

Local Perceptions of NGOs in Montrouis, Haiti

Abigail St. E. Bilby
Global Affairs
George Mason University
4400 University Dr.
Fairfax, VA 22030 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Niklas Hultin

Abstract

How do locals living in communities with a strong non-governmental organization presence understand the work that these organizations do and their presence in the community? This research addresses this question by investigating the perceptions that Haitians in the city of Montrouis have of non-governmental agencies operating in their community. This research examines the way in which Haitians living with aid from, in proximity to, or working for non-governmental organizations see the work that is carried out by these NGOs, and understand the organizations themselves. It analyzes common themes between these perceptions in terms of perceptions gaps, downward accountability, and religion in order to create an adaptive understanding of local perceptions of aid in Montrouis, Haiti. This study finds that these themes affect perceptions of locals who understand that the work of NGOs is not always centered on the needs and ideas of locals and beneficiaries.

Keywords: Local Perception, NGO, Haiti

1. Introduction

Over several decades, Haiti has built an almost cliché reputation as the poorest country in the western hemisphere⁷. Its complex history of colonialism and revolution, political turmoil, and natural disasters has given way to an equally complex system of political and social instability⁹. In January of 2010, these issues were exacerbated when Haiti experienced a 7.0 magnitude earthquake outside of its densely populated capital of Port-au-Prince which flattened most structures in the region and claimed upwards of 200,000 lives¹⁹. Hundreds of thousands more people were displaced by the earthquake, and millions more suffer the psychological effects of the disaster many years later¹⁰.

Following this earthquake, US\$ 16.3 billion was pledged to humanitarian and developmental aid in Haiti from across the world²¹. throngs of foreign aid workers flocked to the affected areas to aid in the aftermath of the earthquake and Hundreds of organizations identifying as “non-governmental”, or NGOs, took root in Haiti to assist with relief efforts⁹.¹⁰ While many organizations showed up in the aftermath of the earthquake and disappeared once funds were exhausted or thought their job to be accomplished, many others remain in Haiti today¹⁰. Besides the earthquake damage of 2010, the various other hardships that Haiti faces recurrently have made it a destination of choice for an unknown number of non-governmental organizations. Official accounts of the number of non-governmental organizations present in Haiti today do not exist, but are estimated to be between 343 and 20,000 on an island of just under 11 million people²¹.²³ These non-governmental organizations play a unique role in Haiti as they predominantly operate with minimal to no public oversight and without official recognition from the Haitian government²¹.

However, this type of operation with limited oversight means that there are often few to no people in Haiti to hold NGOs accountable for the outcomes of their work. As such, there have been accusations of misconduct, mismanagement, hidden consequences, ineffectiveness, and unsustainability of aid organizations and their workers¹⁶.

This push for reflexivity is an attempt to encourage each NGO to look upon themselves and the real effects that their work is accomplishing¹². However, even this more reflexive step in the running of aid agencies seems to be missing a crucial piece of the humanitarian puzzle when voices of locals who are directly impacted by this work are not included.

This research adds to the extremely limited literature on the perceptions of locals on NGOs and their work. Interviews were conducted in the city of Montrouis, Haiti, a city left off of most country-wide maps, but known for being highly populated by resorts and NGOs. Because of prior experience in Montrouis, the researcher chose to leverage the knowledge and contacts that she has in this city to gain an educated and insightful look into the perceptions that local Haitians have on NGO presence in their community. The research then uses a grounded theory approach to identify three major themes present across these interviews to gain a better understanding of local perceptions of NGOs in Haiti.

2. Relationship To Current Research

Many scholars agree that there is a serious need for reflexivity and evaluation of NGOs in order to increase the good that these organizations are able to do¹³. They also agree that the voices of locals in areas where NGOs functions are not often considered in research on NGO performance^{4, 6, 7, 10, 19}. By overlooking the voices of those living in areas with an NGO presence, only half of the picture can be seen in regard to the effectiveness and impact of these NGOs. However, prior literature has shown the value that research in this area including local voices can have towards scholarship and the improvement of NGOs themselves. By hearing local voices in response to aid, organizations can better understand the impacts that they have on communities and then evaluate the perceptions of their work from these people who they intend to benefit.

