Development in Practice

ISSN: 0961-4524 (Print) 1364-9213 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cdip20

Universities, NGOs, and civil society sustainability: preliminary lessons from Ecuador

Susan Appe & Daniel Barragán

To cite this article: Susan Appe & Daniel Barragán (2017) Universities, NGOs, and civil society sustainability: preliminary lessons from Ecuador, Development in Practice, 27:4, 472-486, DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2017.1303035

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2017.1303035

Published online: 13 Jun 2017.

DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE, 2017
VOL. 27, NO. 4, 472–486
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2017.1303035

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Universities, NGOs, and civil society sustainability: preliminary lessons from Ecuador

Susan Appe and Daniel Barragán

ABSTRACT

The context for NGOs in the Global South – delegitimising discourse, restrictive policies, and decreasing international funding – leads to major concerns about the sustainability of organised civil society. As a result, NGOs are exploring new means to contribute to social development. This article explores developing university–NGO collaborations through the case of Ecuador. It contributes to development research on two fronts. First, it examines the role of the university in the South and their collaborations with NGOs. Second, it situates university–NGO collaborations within concerns about civil society sustainability. The article presents lessons learnt by Ecuadorian NGOs.

Pour les ONG, le contexte des pays du Sud – discours délégitimant, politiques restrictives et diminution des financements internationaux – entraîne des préoccupations majeures quant à la pérennité d'une société civile organisée. Il en résulte que les ONG explorent de nouveaux moyens pour assurer leur contribution au développement social. Cet article examine le développement de collaborations universités-ONG en prenant pour exemple le cas de l'Équateur. Il contribue à la recherche sur le développement sur deux fronts. Premièrement, il examine le rôle des universités dans les pays du Sud et leurs collaborations avec les ONG. Deuxièmement, il positionne les collaborations entre universités et ONG au sein des préoccupations concernant la pérennisation de la société civile. L'article présente aussi les leçons apprises par les ONG équatoriennes.

El entorno que actualmente enfrentan las ONG en el Sur —discurso deslegitimado, políticas restrictivas y disminución del financiamiento internacional— ha provocado serias inquietudes respecto a la sostenibilidad de la sociedad civil organizada. Por esta razón, las ONG están analizando métodos innovadores que contribuyan al desarrollo social. El presente artículo examina desde dos perspectivas las colaboraciones que, en el caso de Ecuador, y a fin de aportar a las investigaciones sobre desarrollo, se han establecido entre universidades y ONG. Así, analiza en primer lugar el papel desempeñado por las universidades del Sur y las colaboraciones que realizan con las ONG. En segundo término, enmarca tales colaboraciones en el contexto de las inquietudes existentes en torno a la sostenibilidad de la sociedad civil. El artículo concluye presentando los aprendizajes adquiridos por las ONG ecuatorianas.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 25 July 2016
Accepted 24 October 2016

KEYWORDS
Civil society – NGOs, Partnership; Latin America and the Caribbean

CONTACT Susan Appe sappe@binghamton.edu

Introduction

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been key players in international cooperation and community development in the Global South. NGOs represent diverse efforts of collective action, engagement in advocacy, social service interventions, and/or oversight of government and business sectors. NGOs have "*captivated the imagination of a wide variety of development planners*" (Watkins, Swidler, and Hannan 2012, 286) as they are important to the "aid chain". That is, foreign Northern donors often do not have the access to grassroots communities in Southern communities for development projects. NGOs provide comparative advantages with their ability to innovate (Clark 1990) and offer important intermediary and mobilisation qualities in communities at the local level (Brinkerhoff 2002). The NGO distinctiveness hinges on being part of the "third sector" and therefore separate from government and business sectors, as well as having a focus on development activities (Lewis 2003).

With their comparative advantages, national constitutions and development strategies include and recognise NGOs and civil society as key contributors to social development in particular. However, NGOs might be losing their footing in development. As outlined in a recent *Development in Practice* special issue about civil society sustainability (Volume 26, Issue 5), NGOs and civil society are facing several challenges. NGO credibility and legitimacy are questioned, as NGOs are accused of "*being out of touch, unaccountable, irrelevant, and inefficient*" (Hayman 2016, 672). Tough government discourse is targeting NGOs, in many contexts publicly asserting that NGOs are corrupt, incite public unrest, and represent international interests (ICNL 2015). In addition, restrictive policies toward NGOs are prevalent (Appe and Layton 2016). NGOs in almost 100 countries have experienced restrictions through regulatory policies (CIVICUS 2016). Furthermore, international donor funding which has been a staple in many regions is decreasing and/or being redirected elsewhere (Hayman 2016; Pousadela and Cruz 2016; Pratt 2016).

The context for NGOs – heightened accusatory and delegitimising discourse, restrictive policies, and decreasing international funding – in practice leads to major concerns about the sustainability of organised civil society. Given the context, Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015) argue a need for new strategic partners for NGOs working in development. They write that NGOs "*are actively trying to overcome the structural constraints that face them, by adopting strategies that balance the need for financial survival, the defense of their organizational identities and commitment to goals*" (Banks, Hulme, and Edwards 2015, 712). Banks et al. suggest that NGOs might find themselves "*stepping away from the 'driving seat' of resource flows and their associated agendas to become supporters and facilitators of more deeply networked social action in which other groups pursue their own goals with the appropriate kinds of support*" (Banks, Hulme, and Edwards 2015, 713). Indeed, the constraints that NGOs face might lead to new relationships and foster new civil society action (Banks, Hulme, and Edwards 2015).

