



Praxis Paper 21

# Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation in Practice

*Lessons learnt from Central Asia*

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**Keywords:** participatory monitoring and evaluation, NGOs, CSOs, Central Asia

## Part One

### 1.1 Introduction

Participation in development is generally accepted as a process that is fundamental to addressing issues of ownership and sustainability. Everyone acknowledges the value of participation. Yet when it comes to developing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems many civil society organisations (CSOs) continue to employ experts to develop their objectives, indicators and data collection methodologies – with very little participation from the very people they are attempting to engage with. This paper records an attempt to develop a fully participative M&E system, drawing on the experience of a team of INTRAC staff working on a civil society strengthening programme in close collaboration with their partners in the five countries of Central Asia.

The ambitious intention at the start of the programme was to develop a participatory M&E system that would provide important lessons for both the participants of the process and any other practitioners that were embarking on developing their own M&E system. The process would belong to the partners, ensuring they controlled what was appropriate in monitoring their own development processes. This paper highlights how INTRAC attempted to:

- **realise participation** in the development of a M&E system
- **use the INTRAC Central Asia programme as a model** on which partners could develop their M&E skills. This was a DFID (Department for International Development) funded programme for 'Institutional Development of Civil Society in Central Asia'.
- **provide feedback** to INTRAC ensuring the programme was providing the capacity building support the local CSOs needed
- **provide the necessary accountability to DFID** plus general management information on the progress of the programme
- **provide an opportunity for INTRAC partners to empower themselves** by developing the objectives of the programme in order to provide them with their capacity building needs, defined by themselves, including developing indicators that would be used to measure any successes or weaknesses of the programme
- **provide findings** to be used by INTRAC to ensure the programme continued to provide the capacity building support the partners needed, through a process of developing new and innovative inputs when required.

This paper documents the different stages of the process, the challenges that arose and the ways in which the INTRAC team and the local partners sought to tackle these. Donors, practitioners and implementers could gain from the lessons learnt in this paper. It also addresses the critical questions of:

- Is it possible to introduce a participatory approach to M&E by trying to integrate the process into development practice whilst addressing the issue of ownership?
- How affective is monitoring and evaluation as a tool for managing the process of a programme as well as addressing issues of accountability and learning?
- Can M&E systems and approaches be consistent with, and support, programme objectives?

The paper is aimed at all sectors of the development community. It tackles participatory monitoring and evaluation from a practical perspective rooted in a three year regional programme across five countries in Central Asia. It is therefore grounded in the reality of managing a programme and working with local partners. At the same time the issues of participation and meaningful M&E are assessed with reference to the debates and experiences of others. The paper reflects the INTRAC approach of using training, research and consultancy in a dynamic way. For these reasons it will be of use to academics and researchers, policy and programme managers as well as to managers and practitioners in the field. It has a wider appeal than Central Asia as the issues of participation and meaningful M&E systems are ones that are seen across the whole global development community.

## 1.2 The republics of Central Asia: **Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan**



Since 1991 all Central Asian states have experienced a massive increase in poverty due to economic decline and a simultaneous collapse of comprehensive Soviet social

welfare systems. Economic output and household incomes have plummeted and there has been a sharp deterioration in virtually all measures of human welfare and health. Furthermore, this growth in poverty has been accompanied by marked and increasing inequality. Although it is difficult to derive from statistics any clear sense of who the winners and losers are in the processes of transition, it seems that the progress made towards political and economic gender equality during the Soviet era is being eroded. Women are suffering more than men from job losses, they have become increasingly marginalised from political decision making and representation, and uncertainty is leading to the re-emergence of older patriarchal cultural norms. Secondly, the shift to privatisation and market-based economies has conferred benefits on certain elite groups whilst increasing poverty and social exclusion for the majority of the population. Particularly destabilising is the process of impoverishment linked to ethnicity, creating a fertile recruiting ground for those intent on provoking conflict. Tensions over land and water, as well as the illegal drug trade, are all possible flash points. Economic migration of the young has created poverty for the elderly, particularly as state pension schemes have collapsed.

