

viewpoint

15 years of INTRAC in Central Asia

Last year, INTRAC celebrated its 15th anniversary in Central Asia. We initially began working in the region in 1994, at a time of very little civil society activity. Yet there were very considerable needs in what was one of the poorest areas of the old Soviet Union. In Kyrgyzstan, old safety nets had collapsed, the health system was dysfunctional, and food and fuel distribution, essential in the harsh Central Asian winter, was severely curtailed. In this context INTRAC's deep interest in the region began, and we have since built up a reputation as one of the most experienced INGOs in the region.

Our work has expanded into a long-term capacity building approach across the region. Over the last 15 years we have moved to having predominantly local staff, who can take the capacity building process to a higher level, understanding and responding much better to local needs than we could in 1994. The continuing political and economic challenges, as the recent unrest in Kyrgyzstan so vividly illustrates, reminds us there is no 'quick fix' but rather an ongoing need to gradually strengthen local civil society so that it is able to tackle problems of poverty, inequality and accountability. INTRAC's

long-term commitment has enabled us to work more effectively in strengthening the sector as a whole, particularly when working with local government and NGOs.

Here, we explore some of the highlights of INTRAC's 15 years in Central Asia.

From poverty reduction to capacity building

The fall of the Berlin wall, and the important role played by civil society groups in the newly emerging Eastern Europe, contributed to the notion of support to 'civil society' as a valid objective for development workers. The unexpected independence of the five former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan provided a challenge for these country's populations and governments: that of building and supporting civil society where, for the previous 60–70 years, civic engagement had been largely defined and constrained by the State.

INTRAC was first invited to Kyrgyzstan by UNDP/UNV in 1994 to design a community-based poverty reduction programme. The underlying assumption

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In this issue:

We focus on the Central Asian region, drawing on INTRAC's experience of working across the five republics in Central Asia over the last 15 years. The viewpoint article gives some background on our work, highlighting some of the key initiatives and activities we have been involved in.

The following articles address some of the most pressing issues across the region. Anara Musabaeva looks at the challenges related to organisational capacity that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan face. Ina Zharkevich summarises the key findings from INTRAC's report on Tajikistan, and where it fits into the fragile states debate. Anara Moldosheva discusses lessons from a regional study on the women's self-help movement. Finally, Charles Buxton, the head of the INTRAC Central Asia Programme, looks to the future, exploring the current context, INTRAC's strategy, and continuing challenges across the region.

We would like to extend special thanks to our colleagues in the INTRAC Bishkek office, and our partners across the region, for their work in compiling this issue of ONTRAC in difficult circumstances.



Villagers in Kyrgyzstan attending a photo exhibition on the problems facing the village youths.

was that any programme would be a quick holding operation. We believed though that, in the absence of structures to work with, what was needed was a much longer process requiring building the capacity of the newly emerging civil society. This in turn led to involvement in a UNV capacity building programme, which built up basic understandings of “what is an NGO”, quickly moving into using UN volunteers from South Asia to help new NGOs engage with local and rural communities through participatory methods such as PRA.

This expanded into an ‘Institutional Development Programme’, as strengthening NGOs alone was insufficient if there was little understanding or support for their roles by the government and public. With support from DFID from 1997–2000 in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, this work included: organisational development support for individual NGOs; production reports about the issues affecting the NGO sector; research into local civil society in various contexts; workshops and round tables concerned with supporting an ‘enabling environment’; and work to strengthen regional networks. In collaboration with UNDP, INTRAC also facilitated a donor consortium which discussed donor roles in providing support to civil society. Donors were able to jointly lobby governments on the behalf of CSOs, which was particularly successfully in Kazakhstan.

During this period an innovative series of training courses for local NGO staff was also developed. The programme was much more comprehensive than previous training courses in the region. Guest speakers from government and the private sector gave participants a deeper understanding of NGOs’ relationship with broader civil society, the public and private sectors, and participants were provided with tools and ideas to take back to their own institutions. Learning was shared between participants, and trainers visited them in the workplace to help with embedding the learning.

Increasing our reach

In 2001 DFID funded INTRAC to continue work, against a background of almost no European NGOs who would take on the challenges of work in Central Asia. INTRAC’s work became broader,

expanding to all five states in the region, and operating out of three offices in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. During this phase, the programme continued with general support to build an enabling environment for civil society through workshops, coordination of donor discussions, promoting work in local communities, investigating third sector trends and developing methodologies for building linkages between civil society groups and local authorities.

