

NGOs, EDUCATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

- A case study about the social impact of a NGO in the Rishikesh community



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ABSTRACT

During the last three decades, the number of NGOs within the educational field in India has increased dramatically due to the Indian government struggling with providing free quality education. NGOs in India have been praised for their contribution to development, but also criticized for inefficiency and lack of accountability. This case study provides an empirical example of a NGO called Mother Miracle, a local actor in the field of Education and Poverty Reduction (EPR) in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, northern India. The study brings up the issue of accountability, and discusses mechanisms used to track the impact of the NGO in its local community. The study includes qualitative data collected during participant observation at Mother Miracle, and uses three theoretical frameworks in its analysis; accountability, postcolonial and organization theory. Insights from the study shows the complexity of development in practice and the social impact of a grassroots NGO. The case aims to contribute to the academic discussion about the role of NGOs within the field of education and poverty reduction in India, and raise new questions and awareness about NGOs accountability.

Key words: *Accountability, NGO, Education, India, Poverty Reduction*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- NGO – Non-Government Organization
- MM – Mother Miracle
- EPR – Education and Poverty Reduction
- FCRA - Foreign Contribution Regulation Act
- BPL – Below Poverty Line
- LKG – Lower Kindergarten
- UKG – Upper Kindergarten

1. Introduction

During the last three decades, the activity of foreign NGOs has increased dramatically in India. The Voluntary Action Network of India suggests that the financial support of NGOs doubled during the 1990's and measured an estimated US\$71.5 million by the end of the decade, and some has expressed it as "the NGO-ization of the grassroots" (Kapoor, 2005). NGOs in the educational field has often become the "better option" compared to government provided education. While the Indian government is struggling with colonial legacy, poverty and corruption, NGOs has become an important and appreciated actor in the Indian field of development (Chandavarkar, 2007: 443, Jakimow, 2012). The growing role of NGOs in the Indian development have not only brought praise and celebration, but also critique. NGOs and development projects in India have at times been questioned and pointed out as inefficient, non-context based, fund-chasing, corrupt and weakly governed (Kapoor 2005; Gopalan & Sundararaman, 1999; Chandavarkar, 2007:443447).

This paper brings up the case of a NGO called Mother Miracle working in the field of education and poverty reduction (EPR) in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, northern India. Using postcolonial, organization and accountability theory, the study examines the purpose and social mission of the NGO and explains internal and external accountability mechanisms (Ebrahim, 2003, Gellner 2001; Suárez-Krabbe, 2011). Furthermore, the study discusses some of the issues faced in the local community and the socioeconomic impact of the NGO. The study uses a qualitative method, and the data included has been collected through participant observation and semistructured interviews. Through empirical evidence, questions are raised about NGOs and their responsibility.

2. Background

2.1 Historical overview

It is impossible to write about a case in India without mentioning the country's history of colonialism and caste. The British colonialization of India, also referred to as the period of the British Raj (1858-1947), has left a strong legacy in the Indian governance, and sustained the infamous caste system dividing the Indian society into groups of class, ethnicity and regions

(Kerr, 2015: 537, Dirks, 2011: 14-18). Chandavarkar argues that the Indian democracy got its form of governance from colonial practices. The colonial state raised above the rest of society through governance practices that was highly self-rewarding. Indian representatives of power were carefully chosen by the British, a colonial system that can be traced in the postindependence Indian democracy (Chandavarkar, 2007:447-449).

Within the educational field, India has a long history documented, initially with large focus on indigenous spiritual education. During the British colonial rule western education was introduced, and British documentation from the 1820's witness about "one school in every village" suggesting that education was rather accessible (Gupta, 2008). Today, public government schools are still relatively accessible, but attempts from the government to improve access to education vary between the north/south and rural/urban (Agrawal, 2014). Issues such as poverty, school fees, household duties, disappointing quality of education and school facilities are a few examples of what causes a great number of children in India dropping out of school, or never attending any education at all (Banik, 2014). As a consequence, NGOs providing education has often become the "better option" compared to the government provided options, due to their ability to provide cost-free quality education. This has led to a fast increase of foreign funded NGOs providing communities with education in India (Roberts & Chittooran, 2016).

2.2 NGOs and Governance

It can be argued that an adequate system to regulate NGOs activities is currently absent, although there are different methods to monitor foreign funded NGOs and development projects.

International NGOs usually have their own control organs and reporting systems between linked organizations, and some are monitored by government (Ebrahim, 2003, Kapoor, 2005). In India, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) has been in use since 1976, giving the Indian Government authority to supervise foreign funds (Ebrahim, 2003). Still today, all foreign funds received by NGO's are required to be approved and monitored by the government according to the FCRA. To register a NGO requires government approval, usually including continuous reports and visits from government officials (Ebrahim, 2003). There are plenty of independent and locally operating NGOs in India that are not linked to other "higher" institutions or

organizations, and only respond to their own community of actors and the government. This can be considered problematic since India is fighting with poverty and corruption, where loopholes within government policies and bureaucracy often is encountered (Chandavarkar, 2007: 443; Kapoor, 2005).

2.3 The local context

Uttarakhand is a state in northern India situated in the Himalayas with plenty of rural areas and villages hard to access and the capital city is Dehradun. Rishikesh, where this case study is taking place, is the seventh most populated city in Uttarakhand situated around 45 km away from the state capital (Census India, 2011; Jakimow, 2012). The post-independence state has during the last decade gained better tools to provide development itself, still NGOs are filling the gaps where the government cuts short, especially in rural areas. In a case study conducted among 47 NGOs working within the development field in Uttarakhand, only 2 were involved in urban development (Jakimow, 2012).

