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Transforming Links

Participation, Empowerment and Foreign Aid Dependency

An investigation of rural development projects in Honduras.

Mariana González Armijo
mariaganonzalezarmijo@hotmail.com

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Supervisor
Dr. Anne Jerneck
Anne.Jerneck@lucsus.lu.se

Co-supervisor
Doctoral Candidate Vasna Ramasar
vasna.ramasar@lucid.lu.se

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Foreign aid has been increasing as a catalyst to development despite its much contested effectiveness and contribution to dependency. Among the international development cooperation arena, participation is assumed to promote processes of empowerment. Hence, most NGOs incorporate participatory approaches in their development interventions; even though, it still remains unclear what participation implies. This research studies participation as a major dimension of empowerment. Transformative participation is considered as an end in itself that can enhance social agency and local people's capabilities in order to foster a sustained empowerment that contributes to overcoming foreign aid dependency. This thesis studies the participation phenomenon through the intervention of the international NGO Action Aid (AA) in Honduras. An analytical frame was built to illustrate how the linkages among foreign aid, empowerment, social agency, capabilities and participation are understood in the study. In order to operationalize such a framework, the involvement of local people in decision-making in different phases throughout AA's intervention was assessed using a participation typology. Results show that even instrumental forms of participation appear to empower local people through an enhancement of both, social agency and local people's capabilities. For achieving a transformational participation, power structures and heterogeneity among communities need to be understood. Such understanding allows to address representation and inclusion factors by explicitly stating what is meant by participation and what the expectations are at different phases and processes of the intervention. Moreover, participation and empowerment must take place at different levels so substantial changes can be triggered, which will allow for the transformation of the prevailing linkages to foreign aid dependency.

Keywords: participation, empowerment, rural development, foreign aid.

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Abbreviations

AA	Action Aid
ADT	Area of Territorial Development
CIAL	Research Center for Local Agriculture
CODEL	Local Committee for Risk Management
CODEM	Municipal Committee for Risk Management
CRAC	Rural Cooperative for Microcredit and Savings
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EC	European Commission
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EIC	Computers and Citizenship School
FOPRIDEH	Non-Governmental Organizations' Federation for Honduras Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDA	International Development Association
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PC	Project Cycle
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
WB	World Bank

1. Introduction

'Development is an idea, an objective and an activity. These are all interrelated. When we examine the idea of development we are exploring an area of theory' (Kothari & Minogue, 2002:12). The idea means different things for different people. It has been in use for more than sixty years and its actual meaning is 'still elusive, since it depends on where and by whom it is used' (Rist, 2007:485). However, the prevailing assumption through time has been that development could 'lead to improvement of situation of poor people' (Hayter, 2005:89).

Despite conflicting views on means and aims of development, it can be argued that there is a consensus that overcoming global poverty and multiple inequalities in a sustainable way remain a big challenge (cf. UNMP, 2009). Private foreign aid and Official Development Assistance (ODA)¹ have had a core role in the debate for overcoming such problems in developing countries². However, the view of aid as a tool for development is accompanied by a critical debate about the effectiveness of the flow of foreign aid

There are polarised arguments. On the one side, 'foreign aid skeptics' argue that foreign aid increases unproductive public consumption, failing to promote investment and home-grown development; and, that it weakens governance³ (Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009; Rajan & Subramanian, 2007; Alesina and Dollar, 2000). On the other hand, 'foreign aid defenders' argue that foreign aid is crucial for ensuring the successful economic development of the poorest countries and that it promotes long-run growth (Sachs, 2006; Minoiu and Reddy, 2010). Also that by understanding poor economies' traps, such as bad governance in a small country, aid could potentially help to overcome poverty (Collier, 2008).

In fact, foreign aid over the last years has kept increasing (cf. DAC,2010) and thus remains important for development. The role of donors and development agencies is crucial for ensuring its effectiveness, since they define the criteria for intervening in the name of development in other's people's worlds (Mikkelsen, 2005). Their intervention can help to ensure that the role of the external agent is transferred to local people and ultimately to prevent dependency. So, local people can continue their own processes regardless of external persons and inputs (cf. Smilevski's 2008).

¹ ODA activities include 'projects and programmes, cash transfers, deliveries of goods, training courses, research projects, debt relief operations and contributions to non-governmental organisations' (OECD, 2010) .

² The eighth goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasizes the partnership between the richer countries committed to meet their aid obligations, and the poorer countries committed to provide the appropriate context for development (cf. UNMP,2009)

³ Governance is understood as the traditions and institutions which authority in a country is exercised. It has different connotations and dimensions. Some of its dimensions are: voice and accountability; political stability; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and, control of corruption. (Ear, 2007).

In this way, participation is one of the most important concepts in development cooperation. It is assumed to contribute to an ‘empowering process which enables local people to do their own analysis, to take command, to gain in confidence, and to make their own decisions [...] It implies a commitment to equity, empowering those who are marginalized, excluded and deprived’ (Mikkelsen, 2005:54; cf. Cleaver, 2001;). However, participation is a highly contested concept (cf. Cooke and Kothari, 2001). It has mainly been criticized because of its instrumental use: for achieving development cooperation predetermined goals in a short-term perspective through passive forms of participation; instead of approaching participation as an end in itself as a long-term process that attempts to empower people (cf. Oakley et. al. 1991). If participation is to be achieved as an empowering process that helps change the foreign dependency dynamic, then, it has to be re-established as a ‘transformative approach to development’ (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:20). Transformational participation is an end in itself that ensures people’s influence in their own situations (Oakley and Marsden, 1991). For this to happen, a more adequate understanding of participation, both in theory and practice, is still needed.

1.1 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to an understanding of participation as a major dimension of empowerment within rural development projects funded by international development NGOs and agencies. This thesis explores participation as an end in itself that enhances social agency and people’s capabilities, two major components of empowerment. For this purpose, a case study⁴ of the participation phenomenon through the intervention of the international NGO *Ayuda en Acción* (Action Aid in English) in Honduras was conducted to assess the organization’s work and to examine the forms of participation in the intervention. The impacts that participation has on people’s lives and realities are examined in Honduras’ particular context of high dependence on foreign aid.

The scope consists of assessing Action Aid’s (AA henceforth) intervention work and approach, and not the projects per se to examine how the organization intervenes in the communities; how people participate through the decision-making processes at distinct phases of the intervention; and, the impacts on people’s lives from participating in different projects and processes supported by the organization. This allowed the researcher to learn about the consistency between AA’s rhetoric and practice. AA was selected as it is an important international NGO with a significant level of intervention in Honduras (cf. Foprideh, 2010).

This research aims to contribute to sustainable development: ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Brundtland, 1987) by focusing on the social dimension towards accomplishing the broader sustainability goal. The study follows that human development should be ‘defended as a goal in

⁴ A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003:13).

itself; it directly enhances the capability of people to lead worthwhile lives, so there are immediate gains in what is ultimately important, while safeguarding similar opportunities in the future' (Anan and Sen, 2000:2038).

The objectives of the research were framed according the questions below.

Overall research question:

Under what conditions of participation can rural development projects funded by foreign aid empower people?

Specific research questions:

1. *How are the forms of participation in Action Aid's intervention in Honduras?*
2. *What are the common characteristics of participation in the intervention projects?*
3. *How has participation in Action Aid's projects, if at all, enhanced social agency and local people's capabilities?*

The research is organized as follows. Section Two briefly introduces the Honduran situation and its relation with foreign aid. In Section Three the methodology and research design are explained; followed by Section Four where key concepts in this research, such as empowerment, social agency, capabilities and participation are elucidated. These are used for presenting the particular analytical frame that was applied in this study. Section Five presents the findings and analysis from field research in Honduras; followed by the discussion in Section Six. Finally the last Section contains the conclusions. Since this is a case study of participation in rural development projects (micro-level) funded by an international development NGO in Honduras (meso-level), the next section presents this country's situation and its linkages with the foreign aid dynamic (macro-level).

2. Honduras and its Foreign Dependency

Honduras' history has been written not only by its richness regarding people, culture, biodiversity and natural resources, but also many devastating natural disasters (mainly hurricanes and earthquakes), *coups d'état* and foreign aid and intervention. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in Latin America with a high aid dependency. It receives approximately \$464 million USD of aid yearly (UNICEF, 2007).

Between 1950 to 1980 there were twelve changes in the executive during five⁵ of which the military took control of the government. In 1982, when the country returned to democratic⁶

⁵ October 1956, October 1963, December 1972, April 1975, August 1978 (Morris, 1984)

government, the number of donors became high mainly within the health sector (CBO, 1997). It was also during this decade and the beginning of the 1990s when it received large amounts of foreign aid due to the interest of the government of the United States, in getting the country's support for its political and military initiatives in the area⁷.

In late October 1998, the country was going through an economic stagnation stage and it was hit by the hurricane Mitch, considered at the time as 'the most destructive hurricane in the western hemisphere since 1780' (Jansen, 2003). The hurricane caused thousands of deaths and devastated the country's productive capacity⁸. This natural disaster was followed by substantial flows of foreign aid from different international organizations and agencies, which were established as a condition not only to reconstruct the country, but to transform it by increasing civil society participation⁹ and enhancing the country's governance. For this endeavor the Honduran government received US\$123.1 million¹⁰ of extra official aid in the aftermath of the hurricane (IADB, 2000). Since then, there has been a continuous inflow of foreign aid into the country (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Honduras' Total ODA (Source: data from OECD-DAC, 2010)

⁶ This assertion is quite controversial, since it will imply analyzing the country's history and the connotation that democracy has in that particular context. However, such analysis is out of the scope of this research.

⁷ USA was mainly combating the Nicaraguan revolution. For this purpose, Honduras provided bases for US military training and exercises. The largest base presently still operates in the country. When this multi-million dollar subsidy that Honduras received for its support to the USA finished, the country's growth stagnated within a stabilization process that had a high social cost and external indebtedness.

⁸ There are differences about numbers, but for picturing what the hurricane meant to the country, official sources state that it caused 5,657 deaths, 8,058 missing persons, 441,150 cases of house damage or loss and 68 lost bridges and 53 damaged ones (GERNH).

⁹ However, the post-disaster plans did not reflect on the character and capacity of the state for confronting this conditional. They focused more on reconstructing the country because of Honduras' critical situation (cf. Jansen, 2003).

¹⁰ 1999 USD value.

Currently, many developmental international organizations¹¹ operate in Honduras and its dependency to ODA equals roughly 7.6% of its GDP (NM, 2007). In 2001 Honduras acquired the status of Highly Indebted Poor Country¹² and since then it has been working within a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

Despite all the external intervention and foreign aid, it can be argued that the situation has not improved considerably. As a matter of fact, on June 28th, 2009 the country went through another *coup d'état* against the executive. This shocked the country, and, its vulnerability and foreign aid dependency were exposed when the new head of state proclaimed in his initial speech that he was receiving the country in bankruptcy; asking for the support from the international community to push the country forward (El Universo, 27th January, 2010). After nearly 12 years that the international assistance got on track for Honduras' reconstruction and transformation, its dependency towards foreign aid and intervention remains.

Table 1. Honduras in Figures

Honduras Figures	
Population	7.3 million
Rural Population	53%
HDI	0.732 (no. 112 worldwide)
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	3,796
Population below international poverty line	50.7%
Gini Index	53.8 ¹³
Population without improved water	16%
Adult illiteracy	16%
Emigration rate	5.3% ¹⁴

Source: WB, 2009; IFAD, 2005; UNDP, 2009; UNICEF, 2007.

Given this context of high aid flows and the country's current circumstances (Table 1), this research seeks to address questions of dependency in Honduras by studying the participation phenomenon in rural development projects and impacts in local people's lives and contexts in terms of empowerment. The research was conducted on Action Aid, an international NGO that

¹¹ USAID, CIDA, SIDA, CARE, Global Village, Oxfam, Action Aid, UN Children's Fund, Caritas, AECID, JICA, Trocaire, ICA just to mention a few.

¹² Honduras' request to its debt forgiveness was right after the hurricane Mitch, in 1999 it became a candidate and in 2001 it acquired the status.

¹³ The first quintile (20% poorest population) of the population concentrates 1.93% of the country's richness, whereas the fifth quintile (the 20% richest population) concentrates the 60.98%.

¹⁴ Remittances to Honduras are now the largest source of foreign exchange and direct foreign investment, and exceed total amounts of foreign aid to Honduras. In 2008 they equaled 20% of the GDP (ECLAC, 2009).

gets most of its economic support from Spain. As it can be seen in Table 2, Spain is the major donor to this country, confirming two of the tendencies that donor countries have for allocating aid money: sharing the same language and colonial heritage (Alesina and Dollar, 2000)¹⁵.

