The natural environment

As you approach the town of Tambo Grande in the department of Piura, roadside signs tell you that life is worth more than gold. Far from an abstract statement of philosophical or religious belief, the words are full of current political meaning. Living on top of a large gold deposit, the people of Tambo Grande are determined to stop a mining project that would destroy a substantial part of their town. Far from being a boon to people in this part of Piura, the Tambo Grande project is viewed as a direct threat to their livelihoods and way of life. Tambo Grande is the main town in the San Lorenzo valley, and the area has a population of around 70,000. Although the history of Tambo Grande stretches back to Inca times, the valley first became agriculturally important in the 1950s, as a result of a World Bank irrigation project. For 40 years, small-scale producers in San Lorenzo have shown the way in exporting agricultural goods, notably mangoes, lemons, limes, tamarind, avocados, and oranges. The people of the area fear that, if developed, the gold mine will not only spell the end of Tambo Grande as a town, but will ruin the agriculture of the region through air and water pollution. Determined to stop the project going ahead, they say they will put their lives on the line if need be.

Other than the mining company involved – a Canadian firm called Manhattan – the locals' main adversary seems to be the government in Lima. The Toledo administration is under pressure, from the IMF and others, to leave no stone unturned in the quest to attract foreign investment and maximise export earnings. If Peru is to repay its debts and increase its international reserves, then – the argument goes – it needs to attract foreign investment and increase its exports. Tambo Grande is one of a number of mining projects where foreign companies are evaluating the economic possibilities. Geologists believe that Tambo Grande may be part of a much larger area of gold deposits in the eastern part of Piura. Such prospects, of course, have aroused the attention of business interests in the capital of the Piura region, where some see the project as a way to make money.

▼ *The slogans on this Tambo Grande building read 'Mango: work for all', and 'Development with agriculture, without mining'.*

Susana Pastor

The battle for Tambo Grande

The Manhattan company publicity video describes Tambo Grande as a town 'looking towards the future', and portrays agriculture and mining as an 'an alliance for sustainable development'. The mine, it says, will go forward on the basis of 'citizen participation'. Not so, says Francisco Ojeda, the president of the Tambo Grande Defence Front. In his view, the mine would be an ecological disaster of huge proportions, ending San Lorenzo's hard-won battle to win foreign export markets for its prized mangoes and lemons. As for consultation and participation, he says, Manhattan has pursued its project behind the backs of the local people.

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The planned open-cast pit would be 1 km long, 750 metres wide, and 300 metres deep. It would cover an area of 75 hectares, and involve the demolition of 1600 homes, and displacement of 8000 people. The building of a refinery would take up another 15 hectares. The project would divert the course of the Piura River, which runs through the town.

The company film says that there would be no contamination, and that the mine would not take a 'drop of water' from the San Lorenzo reservoir that serves the valley's agricultural needs. 'This is nonsense', says Ojeda, 'dust from the project will contaminate all our crops', pointing also to the toxicity of the chemicals used in refining gold. Whatever the technology ultimately used, NGOs in Piura doubt the government's ability to ensure compliance with environmental standards.

The Defence Front has rallied local opinion in the San Lorenzo valley, and lobbied hard both in the regional capital and in Lima. In June 2002, it prevailed in holding a local referendum on the issue, in which Manhattan's proposals were decisively rejected.

Tambo Grande is emblematic of the conflicts of interests that investment projects can generate. Their resolution is not just a question of environmental impact assessments, but, ultimately, of political decisions. Few other mining projects in the *sierra* are situated as close to human habitation or areas of agricultural wealth as Tambo Grande. Traditionally, most mines have been located in the high Andes, where agriculture is of low productivity. These projects have affected poor peasants who lack the political clout of the Tambo Grande Defence Front. Striking the right balance between the need to export and the need to protect the interests of local people is often difficult. Powerful interests are involved, and in the past, mining companies in Peru have been notoriously insensitive towards the interests of those who they consider to be 'getting in the way of progress'. Such conflicts can be dangerous for those involved: in Tambo Grande, one of the Front's main leaders was killed in mysterious circumstances in 2001. Manhattan denies that it

▼ *The poster reads, 'Imagine cebiche without lemon'. Cebiche is a famous typical Peruvian dish, made of fish marinated in lemon juice. Tambo Grande residents fear the mine will destroy the flourishing local lemon industry.*

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was in any way involved in this killing. Although his death may have been wholly unrelated to his activism, many local people fear that it was not just an accident.

