

## Capacity Building and Legitimacy in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe 'Scaling Up' Impact: An Advocacy Skills Training Programme in Uganda

Also in this issue: Nurgul Djanaeva and Anne Coles write about gender relations in Kyrgyzstan; Ian Chandler reports on an Advocacy Skills Training Programme in Uganda; Vicky Brehm presents research findings on NGO Partnerships; Julie Gale and Simon Heap debate the subject of NGO accountability and regulation.

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### **viewpoint:**

#### **NGOs: Ethics, Accountability and Regulation**

The passing of the phrase 'the Value-Driven Sector' should not go unannounced. The old notion that 'Civil Society' consisted of the State, the Market and the Value-Driven Sector has given way to a re-classification of the latter as either the 'Voluntary Sector', the 'Third Sector' or even 'Civil Society Organisations'. It has probably always been true that not all Civil Society Organisations are value-driven; however even if this assumption is laid aside, the fact remains that many NGOs see themselves as distinctive because of their strong adherence to humanitarian and other values.

However, in recent years, NGO values have been challenged in several ways: The complexity of the social impact of humanitarian aid: there is increasing evidence that even the most basic forms of humanitarian aid can do more harm than good, undermining local societies, cultures and coping mechanisms. Conflicting values: decisions are not always easy and the consequences are not always obvious. Many so-called 'universal values' are derived from western views; religious, cultural and other differences can in fact produce strong conflicts of values.

The growth of 'NGOs incorporated': these are essentially not-for-profit contractors or public service providers, delivering programmes on behalf of clients (often international donor agencies).

The 'self-interested organisation syndrome': the Third Sector has become a major employer with increasing numbers of organisations whose primary aim is to survive and prosper rather than to achieve their goals and close!

Diverse constituencies: small organisations based on a very homogenous constituency – such as some religious groups – may achieve consistency in values. However, many other NGOs have a very mixed constituency and staff themselves may hold conflicting views. Staff may feel that the founding values are out of date in light of 'professional' experience and disagree with messages portrayed in their own fund-raising.

One reason for the lack of consistency between the values of an organisation and its supporters is that accountability mechanisms are often weak. Annual reports are usually the main public document, but in reality such reports do not reflect what NGOs do in practice. Simplistic fund-raising images replace serious discussions of the constraints and issues facing the NGO. Furthermore, in spite of the remarkable progress made in areas such as participatory evaluation and people-centred development, there is still an inexorably upward pull of accountability to donors and away from recipients of development aid. This upward pull is dominated by large, official donors rather than individual supporters. Thus, on the one hand accountability to the clients or recipients of development aid is weak and on the other hand a real and honest rapport with constituents is often absent.

In extreme cases, some NGOs have grown far-removed from their constituencies and have failed to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of and share the same values; these agencies are barely accountable to anyone. This raises an ethical debate about whether such 'NGOs' can really justify their existence. The lesson from this is that NGOs need to ensure that they do not lose their value base and that they keep in step with both their constituencies and their client groups, even if this means reducing levels of activity. Many NGOs have already realised the risks of becoming divorced from their own constituencies. The concept of stakeholder analysis has helped some to engage with both constituencies, Southern partners and clients, so that staff are not alone in determining programmes and strategy. The NGO sector is ripe for serious debate about its future development and the introduction of professional, ethically-based (self-) regulation. In many places, this is already starting to happen, for example through umbrella groups setting standards for NGO validation and through the introduction of ethical codes of conduct. This edition of ontrac explores the question of NGO legitimacy and accountability to respective constituencies. Janice Giffen assesses NGO legitimacy to constituencies in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and Vicky Brehm explores questions of accountability in the context of North-South NGO partnerships. In relation to the current debate on NGO accountability and regulation, Julie Gale presents examples of regulation and Simon Heap analyses the concept of public trust in NGOs, outlining the potential benefits of codes of conduct. We hope that this edition of ontrac will stimulate further debate on this important subject.

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### **Gender Relations and NGOs in Kyrgyzstan**

INTRAC is in the process of carrying out a gender analysis of the organisation itself and of its partners. In September 2000, Nurgul Djanaeva from the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan and Anne Coles, INTRAC Board Member, carried

out the first in a series of country studies, based in Kyrgyzstan. The findings suggested that the concept of gender is new to the majority of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. For example, senior members of the local development community consider that there is no 'gender problem', citing the theoretical equality of opportunity for men and women under the Soviet system. The majority of local NGOs and many international NGOs neither adopt a gender approach in their work nor a gender dimension as part of their development policies or projects. Where issues relating to changing women's lives are part of their work, local NGOs, including women's NGOs, do not differentiate between gender issues and women's problems. There is, however, general recognition that both women and men face particular, and to some extent distinct, socio-economic problems as a result of the transition.