Although there is some recognition amongst governments that they are not in a position to provide for all the needs of their citizens and that NGOs attract much needed foreign funding, none of the Central Asian republics have a clear or transparent policy in relation to NGOs. Whilst at least part of the problem lies with the governments' lack of familiarity with the concept and potential of NGOs, governments are largely suspicious of NGOs as an alternative sector with interests apart from and in opposition to the State. With a long tradition of state provision and complete state control, governments fear to relax their grip on power. As the role and capacity of post-independence governments in relation to social and economic issues have been evolving, a general trend towards declining space for NGOs and increasing centralised government control has emerged.

All five countries suffer from a lack of legal or consensus definitions of NGOs. This kind of legislative environment has not only allowed an enormous range of organisations – from circuses to Chambers of Commerce – to become registered as NGOs, but also rendered the practice of setting up government NGOs extremely common. These have not only served the purpose of accessing donor NGO funding, but also of incorporating the NGO sector within the structures of the state. Similarly, in those republics where state laws were changed, the objective has predominantly been to regulate and control NGOs rather than to facilitate their development.

### 1.3 NGOs in Central Asia

In the years following independence, **NGOs have emerged as a wholly new form of organisation** in Central Asian republics. There are significant and increasing numbers of NGOs in each country, established by dedicated professionals, committed to promoting positive change in their newly independent countries. Foreign donor funding, training and technical support has helped these fledgling organisations to establish themselves, define their role and begin to make their mark. However, in all Central Asian countries, **many NGOs remain at an early stage of development**, with limited capacity and negligible impact on social and economic

change. A number of factors have combined to inhibit the quick development of a thriving independent and effective NGO sector:

- the continuing state of political, economic and social flux
- certain aspects of the Soviet legacy (i.e. that Soviet legal systems were not conducive to non-governmental organisations)
- the often negative perceptions and behaviour of government
- the characteristics of NGOs
- the approach and role assumed by donor organisations.

NGOs remain dependent on donors and have yet to establish themselves as integral and recognised elements of Central Asian society.

In addition to a general isolation from the development debates and experiences familiar to organisations working in other parts of the world, there is very little indigenous academic engagement with development discourse and analysis. NGO staff have neither the experience of development interventions nor the exposure to a variety of approaches to assist them in adapting ideas to their local context. Very few NGO activities have been developed from a grounded process of consultation and analysis involving target groups. Instead, as NGO personnel involved in service delivery often perceive themselves as providing services to recipients, they decide upon NGO activities according to their own understanding of needs. Overall, few NGOs are able to clearly conceptualise their work, few liaise with other local service providers or demonstrate awareness of lessons learnt and good practice. Few have set goals or indicators for assessing progress and impact.

The limited exposure of NGO staff to development-related information and skills coupled with the constraints of donor funding has inhibited the development of an independent NGO sector. Development-related training tied up with donor funding has put NGOs in no position to challenge policies and approaches. The predominance of 'low quality' donor funding, i.e. low level, short-term and project-specific, means a hand-to-mouth existence for most NGOs and severely limited opportunities for organisational growth. On the other hand, higher levels of funding tend to come with high conditionality. With practically no alternatives for self-sustainability, NGOs are prone to 'fit the bill' of what they perceive donors' expectations to be.

In addition, it is difficult for local NGO support organisations to respond effectively to the increasing demand for development-related training. Whereas training of trainers in the basics of NGO start-up is comparatively straightforward, promoting development-related training in the same way has limited value. Participatory Rapid Assessments (PRAs) and 'organisational development' have become increasingly fashionable for example, but packaged as tools, in the hands of inexperienced trainers, they are all too easily stripped of their conceptual basis, complexity and value.

The donor community has been responsible for shaping the profile and activities of NGOs, encouraging and funding western style organisations. Only very recently have donors recognised or sought to engage with more indigenous and rooted forms of

social organisation such as community-based organisations deriving from or replacing previous state co-operative structures.

