

helping themselves. The involvement of people in the process of helping themselves is a cornerstone of good development. This has been realized by many development agencies, hence the importance they attach to PMs. Today, no NGO or development organization worth its reputation feels it is doing, or is seen to be doing, a good job without using a PM of one kind or another. I have no quarrel with PMs as such, it just depends on how one uses them. My main concern is that, despite the increase in the number of NGOs, PMs, and after many years of poverty alleviation, poverty continues to be rife and communities continue to languish in it. There is no doubt, then, that something is wrong. It must either be that NGOs and/or PMs—the tools of their

trade—are ineffective, or that NGOs use PMs wrongly. My view is the latter.

Note

- 1 An earlier version of this article was presented by the author at a PAMFORK Participatory Methodologies Workshop held on 24–27 September 1996 at Resurrection Gardens, Karen-Nairobi, and was published in *Baobab*, Issue 22 (May 1997).

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Practical Notes

Soup kitchens, women and social policy: studies from Peru

Luiba Kogan

Introduction

The worsening situation in Peru has profoundly affected the daily lives of poor women. State spending cuts coincided with the worst recession this century, and with the outbreak of terrorism. Soup kitchens, organized by women's groups, emerged from the early 1980s to address food shortages.¹

In 1996, a multi-disciplinary team from the Peruvian non-governmental organizations ALTERNATIVA, FOVIDA, and INCAFAM, examined the challenges facing these kitchens, from the perspective of the women. Information was drawn from interviews with leaders and members of 12 soup kitchens in Lima; from the 21 women who took part in a workshop on soup kitchens; and interviews with leaders of the Federation of Organizations of Self-Managed Soup Kitchens of Lima and Callao.

Soup kitchens

There are two types of soup kitchen: the self-managed variety that makes decisions autonomously and negotiates agreements with various donors; and those that started as mothers' clubs, are recognized by the state, and depend on government programmes. Initially, the former merely pre-

pared food, while the latter also engaged in such activities as day-care services and minor business enterprises (mainly involving sewing and knitting). Now many more soup kitchens are acting as bases for 'connected activities'—income-generation or social services aimed at cutting family expenses.²

Soup kitchens operate on communal premises that may be rented, borrowed, or owned. Working conditions depend on the space, infrastructure, equipment, and utensils. Membership also varies. Self-managed soup kitchens average 35 members, though some have as many as 100. Mothers' clubs average 60 members. In both cases, active members work cooking shifts and receive a set amount of meals in return, while ordinary members buy food and take part in assemblies. Soup kitchens prepare between 100 and 560 daily meals and charge a unit price of less than one new sol,³ which does not cover the actual cost. Law 25307 (yet to be fully enacted) will require the state to subsidize at least 65 per cent of the food costs of social organizations that provide meals.

Soup kitchens start at about 5.30 a.m. when some women go to market while the others start on cooking. By mid-day everything is ready. The women serve meals in receptacles the members bring, and clean the kitchen before going home to eat. Meals are cooked in daily shifts by two to four women, who usually cook once a week. However, if someone cannot work her shift, she can pay a substitute—the amount and method of payment is worked out between them.

All soup kitchens belong to a central body either at zone or district level.⁴ Most have statutes and regulations, but not all are

legally incorporated. Organizational structures usually comprise a governing board (chair, secretary, treasurer, social worker, and auditor) and a decision-making assembly. Most hold monthly meetings, but some meet more often. Issues concern the functioning of the soup kitchen (accounts, receipts, cooking shifts, food supply, and meal standards) and organization (training, new members, selection of welfare cases,³ reports to the central body, and relations with outside agents). Soup kitchens that engage in connected activities also report on these.

Soup kitchen assemblies seldom deal with women's specific problems, such as family conflicts and domestic abuse. However, the governing board may exonerate members from payment for meals, or take other action, for instance in cases of extreme physical abuse.

