CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Preamble

Environmental preservation, sustainability, global interdependence, structural adjustment, trade reform and disarmament became the catchcries of the latter half of the 1980s. As Cold War tensions disintegrated and popular pressure led to the dismantling of the power bloc in Eastern Europe, as economic recession gripped the Western world, and as mounting evidence of global warming and ozone depletion focused world-wide attention on the importance of preserving the environment, the message of vocal minority groups has become increasingly 'respectable', with their jargon adopted by the media and politicians. In this climate, non-government development aid organisations (hereafter NGOs) have gained new prominence in the Western world, linking their message to that of the environmental movement and stressing the relationship between poverty and continued environmental degradation (Arnold, 1989:22; Conroy, 1989:2-4). This prominence is not surprising because research has shown that there has been a proliferation of voluntary welfare organisations in response to general economic recession and retreat by Western governments from the principles of the Welfare State (Milligan et al., 1984:6-7; cf. Hardwick and Graycar, 1982:3) and in response to 'the de-personalised, bureaucratic nature of complex institutions, the pervasiveness of technology and increased professionalism' (Hardwick and Graycar, 1982:7). At the same time, developing countries have witnessed the proliferation of voluntary organisations 'taking an increasingly active role at the national and regional, as well as the international, level' (Minear, 1987a:26).

Noting these trends, Porter pointed to the importance of people's

organisations throughout the world in the struggle for development and access to basic necessities and dignity for all people:

> Ironically, just as we are less assured than ever about our collective capacity to manipulate our global futures, all nations face demands for democracy and increased capacity of people to influence the political and economic circumstances of their lives. The popularity of NGOs is part of a broader restoration of civil society worldwide ... (Porter, 1991:55).

Similarly, Cernea suggested that the world has witnessed 'the explosive emergence of non-government organizations as a major collective actor in development activities and on the public agenda in general' (1989:1. See also Therien, 1991:266-270 and Thomas, 1992:117).

Despite the rapid expansion of the size and activities of the voluntary sector throughout the world, the work of these organisations has been subjected to relatively little scrutiny (see p. 55ff.). In particular, the voluntary organisations delivering aid to the developing world have been largely neglected by those involved in development studies and there is a relative paucity in both quantity and quality of published information about their activities (see pp. 57-62). This thesis seeks to redress, in part, this neglect by examining one section of the Australian voluntary sector: those organisations working primarily in the field of international development.

The Scope of the Thesis

Based in development theory, this thesis is a broad study of Australian non-government development aid organisations. Its primary purpose is to discover those factors which are endogenous to the organisations or which operate in the Australian and international environments within which they function, which influence the final form of the assistance that they deliver overseas. The detailed description of a selection of Australian NGOs allows analysis of:

the development philosophy of the NGOs; the historical factors affecting organisational growth and change; the modus operandi of the organisations, including decision-making structures and processes such as the selection, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation of aid projects; fund-raising techniques used by the organisations; the nature of linkages with the recipients of aid; and the relationships of the NGOs with the donor public and with other voluntary and government authorities with which they interact in the course of their activities. The extent to which these factors enhance or hinder the fulfilment of the stated objectives of each organisation is examined.

A study of the Australian operations of NGOs could be approached from the basis of a number of different intellectual traditions. An ethnographic study of individual organisations, followed by the application of organisational theory, could be conducted within the sociological disciplinary framework. This would be a valuable study in itself. So, too, an academic analysis of the operational styles and administrative practices of Australian NGOs from a management perspective would be of intellectual interest, as well as being beneficial to the NGOs themselves. However, this thesis does not draw on these traditions.[1] Research based in these intellectual traditions would have produced an entirely different study. An organisational analysis or a study of management practices would focus on and demand detailed discussion of personnel and resource management issues. It would require an in-depth ethnographic study of one or two organisations. Such a study would not have allowed the generation of comparative case studies, given the available time and resources, and would thus not have allowed the broad research questions outlined above to be addressed. A comparative case study approach is therefore used in this research in order to enable an

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[1] While the value of applying organisational theory to understanding the functions of NGOs is acknowledged, this is not the intention of this study. Because of the frequently interdisciplinary nature of development studies (see Connell, 1988:5), and the focus of this study, the work may at times seem to possess an 'organisational flavour'. However, it should be noted that when terms like 'organisation' and 'structure' are used throughout this work, an everyday usage is intended, as opposed to the theory laden language commonly adopted by organisation and management theorists.

investigation of changes over time in the activities of Australian NGOs and an examination of the factors precipitating such changes (methodological issues involved are addressed more fully in Chapter Three). It is for others to attempt organisation theory-based or management-oriented studies.[1]

Presentation of detailed information about five selected Australian NGOs and about the various influences over time on their operations also allows examination of the disparities and similarities in their ideals and in the means they use to translate them into practice. Each organisation is examined in terms of its own stated objectives, as well as in the light of features commonly cited by proponents of NGOs and in published sources as the beneficial characteristics of these organisations (see pp. 38-41). Similarly, the operations of these Australian NGOs are compared with the disadvantages commonly associated with non-government development aid organisations.

It is beyond the scope of this work to attempt to study the overseas operations of these Australian NGOs or the developmental impact of their work. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of the Australian-based operations of five NGOs provides the basis for generalisations to be drawn about the factors which influence and shape their in-field development activities. The study thus contributes to knowledge in the field of development geography.

The Organisation of the Text

To provide a context for the research to follow, the thesis discusses, at the outset, the changing theoretical frameworks underpinning development studies, particularly those relevant to

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[1] Some texts on the management of development projects have become available in recent years. See for example, Hage and Finsterbusch (1987), White (1987) and Esman (1991).

development geography. The ensuing study of Australian non-government development aid organisations is also located within a context consisting of an outline of debates about appropriate styles of practice, a discussion of literature about non-government development assistance organisations, and a description of international trends in voluntary aid activities. The remainder of this chapter therefore outlines major changes in development theory. A setting is thus provided for the subsequent description of the growth in importance of voluntary aid endeavours and for explanations for the increased significance of such work. These are presented in Chapter Two. As a basis for the analysis in following chapters, Chapter Two also emphasises the advantages and disadvantages of delivering assistance through non-government organisations. The extent to which existing research has contributed to enhancement of understanding about the factors shaping the behaviour of voluntary organisations is also discussed.

The third chapter of this study details the primarily qualitative research methodologies used to obtain the substance of the case studies described and discussed in the thesis. Difficulties encountered in the research project are outlined, as are the reasons and factors which determined the selection of case studies. So too, assumptions underlying analytical comments are outlined.

Each Australian NGO has a unique history, organisational structure and set of internal and external forces shaping its operations. Yet, the development and activities of each organisation can only be fully understood in the context of the wider community of NGOs. Accordingly, Chapter Four outlines the history and development of the Australian NGO community. This is done to set in context the subsequent detailed study of individual organisations. Thereafter, chapters describe in detail the operations of five Australian NGOs, analysing the major influences on their behaviour.

Chapter Five discusses the formation and growth of an NGO called APACE (Appropriate Technology and Community Environment), a small, secular, single-purpose organisation, totally dependent on the

energies of committed volunteers for its survival. In contrast, Chapter Six outlines the operations of a large, long-established, non-sectarian organisation, with a high public profile: Community Aid Abroad. Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine outline and compare the activities of three church-based organisations, in order: the Australian Board of Missions, Australian Catholic Relief and the Adventist Development Relief Agency. These agencies have vastly different organisational structures and aid programs, despite a common Christian philosophical basis providing the raison d'etre for their operations.

The final chapters, drawing on the preceding case studies, summarise the influences on Australian NGO behaviour, analysing the potential of such influences to hinder or assist the organisations in their attempts to translate philosophy into practice. Thus, the study is intended to contribute to the growing body of research about voluntary aid organisations, by providing a detailed study of the internal dynamics of Australian NGOs and the influences on their programs of the external environment within which they function. In addition, this research should raise the self-awareness of the voluntary aid community, thereby encouraging ongoing processes of reflection and evaluation, leading to the improved efficiency and efficacy of their programs.

Changing Paradigms in Development Geography

Before embarking on a discussion of the growing significance of NGOs as actors in the development arena and presenting research about the activities of Australian NGOs, it is useful to locate their activities within the broader spectrum of development theory and practice. Indeed, it is partly due to the recent impasse (so-called by Booth, 1985; Sklair, 1988; Long, 1992:8; Slater, 1992:283 and Corbridge, 1993) in the debate about the appropriate theoretical basis for development practice, that the NGOs have reached new levels of respectability in the world of development practitioners (see

pp. 25-30). Additionally, as one development theorist recently observed:

> ... theoretical and pragmatic issues and activities are so closely interwoven that one cannot have one without the other. Obviously policy models and measures are themselves underpinned, whether explicitly or implicitly, by certain theoretical interpretations and methodological strategies, just as theorization and research are laden with evaluative judgements and decisions of a practical nature (Long, 1992a:3).

Thus, theoretical issues must be explored for, by themselves, 'facts ... are incapable of telling us anything. ... All facts are theory laden' (Taylor, 1992:11). Accordingly, the following pages outline the changes in theoretical understandings of development problems which have helped to shape research and practice in development, particularly within the academic realm of development geography.

In the arena of development studies, a multiplicity of paradigms has emerged, with none having been accepted as a central theory. Thus, as the development sociologist Norman Long observed:

> Few scholars would challenge ... the observation that the general course of debates and interpretations on the development process since the Second World War have been from perspectives based upon the concept of modernization (in the mid-1950s), to dependence (in the mid-1960s), to political economy (in the mid-1970s), to some kind of ill-defined 'post-modernism' of the mid-1980s. The latest post-modernist phase depicted in many quarters - even among certain diehard structural Marxists - is entailing the deconstruction of previous orthodoxies and perhaps even theoretical agnosticism, which some scholars regard as verging on empiricism (Long, 1992b:17).

Others have ably detailed the history of the changing paradigms dominating development thought, together with their chief exponents, their theoretical basis and practical application, their popularity amongst scholars and practitioners, and the historical and intellectual changes leading to their deconstruction and to the ascendancy of new theories (see, for example, Brookfield, 1975; Goodenough, 1977; Preston, 1982; Hettne, 1982; Riddell, 1987; Corbridge, 1988a; Taylor, 1989; So, 1990 and Long & Long, 1992). What follows can therefore only be regarded as a precis of the major

strands of development thought. By virtue of its brevity, it cannot hope to display all the nuances of each paradigm or detail the historical factors giving rise to each. Rather, it seeks to present an overview of major theoretical changes, thus locating in its wider theoretical context the ensuing examination of the activities of Australian non-government organisations delivering development assistance. Before proceeding further, it must also be stressed that the chronological approach used in outlining paradigms does not imply that one theoretical approach ceased to exist with the advent of new ideas. As Hettne observed:

> In the social sciences 'paradigms' ... tend to accumulate, rather than replace each other, one reason being that they may fulfil ideological purposes, even after their explanatory power (if ever there was one) has been lost. Thus, progress in the social sciences is to a very large extent a matter of subjective views and perspectives ... (Hettne, 1982:10).

The ideological value of each theory, the inadequacies of new theories, a focus by some on development practice rather than on theoretical issues, as well as an inertia factor, mean that historic paradigms linger on. Currently, development practitioners and theorists use the explanatory tools of many of the theories outlined hereafter. Some identify with one development ideology more than another. Others adopt the jargon and assumptions of several theoretical approaches.

The Early Geography of Development

Before the Second World War, the study of developing nations was dominated by the welfare-paternalist attitudes of colonial powers towards the peoples of developing nations (Lubett, 1987:1-2). Goodenough characterised early study of Third World peoples by geographers during the Nineteenth Century as 'racist stereotyping of non-whites' which reflected a colonialist mentality. These studies provided simplistic "explanations" for the lack of economic and social development that was perceived ... there was an underlying assumption

that poverty was caused by the natural environment and climate' (Goodenough, 1977:20-21). Western life-style and culture were assumed to be superior. Much geographic research focusing on underdeveloped nations was idiographic in approach, concerned with unique cases, or with the collection of 'exotic facts about faraway lands and native peoples' (Taylor, 1992:11). Analysis was from the viewpoint of each case or from that of the researcher. There was no emphasis on the relationships between nations. Until the 1940s, and into the 1950s, LDCs were treated as

> ... specific objects of study. No attempts were made to study them systematically, look for underlying principles or explain their common poverty. In particular, the contributions made by geographers studying Africa and the West Indies continued to lack ... a strong theoretical position. Geographers working on the LDCs in the pre- and post-war periods still tended to be descriptive or at best only employed simplistic models and theories to explain the lack of development in these countries as a whole (Goodenough, 1977:28).

Such approaches to the study of developing nations reflected the paternalism of relationships between colonial powers and the Third World. So too 'early efforts to improve and help local populations, as distinct from exploiting them, could be described as welfare-paternalistic' (Lubett, 1987:1). The focus of such efforts was on saving lives and relieving suffering and hardship. It depended on the charity of the wealthy and the activity of the church. Lubett, for example, described the expression of charity in institutional, curative health services and Western-style education as being designed to prepare indigenous peoples for the evangelistic activities of the church (Lubett, 1987:1).

In short, theory was slow to develop. Indeed, as reviews by Brookfield (1975:2-23), Preston (1982:18-25) and Hettne (1982: 11-15) have shown, the application of theory to the developing world is relatively recent. Most development theory is in fact the product of the post-1945 period (Brookfield, 1975:2. See also Trainer, 1989:481).

The Genesis of Development Theories.

Although the ideas associated with the concept of development have a long history, geographers only began to take interest in processes of development in the post-war period (Goodenough, 1977:28). Thus, the following description of major changes in development theory focuses on the post World War II period; this is also the period during which most voluntary aid organisations aiming to assist peoples in poor nations had their origins (see pp. 86ff.).

During the 1930s, Keynesian theories, with their emphasis on planned government intervention in the economy, were the dominant ideology in the industrialized capitalist world (Toye, 1987:22). Keynesian theories suggested that demand would be stimulated and business confidence increased if state spending created employment, thus increasing incomes (Thomas and Potter, 1992:139). Although not formulated in relation to developing nations, growth theories, combining both Keynesian and Neo-classical models of growth, heavily influenced post-war development thinking (Corbridge, 1988a:33-34). Brookfield argued that the distinction between these models is of 'greater importance to economists than to users of their work'. He went on to point out that 'the basic assumptions contained in the growth models and in their evolution became also the assumptions of economic policy' (1975:30). Economic explanations for the lack of development in the poor world thus held sway after the Second World War. Many of the models used to analyse processes of development in the 1950s were derived from the first economic growth model of Harrod and Domar 'which spelt out that lack of capital was the obstacle to development and that its more abundant supply was the key to progress' (Goodenough, 1977:32). Lubett, in tracing changes in development theory, summarised this early period as follows:

> The post war years were heavily influenced by Keynesian economic principles, which called for increased government intervention in the management of the economy. The success of Keynesian policies in the developed North, and the rush to quantify every economic variable and incorporate them all in a comprehensive "plan", led to the creation of economic plans in almost every newly independent country

> of the Third World. Wealth creation was the objective of these plans; high technology, large scale and centralised production were their strategic choices; and the Gross Domestic Product per head was their universal indicator (Lubett, 1987:2).

Preston dated the emergence of this doctrine as a dominant theory during the period from 1951 to 1958 (1982:54). However, growth theories had limited relevance to developing countries and were criticised for assuming a base of an already dynamic and wealthy economy (Brookfield, 1975:32) and for failing to explain the relationship which was assumed to exist between capital and economic growth (Goodenough, 1977:32). Despite such limitations, growth theory became entrenched during the 1950s and 1960s for, as Brookfield contends:

> Movements tend to feed on themselves. The use of growth theory generated measurements of national economic performance, improved data fed the further elaboration of theory. ... [growth models] passed quite ineradicably into general use for the purposes of international and throughtime comparison, and with them a basic concept of material productivity as an indicator of economic welfare (1975:36-7).