This article examines university–NGO collaborations as means in which NGOs in the Global South can continue to contribute to social development. University–NGO collaborations are relationships among academics and academic units with NGO practitioners and NGOs, based on shared interests and objectives. As explained by Aniekwe, Hayman, and Mdee (2012), the "*underlying premise is one of a win-win situation in which NGOs provide access to empirical experience and evidence, and the academic partner brings theoretical framing and methodological expertise*" (4).

The article is an exploratory inquiry about university–NGO collaborations in the Global South, contributing to development research on two fronts. First, it examines the role of the university in the South and the possibilities for collaborations with NGOs. Universities in the Global South are defining what it means to be engaged institutions and NGOs emerge as promising partners. Second, the article situates university–NGO collaborations within concerns about civil society sustainability. For NGOs, collaborations with universities can help gain (and sometimes regain) civil society legitimacy, promote organisational sustainability, and play to the strengths of NGOs in contributing to social development. In addition, NGOs in collaboration with universities builds on debates about NGOs'

roles in knowledge production (see Hayman et al. 2016). This article provides preliminary lessons from the Global South through the case of Ecuador. The Ecuadorian case is especially interesting because government mandates have presented a new role for the university system in the Andean country. The article identifies university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador and what civil society leaders have learnt from these emerging relationships. It ends with implications for university and civil society leadership as well as avenues for further research.

The role of the university

Universities have three functions – teaching, research, and community outreach and extension – and university–NGO collaborations can be associated with all three functions. We focus on community outreach. Under the umbrella of community outreach, universities seek to advance what can be called the engaged university (Munck et al. 2014). Approaches to university community outreach include a variety of learning and research methodologies: "*such as internships, academic service projects, applied research, organisation and community capacity building, and collaborations through grants*" (Clifford and Petrescu 2012, 78). Community outreach as a university function is culturally accepted, but not always government mandated. In the US for example, only land grant universities are required by government to participate in community engagement and development as a result of the Morrill Act of 1862. However, the land grant university model has spilled over into other types of universities in the US. In the UK, there are more pressures for higher education institutions to "*demonstrate how their findings will impact policy and practice*" (Stevens, Hayman, and Mdee 2013, 1072). As a result, universities have sought better partnerships and alliances with institutions outside of higher education, such as NGOs and other communities (Stevens, Hayman, and Mdee 2013).

While there is a growing global understanding of the importance of outreach as a function in the overall mission of university education, published research is disproportionately focused on cases in the United States and Europe (Appe and Barragán forthcoming). Indeed, there are robust experiences in community outreach by universities in the Global South, especially since the 1960s; however, little is known about the practices in non-English speaking parts of the world. In Latin America, Gutberlet, Tremblay, and Moraes (2014, 179) explain: "*What remains a challenge … is that the richness of Latin American activist intellectual experience is largely invisible to a world that operates mostly in English.*" Indeed, some argue that Latin America in particular is isolated from a spectrum of practices and debates in higher education due to the limitations of language (Tessler 2013).

Under the umbrella of community outreach, universities and academics can be reluctant to partner based on the premise of not compromising "academic neutrality" (Stevens, Hayman, and Mdee 2013). However, Latin America's experiences bode differently and provide a foundation for dynamic community partnerships. Latin American scholars note a long tradition of community outreach by universities, as universities in the region have committed themselves to advancing the institution as a public good for nearly a century (Gutberlet, Tremblay, and Moraes 2014). Current models of university outreach in Latin America include both market and social justice orientations (Appe and Barragán forthcoming). Additionally, an emergent model is growing in Latin America that frames higher education institutions as committed to "university social responsibility", which "*retains a strong component from the market-oriented perspective in terms of prioritizing university relevance in the economy, while also asserting that students and community members should participate as equals with the academy in promoting social change and research*" (Appe and Barragán forthcoming).

While the university social responsibility model is promising, scholars have noted the challenges that low- and middle-income countries have bringing both university research and education into the social and public spheres (Thorn and Soo 2006). While some of this work is focused on university and industry partnerships, a similar conclusion can be drawn about partnerships among universities and NGOs. Yet, solid networks of community outreach practices with NGOs exist in Latin America (Gutberlet, Tremblay, and Moraes 2014) and might include a multitude of tools and methods such as:

"*popular education, participatory research, theater of the oppressed, participatory video, feminist research, indigenous-centered research*" and service learning (179). These practices, however, are not generally systemised and often are not part of an overarching community outreach strategy of a university.

Indeed, universities are charged with creating active and engaged connections with communities through outreach programmes. What does this look like in the Global South? What might university–NGO collaborations offer to the university's outreach function? What might collaborations bring to NGOs which face the challenging contexts as outlined in the introduction? The rest of this article examines developing university–NGO collaborations in the Global South through the case of Ecuador.

Methodological approach

To elaborate the case of Ecuador, the article presents findings from purposively selected university–NGO collaborations. The collaborations have emerged as a result of Ecuador's recent mandate through a 2010 higher education reform (explained further below) which seeks to reform what is considered to be a weak university system, particularly related to community outreach and research productivity.

The methodological approach for the exploratory research includes document analysis of administrative archives provided by civil society leaders, public officials, and university administrators. In addition, data were collected from in-depth interviews with civil society leaders. We used snowball sampling (Lofland et al. 2006); purposively selecting leaders of NGOs and contacting others who were recommended by interview participants and who may have insightful information related to university–NGO collaboration in Ecuador. We conducted in-depth interviews with eight directors and four staff members who were involved in university–NGO collaborations. We note that this research is conducted through academic–pracademic collaboration. Both authors identify their

Table 1. Selected civil society networks and NGOs.

