

# NGOs, Organizational Culture, and Institutional Sustainability

By  
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This paper draws on ongoing qualitative research on a sericulture project in Bangladesh to explore the ways in which the concept of organizational culture—which is rarely considered within the analysis of development interventions—can help reveal the complex roots of sustainability problems within multiagency rural development projects. The approach focuses both on local organizational realities and on power in the relationships that link project actors and process with wider systems and structures. It was observed that many of the initial project meanings have gradually fragmented over time, despite the earlier coherence expressed through the formal project culture expressed through documents and other artifacts.

*Keywords:* sustainability; Bangladesh; development projects; organizational culture; development anthropology

This article draws on data collected within the Bangladesh component of a recent three-country research project on organizational culture and empowerment within multiagency rural development projects, which is currently being written up. The overall objective of the research is to explore the potential relevance of organizational culture in development projects seeking poverty reduction through income generation and empowerment of so-called organizations of the poor.<sup>1</sup> The Bangladesh study has focused on the World Bank's Silk Development Project (hereafter referred to as the silk project), which is a multiagency project comprising a partnership between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), grassroots organizations, and a not-for-profit foundation designed to provide

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support to the sericulture sector in Bangladesh. The research undertaken was primarily qualitative, based on semistructured interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions with a wide range of project participants.

The argument presented in this article is that the concept of organizational culture—a frequently neglected aspect of international development projects—can form a useful entry point to the analysis of the workings of development projects. The focus here is on the relationship between organizational culture and sustainability, particularly in relation to the roles of NGOs and grassroots groups within such projects.

The silk project has been successful in many respects, but in recent evaluations, critics have drawn attention to, among other things, problems of sustainability. This article argues that the roots of these sustainability problems can be usefully analyzed through the lens of organizational culture, that they have international as well as local dimensions, and that we should in this analysis be concerned with both material and nonmaterial aspects of sustainability. The organization and activities of the silk project are linked into international markets through the attempt to export silk products by the project actors and into the international aid system through the funding arrangements of involved organizations, which help drive the project itself. At the same time, all such projects need to sustain a level of shared meaning about values and purposes if they are to remain coherent. The focus on organizational culture allows us to explore the ways in which meanings are constructed and contested within development projects and also draws attention to the local and international relationships that form part of these processes.

The article aims to contribute to debates on the general concept of sustainability, which, it is argued, needs to be situated within a wider context and wider processes. Development projects are time-bound interventions with a stated intention of providing lasting benefits for the poor beyond the life of the project. Institutional sustainability in the project setting can usually be seen as having three interrelated levels (Cannon 2002). Financial sustainability refers to a project's ability to generate resources from a variety of sources, which will, over time, reduce its dependency on development assistance funds. Organizational sustainability refers to the capacity of organizational arrangements to continue to provide a framework through which benefits to the poor can be delivered over time. Finally, benefit sustainability refers to the continuing availability or otherwise of benefits such as services beyond the life of the project, even if these are provided from other sources such as the state or the private sector.<sup>2</sup> Each of these levels of sustainability has cultural dimensions, and the idea of sustainability is itself a site of contested meaning among project actors. This approach also aims to serve as a counterweight to continuing tendencies within critical development research—particularly by anthropologists—to conceive of a single dominant development discourse in which developers act on objects of development (see, e.g., Grillo and Stirrat's 1997 critique of Escobar 1995) and to present an overparticularized conception of the relationship between the global as a homogenizing force and the local as a site of resistance (Sivakrishnan and Agrawal 1998).

The discussion presented here draws primarily on material relating to two of the local NGOs involved in the silk project as well as their project relationships. Although NGOs are often conceived as a unitary group of organizations with similar characteristics, in practice, there may be important differences in ideology, scale, approach, and culture.