Table 2. Honduras' Top Ten Donors

Top Ten Donors of Gross ODA (2007-08 average) (USDm)		
1.	IDB Spanish Fund	664
2.	Spain	186
3.	United States	100
4.	IDA	53
5.	EC	33
6.	Japan	31
7.	Germany	29
8.	Sweden	19
9.	Canada	14
10.	Global Fund	8

(Source: OECD-DAC, 2010)

3. Methodology

AA was selected as an exemplifying case¹⁶ (Bryman, 2004:51), for achieving in-depth knowledge about the participation phenomenon of rural development projects funded by foreign aid in different settings in a high dependant country on foreign aid.

3.1 Case Study Setting

AA is an international non-governmental developmental organization that has been present in Honduras since 1998. Seventy-seven percent of AA's economic resources come from private funding from Spain and twenty-three percent from official funding and/or enterprises (AA, 2008:43).

AA works along different strategic lines of intervention: health; education; promotion of a more dynamic local economy; food security and sovereignty; sustainable resource management; water and sanitation; risk management; and, organization. Each of these lines serves as an umbrella for diverse micro projects or processes under long-term general aims. The organization has established five different Areas of Territorial Development (ADT), as a way of organizing its intervention in the country. These areas go along the country's territorial arrangement. In each ADT there is an Action Aid team composed of one coordinator and seven technicians that accompany projects and processes under the different lines of intervention in all the communities of the ADT.

¹⁵ In fact, Honduras' dependency on Spain goes beyond foreign aid. On May 19th, 2010, Porfirio Lobo, Honduras' current president asked Spain help for solving reporters' murders and support for advocating for Lobo's recognition as president by the international community (La Prensa, 20th May, 2010).

¹⁶ An exemplifying case provides a suitable context for the research questions to be answered; and to examine key social processes (Bryman, 2004:51)

AA has a wideranging, long-term model of intervention that is different from other international organizations working in the country. AA's institutional mission consists of: 'improving children's and their families' lives in poor countries and regions through sustainable development projects and through awareness activities with the aim of favoring structural changes that contribute to eradicating poverty' (AA, 2008a:6). Also asserts that its efforts should focus on ensuring that its intervention enhances poor and marginalized people's capabilities; in a way that they increase their negotiation and decision power for influencing the decisions that affect them¹⁷ (AA, 2008a:3). The organization's strategy stresses that the intervention must seek out the most poor and marginalized groups to be the protagonists of their development; that it should work in a participatory manner 'elbow to elbow' with the beneficiaries fostering a human rights based approach and enhanced participation, empowerment, gender equality and democracy. Thus participation and empowerment seem to be important elements of AA's strategy, which this research seeks to assess in its application.

AA's holistic model of intervention; its empowerment policy emphasizing participation as a fundamental aspect; jointly with Honduras' high dependence on foreign aid make it a good case study for this research.

3.2 Units of Analysis

The study was carried out in two out of the five ADT where AA intervenes: ADT4 Comayagua Norte and ADT5 Yoro (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Honduras' Map - Study Areas (Modified from: www.worldmaps.com)

¹⁷ Action Aid's quotations have been translated from Spanish by the researcher.

The specific units of analysis in each of the two ADTs were determined through participatory planning with the coordinators of the ADTs and other persons from the organization at the national offices in Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras. The following criteria were considered:

- Geographical position (two different areas of territorial development)
- Community size. In each ADT: 1) a municipality centre and/or big community (over 2,000 inhabitants); and, 2) a village (up to 350 inhabitants) were chosen. These represent the country's rural territorial arrangement.
- High level of Action Aid intervention, i.e. different lines of intervention present in the community.
- Different time length of intervention -12 and 7 years in ADT4 and ADT5, respectively. This provides sufficient time in order to see outcomes in terms of participation and empowerment at the individual, collective and community¹⁸ level.

Table 3 contains the units of analysis. Studying the same phenomenon in four different settings allowed the researcher to deepen and enrich the understanding of participation across projects and processes supported by AA.

Table 3. Units of Analysis¹⁹

ADT	Communities	Type	Population	Territorial arrangement
ADT4 Comayagua Norte	Las Lajas	Municipality' center	7 450	1490 households (neighborhoods)
	La Dalia	Village	300	40 households
ADT5 Yoro	Las Vegas	Large locality (close to municipality' center)	2 000	400 households (neighborhoods)
	Rincones	Village	350	63 households

The particular characteristics of the communities that AA intervenes are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Characteristics of Units of Analysis

Units of Analysis Characteristics	
69.77%	with primary school
8.87%	with secondary school
0.39%	with graduate studies
71.57%	illiterate
39.16%	have own land
68.95%	dedicate to agriculture
3.40%	raise animals
6.2	average members per family

Source: (AGRONET, 2008:ii-iv)

¹⁸ In section 4.2.2 the connotation given to 'community' is contested.

¹⁹ Population data is approximate; figures were taken from different AA (2008a,b,c) sources and AGRONET, 2008.

3.3 Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

This research held a constructivist ontological position which asserts that ‘social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors’ (Bryman, 2004:17). For a rigorous representation of participation on AA’s rural development projects and its impacts on people’s lives, this research is based on ‘the perspectives of the people being studied’, aiming to understand ‘their lives and their worlds [...] through their eyes’ (Ragin, 1994:92). By learning and understanding the perceptions and actions of the different actors (Table 5) involved in AA’s intervention at diverse levels and processes, it was possible to elucidate the links between participation, empowerment and foreign dependency. After all, ‘the world [...] is constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it’ (Porter, 1996:98), resulting in diverse realities.

3.4 Data Collection

Following the case study approach, the research draws on multiple methods (Silverman, 2010:132). This allows constructing diverse data that allow complementary and verification of findings, aiming to substantiate the constructivist perspectives. The main methods used are presented below.

3.4.1 Theoretical Sampling

A non-probabilistic theoretical sampling²⁰ method helped to determine the informants (Bryman, 2004:151), i.e. people that provide information regarding the study, and respondents (*ibid*:109), i.e. people answering questions about themselves (Table 5). This was done by studying the organization’s structure and its work model through participatory observation in general meetings at the Central Office in Tegucigalpa; and through institutional documents, policies and reports from the two ADTs during the first week in Honduras. It aimed for a broadly representative cohort of individuals.

3.4.2 In-Depth, Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with AA’s staff in the two ADTs. In each of the four communities participants and users were interviewed individually; as well as focus groups were organized depending on the existing organizations and collective groups in each community, and their accessibility and willingness to gather. Table 6 contains a summary about the respondents. Appendices I and II provide detailed information of the respondents: community; project they were participating; individual interview or focus group; gender and age. These last

²⁰ This sampling means that the studied groups and categories were selected on the basis of their relevance to the particular questions of this research and the theoretical position (Mason, 1996:93). ‘The goal of theoretical sampling... is a sample that aids the development of concepts and deepens the understanding of the research subject’ (Ragin, 1994:99).

two features are due to the broad approach the organization has which includes both genders²¹ and diverse ages. Appendix III provides more information about informants.

Table 5. Map of Actors

Stake-holders	Actors	Roles
Informants	Action Aid' Directors	One Director per line of intervention in the National Office. They work directly with Coordinators and Technicians of all ADTs.
	Action Aid's Coordinators	One Coordinator per ADT. They work directly with technicians and communities.
	Action Aid's Technicians	One technician per line of intervention in each ADT. They work directly in the communities implementing projects and accompanying processes.
Respondents	Organizations and collective groups	AA supports projects and/or enhances processes through different organized groups in each intervened community.
	Local Persons (Participants)	Individuals participating directly in projects or processes supported by AA. Many times they also belong to an organization or collective group (level above).
	Local Persons (Users)	Individuals in the communities who are benefiting from the intervention without being actively involved in any specific project or process (spill-over effect).

Table 6. Respondents Summary

Respondents Summary				
Total persons	145	15-30 years	31-50 years	>50 years
Women	61%	42%	47%	11%
Men	39%	39%	48%	13%

The community of Rincones was unique, since a community assembly was organized by the local people for the research with at least two participants from the different projects and groups present in the village. There were approximately 30 persons. They are not included in Table 6.

An effort was made to avoid AA's staff participation during the fieldwork while having individual or focus groups interviews, for people to freely express their perceptions without feeling pressured. In this way, they could unreservedly talk and make judgements related to AA and its intervention. Appendices IV and V contain the interview guides used by the researcher during fieldwork. The principal points addressed in the interviews were:

1. Narrative of the project.
2. Time length and forms of participation in the project.
3. Most significant changes²² and other perceived changes/learnings from their participation in projects/processes.

²¹ The organization has a Gender Policy, which is relevant when assessing intervention and empowerment. For AA 'gender equality implies that both, women and men, have the same economical, cultural, civil and political rights across all aspects of human development; that both genders can enjoy the same level of respect; freedom to choose, and autonomy and capacities for developing the outcomes of such choices' (AA, 2010:6)

4. Aspirations and motivations.
5. Role of the organization
6. When interviewing individuals that did not belong to any group or project, the subjects addressed were: knowledge regarding the existence of organizations and projects in the communities; reasons for not participating; perception of changes in the community over time; reasoning behind them

These in-depth semi structured interviews were conducted in a fairly informal manner where interviewees liberally shared their perceptions. This was because local people open more themselves in an informal environment where they feel comfortable to share their experiences and perceptions. So the interview guide helped to check that all the points had been addressed during focus groups and individual interviews, but always allowing the natural flow of the talks.

3.4.3 Participatory Observation

The method of participatory observation (Bryman, 2004:472) was used continuously in order to learn about the social characteristics and dynamics of the different contexts being studied. AA gave the researcher the opportunity to participate in different meetings which allowed acquiring a deeper understanding of the work the organization is doing and the approaches it takes internally (among the staff) and externally (with the community and other organizations). In each of the ADTs the researcher lived with local families for two weeks. The organization contacted the families and arranged the accommodation. However, during the fieldwork the researcher contacted the people and groups for conducting individual and focus groups interviews. This permitted immersion in the community daily life and to have a better understanding of the complexities of the contexts of intervention, their commonalities and differences.

3.4.4 Literature Review

The researcher focused, among other things, on academic papers of foreign aid, international cooperation for development, Honduras' history, empowerment, capabilities enhancement, participation, as well as on AA's institutional reports, policies and strategies that were provided by the organization.

3.4.5 Planning and Feedback Meetings

Besides the first planning meeting with AA, prior to starting the work in each ADT the researcher had an introductory meeting with each ADT's team. This space gave the researcher the opportunity to talk about the aim of the research and to hear how the staff perceived their work, the communities' responses, their intervention, challenges within their intervention and how they

²² This technique by Davies and Dart (2005) helps to find out what the persons that are involved in projects feel has been the most significant change regarding their participation in projects/processes and the organization's intervention. Also to find out what people can do that they could not before their participation in the project allows knowing what people value.

talked about empowerment and participation. These meetings allowed the researcher to contrast the organization's stance and pragmatism with what was found in the communities. At the end of the fieldwork there were also meetings with AA's staff team in each of the studied ADTs in order to present a report with the preliminary analysis of the findings and to discuss how the process went for both parties, i.e. the researcher and AA's staff; allowing to learn from different perspectives on the report.

3.5 Data Analysis

As stated above, the literature review helped to build background for the case study and its linkages with the theory. From this emerged initial 'sensitizing concepts' (Ragin, 1994:87), which helped constructing an initial analytic frame with categories at the outset that guided the fieldwork and interviews planning. However, during the course of the fieldwork such concepts and categories were changing and being clarified according to what was found in the field and their importance for the research.

An 'analytic induction' (Ragin, 1994:93) technique was thus used, meaning that there was a systematic examination of similarities and differences among the analyzed units. This helped to develop an analytical framework with specific concepts and categories that evolved from a continuous 'reciprocal clarification' (*ibid*:82) between theory and reality, i.e. what was being found in the field. This constant dialogue between theory and the data that was being collected, allowed the researcher to build the particular analytical frame for this research. Such frame constitutes how the links among the key concepts such as foreign dependency, empowerment, capabilities, social agency and participation are understood for the context of this research²³. Different phases of AA's intervention process were assessed according to a specific participation typology, in order to determine how different actors are engaged in the decision-making process. This allowed operationalizing participation.

