

BLINDED BY BIASES: OUTSIDERS' MISPERCEPTIONS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT –
A CASE STUDY OF RURAL PERU

By Angie Fuhrmann

The following article is based on my experiences during my summer field work in rural Peru.
This paper is still a work in progress and will be submitted to the Anthropology Graduate
Student Journal for publication in fall of 2011.

ABSTRACT

Outsiders, people concerned with rural development who are neither rural nor poor, underperceive rural poverty because their actual experiences are usually limited to brief and hurried visits to rural communities. These tourist-like experiences exhibit six main sets of biases, all of which inhibit contact with and learning from the poorer people. Using my field notes and observations, I analyzed specific examples to critically examine how outsider biases affected the overall effectiveness of the case-study development project in Peru. Because of a failure to recognize these six sets of biases, the poorer people were seen very little, and even less was the nature of their poverty understood.

Blinded By Biases: Outsiders' Misperceptions of Rural Development – A Case Study of Rural Peru

“All powerful uppers think they know,
What's right and real for those below,
At least each upper so believes,
But all are wrong; all power deceives.”
(Chambers 1994:100-101)

Introduction

In light of the creation of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), more money and human resources are being allocated towards development projects that seek to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty, encourage gender equality and education, improve health through the suppression of certain diseases, promote environmental sustainability and establish global collaboration for development (United Nations 2000). However, many of these projects are failing to reach the often poorer and rural populations because they have been built upon myths and errors that have persisted for decades. In a field where errors are a regular happenstance, they are sometimes embraced and lead to quick learning, evaluation and change. This reflects a class of errors that are short-term and reversible, leading to quick improvements through trial-and-error or learning-by-doing. More often than not, however, the errors that have become embedded in development beliefs “go deeper, last longer, and do more damage” as they are sustained through constant reiteration and reinforcement by highly educated people from various disciplinary and occupational backgrounds (Chambers, 1994, p. 29). Examples of these entrenched errors have surfaced from many different developmental domains and include popular beliefs about food and famines, macroeconomic policies, science and technology, knowledge transfer, and beliefs about peoples' relation to their environment (Chambers, 1994). These are the types of embedded errors which proliferate failures. As a result, many projects, and therefore a lot of development, have caused significant “misallocations of funds and human

resources”, “misguided programs”, “missed opportunities” and, for professionals, has led to “deception, cynicism and loss of commitment” (Chambers, 1994, p. 15). Further analysis of these erroneous setbacks raises questions about how and why these myths and errors developed in the first place, how and why they became so deeply embedded in the philosophies, reasoning, principles, and practices that have guided development professionals, and why have these beliefs persisted into the 21st century (Chambers, 1994). With an understanding of these embedded errors, similar ones can be avoided in the future.

Instead of looking to externalities or the local people as the cause of flawed data and misinformation stemming from development projects, a lot of the mystery disappears when we focus attention towards ourselves, the outsiders (Chambers, 1994). This is because rural development professionals tend to under-perceive rural poverty as their experiences, observations and reports are based upon their brief visits to rural communities, and not the reality of the people that actually live there. Coined by Robert Chambers (1983) as ‘rural development tourism’, these tourist-like experiences tend to exhibit six sets of biases which inhibit the outsider from contacting and learning from poorer, rural people. Failure to recognize these biases helps sustain and reinforce the errors that have persisted in the international development field while causing real-life consequences for the rural and poor communities who are being ‘developed’. For these reasons, this paper invites outsiders concerned with rural development to take a step back from their projects and positions, to analyze the ways in which they think, learn, feel and act, and understand how these approaches may influence their observations and experiences. Through this self-reflection, outsiders will be more equipped to adjust their actions accordingly, promote more sustainable development and be more effective in reaching those who are rural and poor (Chambers, 1983).

This paper explores the concept of ‘rural development tourism’ and the power relations created through this phenomenon, which often lead to selected presentation, staged authenticity, and deliberate misinformation about and by rural communities. After an overview of the basic principles as outlined by Chambers (1983, 1994), the six main sets of biases (spatial, project, person, dry-season, diplomatic and professional) are discussed in greater depth. I then present the case study of a development project in Peru, in which I participated during the summer of 2010, and analyze my observations and experiences based on the bias sets previously mentioned. Based on the analysis, I draw conclusions of where the project was effective and where it fell short, offering suggestions for improvement. Finally, I relate the case study conclusions to future studies of development and the accomplishment of more sustainable, successful, and applicable development.