Peru's perennial need for foreign exchange means that economic opportunities in any sector are seized upon with little thought for the longer-term consequences. The fishing boom of the early 1970s, for instance, ended in lengthy bans on fishing: exploitation of Peru's marine resources led to the exhaustion of stocks. Towns like Chimbote profited from the fish bonanza, attracting huge flows of migrants, only to become areas of mass unemployment when the fishing industry collapsed. The application of 'green revolution' technologies in agriculture – such as high-yielding varieties of seed, and increased use of irrigation and agro-chemicals – had rather similar effects. Initially, agricultural yields rose substantially, but then the improved yields decreased as the quality of the soil was depleted. There are large areas of agricultural Peru where attempts to apply modern imported technologies have had disastrous ecological consequences. In the jungle, where soil quality is poor, agricultural development is particularly problematic. So too with mining: the drive to maximise revenues in the short term typically obscures longer-term development planning. The concept of 'resource management' is conspicuously lacking; little thought is given to the needs of the next generation, still less to their heirs and descendants.

▼ *Effluent flows from the mines at Toquepala and Cuajone. Communities lower down the valley complain of contaminated drinking water.*

Susana Pastor

Mines, water, and the environment

You can smell the town of La Oroya before you see it. The last turn in the road reveals the smelter, its chimneys belching forth fumes into the already thin air. Situated at 3745 metres above sea level, and surrounded by bare limestone hills where the vegetation has long since died, La Oroya sits in bowl of concentrated gases, making this one of the least healthy places to live in Peru. Many of those who live and work in La Oroya suffer from chronic lung and bronchial disorders. The smelter was originally the nerve centre of the Cerro de Pasco Corporation's mining activities in the central *sierra*, until the Velasco government turned it into a state company, Centromin. It processes copper, silver, and zinc from the region's many individual mines. Deprived of investment since nationalisation, however, La Oroya has not improved with time. When the Fujimori government sought to privatise Centromin,

its initial plans went awry because no large international mining company was prepared to assume La Oroya's environmental liabilities. In 1997, the government sold it off cheaply to a US firm, Doe Run, on the understanding that the firm would invest heavily in the upgrading of the plant. There are many doubts in the industry as to whether Doe Run has the money or the interest to do so.

The attempts of the Fujimori government to sell the state-owned mines and mining infrastructure coincided with moves to improve environmental regulation. In 1990, a new code was introduced to tighten controls. In many ways, it was quite advanced in its thinking. But the scale of the problem is huge. Peruvian mining operations have a poor environmental record. This is not just the case for former public sector mines, starved of investment from the 1970s onwards: it holds for private sector companies too. The SPCC copper refinery at Ilo vies with La Oroya as one of Peru's environmental black-spots. Since the enactment of the environment code, new investors in the mining industry have sought to incorporate its main points. However, this is no guarantee against environmental disasters, like the 1999 mercury spill at Choropampa, between the Yanacocha mine and the coast. The multinationals are not always the worst offenders; there are smaller Peruvian-owned firms that simply ignore the rules. But in the case of Choropampa, it turned out that there were no rules governing the transport of dangerous minerals and chemicals.

A major problem is the inability of the government to enforce the legislation. The National Environmental Council, the body ostensibly responsible, is a small organisation that lacks political force. In practice, the mining ministry itself regulates the industry. But the regulatory team at the ministry lacks the personnel and the funding to do the job properly. Its decisions also sit uneasily alongside the ministry's main mission to attract investment by whatever means possible. All projects have to undergo environmental impact assessments, but these are usually conducted by consultants at the behest of the companies involved. They are generally written in technical language that is difficult for non-experts and local people to understand. Consultation with local people is generally perfunctory, and objectors have little chance of making their voice heard. Local municipalities in mining areas, like those of Cajamarca and Huaraz, have taken the lead in pushing the government to take regulation more seriously.