For example, each of these two NGOs has a contrasting operating style (see note 2). Organization 1 is a local NGO dedicated to the welfare and empowerment of women, run by a charismatic founder who still retains a strong level of control over the organization's decision making and public image. Organization 1 can be characterized as an NGO influenced by a charitable and rather top-down approach. Organization 2, on the other hand, is an organization with its origins in a more political, Freire-influenced analysis of poverty, and organization 2 has no charismatic founder to represent the organization to the outside world. These two NGOs were selected for case studies during the research because they can be seen, at least in general terms, to represent quite well the two different strands of motivation espoused within the Bangladesh NGO sector—the charitable tradition of welfare and “helping the poor” on one hand and the more radical language of the politics of inequality and empowerment on the other (Hulme 1994; Lewis 1997).

## Organizational Culture

While organizational culture has been widely discussed within organizational theory and management, it has received far less attention within nongovernmental sector research and wider development studies (Lewis 2002). Simple definitions of organizational culture often refer to “the way we do things around here,” “the way we think about things round here,” or “the commonly held values and beliefs held within an organization” (Hudson 1999), while Handy (1988) offers a general definition of organizational culture as “the overall ‘character’ of an organization.” At the other, more complex end of the definitional spectrum, the work of Edgar Schein (1985), influenced by social psychology, focuses on the construction and negotiation of values and meanings as expressed through organizational artifacts, motivations, and behaviors. Schein's work shows, for example, how cultural incompatibilities may be at the root of problems experienced when companies attempt to diversify product lines or expand into new markets. Alongside the definitional complexity, organizational culture can also be seen as a particularly difficult subject of research since it cannot easily be isolated as a theme in itself and needs instead to be observed in relation to ongoing events and processes.

A useful starting point for any discussion of organizational culture is Handy's (1988) outline of four general types that can be found to exist, each corresponding loosely with an overall organizational style. First is club culture—in which a charismatic leader sits in the center of an organization, surrounded by a group of like-minded people who work on behalf of the leader, a form arguably common within the NGO sector. This is contrasted with role culture, in which a machinelike structure divides an organization into a collection of clearly defined roles, emphasizing

rules and order, such as a Weberian bureaucracy. The third variation is task culture, in which teams of people with combinations of skills are used to address different tasks as necessary, emphasizing plans rather than procedures. The task culture is increasingly found in areas of the private sector where flexible restructuring has been prioritized. Finally, a person culture exists in organizations in which people themselves are seen as the main resource of the organization but serviced only by a minimal structure. An academic department is often cited as an example of the person culture.

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*The cultural diversity found among NGOs is a fact that often goes unappreciated by policy makers—both governments and donors.*

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This framework provides the means to analyze organizational culture in general terms, but more detail is needed to capture the cultural dynamics and difference that may exist within and between organizations. Hudson (1999), drawing on Schein's (1985) work, referred to three levels of organizational culture. First are the visible representations, which include buildings, structures, language, and images, such as the NGO with a smart, well-equipped office as compared to the NGO with the broken-down, untidy one. Second is group behavior (which includes the ways people act and react under different circumstances, such as making decisions, dealing with a crisis, or the ways they treat users) or the ways senior managers treat junior managers. Third are the underlying beliefs, which include the values that influence people's behavior, such as a belief in radical empowerment or a belief in more charitable welfare ideas.

For some management writers, the concept of organizational culture has come to be seen simply as a crucial variable, which, if gotten right, can contribute to improved organizational performance. The work of Peters and Waterman (1982), which drew attention to the role of values as the single most important key to management excellence, exemplifies such a view, and the authors identified eight qualities they found to exist in what they considered the best-run companies in the United States. However, many anthropologists—also known of course for their strong interest in the idea of culture—have been critical of the work of management writers in this area. Anthropologists have been wary of a tendency among management writers to oversimplify the idea of culture and posit a straightforward causal relationship between culture and various organizational effects. Instead, anthropological approaches emphasize the negotiated and conflictive manner in which culture is constructed by behaviors within organizations as an ongoing pro-

cess, not as a set of outcomes. Cultures shift and change, and a range of subcultures may exist, both reflecting and exercising power relations within an organization. As Wright (1994) observed, organizations do not have cultures that can be identified and isolated from other aspects of an organization—instead, organizational cultures *are* and are constantly enacted and recreated as part of an organization's ongoing everyday existence.

