

# 4 Disaster Resettlement Organizations and the Culture of Cooperative Labor in the Ecuadorian Andes

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## INTRODUCTION

Disasters are destructive of livelihoods and well-being and compel affected people to adapt to new environments, lifeways, and subsistence efforts. They also draw together social actors, social groups, and state and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in novel relationships. With changes in the environment and economy, aberrations, departures, and dialectic tensions emerge in both practice and representation as these new relationships are negotiated. As aspects of culture appear to shift or adapt in these contexts, we are compelled to ask whether these apparent changes are

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fleeting or enduring and whether calamity truly changes cultural practice or reveals new aspects of culture (Hoffman 1999, 302–310).

This chapter explores the role of cooperative labor groups (*mingas*) in the political economy of disaster-induced resettlements in the Andean highlands of Ecuador and the important functions these groups play in the distribution of aid and development resources. I look at ways in which resettlement agencies and other institutions have worked with minga groups and highlight power relations implicated in the forms of brokerage that are produced in this encounter. In these contexts, mingas become globalized as extensions of state and multinational processes of disaster recovery, resettlement, and development. They are critical sites of the exercise of power at intersecting levels of scale. The story that unfolds is about how the cultures of these groups adapt in the context of interventions of the state and NGOs and how these changes are, in many ways, born of adaptations of existing cultural repertoires in these contexts. Above all, these are stories of how these encounters are brokered by powerful intermediaries whose ability to compete for scarce resources is intimately tied to particular institutional strategies.

## MOUNT TUNGURAHUA

The communities in this study are part of Canton Penipe, a rural county in the Andean highland province of Chimborazo, Ecuador. The largely mestizo population is primarily composed of smallholding subsistence agriculturalists and pastoralists. Locals' direct involvement in capitalism has been historically negligible, although many take small shares of their crops to local markets and some do migrate for wage labor employment. Locals primarily cultivate corn, beans, potatoes, and, to a lesser extent, peas, tree tomatoes, blackberries, and fruit trees. Many also raise cattle, pigs, guinea pigs (*cuy*), chickens, and rabbits.

Canton Penipe is located along the western and southern flanks of the stratovolcano Mount Tungurahua. Its three northernmost parishes (*parroquias*)—Bilbao, Puela, and El Altar—lie in the highest volcanic risk zone. In 1996, after nearly 80 years of dormancy, Mount Tungurahua began a new eruptive phase that continues at the time of writing. Massive eruptions in 1999 and 2006 devastated the region with ashfall, pyroclastic flows, lahars, and incandescent material, affecting roughly 650,000 area residents. In addition to six fatalities, many injuries, and subsequent illnesses, homes, crops, and animals were lost; soils were degraded; and fruit trees were desiccated by volcanic ash. Thousands were displaced, as they were unable to return to their homes or eke out any kind of livelihood on their lands. In the interim period between the two eruptions, more than 3000 people languished in shelters, often for several years, whereas others migrated to cities in search of new livelihoods.

Shortly after the 2006 eruptions, many began to assess the damage to the region and confront the possibility that it would be too dangerous and costly to rebuild the villages in the risk zone. Several agencies began constructing resettlement communities in 2007–2008. The largest resettlement was built on a landless, urban grid in the municipal center of Penipe. The Ecuadorian Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MIDUVI) built 185 homes and Samaritan's Purse, a Christian evangelical

disaster relief organization based in the United States, built another 102. Another resettlement, known as Pusuca, was built by the Esquel Foundation, an Ecuadorian NGO, approximately 5 km to the south of the municipal center. This hilltop resettlement included 45 houses, with each allotted a half hectare of land and additional plots for communal projects.

## MINGA HISTORY

Local institutions are of perennial interest to theorists and practitioners dealing with disasters (Jones and Murphy 2009), displacement and resettlement (Cernea 2006), and development (Cleaver 2001). Researchers look to local institutions as indigenous forms of self-governance and mutual aid, capable of adaptation, disintegration, and resistance (Oliver-Smith 1996). They also provide a form of legibility and legitimacy. By working through local institutions, outside organizations are able to recruit and organize in ways that at least appear participatory, thereby obtaining a degree of sociopolitical validation.

