGOS volunteers for many years in a row. By developing a means of tracking capacity building impacts over a longer period than just one summer, AMIGOS can begin to determine whether any capacity building changes are actually being achieved. This information could inform project implementation processes and methods. In addition, tracking project results over a longer period would help those involved to re-frame their ideas of success. The reality is that participation and empowerment processes happen over long periods of time. If AMIGOS volunteers and staff see their work during one summer as part of a longer

process toward longer-term goals, they will become less focused on achieving physical, quantifiable goals during their summer project.

In order to gather information on whether participation and empowerment processes are occurring, and if so, to what extent, AMIGOS needs to make evaluation systems that take a longer-term look at community work. Systems should be developed to track development of participation in communities over the long term.

## CONCLUSION

Currently, AMIGOS has adopted the rhetoric of participatory development theories and some of the related practices. However, a number of factors related to attitudes and behaviors, training, the realities of project implementation, and monitoring and evaluation methods, inhibit the participatory development practices from playing out in the field in the way that theory says they will. Thus, AMIGOS has made the partial transition to participatory development that is evident in many development organizations. Though it will likely be impossible for AMIGOS to ever fully embody participatory development theories and practices, there are still more steps in the evolution of development practices that AMIGOS can take.

Bell (1994) writes that participatory development models: “are only as untyrannical...as the context and [practitioner] are prepared to be, and perhaps more meaningfully are able to be, given the limitations of their own culturally based view of their own methods (p.332). The reality is that the discourse of development and the resulting social, cultural, and political views of poverty and development find their way into all models of development. Unless challenged, attitudes and beliefs that seem natural after years of development work can continue to shape the policies and practices of development organizations and professionals.

Thus, the example of AMIGOS raises the question of whether participatory development is an alternative to development or a development alternative. Theories of participatory development aim to create practices that step away from the ideas and methods within development discourse. However, as the example of AMIGOS shows, in

practice, participatory development is more of an alternative method of doing development work that remains similar to ideas within the development discourse.

This analysis of AMIGOS shows that despite sincere interest in fostering positive community development through participation- and empowerment-based models, the policies and practices of an organization can continue to control community-level development processes in ways that can inhibit participation and empowerment.

Participatory development is often framed as being as simple as involving community members in the development of their communities. However, participatory development theory and philosophy require a confrontation of the development discourse, and its inherent power inequalities, and then a re-adjustment of development practices to step outside of the discourse as much as possible. Simply involving community members in development decisions and processes does not necessarily accomplish this. Development organizations and professionals must also evaluate all levels of attitudes, policies, and practices that may impact and/or inhibit community-level processes of participation and empowerment.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to AMIGOS' process of self-evaluation with the ultimate goal of adjusting and redesigning organizational attitudes, policies, and practices so as to move farther away from the discourse of development and closer to the ideal presented by participatory models. As shown, the challenge of adjusting the attitudes and behaviors of AMIGOS staff and volunteers often results in community-level work remaining within the power imbalances of development discourse. Furthermore, the methods of project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation often encourage the

maintenance of those attitudes and behaviors.

As stated in the introduction, the motivation behind this critical analysis of AMIGOS' transition to participatory development was not to cast AMIGOS in a negative light. Rather, the goal is to provide a constructive analysis of the organization's work; an analysis can be seen as part of the important and continuous process of acknowledging and confronting the role that development discourse plays in all development work and, in doing so, striving to move beyond the discourse. As Escobar (1995) writes, "the process of unmaking development...is slow and painful, and there are no easy solutions or prescriptions" (p.12). In fact, it is likely impossible to every fully separate development work from the development discourse. However, there are many ways in which organizations and individuals can continue to critically evaluate and redesign development work so as to deconstruct the discourse.

My hope is that this paper will serve as a resource for AMIGOS in evaluating the organization's partial transition to participatory development. I believe that despite the unique nature of AMIGOS as a development organization, there is still a lot of potential for AMIGOS to more fully transition to participatory development. Furthermore, in adjusting policies and practices to more effectively foster participatory development, AMIGOS does not necessarily need to sacrifice the strengths of the organization's programs related to cultural exchange and leadership development.

## APPENDIX A

### VOLUNTEER SURVEY METHODS

#### **Methods:**

In effort to gauge volunteer understanding of their role in participatory development I developed a survey that I administered to all 40 of the volunteers participating in the San Pedro, Paraguay project in 2008. Volunteers filled out the survey at the following points during the project: (1) upon arrival in Paraguay, but before leaving for their communities, and (2) at the end of the project, after departing community and before returning back to the U.S. Each time, the survey was given to the same 40 individuals.

It is important to note that the survey was written and administered at a point when my research was aimed solely at gauging the effectiveness of AMIGOS trainings. Therefore, while the survey was very useful in the writing of this paper, not all of the questions were as relevant as I would have liked for my final focus.

**Respondents:** Total number of respondents for both surveys was 40 (all the volunteers on the San Pedro, Paraguay 2008 project). These individuals were all between the ages of 16 and 18 and all but 2 of them were first time volunteers.

**Pre-Experience Questions:**

1. Why did you decide to spend this summer with AMIGOS as a volunteer?
2. How will you work to contribute to the AMIGOS mission this summer?
3. What special qualifications do you have for AMIGOS work? Why do you think these qualifications will help you with your work this summer?
3. What do you expect your community to be like? Your community members?
4. How do you think you will work with community members on the projects this summer?
5. How have you explained to your friends and family what you will be doing this summer?