First, despite these different approaches to organizational culture, it is clear that both versions of the concept can draw useful attention to the fact that organizations are best seen as sociocultural systems that are embedded in wider social and political environments, a fact that is often neglected in the technocratic worldview often expressed by development planners. Second, the organizational culture concept also suggests that significant events within organizations are often ambiguous and uncertain and that the same events may mean different things to different people. In this sense, organizations are filled with internal contradictions and conflicts and cannot be regarded as either unitary or predictable structures.

## The Silk Project

Sericulture is a well-established sector in Bangladesh, but it has long been characterized by top-down bureaucratic interference and has remained relatively uncompetitive in international markets compared with other production centers in China and Thailand (Van Schendel 1995). The sericulture sector in Bangladesh has two separate subsectors: a traditional subsector in which households have been active as silk producers for many generations and a nontraditional subsector—which forms the concern of this article—in which development organizations such as NGOs have promoted sericulture through extension and training to low-income households as a new supplementary income source. For many of Bangladesh's NGOs, sericulture has featured as a particularly attractive element of the portfolio of possible rural, nonfarm, income-generation activities for the poor since it is a high-value commodity that lends itself to small-scale, household-based production. In a society where women's subordinate position in the labor market is widespread, it is also an activity that is relatively gender neutral and that creates a range of employment opportunities for women at different stages of the silk production cycle, from silkworm rearing to silk thread spinning.<sup>3</sup> Part of the attraction for NGOs is that many of Bangladesh's NGOs are themselves currently seeking sources of improved sustainability for their operations as they become less dependent on foreign aid—either by choice or necessity. One option for these organizations is to turn to the market for income, and the sale of locally produced handicrafts and other products has become one possible route to improved NGO financial viability (Stiles 2002).

The silk project was approved with U.S.\$11.35 million International Development Assistance (IDA) credit by the World Bank in November 1997 as a five-year project designed to revitalize silk production in Bangladesh. The total cost of the project was U.S.\$13 million, with the difference made up by contributions from

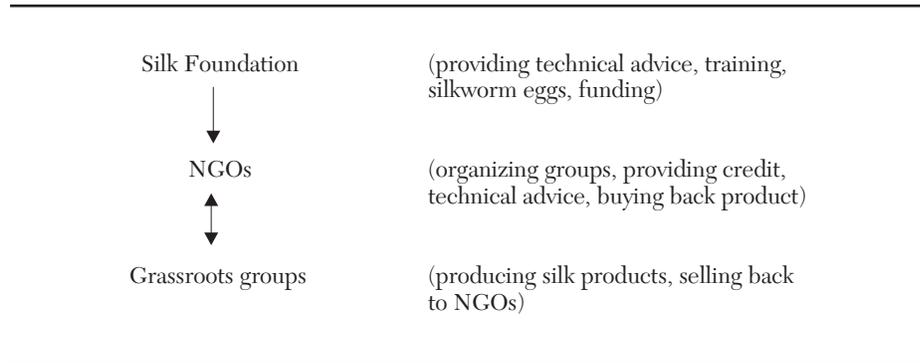
the government and participating NGOs. The first objective of the project is to assist in increasing the incomes of small-scale silk producers, most of whom are poor women, through introducing improved technology and creating institutional and policy improvements designed to encourage sustainable development of the silk sector. This aim has both an income generation component at the household level and an empowerment element at both an individual and a grassroots group level.

The second objective of the project is to address the institutional, economic, and technical constraints that are affecting silk development in Bangladesh. To shift the silk sector away from a traditional dependence on government-owned parastatal production and marketing agencies, the project created a new autonomous organization, called the Silk Foundation, to provide technical assistance to private-sector and nongovernmental work in the sericulture sector. The Silk Foundation works with nine NGOs that view sericulture as an employment-generation activity for low-income rural people. The target group has been mostly poor women, and these tend to be organized by the NGOs into their own semiautonomous grassroots groups.

The structure of the silk project is set out in simplified form in Figure 1. It is not the purpose of this article to review the structure and performance of the project in detail (further aspects of which can be found in Lewis and Siddiqi 2003); instead, the aim is to discuss issues related to organizational culture that may have wider relevance. The important issue to note for the present argument is that project evaluation reports undertaken in 2001 stated that the project had proved relatively successful in two main areas. First, it has increased silkworm-rearing productivity and provided useful additional income for female producers (see note 3). Second, the evaluation found evidence that the status of women had improved in terms of greater knowledge levels about sericulture, increased local mobility, and improved access to financial resources (Lewis and Siddiqi 2003).

