Examples of Good Practice in Bridging Social Capital

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Community activists’ perspective

1. How to overcome people’s apathy?

1. Understand where passivity comes from

Does it come from cultural factors such as ‘apathy’ and paternalism or from structural factors, such as poverty experienced by people (Babajanian 2005, 215)? Does it come from lack of confidence, skills and knowledge of one’s rights? Or is it determined by an unfavourable legal environment?

a. In contexts of drastic economic decline and deterioration of social services, such as in the former Soviet Union, service delivery, especially water, sanitation and health, might be important in encouraging community associations. In such contexts, people are willing to organise around rebuilding infrastructure and improving social services (INTRAC 2005, 22).

b. In contexts where people are not aware of their rights, creating resource banks of materials about citizen’s economic and social rights and promoting awareness of rights in the workplace is a valuable approach (INTRAC 2005, 21).

c. Creating urban–rural links; disseminating information and doing research beyond the capital city; and translating development jargon or civil society concepts of community activists into a language intelligible for the target audience are essential for any community-building or motivation programme (Garbutt and Heap 2003, 35, 47; INTRAC 2005, 10).

d. “Community development initiatives need to be introduced into an environment where communities are able to respond: if a government is in conflict with civil society then no amount of community development initiatives will prevail.” (INTRAC 2005, 6) “Any attempts to politicise community development should be done carefully so as not to undermine social cohesion in the local communities.” (Ibid, 9)

2. Gather people around the issues relevant to them

In Bangladesh, people were motivated to participate in community action around the issue of landlessness; in Malawi, around the failure of the Parliament to adopt a new budget; and in Brazil around the right to decent housing (forthcoming Beauclerk, Pratt and Judge 2010). In order to facilitate the emergence of social capital, one should ask: What is of key importance to citizens in this particular country, in this region, in

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this village etc? For instance, the agenda of democracy promotion and human rights often favoured by donors might be problematic in many contexts, especially in the states where the history of violent conflict is associated with democracy promotion (Zharkevich 2010, 43).

3. Do not neglect local capacity (Tukker and Pelje 2010, 3), ‘communal’ or traditional forms of civil society
Start community organising from understanding what forms of social capital are already there:

a. Support groups which already exist and have valuable initiatives, without undermining the commitment and independence of these groups (forthcoming Beauclerk et al 2010, 72). These can range from mutual support groups of people affected by HIV/AIDS and parents’ associations, to environmental groups that emerged from within the local society.

b. Understand local forms of social capital: “There are myriad types of self-help groups, other forms of reciprocal labour, local groups helping neighbours in distress, savings clubs, credit circles, parent-run pre-schools, church or mosque-based welfare and educational services, health committees around local clinics, representational and membership groups. Sometimes the mere mapping of voluntary organisations can be a major task in itself. Such exercises can form a prelude to capacity building programmes and offer opportunities to further encourage voluntary groups, or identify which ones are willing and able to participate in specific developmental activities.” (UNV 2002, 19)

c. Do not ignore social capital based on extended family connections, or clans, castes and ethnic associations (especially in rural areas) which often perform the role of safety nets and mutual support in times of crisis. Build on the existing forms of informal institutions ranging from housing associations, youth and women’s groups, to forms of traditional reciprocal labour which form a good basis for creating self-help groups (Beauclerk et al 2010, 19; INTRAC 2005, 7; Buxton et al 2007, 8-9).

d. Pay special attention to creating links or probing work with trade unions, business associations, and lawyers groups, which in many contexts have proved to be the most active elements of modern civil society that are not extensively funded from abroad.

4. Raise the prestige and status of local volunteering or national volunteering
“There need to be more programmes that encourage local level volunteers and promote their status as important actors in developmental activities. In some cultures, prizes and awards are used to show recognition of volunteers, while in others, faith-based organisations provide support. What is most appropriate and effective will probably be culturally specific, but once programmes are implemented the volunteers will more than repay the limited investment involved...The promotion of volunteerism and the involvement of local volunteers clearly contribute to the development of locally sustainable structures and service” (UNV 2002, 16)
5. **Invest time in identifying local leaders**
In societies based on hierarchical principles, the figures of local authority, ranging from school directors to the head of the local village, might be key in facilitating people’s engagement in community action and overcoming inertia (Babajanian 2005, 216-217). Select potential leaders within the community and provide coaching and/or mentoring, only on condition there is a motive for change and interest in such coaching (Dean et al 2006, 14).