A second training programme, the Analytical Skills Training Programme, was also developed to help participants understand issues facing their target groups, to develop realistic and appropriate strategic interventions and provide material for their advocacy work. Between the modules the participants carried out research assignments with their partners. The programme was run in three different countries over three years, culminating in each case with a small conference where participants presented their analytical work to a wider audience of civil society, local authorities and the media.

INTRAC introduced a fully participatory monitoring and evaluation process where in the interests of transparency and learning we used INTRAC as the case study, opening our programme to civil society partners, to be evaluated using participatory methods through a series of workshops and meetings. This was the first time this was done by an international NGO and the results of this process are documented in Praxis Paper 21¹.

Building capacity for self-help groups

From 2005–9, INTRAC was funded by ICCO to support 20 NGOs working in poverty reduction, using self-help methodologies, in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Organisational evaluations set the priorities for a three-year capacity building programme. There has been a very successful repeat of the analytical skills training programme, this time more focused on mini-research projects on access to basic education and health services; an ‘action learning groups’ initiative helping two main sets of NGO staff – middle managers and community development workers – develop their skills. Another highlight is our leadership development

project, arising out of Praxis Paper 18 ‘Civil society leadership in transition’² and a successful pilot programme with Centre Interbilim. A regional study of the self-help movement and its impact on civil society informed these programmes. A small open training programme was launched in 2005, with courses delivered in Russian across the region.

INTRAC has worked with most of the main European NGOs now active in Central Asia: Oxfam, Christian Aid, ACTED, Caritas, Mercy Corps, Save the Children, HelpAge, Helvetas, German Agro Action, DanChurchAid – and also others like Eurasia Foundation, Red Crescent and Aga Khan Foundation. Our support is still in great demand and we continue to offer relevant services and insights in the continuously changing contexts of the different Central Asia countries.

Lessons from Central Asia

It takes time to transition from autocratic governance to a flourishing civil society. Our experience shows that in such contexts, it is necessary to look beyond immediate needs and take a more strategic view of development. It is also essential to engage a wide range of stakeholders such as small community groups, local and national NGOs, donors and local government. In transitional contexts civil society is a new experience for everyone, there are no ‘experts’, and the best approach seems to be to bring people, both local and international, from north and south, together. By sharing their experiences and expertise, an approach that is useful and appropriate in these new contexts can arise.

The rest of this article addresses some of the most pressing issues across the region. Anara Musabaeva looks at the challenges related to organisational capacity that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan face. Ina Zharkevich summarises the key findings from INTRAC’s report on Tajikistan, and where it fits into the fragile states debate. Anara Moldosheva discusses lessons from a regional study on the women’s self-help movement. Finally, Charles Buxton looks to the future, exploring the current context, INTRAC’s strategy, and continuing challenges across the region.

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¹ Download at: www.intrac.org/resources.php

² Download at: www.intrac.org/resources.php

Civil society in Tajikistan – strengthening political accountability

Tajikistan, as well as the other Central Asian republics, is invariably labelled a ‘fragile state’. Despite this, it has received relatively little attention from the international donor community. This is surprising considering the strategic location of Tajikistan on the border with Afghanistan.

A recent report of the International Crisis Group states that Tajikistan is “on the road to failure”. However, INTRAC’s study¹ suggests that despite volatile neighbours, the legacy of a recent civil war and economic difficulties, Tajikistan has achieved elements of stability while providing the barest minimum of social services, maintaining security within its borders and wielding fiscal authority. The study also suggests that in the situations of fragility civil society can make a positive contribution to the institutional and state-building process by engaging and working with government bodies.

What role for civil society?

Tajikistan is arguably a case of a successful post-conflict transition, where civil society has grown gradually stronger and has improved its position in relation to the state. Tajikistan has a recent history of violent conflict and has the lowest level of human development in Central Asia. Whilst in these kind of situations civil society’s major roles are service delivery and humanitarian provision, INTRAC’s research shows that it can move beyond that, towards improving political accountability and influencing institution-building processes. In Tajikistan, civil society does so by lobbying for reforms in legislative and policy frameworks and the court system, improving the delivery of services provided by the state, and monitoring adherence by the state to existing legislation. Despite the personalistic nature of the regime, civil society organisations (CSOs) have managed to gain recognition by the state as a legitimate part of society.