3.6 Research Limitations

This study is qualitative focusing on people's answers and perceptions of change at one point in time. As an outsider there are implications, for example, getting answers that are 'expected', however, at all times effort was made to be aware of the whole context and to be as objective as possible. Another limitation outside the researcher's control is the fact that there is little agreement in the literature in defining empowerment and participation and there are few accepted techniques or indicators for measuring them. It is also difficult to identify straight forward empowerment-related changes²⁴. Besides changes are influenced by the historical, social, economical and environmental particularities of the context and by each individual's life story which cannot all be included in an analysis. Nevertheless, this research offers a contribution to a better understanding of participation within the international development cooperation arena.

²³ Fig. 5 in Section 4.4.

²⁴ This is developed in Chapter 4.

4. Participation as a Major Dimension of Empowerment

In this section key components of the analytical frame are elucidated. The analysis is drawn from such frame, which is explained at the end of this section (Fig. 5).

4.1 Conceptualizing Empowerment

There are different definitions of empowerment²⁵. In the 1960s and 1970s empowerment was associated with processes that enabled oppressed and marginalized people to recognize and exercise their social agency, which refers to the ‘freedom to bring about achievements one considers to be valuable’ (Sen, 1999:191; cf. Freire, 1972). More recently, empowerment is said to happen ‘when individuals and organized groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realize that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty’ (Eyben, et. al, 2008:6). Along with this tenet, empowerment is assumed as ‘increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make purposeful and effective choices in the interest of pursuing a better life for themselves’ (Smulovitz and Walton, 2002:3). Narayan (2005:5) asserts that empowerment ‘is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives’.

Regardless of its different definitions, there are some aspects frequently found in empowerment literature (see Table 7). Among these features, participation is of great importance since between development agencies and NGOs there appears to be a consensus that participation can help to address other factors that lead to empowerment. At the same time participation is assumed as ‘a process that enhances the capacity of individuals to improve or change their own lives’ (Cleaver, 2001:36). It is seen as a process that enhances social agency and people’s capabilities, which, as it is shown in Table 7, are two major components of empowerment.

This research studies empowerment through participation as a dimension that enhances capabilities and social agency. It is suggested that participation helps overcoming foreign aid dependency through empowerment.

The capability approach that emerges from Amartya Sen’s work *Development as Freedom*²⁶ (1999) has been crucial for reflecting on development’s rhetoric and practice in terms of local people participation. Put simply, the capability approach argues that ‘the goal of both human development and poverty reduction should be to expand the capability that people have to enjoy valuable things and doings. They should have access to the positive resources they need in order

²⁵ There are different approaches that conceive empowerment from very particular perspectives, such as: economic empowerment; political empowerment; social empowerment; women empowerment; and, legal empowerment. Empowerment is also assumed as an enhanced capability through a developmental intervention (cf. Alkire, 2002). However, this research addresses empowerment in a broader way focusing mainly in participation as a major dimension of empowerment, which is assumed to involve both, capabilities’ enhancement and social agency, when positive, as it will be argued in this section.

²⁶ Sen’s approach challenges traditional welfare economics, which mainly focuses on resources and utility, and he states that what should be measure as human well-being and development is a whole range of human functionings and capabilities that people have reason to value. In this sense, according to Sen, development involves the expansion of human capabilities and the enrichment of human lives.

to have these capabilities. And they should be able to make choices that matter to them' (Alkire, 2002:2).

Table 7. Empowerment Aspects

Aspect	Characteristics
Power	Understanding power as 'the networks of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible action' (Hayward, 1998:2). To be empowered one must initially be disempowered. Funding agencies are always in a position of power in relation to local communities and people. Donors need to be aware of the effects of their power in their relations with others: avoiding to perpetuate disempowering discourses and institutions.
Social Agency	Empowerment cannot be applied by a third party; people must become active agents. Development agencies cannot empower people, they can just enable the environment.
Capabilities	Empowerment involves the enhancement of different capabilities in order to not only change awareness, but encourage action: to 'participate in', 'negotiate with', 'influence'.
Process	Empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product. It can only be judged through its effects, although there are not straight forward empowerment-related changes. People are empowered or disempowered, relative to others, or, relative to themselves at a previous time, which can actually be told by them.
Context specific	Empowerment's strategies involve the enhancement of individuals' ability to function collectively in their own interest in their specific context.
Participation	Empowerment is a 'consequence of participating in collective action and gaining greater control over the means to one's livelihood' (Friedmann, 1996:164).
Decision-Making	Empowerment involves a sense of people making decisions and being able to carry them out on issues that matter in their lives.

Source: After Mosedale (2005:244); Eyben, et. al (2008); Koggel (2006); and, Sumolovitz and Walton (2002)

Sen (1999:53) asserts that 'people have to be seen, in this perspective, as being actively involved – given the opportunity- in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs', this means that people have to actively participate in decision-making processes and be given the opportunity to be active agents. He states that agency freedom is 'what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important' (Sen, 1985:203).

This approach emphasizes the fact that there are different types of information relevant for the assessment of well-being and quality of life than those considered in mainstream economics. For example, 'how people actually live', 'what they do and are', 'their freedom', and 'what they are able to do and be' (Gasper, 2007:340) are important, so the locus here is on people. The public procedure for prioritizing is a key feature; i.e. participation and group decision making within it. 'Freedom concerns the person's role in decision making' (*ibid*); freedom 'is the capacity to

participate effectively in shaping the social limits that define what is possible' (Hayward, 1998:2). Then, participation in this thesis is seen as a core part of development intervention, which with the right approach could trigger substantial changes: 'participation... has intrinsic value for the quality of life' (Dréze and Sen, 1995:106).

4.2 Mainstreaming Participation in Development Cooperation

'Participation has been taken on board in the mainstream development discourse and appears as a mandatory approach in strategies for development cooperation globally' (Mikkelsen, 2005:53). One of its main uses is to describe an empowering process which enables local people to do their own analysis, to take command, to gain confidence, and to make their own decisions (*ibid*). Most international NGOs and development agencies have incorporated participatory approaches when intervening. Critiques towards the rather instrumental approaches to both, empowerment and participation have been raised during the last decades, mainly due to the emphasis encountered in development discourses of '*relocating* the poor within the prevailing order: bringing them in, finding them a place, lending them opportunities, empowering them, *inviting them to participate*' (Cornwall, 2002:3 emphasis in original) rather than associating the term with a people's own process. This suggests that participation is something driven from the outside rather than internally led by the community involved.

The participation concept is not new, since the 1940s it started as a colonial approach for community development²⁷ and it has had a trajectory filled with different kind of discourses within the development cooperation that has led to its current link with broader matters of policy and governance, and to the debate whether participation is a new kind of tyranny or if it can be relocated as a transformative approach²⁸. Therefore the relevance of understanding forms of participation in development cooperation intervention.

In the 1990s Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers, 1994;2007) emerged as an umbrella containing different participatory methods. The main discourse was a critique towards top-down approaches and such methods were supposed to help to reverse power relations from 'uppers' to 'lowers'. It asserts that 'power and knowledge are inextricably bound up' (Chambers, 1997). It became very popular during that decade not just among NGOs, but also in the public sector development bureaucracies. Such increased popularity was accompanied by severe critiques, which did recognize the advantages of PRA-based²⁹ methods and the need to challenge existing power structures, but also argued that participatory approaches had 'proved compatible with top-down planning systems, and have not necessarily heralded changes in prevailing institutional

²⁷ During the 1940s-1950s the UK Colonial Office stated that development requires participation and self-reliance and that stable rural communities needed to be reproduced in order to counteract urbanization and sociopolitical change (Hickey and Mohan, 2004).

²⁸ Refer to Cooke and Kothari (eds) (2001) and Hickey and Mohan (eds) (2004).

²⁹ The three main components of PRA are methods, behaviors, attitudes and sharing. Due to its fast spreading Chambers (1994) warned about the main 'dangers', which include, among other things, routinisation, and, misuse of labels and methods.

practices of development' (Mosse, 2004:16). On the one hand, the chief arguments against participatory development within the debate are (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:11; Mikkelsen, 2005:76;):

- Technicalization. Predominance of orthodoxy; treating participation as a technical method.
- Neglecting context. Inadequate understanding of power imbalances within local communities. Applying participatory techniques mechanically.
- An obsession with the local as opposed to broader structures of injustice and oppression.
- Tendency of idealizing community.

On the other hand, some participation advocates acknowledge these challenges, but claim that labelling participation as 'mainstreaming' is a sign of success, since it implies the use of methodologies that involve all actors and levels of decision-making. It also implies an ongoing process of the reconceptualization of participation where broader realms such as agency, citizenship and governance are included; and that there are new approaches seeking radical alternatives (*ibid*). The debate is broad and every argument raises new questions that at the end nourish development discourses and approaches and more practically, developmental agencies and NGOs' interventions and practices.

The reality is that participatory approaches are incorporated into the participation agenda from international development agencies and NGOs, and now that the pitfalls have been recognized, the challenge remains of learning from them, avoiding them and putting in practice different participation approaches. This research supports the statement that the proper objective of participation is also 'to ensure the transformation of existing development practice and, more radically, the social relations, institutional practices and capacity gaps which cause exclusion' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:13), then it can lead towards sustainable rural development that lessens foreign aid dependency and builds towards broader sustainability goals. The negative and positive elements of participation were also considered in looking at AA's approach in Honduras.

4.2.1 Participation's Typology

The tendency among donors has been to incorporate participatory approaches as a requirement, while in practice this is done by including local people only superficially in any part of the decision making process as a requirement for implementing the project and then to be able to report outcomes (Little, 1994; Wilhunsen, 2000). This has been confirmed by several projects' reviews³⁰, which have concluded that local people are treated as passive beneficiaries of project activities by failing to involve them in the process of change and their own development. Therefore it is important to differentiate between instrumental and transformational participation (Oakley and Marsden, 1991, in Mikkelsen, 2005:58):

³⁰For example, Wells and Brandon (1992) studied twenty-three conservation and development projects; Little (1994) reviewed the participation component in twelve conservation and development projects; Wilshusen (2000) has several case studies as well.

- Instrumental participation. ‘Participation as means to improve development activities, making development interventions more effective and sustainable by involving the users’; or
- Transformational Participation. ‘Participation as an end in itself ensuring people’s influence on their own situations as empowerment’.

Typologies of levels of participation have been elaborated as means to explore interventions. They are not blueprints for evaluating participation, since they need to be complemented and contextualized when being used; however, Pretty’s (1994) and DFID’s (2003) typologies (Table 8 and Fig.4) can be good analytical tools within theory and practice. Such tools were combined, modified and applied in this research.

Table 8. Types of Participation

Type of Participation	Characteristics
Level 1. Passive Participation	People are informed about a planned intervention by the NGO’s staff. They lack the ability to change it.
Level 2. Participation in information giving.	Local people answer questions posed by extractive researchers and developers. They do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings.
Level 3. Participation by consultation	People are consulted by NGO’s staff, and the obtained information is used to define problems and design interventions. People do not take part in decision-making.
Level 4. Participation for material incentives	People participate by providing resources in return of material incentives. They do not participate in decision-making.
Level 5. Functional participation	People participate by forming groups or committees, which are seen as means to fulfill predetermined project objectives. Groups can initially depend on external initiations, but may become independent.
Level 6. Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis and design of actions plans. Groups may be formed and together with the donor NGO make use of systematic and structured learning processes. Local people participate as full partners in decision making.
Level 7. Self-mobilization	People organize by themselves and undertake action with no external assistance, although the latter can help with an enabling framework.

Source: Adapted from Pretty (1994:41).

As it can be seen in both typologies, people’s involvement in the decision-making process during the intervention is crucial for assessing participation. It also follows that empowerment usually ‘includes a sense of people making decisions on matters which are important in their lives and being able to carry them out’ (Mosedale, 2005:244); i.e. people being agents that ‘act and bring about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of their own values and objectives’ (Alkire, 2002:6).