Conflicts between mining companies and the communities that surround them are frequent. The main issues are usually land rights, and the compensation on offer for the use of land. Such payments rarely reflect the economic value of the land, and when objections are raised, the government can easily overrule them. The 1993 constitution revoked the clause in the previous constitution that made land inalienable. Without external help, communities are often powerless to defend their rights, and even when local NGOs become involved there is no guarantee of success.

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▲ *Ricardo Catacora and Gladys Márquez, technical staff at Labor.*

Environmental offensive in Ilo

The town of Ilo has fought back against environmental pollution. Although the SPCC copper smelter continues to emit acrid black smoke, air pollution conditions in the town have improved. This is thanks largely to the activities of the town council and those of *Labor*, a dynamic local NGO that has lobbied locally and in Lima for better controls. As a result of such pressure, SPCC has taken steps to reduce emissions of sulphuric oxide from the smelter. In 1996, an official report said these were dangerously high. Since 1998, with the help of the Dutch government, the municipality has been monitoring air quality. In 2001, an epidemiological study was underway to measure the effects of pollution on human health in the town. The municipality has also tried to force SPCC to clean up a 15km stretch of beach, known locally as the 'Black Sea', where the sand is black from the smelter's residues. But it has been a tough struggle. According to Labor's Denis Rojas, the local council cannot assume responsibilities for such matters if the National Environment Council in Lima 'is nowhere to be seen'. The problem, he says, is that companies like SPCC have much better access to the highest levels of government than local people. This may be changing. With financial backing from the Inter-American Development Bank for better pollution control, the mining ministry is beginning to take environmental problems more seriously.

Annie Bungeroth

▲ *A key-ring produced by protestors at Tambo Grande reads, 'Trees are life, mines are death.'*

On occasions, however, international mining companies can be shamed into treating communities better. Complaints to the Australian mining ombudsman by Peruvian NGOs and communities, for instance, forced BHP-Billiton (an Anglo-Australian company with headquarters in Melbourne) to negotiate with the peasants' demands for compensation at Tintaya, the firm's mine in southern Peru.

Other causes of tension with local communities include the use of water and the contamination of rivers. Along the western side of the Andes, and through much of the highlands, rainfall is scarce (if not non-existent). In many places, mines take water from close to source, either to provide drinking water to the mining camps, or for use in the treatment and transport of minerals and waste. This causes water shortages lower down the river valleys, to the detriment of farmers who rely on rivers to irrigate their crops. In Moquegua, farmers have expressed concern that development of the Quellaveco mine by Anglo American will diminish the aquifer in the region, and exacerbate water shortages. Water courses also become polluted either as a result of spillages or, more commonly, from seepage of mine tailings into rivers and streams. For decades, the town of Locumba in the department of Tacna has suffered the effects of arsenic seeping into the river Ite from the Toquepala copper mine tailings. According to the mayor of Locumba, Juan Víctor Dávalos, contaminated water supplies have had a major long-term impact on the learning capacities of children in the town. At the point where the Ite runs out into the Pacific, between Ilo and Tacna, the environmental damage to

STATE WITHIN A STATE

They don't welcome passers-by in Toquepala. The entry point into the mine is guarded as if it were an international frontier, with guards checking and re-checking identity documents. SPCC, like other mining companies, is very averse to bad publicity from snooping journalists or NGO representatives. Beyond the checkpoint, visitors enter a different world. The managers' compound, at least, is like a piece of California relocated in the arid mountains of southern Peru. The street names are in English: Crystal Lane and Begonia Avenue. The mown lawns, the golf course, and the tennis courts suggest no water shortage or poisoning here. Together with the smelter at Ilo, and the copper mine of Cuajone, near Moquegua – all connected by the company railway – SPCC is like a state within a state. Commercial calculations are uppermost on SPCC's agenda, especially as copper prices decline. Although SPCC pays its staff well by Peruvian mining standards, the payroll has diminished as machines progressively replace people. Toquepala, Cuajone, and Ilo employ 5000 workers, and a further 2500 depend on tertiary firms providing services. Ten years ago, SPCC employed twice as many workers. The region's economy has certainly felt the difference.

vegetation is clear for all to see, in spite of recent steps by SPCC to clean up the shoreline.