Outsiders

Outsiders are people interested in rural development who, unlike the people they intend to work with or among, are neither rural nor poor (Chambers, 1983). Often, they come from a wide variety of professions and academic backgrounds including “field and headquarter staff of governmental organizations, academic researchers, aid agency personnel, bankers, businessmen, consultants, doctors, engineers, journalists, lawyers, politicians, priests, school teachers, staff of training institutes, and workers in voluntary agencies among others” (Chambers, 1983, p. 2). They come from different countries, ethnic backgrounds, religions, careers and generations. They speak different languages and cover the spectrum in terms of interests, prejudices, preparation, and prior experiences (Chambers, 1983). Yet, despite their contrasts, three characteristics unite these outsiders: (1) “they come from urban areas”; (2) “they want to find something out”; and (3) “they are short of time” (Chambers, 1983, p. 11).

The Rural and Poor

In addition to the MDGs, most aid agencies, nonprofit organizations, sectors of national governments and development-focused groups have distinguished an explicit “need” for development to be directed towards the poorer, subaltern sectors of society (Mowforth and Munt, 2009, p. 335). Both internationally and within countries, educated people and resources tend to move out of rural areas and into urban centers (Chambers, 1983). This results in the distancing of more vulnerable and poorer populations from urban centers, and creates a higher concentration of poor people in rural environments. For the purposes of this paper, I do not attempt to define what makes one person poor and not another because the incidence and depth of poverty are not easy to distinguish. On the contrary, attempts by outsiders (in my case, a white person, formally educated, from the middle class and the North) to define the economic, social, or resource-based variables that make a person poorer than another are subject to many of the myths and errors mentioned earlier in the paper (Chambers, 1994). Self-critical analysis, strong rapport and participatory methods of an outsider can increase understanding and insight into the beliefs, values, priorities, and actions of poor people, but it is necessary to note that there will always be misrepresentation to some degree because “we can never fully escape our conditioning” (Chambers, 1994, p. 163). That being said, outsiders often distort the realities of the poor due to a lack of contact and communication. “Poor people are rarely met; when they are met, they often do not speak; when they do speak; they are often cautious and deferential; and what they say is often either not listened to, or brushed aside, or interpreted in a bad light” (Chambers, 1983, p. 104). Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, poverty is understood as relative to the context and to the outsider. Attempts at understanding and learning from the poor must begin with introspection by us, the outsiders, to determine our preconceptions, prejudices and

rationalizations. Through this self-examination, we become more equipped to question our comforting beliefs and our justifications of relative affluence and the poverty of others.

Rural Development Tourism

Rural development tourism, “the phenomenon of the brief rural visit” is the “direct experience of rural conditions” for these urban-based outsiders (Chambers, 1983, p. 10). The visit may be for one or several days, and the ‘tourist’ typically travels from a different country, a capital city, a local headquarters, or some other type of urban center (Chambers, 1983). As soon as the outsider enters into the rural community, power imbalances are established and are constantly reinforced throughout the visit. Though the outsider may not realize it, their power exists by virtue of their education, their links to vast networks of information, their financial and logistical support, and their access to research and project reports of the past and present (Adams and McGraw, 1997). An outsider’s role within the project may also create a power imbalance where community members or project participants perform “distinct, ‘contrived’ roles and [the outsiders] act as ‘stage managers or directors who guide, and attempt to delimit’ the performance of participants” (Mowforth and Munt, 2009, p. 228). Within these unbalanced power relations, the local and more vulnerable community members cope using their own strategies. The first type of strategy is the acceptance of the outsiders’ transfer of reality, where the local people conform to and internalize the beliefs and values of the outsiders. Local community members also have the option to speak out, rebel against, or reject the outsiders’ paradigms. However, rural communities typically take the middle course of action, neither fully accepting nor rejecting the beliefs of the outsiders through actions of diplomacy and deceit in order to maximize opportunities and benefits. Yet, it is often this third strategy that misleads the outsiders the most (Chambers, 1994).