In the 1950s, economists turned their attention to the limitations of the application of growth theories to developing countries and to reasons for slow growth. This produced the argument that it was necessary to make a 'big push' in order to overcome the vicious circle of low production, small market, small savings, little capital and low production. Such a push would increase the pace of industrialisation (Brookfield, 1975:32). Such ideas reached what has been called their 'apogee' (Preston, 1982:96; Lubett, 1987:4) in the idea of stages of economic growth, through the theory of an economic historian, Rostow, who 'set himself up as a latter-day anti-Marx' (Brookfield, 1975:37). In 1960, Rostow argued that there were many under-resourced economies which needed to 'take-off' into sustained growth (see Rostow, 1960). With an injection of capital into unbalanced economies at a critical point, a society could be converted into one which benefited from automatic 'sustained' growth. Because Rostow's work was widely read and accepted, Brookfield described the 1960s as 'the Rostow period in the history of development studies' (1975:38), arguing that 'through its influence

on a whole new generation of students of change, this publication is a major event in the prolonged obfuscation of the real issues contained in development' (1975:37). The concepts of 'take-off' and 'sustained growth' passed firmly into the literature 'outliving the historical criticism which disproved their identification in country after country' (Brookfield, 1975:38).

Attitudes towards such theories were ably documented by Hettne (1982). After a comprehensive discussion of the development of growth theories, Hettne suggested that early development theory

> ... had an optimistic tone which is hard to explain today. It was a manifestation of the dynamic growth experienced by the industrialized countries themselves, supported by a philosophic tradition which looked upon growth as more or less inevitable. The simple formula was: just find out the incremental capital output ratio and the desired rate of growth. Then you can (after due consideration to the rate of population growth) arrive at the appropriate level of investment. Growth was thus seen mainly as a function of investment and very few doubted that a process of economic growth through a series of "stages" ultimately would benefit the whole nation. The 1960s were proudly given the name of the First Development Decade in expectation of what was to come. Those were truly innocent years (Hettne, 1982:27).

Modernisation Theories

The 'Rostow' period, with its roots in economic growth theories, marked the beginning of the ascendancy of what has become known as the 'modernisation' paradigm. Lubett summarised the central assumptions of the 'modernisation' school of thought as follows:

> i) The causes of poverty and underdevelopment lay within developing nations - in behaviour such as apathy, indolence, resistance to change; in social customs tending towards equality, such as sanctions on personal wealth accumulation, or expenditure on ceremonies and feasts for prestige purposes; or in low technical productivity.
> ii) For a nation to develop and to eliminate poverty, "modern" technology, education and values had to be introduced from outside.
> iii) The objective of modernisation was economic growth,

> measured as growth of GDP per capita. The easiest way to raise this was to invest in large, centralised projects, and hope that some of the benefits would trickle down to more disadvantaged sectors (Lubett, 1987:3).

However, modernisation theories of development were not only based in economic theories, but were more interdisciplinary in scope. They adopted '... a particular view of change which is essentially dualist: tradition and modernity are seen as opposed forces, the latter growing at the expense of the former' (Brookfield, 1975:77). Preston, in a full account of the crystallization of modernisation strategies (1982:72-99), noted that 'we see the resources of a wider set of disciplines being plundered for elements which might flesh out a theory of modernisation' (1982:83. See also Thomas and Potter, 1992:134). Thus, modernisation theory at its height not only saw development in terms of economic change, but as social and cultural change:

> Modernisation theory visualises development in terms of a progressive movement towards technologically and institutionally more complex and integrated forms of 'modern' society. This process is set in motion and maintained through increasing involvement in commodity markets and through a series of interventions involving the transfer of technology, knowledge, resources and organizational forms from the more 'developed' world or sector of a country to the less 'developed' parts. In this way, 'traditional' society is propelled into the modern world and gradually, ... its economy and social patterns acquire the accoutrements of 'modernity' (Long, 1992b:19).

Modernisation theories were predicated on two major assumptions; that all societies travel along a similar path, and that this process produces a tendency towards convergence (or modernisation) which is an irreversible, lengthy and progressive progress (So, 1990:33). Such theories were attractive in underdeveloped nations for most were seeking some degree of modernity and industrial development. Modernisation theories seemed to offer the possibility of change to all nations and some newly industrialised nations, especially in Asia, demonstrated that industrial growth and modernisation were possible for developing nations. These theories also appealed to the developed world, for they '... helped to provide an implicit justification for the asymmetrical power relationships between "traditional" and "modern" societies' (So, 1990:36). Preston

contended that modernisation theory 'was the ideological child of the Cold War', offering '"modernisation" and membership of the "free world" as against "socialism". It is here that we find the moral code of "modernisation"' (Preston, 1982:72). Certainly, both growth theory and modernisation theories provided the legitimation for intervention strategies, a logical consequence of which was the provision of aid from the Western world to nations in 'need' of 'development'. Reflecting the optimistic belief that outside assistance could catalyse development and assist to overcome poverty, many non-government aid organisations and government aid authorities were established during this period. The transfer of western values, advice and technology was assumed to be appropriate as a means of fostering 'modernization' (Toye, 1987:11). According to Hunt, modernisation theories

> ... encouraged a preoccupation in aid programs with the provision of social overhead capital (such as transport facilities) and other inputs designed to foster rapid industrialisation. The benefits of these inputs and the growth they supposedly produced were expected, sooner or later, to 'trickle down' to the poor. ... The aid projects engendered ... were typified by capital intensive inputs and large-scale infrastructure investments; either a neglect of agriculture or half-baked attempts to 'modernise' it; a focus on formal western-type education and institution-building; and a reliance on western equipment and technology (Hunt, 1986:9-10).

Time and experience revealed, of course, that the basic tenets of modernisation were not universally valid. Benefits of growth did not automatically trickle down to the poor (Trainer, 1989:485), governments did not always act to reduce poverty, and it was found that small farmers could be productive and increase their own income without undergoing 'modernisation' (Streeten, 1979:29). Rostow's theories 'denied the possibility of any alternative end point other than modern capitalism' (Connell, 1980:6) and the suggestion that tradition was synonymous with underdevelopment was criticised (Connell, 1980:6. See also Knippers-Black, 1991:21). Hettne traced the rise of doubts about modernisation, summarising in particular the influential critique of Frank, who argued in 1969 that underdevelopment was a created condition, not an original stage as Rostow suggested. Frank argued that Rostow's stages of growth did

not exist in reality and that the difference between developed and underdeveloped nations did not necessarily constitute development (Hettne, 1982:35-37). In addition, it became apparent that modernisation strategies were overly optimistic (So, 1990:54) because 'conventional development wisdom was not delivering the goods' (Lubett, 1987:4. See also Trainer, 1989:489) and growth did not necessarily lead to an equitable reduction in poverty (Seers, 1978). Similarly, Hunt has summarised the commonplace criticisms of the 'trickle down' doctrine that the benefits of growth had by-passed the poor (1986:15-16).

Disenchantment with growth strategies led to a reappraisal of development strategies and to the implementation of alternative poverty-focused approaches, such as appropriate technology, employment-generation, integrated rural development, women and development, participation and basic human needs (Hunt, 1986:17). Although they attempted to overcome some of the shortcomings of growth-centred theories, such reforms did not question the basic tenets of the modernisation paradigm. As Hunt summarized:

> Together, these poverty-focused approaches and their advocates constitute a new reformist school which presents a fundamental challenge to many traditional assumptions. Each approach explores ways of targetting the benefits of aid and development to the poor, and each acknowledges that development has a social and political dimension as well as an economic one. Nevertheless, the reformists still sit firmly within the broad ambit of modernisation theory: on the whole the legitimacy and necessity of creating economic growth is usually not questioned, and there are no prescriptions for large-scale social revolution as a pre-requisite of development (Hunt, 1986:17).

Geographers whose response to the inadequacies of development theory was to attempt to modify the existing Eurocentric theoretical framework were known as the 'liberal reformers' (Goodenough, 1977:54). Over time, increasing numbers of theorists rejected the modernisation paradigm and the concept of a linear development path, arguing that underdevelopment is both a condition and a process (Goodenough, 1977:55). Moreover, they noted that developing countries were extremely diverse which meant that there could be no fixed valid models for their economic development (Hewitt, 1992:227). Together

with the growing dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of modernisation theories, such attempts to understand the processes causing underdevelopment were instrumental in ushering in new interpretations and methods of analysis.

Radical Development Theories

As Preston noted when discussing the demise of positivist growth theories, '... we are treating a web of events in the real world and theoretical responses amongst academics and practitioners ... we are dealing with themes ... The "positivist" orthodoxy does not simply go away ... ' (1982:103). Despite this warning, there seems to be a consensus amongst scholars of development theory that the dominance of the positivist modernisation paradigm was undermined by dependency theories which became 'one approach permeating a large number of analyses' (Hettne, 1982:39. See also Booth, 1985:775).

It is beyond the scope of this outline of development theories to detail all the strands of thought that resulted in the 'dependency' paradigm.[1] Indeed, even development theorists indicate that controversy and confusion surround the labelling of approaches resulting in this paradigm (Hettne, 1982:39; Preston, 1982:159 and Henriquez, 1983:391) and that it is difficult to describe the 'intellectual pre-history of a new paradigm' (Hettne, 1982:42). What is significant is that, during the 1970s and early 1980s, a new theoretical stance provided an effective critique of the modernisation paradigm and an alternative view of the problems of underdevelopment, a view which has permeated development thought.

Hettne suggested that 'the dependency school emerged from the convergence of two intellectual trends: one often called 'neo-Marxism' and the other rooted in the earlier Latin American discussion on

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[1] For more detailed discussions of contributions made by Marxist, neo-Marxist and dependency theorists to development thought, see Preston (1982); Hettne (1982); Booth (1985); Riddell, (1987); Corbridge (1988a) and Watts (1988).

development' (Hettne, 1982:39. See also Thomas and Potter, 1992:136138). The new theorists, who were frequently called the 'radicals' (Goodenough, 1977:55 and Preston, 1982:101ff.), rejected the idea of a linear concept of development, arguing that underdevelopment is both a condition and a process.

The Latin American contribution to dependency theories stemmed from the work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), notably the 1950 work of Prebisch (see Lubett, 1987; and Thomas and Potter, 1992:136). The focus of this analysis was a critique of the conventional theory of international trade. It aimed to demonstrate that the world economy was composed of two poles - the centre and the periphery - and that there was an uneven relationship between them that was of much greater benefit to the centre. The structures of production differed substantially in each pole with manufacturing concentrated in the centre and primary production dominant in the periphery (Henriquez, 1983:393). Structural relationships between the poles, with their inherent inequalities, were seen to dominate international relations and therefore development processes. Applications of these theories were anathema to those of the right and '... were criticized from the left for failing to sufficiently denounce the mechanisms of exploitation within the capitalist system' (Henriquez, 1983:394). Yet, they did lead to the realisation that the transformation of the socio-economic system, advocated by modernisation theorists, was likely to be impeded by existing social, economic and political structures.

In addition to the contribution of Latin American theorists were those who extended Marxian ideas, which were primarily about antagonism between classes within a capitalist state, to the relationships between nations. In general, these views were concerned with the social and economic structures underlying the global order and with the exploitative relationships which existed between nations. They saw development as the result of changes in these structures. As Knippers-Black summarised:

> ... whereas the Marxist-Leninist theory of imperialism

> seeks to explain why and how the dominant capitalist powers expand their spheres of hegemony or control, dependency theory examines what this relationship of unequal bargaining and multilayered exploitation means to the dominated classes in the dominated countries (1991:27).

These theories have been labelled 'structuralist', with the suggestion that 'structuralists see history in terms of political and economic struggles between large social groups, particularly classes, as new structures and systems replace old ones across the globe' (Thomas and Potter, 1992:136).

Andre Gunder Frank is frequently credited with the generation of the dependency theory of underdevelopment. Extending the Marxian ideas of relations between classes in a state to the international realm, he presented the view that underdevelopment is not 'a condition generated from <u>within</u> a country but a process resulting from the interaction between countries; it is the counterpart of the process of development taking place in the advanced countries' (Goodenough, 1977:56. See also Frank, 1969). Paul Baran (1957) has also been credited with assisting to promote neo-Marxism and, therefore, to some extent, the dependency school (Hettne, 1982:40). He argued that underdevelopment is a continuous process rather than an original state and he singled out capitalist penetration as the principal cause of underdevelopment. Dependency theory, in this sense, transcended the early economic theories, conceiving dependency as a socio-political phenomenon with economic outcomes (Hettne, 1982:43). Hettne traced the varied emphases of dependency theorists, but summarised as follows the main thrusts of dependency theses:

> - The most important obstacles to development were not lack of capital or entrepreneurial skills, but were to be found in the international division of labour. In short - they were external to the underdeveloped economy - not internal.
> - The international division of labour was analysed in terms of relations between regions of which two kinds - centre and periphery - assumed particular importance, since a transfer of surplus took place from the latter to the former regions.
> - Due to the fact that the periphery was deprived of its surplus, which the centre instead could utilize for development purposes, development in the centre somehow implied underdevelopment in the periphery. Thus development

> and underdevelopment could be described as two aspects of a single global process. All regions participating in this process were consequently considered as capitalist, although a distinction was made between central and peripheral capitalism.
> - Since the periphery was doomed to underdevelopment because of its linkage to the centre, it was considered necessary for a country to disassociate itself from the world market and strive for self-reliance. To make this possible a more or less revolutionary political transformation was necessary. As soon as the external obstacles had been removed, development as a more or less automatic and inherent process was taken for granted (Hettne, 1982:46).

These generalisations became paradigmatic for 'As soon as this general perspective was accepted, much of the previous approaches in social science, such as growth models, pattern variables and political modernization, drastically lost relevance ... ' (Hettne, 1982:46). The rhetoric of development practitioners and NGOs reflected these changing ideologies, with growing emphases placed on the need to change social structures through education or through the political activity of local communities, rather than the continued transfer of western technology and personnel as project aid (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of these changes in the Australian context).

What were seen by modernisation theorists as the 'promises of the diffusion of Western culture, technology and money' were seen by the dependency theorists as 'an impediment to development' (Knippers-Black, 1991:27). The implications for policy of dependency theories were the reverse of those suggested by modernisation theorists. Where modernisation proposed that the periphery should foster contacts with the west in the form of transfers of aid, technology and western values, dependency theories suggested that continued contact with 'core' countries is harmful. Thus, the dependency school encouraged peripheral countries to sever their ties with core countries, adopting self-reliant strategies of independent national development (So, 1990:105). Further, it was considered that socialist revolution was likely to be a necessary precondition for pursuit of strategies of self-reliance, allowing the overthrow of existing elites with their close ties to foreign interests. Thence, a new power group committed to restructuring could emerge (So, 1990:106).

The ideas of the dependency school were extended to incorporate the notion of the 'interdependence' of nations. Rather than stressing the dependence of one pole on another, one of the chief exponents of this view defined development as 'the whole process of change brought about by the creation and expansion of an interdependent world system' (Brookfield, 1975:xi). Goodenough regarded this extension as significant because it held that the 'two systems are interdependent rather than discrete or separate from each other and in this ... [the approach] differs from Frank's theory of underdevelopment' (Goodenough, 1977:64).

What has been described as the 'most sophisticated' extension of radical development theories which eradicated the 'error of developmentalism' (Taylor, 1989:308) is the world-systems approach to understanding international structures of development. Rapid economic growth in east Asia and the failure of self-reliance as a development strategy undermined belief in the dependency perspective. Wallerstein (1979) argued that the world consists not of a collection of societies on the path to modernity, but of one society. Dominated by the capitalist world economy,

> ... the essence of the system is one economy but multiple polities ... He [Wallerstein] provides us with a holistic global picture of our world set out on a social trajectory in which social, economic and political processes are part of a single overall logic. It is a logic that produces a polarisation spatially represented by core and periphery in the world economy ... Modern history is interpreted not as a ladder, but as a process whereby the world has come to be organised into a single large functional region ... (Taylor, 1989:308).

This whole world system is continually restructured, where 'social changes involving occupations, education and residence are part of the overall process in the unfolding dynamic of our world economy' (Taylor, 1989:311). Thus, any social change must be considered in the context of the operation of the world system as a whole. Instead of a simplistic core-periphery model, a trimodal theoretical structure was developed with a core, periphery and a semiperiphery which stands in between and exhibits characteristics of both the core and the periphery. This three-tiered concept avoided the determinism of

previous models in relation to the direction of development, allowing both upwards and downwards mobility (So, 1990:198-199). Rather than focusing on interaction among governments, this approach focuses on the interactions of non-state actors, particularly banks and multinational corporations (Knippers-Black, 1991:29). Thus, the 'nation-state ... has ceased to be the institutional base of the global economy. The essential struggle then, is not between the rich and poor states, but rather between the rich and poor classes in a global society' (Knippers-Black, 1991:29).