2. **How to overcome distrust? (community activists are just in it for themselves)**

   a. **Do not come with preconceived agendas to people: listen to what community members have to say**
   Organise “Reality Checks” – research studies, described as a listening exercise, aimed at “listening to, trying to understand and convey poor people’s reality”. This involves sending community activists, development workers and government officials in different sectors to stay in poor people’s homes for several nights and days and holding informal in-depth conversations with them (INTRAC 2009, 10). “The main idea is that officials will develop respect and interest in people’s voices and lives. Immersion has had some success in demonstrating to government officials the importance of listening. Many had never previously interacted with poor men and women whose lives they were supposed to improve.” (forthcoming Beauclerk et al 2010, 37)

   b. **Train a cohort of volunteer community activists and local community leaders**
   These are likely to be and perceived as “not just in there for themselves” or development salaries. (See p.1 Below) If possible, choose community activists from the local areas, and choose leaders who are embedded in the life of the region under consideration. There is evidence that suggests that most successful in encouraging community development are leaders with strong ties to the community in terms of residence, participation in local structures and identification with the community (Babajanian 2005, 218).

   c. **Bring in intermediary figures, such as lawyers doing pro bono work for common citizens**
   Pro bono legal work or the work done through specialised lawyers’ associations can assist distinct members of community in solving their problems and filing complaints to the local/regional authorities. The case of Tajikistan shows that such voluntary legal assistance can range from work helping to safeguard the rights of conscripts, to filing complaints against overrated utilities bills (Zharkevich 2010, 31-32).

3. **How to get people to formalise their contribution beyond their tight group networks?**

   a. **Promote the culture of local volunteering**
   In Iran, due to the fact that no funding from abroad was possible, many civil society organisations relied almost exclusively on volunteers as well as different fundraising activities, ranging in scope from holding bazaars, to raising money from businessmen and Diaspora members (Squire 2002). In India, improvement of community services through voluntary action has proved to be a successful
b. **Encourage volunteering by local professionals**
“The classic example of the local bank manager volunteering as honorary treasurer to a community group provides a model which can be replicated in many societies and contexts” (UNV 2002, 16).

c. **Invest in creating self-help groups (SHGs) based on local avenues of mutual support**
“SHGs have shown that they are a useful tool for empowerment at individual and group level. Members feel that their understanding of local issues, their involvement in decision-making has improved. They have had an opportunity to tackle economic and social problems. Their attitude to life has become more positive, and for isolated groups like the elderly people SHG membership has been a way out of loneliness.” (Buxton et al 2007, 62)

d. **Recognise the diversity of local channels which can generate social capital beyond group networks** (see question 4)
The more inclusive groups can range from burial societies (Ethiopia) and parents’ associations, to faith communities across the world which unite rich and poor as equals. The cases of the Apostolic church in Armenia which enjoys a great degree of popular trust, and the Pontanima Choir in former Yugoslavia can serve as important examples (Beauclerk et al 2010, 53). Self-help groups also have a potential to unite people of different socio-economic backgrounds.

4. How to deal with extensive social disparities as the people you are trying to engage may have widely varying socio-economic circumstances?

   a. **Mixing people of different backgrounds during workshops, training events and volunteering**
Mix people of different communities during workshops and training events with the aim of not letting “animosity perpetuate itself” (INTRAC 2009, 7).

   b. **Organise relational volunteering schemes**
This could involve, for example, engaging people from different socio-economic background in carrying out community projects. “Twinning programmes can often provide relational volunteering. One such scheme between towns in Senegal and France led to the reconstruction of a local market which in turn drew in people from the rural areas as well as opening the town to trade from outside. The twinning arrangement led to multiple new relationships being built.” (UNV 2002, 11). A further example is given whereby people of different backgrounds are brought together in parents’ associations working for children’s educational and health needs (ibid, 16).

   c. **Carry out an annual research study “Reality Check” (see 2.a.)**
Send community activists, governmental officials etc to live for a number of days with the poor and listen to their perspectives of what should be changed.