Water shortage in much of Peru has sharpened conflicts between agricultural producers, large and small, over the ownership of, and access to, water courses. This is far from being just a problem related to mining. Changes in the flow of rivers can have major implications for farmers. When the San Lorenzo dam was constructed on the Quiroz River in Piura in the 1950s, it cut the flow of water into the Piura River, reducing the amounts available to cotton-growers in the lower Piura region. The angry response of the estate owners led to Velasco building a canal to channel water from the Chira River (where it is plentiful the year round) into the Piura (where it is scarce for much of the year). Water is life on the coastal strip, and nothing grows without it. However, water is often used wastefully. The cultivation of rice over large areas of the otherwise arid department of Lambayeque – involving intensive use of water – is inappropriate where water has to be transported from the *sierra*, and where the end result is salinisation. The cost of hugely expensive irrigation systems, borne by the state, is not factored into the price of the end-product. In the *sierra*, too, access to water is of

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► *The Piura river-crossing into Tambo Grande – in the rains it becomes completely submerged, and travellers must cross by boat.*

fundamental importance to agriculture, since water is scarce for much of the year, and drought is not uncommon. Access to water, as well as access to land, is the source of ancestral conflicts within and between communities, and between communities and major landowners.

Natural disasters

The Spanish *conquistadores* had a special gift for building cities in places prone to natural disasters: Mexico City, Guatemala City, Bogotá, Quito, Lima, Santiago all lie abreast a major fissure that arcs around the Pacific rim, giving rise to earthquakes and volcanoes. Peru has had its fair share of natural disasters, the worst in living memory being the 1970 earthquake which claimed 70,000 victims. Some 20,000 alone died in the town of Yungay in Ancash. The earthquake set off avalanches and a mudslide down the side of Huascarán (Peru's highest mountain), which buried the town. All that remains of where Yungay once stood is the tips of the four palm trees that had stood at each corner of the main square. It is a poignant monument to the power of nature to wreak havoc on unsuspecting people.

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▲ *Jocelyn and Luzbenia's school in Locumba collapsed during the Arequipa earthquake. They are studying in temporary classrooms.*

The most powerful recent earthquake was the 2001 quake in Arequipa. Measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale, it produced large-scale damage, and shook the whole of southern Peru. Its tremors were felt as far away as Cochabamba in Bolivia. One of the worst-affected areas was Moquegua, where the geology is particularly unstable. There, 15 people were killed and many hundreds made homeless. At Ilo, people feared that the earthquake would bring in its wake a *tsunami*, or tidal wave, that would swamp the town. In the event, it did not happen, but in this well-organised town, schoolchildren are drilled in what to do in the event of such a calamity. In Camaná, further north up the coast, a *tsunami* destroyed nearly 1000 homes.

Among the worst-hit towns was Locumba in Tacna department. Situated in the desert, 95 per cent of the houses there were either destroyed or made uninhabitable. Even the town's stout church – a holy shrine marking the spot where Christ appeared in a vision to a local peasant – was badly shaken. Electricity and water supplies were cut, and road communications to Tacna severed, when the bridge that carries the Panamerican Highway collapsed into the Ite river. Although the immediate response from the authorities was slow and half-hearted, international aid

agencies responded to Locumba's plight rapidly, providing temporary shelter and cisterns to store water. After the initial emergency, the municipality of Locumba faced the daunting challenge of reconstruction. But the mayor of Locumba struck an optimistic note when he described how the disaster had elicited a spirit of mutual self-help and solidarity among the townspeople. He claimed that out of the rubble and debris, a new, better-planned town would emerge, more resilient to future tremors. 'We start again from scratch,' he says, 'putting in things like proper drains and sewers we never had before.'

Tremors are a fairly common feature of everyday life in Lima and other cities, and a reminder that one day the 'big one' (*el grande*) may strike. The biggest quake to affect the city was in 1940; but then Lima had a population of 400,000, not eight million as now.

The possibility of a major earthquake in Lima is a nightmare scenario for urban planners. In theory, tall buildings in the capital are built to withstand earth movements. In practice, safe construction techniques add to the cost of building, and are only ever applied in higher-income neighbourhoods where local councils check on compliance. The regulations governing medium-rise housing are less strict than for high-rise, and the majority of city housing falls into this category. Most houses and public sector buildings in Lima are constructed by builders whose main concern is to erect walls and roofs as quickly and cheaply as possible. The collapse of a school in Nazca revealed the fact that the builder, to cut costs, had skimped on the metal ties that grip the iron rods sustaining the concrete beams and pillars.