Central Asia continues to present a largely unfamiliar environment for western agencies. All organisations (commercial, state and non-state) have been going through a process of familiarisation in order to understand better how to operate effectively there.

A young woman from a newly developing NGO in Uzbekistan once described to the authors how massive the change within her country was having on their lives. 'Before 1991 if the electricity had been disrupted we would light a candle and sit waiting for Moscow to correct the fault. Since 1991 the foreigners who have come to our country expect us to not only to correct the fault but to manage the process too.'

## 1.4 History of INTRAC in Central Asia

Within this rapidly changing and highly volatile environment INTRAC involvement in Central Asia began in 1994 with an invitation from UNV/UNDP to design a community-based poverty alleviation programme in Kyrgyzstan. Whilst external agencies were assuming that local NGOs would provide services in place of collapsed state structures, it was immediately clear that there was a lack of recognisable (in the western sense) NGO structures to work through. From 1994 to 1997, INTRAC focused on strengthening the organisational capacity of NGOs and NGO support organisations in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Mostly these NGOs had been established with funding from USAID through a consortium of American NGOs called Counterpart Consortium (CC). One of INTRAC partner NGOs described their relationship with INTRAC and CC as, 'CC is like a school teaching us how to be NGOs. INTRAC is the university training us to manage and develop our NGOs.'

During this initial phase of work in Central Asia there was a great deal of learning going on within the local NGOs and INTRAC – both in developing an understanding of the region and in working within a post-communist transitional environment. The NGO sector was so new and underdeveloped there was no real need for a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system. All activities were so new and different from anything previously offered it was easy to spot changes as they happened. INTRAC was able to document those changes and publish the effect of its work in publications.

At the end of 1996 it was realised that 'capacity building organisations alone would only achieve limited development of the NGO sector whilst the environment remained poor'.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, in 1997 INTRAC expanded its focus to institutional development of the sector as a whole – aiming to encompass the whole environment within which the NGO sector was functioning, whilst continuing to provide organisational capacity building support to NGOs and NGO support organisations. During this period INTRAC adopted the definition of capacity building

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt, Goodhand (1996) 'Preparing INTRAC for Central Asia', INTRAC internal document

as 'a process of adaptation to change and of internal reaffirmation, that gives an organisation both the resources to deal with challenges as they arise, and the will to continue acting' (Eade 1997).<sup>2</sup>

In order to take on the expanded work INTRAC appointed a Programme Manager based in Oxford and a Country Manager based in Bishkek. The new programme would involve work at multiple levels – communities, local government, NGOs, NGO support and coalition organisations, donors and to a lesser extent central government – balancing continued development of the role and capacity of NGOs with promoting a positive enabling environment for NGO activity. Work focused on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, but involved and encouraged the participation of organisations and individual NGO staff from Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. INTRAC had realised that providing capacity building support to NGOs alone was not going to help if the environment within which they were working was not conducive to their growth.

It was now becoming more apparent when working at so many levels how important it was going to be to monitor the progress of the interventions. The sector as a whole still had not been introduced to monitoring and evaluation systems and INTRAC, like many international NGOs, was concerned about how it was going to report progress against the interventions in order to satisfy three different donors.

INTRAC was now ready to move into a consolidated phase of its work in the region. The lessons learnt in the previous two phases clearly pointed to the need for INTRAC to expand the work geographically much wider in order to maximise the critical mass needed to affect changes within civil society.

In 2002 INTRAC in close collaboration with DFID developed a much expanded phase three programme aimed at strengthening civil society in all five Central Asian states, working much more intensively in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan than in previous phases. INTRAC opened offices in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, employing both expatriate and local staff.