Colectivo Cuenca Ciudad para Vivir
The Citizen Collective "Cuenca, City to Live" is a network of citizens, NGOs, and other local actors that came together in 2010 in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador. The collective seeks to support the construction of a city which is a public good and encourage its development through collaboration of diverse actors.

Asociación Red de ONGs de Guayaquil (AROG)
The Association Network of Non-Governmental Organisations of Guayaquil has existed since 2001, in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. It seeks to strengthen social development, transparency practices, and advocate for more inclusive public policies through civil society action.

Red de Territorios Justos, Democráticos y Sustentables del Ecuador (RTJDS)
The Ecuadorian Network for Just, Democratic, and Sustainable Territories is a network of local actors which started in 2010. The network looks to promote the participation and co-responsibility by citizens to recuperate and use public spaces. It focuses on accountability by local government to provide quality public goods and services.

Fundación Ecuatoriana de Tecnología Apropiada (FEDETA)
The Ecuadorian Foundation of Appropriate Technology is a non-profit organisation working since 1984 for a more just world and healthy environment through the use of new energy technologies, including renewable energies.

Fundación Ecuatoriana Equidad
The Ecuadorian Equity Foundation is a non-profit organisation created in 2000 to provide health services and a platform for human rights and well-being for LBGTI communities through research, advocacy, and service provision.

Fundación Esquel
Esquel Foundation is a non-profit organisation working in Ecuador since 1990 that works in human development. It seeks to improve the quality of life and eradicate poverty, while also encouraging democratic practices.

Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental (CEDA)
The Ecuadorian Centre for Environmental Law is a non-profit organisation working in Ecuador since 1996. Its mission is to encourage processes aimed at changing attitudes and practices of decision-makers and civil society leaders to address environmental problems through an innovative, comprehensive, and technical approach via capacity-building, public policy research, and creation of environmental legislation.

Grupo Faro
Grupo Faro is a non-profit think tank that seeks to influence public policies to build a more democratic, innovative, sustainable, and inclusive society through research, informed dialogue, and collective action. Grupo Faro has been working since 2004.

positionalities as working closely with NGOs and civil society in Latin America, and have years of working alongside NGOs, specifically in Ecuador.

The article presents findings from three civil society networks in Ecuador (representing more than 150 NGOs), as we recognise the importance of networks due to the roles they play in "*advocating for the sector, earning public support, and improving the provision of public goods and services*" (Appe 2016, 189), and five NGOs which work in different policy areas (for example, environment, human rights, human development, and poverty eradication). All eight cases have relationships with universities under the framework of community outreach as required by the 2010 higher education reform (see Table 1).

Across the selected NGOs – three networks and five organisations – there are 13 signed institutional agreements with a total of 15 unique universities, and two agreements in development with two additional universities, giving a total of 17 universities included in the selection of collaborations.

Emergent university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador

The following sections present important context to the Ecuadorian case derived from document analysis. We then review the types of university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador and outline the lessons learnt through these collaborations from the vantage point of the civil society leaders.

NGOs in Ecuador

Ecuadorian NGOs are experiencing many of the challenges outlined above: heightened discourse, harsh regulatory policies, and shifts in international aid. In particular, government discourse has sought to confront and delegitimise NGOs and their role in development in Ecuador. Government officials have denounced the fact that there are more than 50,000 NGOs with legal status in Ecuador, with the President stating that: "*no one knows where* [NGOs] *are, who* [NGOs] *represent, nor do* [NGOs] *inform the government*" (La Prensa 2010). Since the beginning of his presidency in 2008, President Correa has publicly discredited NGOs in statements and press conferences (EFE 2010). He asserts that such organisations have avoided paying taxes, have meddled in Ecuadorian politics activities, and represent international interests.

NGOs in Ecuador have also encountered recent regulatory reform. Regulatory reform targeting NGOs in Ecuador started in 2008 with the enactment of Decree No. 982 (Presidencia 2008), which aimed at improving the transparency of NGOs and mechanisms of accountability through the creation and implementation of a registry of civil society and an accreditation process for organisations that receive public funding. The Decree allows the state to assume more control and monitoring of organisations (Chiriboga 2014). In 2013, Executive Decree No. 16 was implemented, replacing Decree No. 982. It also regulates NGOs and proposes new mechanisms to strengthen NGOs, which include processes of training, technical assistance, and the establishment of a competitive fund for NGOs (Presidencia 2013). However, these mechanisms have yet to be operationalised in practice. Furthermore, Decree No. 16 is criticised by NGOs and international actors for having a high level of discretion related to the closure of organisations. In 2015, President Correa promulgated Decree No. 739 which encodes and reforms Executive Decree No. 16. This Decree reforms the statutes related to the

Table 2. Relevant articles in LOES for NGOs.

- Promote and implement research programmes (Art. 8)
- Strengthen the exercise of research (Art. 11)
- Abide by the certification processes and resource allocation based on parameters including efficiency in research (Art. 24)
- Designate at least 6% of university resources to the publication of peer-reviewed journals and fellowships for professors (Art. 36)
- Conduct programmes and courses related to community outreach (Art. 125)

Source: Consejo 2010.

government registry for NGOs, and removes the need for lawyers and other financial burdens for the registration of a NGO; however, it maintains discretion to dissolve organisations as was laid out in Decree No. 16 (Presidencia 2015).

