

Attitudes towards Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Central America

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Abstract:

This paper analyses, from a sample of 860 undergraduates in Nicaragua and El Salvador, how willing they would be to donate money to ONGs if they lived in an industrialised country, as well as their perceptions of the work undertaken by these organisations, the trust they generate, their perception of the effect their work has and how sustainable they think the projects they undertake are, and how they perceive wrongdoing by their members. Are also analysed how differences in socio-demographic variables, the university at which they study, their political ideology, economic situation or links to an NGO affect these perceptions.

The results show a high degree of willingness to donate money to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country. With increased willingness being shown by women, the more politicised, those that consider themselves to be poor, and those that work or collaborate with NGOs. Moreover, different degrees of agreement with aspects related to NGOs were found according to the economic situation, the university at which they studied and the gender of those interviewed.

Key words: Attitudes, Non Governmental Organisations, Central-America

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1. Introduction.

To achieve the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2008) and in particular the main objective of reducing extreme poverty by the year 2015 (World Bank, 2003) requires an enormous effort on the part of both governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Bolitho, 2007). To achieve the Millennium Development Goals –something that appears unlikely– an important shift in the public's awareness of the need to dedicate more economic resources to it, both through public taxation and private donations, must take place (Fransman and Lecomte, 2004). Regrettably, support for these measures is hindered by, amongst other things, doubts in the public's mind about the ability of those that receive aid to administer it effectively (McDonnell and Lecomte, 2005).

The last quarter of the XX century witnessed an important growth in both the number and development of NGOs, largely the result of a strategic global search for alternatives to services that should have been provided by the states (Gibelman and Gelman, 2004), a search, which was in the main, the result of the disillusion produced by the failure of governments to implement the welfare state (Eisemberg, 2000; Harris, 2000).

NGOs are distinguishable from other organisations in so far as their mission is concerned. Wagner (2000) noted that few institutions are as sacrosanct or vaulted as NGOs. In fact, in recent years these organisations have achieved an elevated social status (Leat, 1994), and as such, it is expected that their work will be carried out well, with altruism and morality. From the beginning, high, perhaps unrealistic, expectations towards NGOs have existed (Gibelman and Gelman, 2001), which makes them more likely than other organisations to create disillusion amongst the population (Leat, 1994).

Hine, Montiel, Cooksey and Lewko (2005) point out that NGOs have developed different strategies in their attempts to combat poverty, due mainly to lack of agreement over the root causes, with the result that there is no clear consensus about which strategies are the most appropriate for confronting the problem, which in turn results in a lack of coordination for the different aid actions. To this, as Valladares and Neira (2003) pointed out, must be added the differences of opinion and interest that exist between the public, the NGOs and governmental institutions, which on many occasions results in the recipients of aid feeling that the aid they have received is neither in their best interest nor does it address their needs.

But the most serious problems that NGOs face, many of which are aired by the media, are those that Gibelman and Gelman (2004) classify into six large categories: personal life style enhancement, parallel enterprise, resource expansion opportunities, theft, mismanagement of resources, and support of activities and groups outside of the organization's purview. And the authors point out that despite exposure to these problems by the mass media, the recommendations carried out to prevent them and the controls proposed for the running of NGOs, not only do the abuses continue, but new forms of wrongdoing, such as excessive compensations or conflict of interest have arisen.

NGOs raise money on the basis of donor trust, a trust shaken to the core by the revelations of improprieties. Long-term implications include difficulties raising money, loss of board members who want to dissociate themselves and save their individual good name, and calls for greater accountability by citizens and government (Gibelman and Gelman, 2004).

Although most NGOs carry out their work adequately, a few cases of corruption are all it takes to change the public image of these organisations and erode the trust the public has in them. Regrettably the scandals and controversies that surround NGOs continue into the new century, increasing public scepticism and affecting their ability to obtain funding within a global context in which the role of NGOs continues to be indispensable.

