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Representation of the Other in social advertising: Analysis of the graphic advertising of NGDOs in social networks

Claudia Arely Donis Universidad de Valladolid (UVA) - Spain - comunicación.claudia@gmail.com

Teresa Gema Martín Casado [CV] [ID] [ORCID] Professor of Communication and Advertising. Universidad de Valladolid (UVA) - Spain - teresagema.martin@uva.es

Abstract

This article examines social advertising's discourse and representation of the “Other”, understood as any social or cultural group of people depicted in such advertising message. The article describes the features used in recent decades by social advertising to represent minority groups or groups of people in a situation of vulnerability or exclusion. The study is based on the analysis of the representation of the Other in the graphic advertising disseminated by NGDOs in social networks, in Spain, between 2011-2016. A sample of advertising messages is subjected to content analysis to identify the sectors targeted and depicted by NGDOs and the differences in their representations, as well as the type of discourses used to portray these groups. The critical analysis of the discourse and image aims to determine whether NGDOs legitimise social relations of subordination between social and cultural groups. Finally, the article examines some theoretical proposals based on the transformation of the representations and discourse of the Other (minorities and vulnerable cultural and social groups) in the social advertising of NGDOs, to identify ways to avoid social representations that legitimise relations of inequality among the populations depicted by the advertising discourse, as a first step towards an improvement in this area.

Keywords: Social advertising; Social representations; NGDO; Social networks; Otherness; Discourse.

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Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos**
(PhD in Communication, University of London)

1. Introduction

This study aims to analyse the discourse and representation of the Other in the graphic advertising published on social networks in Spain by Non-Governmental Development Organisations (hence NGOs), to determine whether the content of these advertising messages legitimises power relations and inequality towards the populations depicted in such messages. In this research study, these populations are known as the “Other”.

To recognise equality in this world: “it is necessary to question all the forms, methods, codes, strategies and mechanisms through which inequality, subordination, subjugation, oversight and indifference is naturalised” (Vasilachis, 2013: 258). Peace studies consider that any relationship of dominance and inequality is a violent relationship (Martínez Guzmán, 2003) and in this sense, this research seeks to make visible the representations and discourses that legitimise a culture of violence and normalise relations of subordination through the media, since humans are built cognitively by discourses, which underpin their beliefs, which are subsequently transformed into attitudes and behaviours (Rivas, 2005).

The representations in the advertising of NGOs show the point of view of the sender, in this case through the discourses used by these organisations to depict the populations included in their messages and address their target public. The concept of the Other (Gómez, 2003) indicates that: “in the phenomenon of solidarity, of relief, and public assistance, there is always one Other, a final recipient of either our aid or our messages” (p.144). In this context, the Other is the beneficiary of the development projects carried out by NGOs. Many of these Others are associated to certain social groups and stigmas: “drug addicts, alcoholics, sick people, elderly people, abused women, orphans, disabled people, immigrants, pedestrians, poor people, refugees, marginalised people” (p.145). It is through advertising campaigns that NGOs seek to raise awareness and to persuade people to get involved in certain social causes, either through economic contributions or other actions in favour of the organisations involved in projects that seek to help these populations.

In the field of power relations, this concept is generally developed from the public sphere and politics, leaving out other exercises of power such as those that are exercised in the daily life, family, couples, partners, the workplace and any social space (Piedra, 2004). However, this study understands power relations precisely from the perspective of these daily spaces, which are finally

represented in advertising. Power relations are examined from the perspective of the ideas of Michel Foucault (2003), who has argued that power is everywhere at all times, and that the discourse of power and the discourses of knowledge make visible these relationships, because the areas of knowledge are what represent hegemony in certain historical moments. These spheres of knowledge are revealed through discourse, in this case the advertising discourse. The diversity of individuals in societies are elements that are also used to express power relations.

“Power relations are primarily determined by the objective existence of diversity among individuals (skills, capacities, physical features, location in ecosystems, etc.) and are always culturally defined as differences between individuals and groups, which, in the course of social action, are a consequence of the establishment of power relations and the configuration of inequalities between those individuals or groups.” (Escalera Reyes, 2012: 146).

The observation of the actions and representations of the groups of people depicted in the social advertising of NGOs will allow us to determine whether this type of advertising legitimises social power relations between the social and cultural groups represented in the advertising messages.