Relatively recent discourses on development theory refer to political economy theories as yet a further extension of the ideas of dependency theorists (Long, 1992b:17 and Knippers-Black, 1991:30).[1] Political economy theorists, in common with those of the world systems school, embrace aspects of both modernisation and dependency theories. Although agreeing with world systems theorists that development 'follows a preordained sequence', they fault the world systems approach for underestimating the role of the state in determining economic outcomes (Knippers-Black, 1991:30). Political economy theorists contend that both state and market have important roles to play and that the penetration of foreign capital does not necessarily undermine the progress towards development of an underdeveloped nation. While these theories transcend the deterministic nature of early dependency theories, their concern is still largely based on understanding the relationships between a nation and the global economic, political and social structures within which it functions.

The radical theories of development were significant because they were a stark contrast to early studies with their emphasis on

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[1] There is debate about whether the world systems school of thought or the political economy school are in themselves paradigmatic. So (1990:13) argued that world systems theories form a paradigm which goes 'beyond the confines of dependency studies'. Similarly, the political economy school of thought has been labelled as paradigmatic (Long, 1992:17 and Knippers-Black, 1991:30). However, the world systems and political economy theories are treated here as an extension of radical development theories. My contention is that, within the multiple strands of post-modern thought (discussed in the next few pages), these theories have not assumed the distinctive and dominant status of a paradigm.

describing and predicting patterns of development within countries, based on nineteenth century European economic and social experiences. The radical theorists rejected ideas of a continuum of development and concentrated on explanations of causal structural processes (Goodenough, 1977:67). Dependency theory thus provided important new perspectives to enable understanding of development and underdevelopment. It therefore 'adds to and enriches the classical Marxist approach to imperialism and underdevelopment' (Henriquez, 1983:397). Many of the assumptions of dependency theorists have a 'strong ongoing presence in radical development literature' (Booth, 1985:765) and it has been argued that, whatever its shortcomings, the Marxian discourse has been the source of much useful debate and dialogue in human geography (Watts, 1988:152).

While the contributions of the dependency view to development thought are undeniable, the view has been criticised for it is

> ... not clear on (sic) how the contradictions of capitalism as an international system might be overcome ... it tends to be uncritical of Third World states, and assumes ... that they are unified organisations with the power and the will to implement anti-capitalist policies (Thomas and Potter, 1992:138).

Additionally, dependency has been criticised for its generality for 'the actual mechanisms of dependency are seldom spelt out in detail. Everything is connected to everything else, but how and why often remains obscure' (Henriquez, 1992:397). Booth argued that 'the dependency position is vitiated by a variable combination of circular reasoning, fallacious inferences from empirical observation and a weak base in deductive theory' (Booth, 1985:762). Similarly, the theorist Corbridge contests 'those discourses within Marxism which posit necessary or general laws of tendency ... or which suggest that political forces, movements and struggles are neatly signposted by objective economic conditions or structures' (1988b:247). In like manner, Booth suggested that 'no systematic effort was made to distinguish the effects of transnationalisation per se from those of the local social and political content, the prevailing economic policy regime and so on' (1985:763). Additionally, the uneven pattern of industrialisation in the developing world 'has called into question

the very bases of an account which insists that economic development in the periphery is inimical to the interests of the developed world' (Corbridge, 1988a:62. See also Toye, 1987:14).

The determinism and ethnocentrism of Western Marxism was similarly criticised by Slater for its assumption that the analyses of Western capitalist societies could be projected onto the developing world (Slater, 1992:287). Trainer likewise argued that the growth-based modernisation paradigm and 'radical' theorists have both been accused of a common weakness (1989:508); that 'all share the basic conception of development as equivalent to indiscriminate economic growth ... There is, in other words, no conception of appropriate development' (Trainer, 1989:491).[1]

Despite such criticisms of Marxist, neo-Marxist and dependency theories about underdevelopment, it is undeniable that they have been the source of 'vitality and creativity' (Watts, 1998:152) in the geography of underdevelopment and their contributions have been profound for:

> To be fair, scholars in this tradition have served us well by highlighting the flaws of comparative advantage theory, by challenging the equation of development with Westernisation, and by drawing attention to the powerful asymmetries which structure the interdependent world system (Corbridge, 1988a:62).

Given this, it is not surprising that the ideas and language of dependency theorists, with their emphasis on global structures responsible for and perpetuating poverty, entered the rhetoric of some Australian non-government development aid organisations. The impact of these ideological changes on the practices of these organisations is explored in Chapter Four.

Before moving to a discussion of more recent attempts to define theories accounting for underdevelopment, it must be reiterated that 'these sets of claims are presented here as 'paradigms' or

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[1] For a comprehensive discussion of the criticism of both modernisation theories and radical theories of development, see Riddell (1987).

'archetypes' and as such their differences are exaggerated and important nuances are lost' (Corbridge, 1988a:60). It is not germane to the purpose of this thesis to explore these differences in detail; it is enough simply to sketch an outline in which to locate the research to follow. Inevitably, this means simplification and a failure to adequately describe the complexity of the lively debates occurring over several decades about the contribution of dependency theorists to development studies. Such detail can readily be found elsewhere (see p. 16).

Post-Modern Theories of Development

Dependency theories were still dominant in the early 1980s and continue to feature as the theoretical basis of much research in development studies, although by the mid-1980s these theories were described as 'having lost much of their pull' (Booth, 1985:762). It was soon common for development theorists to refer to the 'impasse' in development theory (see Booth, 1985; Sklair, 1988:697 and Corbridge, 1990). As recently as 1992, Long referred to a crisis 'marked by the crumbling of theoretical orthodoxies of both "liberal" and "radical" varieties generating a sense of analytical and political disorientation' (1992a:8). Despite what has been called the 'passing parade of paradigms', evidence was clear that the lot of the great mass of people had improved only marginally and frequently the unequal distribution of benefits within and between nations had been accentuated (Connell, 1980:2). The demise of faith in the structuralist paradigms - modernization and dependency - and the failure of socialism and strategies of self-reliance to overcome poverty, resulted in a range of debates and attempts to develop new theories of development. Loosely grouped together by theorists under the rubric 'post-modernism', it is impossible to describe this recent period as being dominated by any one contribution to the theoretical debate. As Slater recently argued, 'The post-modern escapes unequivocal definition. It has ... a proliferation of meaning ... or a certain semantic instability, foreclosing the possibility of

any lasting consensus of meaning' (1992:309). Taylor likewise maintained that the hallmark of current human geography is a variety of perspectives and a distrust of any new conformity (1989:313).

It has been argued that the recent period has been characterised by disenchantment with, and deconstruction of, existing theories (Slater, 1992:283) and that there exists a 'pronounced post-modern emphasis on plurality, difference, heterogeneity and the marginal' (Slater, 1992:290). The emphasis is also on 'specificity, regionalism, social minorities, the marginal and political projects which are local in scope' (Slater, 1992:289). Corbridge similarly described the dominance of issues of participation, gender relations, social movements and the environment as recurrent themes in the recent literature (1991:315-316). He then noted that 'a concern for rights as well as needs, for participation as well as equality, is central to an emerging oppositional imagination of development theory and practice' (Corbridge, 1991:317). Environmental issues, or sustainable development, have similarly been presented as the possible focus of an emerging paradigm (Lele, 1991). While post-modernism does not constitute a 'coherent set of theoretical assumptions' (Meek, 1993:8), unity (if any) resides in the fact that there are no universals. As Meek suggested:

> Basically the post-modern movement is a reaction against modernism, against overly deterministic grand theory of either the right or left persuasion, against the assumption of the ubiquitous nature of western humanism and scientific rationalism and against equating change with progress and modernisation (Meek, 1993:8).

Various authors have attempted to group the strands of post-modern thought which have emerged amongst development geographers. In 1988, Watts described the 'somewhat patchy corpus of geographic scholarship in the Third World' (1988:144) and identified two currents in development geography. The first related to the deconstruction or 'identification of certain empirical 'irregularities' in relation to Marxist theories. The second was a return to study of the specific' (1988:144). Most recently, Slater suggested that there are three concurrent post-modernist perspectives, namely the 'continuation of troubled conceptualizations of centres

and peripheries', questions regarding agency and power, and research related to the meanings of democracy and socialism (1992:284. See also Corbridge, 1993).

Thomas and Potter recently suggested a similar division of all development theories, arguing that they could be divided by their emphasis on issues of structure and agency. The modernisation, Marxian, and dependency theses were seen to be structuralist in approach, where structure is seen to be 'A factor explaining development referring to relatively slow-changing sets of relationships between classes, economic activities and other general elements in society'. In contrast, 'agency' is 'seen to be a factor explaining development referring to particular sources of action' (1992:133), namely 'interventionism' (state involvement in action to promote development) and 'populism', - an emphasis on people themselves as agents of development, solving their own problems individually or through local organisations or networks (1992:140).

Disillusionment with the ability of structural analysis to overcome problems of poverty has led to a stronger focus on issues of intervention, particularly involving non-state actors. The focus of attention has shifted to include emphasis on agents of development, on 'bearers of productive initiative outside the regulatory and restrictive attention of the state, and as the new expression of individualism, creativity and personal advancement in a hostile world' (Slater, 1992:303). In an overview of post-modern theorising, Slater argued that 'interest in social movements, in the rise of democracy is growing', for '... radical theorizations have so often tended to be couched in the predictable language of class and capital. The unpredictable potency of human agency has so often been anaesthetized and absorbed into the narrative of capital accumulation and class struggle' (1992:303).

Others have also adopted the language of human agency in what Watts described as the 'Giddens boom' in geography (Watts, 1988:144). The language of Giddens' 'radical social theory', with its emphasis on human agency, or on 'how history is made through the active

involvements and struggles of human beings' (Giddens, 1982:165), has permeated development theory in the last decade, providing a theoretical linchpin for pre-existing strands of thought in the development literature. As the development sociologist Norman Long summarised:

> Although less well articulated in the literature on development until relatively recently, there has always been a kind of counterpoint to structural analysis. This is what I call the actor-oriented paradigm. ... although it may be true that certain important structural changes result from the impact of outside forces (due to encroachment by the market or the state), it is theoretically unsatisfactory to base one's analysis on the concept of external determination. All forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-worlds of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way are mediated and transformed by these same actors and structures. ... [Although] large-scale and 'remote' social forces do alter the life-chances and behaviour of individuals, they can only do so through shaping, directly or indirectly, the everyday life experiences and perceptions of the individuals concerned ... A more dynamic approach to the understanding of social change is therefore needed which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of 'internal' and 'external' factors and relationships, and which recognizes the central role played by human action and consciousness (Long, 1992b:20).

These ideas have been widely adopted across the political spectrum, variously called the 'empowerment doctrine', 'participatory development', 'neo-liberalism', 'democratisation', and 'populism' (Corbridge, 1992:589 and Thomas and Potter, 1992:140), with the common recognition that social movements rather than classes may be the fundamental agents of historical change (Slater, 1992:295).

The new emphasis on human agency in the development process is also related to the bridging of a divide between development theory and practice. Development theory has frequently been perceived as irrelevant to the real issues of development practice:

> ... the gap that most needs to be bridged is between theory and practice. Most of our theoretical approaches are pitched at a level too abstract - too global in purview, too dependent on aggregate data, in general too far removed from the workaday world of the world - the beneficiaries - to be much help to those who would actually design and/or

> implement projects in areas steeped in poverty ... Furthermore, those who deal in grand theory are understandably, perhaps necessarily, drawn to models that reduce actors to ideal types and predict behaviour on the basis of a very limited number of factors (Knippers-Black, 1991:8-10).

Long also argued that there has long been a divide in post-war literature on development and social change between the macro and the micro levels, represented by the contrast between theories relating to either structure or human agency, between macro-theory and local action for development (1992b:18).

The theories discussed earlier in this chapter - modernisation and dependency theories - were primarily concerned with the macro scale. These dominant theoretical paradigms continue to shape much development practice (see Knippers-Black, 1991:20). However, alongside these paradigms, an alternative vision has existed, based on the experience of development practitioners implementing development projects at the community, or micro, level. For example, in 1973, Connell argued for increased emphasis on the micro rather than the macro, on research with 'practical rather than theoretical objectives; concepts of development must relate most closely to the poorest people in the poorest areas' (Connell, 1973:34). Fifteen years later, Connell asserted that '... the debate over the most appropriate form of practice has never subsided' (Connell, 1988:2) and that the dual concern with development theory and practice has persisted.

Development practitioners ask a different set of questions about the development process, questions which relate to power relationships and organisational behaviour at the community level. Rather than viewing the material product as the goal of development, some believe that development must be 'nurturing, liberating and even energizing to the unaffluent and unpowerful' (Knippers-Black, 1991:21). This 'bottom-up' approach to development emphasises community development through self-help programs, 'but with greater emphasis on the process itself rather than on the completion of particular projects' (Knippers-Black, 1991:21). The emphasis of development practice in the 1980s was on the sustainability of the process and on collective

decision-making and action rather than on material products. Conventional planning methods were rejected in favour of an approach involving local communities in every stage of development planning: from the identification of local needs, to selection of priorities and to project implementation and management. In this form of development process, the development practitioner or change agent is seen to possess the role of 'catalyst and information broker rather than of decision-maker or information giver, that of promoting self-reliance rather than dependency' (Knippers-Black, 1991:21). Success of a development project is not measured in terms of growth in income, but in intangibles such as the promotion of social equity, the extent of participation of local communities, and the extent to which their capacity to take charge of setting and meeting their own goals is enhanced. This 'participatory' approach to development (discussed in more detail in Chapter Two) has been adopted by many development practitioners and is espoused by most NGOs as the form of development practice most effective in alleviating poverty at the community level.

In its extended form, the idea of 'bottom-up' development, of participation of human agents in the development process, is expressed in the 'empowerment' vision. The concept of empowerment applies primarily to strategies of development practice, rather than to grand theoretical models. Illich (1969; 1978), Freire (1973a; 1973b and 1974) and later Galtung (1980, 1989) were notable contributors to this alternative vision. The Latin American ex-priest Ivan Illich, in a critique ideologically related to dependency theory and to Latin American liberation theology, criticised the 'atrophy of social imagination' which conceived of Western-style modernisation with its associated consumerism as progressive development (Illich, 1969:3. See also Illich, 1974). He argued that underdevelopment is a state of mind, and urged for educational processes which encouraged 'the awakening awareness of new levels of human potential' (Illich, 1969:3), rather than traditional schooling which tended to 'rationalize the divine origin of social stratification ... which forever condemns most Latin Americans to marginality or exclusion from social life - in a word, underdevelopment' (Illich, 1969:4).

Believing that existing institutions and products shape human conceptions of reality, he urged a radical search for alternatives to the then current pre-packaged solutions to problems of poverty.

Freire extended this view, arguing that the goal of development should be to transform the attitudes of oppressed individuals, thus enabling them to become agents of their own social reality. Through dialogue, leading to 'conscientizacao', they should be convinced of the need to fight for liberation (Freire, 1973a:424. See also Freire, 1973b). Freire is noted for his expression of a belief in education as 'the practice of freedom' (Freire, 1974:162). He urged development practitioners to aim to promote liberation and to

> ... ask themselves if they really believe in the people, in ordinary people, in the peasants. ... If they are incapable of believing in the peasants, of communing with them, they will at best be cold technicians. They will probably be technocrats, or even good reformers. But they will never be educators who will carry out radical transformations (Freire, 1974:162).

Galtung also drew attention to the importance of changing structures in favour of the weak, in order to enable people to overcome inequitable structures (1989:27) and to foster political will as 'an instrument to bring about structural change' (1980:4). This language of 'conscientisation' or 'empowerment' has been adopted by many engaged in the practice of development. The empowerment vision has been the primary motivational force for many NGOs based in both the developed and the developing nations and has been expressed in their involvement in development education or what they call 'conscientisation' activities.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has traced the major theoretical shifts which have occurred within development geography, from an early interest in describing the uniqueness of developing countries, to attempts to understand the processes responsible for development and

underdevelopment. Interest in causal explanations resulted in the advent of growth and modernisation theories, thereafter in the emergence of the radical development paradigm and, most recently, in a period of rejection of deterministic grand theories and of a proliferation of attempts to generate new theories of development. Primarily abstract theorisations concerned with providing explanatory tools for processes at the macro scale, these shifting paradigms have remained largely irrelevant to the development practitioner or non-government organisation grappling with the practical realities of trying to alleviate poverty and catalyse social change. The continued activities of these practitioners have fostered an alternative ideology which is grounded in the experience of working in partnership with local communities as they seek to overcome oppression and poverty.