PREDES is an NGO that specialises in disaster prevention and mitigation. It helps to diagnose risk levels in communities, and develops contingency plans with local municipalities and grass-roots organisations. It is slow, unspectacular work, but is advancing well. Real problems arise

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Constantino Condori and Justina Velarde Condori saw their home in Piñapa, just outside Locumba, fold up like a house of cards. Constantino had been living in a tent for months when we talked to him. He described how, with the quake, the whole landscape seemed to move, and the valley was filled with choking dust as rock pounded down the hillsides. 'It only lasted a few minutes,' he said, 'but it seemed to last for ever.' Constantino rents a few hectares of land close to the river Ite. The year before, most of his crops were washed away as unusually heavy rains in the *sierra* turned this modest river into a roaring torrent.

The picture shows Constantino and Justina outside their newly-built house, one of 79 self-construct housing modules donated to Locumba by Oxfam.

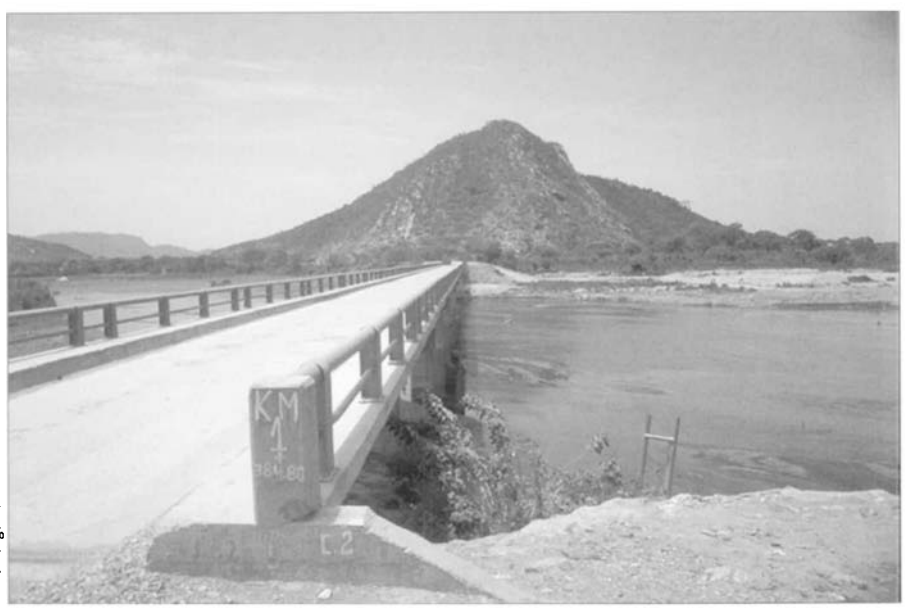
Delayed action

Niño floods are so dramatic that they elicit a swift response from the emergency services and foreign relief agencies. But the most serious problems often arise when the waters recede, and the TV crews and aid workers leave. Jaime Morillos was among those made homeless in Ica in 1998. He worked with PREDES on rebuilding in an area called (perhaps with some irony) 'The Promised Land' (*La Tierra Prometida*). 'When we had been here for a certain amount of time we felt we had been deserted.... When we had been here for a month and a half, some people threatened to move the [displaced people's] camp to the main square of Ica. We wanted to make our presence felt so that we couldn't be ignored. When the officials heard what we were planning, they soon came to see what we wanted.'

when poverty forces people to settle on land that is ever more exposed to risk, for instance, steep hillsides where even small earth movements set off avalanches of rock and stones. According to Gilberto Romero, 'You can take steps to build walls of stones but, fundamentally, you cannot de-link preventative work from strategies to improve living conditions.' A key element in the ability of people to survive natural disasters is the strength of community organisation, and the existence of preventative strategies that cut across all other social programmes. 'The strength of community organisation in Lima is very unequal', says Gilberto. 'For historical reasons, it is much stronger in some neighbourhoods than others.'