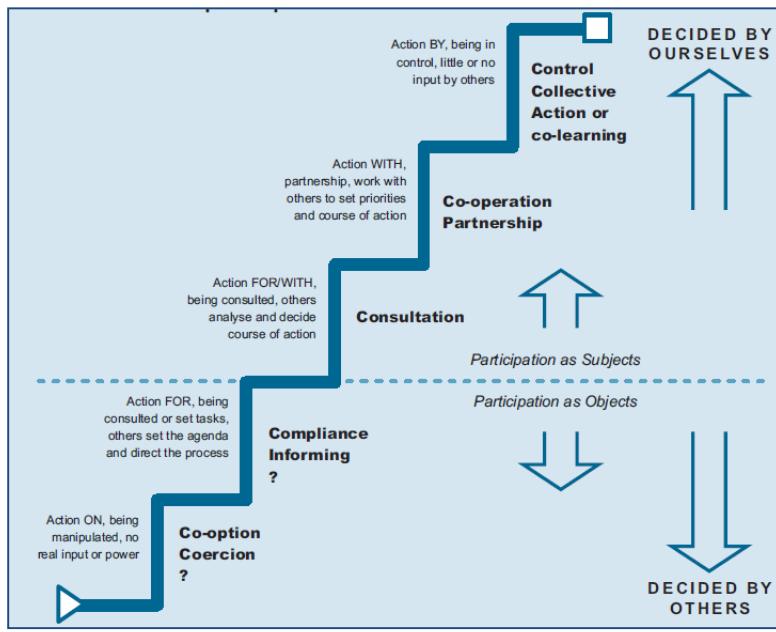


Figure 3. Participation Ladder (Source: DFID, 2003:7.5)

4.2.2 Representation and Inclusion

The above tools (Table 7; Fig. 3) help to distinguish among types of participation, but they do not identify who the participants are. A pattern in participatory approaches is the focus on collective work, manifesting the social in a ‘community’ sense. The concept of ‘local community’ prevails in the rural development rhetoric. ‘Communities are envisaged as playing an integral part in the process of initiating and managing projects in their own areas’ (Storey, 1999:308). Communities are sometimes seen as an uniform whole rather than representing diverse individuals and groups.

Representation and inclusion focuses on the *who* question (Narayan, 2002): Who is included? Who represents whom? The agencies and NGOs’ interventions should reach the socially marginal and challenge the sets of power relations within the context they are intervening. Chambers (1994:1444) states that ‘whether it is equitable depends on who is empowered. There is a danger of a naïve populism in which participation is measured regardless of who participates or who gains’. Hence, the importance of not overlooking representation and inclusion issues since they also help to assess power relationships and the impact of the intervention on them. It is important to analyze the dynamics of participation and how power has manifested, since participation is a way to empower: who participates?, who benefits?, who did not enter the arena for participation and why?; again, who speaks for whom? who takes part in the decision-making process?

4.2.3 Participation in Decision-Making and Project Cycle

As has been shown, a main factor when assessing participation is the level of engagement of the participants in the decision-making phases during the intervention. It is argued that transformative participation could be achieved through really including local people at each stage of development interventions.

The degree of participation in projects can vary throughout. Thus it is helpful to identify distinct phases or categories when analyzing projects and/or processes in order to have a better understanding of the participation in the decision-making process and the impacts of projects on people's lives. A useful tool for doing this is the Project Cycle (PC). It is based on progressive phases³¹ that help to follow the intervention work³² (Fig. 4). It was used in this research for assessing how local people participate in decision-making among different AA's phases of intervention.

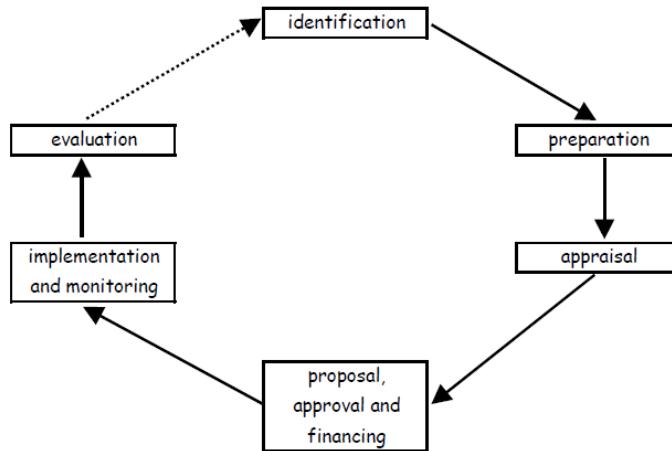


Figure 4. Project Cycle (Source: FAO, 2001:12)

4.3 Analytical Frame: Participation, Empowerment and Foreign Aid Links

As a way to illustrate how the linkages are understood and how they were operationalized, an analytic frame was created by the researcher as an outcome from the on-going dialogue between theory and evidence during the fieldwork and the data analysis stages (Fig. 6). This research asserts that if the foreign aid money being invested in rural development projects in developing countries promotes not just an instrumental participation but a transformational one, i.e. local people taking part in the decision-making process throughout the intervention process; then this can potentially enhance people's capabilities and social agency (two major components of empowerment). Such empowerment would foster both, more participation at different levels of the system, which would be a positive reinforcing process (R); and, in a long-term it would facilitate change to the foreign aid dependency dynamic; given that people will be able to continue with the processes and projects by themselves. In this way, the dependency cycle will eventually balance (B), and the empowerment process will keep reinforcing itself through participation without the foreign aid.

³¹ The selected phases can be modified according to the particular needs of the process to follow.

³² It is important to note that this is just a tool for planning, and can be used as complement to other ones, e.g. the Logical Framework Approach that helps during problem identification and analysis just to mention one. Also there are different participatory approaches for each phase. Special emphasis has been given to the monitoring and evaluating phases within aid assistance.

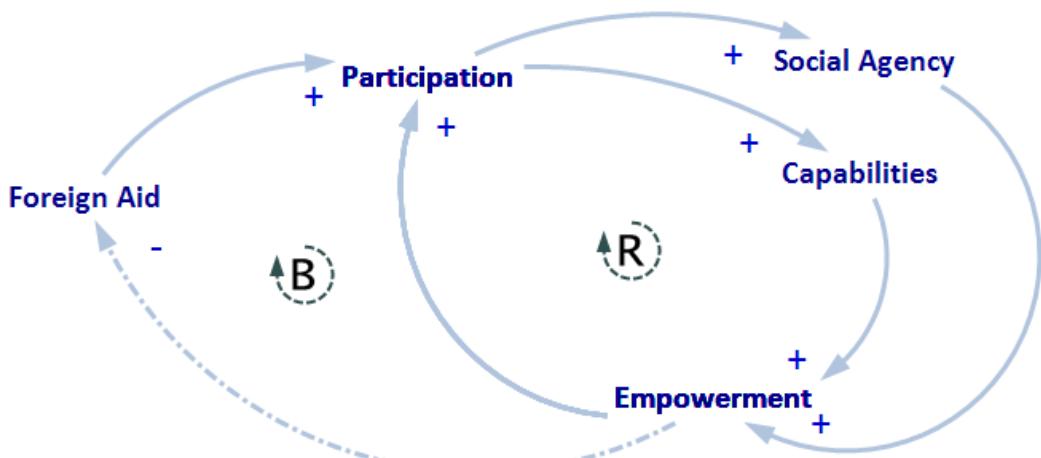


Figure 5 Participation as a Major Dimension of Empowerment

In order to operationalize the above diagram the researcher defined and assessed five different intervention phases within AA's projects and processes (Table 9). Representation and inclusion were considered in all phases through the intervention. This allowed to understand conditions for successful participation and empowerment.

Table 9. Assessed Phases in AA's Intervention

Phase	Participation / Decision-making on...
Identification	Prioritizing needs. Projects to be executed.
Ownership	How people appraise the project and get involved
Planning	How it will be done: distribution of key tasks, roles and responsibilities.
Implementation	How projects are carried out.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Tracking of inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes. Project's impact assessment.

5. Findings and Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the findings of the research on participation in AA's projects in Honduras. First, the researcher investigated AA's intervention model through institutional documents and participatory observation in meetings. This allowed her to assess people's involvement in the decision-making process across five PC phases of the projects. The following section has been constructed with the collected data by different methods. The diversity of methods used allowed the researcher to acquire a deep understanding of AA's work in Honduras. Findings are explained and analyzed below.

5.1 Action Aid's Intervention Model in Honduras

AA's head office is located in Spain while the Honduran National Office is located in Tegucigalpa, the capital. The National Office is where the national director and the directors of each line of intervention operate. The research was done in two of the five Areas of Territorial Development (ADT) where the organization intervenes, ADT4 Yoro and ADT5 Comayagua³³.

In each ADT there is a team consisting of one coordinator and seven technicians: one for each line of intervention. Despite belonging to the same organization and being guided by the same institutional strategies and policies, it was found that each ADT works on a triennial plan from which yearly plans are drawn and yearly evaluations based (cf. AA, 2008b,c). An independent budget is allocated to each ADT according to its plans and goals. Regardless of having this decentralized system for operating, everything has to be approved, reported and monitored by the Central National Office, responsible for reporting to Spain. Therefore, the macro organization's process is highly centralized.

The researcher participated in a general planning meeting. Such meetings and evaluation processes take place in general meetings where all directors and coordinators of each ADT are present. Whereas each ADT has certain level of autonomy, the broader goals are common, and so are the intervention guidelines. When participating in these meetings, the researcher noted that an analysis of the macro context is carried out by AA's staff as a way to revise the role they have as a developmental organization, not just within the communities they are intervening, but also in the broader National context. In this way, it can be said that a self-reflection on AA's role as a political body is being triggered, in order to question their practice.

There is an important collaboration among areas that share similar challenges, or that have projects in common, so a constant exchange of knowledge and experiences happen within this level of the organization. It was seen that an efficient flow of information and a high level of transparency among the directors, coordinators and staff as a way to foster such practices in their work while intervening in communities. It was found that overall AA tends to have 'goal-oriented' monitoring and evaluation processes (Mikkelsen, 2005:270). It focuses more on whether the planned goals of the intervention have been achieved. This is done through documents such as the 'Triennial Plan of Intervention', 'Activities' Programme', 'Annual Activities Report', 'Micro-project Fact Sheet'³⁴. In such documents achievements are measured against the standards that were set when the intervention was planned. Outcomes are evaluated through quantitative measures: how much was achieved; time horizons: when it was achieved in accordance with work plans; budget: what costs; quality: how it was achieved.

³³ Refer to Units of Analysis p. 14

³⁴ These are institutional documents where goals and outcomes are reported in terms of numbers: persons, budget, workshops quantities, cf. AA (2008a,b,c).

5.1.1 Initial Intervention

When AA first arrives at a location, they start with what they call ‘trusting actions’. Such actions consist of contacting the localities’ authorities and representatives (Table 10) to introduce themselves. In this way, the organization establishes a first contact and dialogue to gain some insight from the community. This process is accompanied by an important investment in a project according to detected needs, so they can get people’s trust and support, e.g. the building for a CRAC. Economic contributions from private persons in Spain are a major source of AA’s resources. Their model is based on donations for sponsored children. Thus having sponsored children is one of AA’s criteria for intervening in a region³⁵.

Table 10. Common Authorities and Representatives in Communities

Authority	Role
Municipal Mayor	Each municipality is formed by several communities, which are represented by a Municipal Mayor.
Patronage	Each community elects a Patronage which represents it before the government authorities, such as the Mayor.
Water Council	Most rural communities have organized themselves to look after their water supply in diverse ways, as an answer to the government’s absence.
Schools’ Representatives	Directors and teachers posses an important role within communities since they negotiate resources for the school before NGOs and governmental institutions, and organize a Parent’s Council for activities, due to the government’s absence.

5.1.2 Link Contacts

The sponsored children in AA have to write letters on a regular basis to keep in touch with the donors. So, AA’s solidarity links line of intervention is in charge of following the communication exchange between sponsored children and Spanish donors. For this purpose the organization has ‘link contacts’³⁶, whose main role is to support the organization by following the letter-writing process; however, they are also considered as referents and as main *channels of communication* between the organization and the community. These persons are contacted periodically and invited to different kind of workshops a few times a year. The organization aims to have a ‘multiplier effect’, so the *link contacts* are expected to transmit the information and knowledge gained in AA’s workshops to the rest of the community.

5.1.3 Mode of working

AA’s institutional strategy states that the intervention must be done through organized groups. In this way, the organization supports and enhances on-going projects or processes, or propels new

³⁵ The researcher has different arguments regarding the sponsorship model, but they are not addressed in this paper, since it is out of the scope of the study.

³⁶ The name in Spanish is ‘enlace’ which means ‘link’ and it is given the connotation of linking the community and the organization.

ones through existing groups or by fostering the creation of groups. The organization calls them *interest groups* (AA, 2008a,b,c).

AA's intervention model is based on a triple-share economic contribution. It requires a 'community' and a 'government' share as responsible stakeholders. Regardless it is the organization which contributes invariably with the largest amount of money. The community share usually involves a smaller economic contribution or/and non-qualified labor and local materials.

AA has transparency and accountability policies. At all organizational levels there are consultancies for guaranteeing that the money is being used properly. Thus, teams in ADTs also have to inform the communities how the budget will be invested and afterwards they have to present a report of all the activities and the expenses.

5.2 Participation assessment in Intervention Phases

The researcher assessed participation in decision-making through different phases of AA's intervention for each of the AA's projects/processes studied. The criterion used is shown in Fig. 6 that contains the typology that the researcher built for this particular study³⁷.