The persistence of an alternative view of development which was based on the experience of development practitioners, combined with the demystification of the state in the post-modern era, has enabled the emergence of the 'notion of the "international non-state actor"' (Therien, 1991:268). Within the current climate of disillusionment with grand structural theories, and with the reassertion of the importance of social movements as agents of change, non-government organisations have flourished. The absence of a single dominant theory in the post-modern era has ensured that 'multiple voices and projects are now being celebrated', the value of which is to 'encourage us to empower those on the margins by first heeding their voices' (Corbridge, 1992:587). These emphases, with their focus on the importance of human agency in the development process, have been enabling for social movements and have allowed non-government development assistance organisations to thrive. This brief exploration of the maze of development theory has outlined a theoretical context for the ensuing study of NGOs which are regarded by some in the current climate to have 'a unique capacity to shape the workings of international development co-operation' (Therien, 1991:266). The following chapter will explore further reasons for the recent growth in popularity of these organisations as the preferred agents of change in the development process.

CHAPTER TWO

NGOS: AGENTS OF CHANGE?

The post-modern era has been characterised thus far by disillusionment with the failure of development theories and with the potential for large-scale development programs to significantly reduce poverty for the mass of people in the developing world. As the previous chapter outlined, these factors, combined with increased emphasis on the importance of participatory development strategies by development practitioners, have provided a new legitimacy for the activities of non-government development assistance organisations. To provide a context for the detailed study of Australian NGOs that is to follow, this chapter will outline the evidence for, and provide further reasons for, the increased significance of NGOs. It will also describe the advantages and disadvantages of these organisations, and discuss the extent and quality of existing research into their activities.

The Significance of Non-Government Aid Organisations

Voluntary development aid agencies have increased in popularity throughout the world as a means of assisting the less fortunate. Many commentators have noted the growth in the quantity of funds raised by development aid agencies. The disbursements of developed country non-government aid organisations increased fourfold, from US$1 billion in 1970, to US$4 billion in 1985 (Minear, 1987a:96; Streeton, 1987:94). It then grew to US$6.4 billion in 1989 (Clark, 1991:51). Between 1970 and 1985, private contributions tripled from US$0.9 billion to US$2.9 billion (Minear, 1987a:96). Trends in individual countries reflect these broader changes. For example,

Herbert-Copley suggested that '... the most obvious trend in the Canadian sector over the past decade has been the tremendous growth' (Herbert-Copley, 1987:25) and Brodhead argued that '... private contributions to Canadian NGOs have grown considerably over the past decade - easily outstripping the rate of inflation...' (Brodhead et al., 1988:26). Clark also reported that some large NGOs operating from the United States and the United Kingdom 'handle funds of similar order to many of the official aid agencies' (1991:50-51).

In addition to the increase in financial flows from 'northern' NGOs to the developing world, newly formed agencies proliferated. The number of NGOs registered in OECD countries increased from 1,700 in 1981 to 4,000 in 1988 (Porter, 1990:6). In Canada, the number of NGOs involved in development work increased rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s and at least 16 per cent of Canadian agencies operational in 1988 were founded between 1980 and 1985 (Brodhead et al., 1988:20). Similarly, the United States has an array of voluntary organisations working in the field of development; these have increased in size and diversity in the 1980s (Fox, 1987:11-12). The number of Japanese NGOs has also grown rapidly (Overseas Development Institute, 1988:42). Few commentators have presented precise figures, but many share Clark's view that 'at the same time that the size of many NGOs is increasing rapidly, there is a mushrooming of the numbers of NGOs' (1991:51).

Active voluntary agencies have also proliferated throughout the developing world. Fernandez documented the growth of popular participation through NGOs in South Asia (Fernandez, 1987), and Landim described the growth of formal voluntary organisations as a '... relatively new and widespread phenomenon in Latin America ...', noting that in August 1986, 1,041 NGOs were surveyed in Brazil alone (1987:30). Similarly, the recent growth and changing functions of the NGO sector in India have been observed (Tandon, 1989:15-16) and it has been noted that over 10,000 NGOs are registered in Bangladesh (Williams, 1990:31). Schneider, after outlining the difficulties of identifying and quantifying NGOs in developing countries, indicated that there are several thousand active NGOs

in the Philippines, 227 in Indonesia, and that more than 1,000 are registered in Thailand (1988:78-79). Further afield, Muchiru described the emergence of NGOs in Africa as 'a form of survival mechanism' which 'represents a new phase in the region's effort towards sustainable development' (1987:112-113). Reinforcing such claims, Fowler reported an increase of 60% in the number of indigenous NGOs in Botswana between 1985 and 1989, and a 115% increase in local NGOs in Kenya between 1978 and 1987 (1991:54). Evidence of the growing importance of the NGO movement throughout the developing world can be seen also in the formation of coordinating bodies as NGOs attempt to strengthen their capabilities (Stremlau, 1987).

Increasing numbers and financial flows are not the only trends marking the extension of NGO activities world-wide. Cernea argued that existing voluntary or charitable organisations have extended their range of functions, 'adding development-oriented and production support activities to their traditional concern for relief and welfare' (1989:2-3). He suggested that, in addition to adopting new concerns, organisations have 'become internally more sophisticated and better organized, more aware of their power, and thus have increased their militancy and mobilization capabilities' (Cernea, 1989:2-3). Further emphasising the significance of the endeavours of a growing number of NGOs, Schneider estimated that '... using rather low estimates and in a fairly pessimistic perspective, the total number of rural inhabitants around the world benefiting from NGO development efforts must come to around 100 million people' (1988:222). It is unclear how accurate such figures are, yet Van der Heijden similarly estimated that working through their southern counterparts, 'northern' NGOs assist some 60 million people in Asia, 25 million in Latin America and 12 million in Africa (Van der Heijden, quoted in Clark, 1991:51).

The Australian NGO community has also grown, with a steady increase in the number of active non-government aid agencies. Of ninety agencies surveyed for this study, 22 per cent were founded after 1980, with nearly half (49 per cent) of Australia's aid agencies established since 1970 (see Chapter Four and Appendix 1). The total

amount of Australian donor dollars sent to the developing world each year has increased, albeit with fluctuations, from A$14 million in 1970 to A$66 million (current prices) in 1989 (see Chapter Four). It seems that in Australia, as throughout the world, voluntary organisations have become increasingly popular as a vehicle for those wishing to assist the less fortunate in the developing world to survive.

'NGOs' Defined

Having established the significance of the expanding numbers and work of non-government aid organisations, it is important that, before proceeding further, the meaning of the acronym 'NGO' be clarified. The term 'non-government organisation' is so broad as to almost defy generalisation:

> ... surprisingly, it remains difficult to define NGOs. The relevant literature is imprecise and as diverse as the organizations it seeks to capture. Articles about NGOs commonly lament the lack of singular definitions on what they are, what they do, and what their objectives are. In Australia, the range of NGOs is less extensive, but the search for singular definitions remains troubled by their diversity. How could singular definitions account for the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists alongside the Australian Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific and be true to the peculiarities or integrity of either? (Porter, 1991:56).

This very diversity is often regarded as a strength of the community of voluntary aid organisations, '... an article of faith, an important element of NGOs' collective philosophy ... "strength in diversity" ... part of NGOs' claim to both effectiveness and legitimacy' (Herbert-Copley, 1987:21). Despite this great diversity, the term 'NGO' is widely employed by those working in the field of development to refer to non-government agencies whose aim is to assist those in the less-developed world. One of the most useful and widely used definitions was posited by Lissner in 1977:

> a 'voluntary agency' is a non-governmental, autonomous non-profit organization, supported mainly by voluntary

> contributions in cash and kind from the general public, or certain segments thereof, in the high-income countries, specialised to carry out a number of functions related to development aid and emergency relief primarily but not exclusively in the low-income countries (1977:23).

This definition excludes some church-based and secular charities if their primary work is not in the developing world and excludes missionary organisations which work in the developing world but are chiefly involved in evangelistic activities. Most writers on 'the NGO approach' include all non-government agencies, church-based or secular, which 'are not controlled by people intended to benefit from their activities' and receive revenue on the 'basis of defined, non-profit relief and development assistance and advocacy' (Porter, 1991:56-57). Henceforth, therefore, the acronym NGO will be used to refer to organisations described by Lissner's definition, that is, to autonomous, non-government and non-profit organisations which profess that to assist development in poor nations is their primary aim.

As a general definition of NGOs is difficult to derive, so too, it is extremely difficult to classify NGOs in any systematic way. Various attempts have been made to bring some order to the diversity of NGOs. Lissner classified agencies according to their purpose and origin, placing them into the following eight categories: mission agencies; church-related voluntary agencies; secular voluntary agencies; educational institutions; student welfare organizations; Jewish welfare agencies; labour and business organizations and foundations; and umbrella organizations (1977:32-33). Rollason similarly suggested Australian NGOs could be classified according to the type of assistance they offer and their support base. He identified five groups - church-based organisations; secular, community-based agencies; agencies with a special focus, such as a particular country or target group; professional organisations providing highly specialised assistance; and community development organisations (Rollason, 1988:4). Recognising that the diversity of NGO experiences and purposes defied classification, Korten identified three distinct program orientations: relief and welfare; small-scale, self-reliant local development; and sustainable systems

development. Calling these first, second and third generation strategies, Korten suggested that 'all three strategic orientations appropriately co-exist within the larger NGO community, and sometimes even within a single NGO' (Korten, 1987:147). In 1990, Korten added a fourth category to his classification; a fourth 'generation' of NGOs known as 'People's Movements', whose goal is to 'energize a critical mass of independent, decentralized initiative in support of a social vision' (Korten, 1990:127). Noting, as Korten had before him, that 'the spectrum doesn't divide precisely into separate primary colours. Most ... are a blend of several colours on the pallet, though one may predominate', Clark (1991:41) divided NGOs into six schools, reflecting their historical origins: relief and welfare agencies; technical innovation organisations; public service contractors; popular development agencies; grassroots development organisations; and advocacy groups and networks.

Such systems give some indication of the range of NGOs. However, as Korten (1987:147) and Clark (1991:41) noted, NGOs are such a heterogeneous group that many agencies do not fit neatly into a category, or their activities place them into several categories at once. Thus, rather than attempt to impose any classification system on the Australian NGO community, the general definition of NGOs - outlined earlier - is preferred. Some assessment of the validity of existing classification systems will be possible following study of individual case study agencies and of the Australian NGO community in general.

While the most general definition of non-government organisations has remained constant, their role and popularity as vehicles for aid delivery throughout the world has undoubtedly increased. This increased significance is a function of several factors, which are discussed in the following pages - the inbuilt advantages of voluntary aid agencies, changes in development philosophy in recent years, and increased government financing of NGO activities.

The Advantages of NGOs

Although voluntary aid agencies are marked by their diversity, recent research into the activities of NGOs presents a strikingly similar list of the benefits of voluntary agencies (Tendler, 1982:2-7; Schneider, 1988:20; Porter, 1990:16-17; Clark, 1991:54-63). In describing themselves, Australian NGOs stress their comparative advantage - hardly surprising since their very existence depends on public perception of their benefits (ACFOA, 1987a:2; ACFOA, 1988:4). It is important that these supposed advantages be outlined, for they provide a series of yardsticks against which individual agency behaviour can be measured and provide a baseline for the development of theories about the reasons for NGO behaviour.

In common with most voluntary organisations (Scott, 1981:1), the NGOs generally claim that, unencumbered by political, strategic or commercial concerns, they are able to be flexible and innovative in their activities (Verghese, 1981:4; Overseas Development Institute, 1988:44). The small size of their projects and their direct contact with local people is assumed to allow NGOs to respond to need more quickly and flexibly than can bilateral and multilateral agencies (Tendler, 1982:5). It is also claimed that, in seeking to meet the needs of their partners (recipient groups), they are likely to take risks more readily than official agencies (Kozlowski, 1983:13) In addition, proponents of NGOs suggest that the agencies are prepared to work in geographically remote areas or in sectors neglected by governments (Williams, 1990:32; Cernea, 1989:17).

Voluntary development aid agencies claim to be able to implement and administer development assistance projects and programs at lower cost than other aid delivery bodies. This is attributed in part to the large contribution made by volunteers to the administration of many NGOs (Cernea, 1989:18) and to the use by the agencies of indigenous expertise, labour and materials in implementing and administering projects (Kozlowski, 1983:13). Tendler has also suggested that 'freedom from the inefficiencies and lethargies of large organizations' enables voluntary agencies to operate at lesser

cost than public-sector organisations (1982:6).

Perhaps most significantly, NGOs claim to have better links with the neediest groups in the developing world. Not constrained by having to work through governments, they are able to work directly with the poor, and are thus able to 'use participatory, "bottom-up" processes of project implementation and help poor people to gain control of their lives' (Streeten, 1987:92). Longer experience of working with local people, it has been argued, means that 'NGOs tend to have accurate knowledge and understanding of local needs and capabilities' (Kozlowski, 1983:12).

Related to a conviction that 'poverty results from the loss of popular control of resources and means of production and from their use for purposes other than ensuring the livelihood of the people' and that the poor should be able to participate in decision-making about their own lives, many NGOs claim to emphasise process in their programs (Freedom From Hunger Campaign/Action for Development, 1985:2). Emphasis on process means NGOs do not give priority to provision of tangible goods, but to what has become enshrined in their jargon as the 'empowerment' of local people. As one indigenous Indonesian NGO stressed:

> ... people are truly empowered when they gain access to and control over economic resources; when they are able to reduce and overcome their dependencies on forces which exploit them; and when they manage their own economic activities which truly respond to their needs and that of the community (Espiritu, 1989:206).

Tendler similarly suggested that NGOs 'feel that the emphasis on process is distinctly different from the "dominant ideology" about economic development -- adhered to by governments, large donors and development economists -- which look for results in the form of growth in output and other physical measures' (1982:5).

In addition to the above advantages, it is frequently suggested that voluntary organisations attract strongly motivated, dedicated personnel who approach tasks with a commitment and energy often lacking in government agencies (Schneider, 1988:205). Valuable

opportunities for voluntary service are provided by NGOs which benefit from access to a wide base of skills offered by volunteers, including motivated professionals. The non-profit sector is the largest employer in America (Drucker, 1989:88), providing opportunities for those who believe that in paid employment 'there isn't much challenge, not enough achievement, not enough responsibility, and there is no mission, there is only expediency' (Drucker, 1989:93). In Australia, increasing numbers of unemployed are using the voluntary sector as a means to maintain or acquire useful skills, while contributing to what they believe to be a worthwhile cause (Bishop, 1991:1s).

Independence of government also allows the voluntary aid community to adopt an additional role as advocate and government critic (Roughan, 1990:106). Research into the activities of voluntary organisations has recognised their role as pressure groups seeking changes in the policy and practices of other organisations and governments (Wolfenden, 1978:43). Scott, for instance, argued that voluntary organisations are 'usually the most effective, knowledgeable and independent critics of the official services ...' (1981:1). Of course, in the case of voluntary development aid organisations, independence of commercial considerations is questionable, given their need to attract donations. However, NGOs argue that, compared to official aid organisations, their freedom from commercial or domestic political interests places NGOs in a unique position to educate the public about the developing world. Indeed, most agencies believe education is a legitimate, indeed essential, agency function (see p. 30 and pp. 100-104):

> Aid must contribute to creating the political will so necessary to ... tackle the causes of world poverty. So the challenge of development education is to communicate information about, and help people to understand, aid issues but also to motivate them to take action and assist them in identifying the most appropriate action in any given situation (Rollason, 1986:38).

Involvement in education of the general public about the needs of the developing world is seen to be another of the positive contributions made by NGOs. As a result, the extent to which some Australian NGOs engage in development education programs will also

be explored in this study. The detailed descriptive studies of individual NGOs conducted for this thesis will in fact enable assessment of the extent to which some Australian NGOs can lay claim to all of the advantages commonly ascribed to NGOs actively delivering development assistance.