In addition, NGOs are experiencing a funding crisis that affects not only NGOs in Ecuador but NGOs throughout Latin America (Chiriboga 2014; Pousadela and Cruz 2016). The international sources that have traditionally existed have been reduced through the departure of aid agencies, a decrease in available funding, and/or a redefinition of thematic and sectoral priorities by donors. Ecuador is designated as a middle-income country. The World Bank Atlas method identifies middle-income countries based on the gross national income per capita and this designation changes eligibility for the receipt of international aid. This situation was further evidenced in a 2013–14 Collective Accountability Report of the Ecuadorian Confederation of Civil Society Organisations, which stated that the biggest change in the composition of resources for its member NGOs was in international cooperation, which fell from 37% of generated resources in 2013 to 23% in 2014 (Confederación 2015).

Higher education reform

In the mist of the regulatory reforms targeted at NGOs, in 2010 the Organic Law of Higher Education (LOES) was passed. LOES proposes new standards related to teaching, research, and outreach in the university system in Ecuador in order to improve the level of quality and academic excellence in higher education (Consejo 2010). While there are several new standards, we focus on the requirements for universities to create programmes and courses dedicated to community outreach as well as, to a lesser degree, universities' mandate to produce high-quality research (see Table 2).

While specific data on the funding allocated to university community outreach in Ecuador are not available, according to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (SENESCYT) the funding allocated by government to research is growing in Ecuador's 34 accredited universities. Funding has doubled from US$35,286,578 in 2012 to US$70,741,501 in 2014. However, it still represents only 4.47% of the total budget of universities, and the legal requirement specified in the LOES is 6%.[1]

University–NGOs collaborations in Ecuador

Before examining what civil society leaders have learnt in the nascent phases of collaborations with universities, we provide a descriptive overview of the types of emergent collaborations since the passing of LOES in 2010 in Ecuador (see Table 3). The new role for the university in Ecuador is government mandated and while not widespread in the region, Ecuador follows other countries which have government requirements related to research and community outreach, such as Brazil and Colombia (Colombian Ministry of National Education 1994; World Education Services 2016). While there is not consensus on what exactly community outreach means in Ecuador, three overarching types of university–NGO collaborations have emerged across the signed and developing agreements.

Student learning

First, programmes centred on student learning are a more "traditional" take on community outreach that has been practised in Ecuador for some time. These experiences provide students with internships and practicums in NGOs and communities. Civil society leaders described these opportunities as existing in many universities, and often in collaboration with NGOs. However, with the LOES, there is a greater sense of urgency for these collaborations to formalise through written agreements between universities and NGOs. This formalisation allows universities to demonstrate evidence of community outreach. Many university programmes seek to highlight the practical experiences provided to students in specific academic fields. As part of this, universities are creating "banks of

Table 3. Selected civil society networks and NGOs and their collaborations with universities.

Name of civil society network or NGO	Type of organisation, year of incorporation	Organisational mission	Number of signed agreements	Number of universities involved	Types of university–NGO collaborations	Examples of collaborations
Colectivo Cuenca Ciudad para Vivir. [The Citizen Collective 'Cuenca, City to Live']	Network of citizens, NGOs, and other local actors, 2010	To construct a city which is a public good and to develop collaboration between diverse actors	1	3	• Student learning (internships, research, practicums) • Short-term projects and programming	• Community-based research projects about citizenship, culture and education
Asociación Red de ONGs de Guayaquil (AROG). [The Association Network of Non-Governmental Organisations of Guayaquil]	Association of NGOs, 2001	To strengthen social development, transparency practices, and advocate for more inclusive public policies	3	3	• Student learning (internships, research, practicums) • Short-term projects and programming • Capacity building of NGOs	• Capacity building of NGOs through the creation of a 'School of NGOs' in a local university
Red de Territorios Justos, Democráticos y Sustentables del Ecuador (RTJDS) [Network for Just, Democratic and Sustainable Territories of Ecuador]	Network of civil society networks, 2010	To promote participation and active civic responsibility and accountability for public goods and services	1	1	• Student learning (internships, research, practicums) • Short-term projects and programming	• Capacity building in four local governments for sustainable urban development and land management planning
Fundación Ecuatoriana de Tecnología Apropiada (FEDETA) [The Ecuadorian Foundation of Appropriate Technology]	Non-profit organisation, 1984	To seek a more just world and healthy environment through the use of new technologies	1	1	• Student learning (internships, research, practicums) • Short-term projects and programming	• Design and implementation of wood stoves and drinking water systems in rural communities
Fundación Ecuatoriana Equidad. [Ecuadorian Equity Foundation]		To provide health services and a platform for human rights and well-	2	2	• Student learning (internships,	

	Non-profit organisation, 2000	being for LBGTI communities through research, advocacy, and service provision			research, practicums) • Short-term projects and programming • Capacity building of NGOs	• Part of a university's 'banks of organisations' for student internship placements
Fundación Esquel [Esquel Foundation]	Non-profit organisation, 1990	To improve the quality of life and eradicate poverty while also encouraging democratic practices	2	2	• In development	• In development
Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental (CEDA) [Ecuadorian Centre for Environmental Law]	Non-profit organisation, 1996	To change attitudes and practices of decision-makers and social leaders to address environmental problems	3	3	• Capacity building of NGOs	• Capacity building of NGOs about social responsibility, transparency, and accountability
Grupo Faro	Non-profit organisation, 2004	To influence public policies to build a more democratic, innovative, sustainable and inclusive society through research, informed dialogue and collective action	2	2	• Capacity building of NGOs	• Training to local NGOs about governance tools to more effectively address pressing local social problems
Totals			13 agreements Two in development	15 universities Two in development		

organisations" for students to consider for internship placements. NGOs can complement this with formal internship programmes, some of which have been effective mechanisms to recruit students who are interested in a career in civil society.