Earthquakes apart, the other most common type of natural disaster in Peru is *El Niño*, the meteorological phenomenon that regularly plays havoc with rainfall along the length of the Peruvian coast and in the *sierra*. The precise causes of *Niños* are still not well-understood, but there is no doubt as to the symptoms. The cold waters that normally flow up the coast of Peru from the Antarctic are displaced by warmer waters flowing south from the tropics. The rise in sea temperature is usually first noticed by fishermen who see their catch diminish as a result. *El Niño* brings rain to areas (like the *costa*) where it never normally rains, and drought to areas (like the *sierra*) where there is usually plentiful seasonal rainfall. As a result it can have catastrophic effects on both fishing and agriculture. *Niño* years tend to be cyclical, happening at about five-year intervals. However, predicting the strongest *Niño* years is more difficult. The worst *Niño* years in the 20th century were 1925, 1983, and 1997-98. Meteorologists have predicted a return of the *Niño* in 2003. Perhaps all that can be deduced from this is that, with global warming, bad *Niños* may be becoming

▼ *This bridge across the Rio Bigote in Piura was built to replace one that was washed away during the 1997 El Niño. The destruction of the bridge left thousands of people cut off.*



Annie Bungeroth

Annie Bungeroth

▲ *The Niño rains destroyed the bamboo roofs of houses.*

more frequent. Also problematic is *La Niña*, which follows *El Niño* but with reverse effects.

When the 1983 *Niño* struck, it had dramatic affects in both the *costa* and *sierra*. There were no preparations to mitigate its worst effects. Swollen rivers along the Pacific coast burst their banks, creating widespread flooding. Houses are typically made of mud, without proper roofs, and were unable to withstand the damage. In many places, houses, roads, and bridges were simply washed away. The drought that year throughout the *sierra* was visually less dramatic than the coastal flooding, but worse in its economic impact on the peasant economy. The experience of 1983, though, had the positive effect of encouraging many communities to take steps to minimise the risks in future.

The early warning signals of *El Niño* events are various, and often reflect popular lore: the appearance of herons in the *sierra* betokens drought; the appearance of frogs, imminent rainfall. Whatever the chosen indicator, *Niños* are to some extent predictable, enabling pre-emptive action to take place. When the *Niño* returned in 1997, the people of Piura – to name but one instance – were better prepared than in 1983. Unfortunately, the municipal and regional authorities had failed to co-ordinate their actions, and the city was flooded. The Fujimori government was unwilling to work with NGOs, and thus failed to take advantage of the advances in local organisation which could have been used to harness people's energies in a co-ordinated manner.

In Lima, PREDES also works in contingency planning to reduce the dangers of climatic variations on human settlements. Other than earthquakes, the main problems are flooding and landslides. Within the Rimac river basin, inland from Lima, these problems occur during most years, though the effects are magnified in *Niño* years. Effective responses to such problems are often blocked by bureaucratic obstacles, such as the number of different institutions involved, and their failure to co-ordinate their actions. The boundaries between municipalities do not necessarily conform to geographical logic, and within a single river basin there may be several mayors working in opposition to each other. One of PREDES' main contributions has been to create spaces in which different local agencies can collaborate. It also tries to inculcate greater awareness of such problems among government ministries and agencies. However, as Gilberto Romero remarks, this is problematic since, 'Such overlapping notions still do not fit with ministerial responsibilities.'

▼ *A woodcutter chops trees washed down from the mountains during El Niño. He will use them as firewood.*

Conclusion

Susana Pastor

▲ *Lima construction workers take a break. But how can Peruvians build a better future for their country?*

Looking at Peru in terms of the 'macro' picture, you may be forgiven for feeling a little depressed. Politically, the country has swung between authoritarian and rather more democratic forms of government, but without breaking the pattern of elite control. Although citizens may use their vote to determine who should be president or who should represent them in Congress, the extent to which ordinary people can use these rights to 'empower' themselves is still very limited. The size of the gap between rich and poor is such that the economically powerful and politically influential will fight tooth and nail to maintain their privileges, even if this means resorting to undemocratic methods. Democratic institutions are weakly constituted in Peru. Equally, the rate of economic growth has been sluggish over the last thirty years, and the distribution of its benefits has continued to favour a small proportion of the population at the expense of the great majority. For most people, living standards have tended to decline, while the country continues to export a good proportion of its wealth in the form of debt repayment. Poverty and inequality have become more pronounced. The chances of the average 18-year old getting a reasonably-paid job today are much slimmer than would have been the case at the end of the 1960s or the beginning of the 1970s.