Participatory Development and NGOs

These popularly cited advantages of NGOs are not the only reason for their increased significance. As Chapter One briefly outlined, there has been recognition by development practitioners of the validity of arguments for participatory development espoused by NGOs - that the poor should be directly involved in processes aimed to alleviate their poverty and that the formation of grassroots indigenous organisations can have a catalytic role in encouraging sustainable development:

> ... throughout the diverse ranks of development professionals, there is a growing consensus about the importance of grassroots projects and of NGO participation in them. Not only are NGOs being given an ever greater role as project implementers, but mainstream development theorists have come to echo their views - a first in the short history of development (Dichter, 1988:36).

Cohen and Uphoff have summarised the historical development of concern for participation by development practitioners, suggesting that experience showed that development efforts failed in the absence of popular support and co-operation (1980:213-218). Arguing that, at the project level, success is critically affected by the nature and extent of participation, they defined participation as 'the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions which enhance their well-being, e.g. their income, security or self-esteem' (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980:214). In 1980, they wrote that the 'tide of thinking has been turning. Whether it will remain "in" or will go "out" remains to be seen' (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980:218).

A decade later, it is clear that participation has remained

'in', with the term enshrined in the jargon of voluntary aid agencies, development practitioners and, more recently, of official aid agencies. Indeed, by 1989, Crittenden and Lea were able to write of the 'burgeoning literature on the idea of an 'indigenous development', and of the need for the 'top-down' approach to planning and research to be replaced by initiatives from the 'bottom-up' ... a new 'populism' (1989:477). The focus on the participation of local people in strategies designed for them was encapsulated in Chambers's work, which emphasised that successful rural development 'involves helping the poorest ... to demand and control more of the benefits of development' (1983:147). Recent research reinforces the appropriateness of this stance (Ralston et al., 1983; Bryant and White, 1984; Chambers, 1988). For example, after living among people whose lives were affected by World Bank supported urban development projects in Latin America, Salmen wrote:

> There is often an assumption among development professionals that a good development project sells itself. The project is seen to have a viability apart from the people for whom it is intended. Perhaps the main lesson underlying the stories told here is that to be successful a project should be designed and executed with significant participation of the beneficiaries at each step of the way. Beneficiaries participate when they understand and appreciate how a project may help them. Project designers create helpful projects when they understand the needs and priorities of the people for whom help is intended. Effective understanding of these people is achieved by listening to them. This understanding is the basis for the kind of communication between people and managers which underlies both the participation of the community and the success of the project (1987:49-50).

Further, Salmen argued that project success could be gauged by 'the degree to which it has encouraged people to do things for themselves beyond what the project did for them. This ... may be seen as the catalytic effect of a development project' (1987:35).

Similarly, Schneider has recently traced the evolution of development thought and practice and the growing emphasis on the participation of beneficiaries in project design, implementation and evaluation. After an analysis of 93 NGO projects throughout the developing world, he concluded:

> ... a leitmotiv of the entire study, is the need for stressing 'people-oriented' development. This is where cost-benefit analysts and economists throw up their hands in despair. Economic growth can be charted, food self-sufficiency calculated, skills, technology, and capital costed, but the most important variable, the human factor, is totally unpredictable. Experts often tend to overlook this fact, forgetting that development must serve real human needs. The ultimate reason for development is the satisfaction of basic human needs which include dignity and human rights. The part of most of the projects visited which is most difficult to quantify, but certainly the most important and encouraging for the future, was that which engaged each participant's imagination, creativity, decision-making, sense of responsibility, and desire to control the circumstances of his or her life in a harmonious environment (1988:235).

While it is possible that such analysis is self-serving, or at least optimistic, there does seem to be mounting evidence that aid projects are not effective without the support and involvement of beneficiary groups at every stage of project design and implementation (Hellinger et al., 1988:3). This has led to the new popularity of voluntary aid agencies, whose approach claims to depend on participation by project beneficiaries (Fowler, 1986:3) and to be a '... complete reversal of the strategies formerly applied by most private governmental, or international development agencies' (Schneider, 1988:151).

Many have criticised the technocratic approach of major bilateral and multilateral aid organisations (Linear, 1985; Hayter and Watson, 1985; Hancock, 1989; Hellinger et al., 1988). For example, after their study of large integrated rural development projects in Papua New Guinea, Crittenden and Lea concluded that, when local people are not involved in project design and implementation, project objectives are 'divorced from local ways of doing things, local customs, aspirations, hopes and capabilities to such an extent that the projects become self-serving, mainly benefitting those who run them' (1989:475). While it is not the task of the present research to assess the merits of these activities, an awareness of the views of their detractors contributes to an understanding of NGO attitudes towards such aid. Indeed, arguments presenting the operations of voluntary aid agencies as credible and practical alternatives for

such endeavours form a vital part of NGO claims to legitimacy and help to account for their popularity. A litany of complaints about the work of official aid forms part of the NGO dogma:

> NGOs are generally disapproving of the excessively aggregative and impersonal type of development practised by the major bilateral and multilateral agencies ... NGO criticism is characterized by chants that official development is too top-down, too large-scale, too trickle down oriented, and too supportive of elites and corrupt officials (Porter et al., 1991:139).

At worst, critics have argued that a cessation of flows of official and multilateral forms of development assistance would be in the best interests of all:

> Garnered and justified in the name of the destitute and the vulnerable, aid's main function in the past half-century has been to create and then entrench a powerful new class of rich and privileged people. In that notorious club of parasites and hangers-on made up of the United Nations, the World Bank and the bilateral agencies, it is aid - and nothing else - that has provided hundreds of thousands of 'jobs for the boys' and that has permitted record-breaking standards to be set in self-serving behaviour, arrogance, paternalism, moral cowardice and mendacity. At the same time, in the developing countries, aid has perpetuated the rule of incompetent and venal men whose leadership would otherwise be utterly non-viable; it has allowed governments characterised by historic ignorance, avarice and irresponsibility to thrive; last but not least, it has condoned - and in some cases facilitated - the most consistent grievous abuses of human rights that have occurred anywhere in the world since the dark ages (Hancock, 1989:192-193).

Similarly, Hayter and Watson's acerbic critique of operations of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and bilateral donors concluded that 'aid' probably does more harm than good to Third World populations. Such aid not only fails to alleviate poverty, they argued, but 'its overall purpose is the preservation of a system which damages the interests of the poor in the Third World' (1985:1). In like vein, after analysing the past performance of U.S. AID, Hellinger, Hellinger and O'Regan argued that in the developing world, 'funds have been used primarily to advance the economic and political interests of their relatively small elite, as well as counterpart interests in the United States' (1988:28-29).

Following an analysis of some Australian ODA projects, Hunt concluded that Australian official aid operated according to a 'de facto hierarchy of aid objectives which relegated equity considerations to insignificance' (1986:407). Further, she suggested that 'a concern for the poor has also remained largely irrelevant to the structure and processes of aid management practice' (1986:407). More recently, through detailed study of an extended Australian aid project in Kenya, Porter, Allen and Thompson have illustrated how 'control-orientation' of official endeavours can lead to a situation where 'Third World people, who despite billions of dollars and immense and sincere human effort, are more frequently the victims of rural development aid projects than the beneficiaries' (1991:3).

The growing number of studies attacking official aid endeavour, combined with increased evidence of the importance of participation or democratisation for successful development, have resulted in pleas for a widespread change in the attitudes of the aid community towards the poor:

> These changes, in turn, require a fundamental change in the posture of the aid community as a whole toward the poor, which must be reflected in a responsive approach to their organized initiatives. Implicit in this approach is not only a genuine respect for the capacity of the poor to manage their own development, but, perhaps more importantly, an appreciation for their understanding of their own circumstances, their knowledge of external constraints and internal capabilities, their creativity and their ability to define appropriate development paths for their immediate and wider communities (Hellinger et al., 1988:9).

It is in this environment that the claims of NGOs to be better defenders of recipient interests than multilateral or bilateral aid bodies have found fertile ground. In the words of Porter, Allen and Thompson, 'the rise of NGOs is a direct outcome of the inability of most development projects to reach the poor, and to create local institutions which will serve the interests of the poorer majority' (1991:137).

Government Support of NGOs

The increase in popularity of NGOs has resulted in a widening of their traditional support base. Private financial contributions have not been solely responsible for growth in NGO output. Significantly, a growing percentage of NGO finance has come from donor governments (OECD, 1988:25). In 1983, Kozlowski noted that 'in the past five years, nearly all DAC governments have developed co-financing schemes whereby typically 50 per cent (and sometimes as much as 80 or 90 per cent) of an NGO project is financed from government funds' (1983:14). Government funding of Canadian NGOs as a proportion of ODA tripled between 1976/77 and 1984/85 (Herbert-Copley, 1987:21). It has been estimated that approximately one-quarter of the total US$2 billion combined annual budget of US NGOs is derived from the US Government (Fox, 1987:16). Overall government co-financing of 'northern' NGOs increased eleven-fold, from US$100 million in 1970 to over US$1.1 billion in 1985 (Minear, 1987a:96; Van der Heijden, 1987:103). In tandem with trends in other donor nations, the Australian Government has, for the last fifteen years, co-financed projects selected and implemented by Australian NGOs (see Chapter Four for further details).

Increased support of NGO activities by government aid bodies has been a marked trend throughout the developed world (Ricordel, 1985:24; OECD, 1988:25-26). The growing respectability of what have long been tenets of NGO philosophy has contributed to this trend (Overseas Development Institute, 1988:44), in addition to 'some disappointment they [official agencies] had experienced with the defective implementation of government-to-government projects ... and with discontinuation of activities once external aid was phased out' (OECD, 1988:26). It is not the intention of this research to enter into quality versus quantity arguments about the significance of NGO activity compared with official aid programs. However, one survey revealed that the advantage of NGOs most commonly cited by official agencies as their reason for channelling funds through them was that the NGOs 'attempt to ensure that the poorest groups benefit directly from developmental activities' (OECD, 1988:26). It has

also been argued that the growing popularity of NGO programs 'can be attributed to northern governments' desires to by-pass what they perceive as inefficient recipient governments' (Porter et al., 1991:6). In addition, the suggestion has been made that increased government funding of NGOs has other, less pure motivations:

> ... the development philosophy and humanitarian concern espoused by NGOs is of less significance in accounting for their official popularity than the practical assistance they can provide in overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the aid program and bolstering its domestic political legitimacy (Porter, 1990:15).

Similarly, Brodhead argued that

> Official support for NGOs has less to do with what NGOs themselves may consider to be their unique contributions to development thinking and action than with factors such as public disillusionment with the result of 20 years of official development assistance; the institutional and resource constraints imposed by declining aid flows in many countries; and tight ceilings on administrative expenditure ... It is hardly surprising that NGOs, with their "human face" and public support, their history of targeting the poorest in their programs and their relatively low-cost management style seem an attractive alternative (Brodhead, 1987:1).

It is clearly simpler and more cost-effective for a large bureaucracy to distribute funds to NGOs for them to implement their own small-scale activities, than for the large agency to use its own resources to identify, fund and implement many small projects. Even so, increased government funding of NGOs could not be justified to its constituency without some conviction that NGOs are able and worthy of the trust placed in them. Certainly, the rhetoric of the Australian Government has stressed the benefits and quality of NGO activity in accounting for its decision to allocate funds to them (see pp. 112-117).

The Disadvantages of NGOs

Despite their growing popularity and the claims made about the significance and quality of their work, NGOs working as agents of development are not without disadvantages (Clark, 1991:63-73). As there is remarkable similarity in the oft-cited advantages of NGOs, so too with the list of weaknesses presented by their opponents:

> ... NGOs are so frequently lost in self-admiration that they fail to see that even the strengths for which they are acclaimed can also be serious weaknesses: for instance, in the face of pervasive poverty, "small-scale" can merely mean "insignificant"; "politically independent" can mean "powerless" or "disconnected"; "low cost" can mean "underfinanced" or "poor quality"; "innovative" can mean simply "temporary" or "unsustainable" (Cernea, 1989:18-19).

The extent of these weaknesses, which are discussed below, will later be examined in the Australian context in relation to five selected agencies.

Perhaps the most commonplace criticism of NGOs springs from their comparatively small size (Kozlowski, 1983:13; Streeten, 1987:92). Small NGO projects are frequently implemented individually, uncoordinated with programs or projects implemented by other aid agencies or local institutions. The NGO may lack understanding of the broader socio-economic circumstances and familiarity with the physical environment of a particular country or region, which 'may lead to choosing inappropriate or counterproductive priorities' (Kozlowski, 1983:13). Co-ordination of NGO activities is often poor and results in duplication of efforts and missed opportunities (Streeten, 1987:92). It has been suggested that their activities are simply too small and localised to have any significant impact at a regional or national level (Cernea, 1989:18). For instance, one Australian critic suggested that 'relative to the magnitude of the problem the NGOs seek to address', their impact is 'like a grain of sand in a desert' (McLeod, 1990:1). Despite the rhetoric of NGOs that they are best able to reach the poorest, Clark argued that their '... projects often don't really benefit the poor, they focus

on those easiest to reach' (1991:69). Further, grassroots participation has sometimes been found to be lacking, with decision-making dominated by local elites (Clark, 1991:69). Following their study of NGO involvement in one aid project, Porter, Allen and Thompson also concluded that, despite NGO intentions to operate in a participatory manner, there were considerable constraints to proper participation, particularly the difficulty of obtaining other than a 'shopping list of wants' from local communities dominated by existing patterns of leadership (1991:148).

While the ability of NGOs to operate at low cost has been lauded by their supporters, shortages of funds can result in a number of problems. Pressure to limit overheads means agencies are frequently understaffed and use voluntary labour. While on the one hand such staff usually possess commitment and dedication, NGOs are frequently labelled as amateurish and non-professional because of their inability to employ highly qualified development professionals (Wilson, 1983:21; Kozlowski, 1983:13). Further, it has been suggested that volunteers may be unreliable and lacking in skills necessary for agency efficiency (McLeod, 1990:13). Poor leadership and 'structural amateurism' have also been identified as factors preventing flexibility and creativity in NGOs' development strategies (Clark, 1991:66-67). It has been argued that NGOs frequently lack the managerial and technical expertise to carry out effective feasibility studies and to implement projects of a technical nature (Cernea, 1989:19; Clark, 1991:70). Scarcity of financial resources and personnel have also been blamed for insufficient local follow-up and evaluation of projects (Kozlowski, 1983:13; Schneider, 1988:204). Dependence on public goodwill not only creates competition amongst NGOs for the donor dollar, but may also influence project selection, with suggestions that the fund-raising imperative has led to 'concentration on situations that lend themselves to dramatisation' (Schneider, 1988:204).

A criticism frequently levelled at NGO projects (although arguably true of all development efforts) is that they are not easily replicable (Streeten, 1987:92; Clark, 1991:69). One-off successes

(or failures) may be dependent on charismatic leadership or a unique set of local circumstances. The learning and experience gained cannot easily be transferred to another situation. The NGO lobby argues that small projects of quality which mobilise local people can have catalytic effects. Despite such arguments, critics have accused voluntary agencies (indeed, all aid agencies) of insufficient concern with the long-term impact of their programs (Streeten, 1987:92) and suggested that many of their projects are unsustainable (Cernea, 1989:19; Clark, 1991:69). It has also been argued that NGOs fail to adapt their programs and policies to changing circumstances, despite claiming to be innovative and flexible (Schneider, 1988:204). Further, it has been claimed that NGO activities can have no real impact in the face of the continued 'failure of LDC governments to do enough to improve the quality of the physical and legal infrastructure so as to support productive activities' (McLeod, 1990:9).[1]

Literature on the voluntary sector as a whole reflects these common problems, with emphasis placed on such disadvantages as fragmentation or poor co-ordination of efforts, poor planning, and suggestions that non-government organisations are not sufficiently accountable (Scott, 1981:19, 60, 122-3). A survey of British voluntary welfare agencies led Wolfenden to conclude that '... there is no guarantee that voluntary effort will necessarily materialise where need is greatest, or that standards of service will be maintained ...' (1978:28). Further, inefficient management, insufficient and undependable financial support and lack of clarity about goals and purposes all feature in sociological literature about non-profit organisations (Setterberg and Schulman, 1985:6-9). These weaknesses are the reverse side of the coin, the disadvantages which are part of belonging to the voluntary community, and implicitly relate to non-government development aid agencies. More serious, are a growing number of specific criticisms (discussed below) emerging

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[1] It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the relationships between Australian NGOs and recipient country governments, or to analyse the extent of macro-level impact of Australian NGO activities. These issues remain unexplored and would provide interesting foci for future research.

from recent studies of the activities of development NGOs and from southern (or developing country) NGOs writing about their northern counterparts.