Most NGOs in India are small, meaning they have less than 10 full time staff. The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) measure that of 1.2 million Indian NGOs, only 8.5% have more than 10 full time staff employed (Jakimow, 2012). The NGO in the case of this study has around 37 full time staff and therefore is a part of those 8.5%. The NGO treated in this paper is situated in the urban setting of Rishikesh, therefore it can be argued to be an important case and empirical evidence since it represents a minority of NGOs in both Uttarakhand and India, due to its scale and geographical setting (Jakimow, 2012; Mother Miracle, 2017).

2.4 About Mother Miracle

Mother Miracle (MM) is a non-profit NGO that runs a cost-free K-12 school (currently from Lower Kindergarten to 8th class) and provides free community development programs in Rishikesh, located in Uttarakhand, India. MM is a non-profit organization founded by a woman named Shahla Ettefagh from San Francisco (Mother Miracle, 2017). In 2002 Shahla left her home in San Francisco and went to India, with a vision to serve a local Indian community and fight poverty. She ended up in Rishikesh, where she started an after-school program in her home.

Eventually, there were too many children coming for tuition to fit in her home, so she had to find a new place for her after school program. After three years of growth, more than 160 children attended classes each afternoon, and in 2005 Shahla registered the Mother Miracle Trust (ibid). In 2008, she moved from the school to a new building, and in 2012 the Indian government granted a permission to accept foreign contributions to Mother Miracle, who so far only had been financed through private funds (Mother Miracle 2017: Kapoor, 2003). Shahla then began a fundraising campaign for the largest construction project yet; a flood-free 25,000sqft. School building for students grades K-12. After one year of completing the construction, the school was ready for 300 children to start school. The latest building was completed in 2016, and is the third building of the current Mother Miracle School. The school has employed around 37 paid members of staff. The organization has a board of trustees and sponsors worldwide. Today the school serves around 345 students, with plans to expand further to give space to more students (Mother Miracle, 2017).

3. Aims & research questions

3.1 Aims

This study aims to raise new questions and critical thinking towards the subject of NGOs and accountability. The paper treats a unique case of a NGO working with EPR in an area with little known academic attention (Jakimow, 2012). Therefore, I argue this study could be a small, yet important contribution to cover a knowledge gap about NGOs and accountability in this specific geographical area (Bryman, 2008: 69-71). The study aims to point out the complexity of development and tracking social impact, and bring new empirical evidence to the academic discussion of the role of NGOs in the Indian field of development. Another purpose of this paper is to shed light on global power relations through including postcolonial theory, encouraging the reader to reflect upon hierarchical patterns (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011). Any findings and conclusions of the study intends to be context based and non-generalizing.

3.2 Research question

1. How is Mother Miracle (NGO) working with EPR in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India, accountable?

4. Delimitations

India is a country of great diversity and a long history of caste and colonialism. Due to time and space limitations of this study, I have chosen not to go deep into explaining these topics since they are too large to fit in this paper. This study aims to focus only on the specific case of MM, and provide enough information to understand the most important parts of the local context. Bringing up the issue of accountability, it is of importance to point out that I have chosen not to primarily focus on the financial aspects of the NGO, instead the main interest of the study lies in the social aspects and the social impact of the organization. Also, I have chosen to focus on MMs K-12 school, and exclude its community development programs. The reason for this limitation of the study is because there has not been time and resources enough to study each of the different targeted groups within the community development programs, and the MM K-12 school is the main purpose of the NGO. The study aims to be context based and avoid any generalizing since I argue that each case is different. Any conclusions made from the study will be regarding this case only.

5. Literature review

In the following chapter, I will present current literature about NGOs in India, accountability and the educational field. The chosen literature includes empirical and theoretical knowledge and aims to summarize the academic field of the study. I would like to point out that I have aimed to use literature that is relevant for this specific context. A lot of literature exists within the field of international NGOs and accountability, but there is little academic evidence about the specific context of this case study. Therefore, the literature available is limited and a major part of the study will be based on participant observation and interviews.

The Indian government has done several attempts to improve education all over the country. Although, evidence shows that efforts and improvements vary between rural and urban areas, and while the south is ahead in providing education, the north stays behind, especially in the rural areas (Agrawal, 2014).

Jakimow explains the role of NGOs in Uttarakhand, where she describes that NGO actors in the state are unsatisfied with the government for not providing the population, especially the rural, information about their rights and how to access services such as healthcare and education (Jakimow, 2012). Instead, NGOs has become a sort of “middle hand” trying to connect different actors, and become a linkage between the government and the people, accessing and sharing information (ibid).

In Uttarakhand’s neighbor state, Uttar Pradesh, there are government schools in almost every village, but they are performing weakly compared to the NGOs providing education that usually is low-fee and of higher quality. This has led to an increase in number of schools run by NGOs in areas where government schools have failed to reach required standards (Roberts & Chittooran, 2016).

Related to NGOs and accountability, Kapoor brings up foreign funded NGOs and the issue of NGOs fund-chasing resulting in launched projects with questionable efficiency. One case describes a NGO supplying Indian sweets in a village where malnutrition and poverty is a daily threat to the public health, a clearly mistargeted development project in the area. Another case describes HIV/AIDS campaigns held by NGOs in areas where there have been no reported cases of HIV/ADIS, just because it happened to be profitable projects to launch at the time (Kapoor, 2005).

But not only fund-chasing can be an issue of efficiency and accountability, considering the cultural context can also be determining the success of a development project. Kapoor describes another case where day care centers were set up by an NGO to provide the Indian indigenous Adivasi women and their toddlers a place to put their children while they went out for work. Now, this may seem appealing to many western cultures, but the NGO did not consider the aspect of Adivasi women breastfeeding their babies until the approximate age of 4 years, and therefore preferred to bring their children with them to work which left the day care centers, that was set up and paid for, empty (Kapoor, 2005).