¹ The article is based on research commissioned by Sida. It explored the role of civil society in augmenting political accountability in fragile states. The full report can be downloaded at: www.intrac.org/resources.php

What can we learn from civil society’s successes in Tajikistan?

These modest but tangible successes of civil society are based on its clearly defined space outside the political domain. The fact that civil society chose to be apolitical is one of the important factors in understanding its positive impact on political stability and social development in Tajikistan. Instead of directly opposing the incumbent regime, civil society actors have concentrated on transforming the nature of state institutions, practices and the norms that underlie their existence. In this way, CSOs hope to have a long-term impact in Tajikistan by ensuring the emergence of a system of checks and balances, and establishing a tradition of dialogue with channels for communication between the state and civil society. This strategy, that sees the strengthening of both civil society and the state as interdependent, could provide a sustainable approach in fragile states, particularly post-conflict situations, where society is often polarised.

What role for donors?

Donors’ positions towards the political regime in Tajikistan have played an important role in moulding the non-confrontational approach of civil society and thus directing events in Tajikistan along a certain path. Despite the authoritarian nature of President Rakhmon’s regime, donors have continued to collaborate with it, at least in part due to regional security considerations. Donors’ civil society strengthening programmes, while acknowledging the democratisation and human rights agendas, have been careful not to touch on controversial issues such as the nature of the political regime or legitimacy of the government. It is clear that the donors’ position has contributed to the development of an apolitical civil society which adopted a cooperative position towards the state, and state-civil society interaction marked by tolerance, increasing recognition and cooperation at different levels of governance.

Continuing needs

Whilst there has been some notable progress in Tajik civil society’s

development since the end of the civil war in 1997, it is not yet mature. In particular, it often lacks the capacity to hold the state to account or to perform high-profile work at the national level. The participation of civil society in the Poverty Reduction Strategy for Tajikistan revealed an urgent need for civil society capacity building. Technical assistance, training and knowledge building was needed in both the non-governmental and governmental sectors. Representatives of civil society interviewed for the INTRAC study stressed that monitoring and evaluation is one of the most important methods for civil society groups to improve political accountability. Additional training in M&E was cited as one of their most urgent needs.

Context and history matters

The case of Tajikistan illustrates that engaging with fragile states requires a nuanced understanding of context. In Tajikistan this means understanding the legacy of the Soviet state and the civil war of 1992-97. Peace since 1997 and security within its borders, in contrast to neighbouring Afghanistan, give the current political regime a certain legitimacy. The benefits of the current cooperative relations between civil society and the state should be looked at against the rapid escalation of conflict between the government and civil society in the early 1990s, which is associated with propelling the country into the civil war. Another important factor to consider in designing policies towards Tajikistan is popular expectations of the state, largely moulded by memories of Soviet socialism. In Tajikistan, the state is seen first and foremost as a provider of order and stability, and a guarantor of social and economic rights, rather than of human rights or democracy. This appears vital for Tajikistan, where the main area of fragility lies in the energy sector, and where donors’ support to government projects could have a significant impact on the macro economic situation in Tajikistan and therefore the prospects of maintaining stability in future.

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Challenges faced by social sector NGOs in Kyrgyzstan

The situation in Kyrgyzstan, which for many years was regarded as the Central Asian 'island of democracy' has changed dramatically since the 'Tulip Revolution' in 2005¹. The NGO sector in Kyrgyzstan, widely considered the most independent and active in the region, has faced multiple challenges. One important trend is increasing state pressure to keep the NGO sector under greater control, seeking to narrow the space for NGOs' activity and exclude anything that relates to the political sphere. This increasing pressure takes place alongside a recent policy from the President to strengthen consultation and communication platforms with different population groups in order to improve state governance, particularly decision-making processes². This policy for 'deliberative democracy' received a mixed public reaction and was criticised by NGOs as a possible deviation from international democratic standards, including electoral democracy.