In the previous phases INTRAC, like many other international NGOs, had developed their logical framework in advance of the funding being agreed. At the outset of this phase INTRAC spent considerable time negotiating with DFID that the agreed log frame developed for the proposal would be an interim version that would be rewritten during the first year by key actors in the region as part of the learning process by the partners. DFID unusually agreed to this process and funded a programme where they would not be certain of its final objectives until the end of the first year. One of the major activities of the programme was to use the programme as a model on which the partners would be able to develop their participatory monitoring and evaluation skills.

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<sup>2</sup> Eade, D (1997) *Capacity Building, An Approach to People-Centred Development* (Oxfam Development Guidelines)

At the development stage of the M&E system INTRAC worked with local NGO partners that it had been providing capacity building support to over the previous years, local DFID staff, local government officials, and a few interested international NGOs to help provide an external view. The following parts explore the issues and lessons learnt from the process taken by INTRAC.

## Part Two

### 2.1 Challenges to participatory monitoring and evaluation

Over the past two decades taking a participatory approach to development has been seen as integral to addressing the issues of:

- ownership
- sustainability
- increased focus on outcomes and processes
- concern over understanding and assessing the impact of development interventions.

Other significant emerging issues include:

- the move from a project to a programme approach
- taking a pro-poor approach
- developing a strong civil society/third sector.

Each of these issues has specific challenges to address. So often we become overwhelmed by them and M&E systems struggle to cope, with lack of time and resources to address fundamental issues and provide support to staff. Even where M&E systems are revised they are often too complex and rapidly fall into disrepair once the initial enthusiasm and drive has been replaced by the 'need to get things done'.

As the importance of key stakeholders' participation in a programme has been highlighted there has been an increasing understanding of the need for consistency in development processes and activities, including monitoring and evaluation.<sup>3</sup> Participation needed to be an integral part of monitoring and evaluation and not just the development activities.

The effect of this has been felt by development programme planners and implementers who have been bombarded with the need to incorporate a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation into their work, with little clarity as to what was meant by taking a participatory approach or how it should be meaningfully linked to monitoring and evaluation. This often resulted in different actors interpreting what participation and monitoring and evaluation meant to them, so influencing the extent they used participatory monitoring and evaluation within their programme. Systems were termed participatory when in reality the participation was limited to supplying or collecting data in a form and on areas determined by a powerful stakeholder (often the donor). One effect of this in civil society

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<sup>3</sup> Roche (1999), *Impact Assessment for Development Agencies*, pp.22-3

development work has been that local CSOs feel that they are encouraged to work in a participatory way but in reality must give higher priority to the more powerful actors, ensuring their monitoring and evaluation needs were met at the expense of the local CSOs'. The problem was that 'participation' was often not defined or understood, with little thinking as to how it should be applied in practice.

The debate on understanding and putting a participatory approach into practice is part of a wider issue on the context and focus of development, changing from a traditional approach focused on the delivery of services to one which builds the capacities of local actors, civil society groups and organisations. A critical aspect of this change is the move from a project or activity focused way of working to one based on understanding and assessing the underlying issues, outcomes and impact of development processes.

From the perspective of approaches to monitoring and evaluation, understanding and incorporating these changes into thinking and practice has been challenging as they represent a complete paradigm shift from traditional approaches and understandings. The challenge in radically changing thinking and practice whilst developing systems and approaches to a wider group of stakeholders which deliver information for accountability and learning has resulted in systems which are overly complex and unworkable in practice, or too simplistic, delivering the wrong information.

## 2.2 Challenges to evaluators

Key points to make are the challenge of putting a participatory evaluation into practice, especially with a number of different stakeholders who will often have different power relationships and agendas. All too often a lead agency will drive the process or it will be delegated to an external team (often with a final report being compiled by one 'expert').<sup>4</sup>

However, making the change is very challenging. Hugh Goyder<sup>5</sup>, writing about Action Aid's work on developing participatory impact assessment methods, noted that:

- The way in which a relatively small number of participatory methods would gain a hold over development workers, and the need for greater thought (discretion) in the choice of particular methods of collecting information. More thought (and research) needed to be carried out to identify which tools were most appropriate for understanding the impact of different interventions.
- Related to this is the assumption that a wide variety of participatory methods should be employed and that it would be a mistake to rely too heavily on one set