Look at Peru in 'micro' terms, and you get a rather different, less pessimistic picture. In researching for this book, we interviewed many people who do not form part of the elite: slum dwellers in Lima, peasant farmers in highland Ayacucho, coffee growers in Piura, mineworkers in Tacna and Moquegua, and jungle Indians in the department of San Martín. We also spoke with many of those who work with ordinary people to help them resolve some of the problems they face. Undaunted by the political and economic processes going on around them, people exhibit

enormous energy and creativity in building for the future, both at the family and community levels. They may be poor, but they are determinedly resourceful. One of Peru's greatest assets is the strength of its community organisation. Whether working alone or supported by NGOs, such organisation provides a response to unfavourable circumstances. Often, it is the only way forward. During my travels, I was struck not just by the resilience of those I met, but also by their determination to ensure a better future for their sons and daughters.

This book was written at a time when democratic institutions were beginning to be rebuilt after a decade of authoritarian rule. The people I met were hopeful that democracy would provide them with some of the tools they need to improve their situation. Democratic institutions should make it easier for them to organise and press for change, providing some defence against repression, whether at the local, regional, or national level. No longer are political institutions manipulated by a national intelligence machine. The power of the armed forces seems to be in check. Past abuses of power and privilege are under investigation, and people I met were hopeful that the lifting of impunity would send a powerful message to the country's new rulers. Money for community development, it was hoped, will no longer be tied to support for the government in office. Voted in on the slogan '*más trabajo*' (more work), the new government promised to tackle the chronic problem of inadequate employment. Perhaps most importantly of all, it has promised to undertake a fundamental shake-up of the way the country is governed, devolving power to local government. This offers the prospect of real 'empowerment', a major change in a country accustomed to top-down government directed from the National Palace in Lima. Perhaps more than ever before, people were concerned with human rights – including citizen rights, labour rights, women's rights – and how to establish and defend them.

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► *Peace is bringing many changes to Ayacucho – including the Internet.*

While pleased by such political changes, most people are somewhat sceptical about how much greater democracy will really help them. Democracy has proved wanting in the recent past. In the 1980s, hopes that the end of military rule would lead to a better future proved misplaced. That decade ended in a spiral of political violence and hyperinflation. As in the 1980s, the ability of government to raise incomes and generate employment continues to be held in check by the dictates of the IMF and foreign creditors. Policies such as privatisation, applauded in Washington, have received a less than rapturous welcome from those threatened with having to pay more for essential services, or those at risk of losing their jobs. Both the IMF and the World Bank have made no secret of their distaste for policy agendas other than their own, especially those considered 'populist'.

Annie Bungeroth

▲ *A girl eavesdrops on a women's group meeting in San Juan de Bigote, Piura.*

As in other Latin American countries and indeed further afield, most people continue to have little faith in politicians of whatever persuasion. Opinion polls attest to the low esteem in which politicians of all sorts are held. Peru's 'political class' has hardly distinguished itself over the previous 30 years for its long-term vision, its capacity to get things done, or its resistance to the economic temptations of high office. The 1970s military governments were hated by the popular movement and the business class alike. The Belaunde and García governments both dissipated the high expectations they initially generated. García's regime ended in total discredit in 1990, seen both as incompetent and corrupt. The Fujimori government, itself a product of public aversion to conventional parties, was finally hounded from office in November 2000. It was possibly the most politically devious and corrupt administration in Peru's republican history.

Hence the new preoccupation with participation, transparency, and respect for rights. Yet, popular organisation is not immune from corruption or manipulation, even in more democratic times. Similarly, local government can be as unaccountable and opaque as national government. Still, the interviews on which this book are based suggest that popular organisation provides the key to establishing and defending rights, and that effective decentralisation should help 'lock in' these gains at the local level. Governments will tend to remain indifferent to the plight of the poor unless forced to do otherwise. For things to change, then, the myriad of grass-roots organisations of different types need to make their voices heard. Building citizenship is a slow, difficult process. But as Luzmila in San Juan de Lurigancho says, 'We take it step by step.... The secret is that we are all united, that we trust one another.'