The push for legitimacy and accountability has been echoed by researchers who focus their attention on the often-unheard voices of locals. Schuller is one of these scholars who believes in the value of hearing the other side of the story than what is told by NGO reports¹⁹. He offers a critique of NGO efforts in Haiti following the earthquake of 2010¹⁶. He compiles interviews with survivors in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of local perceptions on the work of NGOs both immediately following the 2010 earthquake and years later. Schuller finds that perceptions are quite negative of NGOs both in the immediate time and then years following the 2010 earthquake because of the number of Haitians who felt forgotten, betrayed, or both¹⁹. While this research offers an understanding of perceptions of Haitians, it does so only in the years following the earthquake, and only of people whom the earthquake affected. Katz, like Schuller, focuses specifically on the post-earthquake span of time and interviews only those affected by the earthquake^{10, 19}. Thus, while this research is valuable to the specific time and circumstances, it is also representative of a void where local perceptions outside of the earthquake remain unrecorded. This research helps to bridge this gap in literature by presenting research that does not focus directly on the 2010 earthquake response. Instead, this research broadens the lens on NGOs in Haiti by including more development focused groups that intend to be more long-term and less disaster relief oriented years after the earthquake.

Other researchers have grappled with the question of local perceptions towards NGOs across the world. Work has been done in the Democratic Republic of Congo by Dijkzeul and Wakenge on local perceptions of NGO presence³. This research finds that local perception can vary greatly from the perceptions that NGOs have of themselves and their own work³. Donini finds similar results in Afghanistan and coins the idea of a “perceptions gap”⁴. The perceptions gap is defined as, “the significant disconnect between how outsiders and local communities view what is happening in the country – and its implications for actors in the aid community”⁴. The Research Support Program, an initiative by the Institute of Policy Studies in Pakistan, reports similarly on the perceptions gap between locals and outsiders in Pakistan¹⁸. This literature demonstrates how local perceptions can develop, and also how they can range from one person to the next. This research, like that of Dijkzeul and Wakenge and Donini, addresses the ways that perceptions are present in a community with a large presence of NGO activity. Thus, it provides analysis that expands this scope of research into Haiti in a way comparable to other nations.

3. Methodology

This research seeks to answer the question: what are local perceptions of NGOs in Montrouis, Haiti? In order to gather data on the perceptions of locals on NGOs in Haiti, this research relies on eleven referral sampling semi-structured interviews of locals in the city of Montrouis, Haiti. Nine of the eleven interviews were carried out in what can be considered “downtown” Montrouis. This area is within a 10-minute walk of the major market street and paved road,

very close in proximity to several NGO compounds, and within a 5-minute walk of the lodging of the NGO with whom the researcher worked previously. The remaining two interviews were conducted about a 10-minute drive outside of the “downtown” area, and approximately 25 more straight up a mountain. The translator and participants confirmed there that this smaller community on the mountain is still considered, and considers itself to be, a part of the city of Montrouis.

This research was conducted in Haiti because of the large presence of NGOs in the country as a result of natural disasters, economic crises, political instability, and widespread poverty and underdevelopment. It was conducted in the city of Montrouis specifically because of prior experience that the researcher has had working there with a religious NGO. The researcher’s four years of prior work in Montrouis walking and driving past gate after gate stamped with organization logos made her aware of the presence of numerous aid organizations in the community. Thus, when wanting to research perceptions of NGO presence in a Haitian community, Montrouis was an adept and viable location to do so.