Another example of a foreign funded development project, stressing the importance of accountability and considering cultural context, is the SIDA funded project ‘AIDS, STD Health

action Project in Mumbai, India', carried out by a NGO named ASHA (Gopalan & Sundararaman, 1999). The project went on between 1995-1999 and was an action towards fighting STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) among brothels in Mumbai advocating safe sex through handing out condoms, offer STD health care and free testing for women in prostitution and their male clients in the Kamathipura and Kethwadi areas of Mumbai (Gopalan & Sundararaman, 1999). The project evaluation brings up some of the weaknesses of the project, such as that the NGO had not enough considered the cultural aspects such as the moral despite of women in prostitution, which resulted in decisions taken on behalf of the women, and STD testing by force. The project had neither considered the consequences for the women testing positive for STDs, who turned out to be thrown out of the brothels and left in socially vulnerable situations. The NGO had not considered these risks and were not prepared with sufficient resources to offer any alternatives for the women affected. Another aspect of accountability in the project is that the reported numbers of condoms the NGO had handed out at the brothels when the project was running, but had no methods of confirming if they had been used or not (Gopalan & Sundararaman, 1999).

Although these are not examples within the same field of development as the case of this study, they point out some common important aspects regarding grassroots NGOs, development projects and accountability. It stresses the importance of adapting to the cultural and socioeconomic context and avoid implementing aid for needs that has not been expressed. Development projects and grassroots NGOs may have a large impact on people and communities, but do not automatically guarantee neither efficiency or accountability (Kapoor, 2005, Gopalan & Sundararaman, 1999).

6. Method

6.1 Research design

I have chosen to use a case study, since it is examining one specific case of this NGO, Mother Miracle, working with EPR in Rishikesh (India) (Bryman, 2008: 66-69). The reason why I chose this case is because it makes a good example of a grass root NGO that has no connections to

other NGOs or global institutions (such as UN organs) but is governed and evaluated only by itself, its own sponsors and the government (Mother Miracle, 2017).

The benefits of focusing on one single case is that it allows a deeper analyze of the organization. If the study would have included more than one case there would have been less time to get to know and understand the organization, which would have limited the data collection and analysis. The disadvantages of the case study is not to have collected data from another organization, that could have provided material that would have made it possible to compare and get other perspectives that could deepen the understanding of how NGOs work with EPR in this area. Although, considering the time frame of 10 weeks, a single case study was an appropriate choice in order to have enough time to get involved and gain insights about the organization that was crucial for this study.

The research question is of qualitative nature and the data has been collected during my internship in the chosen area of Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India. The reason why I chose a qualitative method for this research question is because it is treating complex social issues, and qualitative methods provides better tools to collect detailed and nuanced data about social relations. Quantitative methods are less suitable since they allow little space for deeper understanding of social relations that can be difficult to measure (De Vause, 2001: 220-224, Bryman, 2008: 380-382, 212-214).

To explain further, the advantages of a qualitative approach is to be able to capture detailed information such as opinions, emotions, experiences and ideas, perspectives that shifts and changes depending on individuals. The disadvantage of using qualitative methods is that it is very time consuming and provides less data in more time, compared to what could be achieved with a quantitative design i.e. sending out a questionnaire with "yes" or "no" questions to a crowd. I argue that the qualitative design of my research probably has limited the quantity of the data collected within the time frame, but has provided tools to make a deeper and more detailed study of the organization, which I argue has been necessary to reach some of the key insights of the research that will be brought up in the analysis and conclusion (Bryman, 2008: 35-38).

6.2 Data collection: Interviews & participant observation

In this study, qualitative data has been collected through semi-structured individual interviews. The semi-structured interviews were prepared with questions to make it easier covering all the topics of interest, but at the same time aimed to leave space for spontaneity depending on the interviewee's responses (Bryman, 2008: 470-472). All interviews were held in English, recorded and written down in notes, with approval from the interview participants. The aim has been to include different perspectives from different levels within the NGO, including different types of answers to the research questions. Some editing of the interviews has been carried out with a purpose of correcting grammar mistakes, removing interruptions and keep a flow in the written text, but no major changes has been made and the meaning of each quotes remains the same as in original. Anonymity has been offered to all participants of the study, and all the names mentioned in this paper has been approved by the interviewee. All the quotes stated in this paper have been approved, including the quotes written down in my notes stated by anonymous members of staff (Bryman, 2008: 493-495, 139).

This study includes 3 semi-structured interviews. Following is a presentation of participants that was interviewed:

Interview 1: Yogesh Uniyal – MM school director, secretary of the MM trust, teacher in science, computer, math, English, all-round tasks.

Interview 2: Maddy Shortt – Volunteer teaching at MM, with previous experience volunteering at multiple local NGOs in Rishikesh.

Interview 3: Kusum Bijalwan – Previous student at MM evening program and college graduate, currently employed office assistant at MM.

Adding to the interviews, the study is also based on participant observation to include valuable information collected during my internship, in situations where interviews were not taking place. The NGO staff were informed about my participant observation and intentions of studying and analyzing the organization between January-March. (Bryman, 2008: 12, 13, 434-435).

6.3 Sampling

This study uses a purposive sampling including participants with a relation to the NGO in this case. The aim is to include different perspectives from the inside of the NGO, so the sampling has been carried out on different levels within the organization (Bryman, 2008: 418-420). The participants all have different roles, relations and experiences of the NGO and each contribute with their knowledge that is relevant in relation to my research questions. The data will be, as earlier mentioned, collected through semi-structured individual interviews with the chosen participants for the study (Bryman, 2008: 470-472).

6.4 Data analysis

In this study, I will use the chosen theoretical framework as a tool to analyze the data collected. Interviews and findings from the participant observation at MM will be coded according to accountability, postcolonial and organization theory.

6.5 Positionality & ethical considerations

This study has been carried out from a position inside the organization rather than outside, which has affected my role as a researcher. Using participant observation, I am aware that my position in within the organization has affected my research. In some regards it might have limited my access to information since I worked side by side with the founder and 'top' of the organization which sure affected my study through i.e. staff thinking twice before sharing information with me, not being able to share any sensitive information that would not be appreciated by the founder or the board of directives. On the other hand, it gave me an insight of being a part of the organization, witness every day routines and events that doesn't happen when the doors are open to visitors (Gellner, 2001: 157-160).