Challenges from external relations

Another serious challenge has been the reduction in donor funding in recent years. Given that NGOs in Kyrgyzstan have minimal alternative sources of funding, the question of the survival of NGOs, especially small and rural ones, has become even more complicated. The state is very sensitive to the activities of human rights and 'activist' NGOs, instead claiming to support 'socially oriented NGOs'. However, in reality, social sector NGOs receive little tangible support from the state. Thus, they are in ambiguous position. Despite the rhetoric of cooperation with the state, these NGOs receive little support, and yet when they attempt to cooperate with public authorities they often face criticism from others in the NGO sector for being excessively loyal to state authorities. From the other end, authorities at the national and particularly the local level often apply an instrumental approach, seeing them simply as social services providers to vulnerable population groups, filling gaps in public provision.



A man goes to the market in the village of Arslanbob, Kyrgyzstan.

© 2008. Tze Hung Seto, freelance development photographer and journalist – www.setophotography.co.uk

Organisational development-related challenges

INTRAC's experience of work with socially oriented NGOs in the ACT-Development programme³, as well as our ongoing research study of NGOs' accountability to their target groups⁴ shows that even mature NGOs in Kyrgyzstan need to find responses to challenges related to their institutional development.

One important problem is achieving sustainability. Many NGOs tend to only look at sustainability from a financial point of view, given the difficulties with survival and financial dependence on foreign assistance. Nevertheless, amongst INTRAC's local partners, sustainability is increasingly perceived as having many aspects. Experienced socially oriented NGOs have begun to consider sustainability from the point of view of NGOs' adherence to their mission, continuous improvement of the quality of their work, improvement of their internal systems and organisational structures, and their accumulation of professional and intellectual capacity.

Secondly, there are gaps in the organisational strategies of NGOs. When trying to increase the capacity of their target groups, NGOs often forget about the need for strategic planning for

themselves. NGOs often either do not update their strategic plans or do not have any plans at all, and continue to base their work on project approaches. This lack of strategic vision prevents NGOs from comprehensively and seriously considering the sustainability of structures and forms of activity generated in the course of their project activities.

To illustrate these challenges, experience from the ACT-D programme shows that NGOs supporting the development of self-help groups in rural areas found it difficult to determine their exit strategy. The question of when self-help groups should become independent from NGOs and how they should develop has not yet been answered adequately. Some NGOs create clusters and federations of self-help groups, while others encourage self-help groups to transform into NGOs. Some NGOs have even begun to feel like prisoners of a paternalistic system which they are partly responsible for. Self-help groups continue to expect that NGOs will tell them how to develop further, whilst NGOs themselves struggle with financial and capacity limitations, preventing them from expanding existing self-help schemes with the poor population groups. NGOs are forced to think about both their own survival and

1 In March 2005, as a result of mass protests, the former President Askar Akayev was forced to leave the country. Following these events, Kurmanbek Bakiyev became President.

2 In March 2010 the country held the Kurultai of Consent, a meeting of representatives of administrative-territorial units, ethnic and religious groups, professional associations, creative professionals and NGOs. During the Kurultai, the President announced the introduction of 'deliberative democracy' as the most suitable model for Kyrgyzstan.

3 The ACT-Development consortium in Central Asia includes Christian Aid (UK), ICCO (Holland) and DanChurchAid (Denmark)

4 This research study is supported by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and aims to research issues related to accountability and legitimacy of socially oriented NGOs in the Kyrgyz Republic.

how to respond to people's needs and meet their expectations.

A final important challenge is the recent questioning of the NGO sector's legitimacy and role in society. NGOs face accusations that they do not represent those groups whom they consider to be their beneficiaries; or that they are really agents or lobbyists representing the interests of international organisations or foreign governments, as they are financed by foreign funds. Such accusations are made primarily by the state; however, one can hear similar accusations from the population as well. This is partly explained by the fact that NGOs do not always communicate with the wider public. Also, the funding problems that NGOs face daily may contribute to their inability to maintain active feedback with the context they work in and people they work with.

Responding to these challenges

Faced with these questions about their legitimacy, NGOs are increasingly concerned to find ways to improve the sector's public image and recognition of its role in the society, as well as to improve communication with target groups and stakeholders, and to strengthen the collective identity of NGOs and their work in coalitions.

Experienced NGOs are now showing an interest in collective self-regulation, learning from mechanisms used in other countries. There is no unanimous opinion on how to improve NGOs' accountability to their target groups, or what self-regulation mechanisms would be appropriate in the current turbulent situation in Kyrgyzstan. The recent political upheavals may delay discussion of them but they will return; they are part of the maturing of the NGO sector.