The researcher’s familiarity with the community of Montrouis helped to prepare for and adapt to the various conditions under which interviews would be conducted. The researcher was also very familiar with a local translator, referred to here as Ino, with years of experience working with NGOs and the *blan yo* (Haitian Kreyol phrase for white people and foreigners. Literally translated: ‘whites’) that they bring with them. Proficiency in the local dialect of Haitian Creole also helped the researcher to pick up unintentional gaps in translation where the translator may have left out a word or two that he found to be very informative. It is likely that prior visibility in this community, combined with basic knowledge of the local language and use of a well-known, respected local translator helped participants to feel a bit more at ease speaking with the researcher than they would be speaking with a total stranger with whom they cannot effectively communicate and a translator who is not from their community.

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at George Mason University for Human Research. The Record ID for this approval is 1547670-1. With linguistic aid from a local translator, the researcher used a combination of chain-referral sampling and convenience sampling to gather participants for this research. Participants were assigned identification numbers 1001-1011 sequentially in the order in which they were interviewed. This is to protect anonymity as well as identify each participant uniquely in the analysis and presentation of this research.

When approaching potential participants, the researcher provided information about herself, her intentions as a student and researcher, and her research interest. Several times, previous participants who had referred me to this new potential participant said these things for the researcher, and she only stepped in to add to their description of herself or the interview process. Potential participants were then asked if they would like to participate. All people asked, except for a bystander and occasional echo to the interview of participant 1010, answered that they would like to participate. Many of these participants seemed happy to share their opinions but provided their own disclaimer that they would answer what they could answer, they may not know all of the answers, and they would do their best to answer the questions asked. Next, the informed consent was read and translated by Ino. When most participants indicated that they were wholly uninterested in this information, the translation became shorter and looser. It was then stressed that the interview could be stopped at any time and that any questions could be skipped over at any point. The researcher next asked if the interaction could be audio recorded. All participants agreed to be audio recorded. At this point, a recording was started on both an iPhone and a field recorder to ensure that if one recorder did not successfully record the interview, there would be another recording on another device to visit later. The researcher then read three statements of consent to which all participants answered affirmatively.

The semi-structured portion of the interview began with demographic questions. This ensured that no-one under the age of 18, or non-local of Montrouis was interviewed. The next portion of the interviews consisted of questions to establish knowledge about NGOs in Montrouis and participant perceptions of the work that these organizations do. By keeping this portion of the interview semi-structured, the researcher was able to clarify statements by participants as well as answer follow-up questions when appropriate. It also allowed the researcher to not linger on subjects that participants may not want to speak on, and keep a faster tempo when participants indicated that they did not have much time or were participating more as a courtesy than a deep desire to further knowledge in the field of international development.

Practical concerns which surrounded the planning of this research such as political instability did not materialize during this research. However, the cultural practice of avoiding leaving one’s house any time that it rains proved to be more significant. Because of this, the first day planned to interview was interrupted by rain showers that made interviewing implausible. Rain is also responsible for forcing the pausing, migration, and rushed nature of interview with participant 1011.

One limitation to this research is the method of sampling. Although intentions were to stay true to referral and convenience sampling, my participant pool was skewed by allowing participant 1006 to lead the researcher to the next

four interviews. Culturally, it was polite to allow him to do this favor. Ultimately, this may have had an effect on the average status, education level, and familiarity with NGOs of participants.

Another limitation to my research is that most of the interviews done in “downtown” Montrouis were done on a Tuesday, which is considered a market day in Montrouis. On these days, most women either set up their stands on the market street or do their shopping at market. This could partially account for the low number of women interviewed in this study. Another potential influence on the results of this study is the experience that both Ino and the researcher have in Montrouis. There is a chance that having seen the researcher previously in association with a religious NGO, participants could link her—intentionally or not—to this NGO. Despite the statement in the beginning of the interview information process that neither I nor Ino were working with an NGO, a connection—intentional or otherwise—could have been assumed anyways.