Minga comes from the Quechua word *mit'a*, meaning “turn.” It refers to collective work parties that are part of a suite of practices throughout the Andean region, which mobilize social labor through complex systems of reciprocity (Orlove 1977). Minga practice was born of subsistence agricultural production that requires seasonal investments of labor that exceed the capacity of households and the challenging ecology of Andes, where periodic shocks affect household ability to meet subsistence needs. This incentivizes delayed reciprocal exchange as mutual aid. Researchers point to mingas as distinct examples of Andean people's historical capacities for cooperation that have played noteworthy roles in political mobilization and social movements (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Mayer 2002). The shared base of minga labor constitutes “a kind of human-made commons” (Mayer 2002, 124), though not always based on common interests (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009, 98).

In general, three different types of mingas are practiced throughout the Andes. There are mingas that function as a delayed reciprocal labor exchange, whereby labor rotates through partners. Here, a party of a dozen laborers may work on one household's fields for a day, after which the household is expected to provide one laborer to participate in the work parties on each of the dozen participating households as the need arises (Chibnik and de Jong 1989). There are also mingas that are organized by village *big men*, who recruit laborers through the conspicuous giving of material goods (gifts, feasting, cash, crop shares, etc.) to participants (Mayer 2002; Whitten 1969).

Finally, there are mingas that serve as a sort of labor tax. Historically, mingas were mechanisms of social subordination that have served as a means to extract free labor from conquered groups, similarly employed by the Incas (Rostworowski and Morris 1999; West 1957), Spanish colonial administrators (Stern 1988), and hacendados (Salz 1984). Today, mingas in Ecuador often take the form of (frequently mandatory) in-kind contributions to state and NGO projects. Minga practice may exhibit the traits of more than one type in different contexts, which are frequently underwritten by reciprocal exchange practices in nonobvious ways (Faas 2013).



In Chimborazo Province, where my research took place, the decline in the hacienda system\* precipitated the emergence of village-level councils whose decision making and practical capacities are almost completely underwritten by mingas. Here, minga practice has increasingly taken the form of labor tax, excised by the village councils. These village councils, known as *cabildos*, form the basis for relations between communities and outside actors. Office holders (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer) are elected via popular, public vote every 1–2 years. However, cabildo leadership power and legitimacy are largely derived from the ability to organize mingas. As we shall see below, this is largely derived from the ability to secure outside resources for the community and is often a unique resource of one or a few village big men, who tend to hold cabildo office repeatedly. In many ways, this is a product of the clientalist political culture in Ecuador. It is also largely a consequence of mingas and cabildos becoming deeply entangled with the modern state and multinational organizations in the late 1960s and 1970s, accompanying the constitutionally mandated diversion of state oil revenues to parish councils in the 1970s (Collaredo-Mansfeld and Phillips 2010). Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing today, cabildos form a critical nexus of state and NGO projects in the region (Cadena and Mayorga 1988).

Mingas, as carried out by cabildos, are the obligation of community households. Since villages range in size from 35 to 65 households and each one is expected to send one laborer, minga size tends to reflect the number of households in the village. However, as will be discussed later, there may be several mitigating factors that affect participation. Mingas may be regular, scheduled activities to maintain common resources, such as forests and communal roads. They may be project based, as for potable water or irrigation. Otherwise, they may be *ad hoc*, responding to emerging conditions, such as with the administration of emergency relief. In these contexts, mingas play critical roles in negotiating the needs and objectives within communities, as well as with outside organizations.

### THREE SITES

This study was primarily conducted in three sites in Penipe Canton, the county-like administrative boundary within which all of my research sites were contained. The first site, Penipe Nuevo, was a landless resettlement on an urban grid of single-story, duplex homes with small (25 m<sup>2</sup>) yards. It was built as an extension of Penipe, the administrative seat of Penipe Canton, and did not include farmland or other productive resources. Prior to the construction of the resettlement in 2008, Penipe consisted of about 240 homes, only roughly 170 of which were occupied full time as a result of significant outmigration in the 1990s. The combined 102 homes built by Samaritan's Purse and 185 built by MIDUVI added about 1500 residents to the urban center, nearly tripling the population at the time.