Central American countries have been the privileged recipients of the work undertaken by NGOs, which makes them the ideal place to analyse in depth the opinion the people of these region have of the work carried out by these organisations. Of all Central American countries, Nicaragua has traditionally been the one that has benefitted most from the implementation of development projects, commanding 48% of the aid from NGOs, followed by El Salvador, with 23% of the development aid distributed by NGOs in the region (Valladares and Neira, 2003). Nicaragua and El Salvador are considered by the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) to be two countries of below average development, that occupy positions 110 and 103 respectively in the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2007). According to data provided by the UNDP (2007) the ODA (Official Development Assistance) received by El Salvador in the year 2005 amounted to US\$199.4 million, equivalent to \$29.0 per capita, which was 1.2% of the country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). In the case of Nicaragua the ODA received in 2005 was even greater, rising to US\$740.1 million, equivalent to \$139.4 per capita, which was 15.1% of the country's GDP. A large part of the aid received by both countries is channelled through NGOs, both local and international, to the point that an important number of the NGOs working in the area are European. In the year 2000 more than 400 European organisations were working on development projects (OECD, 2001), as well as a large number of NGOs from the United States, together with an important number of organisations that, because of their size, are not reflected in any studies or registered with organisations like the OECD, which does not mean that they do not contribute to the overall make up of non-governmental cooperation in those states (Valladares and Neira, 2003).

There are very few works that analyse the attitudes of the population of countries that receive aid have of the NGOs that carry out the work in those countries. There are no published works of these characteristics within the context of Central America. The aim of this work is to discover the perceptions a group of highly educated university students from Nicaragua and El Salvador, who it is assumed will in the future make up the leading class of their respective countries, have of NGOs (Vázquez, Panadero and Rincón, 2007; Vázquez, Panadero and Rincón, 2010). The attitudes of undergraduates towards NGOs is approached by considering cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to the attitudinal object (Zanna y Rempel, 1988), such responses enabling some approximation towards the attitudinal valence (positive or negative) at the same time as they impact the creation and maintenance of the attitudes themselves. Once obtained, this knowledge will provide information of great use when devising actions designed to fostering positive attitudes towards NGOs.

Given that in both Nicaragua and El Salvador the highest poverty rates are concentrated in rural areas, where poverty afflicts 61.7% of the population (INEC, 2001), the work was carried out at four of the principal public universities located outside the urban centre of the respective capital cities. Each of the four universities belongs to a different department; each department belongs in turn to a macro-region with high NGO presence: the Departamento de San Vicente in El Salvador, the Departamento de León in the Pacific macro-region (Nicaragua), the Departamento de Estelí in the central macro-region (Nicaragua), and the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur in the Atlantic macro-region (Nicaragua).

The Departamento de San Vicente, in El Salvador's Paracentral region, has an area of 1,184 km² and an almost completely *mestizo* population of over 155,000. Its main economic resources are agriculture (basic grains) and cattle farming, followed at some distance by commerce and agricultural foodstuffs. Of the four departments covered in this study, San Vicente has the lowest poverty rates. The Departamento de León has an area of 5,138.03 km² and a population slightly above 374,000; most of the population is *mestizo*, an significant percentage of its inhabitants belong to the indigenous group of the Sutiaba. Its main economic resources are agriculture (basic grains, sugar cane, maní) and cattle farming, followed at some distance by services (commerce, tourism) and agricultural foodstuffs. Although high, this department's poverty rates are the lowest of the three Nicaraguan departments covered in this work.

The Departamento de Estelí has an area of 2,229.7 km² with a population of just over 215,000, which, apart from some members of the indigenous Matagalpa, Mayagna and Chorotega groups, is mainly *mestizo*. Its chief economic resources are to be found in the agricultural sector (basic grains, coffee, tobacco), followed at some distance by commerce and industry. This department's high poverty rates are particularly concentrated in the rural areas. Finally, the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur has an area of 27,407 km² and a population of slightly more than 382,000, most of whom belong to the indigenous Miskito and Mayagna groups, or are Creoles (of African origin) or *mestizos*. Their main economic resources are forestry, fishing, cattle and agriculture. This region has one of the highest poverty rates in Latin America.

Although no official university data was available, since the study was carried out in each of the selected department's principal public universities, the enrolled students belonged different ethnic groups and different social strata, including the poorest levels of the population, as is shown in Table 1.

2. Method.

The sample consists of 860 students from different universities in Central America: 63.8% from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua* in León (UNAN-León) (Nicaragua), 22.7% from the *Bluefield's Indian and Caribbean University* (BICU) (Nicaragua), 8% from the *Facultad Regional Multidisciplinaria* of Estelí (FAREM) (Nicaragua) and 5.6% from the *Universidad Estatal de El Salvador* (UES) from its Campus Paracentral in San Vicente (El Salvador). Participants collaborated in the research on a voluntary basis, the only criterion for inclusion in the sample being their enrolment at one of the universities covered by the research. Varying degrees of willingness to participate on the part of undergraduates from the different universities together with the disparate numbers of students enrolled at each of them conditioned the number of participants from each university.