Mass tourism is typically vilified for its tendency to “voraciously consume places and cultures transforming them into Disney-like extravaganzas where cultural inauthenticity is actively promoted,” and the power relations between a rural development tourist and a rural community show several similarities (Mowforth and Munt, 2009, p. 13). Goffman’s (1997) work on “the presentation of self in everyday life” and “the staged authenticity thesis” in tourism reflect the distorted and incomplete representations of everyday life which are presented to the outsiders because community members believe that the information provided will secure support and ultimately “manipulate interpretations to serve their interests” (Mosse 2001; Mowforth and Munt, 2009, p. 228). In this sense, “only the best is shown and seen” (Chambers, 1994, p. 84). The more influential and high-ranking the visitor, the more planned and elaborate are the preparations to receive them, thus complicating a situation with “carefully selected presentation” (Chambers, 1994, p. 84). “The glowing words of the visitor then reflect not the wider reality, but the extent to which the visitor was misled” and in turn, attribute “to the skill and care with which the visit was arranged and managed” (Chambers, 1994, p. 84). This is because the local people, who are faced with complex, diverse, dynamic and unpredictable circumstances have become skilled in discretion, with community experts who handle the outsiders and already know what to say and how (Chambers, 1994). First and foremost, it is the task of these community liaisons to determine what kinds of threats or opportunities accompany the outsider. Then, the liaisons develop a strategy of saying or showing that which maximizes possible gains while minimizing possible consequences (Chambers, 1994). As a result, the primary needs of a local community do not necessarily reflect their reality, but coincide with the pre-determined development that the outsider is there to offer.

Six Sets of Biases

Although there are several types of biases that encumber outsiders' contact with rural people, and in particular, the poorest populations, it should be noted that exceptions can be found to all the different types of biases. However, it is the dangerous underestimation of the power inherent in these biases that blinds outsiders and hinders their ability to see the ways and frequency in which their biases transpire and interlock (Chambers, 1983).

i) Spatial Bias

The spatial bias refers to the imposition of rural development tourists to concentrate their visits "near cities, on roadsides and the centers of villages, to the neglect of peripheries" (Chambers, 1994, p. 111). Although the use of motorized vehicles has facilitated the development of rural communities, most of the outsiders' visits tend to follow developed road networks as they begin and end in urban centers. This along with the convenience of the proximity to urban centers, the comfort of amenities, the amount of fuel used for travel and the time allocated for the visit all reflect the preference of outsiders to travel close to or along roads and trafficked routes (Chambers, 1983). As previously mentioned, it is the intent of most outsiders to reach marginalized areas, where the poorer populations tend to be concentrated. However, these specific communities are not always in close proximity to neither roads nor urban centers.

Following developed or developing road networks also naturally directs attention away from poorer people because roadsides tend to have more development, better services, superior equipment and more resources, like gasoline (Chambers, 1983). Often, it is the more affluent and influential people within the rural communities who move to these locations because they have the clout to do so. With the location comes easier access to electrical and water services, benefits from better information through gossip and people passing by, and economic opportunities for

opening businesses, all of which focus social and commercial activities to these areas (Chambers, 1983). As a result, the poorer and more vulnerable people fade out of sight and the visitor primarily sees the better-off homes, stores and services. This type of bias does not only apply to road networks, but also applies to the spatial distribution of people within a village; those with more power appear more often in social meeting areas, while the poorer people are out of sight and away from these types of locations (Chambers, 1983). In addition, the mode of transportation used by an outsider will affect their interaction with different rural populations. If an outsider arrives via private car, plane, or boat, as opposed to utilizing the local method of transportation, they are also less likely to interact with the poorer populations who rely on the cheapest transportation available.

ii) Project Bias

A project bias refers to the predisposition of an outsider to become connected, through a network of urban-to-rural contacts, and undertake projects in areas where development has already been established (Chambers, 1983). Because of this, contact with and learning from the rural poor is typically contained within “tiny atypical islands of activity” which attract repetitious and reinforcing attention to the projects (Chambers, 1983, p. 16). When outsiders visit these types of communities, attention is again directed away from the poorer populations and is focused towards the success of the project. Outsiders then base their reports, evaluations, and publications on what they experienced while in these atypical and exclusive communities and consequently generate more research, funding and general interest (Chambers, 1983). However, with the popularity and recognition comes a greater time investment in showing outsiders around. “Inundated by the celebrated, the curious, and the crass – prime ministers, graduate students, women’s clubs, farmers’ groups, aid missions, evaluation teams, committees and

directors of this and that – managers set up public relations units and develop a public relations style. Visitors then get the treatment. A fluent guide follows a standard route and a standard routine. The same people are met, [and] the same buildings [are] entered” (Chambers, 1983, p. 17). This illustrates the reinforcement through repetition of outsiders’ beliefs, and how this type of bias may cause a project to become a self-sustaining myth.