\* While a discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this chapter, see the following for more details: Tanya Korovkin. 1992. Indians, peasants, and the state: The growth of a community movement in the Ecuadorian Andes. CERLAC Occasional Paper. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean, York University. <http://www.yorku.ca/cerlac/documents/korovkin92.pdf>.

The Esquel Foundation built Pusuca, their rural resettlement of 45 homes (population ~140), just 5 km to the south, on a windy hilltop overlooking the Chambo River Valley. By contrast, Manzano, a village of 52 households, was in the high-risk zone at the foot of Mount Tungurahua. Villagers were displaced by the 1999 and 2006 eruptions. Four of the households had resettled to Pusuca, whereas the remainder had relocated to a mix of Samaritan's Purse and MIDUVI homes in Penipe Nuevo. Beginning in 2009, nearly all of the Penipe Nuevo residents from Manzano began returning daily to cultivate and raise animals on their lands, as there were no productive resources or other economic opportunities for them in the resettlement, and to serve on mingas. Resettlers in each site had a shared culture of mestizo highland Andean smallholding primary producers, with an emphasis on traditional practices of reciprocity and cooperation.

### METHODOLOGY

I spent a year conducting fieldwork in these sites just after resettlement construction was completed in 2009. During that time, I became aware of the central role of mingas and community councils in administering relief, project recruitment, and post-resettlement development. I returned in 2011 to conduct research on mingas and their role in the political economy of the resettlements, focusing on factors that contributed to the continuity of minga practice. I examined them as a form of reciprocity in which unequal power relations could be produced and exercised, which might be implicated in the distribution of aid and development resources.

Among my primary objectives were to investigate how supralocal organizations worked through these local institutions and to see what implications these factors would have for the distribution of scarce development resources in the communities. Each case is intended to highlight the power relations inherent in the forms of brokerage established by the different agencies and local leaders involved in resettlement and disaster recovery. The information presented is primarily drawn from participant observation and key informant interviews.

While living in Penipe, I participated in more than 40 mingas and dozens of village council meetings in all three sites. I identified four broad categories of key informants. The first were villagers in each community who could explain everyday practices and were reliably informed of daily events. They regularly alerted me to activities of interest or explained events I had missed. Seventeen were interviewed from this category. The second were village leaders (15 interviewed) who would provide history and background to village policies, practices, and politics; explain their objectives and initiatives; and allow me to accompany them as they attended to village affairs. The third were administrative personnel (13 interviewed) from NGOs (Samaritan's Purse, Esquel, and area nonprofits) and the state (MIDUVI, municipal, state, and federal). Finally, there were informants to whom I was referred to by other key informants (eight interviewed) because of their knowledge of past practices (e.g., elderly villagers who remember minga practice in years past, or past cabildo or minga leaders who had organized with the state and NGOs)\*.

\* The total number of informants interviewed does not represent a cumulative total, as some informants appear in more than one category.



## SAMARITAN'S PURSE RESETTLEMENT: THE BASES OF MINGA PRACTICE

In Penipe Nuevo, Samaritan's Purse formed mingas to assist in the construction of the resettlements by requiring beneficiary households to send at least one member to work under the supervision of skilled builders for the duration of construction. By contrast, MIDUVI used only paid laborers to construct their homes. Mingas organized by Samaritan's Purse were unusual, though not unprecedented, in that they organized people from multiple villages and largely circumvented their respective cabildos.

There was at least one important precedent to the institutional recruitment of mingas for direct household benefit, absent a common resource objective. The Peace Corps carried out potable water, irrigation, and roads projects in Penipe from the mid-1960s through the 1980s, recruiting participants by providing them with food rations. Cabildo members and minga leaders from this era say that these projects destroyed the culture of mingas, as they could no longer recruit participants without promising personal compensation. Cabildo leaders were not able to negotiate for their communities' needs with outside institutions based on their ability to organize the community for project-related goals. They could also not mobilize their communities based on their unique abilities to secure resources from outside institutions.