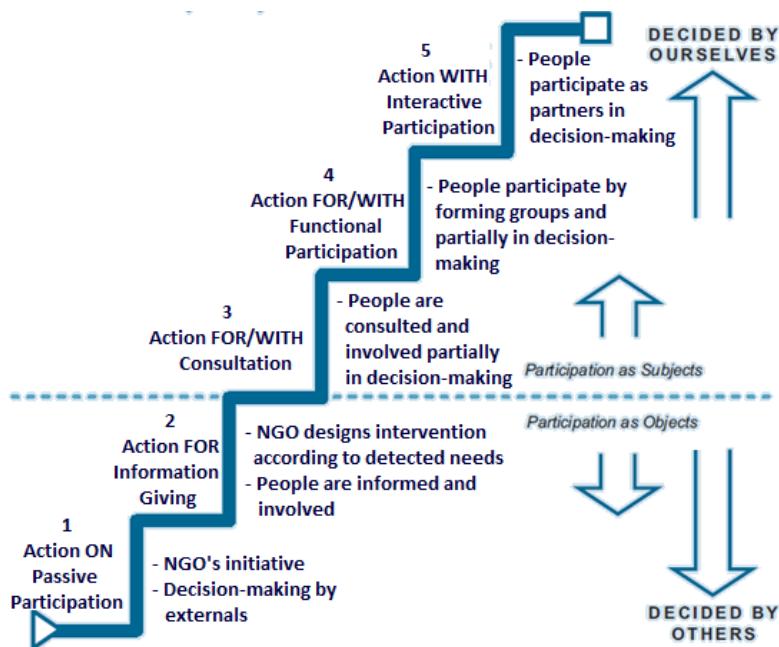


Figure 6. Categorization of Participation (After Pretty, 1994:41; and, DFID, 2003:7.5).

Each intervention phase in each of the studied projects and groups was assigned a number depending on the level of involvement of participation in decision-making from local people

³⁷ Pretty's (1994:41) Participation Typology (Table 4.2) and DFID's (2003:7.5) Participation Ladder (Fig. 4.1) were combined and modified, taking the features that were useful for assessing decision-making across AA's different projects and processes.

related to AA's staff role according to Fig.6. The assessment is based on the findings from conducted focus groups and individual interviews. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) across projects were assessed following the criterion in Table 11. Analyzed results are shown in Table 12. It is acknowledged that data analysis is inherently subjective; and, that a category or number cannot embrace all the particularities and complexities of each project and the persons that construct it. However, the assessment according to the typology for this research helped to organize and analyze the findings based on the results from interviews and observation.

Table 11. Monitoring and Evaluation Ranking

Rank	Characteristics
Low (L)	Project/process depends on external assistance for being sustained. Number of initial members has decreased overtime.
Medium (M)	Project/process struggles to be self-sufficient, but it is finding its way without external assistance, or with limited help from it. Initial members remain.
High (H)	Project/process has been able to continue even without AA presence. The number of members remains the same or has increased.

The monitoring ranking is based on the premise that the higher the participation from local people in the decision-making processes is, then, the more likely the project will become self-sufficient and would be able to continue without external assistance. Instead of losing members, these will remain the same or even increase. People in projects ranked with H and M would find ways to progress without AA. A brief description of each project can be found in Appendix VI. The findings from assessing participation in AA's intervention are in Table 12 and these are expanded and discussed below.

5.2.1 Representation, Inclusion and *Link Contacts*

Most of the projects and processes that AA has supported in the two ADT have been through existing organized groups in the communities. These groups were contacted and interviewed. Many of the groups in ADT4 were created by other international organizations that worked in the communities prior to AA's intervention; whereas in ADT5 the drivers for the creation of groups are variable. However, the important factor is not really how the group came about, but that these groups have become referents for the organization. It was found that projects and information are concentrated among a small group of persons within the communities. This is more noticeable in ADT4, where the diversity of persons integrated in groups is lower. The pattern found by contacting existing groups in Las Lajas and La Dalia was that projects are concentrated within a smaller group of persons than in ADT5 (Las Vegas and Rincones).

Table 12. Participation Assessment

From participants and non-participants interviews, it was found that at the moment of initiating processes the rest of the inhabitants in the communities sometimes are not sufficiently informed, consequently, they lack the choice of whether to get engaged and participate in such processes or not. This was confirmed when interviewing people who were not involved in groups who tended to possess scarce information about existing projects in their communities. Moreover, once a group has been formed it is difficult for other persons to be able to join, since requirements from active members are among others, to give a corresponding economic contribution of what they have given so far.

Link contacts are an important factor within representation in AA's ADTs. All informants considered them as communication channels between the organization and the community. Nevertheless, all interviewed *link contacts* see their role as something instrumental: 'we just help to write the letters'. These persons are supported periodically with training workshops that they are expected to spread within their communities; however, they perceive these activities as incentives to keep helping AA with the sponsored children. It was found that despite being considered the communication channels, in ADT4, *link contacts* were not necessarily informed about other projects supported by AA in their communities, which denotes a weak information flow, concentrated within a small group of persons. In ADT5 people were more informed about processes happening in their localities, in one way due to a wider group of persons organized in groups. Yet, while interviewing non-participants in the communities it was found that the information tends to remain among *link persons and existing organized groups*.

5.2.2 Identification

When asking AA's staff how needs are identified and prioritized, all asserted that this was done by 'the communities' through 'community's assembly' and that afterwards they are informed and together with the communities projects are decided, then 'the initiatives come from the people'. These asseverations correspond to an 'action with/interactive participation' (Fig. 6). Nevertheless, it was found that needs and ideas for projects were identified differently amid the studied projects. Phrases like 'they told us', 'they suggested us', 'they convinced us' emerged when asking about how the projects' ideas came about; contrasting with phrases such as 'we needed', 'we thought of' and 'we asked for'. The former pattern prevails in ADT4's microenterprises, where 6 (Crac Emmanuel, Bakery, Crac San Antonio, Carpentry, Coffee Roaster and Pig Farm) out of the 7 visited microenterprises refer in this way to the project; whereas in ADT5's just 1 (Coffee Roaster 3 Marias) out of the 6 microenterprises visited refer in this way.

Information giving (step 2) predominates among projects in ADT4, since respondents asserted that the projects were proposed by AA, who informed them and at the same time set the proceedings. Conversely, in ADT5 participation by consultation (step 3) prevails in projects. One reason for this is that ADT4 accompanied the majority of the projects from the onset; whereas in ADT5 most of the projects already existed when the organization started the intervention, so they tended to have a more consultative approach.

In the four communities the researcher visited the schools. They all had been supported by AA: classroom in La Dalia; toilettes, fences, classrooms, and, kindergarten in Las Lajas; classroom and kindergarten in Rincones; and, a gathering room in Las Vegas. Also in La Dalia at some point the organization was supporting the schools with inputs for children's breakfasts. These projects go along with communities' needs and they have generally been initiated by school representatives, who act as intermediaries between AA and parents. These projects in education rely more on an Action For/Consultation model (step 3).

5.2.3 Ownership

AA's intervention model requires that the community provides an input in each process that it supports. Local persons have to get organized in order to collect money for the part that corresponds to them. As an example, the Bakery, Taylor's Workshop and the Carpentry are on the same land. The three groups had to gather sand for 86m², stones for 86m², wire for the fence, and to contribute with non-qualified labor. The government gave the land. AA funded the rest, i.e., the qualified labor, the rest of the materials needed (e.g. bricks, cements, rod), and, the machinery, equipment and seed capital for the three microenterprises. For the CRACs (Emmanuel and San Antonio Buen Pastor), members had to save 100 Lempiras each month (\$5USD)³⁸, so they could create the community capital, which then was supported with seed capital by AA.

This 'community share' is one of the organization's model strengths, since it requires participants to actively commit and also to be responsible towards the projects because they cost effort and money to them. Paradoxically, it could be argued that it is exclusive since the onset, when some local persons cannot afford contributions, or even afford to spend time on activities that allow participants to gather money for the projects. Another issue found when interviewing both participants and non-participants is that, once a group is formed, it is very difficult for other local persons to enter, because most of the times they will be asked for an equivalent of the community share to participate. There are exceptions, for example, the CRAC in Rincones, is a good example of an inclusive project, where local people can enter contributing with what is possible for them, still the revenue is divided according to everyone's individual share. However, all members have access to the benefits for saving, borrowing money, and having access to staple grains. This project functions with gathering silos for the community, where crops can be exchanged for cash and thus, it helps overcoming the food shortcomings in dry seasons.

It was found that regardless of how groups are formed and projects elected, the sense of ownership is high across projects in both areas. This was confirmed by how people referred to the project as owners, e.g. 'our project', and as having plans to follow their aspirations regarding the project, e.g. the women in the silk-screen La Amistad in ADT5 stating: 'we want to buy land for building the establishment'. The fact that local people are required to contribute with an

³⁸ 1 Lempira is approximately US\$0.052 (March 2010 exchange currency).

economic share, local material or non-qualified workforce, makes them to get actively involved in implementation. This contributes to having a higher sense of ownership because it cost effort to participants. So, the tendency found was that local people look after projects and feel proud about them. A lower sense of ownership was found in those projects that have been just proposed by the organization without the people's initiative, such as CODELs and CODEMs (committees formed by AA aiming to foster a risk prevention and management awareness among communities). A reason for this can be that such projects do not involve tangible or immediate benefits; on the contrary, it is about fostering a risk management culture. Then, for AA it is difficult to incorporate local people and transfer the project's ownership to them.

5.2.4 Planning

The contribution model requires participants in projects to get actively involved in planning how to collect enough funds to pay their corresponding share. This model triggers people's engagement in the projects. Nevertheless, it is still AA's staff who makes decisions on how other inputs will be obtained and how the project will be carried out. This is why projects were placed mainly in an action For/With participation in this phase (step 3); as people's involvement tends to be partial. Planning activities are essential for the life of the projects, since the continued management of resources and access to capital depend on these activities. Therefore such activities require a high degree of commitment from both, AA's staff and local people.

A shortcoming found at this phase in both ADTs is the need for a proper project plan for microenterprises. Although AA has sometimes supported them with technical trainings prior to the project, this tends to be done mostly when the project has started. The pattern found is that most projects in both ADTs are deficient in having a specific project plan that establishes the project's mission, vision, goals within time horizons, and a market feasibility study. This, in combination with inadequate people's preparation has caused difficulties such as inefficient management of the seed capital; unprofitability; stagnancy; and, economic debts. This weakness in planning is accompanied by a lack of needed training for different activities, which causes difficulties when operating. An exception of this is the Butchery in Las Vegas, where people got proper training, e.g. preparing sausages and grinding meat. As it was previously stated, projects in ADT4 were mainly propelled by AA, whereas in ADT5 they started in diverse ways, but without AA's presence. In this last ADT, it was found that AA had started to work on the project plan issue with some of the microenterprises (e.g. Coffee Roaster 3 Marías, Skil-screen La Amistad), which shows as awareness of this projects' weakness.

5.2.5 Implementation

It was found that when projects involve infrastructure and benefit the whole locality, like the two bridges in Las Vegas and the bridge in La Dalia, local persons in communities and local groups are actively involved, since part of their contribution is non-qualified workforce and local materials. For this, local people have to contact each other and get organized to gather the material and establish who will be contributing and in which way. As a result, this requires participants to

become active in some key decision-making issues. Also for the school projects that were already mentioned, parents must participate in both, collecting the corresponding community share and on building the project. This fosters commitment from people towards the projects. As seen in Table 12 the prevailing approach in most projects is functional participation (step 4). This means that groups or committees are either formed or contacted for executing projects, as one of AA's intervention requirements. Persons are partially included within the decision-making process. It was found that the continuity of such groups varies depending upon the project: microenterprises tend to continue, whereas committees tend to weaken over time due to the lack of incentives or activities, such as CODEM and CODELs (i.e. risk management groups). Yet, some projects in ADT5, had a more interactive approach (step 5), due to their propensity to be more active in the decision-making process. In other processes, such as diverse workshops, the execution is done mostly by AA's staff, who decides when it will be done and what will be addressed, by then informing and inviting people to participate.

5.2.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring varies across projects. In Table 10 it was ranked primarily based on their dependency on AA and the number of members. Projects ranked as Low (L) have fewer members than they had at the outset; these still need different sorts of help to continue. Projects positioned at (M) and (H) demonstrated a stable number of members; these are seeking ways to improve regardless of difficulties, e.g. many of them are saving money and seeking means to buy their own land as patrimony. Differences are that projects ranked as medium rely more on AA than those ranked as high.