I am aware that the information coming from the organization is biased since the information that has been shared most likely has been chosen to provide a good image of the NGO. Still, I argue it is valuable information for this study since it witnesses of the image the organization wants to present of themselves. Although, without doubt, some of the data collected during my internship

was information the NGO did not choose to reveal but that I discovered myself only through being at the right place at the right time (Gellner, 2001: 176-177).

Another important consideration in this study is my position as a Swedish woman coming from a respected university. This automatically gives me certain privileges, and puts me in a position of power, which had to be considered during the whole process of the study (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011). To provide the appropriate tools for this study to consider my position as a female western researcher, especially in relation to the colonial legacy of India, I have chosen a postcolonial approach, which will be discussed further in the theoretical framework part of this paper.

As mentioned in the data section of this paper, children/students under 18 have not been interviewed due to ethical and practical considerations, such as getting permission from parents and NGO staff. I wanted to include as many perspectives as possible, and the children's perspectives and opinions are undoubtedly valuable in the context of the study, but I made the decision not to include them not to take any risk of putting the children in an uncomfortable situation, or even worse, get them in trouble.

Most students (and their parents) and staff at the NGO are Hindus, and respecting cultural norms and practices has influenced many decisions taken regarding my research (Bryman, 2008: 129131).

7. Theoretical framework

Following I will introduce the theoretical framework of this study that includes 3 separate parts; (1) Postcolonial theory, (2) Accountability theory and (3) Organization theory (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011; Ebrahim, 2003; Gellner & Hirsch, 2001; McAuly, 2007). The first part deals with postcolonial patterns to consider in the study, the second part explains accountability mechanisms and actors that will be used in this case, and the third part explains some of the key concepts of organization theory and aspects of conducting participant observation from inside an organization. All theories presented will be used as analytical tools throughout the study and adapted to the specific case and context of MM.

7.1. Postcolonial Theory

Considering the colonial history of India brought up in the introduction, it is of importance to actively consider colonialism and the position of this research in a postcolonial context.

Therefore, I'm using a postcolonial approach in this study because I argue it is suitable in the context of this case, and it allows me as a researcher to constantly reflect upon my own role, power/hierarchical relations, equality and gender. This is specifically important since the fieldwork treats the subject of poverty reduction, class and education. During the interview sessions, I aimed to avoid pointing out any hierarchies or power relations, and tried to make the interviewee feel comfortable in the situation and conversation (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011, Bryman, 2008: 491-493, 509-511).

Suárez-Krabbe brings up the issue of colonialism within research primarily within the field of anthropology and ethnography, but her arguments can also be applied at research within sociology. Suárez-Krabbe argues that the western university and its academic methodologies is a part of colonialism existing in a triangular structure: Colonialism of being, colonialism of power and colonialism of knowledge (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011). This triangle outlines what she describes as a "*global apartheid*" which includes transnational elites in the north, but also in the south. Southern universities are in many cases, through their regimes, dependent on and uncritical towards western methodologies, and are therefore part of an intellectual colonialization. The transnational elite includes international institutions with access to information and resources, such as the UN, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Union, multinational corporations and Universities. The translational elites define who is a member and non-member, and reproduces itself i.e. through universities educating already members of this group of elites (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011).

In order to break the global apartheid and start decolonizing, Suárez-Krabbe means that we need to become aware of ourselves as active actors in this triangular colonialism, and start questioning our own reproduction of colonial structures that includes some and excludes others.

Suárez-Krabbe brings up Denmark as an example, where she argues that decolonizing efforts should focus on bringing attention to what has been invisible, and keep questioning in what ways

this is occurring, aiming to prove that Denmark's connection with the transnational elites has contributed to the maintenance of the global apartheid. De-colonialization should be a process in cooperation with transnational elites and ethnic and social movements.

The postcolonial theory of Suárez-Krabbe provides appropriate tools to consider power positions within the organization, including my own, as well as avoiding reproduction of colonial patterns. In the study, I will use Suárez-Krabbe's postcolonial theory to constantly reflect upon linkages between the transnational elites, question the global apartheid and power relations, aiming to lift more than one perspective (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011).

7.2 Accountability Theory

In this study, I will use accountability theory to analyze MM and how it is accountable to external actors, but also internally within the organization. My theoretical framework will primarily draw on accountability mechanisms explained by Ebrahim (2003). Ebrahim brings up some key definitions to explain accountability and its common mechanisms. First, the definition of accountability can be translated to: The process of holding actors responsible for actions. Ebrahim states that NGOs are accountable to different actors that can be divided into three broad sections: *Patrons, clients and themselves*. *Patrons* usually refers to donors, source of finance, foundations or governments, meaning actors to whom it is of importance to prove accountability i.e. to show that money is spent the right way to maintain flow of income. The patrons in this case is primarily the sponsors and the Indian Government. *Clients* refers to the targeted group who receives the services of the NGO, in the case of MM it refers to the students (and their families) at MM's school and community development programs. NGOs are also accountable to *themselves*, meaning that they have internal responsibilities towards its own staff and missions (Ebrahim 2003).

There are several accountability mechanisms, and Ebrahim brings up five examples: 1. Disclosure statements and reports 2. Performance assessment and evaluation 3. Participation, 4. Self-regulation 5. Social auditing (Ebrahim, 2003). In this study, I will focus on *Disclosure statement and reports*, and *self-regulation*, since these mechanisms are the most relevant and frequently used by the NGO in the case study. The *disclosure statements and report* mechanism implies the tools for patrons, such as governments or sponsors, to collect information about the

activities of the NGO, such as financial reports, ensuring that performance meet goals, and that funds are used towards public, not private, benefits.