A main area of weakness that was identified by the report related to the government's continuing resistance to the wider restructuring of the silk sector, such that the Silk Foundation was given insufficient access to government-controlled hatcheries to produce high-quality silkworm eggs. Another problem related to the differences in attitudes and practices among the NGOs in relation to certain aspects of the project's strategy. For example, there was found to be a high level of continuing dependence by the grassroots groups on "their" NGOs, which supplied sericulture inputs and then bought back what was produced from the group members, often at fixed, below-market prices. Related to this dependence was a perceived reluctance on the part of the NGOs to follow up on World Bank and Silk Foundation ideas about encouraging group members to form more autonomous business-focused producer associations, which could then increase silk productivity by producing for the wider market. My own fieldwork raised some critical questions about the foundation itself, which was struggling to find sources of funding that could make it sustainable beyond the life of the project, which was to end in 2002. There were also some NGOs that questioned the capacity and effectiveness of the foundation itself in providing relevant support to sericulture producers in the field.

FIGURE 1  
A SIMPLIFIED OUTLINE OF THE SILK PROJECT



The project is one of the current end points of a long history of sericulture policies in both the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh, which Van Schendel (1995) has characterized in terms of “authoritarian developmentalism.” This has left production in the region lagging far behind production in other parts of India (such as Karnataka), Thailand, and China in terms of productivity and quality.<sup>4</sup> Various international donors and agencies of different kinds have had a long history of involvement with the promotion of sericulture, from the Salvation Army in the early part of the twentieth century to the Swiss government from the late 1970s. The evolution of a group of so-called silk bureaucrats within the Bangladesh Silk Board combined with the ideas of the international agency experts contributed to the definition of the problem of sericulture and poverty chiefly in technical terms, in need of ever more scientific research and administrative intervention and driven primarily by the availability of external resources and little attention given to “the view from below” (Van Schendel 1995, 181).<sup>5</sup>

### Cultural Perspectives on the Project

At the heart of the project’s problems as outlined in recent evaluations is the problem of the financial sustainability of the Silk Foundation beyond the life of the project, on one hand, and the unwillingness of the participating NGOs to embrace wholeheartedly the World Bank’s vision of the reformulation of NGO grassroots groups into dedicated single-purpose producer groups, on the other hand. Using the analytical lens of organizational culture and drawing on some of the ethnographic data collected during the research, it is possible to explore in more detail how these differences between project actors emerged and why it has proved difficult to build and sustain shared meanings around key project purposes among these actors. These are revealed through the documentation of a range of different narratives constructed by different actors about what is going on.

The project itself is founded on one of the key ideas that remains strong within development discourse: the idea that NGOs have significant inherent advantages over other types of development organizations, which is often expressed in terms of their high level of flexibility and closeness to the community.<sup>6</sup> In this project, silk producers tended to support a view that NGOs presented a different culture than did government. Both NGOs were viewed by group members as having a more accessible culture than local public-sector institutions, such as the Union Parishads, which are the smallest local government units. Such a perception fits into the commonly held view that NGOs tend to be closer to the people than government agencies in Bangladesh, with less rigid bureaucratic structures and fewer status barriers. Group members tended to see NGOs as far more accessible than government:

There is no comparison. If we want to go to the union, we need to get a middleman first [to bribe]. Here we can just walk in. But of course we still need the union when disputes need to be settled.

But the unitary view of NGOs does not hold for very long. Beyond some very broad generalizations, all NGOs do not share a common culture but display important differences in the ways they work. In this project, there were differences of organizational culture in relation to their overall approaches to decision making and management. These became apparent during discussions with junior staff about the roles of individuals within administrative systems. Organization 2 was found to possess some of the characteristics of a role culture, which allowed systems to operate relatively independently of individuals:

It is not that we are led by a leader—rather, our systems drive people so even if the managers change, there will be others to implement the systems.