2. Representation of the Other in the social advertising of NGOs

Research on the external communication of NGOs has offered results in relation to the image of the organisations themselves towards the receiving public. However, such an image implicitly contains the representations of the populations that these organisations aim to help. The authors that have explored this issue include Salvador Peris (1999), who examines the communication of NGOs from the point of view of social marketing, using it as a strategy to raise awareness and funds that enable organisations to put themselves on the map and reach the public in an effective manner. In his analysis of advertising campaigns, Ballesteros (2001), explains how social causes are supported by private companies, mainly those related to disasters and relief. It is a discourse that companies use to differentiate themselves from the competition by associating their image with social components, which enable them to sell more. According to this author, the discourse of the Other in this line of representation is exposed from an *assistentialist* perspective, as it only seeks to raise funds, just as any other commercial company.

Representations of culture in social advertising

Generally, the populations that are represented in the social advertising of NGOs are the so-called societies of the South, as pointed out by Erro and Ventura (2002), who carried out a study of the communication of NGOs in the Basque Country and found out that the realities of the South are exposed in a promotional manner to raise funds, sharing commercial techniques, avoiding reflection and ignoring the cultural aspects that this type of messages transmits to the audience. In the same way, Fueyo (2002) claims that the advertising discourses of NGOs are deeply ethnocentric, since they present the people of the South as responsible for the problems they face, by making reference to their lack of technical knowledge and culture, their lack of interest in carrying out work, and associating them with disasters, wars and a high rate of birth, among others. According to Fueyo, the advertising discourses of NGOs show the dominant view towards the South, highlighting the

support obtained from the economic donations that the North makes, from a charitable and paternalistic attitude and with an air of superiority. Thus, the aspects and imagery used in the depiction of the South are negative and distort reality, according to Fueyo. Likewise, Lucerga (2005) refers to the social advertising campaign “Soy IO”, where the solidary protagonist role of the message is the receiver, associated with volunteers or donors, who are responsible for the change of the populations concerned.

The image that the First World has of the Third World in advertising campaigns will be an important aspect to keep in mind. In this regard, it is concluded that the First World perceives the Third World as asymmetric, dependent, inferior at the relational level and that NGOs use this asymmetry to activate the demand for assistance, through concepts such as duty and guilt (Pinazo, 2005). In *El Tercer Mundo representado* (“The represented Third World”), Martín Nieto (2009) analyses the content of photographs and websites of NGOs, and concludes that the graphic treatment given to the population of the Third World includes relations of subordination: “the image of children and women is associated with people who need help while those who offer the help are represented by males” (p.160), these societies continue to be depicted as remote, dependent and child-like.

The analysis of the advertising messages of NGOs concludes that the prevailing models of such messages are the trade and media models, which privilege images and messages that only incite to donation, which prevents a transformation of the unjust structures of the populations portrayed in the ads (Pagola, 2009). Likewise, Saiz (2010) indicates that solidarity describes the recipients of the messages as lucky, as privileged spectators of suffering, as consumers of Others, who are objectified through visual representations and are associated with the figure of the tourist who travels to meet the cultural Otherness of misery and misfortune.

Representations of gender in social advertising

In an analysis of advertising during the first decade of the 21st century, Martín Casado (2010) argues that the advertising messages of NGOs depict women in the most stereotypical way, and are highly sexist. While they aim to defend women, they portray them as weak, submissive, dependent, locked in the private space, away from their needs for empowerment. Ibáñez’s study (2014) reveals that the image most commonly used by NGOs is an image of women in the so-called countries of the South: who are represented in poverty, or as food producers, who can be partners in the so-called fair trade, reaffirming the stereotype of women from the South as farmers. In the same way, the analysis of the image of women in the website of NGOs (Martín Nieto, 2007) indicates that these spaces portray women as beneficiaries, and rarely as aid workers, activists or volunteers.

In relation to these research works we can indicate that representations in the first decade of the 21st century portrayed populations in asymmetric relations with respect to the issuer and receiver of the North. Based on this situation, this research study presents a comparative analysis that seeks to determine whether such representation trend prevails in the current decade, legitimising power relations, either cultural-based, gender-based or social-based, and to determine whether such representations vary according to the sector targeted by NGOs, be they civil, religious, national or

international, to be able to establish whether the focus of the discourse changes between Spanish and Guatemalan NGOs.