Groups such as CODELs (for risk management), which have been fostered by the organization and that do not benefit the persons tangibly as microenterprises, for example, are very weak and depend totally on AA's staff. Projects that benefit many local persons in a locality, such as CRACs, have been able to continue even without AA's further support. EICs projects consist of a computer school for twenty-five youths per year that have not had the chance to continue their education. There are significant differences between the two studied EICs. In ADT5 it depends fully on AA; whereas in ADT5 there is a committee that helps through the process and that has even mobilized to offer the same course to other persons (mostly adults) by paying a symbolic fee. They have started to plan what they will do once the funding from AA finishes. Hence, the difference in their ranking.

It was found that overall there is no evaluation for each single project supported by AA in different ADTs, since there are numerous projects and processes that they accompany simultaneously in each area of intervention. Due to AA's Transparency Policy at the beginning of each year, staff communicates the investing plan and by the end, AA's staff also reports how the budget was actually spent, which is one feature of the evaluation. However, the evaluation process is more general encompassing all activities per ADT in a determined time-frame, and it is done in both levels, separated by ADT and generally at the Central Office as explained by the ADTs' Coordinators.

5.3 Capabilities' Enhancement

There are differences found between participants and non-participants in both ADTs, regardless of the level of involvement within the decision-making process. During the individual and focus groups interviews, people mentioned important changes that they relate to AA's intervention and their participation in projects. Beyond the infrastructure ones that bring lots of immediate benefits for the whole locality, such as schools, bridges, sewage system, just to mention some; there are changes, benefits and impacts that participants link to their participation in projects and processes supported by Action Aid. The core and more predominant dimensions mentioned in the interviews are described in Table 13 below. The presentation of capabilities enhanced is based on people's own construction of reality which the research has summarized. See Appendix VII for detailed information on prevailing mentioned capabilities by project.

Table 13. Enhanced Capabilities

Dimension	Explanation
Knowledge	Persons involved in diverse projects value the knowledge that they have acquired during the process, 'thanks to AA'. They even clarify that AA is different from other NGOs because of this 'intellectual formation'. People mainly value technical skills such as: accounting books; animal management; irrigation systems; computer training; first aid training; beekeeping.
Knowledge application	Knowledge is not just valued, but in fact applied by persons in their daily lives. This manifests through vegetable gardens at home; incorporation of local nutritious food in people's diet; animal breeding at home; aid in emergencies.
Social Cohesion and Relationships	People value the relationships that have been fostered through the projects. Particularly women involved in projects value the relationships and friendships that they have gained by participating in the different groups. These relationships have had enormous changes in their lives, 'you learn to not be ashamed of speaking in public or of going alone in the streets'.
Women's Participation in Decision Making	Women value the fact of taking their own decisions in the projects they are involved. 'We are not simple homemakers anymore'. They have a voice in the projects and sometimes their own income.
Job Opportunities	Persons involved in microenterprises projects value that these represent a job and an income opportunity to them.
Formal Education	People recognize that AA's presence has changed their perspectives towards education. This has become a priority for many persons in the localities, focusing not only in children, but in adults as well; e.g. Las Vegas EIC represents an opportunity to learn informatics for both, youth and adults.
Collectivity	Persons see as a significant change that the number of persons getting organized in groups for benefiting individually and collectively is increasing. (Especially in Las Vegas).
Motivation	Participation in projects motivates people to continue in different ways: gained credibility before the community; take advantage of the infrastructure; have a better income; increase the number of students in school; and also to seek other opportunities according to their aspirations.

6. Discussion

6.1 Participation in Decision-Making in AA's Intervention Phases

The last section presented the findings and the analysis of the conditions of participation in AA projects in Honduras. The researcher assessed and analyzed participation in decision-making in different phases of AA's intervention, as well as representation and inclusion. The following discussion draws from such analysis, knitting the evidence with the particular analytic frame (Fig. 6) of this thesis.

Through living in the four communities, getting to know their daily life dynamics and interviewing people and organized groups, jointly with the assessment of the different phases across projects supported by AA, the researcher has identified that there are significant differences regarding the local level organization capacity between the two studied areas. Such differences considerably influence the processes supported by AA. From the individual interviews and focus groups conducted in ADT5 it can be state that local persons are more convinced about the necessity of working collectively, so more inhabitants are seeking to get organized in groups in order to be able to get funding and to propel projects that improve their life and the conditions of the communities in general. In ADT4 local people are often more skeptical about collective actions, which paradoxically, appeared as one capability that people valued the most related to their participation in a project. Yet, the presence of conflict while working in group was also mentioned in ADT4 as one of the main reasons why projects were not succeeding.

Such differences in local organization capacity between ADT4 and ADT5 can be attributed to multiple factors. One could be the persistent presence of the Jesuit church in ADT5, which has fostered collective work for decades, and actually in Rincones has been the main driver encouraging people to get organized to achieve changes. Another is the variation in the educational levels among the two regions. The historical particularities of each of the two contexts influence, for example, Las Lajas, the biggest studied locality, does not have a sense of belonging, like in the other localities where main families comprise the locality's history; it is a more varied locality composed from persons that had come from different villages in the surroundings, so the dynamic is more impersonal compared to the other places and there is less interest on spending time in these type of community activities. The emphasis here is that even though the four communities share a collective identity and belong to the same country, there still are significant factors that make each locality unique. So, this is one aspect amongst others that explains divergences between participation approaches for involving people in the decision-making processes throughout the intervention's phases of AA projects (cf. Table 12).

Scrutinizing such phases across AA does not imply an advocacy for a rigid project framework because it is quite normative. Assessing the different phases allowed the researcher to gain an insight into the forms of participation in decision-making processes during the intervention from both sides, the local people and the NGO's staff.

AA's programme aims towards an interactive participation throughout the intervention and the organization explicitly states such in its Empowerment Policy: 'participation from poor and marginalized persons is a key element within empowerment processes'. (AA, 2010a:9). However, participation patterns found in decision-making through the identification, planning and implementation phases consisted more on information giving, consultative and functional forms. Despite the organization efforts towards conceiving participation as an end, it tends to remain a challenge. AA's approach tends to be more goal-oriented, so participation tends to be mostly a requirement to fulfill.

Institutional systems and procedures of the meso-level require reporting quantifiable achievements, e.g. Triennial Plans (AA, 2008b;c). Thus, coordinators and technicians use participation at the micro-level, mostly to achieve predetermined objectives, which are constrained by such institutional systems. AA's staff confronts a high demand of work due to the number of communities comprising each ADT and the amount of projects per line of intervention that each technician accompanies. This, together with measure of efficiency to meet budget targets and to maximize quantifiable achievements pushes them to overlook the role of people in the development initiatives, since the focus is mostly on the achievement of the predetermined objectives of the project rather than on improving the ability of the people to participate i.e. incorporating them in the decision-making. This is very common among intervention programmes and it is seen as a 'dual-logic' in projects (Mosse, 2004:25), where emphasis on participation at the local level for capacity-building clashes with the operational logic, i.e. the emphasis given to the proper use of funds and the planning and delivery of quality programmes. In this respect, despite AA's long-term intervention plan, at the micro-level projects and processes are still planned and operationalized within a short-term perspective that allows meeting the pre-established targets set at the meso-level.

6.2 Participation vs Non-Participation in AA's Intervention

The programme benefits all inhabitants in communities with some projects such as building schools, kindergartens, bridges; supporting health campaigns; donating for improving breakfasts in schools; and projects of the sort, but this does not imply that people are incorporated in the decision-making at any stage, or that they are even informed and aware of the processes. In this respect, there are remarkable differences between people that actively participate and those who do not in AA's projects.

First, the community and government contributions required for any project is an advantage in the model intervention. Much is argued among development cooperation that when asking for community's contribution when intervening is merely instrumental participation because this facilitates the organization's process as means to achieving local facilities and cost-effectiveness (cf. White, 1996). Nevertheless, people's attitudes and engagement towards projects appears to completely change when asking them for their contribution rather than just 'aiding them' with

what is required. Such contribution helps to transfer the ownership of the project to participants. It fosters both, dialogue and negotiation between local people and local authorities, and involves the latter actors more actively in their corresponding roles. The impacts of such a model were found in the interviews in terms of how people referred to the project: 'our project', 'we worked for it' rather than 'it was given to us'. The benefits also manifest through how people become responsible for the project in the sense that once it is finished they look after it because it cost them, generating also motivation acknowledging themselves capable of achieving things and satisfaction about it; issues that non-participants don't experience.

Second, participation in projects, regardless of what 'type' of participation it is considered, was found to trigger changes. People that had participated in AA's projects or processes were more self-confident to share their opinions than those who had not participated. By actively mobilizing, attending meetings, deciding and voting within the groups, they become aware of what they are capable of doing within their realities. Across focus groups, motivation and aspirations appeared all the time: 'want to have our own land for the project'; 'want to improve school conditions'; 'want to keep studying'; 'want to have more irrigation in our fields', and the list continues. The issue here is that through organizing together, expressing their opinions and concerns, planning what to do, and actually achieving it, people gain knowledge, create relations, have job opportunities (cf. Table 13). They realize that things can be different if they become active agents, acting and bringing about change, according to their own values and objectives in their particular realities (Sen, 1999). In contrast, non-participating people are excluded from information channels, their voices are not heard, they do not gain the knowledge that others do, and instead of motivation and aspiration, there is a resignation to their realities. When asking people why they were not organized or involved in projects most of them stated that they are poor and that there is hardly any alternative for them.

So, the perspectives between participants and non-participants are extreme and so are the expectations towards external aid, while participants are willing to actively get engaged so they can gain access to benefits and improve their situations; non-participants mainly expect to just be assisted because they deserve it due to their being poor. Even instrumental forms of participation were observed to enhance people's capabilities and change attitudes by triggering the exercise of social agency on different issues (cf. Freire, 1972; Cornwall, 2008). When this happens, it can be argued that there is an empowerment manifestation at the micro level, since people are committed to actually get organized and make changes happen within their lives and realities; they actually 'imagine their world different'; 'make purposeful and effective choices in the interest of pursuing a better life for themselves', which are the first steps for starting to 'participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives'³⁹ at other levels. In both ADTs these differences among participants and non-participants were found, confirming the positive impact that the intervention implies when working directly with the

³⁹ Cf. with definitions in section 4.1 Conceptualising Empowerment. (Eyben, et. al, 2008:6); (Smulovitz and Walton, 2002:3); and, (Narayan, 2005:5), respectively.

persons. Still, the way the organization creates the spaces for participation highly determines who is included or excluded, in short, who participates, who represents whom in different 'communities'.

6.3 Communities, Power and Participation

Empowerment is about power; and this issue must be considered by an organization when intervening in a particular context and inviting local people to participate. Thus bearing in mind that participation as praxis, 'constitutes a terrain of contestation, in which relations or power between different actors, each with their own projects, shape and reshape the boundaries of action' (Cornwall, 2008:276). When talking about their intervention work, AA's staff asserts that it is 'the community' who identifies and prioritizes projects; that it is 'the community' who mobilizes to get their corresponding share and to negotiate with authorities; and, that the *link contacts* are the communication channels between the organization and 'the community'. Hence, the concept of 'local community' prevails in both ADTs. There is a tendency of idealizing communities, confusing them between the social and geographical (cf. Mikkelsen, 2005). This approach to community has a strong weight on how communities are seen by AA: many times as static, harmonious and most of all as homogenous units. Indeed, communities are temporal beings and change over time (Lyons et al, 2001). As a result, within AA, community is assumed as 'an agent capable of planning and implementing collective initiatives' (Francis, 2001:79) and of reaching a consensus. This tacit homogeneity among intervened communities raises points regarding representation and inclusion within the intervention work.

Representation concerns prevail among participatory approaches, where there is a propensity of having a relatively small group of participants representing large numbers of people or a whole community (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). On one side, AA first seeks local persons among the communities that would like to become a *link contact*, most of the times these are teachers since it facilitates letter writing. The organizational aim apparently is to have these participants in the programme for 'catalysing change', i.e. the involvement of community members in influencing others in the environment for participating and initiating change (IFAD, 2001). AA considers *link contacts* as communities' representatives and communication channels through which information is supposed to flow. However, it was found that such persons are not often aware of projects or processes supported by AA in their localities unless they were actively involved in such activities. Thus, information flows are not efficient at this level and not across communities.