No participants asked to skip any questions or end the interview. Additionally, no participants indicated their discomfort or fear of answering any questions. At most, a few participants indicated that they did not know the answer to some questions. As this occurred, many times Ino clarified that the researcher was only asking their opinion, their interpretation, and many then answered freely. As a result, no interviews were terminated or thrown out.

3.1 Participant Biosketches

Participant 1001 is a married, 25-year-old father of one who works as a school teacher. The school where he works is run by an NGO, and as a child he was around NGOs often. Participant 1002 is a single 19-year-old woman who attended university in the Dominican Republic. Despite working for a local NGO, she says that NGOs “are not what Haiti needs”. Participant 1003 is a single 27-year-old university graduate. He works in graphic design and has translated for two of which he estimates jokingly to be hundreds of NGOs in Montrouis in the last few years. Participant 1004 is a single 27-year-old university graduate. He works as an accountant for a religious NGO in Montrouis. Participant 1005 is a 19-year-old who attends high school. He has a family member who is the Haitian Director of an international religious NGO and as a result he spends a lot of time around this NGO and its employees and volunteers. Participant 1006 is a 42-year-old married father of three. He works as a teacher at a school run by an NGO. He also took it upon himself to act as a liaison and guide around Montrouis to collect interviews from participants 1007 to 1010. Participant 1007 is a 47-year-old principal at the same school as participant 1006. He is a university graduate and married father of 6 who has seen behaviors by NGO volunteers that he deems completely unacceptable. Participant 1008 is the 35-year-old assistant director of the school where participant 1006 and 1007 work. He is a single father of two and university graduate who is concerned that too much NGO presence makes the Haitian government lazy. Participant 1009 is a high school graduate and single mother of three who periodically helps her mother sell packaged goods at market—which she seemed very keen to get back to. Although she stated that she had no interaction with NGOs in Montrouis, she indicated that they made it possible for her to go to school by paying her tuition. Participant 1010 is a 42-year-old university graduate who is married and a mother to two children. She formerly worked in the healthcare field with an NGO and often helped to hold seminars and workshops for other NGOs in Montrouis. Participant 1011 is a married 29-year-old father of one. He is a university graduate who works as a principal and indicated that he had spoken with NGOs before on issues of education.

3. 1 Grounded Theory Methodology

The collected interview data was analyzed through the lens of grounded theory as outlined by Draucker et al and performed by Faye^{5, 8}. This theory includes collecting detailed data known as *empirical indicators*, meticulously analyzing transcripts of the interviews, and then coding them into categories that arise as the analysis progresses and creating a concept from them²⁰. This coding is done in order to organize the wide range of data that is sure to come from the open nature of interviews into meaningful categories²⁰. Data collected from 11 semi-structured interviews was transcribed by hand from recordings of my interactions. Next, each transcript was examined looking for recurring themes that denote personal perceptions of NGO presence and interaction. From the categories created, the researcher identified relationships that are indicative of a higher theory. This included identifying common themes and labeling them in order to create a better understanding of the question of local perceptions of NGOs. Once coded, these interviews provided useful data to better understand how locals in an area of NGO operation perceive aid.

4. Findings

Through the use of grounded theory, three recurrent themes were identified in the interviews conducted on local perceptions on NGOs in Montrouis. These three themes include an understanding of a perception gap between NGOs and interviewees, an indication that participants deserve more downward accountability from NGOs, and a tight linking of morals to Christianity. These themes overlap in many ways. Many participants even allude to multiple of these themes in the same sentence. However, they can be pulled into three different perceptions of NGOs by local participants that indicate how they view NGOs and the work that they do.