'All is not as it seems ....'

Increasing interest in the ability of NGOs to catalyse change, coupled with growth of consumer awareness in Western societies, which has prompted demands by donors for greater accountability, have recently resulted in a spate of evaluation studies of development projects and of research into the activities of NGOs delivering development assistance. Many commentators have suggested that the Shakespearian malady 'all is not as it seems' besets the NGO community - that in practice, they are not worthy of the 'articles of faith' (to use Tendler's terminology) they proclaim (1982:2). The theme 'rhetoric versus reality' is a common preoccupation, with researchers arguing that agency activities frequently bear little resemblance to their stated philosophies:

> ...there was a gradual shift from a charity or welfare approach to the problems of poverty, ... toward a more developmental approach, stressing the strengthening of local capacities for self-reliance. At times, of course, the shift was more rhetorical than actual, as agencies adopted the language of self-reliant development without significantly altering the content of their programs (Herbert-Copley, 1987:21).

Similarly it has been argued that the popularity of NGOs is a function of successful publicity campaigns, with Twose suggesting that the current interest in NGOs is '... primarily because their staff are becoming so proficient at the folksy rhetoric of development. The heartwarming stories of the village which was starving but is now happily growing cabbages and Irish potatoes' (1987:7).

While arguments about the realities compared to the rhetoric of aid are a hallmark of the wider debate about the efficacy of all aid (cf. pp. 43-45), serious (if rather harsh) criticisms of NGO activity are also emerging from the developing world:

> Most development agencies are centers of power which try to help others change. But they do not themselves change. They aim at creating awareness among people yet they are not themselves aware of their negative impact on those they claim to serve. They claim to help people change their situation through participation, democracy, and self-help and yet they themselves are non-participatory, non-democratic and dependent on outside help for their survival (Nyoni, 1987:53).

After analysis of NGO activity in one community, it was suggested that the claim that many NGOs deal with transformation and the root causes of social injustice is a 'gross simplification' (Porter et al., 1991:157). It has also been argued that the new-found popularity of NGOs in development circles is placing new demands upon organisations which are ill-equipped to handle them:

> But NGOs and others do not always act on what they know. Worse, what is known is not based on much hard data and NGOs are increasingly faced with this dilemma: they are being asked to take on more and more even while not, in truth, being certain of what will work over the long haul, or if they are sure, being woefully short of the skills needed to accomplish the tasks. They are also being joined, sometimes petitioned by new indigenous NGOs who have rapidly grown and who have often filled in the gaps that have been left open by government. Altogether, this means new opportunities and a great challenge ahead. But the risks are also great, especially given the NGO's tendency to shortchange reflection in favour of action (Dichter, 1988:36).

Tandon questioned the capacity of Western NGOs receiving large amounts of government funding to truly serve the interests of the poor, arguing that '... their agendas are not decided in Africa but in Europe, America, Canada, etc. because it is to the people and governments of these "donor" countries that they are primarily accountable' (1991:73). Similarly, Porter, Allen and Thompson remarked that 'serious ethical questions are raised for NGOs by the necessity for them to have two development agendas, one acceptable to governments and another which attempts to address the real needs of the people' (1991:158). Accountability of NGOs to those they seek to serve has not been a priority for most, as Clark observed:

> The donors, the general public, and the media hold Northern NGOs to account, and the ebb and flow of donations is the result. But this accountability stresses by and large

> the wrong things. It does not challenge the effectiveness of the projects supported but whether the funds go to where they are supposed to go. The preoccupation with detecting the diversion of funds to the wrong purpose inherently assumes that the intended one is the right purpose (Clark, 1991:72).

Fowler similarly noted that official funding of NGOs has shifted the direction of NGO accounting to the funding source, with onerous reporting requirements (1991:71), and lamented that 'From a governance perspective, eroding the often tenuous accountability of NGOs to those whose lives they are trying to influence ... is one of the most detrimental effects ... ' (Fowler, 1991:71).

Equally serious is the suggestion that NGOs transport their own value systems to the developing world, and 'attempt to impose their values as if they were universal' (Tandon, 1991:75). Paradoxically, it has been argued that what is generally perceived to be a strength of NGOs can also be their greatest weakness:

> NGOs, generally speaking, can penetrate local communities, can establish excellent rapport with people and are flexible enough to take on whatever political hue is acceptable to the people. NGO workers who think they know what is best for the people have, therefore, a far more insidious potential to manipulate community responses than non-NGO project staff who are clearly identifiable as outsiders and who are recognized by the community as posing a risk to them. Thus the bedrock of the NGO credibility is at once both their strongest and potentially their weakest, most vulnerable and dangerous feature (Porter *et al.*, 1991:158).

Satisfied that their intentions are worthwhile, it has been argued that many agencies have concentrated little on operational efficiency (Clark, 1991:70-73). Consequently many appear to be inefficiently managed and amateurish. For example, Green noted that Australia's largest non-government welfare organisation, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, was unsure of its own income (1988:106). In contrast, it has been suggested that some agencies have become overly concerned with daily operations and the mechanisms of survival:

> ... these private channels have themselves become bogged down in bureaucratic procedures, becoming interested primarily in justifying and extending their existence, clamoring for grants from any source, and appealing to

> the lowest common denominator in their fund-raising appeals - in short, operating like any vested business interest but under the guise of goodwill (Sommer, 1977:11).

Criticisms often levelled at NGOs concern their failure to evaluate activities to prove their worth, suggesting they rely instead on the oft-cited advantages of voluntary organisations to legitimate their existence. Tendler suggested that private voluntary organisations' (PVOs) programs have not been evaluated in terms of their own objectives because 'PVO themes have been more important as articles of faith than as standards of self-measurement' (1982:129). In addition, it has been suggested that NGOs share a reluctance to evaluate programmes because '... if the results are anything short of positive, such evaluations may jeopardise future fund-raising success' (Sommer, 1977:85). Although Clark recently defended the reluctance of NGOs to evaluate projects because 'there are no ready indices for "popular participation", no convenient barometer to chart the "raising of consciousness", and no comparative tables listing the degrees of "empowerment"' (1991:71), he also argued that 'resistance to monitoring and evaluation hampers learning from experience' (1991:70). McLeod implied that evaluation is not possible because NGOs are not clear about their aims, suggesting that 'the majority seem to have no consciously thought out position on what the process of development entails, or what their contribution to it, if any, might be' (1990:2).

The detailed case studies undertaken for this study enable such allegations to be compared with the reality of the operations of Australian NGOs. However, before doing so, it is important that existing research about the mandate and operations of NGOs be explored. The major contributions to knowledge about non-government development aid organisations are discussed below and the extent to which their assertions are 'general knowledge' or are conclusions based on detailed study is demonstrated.

Existing Research

Recent years have seen the publication of several major works canvassing the contribution made to the developing world by aid. In the most comprehensive discussion of the ethical bases for aid activities to date, Riddell (1987) dissected arguments from both ends of the political spectrum favouring and opposing the continued distribution of development assistance. After an excellent summary of aid debates since their inception and a detailed review of studies of the effectiveness of aid programs at both the micro and national levels, he concluded that more aid is justifiable:

> ... there is a role for official aid, based on addressing the needs of the poor in the Third World, and that, while aid is by no means the necessary or even the critical ingredient for development, it can assist in the alleviation of poverty, directly and indirectly (1987:267).

Although stressing the need for reform and improvement in aid performance, Mosley drew on quantitative statistical analysis to argue that aid should continue, because '... on balance, I feel that its achievements are sufficient to argue for its retention and reform ...' (1987:xiii). Cassen undertook what he calls an 'extensive and deep' investigation (1986:1), sampling aid activities in detail from seven countries. He similarly concluded that '...the great majority of aid succeeds in its developmental objectives' (Cassen, 1986:13). These publications were lauded as 'raising the aid debate above the low level to which it has sunk ... during the 1980s', with suggestions that they will 'hopefully revitalize not only the aid debate, but aid itself' (Singer, 1988:84). While certainly reflecting a renewal of the aid debate and providing excellent summaries of the historical and theoretical background for and achievements of aid, these publications are silent about the activities of NGOs.

Paradoxically, NGOs are 'flavour of the month' in development circles, yet critics of NGOs and their programs abound. Massive media campaigns, phenomena of the last decade, brought the suffering of the poor in the developing world into Western loungerooms (Hart, 1987). Ironically, the same media have highlighted the failures of NGOs, presenting reports of abandoned, rusting equipment littering

fields in the developing world, or of funds pocketed by corrupt officials (Greenwald, 1987:35; Magistad, 1987:32). It is therefore surprising that voluntary development aid agencies have largely been ignored as a focus of study by academics involved in development studies.[1] Many have lamented the dearth of research about NGO operations (see pp. 57 & 62; van Heemst, 1981:70-71) and it has been suggested that the fierce passions aroused by the aid debate are based on insufficient knowledge:

> The trouble with most of aid's critics - and many of its defenders, too - is that they know very little about it. Everyone has their prejudices, and a limited view of the evidence. Often it is enough for someone to find a number of failed aid projects or cases of corruption (the latter being rather rarer than critics allege), and then take to the typewriter and castigate the whole enterprise (Cassen, 1985:115).

Neglect of all voluntary organisations by researchers has been widespread. Scott noted the general ignorance about the Australian voluntary sector, urging that

> ... many thousands of scattered pieces ... urgently need to be fitted together to understand the past and to improve our ability to face the future in which the voluntary sector is likely to assume greater significance (1981:17).

Writing in 1984 of Australian non-government welfare organisations (NGWOs), Graycar decried the fact that

> Nobody has known how many organisations there are, nobody knows what they all do, what resources they have, or their financial or personnel levels. Their accountability patterns have been unclear; there have been no real measures of how they perform, and so on (1984:45).

As recently as 1984, it was claimed that a national survey of Australian NGWOs was the 'first of its kind undertaken in Australia --- the first comprehensive national overview of any country's NGWOs' (Milligan et al., 1984:ix).

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[1] As recently as the latter half of 1993, one commentator lamented the neglect of foreign aid as a topic of study by human geographers (see Holdar, 1993).

That very little has been published about development NGOs reflects the research difficulties posed by the subject matter. The NGO community consists of a large number of diverse organisations with varied historical origins, philosophical bases, operational structures and conducting a variety of aid activities. The diversity and size of NGO communities make it a daunting, if not impossible, task to conduct a detailed comparative study of all of their activities. Although funding of NGOs by donor governments has, in recent years (see pp. 46-47 for details), necessitated greater financial accountability, evaluation and record-keeping, many agencies have not maintained detailed records of past activities. Frequently, any records are housed in the private files of volunteers, past and present, who served as active board members or agency personnel. Agency staff are often reluctant to divulge information about their work, directing the enquirer to promotional materials. The difficulties encountered in collecting reliable and detailed information about Australian NGOs for this study are discussed further in Chapter Three of this thesis. Generally, dependence on public goodwill for their continued existence means NGOs are unlikely to allow outsiders access to information which is 'sensitive' or which could be misconstrued or used to harm their cause. Certainly, failed aid projects, rumours of corruption, or allegations of misused funds are more likely to attract media attention than are success stories. It has also been suggested that, as NGOs provide only a small proportion of overall development resource flows compared to bilateral and multilateral donors, they have been neglected by scholars because they 'often get lost in the world of aid giants' (Gorman, 1984b:43).

It was not until 1977 that the first major work on the political behaviour of voluntary development aid organisations was published. In the first study to analyse the domestic activities of NGOs, Lissner attempted to 'demythologize organised altruism' (1977:i) with a systematic attempt 'to identify the political "laws of nature" which govern the behaviour and policy-making of this particular group of organisations' (1977:ii). Concerned with the influences on the behaviour of western-based NGOs, Lissner did not focus on a particular

agency or group of agencies. Rather, he looked for general trends, without making what he termed 'a foolhardy attempt to pass judgement on the overall performance of those agencies' (1977:ii).

Only in the last decade has more detailed work been produced. Most has concentrated on the impact of project work - an obvious starting point in view of claims that NGOs are able to channel aid to the poor more effectively than can other donors. For example, Millwood and Gezelius completed a detailed comparative analysis of individual NGO projects at work in Tunisia, Kenya and Nepal. Their observations led to the conclusion that aid 'reflects the needs of the donors rather than those at the receiving end ... [and] ... combines what most donors want to provide with what they think beneficiaries need' (1985:161). Further, they pointed to a gap between agency rhetoric and practical reality:

> The three projects were in fact different in almost every way. Even when those closely associated with them used the same fashionable phrases - 'participation', 'self-help', 'organizational democracy', 'locally run' - the meaning they attributed to each was different. Rather than guidelines determining the action it seems these phrases, once so radical, are today just part of the obligatory rhetoric of aid (Aidspeak) (Gezelius and Millwood, 1986 :7).

The authors urged agencies to try to perceive problems from the viewpoint of those they aimed to assist and to increase their concern for the quality and substance of projects (Millwood and Gezelius, 1985:223-4).

Tendler examined existing literature about, and evaluations of, projects implemented by U.S. NGOs (known as private voluntary organisations in that country). Comparing them to agency self-descriptions, she concluded that:

> If taken seriously by evaluators, the claims made by PVOs could get them into unnecessary trouble. ... Many PVO projects in sum, will be top-down, non-participatory, reliant on known techniques, or dependent on government. Some of these projects will be working well; some will be benefiting the poor ...
> Out of the questions and characterizations discussed in this paper emerges a conception of PVOs and what they do

> that is distinct from the prevailing mythology. Though this alternative image may be less noble, it also may prove to be a fairer way of measuring what PVOs have accomplished ... (1982:iv-vii).

Schneider also concentrated on the field operations of NGOs. He published a broad-based study which examined the efficacy of NGO projects in nineteen countries, concluding that '... in general ... the activities of NGOs are a great deal more successful than had originally been thought' (1988:236). Others have studied the impact of projects of individual NGOs. Australian examples include Jokobi's (1985) survey of the effects of World Vision Sri Lankan development programs in fourteen villages. He concluded that the programs were '... committed unremittingly to working for egalitarian principles...' and embodied '... the theoretical concepts of bottom-up, self-responsible development ... and give the impression to anyone in its purvey that it is actually achieving what it set out to accomplish' (1985:34-35). Similarly, Hardy (1987) discussed the impact of Community Aid Abroad development projects at the micro-level and Nesbitt (1986) studied the impact of a community development project on local women in the Solomon Islands.

A few general studies have described and analysed the work of NGOs from a particular developed nation. U.S. agencies were the subject of a study by Sommer. He examined the impact of US PVOs abroad, noted changes over time in the focus of their activities, and offered recommendations for the improvement of these activities (1977:7). More recently, Gorman (1984a) edited a collection of articles about NGOs which operated primarily from the U.S.. The articles canvassed a range of issues including the appropriateness of PVOs as implementators of basic needs strategies (Gorman, 1984b), improving the effectiveness of PVOs (Ellis, 1984), the influence of the U.S. domestic environment on PVO activity (Roberts, 1984), the role of PVOs in small enterprise development (Hunt, 1984) and the appropriate administration of development strategies (Calavan, 1984).

In March 1987, the popularity of NGOs and debate about the importance of their work was boosted considerably by an international

conference in London called "Development Alternatives: The Challenge for NGOs". Participants in the conference believe it marked the beginning of new ways of thinking about development processes and about the importance of international development assistance organisations as agents in that process (Porter, pers. comm. September, 1989). Korten has stressed the significance of the conference which attracted over 100 development professionals from 42 countries. They 'called for a fundamental re-examination of past development practices and policies, including a redefinition of the development roles of governments, donors and VOs (voluntary organisations)' (Korten, 1990:92). Particularly significant was the impact of representatives from developing nations with their insistence that:

> Northern NGOs should devote more of their attention to strengthening Southern NGOs, to educating Northern constituencies to the realities of the role of the North in sustaining underdevelopment in the South, and to advocating for more enlightened policies ...
> The message articulated by the Southern NGO representatives at the London Symposium carried such force that it was projected into countless subsequent forums - each of which has added new dimensions to the dialogue (Korten, 1990:92-93).

