

## **Civil society at a new frontier: Challenges and opportunities for INGOs**

7<sup>th</sup> December 2011, St Anne's College, Oxford

### **Executive Summary**

#### **1. Civil society at a new frontier: Implications and strategies for INGOs**

*Rachel Hayman, INTRAC Head of Research*

The aim of this session was to build on some of the themes emerging from INTRAC's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, held on the 5-6<sup>th</sup> December 2011, St Anne's College, Oxford. Following a brief discussion, the topics participants chose to discuss in further depth were aid effectiveness; joining large INGO families; and exit strategies.

Rachel gave a brief introduction to the 4<sup>th</sup> High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan. She highlighted the meeting's inclusive nature and outlined the framework that emerged, particularly its emphasis on sustainable and inclusive growth, governments' playing a greater role in financing their own development, increasing country ownership of reforms, and increasing global economic integration of developing countries to create economies of scale. The discussion that followed focussed on how Busan will affect INGOs, observing that the approach of INGOs to aid effectiveness has largely been reactive rather than proactive. We discussed how INGOs could become more proactive around aid and development.

We then discussed the issue of joining large INGO families and the implications this has for the NGO joining the family and its southern partner organisations. It was agreed that this process poses a number of issues surrounding space, accountability, influence, values and identity. The relationship between size, influence and impact was also discussed.

Finally, the issue of exit strategies was discussed. In the current context many INGOs are scaling back their operations, meaning that many are withdrawing from programmes and countries. Many organisations have exit strategies but are struggling to ensure sustainability post withdrawal, and in practice exiting is often an 'event' rather the process that is should

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<sup>1</sup> **NGO Research Programme Members and Guests:** François Lenfant, Cordaid; Hettie Walters, ICCO; Marianne Bo Paluden, Save the Children Denmark; Susanne Kirk Christensen, Save the Children Denmark; Marianne Opheim Sampo, Norwegian Church Aid; Celestine Krösschell, Helvetas; Simon Usher, Plan International; Ton Meijers, Oxfam Novib; Mieke Berghmans, Broederlijk Delen; Nomula Dlamini, CDRA; Jackline Kabahinda, EASUN; Fenella Porter, Birkbeck College, University of London; Jon Griffith, University of East London. **INTRAC:** Rachel Hayman, Head of Research; Rowan Popplewell, Research Assistant; Priya Lall, Research Intern; Brian Pratt, Executive Director; Janice Giffen, Consultant; Alan Fowler, INTRAC Associate; John Beauclerk, INTRAC Associate; Paul Thornton, INTRAC Board; Geof Wood, INTRAC Board.

be. It was felt that INGOs should not need to exit from a country just because a donor decides to withdraw, and a number of examples where INGOs have remained despite government withdrawal were discussed, including South Africa and Indonesia. It was suggested that in future INGOs need to be more proactive and one way of doing this is through transforming the relationships they currently have with partners into more equal, and ideally non-monetary, relationships and that this is perhaps a means of ensuring greater sustainability and genuine partnership.

## **2. The changing nature of research in INGOs**

*Rowan Popplewell, INTRAC Research Assistant*

Rowan's presentation focused on INTRAC's initial thoughts on how research undertaken by INGOs might be changing in response to the changing external environment, including increased pressure on resources, value for money and demonstrating impact. She began by reviewing some of the existing literature on research undertaken by INGOs, which primarily argues that it is 'policy-oriented research' that is instrumental in character. It largely focuses on how INGO policy can effect change through better influencing government or donor policy. She then reviewed some more recent research that is exploring the ways research undertaken by INGOs is influenced by their service delivery and advocacy functions and the challenges and opportunities this poses. After drawing from some examples generated from INTRAC's recent work on research in INGOs, Rowan argued that research undertaken by INGOs has many functions and is not just about influencing donor policy and is used by a number of different constituencies within INGOs for a wide range of functions. The range of functions may have expanded as a result of the changing external environment.

The discussion that followed focussed on NGO relationships with academic institutions; capacity building of southern researchers and partners to engage in and undertake research; questions around impact and instrumentality of research; the importance of 'blue-skies' research; and how to generate the right research questions.

## **3. Moving forward**

The final session focussed on identifying areas for future research and collaboration, based upon the day's discussions and INTRAC's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference. These include: the development framework post-Busan; revisiting aid withdrawal strategies; NGO accountability and legitimacy; civil society space; research within and by NGOs; and joining large INGO families. INTRAC will be fleshing out these ideas over the coming months, looking at topics to be pursued under the aegis of the NGO Research Programme, topics to be pursued in partnership with specific NGOs, and topics to be pursued through INTRAC's wider research relationships.

If you are interested in pursuing further work on any of these topics please contact either Rachel Hayman at [rhayman@intrac.org](mailto:rhayman@intrac.org) or Rowan Popplewell at [rpopplewell@intrac.org](mailto:rpopplewell@intrac.org)