3. Methods

3.1. Methodological strategies

According to the objectives, this research work is descriptive, comparative and confirmative [1] since it aims to analyse advertising representations, and classify the empirical reality of the content of advertisements, through the definition of categories. The reality will be observed to identify differences and similarities in terms of representation in the advertising messages disseminated by NGOs. The analysis will be carried out from the point of view of the issuer of the message, to discover what it says, and how, about the populations depicted in the advertising messages. To this end, we use content analysis, which has been already used to analyse advertising messages and contents by such authors as: Maestro (2010), Martín Nieto (2009), Martín Casado (2010) and Arroyo and Baños (2013), among Others. The content analysis is based on the principles of critical discourse and graphic analysis (Van Dijk 2009, Abril, 2007), and on the generation of discourse by NGOs (Mesa, 2000), to test the hypothesis on the existence, or otherwise, of power relations or inequality in the advertising representations.

3.2. Population and sample

The population of this study consists of the graphic advertising generated by NGOs that have been recognised as such by the Spanish Agency for International for Development Cooperation (AECID) [2]. This is because these organisations are the best qualified, according to the Spanish government, to receive funding and carry out international development projects of at least four-year duration and receive budgets of over one million euros, so that their levels of management and thus communication have the necessary criteria to be selected as the population of analysis in this study.

The sampling is non-probabilistic and purposive, because we considered that the NGOs recognised by the AECID represent the ideal object of study considering that they are part of the group of organisations that are qualified to be selected to receive public funding for international cooperation projects and, therefore, must disclose their results publicly. We focused on the advertising discourses disseminated on social networks because the latter are one of the most used communication tools in this decade and are very accessibility for NGOs and the target public living in cooperating countries.

The units of analysis are the 1468 graphic advertising pieces published between January 2011 and June 2016 in the official accounts of the Spain-based NGOs on social networks: Facebook and Twitter. The results are compared across the different NGO sectors and based on the volume of ads published in that period of time, to identify differences in terms of representations and discourses, according to the number of publications and the target sector of the organisations in Spain.

3.3. Data collection instruments and strategies

The data collection instrument was pilot tested on an earlier study on the advertising of NGDOs in the weekly newspaper *El País* (Spain) and *Revista D* (Guatemala) (Donis, 2016). The study also includes elements of other analyses of advertising representations (Martín Casado, 2010; Maestro, 2013; Martín Nieto, 2013). To determine the type of discourse, we took into account the approach of generation of education for development which has been developed by Mesa (2000) and Pagola (2009) and is associated with the discourse of the NGDOs in our study. SPSS was used for data registration and analysis. The analysis considers 50 variables in each advertising piece. The registration includes the advertising posted in the official Facebook and Twitter accounts of NGDOS, from January 2011 to June 2016, the date of the registration.

4. Results

This section presents the results according to the selected categories, which reveal the representation of the populations depicted in the social advertising of NGDOs. The results are presented in periods of time between the years 2011 and 2016. Given that the quantities of published ads were very diverse, NGDOs are classified in relation to the number of published ads: 1 to 20, 21 to 50, 51 to 100 and 101 and more.

-Target sectors and amount of ads of NGDOs

With regards to the number of published ads, the results show that the organisations linked to local groups and civil society groups published the smallest number of ads in the analysed period: 76% of them are in the range of 1 to 20 ads, followed by religious NGDOs, with 56%, and in the range of 21 to 50 ads. Meanwhile, international NGDOs publish the largest number of ads: 51 and above.

-Years and frequencies

From 2011 to 2016 there is a consistent upwards trend in the number of ads published by NGDOs in their social network accounts, being *Facebook* the network with the largest number of publications across all sectors, in more than 90%.

-Type photography used to represent the populations

The image used the most in the ads across all ranges and sectors is been colour photography, in more than 80%. Text-only ads represented less than 5% of the sample. The most common shots were medium shot, used in more than 35% of the ads, and the frontal angle, in more than 74% in all ranges. The populations are shown posing in the photographs, in more than 57% of the ranges. The serious face is the most frequent in photographs of groups of people, in up to 54%. All organisations follow the same trend, followed by the happy face, and the sad or angry faces. Concerning posture, up to 55% of the populations are shown standing, followed by people represented in a sitting position (in less than 30%), across all ad-volume ranges.