Some of the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample can be found in Table 1:

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample of Central American undergraduates

	Percentage (n = 860)
Sex	
Male	31.7% (568)
Female	68.3% (264)
Age -average (SD)	21.65 (4.84)
Number of children –average (SD)	0.43 (0.90)
Marital status	
Single	83.3% (693)
Married	8.9% (74)
Living with partner	6.3% (52)
Separated or divorced	1.4% (12)
Widowed	0.1% (1)
University	
UNAN-León (Nicaragua)	63.2% (541)
BICU (Nicaragua)	23.5% (201)
FAREM (Nicaragua)	7.7% (66)
UES- San Vicente (El Salvador)	5.6% (48)
Political ideology	
Leftwing	26.1% (192)
Centre left	10.2% (75)
Centre	43.4% (319)
Centre right	9.5% (70)
Rightwing	10.9% (80)
Assessment of economic situation	
Rich	---
Comfortable	13.0% (105)
Neither rich nor poor	50.4% (408)
Slightly poor	24.4% (197)
Poor	12.2% (99)
Work or collaborate with an NGO	
Work	1.7% (9)
Collaborate	7.9% (41)
Neither work nor collaborate	90.4% (470)

As can be seen in Table 1, the average age of the participants is under 22 and the majority are single women with no children. In the main they consider themselves to be lower-middle or middle class and politically some claim to be leftwing, though the majority say they are of the centre.

However, in Nicaragua and El Salvador it is difficult to associate the centre with a political ideology, it is more realistic to assume that those who claim to be in the centre politically are people who either have no political leanings or are dissatisfied with traditional ideologies. A small percentage of the undergraduates work for an NGO, while a slightly higher number collaborate with these organisations in some way.

The information was obtained via a self-compiled questionnaire designed in Spain. In Central America, with the collaboration of professors from the UNAN-Leon in Nicaragua and the UES in El Salvador, the tool was revised to ensure that it was adjusted to the variety of Spanish used in both countries. The questionnaire was applied collectively in the lecture hall with the collaboration of the centres. After explaining the aims of the investigation and the treatment that would be given to the data obtained, the informed consent of the participants was requested, ensuring those that took part that their complete anonymity would be respected at all times.

In the present work the following types of information concerning the participants is used: socio-demographic, political ideology, the university where they study (UNAN-León, FAREM, BICU, UES), and their perception of their own and their families' economic situation ('rich', 'comfortable', 'neither rich nor poor', 'slightly poor' or 'poor').

In addition, the following question was posed to the interviewees: *Imagine that you had been born and lived in a highly developed, highly industrialised country with a high standard of living. Would you be in favour of donating money to NGOs that develop programmes that aid development in 'third world' countries?* Six possible reply options were permitted: -3 (Completely against), -2 (Against), -1 (Moderately against), 1 (Moderately in favour), 2 (In favour), 3 (Completely in favour). The question aims to address the attitude of university students towards the NGOs by evaluating the importance students attach to the donations made to these organisations. In view of the low purchasing power of the interviewees, the question is asked in relation to the hypothetical case of their possessing sufficient economic wherewithal.

The interviewees were later presented with a list of five statements related to non-governmental organisations (two with positive connotations and three with negative connotations) about which they were asked to give their opinion. By this means, information was collected regarding common cognitive aspects related to NGOs and the emotion of confidence related to that attitudinal object.

The reply options were -2 (Completely disagree), 1, 0 (Neither agree nor disagree), 1 and 2 (Completely agree).

In addition interviewees were asked to supply information about any possible link they may have to organisations of this type, that is to say, whether they 'work' with an NGO, 'collaborate in some way', 'neither work nor collaborate' with an organisation of this type.

To analyse the data of the statistic and management analysis system SPSS (version 15.0 for Windows) was used. From the data obtained descriptive analyses were carried out that drew upon some of the principal characteristics of the sample.

Later, comparisons were made of the average points given to the different items by the participants according to their gender, marital status and number of children, the university where they study, their political ideology, economic situation, and whether they work or collaborate with an NGO. As we are dealing with continuous variables, the comparisons are carried out using *Student t* tests and one factor ANOVA for independent samples.