The most recent national study of an NGO community was produced by Brodhead, Herbert-Copley and Lambert (1988). The first publication to be based on a systematic study of agencies at home and abroad, it drew on surveys of 220 Canadian NGOs and field visits to 51 projects. The research was '... designed to profile the broad range of Canadian NGO activities rather than provide in-depth analysis of a few individual agencies or projects' (1988:xii). The authors attempted to assess the validity of NGO self-perceptions. The broad-based survey undertaken enabled the authors to conclude that, despite a mixed record and some shortcomings, '... the NGO record on the whole has been positive' (1988:146).

It is not intended that this thesis have as its focus the impact or effectiveness of development education activities. Agencies whose sole function is public education were not selected as case studies for this research. Where development education is a function,

additional to the administration of aid programs, of the case study organisations, its role and significance for that agency and its partners will be explored. Its impact on target groups will not be assessed. While it is thus beyond the scope of this research to do more than acknowledge their existence here, studies specifically concerned with the development education activities of NGOs have been published (See Pradervand, 1982; United Nations/NGLS, 1983; Lemaresquier, 1987; Minear, 1987b; Arnold, 1988).

The limited literature on Australian NGOs has elsewhere been reviewed by this author (included as Appendix 2), with the conclusion that:

> Most writings on Australian NGOs are not based on detailed analyses or attempts to systematically collect data about Australian voluntary aid agencies. Media reports are sensationalist in character and concentrate only on controversial or 'newsworthy' aid operations. The publicity and development education activities of the voluntary organisations are frequently tempered by the funding imperative. ... most useful studies remain in unpublished form and most are marked by their brevity ... (Rugendyke, 1989:16).

The first detailed study of Australian NGOs, including contributions from this research, was published as recently as 1991 (see Zivetz, et al., 1991). This was the first attempt to collect empirical data about Australian NGOs, and presented a collection of descriptive profiles of sixteen Australian NGOs, but it did not examine the impact of their field activities. The only significant recent Australian study to do so is that by Porter, Allen and Thompson (1991). The first substantial Australian research to progress beyond general observations, it provides a detailed analysis of the reasons for the failure of an Australian official aid project. The complexities of participation by an Australian NGO in the project are also recounted. Following personal involvement in the administration of the project, the authors present an account which is unique in its specificity and in its attempt to show that the project is 'understandable only in terms of the many different and conflicting realities of the people who 'lived' the project' (1991:xvii). Although offering no easy solutions for the development practitioner,

the writers do affirm their 'belief in the capacity of people to make a difference' (Porter et al., 1991:213).

The preceding discussion is not an exhaustive literature review, but does illustrate the range of literature about NGOs. Although there is evidence of increased interest by scholars in the activities of NGOs in the past few years, much of the research is descriptive and generalised. As Porter, Allen and Thompson wrote of research on NGOs to date:

> We believe development practice cannot be critically examined independently of the social and political environment in which it occurs ... The debate about issues in development practice: sustainability, participation land degradation, are in a similar manner commonly treated in a rhetorical fashion, or informed only by highly generalized information gleaned from overviews at a national level (1991:xvi).

It is inevitable that research in a new area must begin by describing the subject in general terms. Yet, the hard task of examining in detail the activities of individual agencies has not been undertaken. The emphasis has generally been more descriptive than analytical, focusing on evaluation of projects implemented by the agencies, on the increasing volume and popularity of their work, presenting broad surveys of a nation's NGO community, or arguing the benefits of the participatory approach to development espoused by NGOs. Any work examining the influences of the domestic environment on NGO activities, though raising issues, fails to look in detail at individual agencies and couches most conclusions in terms of 'would probably' and 'will probably' (Roberts, 1984:101-104). Even the most comprehensive publication to date about the activities of a Western nation's NGO community avoided detailed reference to individual agencies because '... we felt to name agencies would single out some for praise or criticism and reduce the incentive for others to apply that critical assessment to their own work' (Brodhead et al., 1988:xiii). The broad research base used in Brodhead's study did not allow insight into the factors influencing the activities of individual agencies.

Previous research has largely ignored the internal operations

of NGOs. Some writers have begun to discuss the complexity of NGO operations, suggesting that the study of the effectiveness of NGOs requires more than evaluation of field work:

> What are the factors that make one organisation successful and another one unsuccessful? The temptation is to analyse the programmes but, in fact, the picture is much more complex (Campbell, 1987:1).

Similarly, in his study of the evaluation techniques of international aid agencies, Cracknell argued that factors affecting the effectiveness of aid 'were being virtually overlooked in this process, because of the concentration on project-related issues. These were factors broadly linked to the 'general environment' in which aid is given' (1986:3). Schneider, after conducting a broad-based survey of NGO activity in the field, also hinted at the significance of internal agency operations for project success:

> The obstacles which lead to the breakdown or failure of projects are of two kinds: those related to the project environment and those which are entirely within the responsibility of NGOs themselves, whether they concern methodology, project personnel, or resources (1988:203).

Writing from the perspective of recipients of NGO largesse, Tandon recently reiterated these views, suggesting that Western NGOs are 'a secret lot' and what is known about them is generally based on field activities alone (1991:69). Tandon argued that it is essential for those at the receiving end of the aid process to have more knowledge of Western NGOs, particularly 'how their heart beats' (1991:69):

> Most Western Ngos are shrouded in secrecy. What we know of them are the addresses of their head offices (especially, these days, their fax numbers ...), some of the staff working in these offices, their field representatives and staff, and their glossy magazines showing pictures of the kinds of work they do in Africa ... what we know about Western Ngos are only the outward trappings of these organizations. More than the outward flummery very few Africans know much about them. In particular, it is difficult to know exactly how these organizations take decisions on concrete issues (Tandon, 1991:70).

Further, Tandon suggested that Western NGOs have their own hidden agendas, often unfathomable to outsiders, which arise 'because their

ideological and philosophical orientations are products of complex historical forces within their own countries' (Tandon, 1991:74).

There seems to be increasing recognition that analysis of field programs alone cannot provide understanding of NGOs and account for the success or failure of their endeavours. Yet, the philosophical bases for their operations, historical factors shaping organisational design and direction, agency personnel, sources of resources, relationships to donors, and the decision-making processes within individual agencies have largely been ignored. It is important that these processes be studied, not only to fill a gap in existing knowledge, but to enable the claims of NGOs to be tested. As others have suggested, the general acceptance of NGOs' comparative advantage is surprising given that their claims remain unproven:

> What is remarkable ... is that there is so little demand for any guarantee of quality from organizations entrusted with millions, sometimes hundreds of millions, of public funds, and even less questioning of what they claim to be achieving. What is evident is a widespread general acceptance that NGOs do a better job than governments in converting aid money into development and helping those most in need (Gezelius and Millwood, 1986:6).

The ultimate test of NGOs' claims should be the efficacy of their field operations in promoting participatory development. However, knowledge of the constraints or advantages affecting NGO behaviour is essential to build better understanding of the difficulties of translating compassion into development practice. Accordingly, this research focuses on NGOs and, to use Tandon's personification, on 'how their heart beats' (1991:69) - the internal and external forces which give life and substance to their field programs.

It is therefore intended that this research will examine the influence of the 'general environment' within which Australian NGOs operate on their behaviour and product - their aid programs. In order to do so, this thesis will describe and analyse the formation, growth, philosophy, organisational design and internal operations of a selection of Australian NGOs. The influence of factors within Australia on agency activities will also be discussed, with particular

focus on the increasingly complex relationship between Australian NGOs and the Australian Government's official aid program. As far as possible, the analysis of the influences on agency behaviour will be used to test the assumptions (outlined previously) made in support of, or in detracting from, the work of NGOs. Similarly, the extent to which these factors allow each NGO to fulfil its own stated objectives will be examined. In so doing, the diversity and complexity of the community of Australian NGOs will be highlighted and differences between the selected agencies accounted for.

In attempting to achieve these aims, a variety of difficulties were encountered. The next chapter of this work briefly explores the methodological bases for the research to follow, outlining sources of information, reasons for selection of case studies, and assumptions made as a basis for analytical comments.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MEANS TO AN END - METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

> A preoccupation with methods on their own account obscures the link between the assumptions that the researcher holds and the overall research effort, giving the illusion that it is the methods themselves, rather than the orientations of the human researcher, that generate particular forms of knowledge (Morgan and Smircich, 1980:499).

The Genesis of the Study

This research was precipitated largely by personal involvement with a number of Australian non-government development aid agencies, variously as a donor, as a teacher of development education, as a member of a project selection committee for one agency, and a board member for another. A personal belief in a moral imperative for the affluent to assist the less fortunate lies behind my involvement in, and support of, NGOs. Accepting the view that they should be better defenders of, and providers for, the needs of the poor than official agencies who are bound by political, strategic and commercial interests, it seems plausible that NGOs should have the capacity to deliver effective development assistance. However, mine is not a blind faith. My experience (or inexperience!) in a decision-making capacity with one agency revealed the fact that some were still engaged in activities, such as the unquestioned supply of tractors at the request of Australian expatriates abroad, which my knowledge of development geography suggested have long been regarded as frequently inappropriate. Thus, despite what seemed to be genuine commitment of their staff to assisting the poor, some agencies appeared to be wasting donated funds or, at worst, creating long-term problems for the recipients of their largesse.

This concern resulted in an exploratory exercise to learn more

about Australian NGOs. It quickly became apparent that published material about agencies was sparse and that there were few existing studies of individual Australian agencies or of the influences on their behaviour (see p. 62-64 and Appendix 2). Given the growth in size and numbers of NGOs in recent years (see pp. 32-35) the scarcity of published information about their activities was surprising. These factors provided the impetus for this research.

Research Design

Definition of the research topic occurred only after careful study of existing international literature about non-government development aid agencies (outlined previously in Chapter Two). The starting point for research about the efficacy of NGOs in catalysing development seemed to be in the field. However, some research has already scrutinized the in-field activities of NGOs (see pp. 58-62). Personal experiences with Australian NGOs suggested that many influences shaped agency policies and operations and that some of these influences related to events and processes within Australia rather than in the field. These factors informed the choice of research topic - to study and describe the 'at-home' operations of Australian NGOs, with two other related major aims:

1. To avoid the temptation to present a judgement about what constitutes a 'good' or 'bad' agency. Instead, to compare agency behaviour with the advantages and disadvantages of NGOs commonly presented in literature about them.
2. To observe and analyse the influences shaping agency behaviour.

With the direction for the study determined, finding appropriate sources of information became the next task. As Donovan observed, 'work is started by a researcher choosing a topic; thereafter, the research is not guided, but is directed by what is discovered and logistical difficulties' (1988:186). The scarcity of documentary and published materials about Australian NGOs dictated the style of this research, making it inevitable that this study be exploratory

and highly descriptive, relying primarily on qualitative research methods. The remainder of this chapter will present a brief discussion about the nature of qualitative research, particularly including reasons for the use of a case study approach to describe and analyse the behaviour of Australian NGOs (see p. 74ff.). Thereafter, the pragmatic details related to gathering data for this research are provided.

From Description to Theory

As discussed above, where little prior knowledge exists about a subject, it is necessary to describe the reality under observation before analysis can take place. In the case of Australian NGOs - organisations of humans acting in the real world - qualitative research methods seemed the most appropriate means of obtaining information to build a profile of the Australian NGO community and profiles of individual NGOs. Information about development philosophy, agency history and changes over time could not be elicited solely through formal surveys or presented in statistical form. Rather, it had to be obtained using qualitative research techniques (discussed more fully later) and presented in descriptive form. For, as Tesch wrote of qualitative and descriptive research:

> When we ask questions about human affairs, the responses come in sentences, not numbers. We collect as 'data' narratives, or, as I like to call them, stories. Likewise, observations result in notes that take the form of a description of events ... (Tesch, 1990:23).

This study is therefore largely descriptive, its purpose being to describe an existing reality in order to enable some critical analysis of the operations of Australian NGOs.

The use of primarily descriptive studies and the presentation of justifications for the adoption of such approaches are not new. One such, well known to students of history, anthropology and sociology, is that of Clifford Geertz who (adopting a term he attributed to Ryle), described the practice of ethnography as 'thick

description' (1973:6). Geertz described thick description as 'microscopic' and as possible only after 'exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters' (Geertz, 1973:21). According to Geertz, the sociological mind is concerned with 'the kind of material produced by long-term (mainly, though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts' (1973:23). 'Thick description' of cases is, in this sense, an interpretative process, in which the researcher searches for meaning in active observation of the nuances in social forms, the aim being 'to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts' (Geertz, 1973:28). Extended participant observation, in which the fieldworker becomes 'immersed in the day-to-day lives of people belonging to the group, community or institution studied' (Meek, 1993:11) is central to such ethnographic case studies. So too is the belief that the researcher should become part of and observe the object of study for extended time periods, with recommendations that a year is necessary for the researcher to become part of the object of study and that at least as much time is necessary to write up the resulting detailed description (Meek, 1993:12). Anthropologists and sociologists in particular rely on participant observation of case studies as a basis for description, interpretation and analysis of culture and social forms.[1]

Participant observation would be a valuable means to employ to allow a 'thick description' of an Australian NGO to be written. However, as outlined previously (p. 3), that is not the aim of this research. In the search for some general truths about Australian NGOs, it is necessary to study several NGOs as case studies to enable subsequent comparative analysis. The limited time available to a research student meant microscopic and comprehensive examination of several cases using participant observation was not possible. However, while this study does not present a microscopic ethnographic

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[1] For example, Wild's (1974) study of class and power in an Australian community and Meek's (1982) study of the University of Papua New Guinea are Australian examples of the ethnographic case study method at work.

description of each NGO studied, it does borrow from the general tradition in qualitative research of the presentation of detailed descriptions or narratives as a basis for analysis. For, in Geertz's words, 'We hope to find in the little what eludes us in the large, to stumble upon general truths while sorting through special cases ' (Geertz, 1968:4), and 'there is no route to general knowledge save though a dense thicket of particulars --- no ascent to truth without descent to cases' (Geertz, 1968:22). In descending to a number of cases, this research does not depend on 'thick description' of a 'dense thicket of particulars' about one case, but favours comparative analysis of a number of cases. However, the data presented remains ethnographically rich. It is hoped that what is lost through the decision not to focus on fine-grained particulars is regained through the comparative analysis of a number of case studies.

Chapters Five to Nine present each case study as a 'profile' of an agency. Comparative analyses of case studies have frequently been used by sociologists in the study of organisations, because

> ... detailed biographical case studies of community groups can be systematically analysed for the purposes of identifying and quantifying common variables, and then formulating generalized propositions and hypotheses (Young and Jamrozik, 1988:4-5).

Thus, it was decided to paint a detailed portrait of each agency as a basis for later comparative analysis. As coherent a picture of each individual agency as possible was developed in the time available - a picture of each NGO which would stand alone to facilitate comparative analysis. Thematic presentation of information about several agencies would not build in the reader's mind the same portrait of each NGO as a unique organisation. Therefore, each agency is described in a separate chapter. A brief analysis at the end of each chapter draws out major themes, and compares the agency in question with the general advantages and disadvantages of NGOs outlined in Chapter Two. Thereafter, Chapter Ten presents a comparative analysis of all agencies studied, relying on the premise that '...comparative analyses may also assist in steering clear of "easy" explanations' (Eyles, 1988:12). Chapter Ten therefore explores the similarities and differences between agencies, with constant

reference to the advantages and disadvantages of NGOs as the basis for analysis.

Finally, a brief conclusion presents some generalisations based on observations of the NGO community as a whole, and on the case studies in particular, as a contribution to theoretical understanding about the mechanisms which influence the behaviour of non-government development aid organisations. This study enables such a conclusion, for

> Theory is based on observations of one particular section of reality. Theory is conceived not in terms of logical deductions but relations between observed phenomena ... (Eyles, 1988:4).