4.1 Perception Gap

The first of these themes is a gap in perceptions between NGOs and locals as observed by locals. Although all participants listed areas in which they knew NGOs worked in their community, when asked if they thought that NGOs should change anything that they do in Montrouis, all eleven participants responded affirmatively. They all indicated that if these steps were taken, participants would like these organizations more. This indicates that all participants saw room for improvement within these organizations. Nine participants said that NGOs do not know what is best for the community, only locals know what is best for the community, or alluded in some other way that locals and NGOs have different understandings of what Montrouis needs. Participant 1010 stated "...locals know what is good for the community because we live in the community!" In this way, participant 1010 indicates that because NGOs do not actually live in Montrouis, they cannot understand what it really needs. This indicates that the participants have an understanding of how their community works and what their community needs that they know is different from what NGOs as outsiders think Montrouis needs.

Eight of the participants gave specific examples of where they believed that the NGOs in Montrouis should refocus their attention towards such as health, education, or elderly people. This indicates that they are aware of specific areas that locals perceive as lacking from the focus of current NGO work in Montrouis. Even participant 1005, who seemed very un eager to criticize NGOs considering his close connection to an NGO through which he knew Ino, suggested that he would like current NGOs in his city to expand their focus from only education to health and "feeding children". Participant 1003, when asked what NGOs could change in order for him to like them more answered, "don't think that you know the country more than the locals... and you need to, like to study the field before doing something". This shows that locals know that they know more about the place that they live than outsiders would. It shows that they have a list of priorities that they believe should be addressed in their community and know that these are often different than the priorities that organizations have.

Participant 1007 presents this gap as an issue, saying, "Sure, when you come in the area and you see that you cannot touch everything, change everything, they should have priorities. Sometimes they come with their own objective, they have their own mission that they think of at home. But then they come and they see that the area, like Montrouis, may not need water, but they come with a project of water." This clear difference in what locals see as a priority and what NGOs think enough of a priority to carry out is a matter of concern for this participant. He also demonstrates that these priorities of NGOs are unwavering even when faced by realities that their priorities are not as dire as they imagined before coming to the community.

When combined with the comment from participant 1003 about studying the field before acting on it, this quote moreover shows that participants understand that NGO priorities are often set before they even enter the community. This shows to these participants that their ideas and perceptions of how NGOs should address needs in their community are not even considered. In this way, it makes sense to participants that there would exist a perception gap between NGOs and locals.

These results indicate not only that there is a perception gap between locals and NGOs, but that locals are aware of this gap. Participants indicated that they know the difference in their perceived needs and the needs that NGOs in Montrouis are prioritizing. These findings align with the results of studies carried out by Donini and the Research support Program, which find disparities between how NGOs understand their work and how locals in Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively understand the work of NGOs^{4, 18}. Although my research does not look at how NGOs view themselves, it does acknowledge that locals believe their perceptions are different than those of the NGOs. This angle that locals understand that their ideas of what should be priorities in their community can differ greatly from the actions of NGOs is one that is not widely researched. Moreover, it could also be indicative of questions of NGO accountability, which is a theme to be explored next.

4.2 Downward Accountability

Another theme present in the findings of this research is the issue of downward accountability. All participants were asked “Do you think that NGOs listen to the ideas and suggestions of the people of Haiti?” Although eight of the eleven participants responded that they had spoken with these organizations, some even saying to give them advice, most participants indicated that only ‘some’ organizations listen to locals, while other or most organizations do not. Participant 1004 responded, “sometimes you don’t have the opportunity to talk to them about what they are doing. Sometimes people that are responsible, like the president of the organization, they are not in Haiti, they are not here”. This participant recounted several interactions with NGOs and worked at a school run by an NGO. Even still, he found NGOs overall to be widely inaccessible. Only one participant responded to the question “I do not know”.

Based on their answers to this question, seven participants were asked if they believed that these organizations *should* listen to the ideas and suggestions of the people of Montrouis. All participants answered affirmatively in a way that indicates that they were uncomfortable with being excluded from the decision-making processes of NGOs. This indicates that participants believe that they should be consulted about projects in their community that are there to affect them. Although participant 1003 was present for both prior interviews and most likely could anticipate question 18 about NGOs listening to the ideas and suggestions of locals, he answered, “listen more to the ideas of locals” to question 15 when asked what NGOs could do to make locals like them more.