Increasingly, NGOs understand that by strengthening their accountability to target groups and developing mechanisms of cooperation and self-regulation, they will find at least a partial response to criticism and hopefully be able to survive in the new environment with support from donors, private and state structures.

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Women's leadership in Central Asia – have we forgotten about power?

The history of the post-Soviet women's movement in Central Asia is generally taken to have started with the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, in 1995, attended by delegations from the five republics. The adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action contributed to both the creation of state structures on women's issues and the emergence of a large number of women's NGOs in the region. A decade and half later is a good time to consider the status of the women's movement in the region.

Supporting an alternative system

Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein¹, notes:

'...we can make a collective choice in favor of a new stable system, the main features of which remind us of the previous one, namely, by the presence of a hierarchy, exploitation and polarization ... we can also choose a radically different system that has never existed before – a relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian one ...'

Wallerstein contrasts a system centered around supporting those with existing power and privilege, with a system where reforms can be made from the bottom up. He calls the first system the "Spirit of Davos" since it reflects the concept of the World Economic Forum, and the second system – the "Spirit of Porto Alegre" since it has been formed within the World Social Forum.

We should bear in mind that when we consider the women's movement in Central Asia, we are struggling with the challenge of choosing a new system.

The current state of the women's movement

Civil society participation that is genuine and equitable is central to this vision. In the region, women's activism remains restricted to 'invited spaces' of participation², where certain groups participate within defined roles, in a way that does not significantly change the traditional system of power relations. Furthermore, the strategies of women's



Female self-help group members in Tajikistan.

© 2007, Peter Kenny (ENI)

NGOs are influenced by international development organisations and are generally limited to the 'registration' of women's needs, such as highlighting female unemployment and poverty, violence against women, lack of women in management. Thus, women still primarily perform their political subjectivity as 'victimized subjects'.

The most radical element of the women's movement in Central Asia is the struggle for female representation in current state structures. This represents an attempt to create a 'claimed space' of participation, where women are free to negotiate based on their own, alternative agendas.

Finding alternative approaches

In 2009, a project to develop women and youth leadership in local communities was implemented as part of INTRAC's Central Asia Programme. This project was based on the activities of a local NGO network supported by a consortium of donors – ACT-Development. The 'Ishenim' network has 10 years' experience in promoting self-help groups as a strategy to improve the quality of life and strengthen the voice of poor groups. Self-help groups became widely spread over 15 years ago as a method of community mobilisation to fight poverty. Today, the NGO partners in the ACT-Development consortium support more than 1,000 self-help groups in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Around 75% of these groups are women's self-help groups. Thus one could expect that women's organisations would provide

¹ "Dynamics of global crisis: thirty years later". International conference "Modern State and Global Security" (September, 2009, Yaroslavl, Russia).

² Cornwall, Gaventa in The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia. INTRAC, 2005

spaces for autonomous women's development. But a detailed view of women's mobilisation in microcredit programmes, for example, provides serious grounds to question this assumption. INTRAC's research studies into the activities of self-help groups and other community based organisations in Kyrgyzstan indicated a conflict between models promoting female leadership and the reality on the ground. In practice, women in self-help groups often reject autonomy in exchange for security and physical survival. Because of this it is unlikely that the existing power hierarchies will be transformed or that women will achieve real empowerment. It is revealing that successful women's mobilisation in civil sector in Central Asia is largely within 'invited spaces'. This affects the nature of women's leadership and movement.

INTRAC's recent project on youth and women's leadership worked jointly with participants to question the dominant understandings of power and cultural norms of masculinity and femininity underlying gender inequalities, as well as their impact on leadership in the region. Using new media tools we gathered experience to facilitate discussion between partner NGOs on how the self-help movement can become a space for the development of alternative leadership models within current conditions, and taking into account the interests of different groups of women and men.

The questions from the start of the project remain: Where are the truly autonomous spaces among women's organisations and groups? How can we create them? How can we combine the interests of self-help groups and NGOs in a coherent social movement based on principles of equality? Without special attention to the dynamics of power within NGOs and self-help groups, it will be difficult to resist myths about associations of vulnerable groups – for example, that in women's groups power is distributed more equitably. Stereotypes like these impede an open and critical discussion of the prospects for developing democratic forms of leadership within these groups.