To carry out some of the *Student t* tests for independent samples, variables concerning the interviewees perceptions about their and/or their family's economic situation were dichotomised – distinguishing between those who considered themselves to be poor ('poor' or 'slightly poor') from

those who considered themselves not to be poor ('comfortable' or 'neither rich nor poor')-, the participants declared political ideology, -distinguishing between those who declared themselves to be leftwing ('left' or 'centre left') from those who declared themselves to be rightwing ('right' or 'centre right')-, and working or collaborating with an NGO -distinguishing between those work or collaborate ('work' or 'collaborate') and those who 'neither work nor collaborate'-

3. Results.

Faced with the question: *Imagine that you had been born and lived in a highly developed, highly industrialised country with a high standard of living, would you be in favour of donating money to NGOs so they could develop programmes that aid development in 'third world' countries?* The average score obtained was 2.31 (Sd = 1.12), a score between the items 'relatively in favour' and 'completely in favour' indicated a fairly favourable attitude towards donating to NGOs.

The 'one factor anova' used showed that although there were no significant differences in the average scores obtained for this question in relation to the number of children, the marital status, the university at which they studied or the economic situation in which the undergraduates claimed to find themselves, differences were observed in relation to the participants declared political ideology.

Table 2. Agreement by Central American undergraduates on donating money to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country depending on their political ideology

	Leftwing	Centre left	Centre	Centre right	Rightwing	F
Imagine that you had been born in a highly developed, highly industrialised country with a high standard of living. Would you be in favour of donating money to NGOs so they could develop programmes that aid development in 'third world countries'?	2.50 (0.91)	1.84 (1.60)	2.20 (1.17)	2.44 (0.78)	2.51 (0.82)	4.758***

-3= Completely against, 3= Completely in favour

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001

As can be seen in Table 2, the undergraduates, who in the main, claimed they would be in favour of donating money to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country are those at the extremes of the ('left' or 'right') continuum, with those least in favour being the students who considered themselves to be 'centre-left'.

The *Student t* tests for independent samples show significant differences in the average score obtained for this question in relation to gender, the link with NGOs and those that considered themselves to be 'poor'.

Table 3. Agreement by Central American undergraduates on donating money to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country depending on their gender, economic situation and links to an NGO

Imagine that you had been born in a highly developed, highly industrialised country with a high standard of living. Would you be in favour of donating money to NGOs so they could develop programmes that aid development in 'third world countries'?	Average (D.t.)	t
Female	2.39 (1.04)	2.450*
Male	2.13 (1.27)	
Poor	2.41 (0.98)	1.963*
Not poor	2.23 (1.20)	
Work or collaborate with NGOs	2.61 (0.66)	2.371**
Neither work nor collaborate with NGOs	2.30 (1.16)	

-3= Completely against, 3= Completely in favour

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001

As can be seen in Table 3, despite the fact that the number of participants in favour of donating to NGOs is high in all cases, the women are significantly more in favour than the men. The same is true for those who consider themselves to be 'poor' compared to those who perceive themselves to be 'not poor', and those who 'collaborate' with NGOs compared to those who say they 'neither work nor collaborate with NGOs'.

The average scores given by the undergraduates, in relation to the five statements (positive and negative) concerning NGOs, are shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Agreement with statements concerning NGOs among Central American undergraduates.

In your opinion, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations):	Average	D.t.
The work they do is of great importance	1.42	0.90
Are organisations worthy of trust	0.59	1.12
The effect their projects have is barely appreciable in the places in which they are located	0.35	1.35
The projects they undertake are unsustainable and are of little benefit to those they are meant to help	0.32	1.38
NGO personnel misappropriate a large part of the money and material allocated to the projects	0.23	1.22

-2= Completely disagree, 2= Completely agree

As can be seen in Table 4, there is substantial agreement among the participants on the two statements that describe NGOs in a positive light: 'The work they do is important' and 'They are organisations worthy of trust'. As regards the three negative statements, the average score obtained is very close to 0 (a reply that indicates 'neither agree nor disagree with the statement') although

they are slightly positive in character, indicative of moderate agreement with the fact that the projects have little effect on the people or places where they are carried out, that they are unsustainable and of little benefit to the people they are meant to help and that NGO personnel misappropriate a substantial part of the money and material allocated to the projects.