On the other side, the shallow representation is also reinforced by the fact that besides the *link contacts*, other referents for the organization are local authorities and existing organized groups within the communities, which are contacted when first intervening. Relying on *link contacts*, authorities and existing organized groups explains patterns found in communities where projects are concentrated among a small group of persons while the rest of the inhabitants remain excluded. This exclusion factor goes along with a study made for the organization in 2008, which showed that from the universe of families in all ADTs of intervention (4,472 families), just 16.84%

belong to an organization, and only 5.35% had participated in a training workshop from AA (AGROGENET, 2008:ii-iv). It is important to work with existing groups or ‘interest groups’, as AA calls them, so networks and their confidence can be built up, and access to benefits and capabilities will be enhanced. It is crucial to go beyond these groups to open opportunities to participate for the rest of the community’s population.

In order to foster more inclusive processes, it is crucial for the organization to analyze how power manifests across the communities that it intervenes in and the different actors that construct such contexts. Such analysis of the ‘ways in which power extends and transforms in different micro-or everyday contexts can further understandings of the more readily identifiable types of social control and domination’ (Kothari, 2004:141). In this way AA will be able to challenge the power imbalance among communities instead of preserving it. By including those persons whose opportunities to get informed and engaged in key decision-making processes are fewer due to be the more marginalized and thereby help empower them.

Among NGOs this tends to be overlooked for various reasons, one is that participants (beneficiaries) are considered since the outset as powerless and marginal, acknowledging that ‘sites of power and social control are to be found solely at the macro – and central levels’ (*ibid*:140). So, when establishing contact with persons in the localities to be intervened it is assumed to be working with the marginalized persons, neglecting the existing power relations in their respective realities. Participatory techniques usually do not address the context complexities in the sense that making a diagnostic and understanding local dynamics requires time and outcomes are harder to quantify, since people’s lives, realities and social interactions will hardly fit into diagrams, charts and methodological tools in a goal-oriented programme. By not acknowledging power imbalances and addressing them through the intervention work, there is a risk of concealing communities’ inequalities through participation. For a more transformative participation it is necessary to build up opportunities for local people in communities to engage with ‘those institutions into which the powerful extend invitations to participate, and those through which citizens make and shape their own conditions of engagement and find and use their own voice’ (Cornwall, 2004:85).

Besides fostering inclusive intervention processes, it is important for the organization to understand reasons of non-participation or ‘self-exclusion’ (cf. Cornwall, 2008:279) among communities. Many factors influence this; the ones found among the two ADTs were lack of education; lack of resources that constraint people from assisting to workshops and meetings; lack of interest; expectations of immediate and tangible outcomes, just to mention some. Another issue to take into account is the ‘participation fatigue’ (*ibid*). In contexts like Honduras with such a high intervention from development cooperation this is common. People in rural communities have become both incredulous and weary from being consulted about their situations and invited to participate in meetings that will allow them to get organized and as a ‘community’ seek alternatives.

It is important at the meso-level to be aware that AA's staff are themselves conduits of power; there is a need for transformations in participation to reach 'beyond the local, involving multi-scaled strategies that are operationalized at all levels' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:15) and that these involved a deeper understanding not just of local socio-political dynamics, but also of the dynamics at other levels and the linkages between them. This needs an analysis of NGOs and agencies and their roles.

6.4 Transforming Participation in Different Levels

'Transformative participation is only possible if institutions themselves change' (Cornwall, 2000:49). As empowerment, institutions are also processes rather than concrete things (cf. Eyben et al, 2008:20). In this respect, transforming attitudes, behaviors, perspectives and ways of participation from development agencies and people that construct them is important, since they are the ones who pave the way for triggering changes among dynamics between micro and meso-levels where the intervention is happening; linking and relating such changes with the macro context. Participation needs to be transformed at this level if people in the micro-level are to be empowered.

AA appears to address this point in its Institutional Strategy where it states that 'the organization is built by the persons that comprise it' and therefore AA will foster their professional development (AA, 2010b:20). The organization does support the professional training of the staff. The decentralized model of five ADTs working independently in the country under the same guidelines reflects an acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of the local context at the meso-level; however, this still has to happen among each ADT when working with the different communities that comprise it. At the meso-level there are several signs showing that the organization is aiming towards a more transformative participation: different participatory approaches that seek to be transparent about the processes of decision-making at that level and higher levels by efficient information flow and accountability; participatory approaches that push to analyze and reflect on their role as a developmental organization within Honduras' local and national context and the plan of intervention regarding the country's particular situation; awareness of their role as political body that can strengthen rather than replace the government's role and responsibilities.

In this way, AA is not just enhancing capabilities and social agency through participation of local persons in rural communities, but also through participation and engagement of the staff that forms the organization, who are also Honduran persons within different socioeconomic realities. As it has been argued, AA was found to have a different approach when working in ADT5 and it is also in this ADT where a higher local organization capacity was found. Currently, there is an ongoing process for legalizing this ADT's team as an independent NGO in the country. This implies that as an autonomous national organization, they can get funding from different sources, and impact wider political issues within the country. While the new NGO will still have AA's support, it will be a partner organization rather than a subordinate. Furthermore, if for any reason AA decides to stop its operation in Honduras, this new organization will remain, despite of the foreign

assistance withdrawal. It was found that AA is aiming for a multi-scale empowerment, not just through participation in grassroots projects in rural communities at the micro-level, but also through building up organizational capacity at the meso-level and fostering government's participation in the processes that AA accompanies. This multi-level aspect is essential for reaching a transformational participation, since 'change only breaks through if developments at one level gel with developments in other domains' (Rotmans et al, 2001:20). If international developmental agencies and NGOs such as AA, steer the development cooperation arena towards empowerment through a more transformational participation, then it could trigger a collective learning process and encouraging actors at different levels to think along and become social agents. This could help to change the foreign aid dependency at a macro-level in a long-term (Fig. 5). However, if instrumental participation patterns keep prevailing, then, changing the dependency dynamic, or the current lock-in situation, is unlikely to occur.

7. Conclusions

AA aims towards an interactive and transformative participation that allows changing from the beneficiary perspective to support citizens and foster social agency by approaching participation as an end in itself. Such an aim is clear in the organization's visions and strategy, but remains as a challenge in practice. It was found that consultation and functional participation forms (step 3 and 4 Fig.7) prevailed among AA's intervention phases. However, this is a problem faced by most international developmental NGOs and agencies, since realities and contexts are complex and pre-established goals are required to be achieved. AA's commitment to work within long-term time horizons is an advantage for both, going beyond instrumental types of participation in practice, and impacting different levels of the Honduran context where the organization intervenes.

Findings showed that even instrumental forms of participation enhance both participants' capabilities and social agency. Even when people were incorporated partially in the decision-making positive changes were found (cf. Table 13). Differences between participants and non-participants in terms of capabilities, aspiration and motivation were observed. In order to foster empowerment through participation in rural development projects funded by foreign aid, NGOs need to incorporate a more transformative participation. It was found that this kind of participation goes beyond including people in decision-making in different phases of the intervention. It implies explicitly stating what is meant and expected by participation; addressing power imbalances in communities; acknowledging heterogeneity among intervened communities. This will allow more inclusive processes to be fostered at the micro-level.

First, it is necessary to explicitly state what is meant by participation and how such understanding is going to be operationalized. By clarifying the NGO's expectations in terms of local people's participation in decision-making processes throughout different phases of the intervention, it would be easier to evaluate outcomes and be coherent on this aspect. Once those expectations are explicitly set, it will more feasible to determine how it will be put into practice, monitored and evaluated. An issue here is to enhance information channels mainly at the micro-level, so local

people will be aware of what is happening and will have the opportunity to decide whether to participate or not. Being informed is a substantial change in itself.

Second, it is important to understand the ways in which participation relates to existing power structures in local communities (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:5). This understanding will allow to foster more inclusive development processes and to challenge inequalities at this level. It was found that without such understanding communities tend to be considered as whole homogenous units, triggering low representation, since projects remain concentrated among a small group of local persons that sometimes are privileged ones within their particular realities. Hence, the importance of acknowledging each community's particular context. It is important to ensure opportunities for the most marginalized to get informed and then, to have the opportunity of choose whether to participate or not. In this way, participation's impacts on social agency and local people's capabilities will be wider within communities, which could potentially trigger substantial changes at this level and, inevitably, at other levels as well.

Third, transformations at the micro-level imply changes at the meso-level. Institutions are constructed by persons. Then, changes towards a more transformative participation are also to happen among the organization's staff. This involves enhancement of social agency and local people's capabilities also at these levels, which has a twofold impact: at the micro level in the way the intervention is operationalized and the relations that are established with local people; and, at the meso-level, since this will foster the inclusion of other stakeholders such as the government in such changes. Then, the locus of transformation goes beyond the individual and the local including multi-scaled strategies that encompass the institutional (meso) and structural (macro) levels (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:12).

Finally, it could be said that under those conditions of participation empowerment is fostered at different levels; and that individuals' capacity to make purposeful choices and influence their realities increases. This could contribute to achieving a more sustainable rural development and intervention that in a long-term overcomes the foreign dependency at the macro-level (Fig. 6), by envisioning new paths of action that challenge inequality at all levels, allowing for the transformation of the current links.

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9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix I. Respondents ADT4 Comayagua Norte

Line of intervention	Project	RESPONDENTS ADT4 COMAYAGUA NORTE										Total interviews ADT4
		Women		Men		Respondents		> 50 years		> 50 years		
Dynamization of the local economy	Organization	Health	Education	Food Security and Sovereignty	Risk Management	15 - 30 years	31 - 50 years	15 - 30 years	31 - 50 years	> 50 years	Link contacts	
CRAC Emmanuel	X	x				8	3	5	0	0	0	0
Taylor's workshop*	X	x				3	0	2	1	0	0	0
Bakery	X	x				1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Coffee roaster*	X	x				5	0	3	2	0	0	0
Carpentry workshop	X	x				0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Health Committee		x				0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Education		x	x			3	0	3	0	4	0	3
CORFU*		x	x			4	4	0	0	5	5	0
COL*		x	x			1	1	0	0	3	1	2
EIC*		x				10	10	0	0	4	4	0
Food Security Projects			x	x		0	0	0	0	3	0	2
Women Network*		x	x			8	2	4	2	0	0	0
CRAC San Antonio BP*		x	x	x		4	1	2	1	1	1	0
Integral Farm		x	x	x		0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Water Council		x				0	0	0	0	2	0	0
CODEM		x				x	1	1	0	0	0	1
CODEL		x				x	0	0	0	3	0	2
Users						8	2	5	1	2	1	0
Total persons per group						56	24	25	7	30	13	8
Total interviews ADT4												86

* These interviews were conducted through focus groups.

Note: Some persons are involved in more than one project, so the total number of interviews to different persons is smaller.

9.2 Appendix II. Respondents ADT5 Yoro

		RESPONDENTS ADT5 YORO - Las Vegas									
		Respondents									
Line of intervention	Project	Women		Men		> 50 years		31 - 50 years		< 50 years	
EIC*		x		12	12	0	0	9	9	0	0
Coffee Roaster 3 Marias*		x		5	0	3	2	0	0	0	0
CRAC Las Vegas		x		1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0
Butchery		x		1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Silk-screen 'La Amistad'*		x		3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Colectivo 25 de Julio		x	x	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	1
Health Committee		x		1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Education		x		1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Communal Council		x		0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Commission EIC		x		1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
CIAI Las Vegas*		x	x	3	0	2	1	6	0	4	2
Codel		x		x	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
Users		x		4	0	4	0	2	0	2	0
Total persons per group		33	13	17	3	26	9	15	2	3	59
Total Interviews ADT4											59

* These interviews were conducted through focus groups.

Note: Some persons are involved in more than one project, so the total number of interviews to different persons is smaller.

9.3 Appendix III. Informants

National Office - Tegucigalpa, Honduras January 22th – February 1st and March 1st – 7th, 2010
Ernesto Magaña Alcocer Action Aid Honduras National Director
Mario R. Padilla Raudales Action Aid Cooperation Director
Rosman Francisco Castro Food Sovereignty and Security Director
Dilcia Ivette Morazán Solidarity and Communication Director
Marizol Núñez Núñez Micro-credit and Financing
ADT4 – Comayagua Norte February 1st – 14th, 2010
Lombardo Ardón ADT4 Coordinator
Neri Tejeda Management and Education ADT4
Sonia Casco Health ADT4
Héctor Arredondo Risk Management ADT4
Mario Soto Organization ADT4
Jorge A. Machado Food Sovereignty and Security ADT4
ADT5 - Yoro February 15th – 28th, 2010
Jaime Hernández ADT5 Coordinator
Edwin Torres Food Sovereignty and Security ADT5
Jorge Barahona Organization ADT5
Nelson Murillo Health ADT5
Yamileth Zepeda Risk Management ADT5
Nelly Esperanza Lara Communication ADT5
Miguel Flores Education and Management ADT5

9.4 Appendix IV. Respondents Interview Guide

1. Group/project(s) in which participates.
2. What does such group/project consist of? (Description of activities, objectives, history)
3. How long have you been participating?
4. How are the projects decided/approved/implemented/monitored? Who is/are responsible of following the process?
5. How do you participate in the project(s)?
6. What have the main impacts/changes been in your life link with your participation in the project?
7. Looking back over the last years (or since you are involved in the project), which one is the most significant change?
8. What can you do now, that could not do before?
9. Are there any learnings? How do you apply them? What do these learnings imply in your lives?
10. What is Action Aid?
11. What are the major benefits of Action Aid's work/projects? For you? For the group? For the community? What do you value?
12. What would you change?
13. What would happen without the organization intervention? With them? With the community?
14. If the funding for the project came to an end, would you be able to continue? How?
15. What are your aspirations?
16. Why does Honduras need so much assistance from foreign countries?