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Perspectives on the future of civil society across Central Asia

Hopes for Western-style democracy and substantial economic improvements in the lives of the majority in Central Asia have waned in recent years. In this context, in December 2008, INTRAC adopted a new three-year strategy for civil society support work in the region – the result of nine months of consultation, fact-finding and reflection. The strategy reflects our belief that citizen action will continue to play a key role in change, however gradual this may be, and that international support to foster this is vital.

Continuing need for partnership to support social and economic rights

Civil society in the five countries of Central Asia still works from a limited social and political base, with steadily less attention and priority from outside governments and international agencies. Therefore, the new strategy's first aim is to 'reduce the isolation of civil society in Central Asia by working alongside national and regional networks and associations advocating for social and economic justice and defending the space for civil society'. The reference to economic and social rights reflects our long-term focus in this area. The experience of the Former Soviet Union region since 1991 shows how difficult it is to build broad support for a modern, independent civil society while there is

deterioration in economic conditions and social capital.

Supporting organisations with a poverty reduction and gender equality commitment is seen in INTRAC's second aim, to continue 'capacity building support to local NGO partners and social movements' in order to strengthen the 'participation and empowerment of vulnerable and marginalised communities'. Our work on this aim takes place mainly in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the poorest countries in the region and those most dependant on external aid. In Kazakhstan, most international donors exited around 2005, citing the increase in GDP per capita. Local civil society and development experts challenge this view, noting the failure of the regime to share its oil wealth and a slowed democratisation process. Indeed, many local NGOs were forced to close down, or sell their services as trainers and consultants to government.

Supporting an independent civil society

The development of contracting and the proliferation of official state NGOs illustrate the model of government sponsored civil society that is increasingly influential in the region. ICAP's strategy attempts to address this by declaring an



Village life in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan.

© 2009, Syrgak Dildeev, participant on INTRAC's youth leadership programme.

aim to help 'improve the quality of service delivery by NGOs and ensure that good practice is communicated to government agencies' and 'converted into new and wider policy initiatives'. In other words, we are trying to transfer lessons from international development programmes into the government-funded sector, which is currently run within a very narrow services-purchasing approach.

The difficulties of working in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are substantial. The expulsion of INGOs and closure of local NGOs in Uzbekistan in 2004-5, following the break-up of that country's 'marriage of convenience' with the USA, affected social sector NGOs almost as badly as human rights groups. In 2008, trainers from INTRAC and the UK's Charity Commission ran a workshop on the legal and regulatory environment for civil society in Uzbekistan. We saw how the government has set up its own civil society, providing grants and support of different kinds to loyal NGOs, using the rhetoric of anti-terrorism to justify a very restrictive environment. Indeed, a 2007 INTRAC research workshop showed that the international security agenda has had a negative effect on civil society development in Central Asia more generally, threatening freedom of speech and association⁸.

Continuing political and economic challenges

The authoritarian, nationalist regimes of Central Asia have presided over a return to traditionalism, while at the same time maintaining the secular character of their states and many administrative structures inherited from the USSR. Observers have regularly predicted the fall of the post-1991 regimes in the region but with the exception of Kyrgyzstan this has not taken place so far. In Turkmenistan, the sudden death of President Niyazov in late 2007 was handled with surprising calm. Sadly, the promised opening up of civil society in Turkmenistan has not yet taken place (there are less than 200 officially registered NGOs in the country). The isolationist policies of the previous regime