NGOs in Kyrgyzstan have both men and women in leadership positions; indeed at senior levels, women often dominate. This is partly due to the fact that women have predominately been employed in the service sector and many NGOs have been founded by professional women to provide welfare services. In terms of decision-making, senior women and men are on an equal footing in NGO support organisations such as Counterpart Consortium, Interbilim and the Forum of Women's NGOs. The majority of NGOs have a gender-neutral approach; they have not developed internal institutional gender policies. They have not incorporated gender aspects into their broader policies, neither would they expect to be assessed in relation to how they address gender in their work. Although the NGO community in Kyrgyzstan is interested in the 'genderisation' of their work, there is a deep lack of understanding of what this means, both in terms of theoretical concepts and practice. Furthermore, there is practically no local provision of specialised gender training.

NGOs know about gender differences where they work and try to respond to the practical needs of women, men or both, within the communities' existing gender division of roles, resources and responsibilities. Generally, NGOs do not have achieving gender equality as one of their tasks. No mixed local NGOs aim at women's empowerment as a result of their activities. NGOs are sensitive to readily observable conflicts between men and women, for example in the realm of family responsibilities and inter-personal household decision-making. However, they do not recognise the unarticulated conflicts of gender interest which, at various levels, contribute to unequal participation of men and women in the development process. In NGOs and projects which specifically address women's problems, there may be efforts to increase women's equality in relation to men. Although women's NGOs do not have a gender perspective as an 'official' approach, some of their projects may contribute to women's self-reliance (the 'power within'), whether through participatory approaches or otherwise. NGOs' general projects (which are not aimed at solving women's problems) do not normally consider or address the

special needs of women in the community. There is no practice of assessing women's position in terms of possible difficulties associated with the project; women are simply an undifferentiated part of the overall target group.

In conclusion, there is a need to include gender aspects in NGO management training in Kyrgyzstan, as in other countries. This should include gender awareness and, above all, gender analysis and assessment. NGOs would thus be enabled to adopt a gender mainstreaming strategy in their organisations and in their development projects. The effects of this would hopefully be to empower poor men and women by meeting their strategic as well as their practical needs.

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References

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### **North - South NGO Partnerships, Legitimacy and Constituencies**

Over the past six months, INTRAC has undertaken research into the nature of partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs. The research, carried out as part of the NGO Sector Analysis Programme, compared the approaches to partnership of ten European NGOs in Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It assessed both the policies of the NGOs and how they had implemented the notion of partnership in practice. The focus of the research was on the practical difficulties and limits of achieving 'effective' partnerships, given that relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs tend to be based around funding processes.

A key finding from the research was the importance for NGOs to be rooted in and remain accountable to their respective constituencies. For Northern NGOs, legitimacy comes from strong links with a national constituency, particularly through a formalised membership structure. Northern NGOs can play a key role in development education and solidarity initiatives within their constituencies.

Likewise, it is important for Southern NGOs to remain accountable to their own local or national constituencies.

However, funding processes often skew the accountability process for Southern organisations. The strict, control-oriented reporting requirements of Northern donors (both official agencies and NGOs) mean that accountability for funding comes from Southern organisations to the North. This can seriously undermine local accountability and the rooting of Southern NGOs in civil society, and –

ultimately – their legitimacy. Northern NGOs need to be aware of these risks, and develop radical thinking on alternative forms of accountability. Southern NGO partners need to be given greater flexibility in setting the format for reporting processes. Furthermore, Northern NGOs need to move away from a control-orientation, and place more emphasis on ensuring that their Southern NGO partners have adequate processes of accountability to local stakeholders as part of their organisational structures. Finally, Northern NGOs need to strengthen and formalise their mechanisms for receiving feedback from Southern partners. These findings are based on the first phase of research which assessed partnerships from a Northern NGO perspective. A second phase based on a Southern perspective and including case studies of NGO partnerships is currently being developed. The research findings from the first phase are due to be published by INTRAC later in 2001.

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### **New Publications**

**POWER AND PARTNERSHIP? Experiences of NGO Capacity Building**  
Edited by Rick James, NGOMPS No. 12, January 2001, ISBN 1-897748-59-0

This book has emerged as a result of the 1999 ‘NGOs in a Global Future’ Conference at the University of Birmingham. It is a synthesis of papers presented at the Panel on NGO Capacity Building, which assessed how capacity building is implemented in practice. The term ‘capacity building’ has become almost synonymous with ‘development’ in many aid circles. It is therefore critical to analyse carefully the practice of capacity building in order to learn from experience and avoid the danger that the term capacity building becomes merely a popular and meaningless addition to all proposals and policies. Capacity building is a conscious approach to change which, if taken seriously, has very radical and far-reaching implications not only for skills and behaviour, but also power dynamics within and between organisations.