The ‘one factor anova’ show no significant differences in the average scores obtained for any of the five statements depending on the number of children the undergraduates have, their marital status or their political ideology. However differences are found for different statements according to the undergraduates’ perception of their own and/or their families’ economic situation, which can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Agreement with statements about NGOs among Central American undergraduates depending on their perception of their own and/or their families’ economic situation

In your opinion, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations):	Comfortable	Neither rich nor poor	Slightly poor	Poor	F
The work they do is of great importance	1.43 (0.93)	1.39 (0.92)	1.45 (0.85)	1.51 (0.95)	0.509
Are organisations worthy of trust	0.73 (1.17)	0.57 (1.11)	0.58 (1.07)	0.47 (1.20)	0.881
The effect their projects have is barely appreciable in the places in which they are located	-0.01 (1.35)	0.37 (1.31)	0.54 (1.34)	0.43 (1.41)	3.903**
The projects they undertake are unsustainable and are of little benefit to those they are meant to help	0.09 (1.47)	0.28 (1.34)	0.40 (1.37)	0.57 (1.42)	2.294*
NGO personnel misappropriate a large part of the money and material allocated to the projects	-0.06 (1.41)	0.16 (1.17)	0.44 (1.20)	0.47 (1.23)	5.465***

-2= Completely disagree, 2= Completely agree

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001

As can be seen in Table 5, the poorer the undergraduates consider themselves to be the more they agree with the statement that the projects undertaken by NGOs are unsustainable and that they are of little benefit to the people they are meant to help and that the members of these organisations misappropriate a substantial part of the money and material allocated to the projects (although in all cases the average score is close to ‘0’ which is indicative of being close to the statement ‘neither agree nor disagree’). In relation to the items that express positive statements about NGOs (the work they do is important and they are organisations worthy of trust) no significant statistical differences were observed with regard to the economical situation in which the interviewees considered themselves and/or their families to be in.

Tabla 6. Agreement with statements about NGOs among Central American undergraduates depending on the university at which they study

In your opinion, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations):	UNAN-León	BICU	FAREM	UES	F
The work they do is of great importance	1.49 (0.84)	1.31 (0.99)	1.34 (1.02)	1.28 (1.06)	2.521*
Are organisations worthy of trust	0.66 (1.08)	0.41 (1.16)	0.38 (1.34)	0.83 (0.97)	4.053**
The effect their projects have is barely appreciable in the places in which they are located	0.32 (1.36)	0.41 (1.32)	0.60 (1.37)	0.19 (1.41)	1.156
The projects they undertake are unsustainable and are of little benefit to those they are meant to help	0.24 (1.39)	0.38 (1.34)	0.69 (1.39)	0.33 (1.34)	2.334
NGO personnel misappropriate a large part of the money and material allocated to the projects	0.17 (1.24)	0.44 (1.14)	0.15 (1.24)	0.08 (1.27)	2.590*

-2= Completely disagree, 2= Completely agree

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

In Table 6, it can be seen that the participants who study at the UNAN-Leon agree the most with the statement that the work NGOs do is of great importance, while the undergraduates at UES agree the least with this statement. The latter, however are the ones most in agreement with the statement that NGOs are organisations worthy of trust. For their part, the students at BICU agree the most with the statement that the members of the NGOs misappropriate the NGOs' money and material, while those participants that study at UES are least in agreement with this statement.

From the *Student t* tests for independent samples it can be inferred that although there are no significant differences in the average scores obtained for any of the different items with regard to the participants links to NGOs or with regard to the political ideology they profess to hold, there are significant statistical differences for specific items when gender is taken into account (in the item 'The work they do is of great importance') (Table 7) and whether they consider themselves to be 'poor' or not (in the items 'The effects of the projects the NGOs work on are barely noticeable in the place where they are being carried out', 'The NGO personnel misappropriate a substantial part of the money and material allocated to the project' and 'The projects developed by the NGOs are unsustainable and are of little benefit to those they are meant to help') (Table 8).

Table 7. Differences of agreement with statements about NGOs among Central American undergraduates depending on gender

In your opinion, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations):	Females	Males	t
The work they do is of great importance	1.49 (0.87)	1.24 (0.98)	3.512***

-2= Completely disagree, 2= completely agree

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

As can be seen in Table 7 the women agree to a greater extent than the men that the work NGOs do is of great importance, although in fact both sexes agree with this item to a large degree.