   d. **Invest in promoting self-help groups**
“In SHGs people come together and develop a sense of equality based on the
use of set principles and regulations; minorities do not feel socially excluded and
decision-making processes involve the majority of voices in the community.
People feel diversity in their social lives and livelihoods; through the SHG
movement they take part in a range of public events such as festivals,
competitions, and exhibitions; and by using SHG savings and credits they
generate new income and secure their livelihoods. “(Buxton et al 2007, 22)

5. How to overcome free-riding without being dictatorial?

a. **Involve people in the implementation of community development projects: make them part of the process**
   An example is the involvement of the community members in building of water supply system in one of the villages in Tajikistan: whilst the resources and planning was provided by NGOs, villagers were giving their work as part of the project (INTRAC 2005, 22). A further example is provided by self-help groups in Central Asia where people come together to decide how to lobby the local governments on issues of interest to their communities (Buxton et al 2007).

b. **Form demand for community activism and projects amongst the beneficiaries rather than simply providing resources**
   The example of DFID project in Peru which tried to involve the poor in the process of monitoring the policies of the local and central government (Fenton 2008, 16).

c. **Support locally inspired initiatives of indigenous civil society rather than long-term projects of INGOs**
   “In South Asia, for example, there exists a strong tradition of older local volunteers devoting considerable time and energy to passing on their own experience and skills to community, social welfare and other groups .”(UNV 2002, 15)

6. Other relevant advice to community activists

a. **Invest time and effort in establishing good relations with local officials and governments**
   CSOs should have strong links with local governments since they are often dependent on them for material resources, political access and funds (Garbutt and Heap 2003, 30). In Tajikistan, CSOs are in the strongest position in the regions where they have developed links with the local government (Zharkevich 2010, 22). In Kyrgyzstan, it has been found that the impact of CSOs’ work was greater in areas where there were fruitful partnerships with local councils
“As the Iranian case demonstrates, the involvement of donors does not necessarily make local development more effective. Thus, in Iran donor activities are almost nonexistent. However, through building coalitions with relevant stakeholders and bringing local governments on board, local NGOs can successfully achieve their objectives. Indigenous solutions to local problems can often be more contextually adjusted and effective.” (INTRAC 2005, 18)

b. Before focusing on advocacy and campaigning only, one should invest in service delivery
“If we do a good job and show to the government how it can be done, our advocacy message for better services will be much more powerful.” (INTRAC 2009, 11)

c. “Volunteerism should be deliberately and explicitly included in capacity development plans rather than implicitly attributed roles, or worse being completely ignored. A modest investment in national and local volunteering can pay significant rewards in terms of capacity development at many levels, from specific programme interventions to enhancing social capital.” (UNV 2002, 23)

d. Connect high-profile activism with local forms of community action
It is important to bridge the “extremes of high-profile activism in state capitals, and value-based services in remote areas, in a new generation of CSOs” (forthcoming Beauclerk 2010, 17).

Donors: Good practice in facilitating and accelerating the development of social capital

1. “Good donorship entails consciously taking into consideration the effect that northern agencies make on civil society in the South
Those that already have a presence in the South should try to limit their domination of civic space, and try to create space for local CSOs ability to demand political accountability, by;
• Not entering into competition for funds with local organisations.
• Transferring as many decision making powers as possible to local partners.
• Supporting local organisations, strengthening their capacities and move them to the forefront, even when it is about accessing local EU and other funds.
• Limiting numerical presence to limit power imbalances.
• Keeping similar wage levels to avoid brain-drain.” (forthcoming Beauclerk et al 2010, 39)

2. It is important to provide support to a diverse range of organisations of “different sizes, strengths and interests” through different funding mechanisms (Giffen and Judge 2010, 21). “There may be a role for differentiated grant making targeting groups with marginal members and different capacities, and there is a need for experimental funding to nurture coalitions.” In order to avoid privileging a few elite-based NGOs, donors might consider producing accessible information about existing support modalities and ways to access funding; help weaker CSOs to participate and “push the
benefits of core funding down through INGO intermediaries to their Southern partners.”
(Giffen and Judge 2010, 21-22)

3. USAID-aided program “Citizen’s Initiatives” in Paraguay is sometimes cited as a successful example of building social capital, albeit in a comparatively favourable context. The programme consisted of two phases:
   - The first phase involved capacity building beyond the capital area – including that of neighbourhood commission, local health councils, disables people’s associations. It then proceeded from institutional strengthening to advocacy on a number of issues: access to information, control over the judiciary, civil society as a watchdog.
   - The second phase involved social and administrative institutions, i.e. not only CSOs but also municipality governments; creating 15 advocacy coalitions on distinct issues; 15 nation-wide public awareness campaigns which resulted in increasing cross-sector collaboration, including agreements with local authorities (forthcoming Beauclerk 2010, 22-24).

4. Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) Village Organisation Programme in Tajikistan can be cited as a successful attempt to reinvigorate local forms of civil society in remote mountainous areas of Tajikistan. The programme invested resources both in local forms of civil society and local governments which made this region of the country the best one in terms of state–civil society interaction. The programme involved villagers in the process of determining the needs of the community, setting priorities for plan of action and the process of project implementation. Village organisations were created in accordance with local traditions of self-help, decision-making and conflict-resolution which increased the ownership of the project by local population (Zharkevich 2010, 23).

Donors: Things to avoid as since they may lead to unintended consequences

1. Politicising civil society
   This can result in the almost total closure of space for civil society. This is illustrated by the case of Ethiopia where there was virtually no linkage between the politicised NGO world in the capital, heavily funded by the international donor community, and the wider civil society which did not advocate an immediate transition to the multiparty system but rather organised itself on the level of solidarity groups. The Ethiopian government considered the advocacy of the elite NGO world backed by the donor community as being political with a ‘big P’, and adopted legislation making foreign funding of local NGOs extremely difficult (Beauclerk et al 2010, 25). Therefore advocacy against local governments by foreign organisations or backed by them is considered increasingly problematic: “you have to have local organisations who will fight the fight with the government” (Garbutt and Heap 2003, 6), whereas INGOs can adopt rights-based approaches in their advocacy campaigns.
2. Creating a parallel social service delivery mechanism by heavily investing in service delivery programs of INGOs and NGOs, whilst bypassing the structures of the state
This may lead to:

a. Turning NGOs into simple contractors and service providers, distorting the nature of local civil society from advocates for social change to sub-contractors of international donors. In Kenya, by mid 1990s, 40-50% of education was provided by NGOs (Agg 2006, 3). In Peru, in the context of the state cutting back on social services, CSOs – instead of lobbying the state to provide resources for the poor – provided such services themselves, essentially running parallel structures of social service delivery (INTRAC 1998).

b. Undermining the legitimacy of the state and increasing vulnerability and insecurity in unstable situations. “The wrong kind of capacity building increased structural vulnerability to conflict or hampered resolution (in Moldova, Ferghana Valley, Armenia-Azerbaijan). In Kyrgyzstan, for example, donors, such as USAID, funded NGOs rather than the state. The privatisation of welfare services played into the dynamics of rising conflict in the Ferghana Valley”. This process of collapse of state service delivery on the one hand and creation of a parallel NGO service provision on the other undermined the trust of people in the state and its legitimacy, making it more difficult for the latter to arrive at a long-term resolution of the conflict (Goodhand 2006, 117).

3. Prioritising the aid effectiveness agenda by all means possible. This might have an adverse impact on the diversity of civil society in the South (Giffen and Judge 2010, iii)
Thus, “instead of increased effectiveness, lack of duplication, there might be a demise of certain organisations, prioritisation of more well-established elite organisations, neglect of grassroots, social movements, trade unions. Whilst increasing accountability to the donors, it might further endanger accountability to the constituency; as well as the independence of the decision regarding the areas of work that should be carried out.” (Pratt 2009, 6).

4. Overloading selected local NGOs with considerable amounts of short-term funding might undermine the diversity of the whole local civil society and sustainability and independence of the externally funded NGOs
Thus, when the Kyrgyzstan NGO Forum received funding from US-based NDI to work on democracy promotion, it eventually changed its name and stopped performing the function of a coalition body for NGOs (Howell and Pearce 2001, 200). The civil society sector in Latin America in the 1990s has been largely transformed from the actor of change to service deliverer due to the type of projects prioritised by the donors (INTRAC 2008).
Bibliography