-Company and activity of the population

The represented groups are accompanied in 65% of the photographs. The type of company most frequently presented in all ad-volume ranges is people who belong to the same group or come from

the same region of the protagonist. This applies to 69% of the NGOs in the range of less than 20 ads and are linked to civil society organisations and to 50% of the NGOs in the range of 51 to 100 ads, related to religious organisations. The highest percentage of foreign people who accompany the groups is 12% in religious organisations in the range of 21 to 50 ads. Foreign people are professionals, staff of NGOs or volunteers. They are portrayed in 42% of the civil organisations as delivering aid, and in 53% of the religious and international organisations they are shown just posing for the camera. If they appear with local people the latter is presented as friends, neighbours or relatives and are usually posing for the photo. The most-represented age group is children and adults, while women are the most frequently represented genre. The sector of international organisations is the one that uses children the most in its publications: 69%.

-Represented cultures

In relation to the cultures that are represented the most in the ads, we identified the following categories: Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Maghreb and the Middle East. Sub-Saharan Africa stands out with 37%, followed in second place by Latin America, with 31%. Asia is the most represented region in the case of international organisations, in more than 100 published ads. Finally, the Maghreb and Middle East regions are the least represented cultures across all organisation sectors: in less than 9%. All ads feature images of brown and black-skinned people.

-Represented groups

The groups that are represented the most across all organisations, regardless of their target sector, is children at risk of exclusion, whose presence ranges from 30%, in civil society organisations, up to 60%, in international organisations. The second most represented group is the rural population, followed by refugees who are addressed mostly by international organisations.

-Power-gender relation

The power-gender relation stands out with more frequency in three ranges (75%), when the same image shows both men and women (between 23% and 31% of the ads) and offers representations of equality between men and women. In these photographs, men and women usually appear posing in the same positions or participate in activities where either of them is in a position of subordination with respect to the other.

International organisations with more than 100 ads represent women with more power than men (43%): women are represented as teachers, health staff or members of the NGOs, providing help usually to children. However, there is still between 18% and 25% of photographs that depict women in relations of subordination with regards to men, who are given prominence through certain shots, are shown as sports protagonists, professionals or students, in contrast to the representation of women and girls who appear in the background.

-Power-culture relation

All ads, from all sectors, depict the cultures of the North and the South accompanied by power relations. The populations of the North are shown in positions of superiority in relation to those of the South, while the former are shown as participative and as leaders and the latter are shown as

passive and as followers, especially in educational and health care activities, in 63% of the international organisations and up to 80% on civil society organisations.

-Other groups represented in relations of power

Another group that is in a relation of power with the populations in need is professionals, who are usually associated with the fields of medicine and teaching, with a presence of 52% in civil organisations with less than 20 ads, 43% in religious organisations and 44% in international organisations with less than 50 ads. The other group is parents, particularly mothers who are taking care of their children in 31% of the civil society organisations, 38% of the religious organisations and 63% of the international organisations with more than 100 ads.

-Protagonist voice

The represented populations are often silenced. The organisations have the protagonist voice in more than 90% of the cases in all ad-amount ranges. The representation of empowerment in organisations linked to civil and international sectors reflect an increase in the appearance of non-empowered groups, between 54% and 57% of the cases. However, there is a balance between the images that show group as empowered and as non-empowered. An average of 50% in both cases.

-Stereotypes

Despite the fact that many ads do not present stereotypes, there are some pieces that still do so, mostly sexual stereotypes. The civil organisations with less than 20 ads have the largest percentage of ads that rely on stereotypes (38%). There are female stereotypes in activities dedicated to agriculture, domestic work and child care, while men are represented working in activities that require strength and as athletes. With regards to the relationship between cultures, international organisations represent the highest percentage of stereotypes (18.4%). Their ads show people from foreign cultures helping people from local cultures. The latter appear in a situation of disadvantage with respect to the former.

-Campaigns' theme

The objectives of the ads include reporting results, raising funds, raising awareness, education and fair trade. In this sense, the main theme in civil and religious organisations is fund raising, with 25% and 30% respectively. The predominant theme in all organisations is awareness-raising and education for development, ranging from 30% in religious organisations to 42% in international organisations. These issues are associated with the most frequent type of appeal in the messages, which is the emotional appeal. The rational appeal is more common in ads linked to civil and international organisations of up to 100 ads, where the most frequent topics are research and reflection. Civil organisations of less than 20 ads have the highest percentage (23%) in subjects of reflection and research.