Short-term projects and programming

A second type of collaboration is the development of specific, often short-term projects and programming. This type is seen across NGOs. These are usually projects which have included spaces for learning open to the public and/or targeting students. Some have been community-based projects such as the design and implementation of wood stoves and drinking water systems in rural communities. Others have included community-based research projects about citizenship, culture, and education. Another project involved collaboration between a university and NGOs which sought to build governance capacity in four local governments. This pilot programme focused on developing policies for sustainable urban development and land management. Civil society leaders consider these community-based research projects with universities as serving students and the public as well as advancing community development.

Capacity building for NGOs

The third type of collaboration that has become more common under the LOES requirements is related to the capacity building of NGOs themselves. This is perhaps the least developed of the university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador. In Latin America, despite the strong presence of NGOs and the goods and services they provide, formal non-profit/NGO management education programmes in universities are not prevalent (Mirabella et al. 2007), and this holds true in Ecuador (Appe and Barragán 2013). However, this is changing under the framework of community outreach in the LOES. Staff members of NGOs have taken advantage of capacity building opportunities by participating in intensive training offered by universities. For example, one of the universities working with a NGO network started a "School of NGOs" which has helped the network encourage capacity building in the sector. CEDA has worked with a university to implement a capacity building programme for NGOs on social responsibility to order to encourage and facilitate NGO transparency and accountability. Grupo Faro also has introduced an initiative with a university to strengthen NGOs and local governments' governance tools to more effectively address pressing local social problems in Ecuador (Grupo Faro staff member, personal communication, 2 July 2015; 6 July 2016).

Preliminary lessons learnt from Ecuador

While the LOES was passed in 2010, the government, universities, and NGOs are still establishing what exactly community outreach (and to a degree, university research) looks like in Ecuador. Community outreach not clearly defined in Ecuador and can include student internships, specific projects and programming, and NGO training opportunities. Across the eight networks and NGOs in this research, there are several lessons learnt about university–NGOs collaboration in Ecuador which suggest implications for university and civil society leadership in the Global South. The following section elaborates these lessons: university–NGO collaborations can advance NGOs' missions; collaborations can provide new opportunities for NGOs to advocate for themselves and the sector; and despite these perceived positives, collaborations have not yet met the sector's funding challenges.

Lesson 1: university–NGO collaborations advance NGOs' missions

Civil society leaders observe that the collaborations with universities contribute to their legitimacy as social actors in Ecuador and help advance their organisational missions. That is, collaborations can be tailored to the themes and experiences of NGOs. This seems obvious; however, it was noted time and time again by the civil society leaders. Civil society leaders explained that they were able to bring NGO work into the academic environment and this was important to achieving NGO missions and

civil society action more generally. For example, AROG received assistance from a university – space and other in-kind resources – for the network's publication of its accountability reporting and its public presentation. In addition, the AROG president explained that the university provided space for forums about democracy that help the network's mission to encourage spaces of dialogue. The collaborations with universities provide NGOs public opportunities to show their work to different actors, and due to the delegitimising rhetoric and restrictive political context, collaborations become means for NGOs to further their objectives and perhaps garner additional public support (AROG president, personal communication, 28 August 2015).

FEDETA also discussed its projects with the university as a means to diffuse information about its mission, in this case the promotion of renewable energy. The civil society leader explained that FEDETA wanted society at large to recognise renewable energy in order to encourage the government to help stimulate its growth in Ecuador. Simply put, working with university students provided further opportunities for FEDETA to advance its mission (FEDETA president, personal communication, 1 July 2015).

Likewise, the Colectivo Cuenca's mission is about positioning the city of Cuenca as a public good and to promote the development of collaborations across diverse actors. The Colectivo Cuenca's experience with universities included an ongoing collaboration with three local universities. One of the lessons learnt in the beginning of the collaboration was that "*working together with the three universities strengthens links and academic networks, and multiplies the resources and expertise*" among all actors to further advance the Colectivo Cuenca's mission (Colectivo leader, personal communication, 3 July 2015).

Lesson 2: developing collaborations offer new opportunities for NGOs to advocate for the sector

The interviewed civil society leaders were optimistic for the possibility of long-term implications from the university community outreach requirements. The leader of a civil society network explained that: "*it is an opportunity to have permanent collaboration, this helps to include civil society experiences in the academic environment which helps legitimise the sector*" (Grupo Faro staff member, personal communication, 2 July 2015). We find that collaborations offer new opportunities (and practice) for NGOs to advocate for themselves and the sector, particularly given recent government policy reforms targeting NGOs.

According to NGOs, opportunities to advocate for themselves begin during the drafting of formal agreements with universities. Most of the organisations explained that to draft formal agreements requires patience and a balance between the general and the specific. One leader described that prior to talking with universities, NGOs need to think about what they want out of the collaboration, which allows civil society leaders to produce their own language and advocate for themselves. For example, AROG took the time to outline what it wanted from any collaboration with a university. It has organised collaboration on a spectrum with external considerations on one end, which includes fieldwork, implementing community outreach programmes and research, and at the other end the internal, capacity building and training for NGOs to strengthening the sector. If NGOs understand what they want to see, they avoid formal agreements that are too general and therefore useless. A leader explained:

> "NGOs are becoming very critical of institutional agreements because they are not applicable, they are too general. I think agreements are important, but many NGOs are losing faith in them. NGOs need then to have what they want to include in the agreement and request it." (AROG president, personal communication, 28 August 2015)

This process has allowed NGOs to develop language and build their own discourses which counterbalance the discourses produced by the public and elected officials in the public sphere and within the policy reforms.