Table 8. Differences of agreement with statements about NGOs among Central American undergraduates depending on whether they consider themselves and/or their families to be ‘poor’ or ‘not poor’

In your opinion, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations):	Poor	Not poor	t
The effect their projects have is barely appreciable in the places in which they are located	0.51 (1.36)	0.29 (1.33)	2.134*
The projects they undertake are unsustainable and are of little benefit to those they are meant to help	0.46 (1.39)	0.24 (1.38)	2.077*
NGO personnel misappropriate a large part of the money and material allocated to the projects	0.45 (1.21)	0.12 (1.22)	3.695***

-2= Completely disagree, 2= Completely agree

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; ***p ≤ 0.001

As can be seen in Table 8 those undergraduates who describe themselves as ‘poor’ agree to a much greater extent with the three items that indicate negative attitudes towards NGOs, with the greatest differences between the two groups being found in relation to the view that NGO personnel misappropriate a substantial part of the money and material allocated to the projects.

4. Conclusions.

Undergraduates –a highly educated sector of the population (Vázquez, Panadero and Rincón, 2007; Vázquez, Panadero and Rincón, 2010)- from four macro-regions in the two countries that receive the most international aid in a region like Central America that is the recipient of large amounts of aid, appear, in general, to have a positive attitude towards NGOs, the organisations whose remit is to channel aid to those for whom it is intended. This positive attitude is observed in the fact that if they lived in a highly industrialised country, the large majority of them would be willing to support these types of organisations economically. However, this highly positive attitude loses some of its shine when specific aspects about NGOs are looked at in more depth. It can be seen that very few undergraduates share some of the positive attitudes about these organisations (e.g. the importance of the work they do or the trust they generate), while they do show a certain amount of agreement with some of the negative aspects associated with the work of these organisations (e.g. little impact and the unsustainability of the projects or the misappropriation of funds and material by NGO personnel).

Although the interviewed undergraduates recognise the importance of the work carried out by NGOs, the level of agreement with the idea that they are worthy of trust is notably low. This question is especially worrying given that NGOs obtain their resources –economic and human- in the main thanks to this trust and, in the long term, lack of trust could affect not only their ability to obtain funding, but also result in the loss of valuable collaborators or in demands for accountability by citizen and government donors (Gibelman and Gelman, 2004). Yet, despite generating little trust, the role played by NGOs is considered so important by interviewed undergraduates that they would still make donations to them if they lived in an industrial country. However, despite the importance university students from the four universities, recipients of international aid, give to economic donations made by the inhabitants of industrialised countries, only a small proportion have any link with NGOs in their own country. To a certain degree, the attributions made about the causes of poverty in underdeveloped states (Panadero and Vázquez, 2008), and the perception of

not being in a position to do anything to alleviate the situation, could help to explain the small number of interviewed undergraduates who are involved in any of the aid work carried out by NGOs in those states, although an important number of universities find in these organisations professional openings in a labour market that offers very few opportunities to qualified professionals (Vázquez, Panadero and Rincón, 2008).

In line with the previously mentioned, it is worrying for NGOs to have it confirmed that undergraduates from four macro-regions that receive large amounts of international aid –a large part of which is channelled through these organisations-, consider that the work undertaken by them has little positive effect on the places where it is implemented, that the people it is meant to help receive little benefit from it and that it is unsustainable. Despite the positive opinion undergraduates have of NGOs, in the main they feel they could be much more efficient. The undertaking of unsustainable projects that are of little benefit to those they are designed to help, may be perceived as a waste of resources, which could be used to better effect on projects that have a positive effect on the population. To some degree, the lack of efficiency attributed to NGOs could be caused by the fact that from the outside these organisations appear to have more resources available to them than they do in fact possess, and as Valladares and Neira (2003) point out, the use the NGOs put these resources to does not coincide with the population's perceptions of what their final destination should be. In these circumstances, keeping the population better informed about the true level of resources available, together with a much more active role played by the community in evaluating the priorities for their use-in which sections of the population not directly affected by the problem could participate- would go a long way to improving the people's perceptions of how efficiently these organisations use the resources available to them. However, this hypothesis could be called into question when it is observed that for the points mentioned, no differences in opinion exist between those interviewed undergraduates that work or collaborate with NGOs and those that have no direct link to these organisations. Apparently, even those in close contact with the daily administration of the NGOs' resources share the view on the poor effect they have on the population and the low sustainability of their projects. However, we should not overlook the point made by Hine et al. (2005) in reference to the fact that NGOs develop different strategies in their fight against poverty, to some degree due to the lack of agreement among them as to the root causes of the problem. The lack of consensus as to which strategies are the most appropriate, can result not only in a lack of coordination about which aid projects are implemented, but also to disagreement about the proper use to which available resources are put. In this sense, knowing exactly how people interpret the importance of different arguments about the fundamental causes of poverty, can make it easier to design training and information programmes to modify erroneous beliefs and so facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid to those groups that need it most (Panadero and Vázquez, 2008).