Connected activities

These have arisen in response to demands from members and to offers from agencies such as development NGOs or the state. The involvement of soup kitchen members in running 'connected activities' is geared largely to their ages and the number and age of their children, as this determines the time they can dedicate. Women become involved for various reasons, but the main one is the desire to help their children or partners: personal aspirations do not enter into it. The more personal reasons given for taking part, like awareness-raising, self-esteem, and the possibility of learning new skills, stem from a deeper desire to help their families although women have developed expectations that were not previously voiced through belonging to the soup kitchens—such as their interest in earning cash, coupled with the wish to serve their families and community.

The desire for an income as well as for services was clear in the interviews. However, no soup kitchen we saw has yet run these services with enough collective orga-

nization to satisfy members' needs. However, the emergence of connected activities enabled us to analyse new processes within these organizations, together with the rise of new tensions, such as solidarity versus market economics, or individual versus collective gain.

Among the studies were soup kitchens that had not embarked on connected activities, others that had started running medicine dispensaries or early education programmes (PRONEI), and others that run activities like guinea-pig breeding, bakeries, communal shops, and yoghurt and jam-making. We found only one that engaged both in economic and social services. These activities are not formally incorporated in the organizational structure of the soup kitchen. Those in charge report on progress to the assemblies: as often as not, they are themselves also the soup kitchen leaders.

We found situations where connected services were recognized both by the community and soup kitchen members. However, we also saw problems. In the case of dispensaries, these included finding people to replace those in charge (because they are the only ones qualified to provide the services), observing regular opening times, lack of clients, and so on. As regards PRONEI, the main problem is the low wage that supervisors or teachers receive for this work.

We found some successful income-generation activities in the sense that they were managing to make a profit, with the proceeds ploughed back into the soup kitchens. Most activities are not complex, have low output levels, and produce limited gains. If they do generate any profit, this is because the workers are unpaid. However, the women's perception of connected activities is a sense of stability or permanence in their daily operations, with little thought for whether they are efficient or effective in economic or social terms. Members have identified significant accomplishments as well as limitations. They suggest that the continuity of

connected activities depends on their commitment, though this may be changing since some hope to improve the way activities function in order to obtain real economic gain. Thus, tensions have developed between some members over the need to obtain individual income to supplement family earnings and to create jobs both for themselves and family members.

Well, I volunteered to take charge of the dispensary, but they don't pay me a wage, you see? So I need to work. I'm wasting my time here helping the doctor and not getting paid for my trouble.

The years go by and I'm permanently stuck in the soup kitchen. I give of my all to help others, but what's in it for me? That's why I'm thinking of leaving the soup kitchen for a while ... All the women here have got jobs on the side. I've got to think about myself, my old age. I need a job too.

These tensions stem mainly from the fact that the women involved are unremunerated. Several women said that by leaving the soup kitchen they could earn more money. However, staying guarantees a secure supply of decent food. Further, the hours they spend cooking and taking part in connected activities are not overly demanding, and they work in their own neighbourhood near their children. However, we found that several women were suffering a conflict of ideals, where the desire to serve the community was tempered by the question of whether it was worthwhile to continue investing their own time and effort for no pay. For many leaders who are also in charge of connected activities, the conflict is intensified by the excessive workload.

I had too much on my plate having to find time for the soup kitchen and the dispensary as well. I had a double schedule because I was the zone co-ordinator. At that time we had 84 soup kitchens on the go ... I'd have to shut the dispensary to go to the assembly.

Someone would come round for their medicine but the doña wasn't there because she'd gone to the assembly.

However, other leaders do not feel the added strain, either because the extra work is not too demanding, because they see this as an investment rewarded by learning a new skill, or because the service benefits their families.

Benefits and sacrifices

Personal benefits and sacrifices

Women who get involved in connected activities, or those who work only on the food service side, can expect both personal and family benefits and sacrifices. However, in the soup kitchen, all the activities blend into a single daily experience, making it hard to pinpoint the area in which the learning or capacity-building process occurs.