iii) Person Bias

Generally having contact with men more often than women, local elites more than those at the bottom of the social, economic or political hierarchy, and the users of services more so than the people who do not utilize services, outsiders develop impressions and acquire information from certain sectors of a population more so than others (Chambers, 1983; Chambers, 1994). In this context, the term ‘local elite’ refers to people within a community who are more influential and less poor than others within their community. Typically they include “progressive farmers, village leaders, headmen, traders, religious leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals” (Chambers, 1983, p. 18). With greater flexibility, more accessibility and better fluency, it is these people who provide most information to outsiders. “It is they who entertain visitors, generously providing the expected beast or beverage. It is they who receive the lion’s share of attention, advice and services. It is they who show visitors the progressive practices in their fields. It is they too, who, at least at first, monopolize the time and attention of the visitor” (Chambers, 1983, p. 18). This is opposite of the poorer people who may be reluctant to speak up because they feel weak, secluded and vulnerable.

Not only are majority of the outsiders who visit rural communities through development projects men, but the people with whom they most often establish contact are also men (Chambers, 1983). As mentioned previously, there are exceptions, but it is the women who are

often busy, shy to approach, and reluctant to meet with male outsiders. Nonetheless, it is the poorer women who constitute a vulnerable population within another vulnerable population (Chambers, 1983). Similar inferences can be made about children, people who are ill, older and less agile.

When development projects are concerned with certain facilities or technologies, the users and adopters of these tools are seen and interacted with the most. Non-users, on the other hand, are little seen. Although they may have just as much or more justification for participating in activities and projects, they often lack the means and resources to do so. Overlapping with their spatial biases, outsiders are more likely to visit the buildings and places where these facilities or technologies are concentrated, easily discernable, and as a result, are unproblematic to study (Chambers, 1983).

iv) Dry-season Bias

Deciding to visit a rural community during the dry-season also creates a biased experience for the outsider, because the rainy season is more detrimental to the physical and economic wellbeing of rural people (Chambers, 1994). This is because the rainy season precedes the new year's harvest, during which the food supply is short, prices are growing, work is difficult and disease is rampant, proving to be the one of the most difficult times of the year (Chambers, 1983). At the same time, malnutrition and mortality rates increase, "while body weights decline," and during this time of the year, people are more likely to fall into debt; it is the time when poor people are likely to become even more poor (Chambers, 1983, p. 20). Overlapping again with the spatial biases, it is once the rainy season subsides that outsiders are able to travel with more freedom and ease, which influences their experiences and observations concerning rural development. At the same time, some outsiders have noted their wet-season

avoidance as deliberate so as not to inconvenience people in rural communities when they are most occupied and exhausted from maintaining their agricultural and daily practices in the season of scarcity. This may be considered both practical and moral, but the ultimate result is the misrepresentation of information and a bias against seeing and meeting with people when they are most vulnerable and most likely to need assistance or development (Chambers, 1983).

v) Diplomatic Bias

A diplomatic bias refers to an outsider's combination politeness, courtesy and timidity, and how these work to deter the outsider from approaching and learning from those who are poorer because of the fear of offending the local community through inquiry (Chambers, 1983). This stems from the notion that poverty, in any community or culture, is often a subject of shame or irrelevance (Chambers, 1983). Most of the time, outsiders are concerned about upsetting or insulting powerful and influential members of the community through their inquiry, but other times they may not want to expose previous projects that failed in reaching the poorer populations. A consequence of this is further separation between outsiders and the most marginalized people.

vi) Professional Bias

Referring to the professional disposition and approach of an outsider, this type of bias is especially detrimental for reaching the marginalized and poorer populations because outsiders seek (often subconsciously) the information that fits their preconceptions (Chambers, 1983). Outsiders who are short of time tend to enter rural communities already "knowing what they want to know" and therefore "become even more narrowly single-minded" (Chambers, 1983, p. 23). In turn, they have the time only to complete their professional activities, and end up expending their time and energy on their own objectives instead of using their time to develop

alternative perceptions and open-ended questions to their specific development project (Chambers, 1983, p. 23) A narrow professional focus also is the cause of erroneous judgments and prescriptions because outsiders inevitably underestimate poverty through the partial recognition and confrontation of the problem (Chambers, 1983).