Participant 1003 also indicates that NGOs should be more transparent with locals about the work that they intend to do in their community. This issue of transparency is one that also appears in other interviews such as with participant 1007. When prompted with question 12 about what NGOs in Montrouis do, participant 1007 indicated that he believed often organizations are hiding their true intentions behind a facade of a “mission to help”. Other participants also indicated that NGOs claim their intention to do one thing and instead do another. These perceptions were presented in a way that made it very clear that even more than being left out of the conversation, locals disliked feeling as though organizations were lying to them, without any fear or thought as to how locals may perceive their sudden change in actions. This issue of transparency is a side-effect of a lack of downward accountability. Answers to these questions show that NGOs should be more transparent because they owe it to the people whose community they enter into.

Participant 1007 then adds that these organizations should instead “come and work on what the community needs, and not what they thought the community would need.” This shows that this participant, who is echoed by others, believes that there should be some type of downward accountability. The participants who say that organizations do listen to the ideas and suggestions of locals indicate some degree of downward accountability as discussed by O’Dwyer & Unerman¹⁶. However, the majority of participants that state organizations rarely listen, or only listen if, according to participant 1006, “the organization is very important for Montrouis, they will understand because the only thing that they want to do is just to improve the quality of how they are helping the people. But if they are less important, they are not going to listen to you because it doesn’t matter if they do something or if they do not do something.” This sense of ‘it doesn’t matter to them’ shows an understanding, a perception of a lack of downward accountability.

This theme indicates that most locals interviewed perceived a lack of accountability to locals by NGOs, felt this to be wrong, and wished for more accountability. Most participants who believed in the differing understanding between organizations and locals of the needs in Montrouis connected this to an issue of accountability by suggesting that because locals know better, they should be consulted more. These participants also indicated that they, as intended beneficiaries, or at least community members affected by whatever these NGOs do in their community, deserve to be told what the NGO plans to do and not be deceived in any way. This deception ties into the third theme pulled from this research by sometimes referencing the religiosity of the organization.

4.3 Religious Morals

The third theme found in this research is more loosely tied to the other two themes, but seems to be very important to the locals interviewed. This theme is a sense of morals closely connected to religion. Although there is very little research done on the connection between morals and religion in Haiti, it is apparent from my previous experiences in Haiti and knowledge about the culture that religion is very important to the community of Montrouis. On any given Sunday, dozens of children walk themselves to church, people move from one place to another in their Sunday best, and packed buildings blare religious call-and-responses on every other corner. When responding to a greeting of “*Komman ou ye?*”, “How are you?” is it common to respond “*Byen, mesi jezi/Bondye*”, “Good, thank you to Jesus/God”. Although responses could have been affected to some degree by the fact that Ino and I may have been seen working with a religious NGO in Montrouis before, the response that I received about religious NGOs was very reflective of the overall importance of religion in everyday life in Montrouis.

When asked question 17 about a perceived difference between religious and non-religious NGOs, all eleven participants indicated that there was a clear difference between religious and non-religious organizations. Many emphasized this by adding that the difference was big, or laughing when asked as if I should already know the answer was a definite yes. Despite literature focused on the heavy presence of *vodou* in Haiti, throughout all eleven of these interviews, the term “religious” was changed into “Christian” by either the translator or the participant as if the two words were synonymous. Thus, the eight participants that indicated some type of morals or sense of right and wrong to the religiosity of an organization all did so in reference to Christian organizations, versus non-Christian organizations.