In addition, to reach a formal agreement takes time, as several NGOs explained. Esquel, which is still developing its collaborations with two universities, explained that the first step is creating the space to get to know each other and understand the LOES requirements. This is a process as most universities are not familiar with "community outreach" as an institutional function. An Esquel staff member explained:

> "this is where we have gotten with the universities. From here, the second stage is defining a formal agreement and then a third stage is execution, we are still only at stage one." (Esquel staff member, personal communication, 6 August 2015)

Concerns about long-term sustained programming can be adjusted and clarified in formal agreements. In a community-based research project by the Colectivo Cuenca, there were challenges with follow up from university professors. The professors involved had limited time to dedicate to the project, despite their best intentions. Professors in particular have several more responsibilities and further reporting under LOES. After the initial experience, the Colectivo Cuenca wanted the professors' efforts to be institutionally acknowledged and encouraged. Colectivo Cuenca participants want to see outlined in the formal agreement that the professors' time spent working on the collaborative projects is formally recognised by university leadership.

While establishing agreements takes time, NGO leaders expressed that having these collaborations with universities brings prestige to their work as universities are respected institutions. As such, the Colectivo Cuenca sees long-term sustained collaboration as having concrete potential for organised civil society in Ecuador. As a Colectivo Cuenca leader explained, for NGOs in Ecuador:

> "This is the time to make interesting proposals to universities, in general, because I see that … there is need, [and] there is receptiveness. Also for citizens and organisations it is important to have links [with universities] like this." (Colectivo leader, personal communication, 3 July 2015)

Lesson 3: university–NGO collaborations do not meet sector funding challenges

Civil society leaders have expressed expectations for funding opportunities given the implementation of the LOES. The president of the Ecuadorian Confederation of Civil Society Organisations, Orazio Belletini, explained that NGOs have decades of experiences with communities, whereas universities are more resourced but have less experience with communities, therefore university–NGO collaboration has the potential to meet the needs of both actors. Collaborations with universities might pull NGOs out of the "*funding triangle*" which includes "*international cooperation, the state, and the private sector*" and is a model which has been prevalent in the region but is undergoing change (Pousadela and Cruz 2016, 607). Universities can fit within the funding triangle under the state as public universities as well as part of the private sector in the case of private universities. While in developed countries such as the US, it is often public universities that pursue community outreach as a public good and as part of their public responsibly (Ostrander 2004), we observe that private universities are more likely to engage in collaborations with the eight selected NGOs in Ecuador.

Despite the expectations that public and private universities could provide access to resources for NGOs, the collaborations selected with universities do not show specific and clear funding options. This is consistent with a preliminary study of two university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador (Appe and Barragán forthcoming). In the cases of developing university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador, there is no budget provided by universities in signed community outreach agreements and little funding available for specific research projects. This is consistent across public and private universities in Ecuador. The NGOs' experiences demonstrate that collaborations most often include in-kind resources provided by both universities and NGOs. For example, in one collaboration, the university provided the use of its laboratories. In another case, universities provided the location, covered publishing costs and other materials, and made available the time of university professors and administrators.

Additionally, contrary to the funding expectations, we note that in three of the cases it was the NGOs which contributed financial resources to universities for the collaborations through direct purchase of services and in-kind contributions. When a budget was needed in some cases, the NGO secured the small-scale funding from international agencies and private foundations. With FEDETA, funding for projects was due to a long-term relationship that FEDETA has with an international NGO, with which it had worked for over eight years on projects related to rural development.

An example of a possible funding source as a result of a university–NGO collaboration is through Esquel's experience, which does not yet have signed agreements with the two universities it has been in conversations with, but is developing and supporting the idea that one of the universities will have a competitive fund created for community based-research and outreach programming. It would include requests for proposals from NGOs and communities for research and outreach projects. This might provide NGOs the opportunity to develop and apply to fund specific projects. The organisation explains the challenges with the execution of the competitive fund: "[Our] *experience has been complicated because the university itself still needs* [to secure] *the resources*" (Esquel staff member, personal communication, 6 August 2015).

University–NGO collaborations and next steps

The context for NGOs in the Global South is complex given the heighted discourse against civil society, the increasingly restrictive and/or vague regulatory policies targeting the sector, and the reduction of international aid funding. Given this, NGOs are seeking alternatives in order to continue to contribute to social development. It is noted that this will require new relationships with donors and governments, as suggested by Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015). We find that universities are also an important part of these new relationships. While the case of Ecuador cannot be generalised to represent the entire Global South, it does suggest important implications for university and civil society practice which might be relevant in other contexts. In Ecuador, universities are now required to engage in programming related to community outreach and research. As one NGO leader explained, with the LOES the "*government does not know what it wants but we do know that universities have to do this, so we need to take advantage and construct how universities and civil society will collaborate*" (Equidad leader, personal communication, 11 August 2015). The eight cases of networks and NGOs have framed collaboration as an opportunity to advance the missions of NGOs and provide opportunities for the sector to advocate for itself in social development, even if for now these collaborations might not guarantee the funding that is desired by NGOs in Ecuador.