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<sup>4</sup> The challenges of developing a more participatory approach have been documented, for example, in Jerry Adam's article 'NGOs and Impact Assessment', Policy Briefing Paper No 3, INTRAC, 2001, and an article which looked at the involvement of key stakeholders in a major evaluation of Irish Aid's MAPS Programme (Informed 13, INTRAC, 2005),

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Goyder, (1998) 'Participatory Impact Assessment: ACTIONAID's Experience', in *Outcomes and Impact*, INTRAC

of methods. The findings from this research point out the need to be far more critical and selective over which methods should be chosen.<sup>6</sup>

- The importance of dialogue and participation between NGO staff and beneficiaries specifically with regard to the selection of indicators. Related to this is the issue that both field workers and beneficiaries often have valuable insights on a situation as well as knowledge of previous work, which is all too often ignored or not recognised.

The uncritical assumption that participatory approaches (and the time they take) are empowering in themselves is not well founded. People involved in the process of reflecting on their situation and collecting and analysing information on it need to see real changes in their own situations. The process must be just as meaningful and useful to them as the information they gather.

## 2.3 Challenges to monitoring programmes

Programme managers are often asked to develop monitoring systems that measure the aims and objectives their programme. This apparently straightforward request immediately leads to a number of problems.

The first (and usually inherent) problem facing managers is within the planning process. Not enough time is given to clarifying the extremely complex social development objectives stakeholders are hoping to address within any project or programme, or to establish the logical links between the problem and purpose statements, the objectives and activities. With little time available objectives would often be developed by the managers themselves, sometimes with limited assistance from other stakeholders. Even where there is participation of a wider group of stakeholders this can be very passive and limited to informing them of the objectives, but offering no opportunity for real comment or meaningful input.

A second common experience of development managers is that they are appointed to manage a project or programme once the funds have been secured and after the programme outline has been developed and the objectives set – again with no opportunity for their participation or input and little consideration to integrating a participatory approach to monitoring.

This lack of space for key programme stakeholders to be involved in the development of the fundamental rationale or hypothesis of a programme then feeds through to the development of methods to assess and measure progress – usually through indicators based on the logical framework, which all too often end up being a list of completed activities or inputs. This leaves outcomes and impact to be measured by ‘experts’ who have no vested interest in the success of the project other than for reporting to senior managers or even donors.

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<sup>6</sup> This point bears out work carried out by others who found that despite their apparent simplicity that participatory approaches took more skill to use than traditional quantitative approaches. ‘Case Study of Catholic Development Commission, Zimbabwe’, in Marsden, Oakley and Pratt (1994), *Measuring the Process*, INTRAC

The result is that from the outset meaningful participation by key stakeholders in many programmes has been sidelined. Any participatory approaches carried out as part of the programme can only be done within the framework set out which had no, or limited, participation.

In larger organisations the task of developing monitoring and evaluation systems would often be delegated to a specialist M&E team. The rationale for this would usually be that M&E is seen as an activity that only M&E experts, not programme planners or implementers, are able to provide. Monitoring is not seen as an integral part of project management or the project process. This is especially relevant where the M&E team in a head office sets up the M&E system for country programmes and projects, and local managers are expected to deliver on pre-selected targets and outputs.

Well-constructed monitoring and evaluation systems can contribute towards the achievement of objectives. Equally a badly constructed monitoring and evaluation system could negatively affect the achievement of objectives. In very complex social development programmes there is often no concept of the role and purpose of taking a participatory and empowering approach to monitoring that includes the people who are classified as 'beneficiaries'.