Ostensibly, similar results were evident in the Samaritan's Purse community. Though they elected governing councils in the resettlement, these leadership roles were nominal and practically ineffectual. Elected leaders were unable to mobilize their community or make demands of outside organizations. In August 2011, the council of the Samaritan's Purse community tried to organize a minga to improve the deteriorating park in the center of the resettlement. By the end of the coming week, they abandoned the project, lamenting that people would not participate unless they were provided incentives. They also worried that they would not be able to demand resources from the municipal government, the state, or NGOs if they could not organize the community.

## MANZANO: MINGA PRACTICE AND CABILDO BIG MEN

The traditional leaders who, prior to the disasters and displacement, sat on cabildos, organized their communities, and carried out mingas were largely absent from the resettlement. Their roles as brokers, by and large, were not relocated to the resettlements. Their political power in Penipe Nuevo was neutralized by the usurping influence of direct benefits provided by outside institutions. Also, the lack of productive resources in the resettlements eliminates the very mode of production upon which the social organization of mingas is historically based. As a result, some Penipe resettlers migrated to urban areas in search of wage labor. Most, however, continued to commute to their land in the high-risk zone to eke out what they could, despite the fact that yield was a fraction of pre-eruption productivity due to chronic ash fall. There was also the ever-present risk of harm due to the volcano, which continued to threaten another major eruption. It is here that cabildos and parish councils (*Juntas Parroquiales*) began anew to organize mingas and attempt to attract state and NGO

resources for community development and the restoration of agricultural production and basic service infrastructure.

Cabildo leaders organized mingas for projects including irrigation, potable water, and village road maintenance. Minga practice became a powerful symbol of community solidarity and an important tool in the competition for scarce development resources. Mingas were formed to attract outside aid and projects by proving that the communities were organized and, therefore, deserving of aid and project investment, often putting them in competition with other communities. One of the ways cabildo leaders achieved the perception of unity was by selectively excluding those who do not support the *status quo* or participate on their terms. Meanwhile, though they were working in earnest to attract resources for their villages and constituents, the leadership and their allies accumulated the most benefits from aid and development programs.

In 2011, Bernardo had been the president of Manzano's cabildo for 12 years. He organized his people to work with neighboring villages to build an irrigation canal that would someday span the entire parish. When labor continued for months on one side of the mountain, benefitting other villages but not Manzano, Bernardo withdrew Manzano participation in the irrigation mingas until parish and municipal leaders could negotiate more equitable work plans. Bernardo and his inner circle of political allies constantly worked to attract state and private resources to Manzano. In the past, Bernardo had to deal with a fair amount of dissent within his village, but resettlement changed that. This is when mingas began again in earnest, after a period of decline preceding the disaster. Participation was considered the one road to development project and relief aid eligibility, creating some tension. Not everyone could afford to participate as in the past; commutes from the resettlements and jobs and other obligations often made participation quite challenging.

Those who failed to participate regularly in mingas were gradually excluded from village affairs over the course of the 4 years after resettlement. Even when this was the result of personal and political feuds, Bernardo invariably attributed erstwhile villagers' absence to an unwillingness to participate. On several occasions, I rode with Bernardo as he visited resettlers from Manzano to invite them to mingas or to meetings with a development organization. As we drove without stopping past certain homes I knew to be from Manzano, I would ask why we did not invite these people. His responses varied from "no, she's never on my side. I can't have her in the project" to "no, we can't count on him to participate."

Felicia was effectively ostracized by Bernardo after she ran for parish office on a ticket opposing candidates backed by him. She and others claim that he and his allies in Manzano and neighboring villages in Puela parish hoard development resources for themselves. Indeed, one need only stroll across Bernardo's land to see evidence of this; several goat barns and a half-dozen plastic greenhouses bear the development organization and project placards that are not found on any of his neighbors' properties. In the hills overlooking the resettlement, Bernardo and 19 of his closest allies from Manzano have secured 1 hectare of land each for themselves to move their cattle out of the risk zone and to grow crops. The beneficiaries include some of the more land-wealthy residents of Manzano. These households form the core group of minga laborers and village council loyalists. Many households are included in such programs because they are



loyal supporters of Bernardo and his projects. This sort of participation often substitutes for minga participation and, subsequently, benefit and project inclusion.