The common understanding between interviewees was that Christian organizations had standards that they were expected to meet. Participant 1011 specifically mentioned that the Christian Bible, “says not to do things that are bad”, and then mentions that those without this guidance very often do bad things and take advantage of people. Participant 1006 indicates that Christian “have a straight path to follow”. This response is a nod to the popular phrase in Haiti that indicates how good of a person someone is based on if they “walk right with Jesus”. These and similar responses point to high expectations put forth by locals as to how Christian organizations specifically should carry themselves. Participant 1009 indicates that only Christian organizations have love and kindness, whereas non-Christians do not have these qualities and thus “do not really help”. Participant 1003 agrees similarly, saying that he almost expects non-Christian organizations to be corrupt because they “do not know what is really good”.

Four participants also specifically indicated that those who were not Christian were more likely to be corrupt and less transparent than their Christian counterparts. Participant 1001 stated that because locals could see Christian organizations were Christian, they can trust that a dollar raised is a dollar towards their work. In contrast, he stated that non-Christian organizations were more likely to keep money for themselves because of their lack of morals. Participant 1003 also argued that because of their status as Christian, they should be expected to be more transparent and held to this higher standard.

However, some participants also indicated this difference in transparency and corruption only applies to those who are considered “real Christians”. Participant 1003 said that even though some organizations say they are “doing it for Jesus”, in reality, “...they are not doing it for Jesus. They are doing it for themselves. They are using it as a way to get rich, to get money from poor people, because I have known some of these organizations, they come here and they say they are helping people in the name of Jesus. But instead of helping, they are robbing. You know what I’m saying? So it’s like, it’s always been my concern about Christian organization, like well you come here you say you’re a Christian. But why are you doing this? Why people are working for you, you don’t pay them?”

Another participant, 1007, indicates that he also differentiates between those who say they are Christian and those who do not act how he expects Christians to act. He says that if you do non-Christian behavior, such as smoking cigarettes in a corner, you are clearly not Christian. Thus, organizations claiming to be Christian but participating in such non-Christian acts are not to be accepted as Christian. All participants that make this distinction between those who claim to be Christian and those who actually act Christian find that this is a major issue. They conclude that a label of Christian is not enough, but the actions of these organizations show their true colors, and their true religiosity.

Although a few participants argue that it should not matter and all NGOs should behave in a way that is reflective of Christian values such as kindness and generosity, they also acknowledge that this is not the case. This perceived difference between Christian and non-Christian organizations is one that carries a lot of weight to almost all participants that answered. With the exception of participant 1002 who claimed she was not religious and did not think that religion was really helping, all others claimed that NGOs who had Christian principles and acted Christianly were better than those without this type of moral compass. Comments like those of participant 1004 indicate that without the religious aspect of NGOs, they are less valuable and have less of an impact.

The finding of this theme shows that a focus on religion as an essential part of NGO aid in Montrouis is in line with the emphasis put on religion in everyday life. This cultural connection to religion has shaped the way that locals to Montrouis place their trust. It points to an understanding of a sense of right and wrong common to Christians that they perceive, in ‘true Christians’ to be universal. At the same time, it highlights the gap in literature on the sense of right and wrong that occurs in congruence with Christianity in Haiti.

The identification of these three major themes indicates that locals have very strong beliefs about the presence of NGOs and the work that they do. It shows that they see major issue in not being involved in the decision making and planning of projects and programs that could have a direct or indirect impact on their everyday life. It also shows that these locals believe that they should be involved in this process, having a different and better understanding of the local community than NGOs as outsiders. Sitting in rooms built by NGOs and meeting on streets lined with NGO logos is not enough to these participants who wish that they had a say in these actions before they are taken. Because they are often not, this disconnect between the perceptions of right and wrong for locals is perplexing. Although Christianity seems to be the redeeming tie to kindness and generosity, it is still clear that locals understand their view

of the world, even in the very community in which they live their lives and raise their families is different and often overshadowed by the often-unclear intentions of foreign NGOs.