On the other hand, staff within organization 1 seemed reluctant to step outside of clearly circumscribed roles that were linked with particular individuals:

For policies, we have different people in the administration—they know about policy, so you should talk to them. We do sericulture and if you want to know about that, you will get all the information from us.

There were also different narratives in the project about community development, with some setting it within a notion of market-based sustainability while others placed a stronger emphasis on public social responsibility and welfare. These differences emerged in discussions about the possibility of creating sericulture producer groups. As discussed above, there is a key area of tension within the project concerning the future of the grassroots groups that have been built and supported by the NGOs. In keeping with the market-based or business philosophy espoused by dominant groups at the World Bank, and to a large extent reproduced within the new Silk Foundation, there was an intention to encourage the grassroots groups to evolve over time into autonomous sericulture producer groups or cooperatives.

One of the reasons the NGOs were reluctant to encourage such autonomous, market-based activity by the grassroots groups was that the groups, many of which predate the project, are perceived by the NGOs as multipurpose and developmentally focused rather than merely vehicles for business:

Our groups are not sericulture groups or apiculture groups or fishing groups or anything else; they are formed for the development of the members as people.

Two of the project actors, the World Bank and the Silk Foundation, are engaged in a struggle to build—impose would perhaps be too strong a word—a single coherent logic of market-based sustainability among the different project actors. This

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view of the potential of the NGO groups as future producer cooperatives conflicts with the very different set of values brought to the groups formed by the NGOs with a different purpose. But the conflict of views here is not straightforward or clear cut in that some grassroots groups are interested in the idea and some NGO staff themselves at the local level have ideas that run counter to the view of senior NGO staff. Some staff in organization 2 are giving support to a local grassroots group that wishes to explore this option:

It [the producer association] . . . is seven months old. Now they have twenty-five members, and the savings rate is Tk20 minimum per month. They meet monthly to discuss problems and possible solutions. They set up the association because they think they can do some collective buying of mulberry inputs like fertilizer and other equipment through loans from the association.

A more nuanced view of organizations—often presented in development literature simply as “black boxes”—is therefore needed to reflect different sets of values and cultures that coexist within such organizations.

This is also true within the grassroots groups themselves, which display variations within and between each other. The perceptions of the group members of the organizations of the poor revealed changes in the balance of power within the

household, which might be equated with the project's overall aim of empowerment:

Since we came to the group, we do not have to ask our husbands for money in our hands, and we have something to spend.

Yet within the groups associated with organization 1, there were signs that an authoritarian leadership culture was sometimes present, which ran counter to the norms of democratic decision making (implied by the NGOs' presentation of group dynamics), and this was often resented by other members:

Look, I am the leader and I have to be responsible for any nonrepayment. . . . If necessary, I apply force to get the money paid back. For example, I say that organization 1 will be forced to take the roof off the house or take away some utensils. People get scared and then they make the repayment any way they can.

At the same time, there was a strong view of the NGO as protector or patron and a reluctance in most cases to see an autonomous future for the groups, either as producer cooperatives or otherwise freestanding entities:

If the people from the organization are not there, having only money will not be enough. The root of a tree is very important. If organization 1 is not there, it will be hopeless.

This was also reported from organization 2 group members, one of whom remarked, "Organization 2 has looked after us like children, so we cannot leave them."

When the group members were ready to sell their produce, they were heavily circumscribed in terms of their market choices since they were effectively locked into a relationship with the NGO. There were frequently cited criticisms of the style in which these transactions were conducted, with both a lack of transparency and an apparent arbitrariness in relation to calculations and prices:

Because we take the eggs from organization 1, the condition is that we must give them what we produce. Even if another organization gives a higher price, we cannot sell our *gutis* to them.

My husband was offered less than Tk100 by one staff member. Then another staff member said, "Let's not give him so little, let's make it Tk100." Organization 1 don't weigh the produce in front of us; they just give us a lump sum.

Moving from the NGOs and "their" groups to other aspects of the project, it was found that there were aspects of organizational culture that affected the performance of the project. From discussions among NGO staff, it was found that there was a widely held perception that the Silk Foundation was a remote body out of touch with both the NGOs and the grass roots. One staff member commented,

We appreciate the foundation because we need it to play a coordination role in sericulture. But we'd like it to sit regularly with producers and discuss problems with them.