### PUSUCA: AGENCY AS BROKER

One common alternative to working through existing organizations is the creation of new ones (Cleaver 2001). In Pusuca, the Esquel Foundation helped establish a new village council, or *directiva*, whose officers are elected every 2 years. The *directiva* organized weekly mingas for irrigation and potable water. Failure to participate was sanctioned by levying \$10–\$20 fines on households. In the case of the irrigation canal being constructed in 2011, those who failed to participate or pay the fines were told that they would be excluded from the project.

The *directiva* is similar to cabildos in structure and mandate, but a representative from Esquel, Martha, serves as an advisor to the main *directiva* and the other committees. She attends all meetings and mingas and guides leaders through the decision-making process. Unlike her predecessor, who became entangled in the politics of the village and was subsequently removed, Martha helps to manage the tension between the egalitarian community goals and the unequal power relations that come to bear in the village.

Mariana's experience as the first *directiva* president provides an example of local political tensions. She was ousted after her first year by powerful, relatively wealthy landowners from her own village. Manuel, who was more powerful, succeeded her as president for 2 years. He and his allies successfully excluded Mariana and others from development projects in the community, most notably several large greenhouses that produced tomatoes for market, while offering privileged access to close allies.

Since Martha's arrival from Esquel in the early 2010, the village elected a new *directiva*. In 2011, Manuel and other powerful landowners began to spend most of their time on their sizeable plots of land in the high-risk zone, away from the resettlement. When I visited Manuel there and asked why he has been absent from Pusuca affairs, he told me that the only people who were now actively involved in Pusuca were those who had nothing before. Indeed, formerly marginal (both politically and economically) individuals and households had acquired productive resources and political influence in the resettlement. Although the creation of new institutions in Pusuca only narrowly avoided the reification of power relations, it has not changed the wider social structure. As Esquel steps back and recalls Martha, it is hard not to get the impression that these unequal power relations will return to the forefront and have important consequences for the distribution of resources in the resettlement.

### BROKERAGE MODELS AND POST-DISASTER MINGA CULTURE

I observed three distinct models of brokerage in these sites. By requiring minga participation as a prerequisite for benefit inclusion, external organizations such as Samaritan's Purse insert private gain into the political economy of the minga, usurping cabildo power. Thus, minga participation became predicated not on perpetual communal obligation but on personal benefit. Brokers are essentially eliminated

from the equation, which not only marginalizes the powerful but also inhibits resettlers' ability to organize and negotiate with outside organizations. Though many local informants argued that this destroyed the culture of minga practice in the area, the fact that these same resettlers continued to organize mingas on their lands in the high-risk zone outside the resettlements appears to belie this claim. It also points us to far more central factors in the culture of mingas: common resources (irrigation, roads, and infrastructure central to smallholder agricultural production) and the role of brokers, who serve as key intermediaries between the community and outside organizations. As we see in the cases of Manzano and Pusuca, it is the *sustained* recruitment of participants for the production of common resources, which is the base of minga culture and the source of brokerage power.

Mingas organized by cabildos such as Manzano played key roles in attracting resources from outside organizations and competed with other communities for these scarce resources. In these cases, minga practice was revitalized with the express motives of brokering disaster relief and revitalizing their community. This may have been a novel motive, but this articulates with the clientalist political system of Ecuador and an ages-old form of cooperation and brokerage. The brokers that connected the community to these outside institutions accumulated appreciably more resources than other group members. Their position also enabled a fair amount of exclusion that was often invisible to outside organizations, who perceive the community as tightly knit and organized. Here, brokerage was centralized around a core leader and his inner circle, who were uniquely capable of negotiating with outside organizations on behalf of their constituents, largely by virtue of their ability to organize mingas. Of course, this was simultaneously underwritten by their ability to secure these outside resources. In some ways, their exclusionary practices fostered a competitive environment within their community that sustained their power by distinguishing between deserving and undeserving members. In other ways, these same exclusionary practices undermined their stated goals of unity and organization, but this went largely unnoticed to outside organizations.