Bias Recognition and the Inability to Shed Biases

In the international development field, as mentioned throughout the paper, it is especially important for outsiders to recognize and understand their biases before entering into a rural community. This is because the nature of international development involves entering into another culture where power relations and imbalances are inescapable. In fact, research or development of any type involves the supposition that the outsider is examining something outside of themselves. For this reason, knowledge cannot be acquired solely through introspection, but requires a balance of both self-examination and outside examination. This idea applies to both social and natural sciences, though the latter is more evident in its separation of the researcher and the research subject. Yet, it is impossible for a researcher to study something that is completely isolated from them, so the outsider must evaluate how their presence and inevitable influence affect their investigative process and outcomes (Davies, 1999).

Case Study in Peruvian Amazon

In early June of 2010, I traveled to the Peru Amazon to help coordinate a development project workshop that took place from the 30th of July until the 2nd of August. Generated by the community, the workshop aimed to inform and prepare local participants with the skills and equipment necessary to perform their own territorial land demarcation with accuracy and precision. The project was funded through a grant I had written for the specific workshop, and was endorsed by an international nonprofit development organization, three independent

engineers who had worked on a similar project in the community four years prior, and several local and regional governmental offices. It was also attended by members of the rural community hosting the workshop, in addition to four other surrounding, more rural communities. Because my observations are not replicable, the following is an analysis of my experiences and notes based on my biases. This case study should therefore provide an example to ground the theoretical framework of this paper. Yet, it is extremely important to note that another person carrying out the same or similar work may not only have different results, but also different insights, analysis and conclusions (McGee and Warms, 2008).

i) Spatial Bias Analysis

I arrived in the jungle after a few days of route-planning and information gathering in Lima, Peru. Against the advice of others who were familiar with the community hosting the project, I decided to take the long and scenic route. I traveled directly east from the urbanized coast over the high mountain passes next to towering glaciers, and descended into the steep canyons of the eastern Andes. As the bus skirted the dirt switchbacks, trickles of water formed on the sides of the cliffs, and dropping into the valley below caused these trickles to grow into waterfalls just before flattening out into the streams and rivers below. I began to follow this water, and as I visited the Chanchamayo Valley, Satipo, Puerto Prado, Atalaya, and Pucallpa, the steep creeks expanded into wide rivers. Three weeks and 377 miles downstream, I arrived at the rural community hosting the project. Along the way, I had spent mornings wandering the outpost markets or the deserted river banks; afternoons in boats, chatting with others traveling mainly from village to urban center or vice versa; evenings eating plantains, exploring my river stops, and watching soccer highlights on generator-run televisions; and nights writing notes and swatting mosquitos until I drifted off to sleep.

Through my experience, I was cognizant of my spatial bias and attempted to counter it by taking alternative modes and routes of transportation. By doing so, I learned about the conditions the poorer people had to travel in, and recognized that it was a large time commitment. I was also able to learn more about the areas and cultures I was traveling through because of the opportunities that arose throughout my journey to talk with rural people of various backgrounds, occupations, ages, interests and beliefs. I was fortunate in that I was not limited by time. However, I was limited by money, which constrained the type of travel I was able to do, but also placed me in a situation similar to many other people I met along the way who needed to get from point A to point B, spending the least amount of money as possible. Because of this, I managed to get far away from the roadside and urban centers, but I was still traveling along a central path (the river, in this case) which connected all the rural communities to larger urban centers usually in the downstream direction. While I was in the community hosting the workshop project, I made it a point to travel around to the different streets and neighborhoods so that I could meet the different people living there. This was carried out through several visits to the families living on the border of the community, a 40 minute walk from the main village plaza, and occasional use of the alternate boat entrance to the community, which involved a walk double the normal distance and ferrying a creek in a dugout canoe. In conclusion, I recognized the spatial biases inherent in the project and within myself, and because of this I was able to adjust my styles of learning, thinking and behaving to bridge the power imbalances between myself, the outsider, and the rural people of the region and community hosting the workshop.

ii) Project Bias Analysis

Though there was little I could do to change the project after it had become endorsed by the other outsiders, I still found it important to recognize my embedded project biases.