## Part Three

### 3. INTRAC approach to participatory M&E in Central Asia

#### 3.1 Consistency of approach

The proposed INTRAC approach to developing a participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) system for the Central Asia Programme was to develop a system which would be consistent in its approach and methodology with the purpose and objectives of the programme. This was seen to be fundamental and consistent with thinking on participatory approaches to development. In addition this was seen to be critical for the Central Asia Programme due to its focus on building the capacity of CSOs.

It was seen to be essential to address the common problem of M&E systems being developed separately from a programme and not related to it. With a consistency of approach we also saw that we would be able to address issues of ownership of the M&E system, processes and outputs by different stakeholders.

#### 3.2 Modelling

Following on from this it was seen as important that the approach and process taken, and the methods used to develop and manage the M&E system would act as a model for INTRAC's stakeholders and partners in the region. For this reason we

saw the modelling of a PME system for a capacity building programme as particularly appropriate and helpful to partners.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.3 Ownership

Ownership of the M&E system, processes and products was seen as key element, linked to the need to have a consistent approach. If key stakeholders valued the purpose and outcomes of the project then an important element of this (as well as an indicator) would be a value in owning the process of assessing the degree to which progress was being made towards achieving the programme objectives and input into making adjustments and changes where needed.

To address ownership issues the stakeholders would be involved in each step of the process. In this respect the work that INTRAC had carried out in the region between 1994-2000 provided an important foundation of trust and knowledge. Many of the partners who would be involved in this programme had contributed to the development of the proposal. This was also reflected in the project log frame, as the outputs and indicators were to be developed as part of the programme process in consultation with partners. This was seen to be an essential foundation point aimed at addressing the common critique of M&E systems and log frames being externally imposed.

### 3.4 An iterative process

For the involvement of key stakeholders in the process to be meaningful it was also seen to be essential that they would have the opportunity to critique the process and propose revisions or adjustments. In a very real sense the conceptual framework was seen as something which could be adjusted and not set in stone. For this to happen formal and informal opportunities for feedback and review were created, during programme activities workshops and formal interviews.

Examples of involvement of the key stakeholders include the development and refinement of objectives and indicators as well as reviewing the indicator and tool framework at the end of the first year.

### 3.5 Usefulness to the stakeholders

M&E systems are often perceived to be designed to provide information for a back donor, with no benefits to those who are involved in the process of collecting the information. There is even a criticism of supposedly participatory approaches whose main function is to collect information for back donors with little or no benefit to the supposed programme beneficiaries.

INTRAC recognised that involvement in the process of developing this M&E system would require a lot of time from the different representatives and that many of the

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<sup>7</sup> With regard to modelling there is an issue of a tension between learning and accountability which will be brought out later.

benefits would be seen to be either long-term or more directly benefiting INTRAC. To address this one objective of the training and mentoring process was that it would provide support to the partners involved and assist them in their work and reporting to their own stakeholders and donors. It became essential that INTRAC provided a strong training element.

### 3.6 Rigour and quality of the system

A primary objective of providing training and mentoring support was the recognition that developing an M&E system which focused on the outcomes of a programme rather than its activities, and which was consistent with a participatory approach, would require a training support programme underpinned by ongoing mentoring. Training and mentoring was also seen to be essential in moving the concept and practice of M&E from a simple project understanding to one which could address complex programme objectives.

### 3.7 Taking a participatory approach

At the outset of the programme a set of workshops were planned so that key stakeholders (partners and donor representatives) would have an opportunity to comment on and further refine the programme objectives, as well as participate in the development of the fundamental elements of the project monitoring and evaluation system, before many of the activities began. Participation must be a basic building block of the approach to PME rather than just rhetoric. This was seen as an essential starting point to the process. We characterised the active participation of stakeholders as **ownership and empowerment** using the following participatory framework:

<b>The process of participation</b>	
<b>Passive participation</b> ↓	Stakeholders simply respond to requests for information and have no other role in PME
<b>Increasing involvement</b> ↓	Stakeholders volunteer information and express interest in how it is used.
<b>Active participation</b> ↓	Stakeholders are involved in deciding what information should be collected, methods used and the analysis of the data.
<b>Ownership/ empowerment</b>	Stakeholders play a key role in selecting the criteria and indicators for measuring project progress and call the staff to account for the project's performance.