The self-regulation accountability mechanism refers to the NGO and its own ability to "*develop standards or codes for behavior and performance*" (cited from: Ebrahim, 2003). This mechanism allows NGOs to deal with internal issues that might damage the accountability of the organization, but in the same time keep some integrity and discretion. The self-regulation mechanism concerns accountability to themselves and their clients, and activities coordinated to sustain the accountability. It also includes continuous definition of what accountability means for the organization, since the means of accountability can shift due to a changing social environment or changed requests from external actors (Ebrahim, 2003).

7.3 Organization Theory

Organization theory is relatively new and rapidly evolving including various perspectives in thinking, explaining and describing processes going in inside organizations (McAuley, 2007: 27). Organizations working within a development field are especially complex, since they are not only bound to their common goals and purposes, but also to a diverse hierarchical system of influence and power, including different actors and participants (Gellner, 2001: 157-160). Within an organization, there exists various roles and perspectives, and many insights can be gained from the inside a development organization or a project through observing and participating. There is never one single perspective within an organization, and the role of the observant and researcher is to combine the different perspectives and to open up discussions or narratives that can provide understanding from more than one point of view. At times, tensions between the different roles and perspectives inside an organization occurs, and intentions are not always synced with actions (Gellner, 2001: 160-164).

Organizations, particularly in the development field, have their own systems of producing and controlling information. Depending on different interests within the organization, information is created, processed and shared both internally and "in public". The flow of information is controlled and managed at all levels of an organization, and commonly focused on reporting success, which often implies a simplification of information rather than embracing complexity.

Having a position within an organization, such as being an observant or member or staff, it is inevitable to become more dependent of certain perspectives than others, although linkages between power positions and knowledge can be difficult to distinguish. Information is rarely seen as “public good” and to gain trust from important actors and patrons organizations create mechanisms to control where and when information is shared (Gellner, 2001: 176-179).

In the case of MM, this theory can be used as an analytical tool through the assumption that information has been modified and shared with me as an intern and observant, in the same way as information has been chosen for the website, or in letters to sponsors. Bearing these biases in mind, it becomes easier to critically analyze the information shared from an observing position from inside the organization.

8. Analysis

8.1 Mission statement and accountability

To analyze the accountability of MM, it is necessary to first reach a definition of the NGOs purpose and mission in the Rishikesh community. The following is a quote from MM's website:

"Mother Miracle is a registered non-profit in India and the United States dedicated to empowering exceptionally intelligent children from the slums of Rishikesh, India to be the best. (...) Our vision is for 100% of our graduates to go to college and become employed to break the cycle of poverty" (Mother Miracle, 2017: About – Mission & Vision).

Stated in the quote above is the mission explained in public by the NGO itself, that summarizes the activities of the organization and what it aims to achieve. The mission statement is shared with patrons, clients, anyone in the community, and can be described as the foundation of the NGO's accountability, since it creates expectations to keep its promises (Ebrahim, 2003). To fully understand the mission, I will break it down into smaller parts and explore its meanings and definitions.

First, the definition of being “*a registered non-profit in India and the United States*” means that Mother Miracle is a registered trust with government certificate/approval in both USA and India, with approved international funding according to the Indian FCRA (Ebrahim, 2003; Kapoor,

2005). Looking closer at the mission statement part saying; "*dedicated to empowering exceptionally intelligent children*" it begs the question how the NGO finds the "exceptionally intelligent children".

Following are insights gained through participant observation. Once a year, the MM school open its doors for admissions, meaning that anyone who fits the criteria of age and targeted group (underprivileged, below the poverty line, low caste) can apply for a seat at the school. Every year the school takes in a whole new class of LKG (Lower Kindergarten) and offer a few seats in remaining grades. This year, in 2017, 18-19 March was admission days, when hundreds of children and their parents wait for hours in the sun outside the school entrance from early morning, to apply for one of the 60 seats available. In the morning during the first day of admission, the crowd waiting outside of MMs school gates was so big that they blocked the whole street and the traffic, and staff at the NGO had to go outside to organize a big line not to risk that the admission day was interrupted by the police because of disturbing order, which had happened during previous year's admission day.

To make sure that the children are 'exceptionally intelligent' and able to handle the pressure, standards and the discipline at the school, they are required to carry through two tests, one simple test at arrival, and if they pass that one, a sitting exam. The first test includes brief questions in various subjects and is supervised by one teacher from each grade who decides if the children pass or fail. If the child pass the first test, he/she is taken to a class room to complete another test, while the parents sit down in a separate waiting hall. The youngest children applying for LKG, usually around 4-5 years old, are given a seat at a small table and a white sheet of paper to fill with anything they know, such as ABC or numbers in Hindi and English. The older children write already prepared tests in various subjects. During the test, the teachers take notes on the children who have the patience to sit longest, and who appears to try the hardest.

Admission day can be argued is similar to an audition, where the children's performances in combination with the judgement of the staff decides who has the chance to be provided with high quality education, free access to food and resources. There is a lot of pressure, the youngest children tend to cry and call for their parents while writing the sitting exam. Occasionally

throughout admission day, children are beat up by their parents outside the gates on the street for failing the first test or giving up to soon on the second, missing this once in a year opportunity. Many come two or three years in row to apply for a seat. After admission day, the teachers collect all the written tests and written notes to compare the results. The children with the most outstanding achievements are selected for the last step of the admitting process.

The reason for finding children that are exceptionally intelligent can be argued is a way for the NGO to ensure that they choose children with prospects and ambitions likely to take them all the way through college and finally to an employment. The high-quality education and financial support provided by MM is one part, but the children's ambition and intelligence from the first place suggests an increase of their chances of becoming successful in the future, which can be related to the accountability of the NGO. If the children succeed in their future careers, not will they only represent the success of the NGO, but also bring results to the patrons who invested in donations, time and effort (Ebrahim, 2003).