There are several further implications for both civil society and university leadership in the Global South to consider as university–NGO collaborations develop. First is the role of university–NGO collaborations in the production of knowledge. As in many developing contexts, formal university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador are in their nascent state. Further research on knowledge production through community outreach is needed. Knowledge production is one of the major reasons for the existence of the university in society. However, in Ecuador, knowledge production has only happened at a very small scale. In fact, based on our research, there is not a major push for the public dissemination of knowledge generated through university–NGO collaborations in Ecuador.

Second, university and civil society leadership need to foment spaces for solving public problems – whether in the so-called North or the South. In the case of universities, if they are not engaging in public problem-solving they are at risk of becoming "*socially irrelevant*" (Ostrander 2004, 76). As one NGO leader explained, "*Eventually I would like to see plans of university–NGO collaboration that place community outreach under the framework of partnership, plans that are not only thinking about the university student or fulfilling a requirement*" (Equidad leader, personal communication, 11 August 2015). That is, the NGO leader wants these collaborations to result in solving community problems. Providing spaces to academics and academic units and civil society leaders to "*forge links*" (Aagaard-Hansen and Olsen 2009) and "*calling for more "happy hour" opportunities for NGOs and academics to meet and discuss initial ideas*" (Stevens, Hayman, and Mdee 2013, 1075) are promising directions for problem-

solving that need consideration in Ecuador and the region. Additionally, higher education leaders in Latin America have become more vocal and called on universities to solve public problems. As one Argentinian higher education leader explained:

> "Now is the time to say [to university and college leaders], 'You are not serious enough if you are not involving your students in reality and building relevant skills. You are not serious enough if the knowledge you are producing is not relevant to pressing problems.'" (María Nieves Tapia, cited in Hoyt 2014)

Third, related to knowledge production and solving public problems, universities in the Global South will need to respond to the needs of the market, but avoid the positioning of higher education as a commodity (Ostrander 2004). This research showcased the vantage point from civil society leaders in these developing collaborations in Ecuador. Through this vantage point we can better understand the challenges and potential of the new push for university community outreach and research in Ecuador. However, next steps must include a more systemised look at the challenges and potential that university leadership and administrators experience as these collaborations emerge. This might also be further considered within the global debate and many criticisms about the university as "*academic capitalism*" (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), even as universities use the language of community outreach. It is not only the credibility and legitimacy of NGOs that are questioned, the role of the university – public and private – is also experiencing serious debate. We should explore further whether the community outreach path can indeed strengthen the university as not only an economic driver but also an actor in social development in low- and middle-income countries. Related, is the need for further analysis of any variation across public and private universities and their likelihood to collaborate with NGOs. As mentioned, private universities in the cases selected were more likely to have formal agreements with NGOs. Understanding why this is in Ecuador might help us understand the determinants needed to foster university–NGO collaborations. NGOs reported willingness to collaborate with both public and private universities.

Debates about the role of the university in the Global South will remain a concern of public officials and communities and should be of interest to NGOs leaders. Stevens, Hayman, and Mdee (2013) report: "*The dilemma of how development NGOs and academics can effectively collaborate is not a new one, but is being increasingly felt by both sides as their respective impact agendas push them together*" (1076). Indeed, we need further debate about the role of the university, about collaborations with NGOs in the Global South, and about the relationships needed for civil society sustainability. Community outreach advocates suggest that "*universities, community non-profits, local leaders, and grassroots activists, as well as government and business, must now all work together to build on … strengths and seek more lasting solutions*" (Ostrander 2004, 78). Therefore, research will need to not only look at what collaborations look like and some of the initial lessons learnt related to civil society sustainability as we have attempted to do, but as collaborations continue, research needs to address if these university–NGO collaborations are truly producing needed knowledge and solving public problems in communities which they seek serve.

Note

1. SENESCYT unfortunately has no information on private universities (SENESCYT staff member, personal communication, 30 November 2015).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Susan Appe is Assistant Professor of Public Administration at the College of Community and Public Affairs at Binghamton University, State University of New York. Her research centres on government-non-profit relations, the evolution of the

non-profit sector in developed and developing countries, international service learning in public affairs education, and the role of the university in society. She has been awarded several research fellowships in Latin America, including Fulbright Scholar awards in Colombia and Ecuador.

Daniel Barragán currently serves as Executive Director of the International Research Center on Environment and Territory (Centro Internacional de Investigaciones sobre Ambiente y Territorio – CIIAT) and as a Professor of Research Principles and Sustainability Policies at the University of the Hemispheres (Universidad de Los Hemisferios) in Quito. His work is focused on issues of civil society, sustainability, environmental governance, social responsibility, and transparency and accountability.

References

Aagaard-Hansen, J., and A. Olsen. 2009. "Research into Practice: A Comprehensive Approach." *Development in Practice* 19 (3): 381–385.

Aniekwe, C. C., R. Hayman, and A. Mdee. 2012. *Academic-NGO Collaboration in International Development Research: A Reflection on the Issues*. Working Paper. Oxford: INTRAC.

Appe, S. 2016. "NGO Networks, the Diffusion and Adaptation of NGO Managerialism, and NGO Legitimacy in Latin America." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 27 (1): 187–208.

Appe, S., and D. Barragán. 2013. "Strategies Outside the Formal Classroom: Nonprofit Management Education in Transparency and Accountability." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 19 (4): 591–614.

Appe, S., and D. Barragán. Forthcoming. "Policy Windows for CSOs in Latin America: Looking Outside the Standard Legal and Regulatory Environments." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. doi:10.1007/s11266-015-9666-z.