5. Conclusion

This research contributes to the under-explored fields of local perceptions of NGO aid in Haiti. By focusing specifically on the understandings that locals in the community have about the NGOs and NGO workers that come to their community I find common themes across responses about NGOs. The findings of this research conclude that locals are aware that there is often a disconnect between how they understand their community and how NGOs as outsiders understand their community and areas where aid should be focused. It also finds that locals, as intended beneficiaries, believe that there should be a type of downward accountability that includes them in the work that NGOs intend to carry out in their community. It also finds that Christian morals play an important part in understanding outside NGOs and their intentions and transparency.

The intention of this research is to give a dynamic voice to a group of people underrepresented in development literature as a whole, and within their own country. The answers received through the interview process of this research indicates that these locals have their own opinions on aid in their community and in Haiti as a whole. They have expectations that they want met, and they have issues in their community that they think are of the utmost importance. Through closer examination with a larger participant group, I believe that many more common themes could be found between people in different areas, with different interactions, or different work experience with NGOs. This inclusion of local voices into the field of international aid and development is one that should be explored more for these reasons. It is my hope that the findings of this research can contribute to this field in a way that encourages more NGOs to consider the voices and opinions of the people whom they intend to benefit. It is my belief that these voices have the potential to change the way that development is carried out in a way more centered on the needs and ideas of locals and beneficiaries. This research provides a small step in this direction to better understand the people who live and work in areas swarmed by outsiders bringing in their own ideas and opinions of what to change. My research on the community of Montrouis shows that community members believe that a shift of this kind would be extremely positive.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Interview Script

Researcher: My name is Abigail and I am a student at a university in the United States. I am not working with any NGO, humanitarian aid organization, or religious organization. I am working by myself as a student who would like to find out about the people of Montrouis. If you agree to let me interview you, I will ensure that all of your personal information and responses to questions are confidential. I will not share any identifiable information with any organizations, agencies, or governments. The responses to my interview questions will only be used for research purposes as a student researcher. I would just like to ask you a few questions about your life in Montrouis and any knowledge that you have with Non-governmental organizations. If you agree to participate, but choose not to answer specific questions, we can skip them. If at any point you wish to stop this interview or you would like me to not use any information in my research that you have given me, please say so and I will stop the interview immediately.

Consent:

- Do you wish me to conduct the interview here or would you rather we conduct this interview elsewhere?
- Do you give verbal consent to participate in this interview knowing that the researcher will keep your personal information confidential and you are able to end this interview at any time?
- Do you give verbal consent for the researcher to tape record this interview so that it will be easier for her to understand them later? If yes, your audio recorded interview will only be listened to by the researcher and her professor, and only transcripts of the interviews will be made available in the research records.

- Do you understand that this research is in no way affiliated with any organizations, agencies, or governments and that your responses to these questions will in no way impact any relationship that you have with any such groups?

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. Do you go to school? Where?
4. Did you go to university? Where?
5. Do you live in Montrouis? If not, where are you from?
6. Are you employed? What is your job? How many days a week do you work?
7. Are you married?
8. Do you have any children? How many?
9. How many people sleep in your house each night?

Semi-structured Questions?

10. Do you know what an NGO is? (If no, offer a modified and easily-translated definition of NGO: an organization that does not make money and comes to try and improve life for the people of Montrouis)
11. If I ask you to think about NGOs, what is the first thing that you think?
12. Do you know of any NGOs in Montrouis? What do they do?
13. Have you ever had any interaction with these NGOs or do you know anyone that has? What was this interaction?
14. Do you like any of these organizations or dislike any of them? Why do you feel this way?
15. Do you think that NGOs should change anything about what they are doing that would make you like them more?
16. Do you think differently of NGOs that are from other countries and those that are from Haiti?
17. Do you think differently of NGOs that are run by religious groups like churches versus those that have no religious connection?
18. Do you think that NGOs listen to the ideas and suggestions of the people of Haiti?
19. Do you think that NGOs should be in Montrouis/ Haiti?