The search for messages of denunciation of injustice or causes of poverty associated with the represented in the content of the ads showed that these messages are absent in more than 68% of the ads, across all ranges.

-Generation of the advertising discourse

The charitable discourse stands out in civil organisations with less than 20 ads, with 36%, followed by the development discourse with 33%. In religious and international organisations, of up to 100 ads, the dominant discourse of development with 52% and 37%, respectively. In international organisations of more than 100 ads, the predominant discourses are development and charitable assistance, with 34% and 38%, respectively. Therefore, charitable assistance is the most frequent discourse in civil and international organisations and development in religious and international organisations. The first type of discourse is related to fundraising for projects and emergency situations, while the second shows the results of the projects, generally related to educational activities

5. Conclusions

The cultures that are represented the most in the advertising of NGDOs are Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Other populations that are also frequently represented are children and rural populations. International organisations represent refugees most frequently. The most represented groups are women and children, who are also legitimised as the most vulnerable in this advertising.

International organisations published the largest number of ads on their social networks, in contrast to civil-local organisations, which publish the smallest number of ads in these spaces. This can be associated to the larger budget of international organisations and, therefore, their greater attention to the communication area.

The publications of all organisations have showed a constant increase in the past five years, which suggests that the use of social networks as an advertising medium for these issues will tend to grow in the coming years.

Colour photography is the most widely used format for the representation of the populations and it is characterised by the medium shot and people looking directly at the camera. The shots are planned in advance and have a clearly persuasive intention.

Representations of gender, and the power related to it, stands out in general for the balanced inclusion of men and women, and because they are depicted performing the same activities in the same spaces. However, some ads still show women in situations of disadvantage with respect to men. There are representations that perpetuate stereotypes, like the image of women in the private and domestic sphere and taking care of children, while men are shown to be strong and working in the public space.

Stereotypes are less frequent in the representations of different cultures than in the representations of different local groups. However, when other cultures appear in all types of organisations, the populations of the South appear in disadvantage in relation to the populations of the North. The stereotyping of cultures consists in showing the foreign cultures of the North performing activities associated with development and helping populations from the South that are in situations of disadvantage.

When the populations are represented in the company of foreigners, the latter are usually volunteers from civil and religious organisations. The predominant activities of the foreigners are helping others or simply posing for the photo. The most common mood shown by the face of the populations in the photographs is serious and their most common position is standing, so they are representations that reflect relations of subordination between volunteers and beneficiaries.

Other groups that are represented in a relation of power or advantage over the populations are groups of professionals in the fields of health and education, and the mothers who take care of their children. Thus, women are identified with the role of childbearing mother, in addition to being a person who is in a vulnerable situation and is responsible for the care of minors.

The silence of the represented populations is a common feature in the ads of the organisations from all sectors, while the narration performed by the organisations is the protagonist voice in the ads. In this way, the official discourse of the Other is established in the social advertising generated by these organisations. It is a discourse that does not reveal the causes of exclusion, poverty or marginalisation. Thus, there is a lack of content that denounces injustices.

Among the most common topics of the campaigns across of types of organisations, awareness, education for development, and fundraising stand out in the ads of local civil and religious organisations. The latter type of organisations also has greater content to report on the results of their actions. It is therefore concluded that more campaigns with contents that promote reflection, education and information are needed.

In all organisations, whether civil, religious or international, the discourse of development is still emphasised, which involves highlighting those projects and actions that promote change in the represented populations based on the ideal view of the development of the regions where the organisation's projects are carried out. The second most common discourse is charitable assistance, in which organisations highlight their good deeds to persuade the public to donate economic resources. These discourses legitimise the relations of subordination of Others through advertising representations that highlight assistance and underdevelopment, with which these groups are associated.