MMs mission statements brings up '*intelligent children*', but also "*intelligent children from the slums*" (Mother Miracle, 2017). Following is a quote from MM school director Mr. Yogesh Uniyal, who describes some of the issues that MM's students are facing:

"They don't have houses, they don't have money for education, they don't have that much food to eat, their mother and father are uneducated, they get babies every year without being able to feed them, with five people living in one room. But they are smart. They don't have status in India. Nobody wants to talk to them, nobody wants to give them respect, nobody wants to give them love. They have lice, they don't bath, they don't brush their teeth. Before they come to our school, they abuse each other, because they learn that from home. Because of fathers beating their wives or drinking alcohol. These are the issues we are considering when using the term underprivileged." (Interview with MM school director Yogesh Uniyal, February 2nd 2017).

MM school was rewarded 'The best school' in Rishikesh among 40 schools in 2015 and 2016, and as the example of the role of NGO schools in the neighbor state Uttar Pradesh brought up by Roberts & Chittooran (2015), it outperforms most of the government schools in the area (Mother Miracle, 2017). This has resulted in a high demand of getting

seats at the school, and not only underprivileged families are interested, but families with children from all levels of the Rishikesh society that has heard about the school.

Mr. Yogesh Uniyal, the school director, describes the high demand:

“It attracts powerful people as well. They are pressurizing us from big posts. Right now a person called me, he’s a major in the municipality, he told me to admit his child in our school. I told him OK, but you need to stand in line. If your child pass the test and is poor, then he/she will be admitted. One member of legislature assembly called Shahla m’am multiple times saying; “oh put my kid there”. But how can we? We are bound.” (Interview with MM school director Yogesh Uniyal, February 2nd 2017).

Some children and parents are turned away in the door at admission day, for reasons such as coming dressed up with too nice clothes, or holding an iphone, attributes revealing that they do not fit in the criteria of the targeted group “underprivileged from the slums”.

To validate that the children and their family come from ‘underprivileged’ conditions in a slum area, every applicant need to show a valid ID card, a Rashan Card that has the BLP (Below Poverty Line) sign on it, as well as an Adhaar card with address confirmation (Kaur Soin, 2015). Considering corruption within the Indian government and bureaucracy, the staff at MM are aware of the possibility to pay bribes at the office where to get the BLP Rashan Card, and be able to get it even though there is no evidence to prove its validity (Kaur Soin, 2015, Chandavarkar, 2007: 443).

To avoid any cheating, but also to make sure that the children who gets the seats falls into the criteria of “children from the slums”, the teachers themselves make home visits after admission day's round of tests when the ‘finalists’ have been selected. One of the teachers (anonymous) even witnessed a family who 'borrowed' a relative's house for the home visit because it looked “poorer” and was placed in a big slum area in Rishikesh, an ambitious attempt to fit into the targeted group of "underprivileged". A few of the children already admitted to the school for years have later turned out to come from quite wealthy families who claimed to be 'poor' to admit them. Today the students already have sponsors and have studied at the school for years, so the NGO has decided not to kick them out due to the circumstances (Mother Miracle, 2017).

The last part of the mission statement “*our vision is for 100% of our graduates to go to college and become employed to break the cycle of poverty*” is yet to be explored, since MM school in its current form only has students up to 8th class, that hasn't yet graduated. The vision is for every child to have a sponsor each that will finance their education through 12th at MM school, and continuously all the way through college, until getting an employment providing a salary that can “*break the cycle of poverty*”. The only students who have graduated already are students from the MM after school program before it was a registered NGO and the school as it is today, but there is no statistics available but ‘success stories’ posted on the website about some of the students who graduated college through financial support from sponsors through MM (Mother Miracle, 2017).

Another way for the organization to follow up its mission statement “*to break the cycle of poverty*” is to not admit more than one child from each family. Since so many apply for the school for its many cost-free benefits, it would be unfair to let one family have two or more children supported all the way through college. The opportunities should be spread out, to break the cycle of poverty for as many families as possible. Although, just as the staff has encountered students that come from more privileged conditions than they appeared to when they were admitted, they have also discovered students to be siblings after years in school.

The mission statements and the NGO's processes to fulfill them, witness of the complex environment in which MM is operating. There seem to be no complete foolproof method of verifying neither student's underprivileges or rate of success. This affects the accountability towards the patrons, primarily the sponsors, but also to volunteers who offer financial support, time and free labor, expecting to support children that fits the criteria of being a student at the MM school (Ebrahim, 2003).

8.2 Commitment and self-accountability

The mission and vision stated on the website are the public and common missions of the NGO, a common purpose that goes for the whole organization. The mission on MM's website can be regarded as information about the common goal selected and decided to be shared in public. Although, different levels within the NGO represent various missions and purposes of

importance, both organizational and personal (Gellner, 2001: 157-176). Apart from the public mission statement such as the one on the website, other internal missions focus more on accountability towards the clients (the students and their families) and towards themselves (Ebrahim, 2003).

In interviews and conversations with the teachers most describe that the success of MMs school depends on the ability to employ teachers who are passionate about the cause of the NGO, who cares more about the social mission than the salary, who genuinely loves teaching, cares about the students and can do more than what the job description implies. Although, finding teachers who matches these requirements might be hard to find since commitment is something personal and hard to prove. Maddy Shortt who is a volunteer at MM and has previous experience from teaching in other NGOs in India and Rishikesh, describes the teacher's commitment comparing MM to previous NGO:

“In comparison to the NGO near Ram Jhula (Rishikesh) where I came from, Mother Miracle is serious about what they do. Walking through the door I could tell that they were serious about it, because Shahla wouldn't have invested in this building, just from a visual standpoint, if she wasn't serious about this school. And how serious could Shahla be if she had staff that didn't also share that same level of commitment, whereas the school I just came from there is no feeling walking through the doors, there is no feeling of inspiration, there is no drive, no one took it seriously. The teachers would have a line of kids in front of them and just be on their phone. The students were dancing on republic day and the teachers were laughing, chatting and making phone calls (...) there was no consciousness at all.” (Interview with Maddy Shortt, MM volunteer and teacher, March 2nd 2017).