The foundation is based in Dhaka, in a tower block in one of the city's wealthier neighborhoods, where formal office attire and air-conditioned work spaces contrast starkly with the conditions under which silk producers and NGO field staff normally work. Another NGO staff member reported,

The foundation people don't know anything about ordinary peoples' culture and conditions. They are educated people, but they don't know anything about the poor.

There were also criticisms made by group members about the attitudes of some of the trainers brought by the Silk Foundation from outside the country to assist local producers in the field, some of whom, it was suggested, did not know how to behave in culturally appropriate ways.

### Organizational Culture and the Life of the Project

Returning first to Handy's (1988) framework, it is possible to see the ways in which different NGOs experience a range of organizational cultures within and between them. While role culture is strong in both, it is combined with elements of a club culture within Organization 1 and with a task culture within Organization 2. The cultural diversity found among NGOs is a fact that often goes unappreciated by policy makers—both governments and donors—who may generalize in functional terms about the strengths and weaknesses of NGOs. These organizational, culture-based insights can also draw attention to the ways in which meanings and values are constructed, negotiated, and contested within and between project actors. Organizational culture can be seen as expressed through the visible representation of project buildings and other artifacts, through the group behaviors taking place within and between the different organizational actors involved in the project, and in the different values and beliefs expressed among individual project employees, staff, and clients.

The process of cultural negotiation can be observed in the ways that, while some areas of the project can be seen to agree on common aims and approaches, other areas are characterized by sites of culture-based conflict. One example is the tension around the future of the grassroots groups/producer associations. This partly reflects differences between the market-based development values espoused by the World Bank, which views development success in terms of autonomy judged as market choice as opposed to values that stress broader nonmonetary elements of social solidarity and political relationships that NGOs may themselves favor. Another area of tension is between a culture of patron-clientelism that is evident within some NGO structures and relationships—such as decision-making and leadership norms—and between NGOs and grassroots groups, in the form of a dependent relationship based on services and security. This patron-clientelism is partly reproduced within organizations as part of wider societal norms, and as

Wood (1997) showed, such vertical social relationships are a dominant feature of rural Bangladesh.

These cultural tensions or incompatibilities have profound implications for the sustainability of the project. At the level of financial sustainability, differences in relation to a profit-maximizing versus a social benefit approach to business activities have created a situation in which the financial viability of the Silk Foundation is in doubt once the project period is completed. From the point of view of organizational sustainability, the differences of opinion that exist in relation to the formation of producer cooperatives as opposed to multipurpose, community-based organizations cast doubts on the project's ability to contribute to self-sustaining organizations of the poor, which can continue as a framework for poverty reduction activities and secure income generation through silk production. Finally, in considering the sustainability of project benefits, tensions in relation to cultures of professionalism in relation to the provision of technical assistance to poor silk producers who have tended to stress top-down, hierarchical relationships may have restricted the impact of training in improving technical practices at the grassroots level. These norms of organizational culture cannot be read off as fixed aspects of social interaction but instead are negotiated and reshaped, or even abolished, within certain situations. The focus on organizational culture therefore highlights the interactions between power, agency, and structure. Areas of culture clash are constantly being negotiated, and the fact that one producer association did emerge through the efforts of certain IIRD field staff and group members who shared certain ideas and values that ran against the dominant culture is significant because it shows how outcomes from such interactions are not always predictable. Indeed, these atypicalities may turn out to be sites of potential innovation and creativity as well as tension and fragmentation.

## Conclusion

This brief review of organizational culture issues within the silk project in Bangladesh has attempted to show the ways problems of sustainability require an analysis that can take account of both local organizational realities and the relationships that link local relationships into wider systems and structures. A focus on organizational culture, when combined with other areas of organizational analysis into structures and resources, can help to reveal the complex roots of sustainability problems. In the case of the silk project, these can be linked to the project's inability to build a sufficiently coherent and sustained set of meanings among the different individual and organizational actors involved.