In the case of simple soup kitchens, the chief benefit is access to cheap meals. There is also a sense of security in knowing that one can count on the emotional support provided through working in a friendly environment. This helped women to learn to communicate better and to speak with greater confidence both inside and away from the soup kitchen. They said this had shown them how to function in a group and to get along better with others. They also appreciated the training they received and what they have learnt about management, organization, and women's rights.

However, there are frustrations and sacrifices. Many women are increasingly convinced that soup kitchens do not satisfy their economic needs because they do not undertake activities to supplement their incomes, while their organizational or cooking efforts are unpaid. Additionally, many soup kitchen leaders are so over-burdened that their personal and family lives suffer. And the soup kitchens are often the scene of fierce and difficult disputes between members.

Soup kitchens with connected activities also have their share of benefits and sacrifices. Benefits include learning new skills (e.g. guinea-pig breeding, bread-making, pharmaceuticals management) or acquiring knowledge that can quickly be of use in the home (e.g. administering injections, treating illness, early child education), or that could serve in the future to set up a small business or workshop. Membership in a soup kitchen also provides access to certain 'perks', like medical attention, extra food, or medicines. Some women benefit from the possibility of earning a part-time income by working in dispensaries administering injections or standing in for others unable to work their shifts.

One drawback to participating in connected activities is that women receive little financial incentive to do so. Another is that it can be difficult to replace those in charge because only they have the administrative or productive skills. These women are under pressure not to give up their work, in spite of the added burden and the conflict with their family responsibilities.

I don't let on about my problems, at home at least. I've spent years ... 11 years ... in the soup kitchen. My kids were small back then. I've neglected them a lot. They're older now. There'd be no point leaving them breakfast served on the table or taking them their lunch: 'Here's your lunch. Eat.' I've treated them like objects. Now time has passed and they say to me: 'Mum, you spend loads of time at the soup kitchen and hardly any with us.' They're right.

Personal changes

Involvement in connected activities has changed the way women perceive themselves. Although these changes are not radical or profound, they are important. When they first started managing soup kitchens, they were silent, submissive, unskilled, and unsure of themselves. Now they have

acquired confidence, self-assurance, knowledge, and self-esteem.

Before I was stuck in the house and never went out. I always looked after my kids and did the housework. Going out was good because I learnt to become a leader, to talk to people. I trained myself and became aware of reality: how we should be; how we should work. This has helped me to change. It's given me different outlook on life. Now I feel more sure of myself, no longer worrying that someone's going to pull the wool over my eyes ...

It is difficult to separate the impact of connected activities from that of the soup kitchen. Women's involvement in economic or social projects affects their personal development, teaching them to communicate and overcome the shyness and humility that had prevented them from expressing their views; the soup kitchen has given them the means to develop self-assurance and awareness of women's rights, and provided a space for leisure, emotional stability, and social contact.

Skills and capacity building

Women value the capacities and skills acquired through participating in a soup kitchen and connected activities. Access to information and capacity-building gives a boost to the self-assurance, feelings of power, and recognition from applying this knowledge, both at the soup kitchen, and in other spheres.

The basic skills acquired are to be able to cook low-cost quality meals for the community, and a considerable capacity for organization. Women who become involved in connected activities also develop the skills needed for a particular type of social service or productive enterprise. For example, the women who help run dispensaries learn about basic medicines, how to treat common complaints, administration, and first aid. The leaders who promote PRONEI

learn how to negotiate with state education bodies, and have a greater capacity for organization and communicating information on children's rights. Productive activities teach women skills in areas such as business management, marketing, business administration, loan negotiation, and customer service.

Social recognition

The women feel that their work in soup kitchens is socially recognized by the community and/or by their organization, though the connected activities often suffer from the lack of interest from members and others who are not directly involved. However, these are accepted as making a social contribution at least by service-users if not by community groups and institutions.

