

## **Overview of the NGO Research Programme**

The NGORP was founded in 1995 with funding from the Aga Khan Foundation to stimulate independent NGO research capacity. Representatives from the programme's Advisory Group – these include Cordaid and MS Denmark - later clubbed together to spread the cost. The focus was, and still is, 'what can we give to the NGO sector?' The Programme was an effort to keep NGOs proactive, since NGOs had traditionally been seen as reacting belatedly to changes in development policy – structural adjustment was Brian's example of NGOs 'closing the stable doors after the horse has bolted'. Themes that the Programme has engaged with early over the past few years include diversity, M&E, partnerships and decentralisation, through to our current themes today. Being a reasonably diverse group of NGOs from across Europe, being a 'sounding board' becomes an important element of the NGORP.

Over the years members have asked the Programme to focus on various issues such as rights-based approaches and partnerships. This format has been useful since the NGORP were able to fund, exploratory studies of issues of relevance which could then be built on if there was greater interest, while Intrac would also seek funding for more in-depth work sought elsewhere. Case study research on CSOs in five countries in the 1990s, two years' work through the Ford Foundation, and the current counter-terrorism workshops and analysis are all topics that started as NGORP initiatives which have sought additional funds from other sources including individual members where there has been particular interest.

Originally, the format of the NGO Research Forum was more of a business meeting focusing on financial reporting. This changed as members found the seminar/discussion aspect more interesting and useful.

The NGORP has tended not to work on themes that members already focus on, but to try to provide fresh insights into cross-cutting issues that may be used in different ways, in accordance with need. Not all themes for example would be of interest to every member, but most themes had a shared interest and more over some themes would raise new interest to the long term strategy of NGORP. It is through exploration, debate and discussion that often issues that appear distant may relate to cross cutting areas of work. It is most important to remind members that the themes that INTRAC works on are usually chosen collectively through a prioritisation exercise with members.

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