But one particularly worrying aspect that has come to light as a result of the present work stems from the view held by interviewed undergraduates that NGO personnel misappropriate large amounts of money and material allocated to the projects. This assessment has a potentially destructive effect on people's trust in these institutions, and trust is the cornerstone of these institutions' operation, given that, as Gibelman and Gelman (2004) point out, NGOs raise money on the basis of donor trust. In addition, it must be pointed out that this assessment of corruption on the part of NGO personnel is shared both by those university students with no direct contact with these organisations and those that work or collaborate with them. And, if those that work or collaborate within these organisations share this perception of wrongdoing and corruption, it is of extreme importance for NGOs that the control of their resources is scrupulous, with maximum publicity

given to the use made of them and the criteria used in their distribution. As Anderson (2000) points out, it is of fundamental importance that these organisations are both rigorous and objective when it comes to evaluating the work they do, being equally necessary, as an essential component of transparency, for them to make the results public (Anderson, 2000; Clark, 1991; Edwards and Hulme, 1995).

With regard to the positive attitude expressed by the interviewed undergraduates towards donating to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country, it is interesting to note that the women were more disposed than the men to donate to these organisations. The women appear to have a much more positive attitude towards supportive actions of this type –perhaps due to their increased capacity to empathise with people that find themselves in difficult social situations (Eisemberg and Lennon, 1983; Zahn-Waxler, Ronbinson and Emde, 1992)-, which manifests itself in greater generosity towards NGOs and a greater appreciation of the importance of the work done by these organisations, and this despite expressing the same concerns as the men about the trust NGOs deserve, the perception of inefficiency and unsustainability of the projects they are engaged in and the appreciation that NGO personnel misappropriate money and materials allocated to the projects.

Furthermore, the political ideology expressed by the university students, appears to make a difference when it comes to the possibility of donating money to NGOs if they lived in an industrial country. The more politically active students –those that considered themselves to be either ‘leftwing’ or ‘rightwing’ – are the ones most in agreement with the idea of the citizens of industrialised countries making donations to these organisations. On the other hand, those with the least positive attitude towards donating to NGOs are the ‘centre-left’ university students, although these, like the previous groups expressed an important willingness to dedicate part of their economic resources to these organisations if they lived in an industrialised country. Yet, the political ideology of the interviewees does not appear to affect their perception of the importance of the work undertaken by NGOs, or the trust they generate, or the efficiency and sustainability of the projects they work on or with their assessment that the members of these organisations misappropriate part of the money and material allocated to the projects.

The work was developed with undergraduates from universities located in geographic areas with different levels of development. However the daily coexistence with situations of greater or lesser degrees of social difficulty does not appear to affect the generation of different attitudes towards the possibility of the citizens of industrialised countries donating money to NGOs, although it should not be forgotten that these types of donations are viewed very positively by the interviewees, to such an extent that the majority would make donations themselves if they lived in a highly industrialised country.

However, the data collected shows that the students who study at the Departamento de León (Nicaragua) attribute the greatest importance to the work done by NGOs, while those who study at the Departamento de San Vicente (El Salvador) attribute the least importance to the work done by NGOs. Nevertheless, the latter group trust NGOs the most. This data appears to show that among the undergraduates that study at the two departments with minor rates of poverty (León and San Vicente) there is no correlation between how much they trust NGOs and the importance they attribute to the work done by these organisations.