To attempt to gain as comprehensive an understanding of each organisation as possible within the time available, a variety of data gathering techniques were used. Key-informant interviewing, structured and semi-structured interviewing, document studies, a survey and informal discussions were all used to obtain data with which to build a description of each case study NGO. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the pragmatic issues related to choice of case studies for this research, to constraints influencing the extent of the research, to data gathering techniques, and to interpretation of collected information.

The Overview of the Australian NGO Community

To provide some understanding of the breadth and diversity of the Australian NGO community, a brief questionnaire (see Appendix 3) was mailed to the seventy-five member agencies of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) in mid-1988. By the end of the year, sixty-one questionnaries (81%) were returned. The surprisingly high percentage of respondents reflected the following:

a) that questions asked were straightforward and non-threatening, requiring straightforward answers and demanding little time of respondents;

b) that a stamped, addressed return envelope was enclosed;
c) that an offer was made to share collated survey results with interested agencies;
d) that agency staff are frequently dedicated and highly motivated individuals who are willing to give time to share information.

Much of the information collected by means of this survey has not been used directly in this thesis. Formal surveys have been widely and usefully employed in research as a valuable source of data (Selltiz et al., 1976:294-296). However, the limitations for qualitative research imposed by prescriptive questions which largely dictate responses have been well documented (Selltiz, et al., 1976:314-316; Eyles, 1988:7). For this study, the survey provided the author with a broad view of the range of activities undertaken by Australian agencies, their age, countries in which they work, fund-raising techniques used and the extent of their affiliations with international organisations, with the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, and with the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau. This knowledge informed Chapter Four on the history of the Australian NGO community and provided some information to assist in the selection of case studies.

It was essential to produce a more detailed background picture of the growth and development of the Australian NGO community than a mailed survey could provide. To study documents held by agencies or to interview staff of all agencies to collate the necessary information would have been a daunting task. The number of Australian NGOs alone militated against such an approach. Further, informal discussions with agency staff at conferences led to the conviction that many agencies had kept few, if any, detailed records of past activities, and that the collective memories of key individuals with a long history of involvement with NGOs would best be able to provide information to enable description of the NGO community as a whole. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with key figures in the NGO community and in the NGO section of the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (listed in Appendix 4). Acquaintances working in Australian agencies identified key personnel, and each interviewee subsequently suggested other possible sources of

information.

Formal requests (by letter) were made to each potential interviewee, and no requests were refused. Interviews, which aimed to obtain general information about the history of Australian NGOs, were unstructured and informal, encouraging individuals to reminisce and to explore their memories of events. Discussions of the following themes were encouraged:

1. Major trends/changes in the NGO community over time;
2. Isolated significant events in the life of the community;
3. The impact of the availability of government funds on the NGO community;
4. Major issues facing the NGO community today and in the future.

These broad interviews isolated significant events in the history of the community. The recurrence of common answers, called 'repertoire accounts' by Cornwall (1988:227), pointed the way for further research, including the study of primary and secondary sources relating to the Australian NGO community, particularly records held at the library of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid in Canberra and at the Ideas Centre in Sydney. Wherever possible, documentary evidence was used to corroborate and extend information recorded during interviews.

Informal discussions were held with staff of various NGOs at Conferences, particularly at the ACFOA Annual Conferences in Canberra in 1988, 1989 and 1990, and at the AIDAB/NGO Consultations in the same years. Over meals or drinks, staff shared information openly, and were a valuable source of ideas and information, enlarging understanding of the community as a whole. While such information could be dismissed as gossip, I share the view of social scientists who employ ethnographic research techniques that 'gossip, value-laden statements, and opinions - however ill-informed they may be - are an important part of the historical record of any organisation' (Meek, 1984:20). In addition to some published materials, the sources described above provided the basis for the historical overview of the Australian voluntary aid community in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The Case Study Approach

From the inception of the research project, it was intended to select a few case studies because 'one of the basic purposes of the case study method is comprehensive understanding of social phenomena under investigation' (Meek, 1984:3). It was expected that study of several individual organisations would enable some comparative analysis and generalisations to be drawn about the influences on their behaviour; about the extent to which the context of Australian NGOs dictates their policy and practice. The idea that 'grounded theory is generated by comparative analysis' (Donovan, 1988:186) is a common basis for geographical studies. It was planned to develop a profile of several agencies to enable such a comparison. In light of the various classification systems of NGOs (discussed on pp. 36-37) and knowledge of the community as a whole, the plan was to select a range of agencies which encompassed the following characteristics:

1. a mix of secular and church-based agencies;
2. a mix of recently formed and long-established agencies;
3. a mix of agency purposes - single purpose, relief orientation, general development focus;
4. a mix of agencies selected according to size.

In late 1988 before embarking on case study selection and research, I learnt of a joint research project of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, the National Centre for Development Studies at the Australian National University, and the Monash Development Studies Centre. After discussions with the team, it was apparent that its research was progressing in a similar vein to my own. I was subsequently invited to join the team and prepare agency case studies for the project, during the period February 1989 to May 1991. The arrangement was mutually beneficial; I was permitted to play a large part in project design and financial assistance was provided for completion of interviews and production of agency profiles. This association with the Australian Council For Overseas Aid facilitated access to agency staff and records which probably would not have been available to an individual research student. The

resulting agency case studies and the background chapter already prepared for this research contributed to a publication prepared by the research team (see Zivetz et al., 1991).

Involvement in the tripartite study affected the final selection of case studies. At a 'brainstorming' session of the research team, a choice of sixteen Australian NGOs was made for that study. From this number, I selected those I considered to be appropriate for my research. For pragmatic reasons, agencies based in Sydney were selected; my location in Sydney at the time meant the costs of research would be minimised. At the request of the Australian Council For Overseas Aid, I also agreed to study one Melbourne-based agency, Community Aid Abroad, which suited well the planned selection criteria outlined earlier. The agencies finally selected and the reasons for the choice are outlined below.

Three church-based agencies - the Australian Board of Missions (ABM), Australian Catholic Relief (ACR) and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) - and two secular agencies - Appropriate Technology and Community Environment (APACE) and Community Aid Abroad (CAA) - were selected as case studies. Of these, APACE and ABM are small in terms of staff employed and funds distributed, while the remaining agencies are among Australia's largest. ABM is one of Australia's oldest agencies, CAA has existed for nearly forty years and ACR for nearly thirty years (see Appendix 1). APACE and ADRA have more recent origins. APACE is a special purpose organisation, focusing on the design and provision of technology appropriate to the needs of communities in developing countries. ABM was a traditional missionary organisation which is today involved in the administration of development projects and ADRA was first formed as a relief agency. ACR and CAA have had development work as their focus since their formation, although strategies used in attempting to catalyse development have changed over time.

Apart from these facts, little was known about the philosophies, objectives, structures, constituencies or activities of these organisations. It was expected that together they would illustrate

something of the diversity of the Australian NGO community. It was important to study enough agencies to enable comparative analysis, whilst also enabling study in some detail - hence the selection of only five case studies. Intensive collection of data about case study NGOs through interviews and document analysis commenced in March 1989 and continued until September 1990. By that time, more than enough information had been collected to permit writing of descriptive profiles sufficiently detailed to enable a subsequent comparative analysis to be undertaken. The completed case studies follow the historical overview of the NGO community, and form Chapters Five to Nine of this thesis. The methods used to obtain detailed information for the case studies are discussed in the following pages.

The Research Tools

As observed elsewhere, documentary material and secondary sources about Australian NGOs are scarce (see pp. 61ff. and Appendix 2). In addition, given that through my own experience as a volunteer with NGOs I had observed the sensitivity of many agencies to any outside criticism which could jeopardise their fund-raising success, it seemed unlikely that unlimited access to agency files would be allowed. The fact that paper records frequently reveal only a partial or sanitised version of events (Selltiz, et al., 1976:380-383) also restricted their usefulness. Thus, although analysis of documentary sources has economic advantages (Selltiz, et al., 1976:372), this was not a viable option as the main source of descriptive information for this research. As previously outlined, participant observation techniques, frequently used in the study of organisations or community groups (e.g. Wild, 1981:50-57; Meek, 1984:19-20; Evans, 1988), were considered too time intensive for the comparative study of several organisations (see p. 69). The exploratory nature of the research ruled out the use of formal survey techniques. As has been noted of such techniques, '... formal survey methods using questionnaires or standardised and tightly scheduled interviews restrict research subjects to a limited range of responses' (Cornwall, 1988:24). With

these considerations in mind, informal, unstructured interviews were selected as the most appropriate means of eliciting descriptive information about selected NGOs. Unstructured interviews were more likely to give access to individuals' interpretations of events and their understanding of why they occurred.

Initially, the director of each agency was contacted to ask permission to interview staff and a first interview was conducted with the director. Each person interviewed introduced others, facilitating the aim of interviewing as widely as possible within each organisation. Where possible, past agency staff were interviewed to promote understanding of the historical development of each agency. Despite the expectation (expressed earlier, see p. 76) that agencies would be reluctant to divulge sensitive information, in most cases, those interviewed were surprisingly forthcoming, perhaps reflecting the care taken in dealings with agency personnel. With hindsight, this openess can be attributed to several other factors. Firstly, assurances that confidentiality would be respected if interviewees desired it, added to the willingness of some to provide sensitive information. To respect such wishes, much information in case study descriptions is ascribed variously to an 'interviewee', 'a staff-member' or an 'informant'. A complete list of those interviewed, together with the position they held at the time of the interview, is included at the end of the study (see Appendix 4). The comment was made by a staff member of one small agency that they had 'nothing to lose by being honest'. As a small group with little real power, it felt it would not be damaged by honesty about its failings and hoped the research process would contribute positively to agency learning. The Australian Board of Missions offered unlimited access to agency files. Staff of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (South Pacific Division) were extremely open, revealing facts which, if misused, could be damaging to the agency's reputation. On the other hand, Australian Catholic Relief exerted more control over the research process, with its National Executive Director arranging interviews and selecting resources he believed were relevant to the research. Thus, it is possible that only a sanitised version of events was heard. Additionally, my

employment to assist in a tripartite study of Australian NGOs (see p. 74-75) added credibility to my research and certainly facilitated access to agency staff and records. The National Director of Community Aid Abroad was so receptive as to personally organise accommodation with agency voluntary staff. Most agency staff interviewed believed research into NGO activity would assist all NGOs to learn from each other, so were supportive of the research effort. Despite variations in the extent to which each agency's staff were prepared to comment on agency shortcomings, discussions with past agency staff members, documentary materials and informal conversations with NGO representatives at conferences assisted to provide sufficient information to allow the presentation of detailed descriptions of the selected agencies.

An interview schedule was prepared by Dr. John McKay of the Monash Development Studies Centre for the tripartite study, after collaboration with all members of the tripartite research team (see Appendix 5). While the questions undoubtedly shaped the interviews conducted and therefore should be acknowledged, they were quickly abandoned as a research tool, for, to use Cornwall's words, they '... changed the atmosphere from one which was relatively informal and relaxed where the interviewee had a degree of control over the topics, to one which was comparatively tense and hostile in which I asked questions they were expected to answer' (Cornwall, 1988:225). Eyles similarly noted that when questions are asked and recorded in a standardized form, 'they tend to force replies into particular categories which respondents may or may not have thought about' (Eyles, 1988:7). The prepared questions were therefore used only as a checklist to encourage talk along certain lines, and questions and conversational style were tailored to suit the individuals interviewed, without assuming that 'appropriate question phrasing and style of answer are known in advance' (Eyles, 1988:8). Additionally, the type of agency studied guided the research approach. As Evans suggested, 'the management of impressions on the part of the researcher is guided by the type of community under study (e.g. a three piece suit, briefcase and clipboard will appear incongruous and suspicious in a working men's club)' (1988:207). Thus, the

reputedly conservative agencies met a researcher who was attired in the female equivalent of a three piece suit, while the more radical were approached in the hand-woven, 'made-in-India' garb frequently worn by staff of aid agencies!

In relation to her study of lay health benefits, Cornwall noted that '... all studies are shaped by social relations which can pose theoretical and practical difficulties or obstacles to the work, and that researchers should make this explicit in their accounts of the research process' (1988:230). In particular, 'difficulties that arise out of the researcher's own attributes' (Cornwall, 1988:230), such as age and gender, were presented as obstacles hindering access to potential sources of information. Conversely, Schoenberger suggested 'I have an easier time getting in the door than a male colleague because, as a woman, I am less threatening ...' (Schoenberger, 1992:217). Similarly, noting the significance in gender relations and the differential power involved in research contexts, McDowell argued that '... we should recognize the intersubjectivity of the relations between a researcher and her subjects and that, as a consequence, the knowledge that is acquired is contextual and interpersonal' (McDowell, 1992:214). In my case, age and gender seemed to be beneficial. Agency staff did not regard a young female or her research activities as personally threatening or as likely to result in a negative impact on their organisation. Thus, interviews were readily agreed to, and agency staff were generally prepared to trust quite sensitive information to the researcher. Additionally, my support of, and involvement with, some NGOs was known. This contributed to a perception of a researcher who was sympathetic to the aims of the agencies and, if critical of them, at least willing to understand the constraints under which they worked. My employment by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid as their member of the tripartite study research team also placed me in a position which may have influenced responses. However, those interviewed knew I was not normally associated with ACFOA. ACFOA was keen to maintain what its staff called 'academic respectability' by ensuring that the research be conducted independently of the Council. Nevertheless, the association with ACFOA opened doors;

at least one of the agencies studied does not normally allow students access to its staff or records.

Extensive note-taking was used as a means of recording information received during interviews. Immediately after each interview, notes were checked and corrected according to my memory of events. However, some distortions inevitably occurred because of partial recording, because of inaccurate interpretation of events, but chiefly because 'all interviews, like any social interaction, are structured by both researcher and informant' (Eyles, 1988:8). Social science research relying on qualitative methodologies is inevitably value-laden, reflecting the perceptions of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Those interviewed do not necessarily tell the truth, or at least are selective in what they do tell. Their views, as well as the researcher's own, are coloured by self-interest and individual personality traits. Thus, 'the material we use to describe the world are our representations and constructions of other peoples' representations and constructions of what is occurring in the social world ' (Eyles, 1988:3). Wild argued that all knowledge is limited, not only by the informant, but also by understanding on the part of the researcher: 'In my view, a total reality cannot be objectively grasped by the human mind. Any view of the world must be limited and partial and the meaning that it has is given in terms of the researcher's values' (1981:13). Similarly, Johnston wrote of humanistic geography that 'it is not possible for a human geographer to be a neutral observer, because what one observes is a consequence of the meanings that one applies' (1986:54).

Therefore, given that problems of selectivity and interpretation of information are unavoidable in research dependent on interviews, it seemed important to employ other research methods to obtain information, for

> It is important to strike a balance between the objective and the subjective, between hard and soft data, for although participant observation is the core method of community studies, it must always be supplemented with surveys of various types in order to support qualitative propositions, establish representativeness and provide a basis for comparative analysis (Wild, 1981:55).

Although participant observation was not the method used as a basis for this research, Wild's comments are pertinent. Thus, in attempting to present a balanced view of each agency, documentary evidence has been used, wherever possible, to corroborate information recorded during interviews. Every effort was made to verify oral evidence with more than one other interview or with written material. As others have observed, documents too present problems concerning their authenticity, availability, selectivity and meaning (Selltiz et al., 1976:379-397; Eyles, 1988:10). However, used in tandem with interviews, this 'methodological pluralism' (Wild, 1981:50) provided a balance in sources of information and enabled detailed description of the case studies. Thus, despite problems related to the subjectivity of the research context (which pervade all qualitative research), the variety of methods used to procure information and check its accuracy provided more than adequate substance for detailed descriptions of each case study agency to be written. Internal consistency and consensus of opinions within interviews gave further credence to the validity of information supplied, enabling the presentation of accurate descriptions of the workings of a small number of NGOs. To further ensure accuracy, persons who had been interviewed were sent draft copies of the completed profile of their agency and were requested to check the factual accuracy of its content. Some corrections were subsequently made, although analytical material or conclusions remain the views of the researcher.

In short, despite the methodological difficulties encountered in efforts to study the community of Australian non-government development aid organisations, detailed descriptions of individual agencies have made possible a comparative analysis of their policies and practices. This analysis allows a positive contribution to be made to the existing body of knowledge about NGOs. Accordingly, as a basis for that analysis, the following chapters present detailed descriptions of the Australian NGO community as a whole and of five selected agencies.