Finally, institutions such as the Esquel Foundation have promoted the poor and marginal to positions of leadership. These individuals and households have acquired productive resources and political influence in the resettlement. The brokerage model that has emerged appears, from the most superficial of structural perspectives, to be the most sustainable and ostensibly democratic. In Pusuca, brokerage was seemingly decentralized within the community; the resettlement agency promoted an economically and socially diverse group to positions of leadership, and leadership power was diffused into multiple committees and posts. It became clear, though, that the resettlement agency was itself acting in the role of broker, coaching the village councils into making minga participation a condition of resource inclusion, much like the cabildo in Manzano.

Despite this, the councils of Pusuca and the Esquel Foundation fostered the development of a more equal and participatory culture of minga practice and the distribution of resources. However, their efforts have not had any impact on the wider social structure within which Pusuca and its resettlers are embedded. As purposeful changes were enacted, the tensions between egalitarian goals and power-laden practices of exclusion endured, albeit somewhat stifled for the time being. As Esquel



withdraws from the community, there is a likelihood that old power relations will return to the fore and minga practice will begin to resemble those in Manzano. This can have important consequences for future distributions of resources in the resettlement.

## CONCLUSION

Resettlements are political systems involving complex negotiations between multiple stakeholders, including institutions and local actors with unequal access to scarce resources and power. The destruction and loss of means of primary production through disaster, displacement, and resettlement precipitates a significant shift toward access and control of the flows of aid from state institutions and NGOs as the primary resources of political competition (de Wet 1996, 338–339). Social actors frequently maneuver to acquire or consolidate control of resources by pressuring institutions to honor competing claims of legitimacy and entitlement (Henry 2002; Mosse 2005).

Working through local institutions to realize post-disaster development goals has potential to reify power relations. Even where one seeks to create or restructure institutions, wider social structures that remain unchanged can create unsustainable tension. This chapter does not offer any ideal brokerage structure. Instead, it contrasts three cases as a step toward considering brokerage in cooperative organization more critically, as this has important implications for the distribution of resources in disaster-affected communities and the work of institutions in the distribution of aid and the development of post-disaster resettlements.

Those affected, displaced, and resettled in the wake of the eruptions of Mount Tungurahua went through many changes, mostly in terms of environment and livelihood. The people survived and, therefore, so did their culture. As in other contexts, we see a fair amount of improvisation and rule bending, but little in the way of genuine rule breaking.

When reflecting on whether there were any significant cultural changes as a result of the disaster and resettlement processes, I am reminded of Susanna Hoffman's (1999, 319) response to that question: "no, but also decidedly yes." Because cultures are resilient (in the broadest sense of the term) and they survive with their bearers, change comes largely from within existing repertoires. Therefore, theoretical models of disasters and resettlement that focus on these phenomena as departures from routine culture and practice are problematic, because they presume a sort of pre- and post-disaster/resettlement stasis and bracket out potentially perennial tensions of routine cultures, often envisioning a return to a presumed *normal*. Such notions are doubly problematic, because they largely ignore tensions and inequities that exist in communities prior to resettlement. These might also affect recovery and the political and economic sustainability of resettlements.

The situations in which the displaced of Canton Penipe found themselves were extensions of long-existing conditions of smallholder agro-pastoralism in the challenging ecology of the Andes. In these cases, seasonal investments of extra-household labor and periodic shocks compel reciprocal exchange and cooperative practices

(however, at times, seemingly coerced). The introduction of new actors and agencies qua brokers presents a complexity, for sure, but one that is met with often novel innovations built from existing repertoires.

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# 5 Taking the High Ground

## *Impact of Public Policy on Rebuilding Neighborhoods in Coastal Japan after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami*

Alyne Elizabeth Delaney

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### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores one Miyagi coastal community's plans for rebuilding and revitalizing neighborhoods in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 (3.11). Research shows an intense desire by those impacted by disasters to return to normal conditions as quickly as possible (Edgington 2011). "Normal" is generally conceived of as restoring the patterns and types of development exactly as they existed before the disruption (Edgington 2011; Spangle and Associates 1991).