The challenge was for participation to be an **inclusive** process that is not restricted to dominant stakeholders who have the loudest voices or most power (real or perceived). A number of issues immediately arose:

- Is it always feasible or appropriate that all stakeholders participate to the same degree throughout the programme?

- Is there a danger of participation becoming so all consuming that it affects the outcome of the work and in effect damages or destroys the values and capacities it set out to support and develop?

INTRAC recognised that an effect of developing a participatory M&E system would be that it was also likely to highlight potential inequalities in the programme which would need to be addressed. Therefore, it was seen as essential that the PME system described the impact on all key stakeholders and parties to ensure an **equitable distribution** of benefits, and the project did not contribute to inequality across different organisations – for example capital city NGOs attending every workshop and regional NGOs being excluded.

The reason for this form of participatory approach was to actively engage key stakeholders in the process and to encourage their **ownership** in monitoring and evaluating the programme over the three years. A hoped for benefit of adopting this approach was that it would model the process of incorporating capacity building and ownership (and by implication sustainability) into the very fabric of the programme process. An additional planned benefit was that the development and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation process would provide a relevant and 'live' example on which to base future M&E workshops for NGOs and local support organisations in the region.

The participation of the key stakeholders in the process, their involvement in training and the provision of mentoring support were seen as interlinked and essential in supporting and enabling participants to begin to take forward the processes, ideas and approaches and apply them in their own situations.

Taking a participatory approach was very time-consuming and required commitment and support from INTRAC. The INTRAC input included the authors of this paper leading workshops during their 3-4 visits per year to help develop the system. They led on M&E training courses and worked closely with the INTRAC regional staff based in the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan providing mentoring support as the work progressed.

### 3.8 The process

The outline plan for the process was:

Time	Activities	
Year 1	June	Programme start
	July-Sept	Phase 1: Introductory workshops on introducing the M&E work, finalising objectives and developing indicators – 3-4 workshops envisaged.
	Oct-Dec	Final workshops on objectives and indicators with a core team of key stakeholders drawing together a final list of indicators. Phase 2: Start workshops on selection and application of different data collection tools using concept of triangulation.
	Jan- March	Continue workshops on selection of tools and concept of triangulation and approaches to collecting and writing up qualitative data. Begin field work.
	April-June	Phase 3: complete field work, writing up, discussion and review of what we have learnt. Data inputted into a software system as a means of sharing it and analysing from different perspectives. Report writing of first year. Development of a participatory M&E manual for INTRAC in Central Asia

The process for Years 2 and 3 included a process for consolidation of using data collection tools, developing report writing skills and providing support to partners in developing their own organisations M&E systems.

#### 3.8.1 Detail of the approach

The INTRAC monitoring and evaluation system was a model evaluation system which in the process of its development could be used by the different stakeholders to develop their skills and knowledge in the process of developing a participatory M&E System.

This would be linked to an on-going training programme on monitoring and evaluation.. Each stage of the development and implementation of the system would be accompanied by a training workshop to develop the skills of the stakeholders. In hindsight this was a particularly bold step as INTRAC's shortcomings as well as successes would be exposed to their partners. INTRAC felt this was consistent with its own vision and the purpose of the Central Asia Programme.

**The development of the M&E system was split into different phases:**

## Phase one

### 3.9.1 Defining the outputs and indicators

The purpose in spending time in developing the objectives and indicators for the Central Asia Programme was to address the issue of ownership by the key stakeholders – the NGO support organisations we worked with in the different countries. We were able to do this because DFID (our main donor for the programme) had accepted that the log frame developed for the programme would not have a refined set of indicators developed prior to agreement of funding. Also the objectives for the programme had been discussed with key stakeholders as part of the programme development process.