**Post-Experience Questions:**

1. In your application to be an AMIGOS volunteer, you had to answer the following question: “Why are you applying to be an AMIGOS volunteer?” If you were to answer that question now, after your volunteer experience, what would you write?
2. Which of your accomplishments this summer are you most proud of? Did your goals for the summer change during your time in community?
3. What qualifications or previous experiences do you think helped you to be effective as an AMIGOS volunteer?
4. Think back to what you expected your community and your community members to be like. How did the reality compare to your expectations? What surprised you?
5. Briefly describe how you worked with your community members. Did anything surprise you about this relationship?
6. How will you explain to your friends and family what you did this summer?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amigos Annual Report 2007. (2007). Retrieved Feb. 1, 2009, Web site: [www.amigoslink.org](http://www.amigoslink.org).
- Bergdall, T. (2000). Monitoring and evaluation of projects to promote self-reliant participatory development within rural communities. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wales Swansea, September 2000.
- Bergdall, T. (2003). Reflections on the catalytic role of an outsider in 'Asset-Based Community Development.'
- Blackburn, J. (1998). Conclusion. In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who changes?: Institutionalizing participation in development* (167-172). London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd.
- Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (1998). General introduction. In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who changes?: Institutionalizing participation in development* (1-8). London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd.
- Cooke, B. (2001). The social psychological limits of participation. In Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. (Eds.), *Participation: The new tyranny?* (102-121). New York: Zed Books.
- Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?*. New York: Zed Books.
- Chambers, R. (1995). Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development. In Nelson, N. & Wright, S. (Eds), *Power and participatory development: Theory and practice*. (30-42). London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Chambers, R. (1997). *Who's reality counts?: Putting the first last*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Chambers, R. (1998). Forward. In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who Changes?: Institutionalizing Participation in Development*, (pp. xiii-xvi). London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Delgado, M. & Staples, L. (2008). *Youth-Led community organizing: Theory and action*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the third world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Escobar, A. (1999) The invention of development. *Current History*, 631: 82-96

- Fawcett, S.B., Seekins, T., Whang, P.L., Muiu, C., & Suarez de Balcazar, Y. (1984). Creating and using social technologies for community empowerment. In J. Rappaport & R. Hess (Eds.), *Studies in empowerment: Steps toward understanding and action* (145 – 171). New York: Haworth Press.
- Gaventa, J. (1998). The scaling-up and institutionalization of PRA: Lessons and challenges. In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who changes: Institutionalizing participation in development?* (153-166). London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd.
- Hagmann, J., Chuma, E., & Murwira, K. (1998). Scaling-up of participatory approaches through institutionalization in government services: The case of agricultural extension in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who changes: Institutionalizing participation in development?* (47-56). London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd.
- Hailey, J. (2001). Beyond the formulaic: Process and practice in South Asian NGOs. In Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (Eds.), *Participation: The new tyranny?* (88-101). New York: Zed Books.
- Hickey, S. & Mohan, G. (2004). Towards participation as transformation: Critical themes and challenges. In Hickey, S. & Mohan, G. (Eds.), *Participation: From tyranny to transformation* (3-24). New York: Zed Books.
- Ibister, J. (2006). *Promises not kept: Poverty and the betrayal of third world development*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.
- IDS Workshop “Towards a learning Org.” In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who changes?: Institutionalizing participation in development* (167-172). London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd.
- Kar, K. and Phillips, S. 1998. Scaling-up or scaling-down? The experience of institutionalizing PRA in the slum improvement projects in India. In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who changes?: Institutionalizing participation in development?* (57- 63). London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd.
- Kliksberg, B. 1999. Seis tesis no convencionales sobre participación. Buenos Aires.
- Korten, D. & Klass, R., Eds. (1984). *People centered development: Contributions toward theory and planning development*. West Hartford: Kumarian Press.
- Leurs, R. (1998). Current challenges facing participatory rural appraisal. In Blackburn, J. & Holland, J. (Eds.), *Who changes?: Institutionalizing participation in development?* (124-134). London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd.

- Mosse, D. (2001). 'People's knowledge,' participation and patronage: Operations and representations in rural development. In Cooke, B. and Kothari, U (Eds.), *Participation: The new tyranny?* (16-35). New York: Zed Books.
- Muños, L. Personal Interview. July 2008.
- Parpart, J.L., Rai, S.M., & Staudt, K. (2002). Rethinking em(power)ment, gender and development: An introduction. In J.L. Parpart, S.M Rai, & K. Staudt (Eds.), *Rethinking empowerment: Gender and development in a global/local world*, (3-21). New York: Routledge.
- Porras, L.E. (2008). Everyday life in the fieldwork of development communicators: A Columbian case study. Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, June 2008.
- Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in empowerment: introduction to the issue. In J. Rappaport & R. Hess (Eds.), *Studies in empowerment: Steps toward understanding and action*.(1-7). New York: Haworth Press. 1-7.
- Rowlands, J. (1997). *Questioning empowerment: Working with women in Honduras*. Oxford, England: Oxfam.
- Serrano-Garcia, I. (1984). The illusion of empowerment: Community development within a colonial context. In J. Rappaport & R. Hess (Eds.), *Studies in empowerment: Steps toward and action* (173-200). New York: Haworth Press.
- Staudt, K.(2002). Engaging politics: Beyond official empowerment discourse. In J.L. Parpart, S.M Rai, & K. Staudt (Eds.), *Rethinking empowerment: Gender and development in a global/local world* (97-111). New York: Routledge.
- Veltmeyer, H. & Petras, J. (2000). *The dynamics of social change in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave.
- World Bank. (2005). The effectiveness of World Bank support for community-based and –driven development. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- www.amigoslink.org. (2009). Retrieved February 01, 2009, Web site: www.amigoslink.org.