Specifically, I became involved in the project after being initially connected to a network of highly educated development professionals. As mentioned previously, it was the community who had requested the need for such a project, they were able to have their request heard due to previous development projects in or near their rural community, whereas the other communities who were invited to the workshop were had no previous ties to outside development workers. In this sense, project biases affected the project's overall effectiveness in a negative way, especially in reaching out to the poorer and marginalized populations, because it followed previously established paths of development projects. However, it also provided an opportunity for branching out to the other, more rural populations.

iii) Person Bias Analysis

Before, during and after the project I made it a point to meet all sorts of people within the community. I spent weekends playing soccer, where I was part of an all-women's team that played in community tournament against other women's teams. I celebrated a soldier's homecoming, the Peruvian Independence Day, and the annual *fiesta* of one of the community's neighborhoods by drinking the freshly brewed *masato* (manioc beer) and dancing to *cumbia* characteristic to the region with several people throughout the community until the next day's dawn had arrived. As I traveled between the community and the urban center closest to the town for communication purposes, I also had the opportunity to meet, talk with, and learn from the other people also traveling to the urban center during the six to nine hour boat *colectivo* boat ride. As a woman, I feel that my gender did change some of the relationships I had with people in the community. I was able to sit in the kitchen and chat with the females of a household as they prepared the afternoon meals for their family. Because of my role as an outsider working on a specific project, I was also able to meet with the village elders, leaders, teachers, and other

local elites to discuss, plan and collaborate on the project. And though I was able to speak Spanish, their second language, fluently, I was able to communicate with most members of the community with ease. However, I recognized that I was unable to speak their native language which most likely caused some information to be lost through translation, interpretation and re-translation.

iv) Dry-season Bias Analysis

Because the development project involved the physical demarcation of political boundaries, the workshop was specifically chosen to take place during the dry-season so that we could access the necessary areas without the complications and restrictions of high water levels. For the purposes of the project, the dry-season bias was deliberate. However, I did recognize that though it would have been interesting, and perhaps more useful, to carry out the workshop during the wet-season. This is because the region's transportation networks (rivers and streams) increase in activity and therefore more people cross into the rural community's land for fishing, hunting, and extractive purposes. It may be during this time of the year when they need to be able to navigate to, demarcate, maintain and protect their land the most. Yet, for training purposes, we outsiders felt it would be more cost and time efficient to do this during the wet season, though this should have been something to look into further before and during the development project.

v) Diplomatic Bias Analysis

My first full day in the community, I went with some of the neighbors to the community plaza where a couple hundred people gathered with machetes to help pull weeds and chop the jungle growth that had sprouted since the last community cleanup two weeks before. Through a roll-call system, those present were accounted for and went off to do their assigned tasks. I

offered to help and the women sitting near me just giggled and before I knew it, everyone was hard at work while I was left behind sitting alone in the plaza. I played with a few children before asking a woman if I could help her clean the cement structure by filling her bucket at the nearby well – she gladly accepted. A little girl pumped the water and another woman helped me lift the filled bucket to my head, as they do, and then I attempted a graceful walk back to the community's plaza. I spent the rest of the afternoon raking weeds into piles until everyone finished their tasks and reunited at the plaza for community announcements. Up to that point, the announcements had only been in Shipibo, and I could only understand a few words but a young girl next to me explained in Spanish that the five head elders were talking about me. I was then asked to introduce myself and so I stood up and faced them and gave them my name and purpose for being there. One of the elders, who had contact with the main nonprofit partner of the project, further explained the purpose of the project and why they had requested the assistance of the nonprofit.