The focus on organizational culture is not simply a way of highlighting intraorganizational or interagency structures and processes. It can also provide insights into the link between the micro and macro dimensions of the operation of a development project and the actors who are involved. The tensions within the silk project, which have been briefly explored here, inevitably reflect a number of

wider factors—the reproduction of vertical social relationships between people and groups within organizations (such as patron-client ties), the efforts of the World Bank and other international development agencies to reduce the role of the state in the silk sector in line with neoliberal ideologies of privatization, and the efforts of local NGOs to seek ways of reducing their dependence on foreign aid through the generation of income from new sources, such as through efforts at for-profit participation in international export markets.

The tensions around organizational culture and values within the silk project may also provide insights into the ways in which sericulture problems and project solutions are constructed. As in the case of the livestock project in Lesotho (Ferguson 1990) and, closer to home, the aquaculture sector in Bangladesh (Lewis 1998b), the potential of nontraditional sericulture in Bangladesh is presented as a problem that can be solved by a technically conceived project intervention and a process of administrative restructuring. In this case, the construction is not merely one of a technical scientific problem that requires solution by research and bureaucratic intervention, as has traditionally been the case within the “developmentalist” silk sector discussed by Van Schendel (1995). The sector is now also subject to a market ideology that is expected to unlock the potential of sericulture for the benefit of the poor as part of the wider global discourses of neoliberalism. Such ideas of course sit somewhat uneasily among the bureaucratic traditions of many of the individual and organizational actors within the silk project, which are shaped by the earlier top-down traditions, as well as by newer participatory paradigms that have been in vogue among NGOs and that may sometimes bring their own less than flexible orthodoxies. While there are several different approaches to sericulture evident among different participating agencies, the prevailing atmosphere in the project and the nontraditional sericulture sector more widely is mainly one of periodic optimism punctuated by long periods of frustration and disappointment. This can be observed within the project in which initial project meanings have gradually merged or fragmented over time, despite the earlier coherence expressed through the formal project culture expressed through its documents and other artifacts.

## Notes

1. The research was commissioned by the World Bank and funded by the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In related publications from this research project (Lewis and Siddiqi 2003; Lewis et al. 2003), the organizational culture of a wider set of agencies within projects located across three study countries (Bangladesh, Ecuador, and Burkina Faso) is considered, as is the organizational culture of the World Bank itself. Long (2001) documented a recognition during the 1990s within the World Bank that its prevailing “approval culture” (i.e., a system of incentives and rewards to staff based primarily on being successful at “moving the money”) needed to change in line with its growing stated emphasis on participation but that staff promotion still remained closely linked to financial criteria. My research also bears this out.

2. To preserve anonymity, the actual names of these two local nongovernmental organizations have been changed. This article is concerned with the relationship between organizational culture and forms of institutional sustainability and does not engage with related debates about the issue of environmental sustainability.

3. Silk production involves a complex chain of seven interlinked stages: (1) mulberry sapling preparation at nurseries, (2) mulberry plantation (in land “blocks” or by the roadside), (3) silkworm rearing, (4) cocoon production, (5) silkyarn reeling, (6) weaving silk thread into fabric, and (7) producing garments. Because they

are difficult to produce, eggs (*dim*) are not available on the market but only from the Bangladeshi Silk Board hatcheries and now also from the Bangladesh Silk Foundation. The nongovernmental organizations buy a quantity of eggs and then pass them on to their producers as part of an overall credit and training package. The eggs cannot be bought by producers individually due to economies of scale involved in production. Once the silkworms hatch, they are fed on mulberry leaves.

4. Recent cooperative sericulture initiatives driven “from below” in West Bengal and showing benefits in terms of increasing the power and visibility of *adhivasi* women (Webster 2002) may constitute an alternative—and potentially more sustainable—trajectory within the ongoing struggle to make sericulture a tool for poverty reduction.

5. There is a striking parallel here with the case of aquaculture in Bangladesh, which has been constructed as a problem in technical terms at the expense of social and economic concerns, and where projects and agencies have operated to construct what Ferguson famously termed an “anti-politics machine” (Lewis 1998b).

6. While it would not be accurate to describe this simply as a myth, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that such advantages are not inherent in any nongovernmental organization and cannot be taken for granted.

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