For their part, those that study at the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur (Nicaragua), one of the most underdeveloped regions in Latin America, show the highest levels of agreement with the statement that NGO personnel misappropriate large amounts of money and material allocated to the projects, while those that agree the least with this statement study at the Departamento de San Vicente (El Salvador), one of the departments taking part in the investigation with the highest rates

of development. The perception of wrongdoing and corruption by NGO personnel appears to be highest among those that live with the highest levels of poverty, perhaps due to the fact that the contrast between the lifestyle of the NGO personnel and the general population is more acute... or maybe because in these contexts the incidence of wrongdoing and corruption within the NGOs really exists.

While from the data obtained the level of development of the departments and regions in which the students study does not appear to make any difference, the students consideration of their personal economic situation does appear to affect their assessment of the possibility of donating to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country, to such a degree that those who consider themselves to be 'poor' would be the most highly disposed to donating part of their income to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country. In this sense, a situation of personal need appears to affect the importance attributed to donating to NGOs. However, the undergraduates that consider themselves to be 'poor' express the highest levels of agreement with the negative statements about NGOs: in the areas where they are located the affects of the work they carry out is barely noticeable, the projects they undertake are unsustainable and are of little benefit to the people they are designed to help. The differences between those that consider themselves to be 'poor' and those that do not consider themselves to be in this situation are especially important when it comes to the level of agreement about NGO personnel misappropriating large parts of the money and material allocated to the projects. As mentioned earlier, the differences between the lifestyle enjoyed by those that work for the NGOs and that of the undergraduates who consider themselves to be poor could be the reason behind the perception of corruption within these organisations. It is worth mentioning again that in all cases the average score of the interviewees is close to '0' (indicative of 'neither agreeing nor disagreeing' with the statement that NGO personnel misappropriate a large part of the money and material allocated to the projects).

With regard to the items that express positive attitudes towards NGOs (the work they do is of great importance and they are organisations worthy of trust) no statistically important differences are found between those who consider themselves to be 'poor' and those who do not consider themselves to be in this situation. In this sense, the self-perception of poverty does not appear to be a variable that affects either of the two assessments.

It is striking that there are no significant differences with regard to the level of agreement with different comments about NGOs between those interviewed undergraduates that 'work' and 'collaborate' with these organisations (that are familiar with their inner workings) and those that have no direct link with them, whose opinion could be considered to be formed from information that is both quantitatively and qualitatively inferior. However, the first would be more disposed to donate money to NGOs if they lived in an industrialised country, perhaps because, despite having some negative perceptions about the workings of these organisations, they continue to feel from their knowledge of the day to day workings of these organisations that the work they do is sufficiently important to merit continuous funding.

Finally, the results of the present work once again support the view that when it comes to managing donated funds, be they public or private, NGOs should bear in mind, the Plutarch maxim: 'it is not enough for Cesar's wife to be honest; she must look honest' and, if necessary in the case of NGOs, be able to demonstrate their 'honesty' leaving no room for doubt.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

This study is being carried out simultaneously with people from different countries. The data collected is given voluntarily, anonymously and confidentially, and will be used exclusively for research purposes. We would therefore appreciate it if answers were given as honestly as possible.

01. University: _____

02. What is your economical situation or your family economical situation?:

1 Rich	2 Comfortable	3 Neither rich nor poor	4 Slightly poor	5 Poor
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03. Imagine that you had been born in a highly developed, highly industrialised country with a high standard of living. Would you be in favour of donating money to NGOs so they could develop programmes that aid development in 'third world countries'?

-3 Completely against	-2 Against	-1 Moderately against	1 Moderately in favour	2 In favour	3 Completely in favour
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In your opinion, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations):	Completely disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Completely agree
04. Are organisations worthy of trust	-2	-1	0	1	2
05. The work they do is of great importance	-2	-1	0	1	2
06. The effect their projects have is barely appreciable in the places in which they are located	-2	-1	0	1	2
07. The projects they undertake are unsustainable and are of little benefit to those they are meant to help	-2	-1	0	1	2
08. NGO personnel misappropriate a large part of the money and material allocated to the projects	-2	-1	0	1	2

09. Do you work or collaborate with some NGO?

1. Work 2. Collaborate 3. Neither work nor collaborate

10. Where would you be located politically?

1 Leftwing	2 Centre left	3 Centre	4 Centre right	5 Rightwing
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11. Age: _____ years.

12. Sex.....**1. Male 2. Female**

13. Marital status:

1 Single	2 Married	3 Living with partner	4 Separated or divorced	5 Widowed
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14. Number of children: _____