This experience helped me to break the ice and establish myself within the community. They noticed my curiosity in matters outside of the project's purpose, and through my initial participation in community events, I was told that I was seen in good light. The more I was out-and-about, the more I was under public scrutiny, the more everyone could see my intentions for being there, and the more I was trusted. After a few weeks, I had gained the title of having longest visit to the rural community out of all the outsiders who had previously visited. As time went on, I faded into the background of daily life and was more able to freely move about and speak with whomever I wished without causing offense in my inquiries.

vi) Professional Bias Analysis

As a graduate student in Anthropology I entered the development project setting with clear goals of what I needed to accomplish to fulfill my funding and graduation requirements. As a coordinator for this specific development project, I was also under professional pressure to keep the workshop focused and relevant. It was for these reasons that my focus was narrowed towards the workshop, but as I experienced daily life with these people (albeit for a short amount of time) I noticed other development-related issues that piqued my curiosity or were concerns raised by different members of the community. For example, the head-teacher at the secondary school in the village was very adamant about the development of a training program to teach people in the community about ecotourism. They had been receiving small amounts of tourists, traveling to the rural community to partake in hallucinogenic ceremonies led by the village's shaman. Because of the newly developed demand, the rural community wanted advice in the type of services provided to tourists. Yet, because of my ability to recognize how my professional background can form my biases, I was able to pass along this otherwise lost opportunity to the appropriate local and outside authorities.

Conclusion of the Case Study Analysis

Based on the analysis in the previous section, I was able to acknowledge all of my biases, even though I was not necessarily able to change my methods within the specific development project. I adjusted my beliefs, values and methods based on my recognition of my spatial, person, diplomatic and professional biases. The project and dry-season biases were thoughtfully considered in my reflection, but these two types of bias sets were more difficult for me to base changes on. This is because among the outsiders involved in the project, though I was helping coordinate the workshop, I was one of the people with the least amount of power. Similar to the rural poor, I did not have as much leverage in influencing the biases and therefore the objectives,

methods, and goals of the development project. However, for future workshops in the region or along the same themes, the project bias should be one of the central types to be identified if international development is to truly be effective in reaching the poorer rural populations. This was illustrated by the pleas of surrounding communities participating in the workshop to host the next workshop, or by the people who walked ten hours through the jungle, with their three and five year old children, just to attend.

Final Conclusion

The very nature of traveling to a rural area and learning about it establishes biases of awareness and interpretation towards that which can be seen (Chambers, 1983). Professional and diplomatic biases can also increase the incidence of one-sided explanations, results and prescriptions for rural development. However, it is the more marginalized and poorer populations that are not seen. They remain hidden away from roadsides and urban centers, reserved when more powerful or influential people are present, invisible when outsiders are formulating their projects in urban areas, exhausted by illnesses and wet-season food shortages, concealed by ashamed local elites, and unnoticed within a narrow professional focus. There are additional factors that are often overlooked by rural development tourists, such as the international ties to rural deprivation, the power structures that define social relations (such as indebtedness, exploitation and obligation), and the following of bias trends over time (Chambers, 1983). It is these deeper combinations of causes that need to be thoroughly explored because visibility and professional specialization seem to only reveal the symptoms rather than the causes of problems (Chambers, 1983).

In general, the cognition of our outsider biases in rural development has the potential to improve the distribution of money and human resources while creating more sustainable and

effective development. However, this is a topic that is not touched on often, especially outside of the applied anthropology literature. With the overarching MDGs being adopted by agencies and organizations of different scales and magnitudes, it is critical that outsiders are trained in methods of bias recognition and self-reflection. Through these techniques, many errors and myths that have persisted for decades will begin to be questioned, many projects will be reevaluated, and the poorer populations may be more inclined to work with outsiders in rural development.

References

- Adams, William M. and Charles McGraw
 1997 'Researchers and the rural poor: asking questions in the third world'. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. 21 (2): 215-220.
- Chambers, R.
 1983 *Rural development: putting the last first*. New York: Longman Inc.
- Chambers, R.
 1994 *Whose reality counts: putting the first last*. London: ITDG Publishing.
- Davies, C. R.
 1999 *Reflexive ethnography: a guide to researching selves and others*. New York: Routledge.
- Goffman, E.
 1997 'The presentation of self in everyday life', in C. Lemert and A. Branaman (eds) *The Goffman Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- McGee, R. J. and R. L. Warms
 2008 *Anthropological theory: an introductory history*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Mosse, D.
 2001 'People's knowledge, participation and patronage: operations and representations in rural development', in B. Cooke and U. Kothari (eds) *Participation: The New Tyranny*, London: Zed Books.
- Mowforth, M. and I. Munt
 2009 Tourism and sustainability: development, globalization and new tourism in the Third World; Third Edition. New York: Routledge.
- United Nations, General Assembly
 2000 *United nations millennium declaration* (A/RES/55/2). United Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/ares552e.pdf>