The book analyses a number of specific capacity-building interventions, drawing out the issues and insights from practice. It also highlights the consequent implications, particularly for Northern NGOs involved in developing strategies for capacity building. It is aimed at all development professionals engaged in capacity building, but has particular relevance to Northern NGOs, Southern NGOs and capacity building providers.

### **Forthcoming Publication**

**Women’s Participation in NGOs in Kyrgyzstan**

Martina Hunt, OPS No. 34, forthcoming 2001, ISBN 1-897748-60-4

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### **Northern NGO Guidelines and Codes of Conduct: Conflicting Rights and Responsibilities?**

The last two decades have seen a phenomenal increase in the numbers and influence of NGOs in both North and South. At the same time, questions have been raised relating to quality, transparency, accountability and legitimacy. NGOs have gained an often high-profile role in policy advocacy at national and international levels, and in many cases their funding base has shifted away from public donations to increasing reliance on government and multilateral funding. Concern over the need for public accountability can be articulated in terms of respecting rights – of donors, supporters, and beneficiaries (or clients) – and NGO responsibilities to their various constituencies.

For Northern-based NGOs, three distinct sets of questions arise, related to their activities in fund-raising, programme and advocacy work:

When NGOs address their home constituency, are they honest and transparent in their fund-raising? Is the money they raise used for the purposes they state?

In their programme and project work, do Northern NGOs behave in an ethical way towards Southern NGOs and aid recipients? Are their programmes appropriate to local needs? Do they make a (positive) difference?

When NGOs engage in advocacy, whose agenda are they pushing? Do they really speak on behalf of 'the poor'?

As NGOs have sought to address these issues, a number of guidelines, charters and codes of conduct have been developed to regulate their conduct, guarantee minimum standards, and safeguard rights. In 1995, the Commonwealth Foundation published its 'NGO Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice', the result of three years of research and consultation. It includes guidelines for governments dealing with NGOs, for NGOs themselves, for the policy and practice of funders, for Northern NGOs and international agencies, and a plan of action for the implementation of the guidelines.

Some guidelines are designed specifically to provide assurance to official donors and the general public that their money is being spent responsibly. Examples include the adoption in 1998 of a set of standards for agencies engaged in child sponsorship by the US NGO umbrella organisation InterAction, and the recent draft ICFM 'Donors' Rights Charter', which sets out high professional standards on the part of fund-raisers. Other guidelines set out standards of good practice for NGOs and agencies working in developing countries and emergency situations.

Examples include the SANGOCO 'Code of Conduct for International Funding Agencies Working in South Africa', adopted in 1998, and the Sphere Project's 'Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response'. In some cases NGOs may be required to sign up to charters in order to become eligible for government funds.

The fact that many of the guidelines, charters and codes address one or other of the three sets of questions reflects an underlying issue of conflicting NGO responsibilities: 'upwards' to donors and supporters, and 'downwards' to beneficiaries and staff. Whilst the need to ensure minimum quality standards in all areas of NGO activity is undeniable, there are areas of ambiguity. For example, donors' rights may not always be fully compatible with effective programme design, particularly when the donors' specifications contradict the priorities of intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, the complex nature of development work does not always translate into simple fund-raising messages. It is important, therefore, to avoid the adoption of codes of conduct which are based on mutually incompatible assumptions about rights and responsibilities in the aid relationship.

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Acronyms

ICFM: Institute of Charity Fundraising Managers

SANGOCO: South African National NGO Coalition

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## **Building Trust in NGOs**

Amongst the general public, there is greater trust of groups who do not place profit as their number one goal. NGOs are therefore more trusted than companies.

Winning major public debates on Genetically Modified Food, pushing for the abolition of child labour, and advocating reform of global institutions, an NGO's 'Unique Selling Point' of trust is a crucial ally to its arguments: trust is a non-displaceable and vital part of relationships and image. It is, in fact, a cornerstone of interactions with citizens as supporters or clients (Fowler 2000). Public trust of NGOs comes from two main sources: performance and accountability. By performance is meant the useful social value placed on projects which support positive and enduring change. This article explores one aspect of the accountability debate: how NGO codes of conduct might help.

NGOs should adopt codes of conduct on two counts. Negatively, they can be a necessary defence against criticisms that NGOs are secretive, not transparent about sources of funds, have less than rigorous management procedures and practices and that there is a lack of democratic processes within some prominent NGOs. Positively, by establishing definite standards of ethical behaviour, corporate

governance and financial transparency, codes would enable NGOs to build their support bases and give them greater credibility and authority in their activities. NGOs in several countries now work under codes of conduct. In the Philippines, the semi-independent umbrella body, the Philippine Council for NGO Certification, monitors NGOs with a Code of Conduct and can recommend withdrawal of registration and tax privileges from NGOs who fail to comply. Seventy international NGOs belonging to ACFOA (Australian Council for Overseas Aid) have a Code of Conduct. Adherence to the Code is a requirement for any NGO seeking funding from the Australian Agency for International Aid. The Code contains many reasonable points such as financial reporting and disclosure and prohibiting an NGO from making misleading or false statements about other agencies. This is ahead of the UK, where the agreement of a compact on a new approach to partnership with government only covers those funded to deliver domestic welfare and other services.