This relates to the mission statement that brings up providing high quality education, which concerns the NGOs accountability towards their clients (in this case the students) to deliver what they promise (Ebrahim, 2003). Regardless of the common goals and mission of the NGO, the school teachers own missions and level of commitment effects the quality of the education that the students are receiving.

“Here the teachers are very much supportive and taking care of each and every student. In other schools, I don't think the teachers know everybody, they just

come and teach and go, there is not much interaction. Here there's more communication with the kids." (Interview with Kusum Bijalwan, former student of MM's evening and current employed office assistant at MM, 15th of March, 2017).

Another aspect that might affect the MM staff's commitment is the loyalty towards the organization itself. It appears that the commitment of the founder Shahla, who resembles the leadership of the NGO, and the fact that she is devoting her life to live and work in India has created a sense of accountability towards the organization itself among the staff (Ebrahim, 2011). "(...) Shahla ma'am came to devote her life to India and to serve the Indian people, and she is doing a fantastic job, so I don't want to hurt her." (Interview with MM school director Yogesh Uniyal, February 2nd 2017).

8.3 Disclosure statements and reports

The accountability tool of disclosure statements and reports is commonly used to demonstrate the activities of a NGO and some financial reporting that can guarantee some degree of accountability towards patrons and clients (Ebrahim, 2003). This accountability mechanism is used by MM in their reports and newsletters to the children's sponsors, as well as in the annual government report (Ebrahim, 2003; Mother Miracle, 2017). The newsletters and reports to the sponsors is a way of proving that the money is used in the correct way, and an incentive to the sponsors to keep supporting the children financially by reminding of the cause (ibid).

Once a year, the NGO is required to submit a big report to the government, usually consisting of 800 pages in which everything about the school must be declared. The teachers work for months to bring all the documents together, and are required to report everything from the number of chairs and fans in the school building, to make lists of how many children from each caste they have in each grade. The material report is connected to the FCRA where the government can register everything that has been invested in the school and control if it matches the funds received. The school also needs government approval to run since it uses the national government curriculum in education, so that the students can have the opportunity to continue studying in public government colleges and universities after graduating 12th grade. Although, the caste reporting is another story (Ebrahim, 2003; Roberts & Chittooran, 2015; Dirks, 2011: 14-18).

Following is a quote from an anonymous member of staff at MM:

“We ignore the caste system, but the government doesn’t, so we have to report”
(internship diary note, February 2017).

The government requires that the report includes a list of the children’s names, but also a list of ordered by caste, even though the caste system is no longer in use by law (Dirks, 2011). MM itself is opposing the caste system, offering a chance for low caste unprivileged children to receive quality education, improve their social status and, hopefully, in the future elevate their societal class (Mother Miracle, 2017). This can be argued is an example of contradictions that might occur between the NGO and the patrons when using the accountability mechanism of reports, creating tensions between mission and accountability (Ebrahim, 2003). If the government report would be submitted without covering all articles requested by the government, the NGO could be at risk of losing government approval and authorization, which would risk a closing of the school.

8.4 Self-regulation & public trust

Self-regulation is a way for the NGO to create their own codes of conduct, behavior and achievement that can be dealt with internally if not followed correctly without having to involve external actors or display everything that is going on in public (Ebrahim, 2003). This is convenient for the NGO since it gives the opportunity to regulate errors without creating a public scandal, which would affect the impression of accountability in the local community (ibid). This can be argued is particularly important in the Indian cultural context.

“If something comes in the news then you are in trouble, everybody see you in India (...) If I do something wrong, then my mother will have problems. Her name goes down. We have cultures in India. So, the same thinking goes for the school.”
(Interview with MM school director Yogesh Uniyal, February 2nd 2017).

The social mission of the NGO needs to be accepted and embraced by all members of staff at MM, who are expected to be committed to the cause of the NGO. Anything that happens that violates the common goals will have to be treated by the founder, Shahla, or the director Mr.

Yogesh, which also implicates that if information does not reach the “top”, consequences for mistakes and errors might be avoided (Gellner, 2001: 157-170 ; Ebrahim 2003, Jakimow, 2012). An example of such a code of behavior at the school is the rule against teachers beating the children, even though it most likely happens in the local community, it violates the convention of the rights of the child and is therefore forbidden at MM school (Unicef CRC, 2014). During my internship at the NGO, I was told that a teacher had punished a student through slapping him/her in the face. Another teacher had witnessed the scene, and after the information had reached the founder and director, the teacher was asked to leave her position at the NGO. This is an example of internal self-regulation, where the NGO deals with its own codes of conduct and carry out regulations without getting exposed in public, risking damaging the reputation of the NGO. This can be related to accountability as in the sense of the local community’s impression of the NGO as trustworthy and responsible towards its clients, and how this can be protected through selfregulation (Ebrahim, 2003).

Another incident that required the mechanism of self-regulation was the uncomfortable revealing of a member of the MM bakery staff who turned out to charge money from the children when they came to receive their breakfast and/or midday snack from the bakery.

“The majority of our students come to school hungry. For breakfast we provide a full glass of milk, a midday snack, and our dedicated kitchen staff prepares a warm and nutritious “all you can eat” lunch 6 days a week.” (Quote from Mother Miracle website, 2017: Nutrition and Healthcare).

The bakery staff member had earlier expressed discontentment regarding the salary and income of the MM bakery, and was caught by several witnesses among the children to have charged them a few rupees each for their supposed-to-be free snack when they came to receive it. This had been going on “under the table” with the aims of keeping it secret from the head of the NGO. When the information reached the founder, its caused great disturbance since it clearly violated the what the organization had stated on the website and in its mission. The matter was dealt internally between the founder and the concerned bakery staff member, and resulted in a warning and promised improved behavior, which if not implemented would lead to a definite end of his/hers position at MM.