Appe, S., and M. D. Layton. 2016. "Government and the Nonprofit Sector in Latin America." *Nonprofit Policy Forum* 7 (2): 117–135.

Appe, S., N. Rubaii, S. Lippez-De Castro, and S. Capobianco. Forthcoming. "The Concept and Context of the Engaged University in the Global South: Lessons from Latin America to Guide a Research Agenda." *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*.

Banks, N., D. Hulme, and M. Edwards. 2015. "NGOS, States, and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?." *World Development* 66: 707–718.

Brinkerhoff, J. M. 2002. "Government-nonprofit Partnership: A Defining Framework." *Public Administration and Development* 22 (1): 19–30.

Chiriboga, M. 2014. *Las ONG ecuatorianas en los procesos de cambio*. Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones Abya-Yala.

CIVICUS. 2016. "State of Civil Society Report 2016." Accessed 24 July, 2016. www.civicus.org/images/documents/SOCS2016/summaries/SoCS-full-review.pdf.

Clark, J. 1990. "The Relationship between the State and the Voluntary Sector." Accessed 24 July, 2016. www.gdrc.org/ngo/state-ngo.html.

Clifford, D., and C. Petrescu. 2012. "The Keys to University–Community Engagement Sustainability." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 23 (1): 77–91.

Colombian Ministry of National Education. 1994. "Decree 1478." Accessed 24 July, 2016. www.mineducacion.gov.co/1759/w3-article-86244.html.

Confederación Ecuatoriana de OSC. 2015. "Tercer Informe de Rendición Colectiva de Cuentas 2013–2014." Accessed 24 July, 2016. www.confederacionecuatorianaosc.org/confederacion/sites/default/files/Tercer-Informe-Rendicion-Colectiva-de-Cuentas.pdf.

Consejo de Educacion Superior. 2010. Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior, LOES, Registro Oficial No. 298. October 12.

EFE. 2010. "Presidente de Ecuador anuncia depuración de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales." Accessed 20 December, 2010. www.latercera.com/noticia/presidente-de-ecuador-anuncia-depuracion-de-organizaciones-no-gubernamentales.

Gutberlet, J., C. Tremblay, and C. Moraes. 2014. "Community-based Research Tradition in Latin America." In *Higher Education and Community-based Research*, edited by R. Munck, L. McIlrath, B. Hall, and R. Tandon, 167–180. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hayman, R. 2016. "Unpacking Civil Society Sustainability: Looking Back, Broader, Deeper, Forward." *Development in Practice* 26 (5): 670–680.

Hayman, R., S. King, T. Kontinen, and L. Narayanaswamy. 2016. *Negotiating Knowledge*. Rugby: Practical Action Publishing.

Hoyt, L. 2014. "Leaders in the Civic Engagement Movement." Accessed July 24, 2016. http://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Nieves_Interview_final.pdf.

ICNL (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law). 2015. "The Right to Freedom of Expression." *Global Trends in NGO Law* 6 (1): 1–27.

La Prensa Latina. 2010. "Denuncia Rafael Correa la Existencia de unas 50mil ONG en Ecuador." Accessed July 24, 2016. www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n158261.html.

Lewis, D. 2003. "Theorizing the Organization and Management of Non-governmental Development Organizations." *Public Management Review* 5 (3): 325–344.

Lofland, J., D. Snow, L. Andersen, and L. H. Lofland. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Mirabella, R. M., G. Gemelli, M. J. Malcolm, and G. Berger. 2007. "Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies: International Overview of the Field in Africa, Canada, Latin America, Asia, the Pacific, and Europe." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 36 (4): 110S–135S.

Munck, R., L. McIlrath, B. Hall, and R. Tandon. 2014. *Higher Education and Community-based Research*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Ostrander, S.A. 2004. "Democracy, Civic Participation, and the University: A Comparative Study of Civic Engagement on Five Campuses." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33 (1): 74–93.

Pousadela, I. M. and A. Cruz. 2016. "The Sustainability of Latin American CSOs: Historical Patterns and new Funding Sources." *Development in Practice* 26 (5): 606–618.

Pratt, B. 2016. "Special Issue Overview: Civil Society Sustainability." *Development in Practice* 26 (5): 527–531.

Presidencia de la República del Ecuador. 2008. "Decree No. 982." Accessed July 24, 2016. http://decretos.presidencia.gob.ec/decretos.

Presidencia de la República del Ecuador. 2013. "Decree No. 16." Accessed July 24, 2016. http://decretos.presidencia.gob.ec/decretos.

Presidencia de la República del Ecuador. 2015. "Decree No. 739." Accessed July 24, 2016. http://decretos.presidencia.gob.ec/decretos.

Slaughter, S., and G. Rhoades. 2004. *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stevens, D., R. Hayman, and A. Mdee. 2013. "'Cracking Collaboration' between NGOs and Academics in Development Research." *Development in Practice* 23 (8): 1071–1077.

Tessler, L. 2013. "Can Latin American Higher Education Go Global without using English?" *The Guardian*. Accessed July 24, 2016. www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/mar/05/internationalisation-latin-america-university-host

Thorn, K., and M. Soo. 2006. *Latin America Universities and the Third Mission*. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4002. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Watkins, S. C., A. Swidler, and T. Hannan. 2012. "Outsourcing Social Transformation: Development NGOs as Organizations." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 285–315.

World Education Services. 2016. "Brazil Educational Overview." Accessed July 24, 2016. www.wes.org/ca/wedb/brazil/bredov.htm.