A government-imposed NGO Code of Conduct in the Gambia sets out standards of corporate governance and behaviour for local and international organisations. In South Africa, a 1998 law to facilitate the establishment of NGOs in the post-apartheid era also provides for a voluntary register of NGOs and sets out standards of governance, accountability and public access to information. The accreditation of NGOs to conduct electoral education, be considered for state support or be able to receive public or private funds is not without its drawbacks: one observer put it recently, 'I cannot see the point of this type of accreditation and validation - and can see a number of disadvantages relating to questions of control, financial and information gatekeeping and abuse of power by states' (Graham, 2000).

Yet, unlike shareholders for businesses and elections for governments, NGOs have no convenient way to hold themselves accountable. With stories of high administrative costs and corruption, greater public trust may be built by adopting codes of conduct.

Written by Simon Heap

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Fowler, A. (2000), 'The Ties that Bind: Civic Development and the Importance of Trust'. Keynote address at Resource Alliance's Building Capacity for Sustainability International Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, 21-24 November.

Graham, P. (2000), International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) e-discussion list, 10 October.

### **The ontrac Readership Survey**

There is still time to complete the [readership survey](#) questionnaire which we sent you with the last edition of ontrac! We are keen to receive your feedback and comments.

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## **INTRAC Open Training Programme 2001**

This year we are offering two types of training programme: the Non-Residential Workshops in London are aimed at people who want an introductory overview of the issues, and the Residential Workshops which are more specialised:

### NON-RESIDENTIAL ONE-DAY WORKSHOPS

Train the Trainer Programme 16 February 2001

Change Management: Responding to Partners' Needs 2 March

Adequate Financial Management: Helping Partners Set Up Systems 9 March

Humanitarian Law: Humanitarian Protection, Law and Practice 16 March

What is a 'Rights-Based Approach'? 23 March

Civil Society 30 March

### NON RESIDENTIAL THREE-DAY WORKSHOPS

Supporting Southern NGO Advocacy 2 - 4 April

This workshop is designed for the staff of Northern NGOs working in programme management and support, and in policy departments

Relations with the Private Sector 10 - 12 July

This workshop is for NGOs who are exploring the possibility of working with the private sector.

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### RESIDENTIAL WORKSHOPS

Managing a Participative Monitoring and Evaluation Process 26 - 30 March

Marketing the Cause: Social Marketing for NGOs 15 - 17 May

Financial Management for Non-Financial Managers 6-8 June

Capacity Building: An Organisational Approach 25 - 29 June

Maintaining a Humanitarian Perspective in the 21st Century: Personal Perspectives and Organisational Issues September 10-14

Organisation Development and Change 19 -23 November

For further information and application forms, please contact Susan Owen. Email:

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## **INTRAC's 10th Anniversary**

INTRAC will celebrate its 10th Anniversary in December 2001 by hosting a Conference on 'Working with Civil Society: Trends, Opportunities and Experiences'. The aim of the Conference will be to explore working with, supporting and evaluating the strengthening of Civil Society. Further details of the Conference will be available in the next edition of ontrac. In the meantime, we hope that you will plan to join us here in Oxford in December.

## **INTRAC People**

We are pleased to have appointed Julie Gale in September as our Information Officer. Julie is responsible for the maintenance and development of INTRAC's library and website, and carries out research as part of the NGO Sector Analysis Programme. Debora Kleyn has also joined us for six months to work within the Research Department.

John Beauclerk has recently joined us as our Programme Manager for Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. We also welcome two new Training and Capacity Building Managers, Indrani Sigamany and Sarah Methven, to the team. We would like to wish good fortune to several long standing members of staff who moved on last year. Martina Hunt, previously our Training and Capacity Building Manager, is now working as a Lecturer at Birmingham University. Jon Taylor left in October to take up a position at the European Union.

Salima Padamsey and Blair Sheridan completed their programme work in Central Asia in November. Salima was our Community Development Advisor in Almaty, and Blair worked as Programme Manager in Bishkek.

Many thanks to all those who assisted us on a short-term basis last year. Dolores O'Malley worked as a temporary Training and Capacity Building Manager, and was also involved with this year's Organisation Development course, and Kate Knowles provided invaluable administrative support for the office.

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**ontrac**

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