Gender relations

Women's participation affects the relationships between couples and how the home is run. The main issue is women's need to find time for the activities and assemblies, which involves restructuring work and responsibilities, especially with respect to household chores and child care.

He would say, 'Now you're working in the soup kitchen you forget about the children', but that's not true. I still do all the things I normally do, washing clothes and cleaning. It was only at first that he'd get a bit annoyed because I'd be called to an emergency meeting and I'd have to go, leaving the laundry half done, say, when I was supposed to wash that day. Then he'd say, 'You see. You couldn't do the laundry because of the soup kitchen.'

A woman's participation may not produce positive changes in her relationship with her partner, although the 'old-timers' have usually managed to get their partners to accept it, especially since the men cannot earn the family's keep.

While he had a job he'd say that because of the soup kitchen you don't get anything done in the home, because of the soup kitchen you don't look after the kids as you used to, that's what got him. He didn't know how to deal with his problems away from home, so he'd take it out on me ... I'd wonder if he wasn't right, but then decided not to take any notice. I'd only be leaving the soup kitchen for his sake so I decided to stand firm and that's why I'm still here ... I don't get bored with it. I've got to stay here because that's how I help. Even if it's only a plate of food, it's still something. That shuts him up and he doesn't bother much any more. He's slowly coming to terms with my job.

Overall, however, women's involvement in soup kitchens has led to domestic tension and conflict. Sometimes the husband manages to forget his insecurity and distrust, while the women gain independence and confidence. However, it is rare for a husband to do his share of the housework: even when he is unemployed he is reluctant to help at home because he sees this as 'women's work'. It is usually the children—the daughters—who take on the household chores when their mothers are out. So, while men's initial rejection and hostility may have changed to resignation, appreciation, or even collaboration, there are no substantial or widespread changes towards gender equality and a fairer distribution of domestic labour.

Older children provide support by doing the housework and helping at the soup kitchen when they collect the day's meals. Children seem to recognize and value their mothers' contribution, but some are fiercely critical of the fact that they make no money, and imply that 'they are wasting their time'. Of course, each family situation influences how the children see things; but children tend to be more understanding and supportive than husbands.

Outlook for soup kitchen organizations

Soup kitchen and connected activities

Soup kitchen members know that they satisfy the food needs of the poor by providing low-cost and even free meals (for so-called 'welfare cases'). But the service is seen by them merely as a palliative: if the kitchens were to disappear, there would be no solution to food shortages. However, many women probably feel the real solution lies within the family.

At the same time, women are also looking beyond the soup kitchen for ways to earn money for themselves and to secure employment. They do not see the connected activities as an effective means of solving their needs, or as fulfilling their earlier expectations. On the face of it, women get involved in order to learn useful new skills.

Overall, the soup kitchens are the clearest and most solid example the members have of satisfying basic needs. The kitchens that also undertake social service activities are seen as benefiting the community, while those that only operate a meals service or income-generation activities are seen as benefiting only the members and their families. Some feel that the soup kitchens should stick to providing a meals service, while others believe they should address women's need for child-care, literacy, self-esteem training, and income-generation activities. Some, however, consider that the soup kitchen is not a suitable environment for addressing women-specific problems, arguing that women's problems—like domestic abuse—are private matters, or that women-specific problems should be dealt with by the state.

Leaders who are considering whether to start up connected activities are well aware of critical issues that must be resolved beforehand. Apart from the problems inherent in any business activity, they understand the need for sound and efficient administration, which calls for dedication, time, and skills;

care over the technical aspects of production; and machinery and equipment that are technologically competitive. External aspects mentioned were the importance of market research, publicity, and a marketing strategy to ensure the venture's profitability.

When embarking on social services, members emphasized the need for good co-ordination with state bodies like the Ministries of Health or Education, in order to optimize quality and gain support so that the activity can be properly structured and managed.