9.5 Appendix V. Informants Interview Guide

1. What is Action Aid?
2. How is the intervention designed?
3. How do you determine the areas and municipalities for intervening?
4. How have you started the intervention in each of the areas?
5. How do you detect needs / select projects?
6. How do you invite local people to participate?
7. How are projects planned, implemented and monitored?
8. What is the level of community involvement in project planning?
9. What do you think is the most important change in individuals/communities/society related to the organization's intervention?
10. How do you try to ensure the sustainability of projects once they are no longer involved? (In case you have stopped already working with some projects)
11. How do local people participate in the organization's intervention?
12. What do you understand by capabilities and empowerment?
13. What is AA's approach to achieve these in communities?
14. What are the constraints for achieving this?
15. What are the success factors for achieving it?
16. How long have you been working with AA?
17. Why does Honduras need so much assistance from foreign countries?
18. Can you see a time in the future when Honduras does not depend on foreign assistance?

9.6 Appendix VI. Projects' Description

9.6.1 CRAC Emanuel (Rural Cooperative for Microcredit and Savings)

This project emerged from an existing Women Network Group in Las Lajas which initially was supported by Global Village in 2006. At the beginning there were sixty-three women. Currently there are only twenty-five participants. They got funding through the PRS in Honduras, since they fulfilled most of the criterion: single women and single mothers. They got seed capital from both, PRS and AAI. They were required to make a contribution. Since the onset each woman saves 100 Lempiras monthly (approximately US\$5). Each participant has her 'share', which corresponds to her monthly saving and the interests gained over time.

This rural cooperative helps other local people by lending them relatively small quantities of money with both, lower interests and less requirements than banks. The benefits of being a member are that the person saves money and she has a lower interest rate when asking for credit. The CRAC's capital has been growing at a small rate. If someone wants to join s/he has to pay the same amount of a share that each of the members have. AA has been working with these women for three years already. It has helped them by providing diverse training workshops; opportunities to manage other AA's projects seed capital; and by legalizing the project.

9.6.2 Computer and Citizenship School (EIC)

This project consists of supporting twenty-five youths between fifteen and twenty-five years old with an intensive course on computers and citizenship for eight months. Youths that for several reasons had stopped studying are eligible to apply and they are selected by AA's staff according to established socio-economic criterion. Every day they have classes for four hours; half time students take the computer course, and the other half the citizenship and values course. This opportunity opens perspectives for the youth. For many of them it is the first time they have access to a computer (many of the villages they come from are still without electricity). Besides the citizenship course makes them aware about values, democracy and participation. The course implies a two-week working experience, where they have to develop somehow what they had learned during classes. In both ADT the municipality has supported the project by providing the classroom. In ADT4 the project completely depends on AA in terms of organization, funding and management. In ADT5 a committee with local people and one person from AA's staff was formed. This committee is in charge of selecting students and it is currently planning how the project will continue without AA's support e.g. professor's salary, students' material and computers maintenance. In this ADT they also have organized classes on Saturdays where local people can pay a feasible fee and take computer classes for three months. Mainly local adults assist to this course.

9.6.3 Tailor's workshop, Carpentry and Bakery

Although these are three different projects, they were propelled by AA through the same group and they are constructed in the same land. They have similar features such as big investment in infrastructure and machinery provided by AA; weak project plan; and, low monitoring and evaluation (the three projects have difficulties for continuing without AA's presence and the member of initial members have considerably decreased). Below there is a brief explanation of each project.

Tailor's workshop

The tailor's workshop shop was also triggered through the already existing Women Network group in Las Lajas. Twenty-three local women organized activities that allowed them to gather money for their corresponding economic contribution as 'community'. At the moment of receiving AA's funding for the infrastructure and the machinery there were only twelve women left. They started operations by the end of 2007. On March 2009 they stopped working due to difficulties in organization, e.g. working schedules, production, lack of market, management. On February 2010, when the focus group was conducted there were just five active members. Shortcomings in this project were a weak project planning; a big investment not corresponding with the particular context; and a lack of proper technical trainings. The project has not been legalized yet. Regardless of this, women are motivated and aspire to keep working and to gain market in the surroundings.

Bakery

As CRAC Emmanuel and the Tailor's workshop, this project came about from the existing Women Network group. Initially there were twenty women, who got organized and gathered enough money for their corresponding share. There was a weak project planning, lacking a clear strategy and appropriate training workshops. AA's investment in machinery and infrastructure was significant. However, similar to the Tailor's workshop, this project closed after one year of operation. The main reason for this was that the participants did not manage the seed capital adequately; therefore they needed more funding to continue the project. Currently there are just four women trying to move on with the project, but they are dependent on AA. Participants that had given up the project still need to get back their corresponding share, so the actual members have a significant debt. Whereas if a new local person wants to join the project, s/he would need to give an equivalent of what each participant had contributed.

Carpentry

The carpentry started with a group of ten carpenters that got the idea from AA to group and get organized. They started to collect money for their corresponding contribution. AA provided them with high quality machinery, but there was not a project plan. The project collapsed and the place remained closed for more than eight months. Recently one of the participants has started to work

again. There are more local persons collaborating with him, but the project is dependent on AA. Local people linked with this project are not informed about future plans. AA has not supported them with a proper training in management and with an appropriate project planning that allows participants to continue with the project by themselves.

9.6.4 Municipal Committee for Risk Management (CODEM) and Local Committee for Risk Management (CODEL)

CODEMs and CODELs have been AA initiatives to foster a risk management culture. There is a central committee in each municipality' center, and the idea is that every community has their own local committee. Participants in such committees are supported with trainings according to the vulnerabilities existing in each context. In case of disaster, they are expected to inform the municipal committee, and this is supposed to inform both, authorities and AA. The project is clear and well planned and it is of great importance due to Honduras' vulnerable context. However, the organization has found difficulties to engage people, because such projects do not imply tangible outcomes and it is more about altruism work. So, the role has not been transferred. In fact, in the four communities CODEMs and CODELs' participants did not show a sense of ownership when talking about the project. The committees are highly dependent on AA's intervention.

9.6.5 Coffee Roaster Las Lajas

This group is formed by women from the CRAC Emmanuel, the Bakery and the Tailor's workshop, because it was propelled through the existing Women's Network group as well. Another foundation provided the group with funding for the machinery. AA supported the project with seed capital. However, there is not a project plan that allows women of this group to organize themselves. Participants have conflicts when dividing the work. They were not able to properly manage the seed capital; therefore currently they have a big debt and the last year and a half have been working hard, using the profits for paying off such debt.

9.6.6 CRAC San Antonio Buen Pastor (Rural Cooperative for Microcredit and Savings)

This project started operations in 2006. Participants saved 20 Lempiras in each meeting they had for almost two years (since 2004). There are eighteen members – ten women and eight men. The project was propelled by AA. Participants were not sure about it in the beginning, so AA 'convinced them'. The project not only benefits members who save money and can access to credit with a low interest rate, but also the rest of the inhabitants of 'La Dalia', where the office is. They also have participants saving money from San Antonio Buen Pastor, another community just a few kilometers from La Dalia. Before the CRAC started operating local people used to go to the municipality center, Las Lajas, to borrow money at higher interest rates. A shortcoming with the project has been the planning; participants were not prepared when they started, so they have been asking support with training workshops from AA and Funder. The directives are supposed to rotate; however, they have remained the same since the beginning. The rest of the inhabitants of La Dalia where not aware of the project and many non-participants expressed their wish to be part

of a CRAC. So, other local people have started saving money by themselves, but without any external support.

9.6.7 Integral Farms

The project has been propelled by AA. The idea is to work on activities that in a short-term foster food sovereignty and security. AA provides training workshops providing local people with tools that complement local knowledge, so they can choose from a wide range of activities depending on local people's particular needs. Integral farms consist of activities such as vegetable gardens, fruit trees, raising livestock animals, crops diversity, among others.

9.6.8 Coffee Roaster '3 Marías'

This project started with ten women who got funding from the PRS in 1999. They were initially linked to the coffee farmers' cooperative 25 de Julio. However, in 2002 they became an independent group from the cooperative. They called themselves 'Three Marías'. AA has supported them providing technical training workshops such as coffee roaster, quality, grinding, packaging. They still have not been legalized. On 2009 AA started supporting them with a project planning, which is one of the project's weaknesses. Currently, they are seeking for funding for both, buying a piece of land and constructing a place for the microenterprise.

9.6.9 CRAC Las Vegas

This project was propelled in 2002 by a local man that had participated before in a CRAC in other community. This CRAC started without seed capital with just ten members. Currently, there are eighteen members who save 100 Lempiras monthly. AA has supported them mainly with training workshops in accountancy. This CRAC has two-hundred and forty persons saving money as clients, so has had a positive impact in the community. The difference between members and clients is that members have a larger share, they save money systematically, and, when asking for credit they have lower interest. Clients can save the quantity of money that they wish and can afford, and they are still able to access to credit, with a much lower interest rate and requirements than banks ask for.

9.6.10 Butchery

The butchery in Las Vegas originated from the CRAC in the same community. There was not butchery because they used to lack electricity. When this changed, together with AA they started to plan the project. The members gave their corresponding community share, the government lend them a piece of land (where the microenterprise is presently), and AA provided funding for building the space and organized training workshops for the members. There was not a structured project plan for organizing the business. This caused difficulties since all participants were taking turns for working. Currently they are going through a crisis, since they have not had enough sells and profits. At the moment of the interviews, participants were still deciding the next steps regarding the project continuity.

9.6.11 Silk-Screen La Amistad

This project started in 2003. Currently there are nine participants, seven women and two men. In 2008 AA supported the microenterprise legalization. The organization has also supported them with funding for machinery and with training workshops e.g. accountancy, depreciation on machinery, and seed capital. They already managed to buy a piece of land. Now they are seeking ways to get funding for constructing a building for the microenterprise.

9.6.12 Research Centre for Local Agriculture (CIAL)

In Las Vegas and in Rincones there were CIAL groups. These started in 1998 propelled by other NGO. AA started accompanied them in 2004 by providing them support in goods such as silos, seeds, irrigation systems and some technical training workshops as well. Their aim is to improve the local agricultural crops such as maize and beans and to create seebanks from local people's own harvests in a way of fostering food security and sovereignty.

9.6.13 CRAC Rincones

The CRAC in Rincones emerged more than for saving money and having access to credit, as an alternative for securing food in the community. AA supported participants by providing them with silos, seed capital and a building for the CRAC. Then, inhabitants of the community were able to sell their harvests to the CRAC, who started buying them with the initial seed capital. By selling their harvests to the CRAC, people are able to have money for their daily expenses at the time. Then, when the dry season arrives, local people are not going to municipality centers anymore as they used to. This would imply long walks, for buying small and expensive quantities of beans or maize due to the scarcity season. Now, they can go to the CRAC that sells them their same crops pretty much at the same price they sold them. Besides this, just as other CRACs, local people can become members and start saving money and also have access to credits with a small rate when needed. The project has not been legalized yet. However, it is self-sufficient and benefits the whole community and other communities in the surroundings.

9.6.14 Colectivo 25 de Julio

This Collective was formed in 1992. It is formed by thirty-two men from five different communities in Victoria municipality. Most of them are coffee farmers. They realized that by getting organized they would be able to have more benefits from their work. The organization has grown and gets funding from different NGOs. It has become AA's strategic partner in ADT5. The Collective contacts families growing coffee and they propelled projects which then are funded by AA. After 2006 they started to work with a more integral model, comprising not only agriculture (coffee, maize, beans and sugar beet) but, bee-keeping and livestock as well. AA has helped to built up the projects by supporting them with seed capital and technical training workshops. This key actor will be part of the new NGO formed by AA's ADT5.

9.7 Appendix VII. Mentioned Capabilities by Project