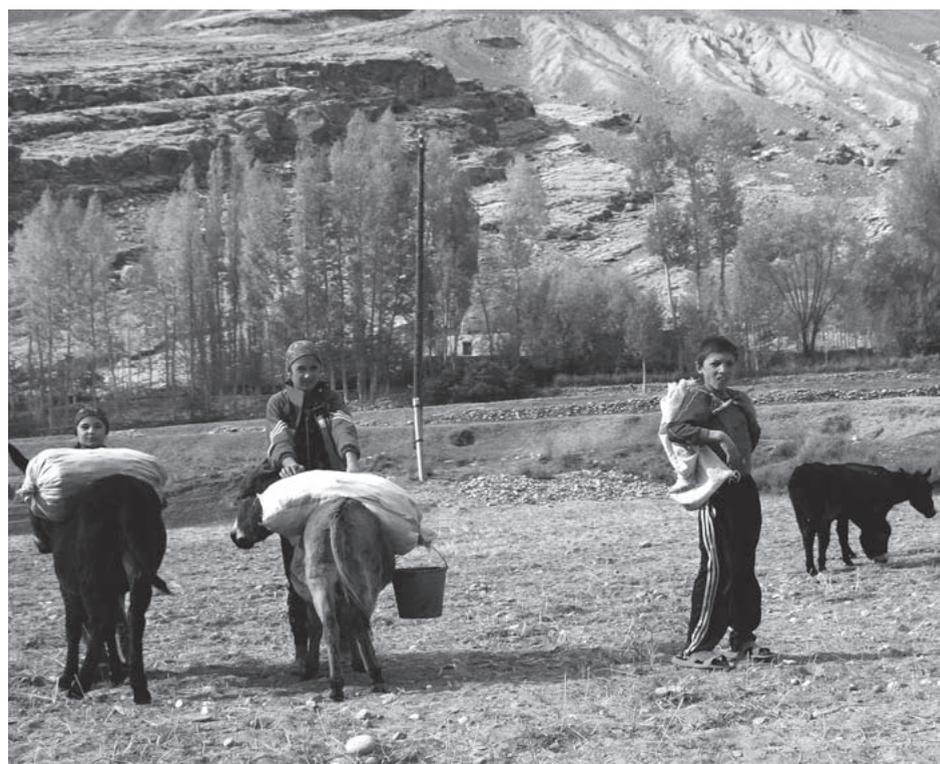
resulted in an out-flow of the professional classes and a very limited capacity for progressive reform. Nonetheless, INTRAC and its local NGO partners have been able to run a leadership program for youth activists.

The region is still struggling with the consequences of draconian public sector cuts during the 1990s. The women's movement is an important player in defending the social gains of the Soviet period and includes a wide range of groups – the most established of which have strong links with government. The labour movement was seriously weakened by the loss of its Soviet-era privileges and by economies crashing to 50% of their previous size; only in Kazakhstan do we see effective trade unions confident enough to take on employers including with strike action. In Kyrgyzstan, informal workers action was an important component of the 2005 revolution, including attempts to save jobs in the coal industry and to reverse contested privatisations. However, the new regime failed to live up to promises made in this area, returning to a broadly neo-liberal path.

As this issue of ONTRAC went to press, a wave of popular anger at clanism and corruption in government took place in

Kyrgyzstan. There were mass citizens' action protests against the trebling of central heating and electricity tariffs and the sale of power companies. The interim government has promised a return to the aims of the 2005 'Tulip revolution' – greater democracy. However, the depth of the economic crisis in the poorer countries of Central Asia suggests that there is no easy answer, even for progressive-minded regimes. The continuing conflict in neighbouring Afghanistan continues to play a negative role in limiting development in the region. We have to hope that Kyrgyzstan will recover from the huge and tragic loss of life and the damage to public and private property so as to continue to develop open and democratic systems. Citizens' action remains a vital ingredient for this, alongside a better, more constructive collaboration with the government sector. International support is still vital for the building up of an autonomous civil society with the capacity to defend citizens' social, economic and political rights.

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Children in the Wakhan Valley, on the border of Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

⁸ Sen, K & Morris, T (2008) Civil Society and the War on Terror, Oxford: INTRAC.

INTRAC training

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Organisational Development

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Course fee: £999 non-residential/£1250 residential

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Location: Oxford

Course fee: £550 non-residential/£700 residential

The course is designed to help Southern and Northern NGOs build successful advocacy partnerships and identify approaches for building capacity for effective Southern advocacy. It will explore methods for the joint identification of issues and solutions; review approaches to achieving policy change in different socio-political contexts; and reflect on the causes and solutions to common problems in North-South advocacy relationships. There will be space to consider capacity building options as well as effective methods for monitoring and evaluating advocacy.

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Location: Oxford

Course fee: £999 non-residential/£1250 residential

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is an essential component of international NGOs, NGOs and CSOs striving for greater accountability in their work. There is an increasing demand in the sector for staff to understand what M&E entails, why it is so vital, and how to do it well and in a participatory way. This course will give a thorough introduction to the concepts and practical knowledge and skills needed by new staff, or staff new to M&E. Participants will learn to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities that will help their projects and programmes improve accountability, learning and effectiveness.

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