It is hard to point out any hierarchy system within the organization, but these incidents indicate that there is a form of top-down hierarchy and different levels where information is kept. It is also obvious that the top of the NGO as well as the patrons all come from far more privileged parts of society than the clients of the NGO, which can be discussed in terms of reproducing the global apartheid as described by Suárez-Krabbe (Suárez-Krabbe, 2011). Existing barriers between the different levels within the NGO could hinder the flow of information, such as people not wanted information to leak. In the case of the bakery staff, he/she obviously did not wish the founder to find out about the money charged for the baked goods for the children, but due to the children acting as informants to the top, this could be dealt with through the mechanism of self-regulation. Although, it can be argued that the different levels within the organization and their ability to store and pass on information, could have a great impact on the accountability of the NGO. Had not the bakery member of staff been caught, the NGO would unwillingly and unknowing have failed in providing one of its stated missions of providing free snacks to the kid (Gellner, 2001: 157-179; Ebrahim 2003; Suárez-Krabbe, 2011; Jakimow, 2012; Mother Miracle, 2017).

8.5 Sustainability and social impact

It can be argued to be difficult measuring the social impact and results of MM, especially since there is very little statistics about the population in the specific area where MM is active. Therefore, MM collects its own data to verify its achievements. Following quote can be read on MM's website:

“Since 2008, 86% of our children have shown extreme improvement in height & weight as compared to the average child in their community.”
(Quote from Mother Miracle website, 2017: Nutrition and Healthcare).

When I asked a member of staff about what these statistics are based on, I was told that the school measure the kids every year, keep track of their growth and compare to the height/weight of their siblings at home. This is one way of measuring self-accountability in an area with little access to information and statistics, although the real validity of these numbers can be questioned. Another way of tracking social impact is to turn to someone who received the services of the NGO (Ebrahim 2003).

“(…) If I didn’t go to Mother Miracle, my life would have been very different. Before we used to go to school, come back home and just watch TV and play, and that was our life. But after going to Mother Miracle’s evening program we were excited that after school we would go there, were learning new things, English, computer, art, sports, we never played sports in our school, but there we were learning these things. So it made us confident, our personalities became different, I became stronger as a girl. Like in India, the boys are ahead of the girls, but there ma’am taught us that you are equal to the boys, she gave us this strength. Mother Miracle changed us personality wise.”

(Interview with Kusum Bijalwan, former student of MM’s evening and current employed office assistant at MM, 15th of March, 2017).

The long-term goal of the organization is for all the students to graduate, become employed and support their families. This is done through offering the students career counseling, financial support and options after they finished 12th grade. The final goal, to close the circle, is for the students who reached employment with the support from MM to serve back to the school by sponsoring one of the students (Mother Miracle, 2017).

“I always teach the students to serve back. The serving does not come from pressure, it comes from the heart. We are putting a bandage on you with love, affection, care, motivation, courage, confidence, so you have to apply the same onto your brothers and sisters.” (Interview with MM school director Yogesh Uniyal, February 2nd 2017).

This, in the long run, the graduated and employed former students becoming new MM sponsors would mean that the NGO would be less dependent on the international sponsors, which would relieve some of the efforts in using accountability mechanisms towards the patrons (Ebrahim, 2003). This plan is a part of MM’s goals of being a sustainable actor in the local community and to its clients. It is impossible to evaluate to what extent MM has the capacity to reinforce these promises since none of the students in the current K-12 school have finished 12th grade yet.

Although, there are plenty of hope for the coming generations.

“I think the future of MM’s students is very bright. Compared to other schools, ma’am is focusing on all students. She is giving everybody a chance to do whatever they want to do, she will support them. In other schools, they would not would have the choice to do whatever they want to do after 12th, if they wanted to do engineering their parents don’t have money to pay for them. Money problem is the main thing, so they have to change their dreams. Maybe

they can only go to a simple college, get a simple degree that cannot get them a job. But if they are here, ma'am will support them, they will go to a good college, get a degree and get a job. They have a secure future here." (Interview with Kusum Bijalwan, former student of MM's evening and current employed office assistant at MM, 15th of March, 2017).

9. Conclusion

The findings in this research shows that a NGOs accountability can be measured from various angles, and the results depends on who you ask. Sometimes accountability mechanisms cause contradictions, such as in the case of the government reports and the social mission of MM. Other times, accountability mechanisms such as self-regulation can be a way of protecting the social mission and in the same time protect the reputation of the NGO, something that is culturally valuable within the Indian society. Some things can be counted and measured, while others cannot, and it seems to be impossible to guarantee that promises are being kept to neither patrons or clients. As this study has shown, patrons can't be 100% sure that the NGO is only giving opportunities to underprivileged children from the slums, and the children can't be guaranteed to get their midday snack for free at all times, as promised. Accountable or not, it is evident that the activities of MM have had a direct impact on people's lives in the local community, i.e. the families waiting in hours to admit their children on admission day, blocking the street and traffic, or the students of MMs previous evening program who learned new things they were not learning in their ordinary school. It is hard to predict what would have been without the organization, what the lives of the students would have looked like, even though the question "what if" could supposedly be asked about almost anything. Although, I argue that the findings of this study raise new questions about the future issues of accountability for MM that can be discussed:

- Will the Indian society allow the students to higher positions in society after they finished their college degrees (i.e. will high status working places allow employment of low castes even though they have high qualified degrees)?
- If the students do get employments, is it realistic that they will receive a salary big enough to lift their families out of poverty and become new sponsors of the school?

- If none of the above is actualized in the future, how is MM accountable to its postdegree students?

These are questions that the future of MM hopefully will bring answers to, suggesting further research within the topic of NGOs and accountability in the field of EPR.

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