The soup kitchen women proposed three main courses of action:

- 1 *To improve the connected activity in progress:* Soup kitchens propose to continue and improve their existing activities. In income-generation activities this involves adapting administration and management, raising output and productivity, and improving product quality. The relationship with the soup kitchen would be unchanged, and the gains from the enterprise would benefit the collective. In social service activities, improvements would take the form of strengthening and expanding into other fields.
- 2 *To turn the activity into a small business:* This would involve volunteer work by members with the necessary skills and knowledge. Benefits would be individual, that is only for the members involved.
- 3 *To implement income-generation activities in those soup kitchens that currently offer only a meals service:* There is a strong desire for productive activities, especially garment-making, since many soup kitchens have received donated machinery of this sort.

In summary, soup kitchens are much valued for their contributions to the living standards of members and their families. Connected activities are less appreciated because of the problems they entail. Paradoxically, however, the latter continue to generate high hopes in terms of the possibility of generat-

ing an income, whether collective or individual.

Relations with external bodies

Women do feel that soup kitchens should become less dependent on the government. Hence, there is a strong belief in the need to complete the enactment of Law 25307, since it will commit the state to providing consistent and substantial support that will meet the needs of soup kitchen organizations while moving away from a charity focus. According to the soup kitchen members, private agents compete with each other over delivery and type of food donated, and even insist on being the sole private supplier.

The women's main demands centre on basic community services such as water, electricity, and sewage; good quality food; infrastructure and equipment; financial incentives; and access to credit. Most grassroots organizations are relatively unaware of the changes taking place in the role of the state—changes which will do little to encourage the further consolidation of the soup kitchen organizations, or address anything other than short-term needs.

The women feel that government agencies and NGOs should help in developing co-ordinated platforms of action with other grassroots organizations, in order to make concrete plans and engage on a wider scale. The Federation of Organizations of Self-Managed Soup Kitchens of Lima and Callao has attempted to negotiate with the state. However, difficulties have arisen owing to the government's policy of non-negotiation with grassroots organizations, and to its disregard of the Federation by going directly to the grassroots with its support. The PRONAA (National Food Assistance Programme) is a prime example.

In spite of the apparent reluctance of private or state bodies to negotiate, there are areas such as health, food, and income-generation where there is an opportunity for joint work and where the Federation could

boost the state's poverty-focused efforts. The key to this lies in its organizational capacity, its knowledge, and its ability to develop criteria for focusing help on the poorest sectors.

In conclusion, our interviews suggest a need for a social strategy that takes women's demands into account, particularly their economic demands, while strengthening the soup kitchen movement as a civil organization.

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Notes

- 1 There are several types of grassroots women's food organizations: mothers' clubs, soup kitchens and Glass of Milk Committees. In 1994, Lima had some 15,000 such organizations. According to 1991 figures, 570,000 meals were distributed in Metropolitan Lima daily, benefiting 13 per cent of poor families and 8.5 per cent of families overall (Ministry of Labour, 1992 Metropolitan Lima Households Survey, in National Report on Women, Fourth World Conference on Women, Ministry of Justice, 1995).
- 2 Henceforth, *soup kitchen* refers to both types of project.
- 3 One new sol equals approximately US\$0.42.
- 4 Each type of organization has its own form of centralized, representative organ at metropolitan, provincial or departmental level. There is no body uniting them all, however.
- 5 'Welfare cases' are individuals or families unable to meet the cost of meals. Soup kitchens assume this cost until their circumstances improve.

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Gender-awareness and policies: theory and practice among small NGOs

Jeannette Leskes

Introduction

In recent years, many non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) have committed themselves to addressing gender inequality in their development work, making this an important aspect of their organizational priorities. In addition, the role of NGDOs has changed since the 1980s, and they are now acknowledged both as serious catalysts for change while many are attempting to become more efficient and professional (Korten 1987).

In the light of this apparent synthesis of gender-awareness issues on the one hand, and the 'new' role of NGDOs on the other, we have to ask whether small NGDOs (small in size with a budget of less than £1 million a year) have succeeded in taking up this new challenge within their existing organizational structures. If they have, how

did they do it and do they have any advantages over the larger NGDOs?