6. Proposals to transform the representations of power in social advertising

Social advertising will not be able to contribute to social transformation if it does not attack the root causes of this inequality and does not present a new discourse of the Other that does not perpetuate relations of dominance. We need citizens to recognise their ability to mobilise and transform the problems presented in the advertising discourse of NGDOS (García, 2012). These organisations should produce other forms of representation for these populations, avoiding solidarity of consumption. “The communication of NGDOs is a performativity that does not configure the concepts of eco-social empowerment, relationships of trust and proactive and prosocial attitudes but promotes *assistentialism*, mutual ignorance and minimal-effort solidarity” (Nos Aldás, 2012: 219). Thus, the advertising of NGDOs needs to represent the populations in need undertaking actions in

favour of their own transformation and to represent the active engagement of the target societies, the receiver, through behaviours that reflect their committed with the transformation of the realities that affect the world's population.

- The discourse that questions the development model

The proposal consists in placing more emphasis on discourses that focus on human and sustainable development (Mesa, 2000). Pagola (2009) proposes discourses that focus on the empowerment of the populations and the publics targeted by advertising, recovering the protagonist role of the civil society through awareness. The citizen of the South is given a leading role, with a vision of comprehensive cooperation, where there is economic but also social, political and cultural development. Cerdá (2003) classifies the subject of development at this stage as the alternative or multiplicity paradigm, where communication aims to make the populations participate in their own development. Meanwhile, Mesa (2000) points out that this discourse argues that “global change depends on both the South and the North. This involves questioning the model of development both in the North and the South, because it is neither socially nor ecologically sustainable” (p. 20). The content of the messages, thus, includes the gender perspective, questions the dominant cultural models and intercultural issues, challenges racism, promotes sustainable environmental development and questions consumption to make it more conscious.

The code of conduct of NGDOs in Spain (2014), in the section for advertising and use of images, offers the following guidelines for the representation of cultural Otherness in order for the represented populations and the organisations that produce the messages to be able to develop a counter-hegemonic discourse in favour of development.

- Advertising discourses that denounce the causes and overall co-responsibility of the situations of inequality and injustice that are shown in the representations of the affected populations.
- Empowered discourses and representations, where the protagonist voice is given to the groups living a situation of vulnerability.
- Representations that avoid hierarchical relations or subordination between cultures, and instead show teamwork between cultures, in case more than one culture is shown.
- Representations that reflect the actions carried out by the affected populations for the transformation of their own realities in such cases as natural disasters and emergencies.

- Discourses with a focus on global citizenship

The advertising discourse of NGDOs should promote the awareness of the global citizenship and encourage citizen participation and action. This approach involves the need to empower and mobilise the groups from the South and to put political pressure on the great powers of the North to change the current framework of development (Pagola, 2009). At this stage, privatisation and globalisation affects all citizens, and around the world we need new frameworks for global governments (Ortega, 2007). Therefore, in their discourse of the South, NGDOs should “aim for the mobilisation and

empowerment of poor and excluded groups, Northern NGOs focus on campaigns of political pressure to change the pattern of underdevelopment of the North and the policies of industrialised countries that contribute to develop and perpetuate unjust North-South relations” (Mesa, 2000:23). As stated in the Code of conduct for NGOs in Spain (2014), they should include advertising discourses that encourage participation and social actions and mobilisation for the denunciation and transformation of the policies that affect the realities of inequality.

In this way, the advertising of NGOs can transform the representation of the protagonist of the message, can encourage the receiving public to participate, and can avoid the depiction of the populations in need as dependents. Two trends are configured in advertising, “one is centred on the work values of the organisations (solidarity, cooperation, education) and the other on the messages that focus on the receivers rather than on the subjects or the problems, to avoid inappropriate representations that discredit them [...] Now recipients become the subject of the current social advertising” (Nos Aldás, 2007: 201). The receiving public of the advertising of NGOs, who are located in the so-called developed societies, as well as the populations who are in situations of exclusion or marginalisation must use this discourse to transform together, at the international level, the actions and policies that eventually affect all populations. This type of discourse does not involve power relations or subordination, since any gender, intercultural and social relations are seen as interdependent realities worldwide, regardless of the group to which it belongs.

Despite the existence of proposals to address the discourse of NGOs from other approaches that do not legitimise power relations, such a change has not occurred yet, so new questions of the causes arise and allow the discourses of development and charitable assistance to prevail and dominate in this sector.

7. Notes

1. Method taken from Gaitán (1998).
2. Information available at the official website of AECID. Retrieved on October 2016 from: <http://www.aecid.es/ES/la-aecid/nuestros-socios/ongd/calificacion>

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