The main reason for examining small NGDOs is that little is known about their practices regarding gender. Examples of good practice can help others like them in the dual process of institutionalizing gender and bringing about social change.

Gender: an emerging concept for small NGOs?

With a new focus on gender, gender planning and policies have also emerged. Larger NGDOs tend to have developed more gender-aware policies and practices than smaller ones (NAWO, 1993). For instance, large organizations such as Oxfam GB and the Dutch volunteer agency SNV deliberately recruit gender specialists and are institutionalizing gender each in their own way. Many have developed gender policies in order to guide personnel working abroad in how to address gender issues within their work, as well as designing staff training programmes. But what about the practices of smaller NGDOs?

In an attempt to answer this question, the author carried out a research study among 13 small NGDOs (eight UK-based international donor agencies and five Cameroonian organizations). The study examined:

- the level of gender-awareness in these NGDOs by questioning their gender-awareness and practices;
- the integration of gender issues into their organizational structures; and
- the practical integration of gender at the counterpart project level.

The main findings were that at the organizational level:

- all organizations were aware of the concept of gender and acknowledged its importance, but showed a wide range of ideas as to what gender actually means;
- most organizations had not devised any specific way of incorporating gender into

their programmes because they had no specific person or unit responsible for gender issues;

- organizations with staff specifically responsible for gender progressed furthest in putting their gender-awareness into practice, especially at project level;
- male NGDO employees at all levels were hardly engaged in gender issues.

At the policy level:

- only one organization had developed a gender policy, and one was in the process of developing one;
- although gender-transformative policies are advocated by some of the organizations, these are seldom implemented;
- the welfare and anti-poverty approach were the most common among the sample of NGDOs.

At the project level:

- most of the organizations researched did not carry out a gender analysis before starting their projects;
- women's participation in the projects is seen as important, although often limited to the implementation phase.

What problems do small NGOs face?

The findings indicated that most of these organizations were familiar with the concept of gender-awareness, but had not devised any strategies to incorporate this at the organizational or project level. There was, however, a difference between the British and Cameroonian organizations. A limited number of the former had started to put gender into practice at the organizational level by, for example, making gender-awareness a selection criterion in recruiting new staff; while most also had an equal opportunity policy. In terms of the continuum referred to in Macdonald *et al.* (1997: 30), these British NGDOs have taken gender on board as policy. On the other hand, the Cameroonian

NGDOs saw gender as a good idea and accepted it in theory but had yet really to act on it. A major problem in Cameroon is that most men perceive gender as women taking over from men or at best competing with them.

Why do these NGDOs have such difficulty in putting their commitment to gender issues into practice? Firstly, at the organizational level, a major problem is that most of them lack a person with specific responsibility for gender. In fact, this means that there is no focal point for gender and, consequently, that nobody facilitates access to and learning about new gender practices. In the survey, small NGDOs stated that they have fewer financial resources available to employ gender specialists. Furthermore, they added that they have many other demands on their time and a limited number of staff. It seems that these NGDOs are not yet aware of the importance of gender as an aspect of development, and do not, therefore, see the need to make the human and financial investment required. Even if such specialists were employed, this would not ensure that gender is taken on board at an organizational level. We are still dealing with NGDOs that are based on patriarchal structures and systems of power, in which men do not perceive the need for change. Unless these structures are challenged, it will be difficult to achieve gender equality because nothing in the fundamental structure will have changed.

Secondly, at the policy level, organizations with a transformative gender policy on paper admitted that it was more a statement of intent than of actual practice. We can conclude from this that gender-awareness in practice still means an approach geared towards women's (practical) needs in isolation, rather than taking up interventions that strive for gender equality.

Finally, at the project level, the few NGDOs that had tried to put gender into practice, did not carry out a gender analysis. Constraints from donors were the main hindrance cited, as donors hesitate to fund