The first phase of developing of a monitoring and evaluation system was to develop the objectives and indicators, based on three workshops with representatives from local support organisations, NGOs, donors, international organisations, local government officials and INTRAC staff from all five Central Asian states. The workshops aimed to generate:

- agreement on the broad objectives of INTRAC work in Central Asia
- development of a set of key questions to be used as a framework for monitoring the outcomes and impacts in relation to the programme's broad objectives
- creation of a set of indicators that could be used at multiple levels as a means of monitoring the progress of the programme.

The pre determined **goal** of the programme was 'The development of a vibrant, effective and Independent civil society in Central Asia'.

Its **purpose** was 'Capacity, independence and effectiveness of targeted NGOs, CBOs and support organisations significantly strengthened'.

The DFID-agreed goal and purpose were developed with INTRAC partners' prior to funding of phase three of the programme. DFID agreed to allow the outputs, indicators and activities to be developed post-funding through a participatory process that DFID would be involved in.

### 3.9.2 Developing outputs

Underpinning the goal and purpose were six draft outputs that were to be refined during phase one. Another main activity of the first six months of the programme was to define all of the indicators for the finalised outputs. This work would then form the basis of the development of the M&E system. To ensure that the participants were also receiving capacity building support during this process the INTRAC staff provided M&E training and mentoring support.

In July 2002 the first workshop was convened. Following a brief introduction, the workshop participants were divided into three groups to discuss the six broad outputs that had been drafted during the previous funding period. Key areas to discuss were whether partners felt that the six outputs are representative of how INTRAC work in the region should be assessed.

The groups were asked to discuss each of the draft outputs to assess their relevance at the time of beginning the programme, to comment and, where appropriate, refine them to address their capacity building needs. The three groups then met in to discuss the newly formed outputs.

The draft proposed outputs were:

- Strengthen the organisational capacity and independence of existing and new partner support and coalition NGOs.
  - Enhance the development-related knowledge, skills and critical thinking amongst NGO support organisations and NGO support personnel.
  - Develop links with and support to community based organisations.
  - Promote effective working relationships between NGOs, local government and beneficiary groups in selected target areas.
  - Significantly improve communication between NGOs and the donor community.
  - Design country specific programmes that have a sustainable effect on the enabling environment and attitudes of central government (added by DFID who were present at the workshops as one of the key stakeholders).

Discussion on the objectives by the three groups focused on a number of issues. One group saw the need to 'ensure the involvement of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan NGOs/CBOs sector not only "if circumstances allow"'. There was also concern that a baseline study would need to be carried out in order to make an assessment of progress at some point in the future. The groups also recognised the importance of developing the capacity of local NGOs to work with CBOs and to develop alternative approaches to the selection of new partner organisations.

The six revised outputs of the programme were:

1. Organisational capacity, independence and effectiveness of existing and new partner NGO support organisations and NGO coalitions significantly strengthened
2. Development-related knowledge, skills and critical thinking promoted amongst NGO support organisations and staff (in relation to issues including participatory development, the role of civil society, poverty elimination and gender)
3. Strategies for working with CBOs developed and implemented

4. Effective working relationships between NGOs, local government staff and beneficiary groups promoted in selected target areas
5. Communication and understanding between NGOs and donor community significantly improved
6. Programme of activities regularly reviewed and modified to take account of emerging knowledge and opportunities, and the changing political situation

The agreed outputs were put into a simple framework that resembled the log frame but had only the first column identified.

### 3.9.3 Developing indicators

Whilst we are all familiar with indicators it always seems difficult to actually develop one appropriate to the needs of an intervention. Often indicators do not seem to be relevant to what we are actually trying to achieve. In addition they are often oriented at completed activities, which is not appropriate when trying to understand the effect of a project or programme. An important principal when developing indicators is to ensure that they actually link with the hierarchy of objectives – overall impact, outcomes, outputs and activities of the programme. As a first step towards identifying indicators for the M&E system, we used a process developed by Peter Oakley using key questions as a means of developing appropriate indicators. The answers to those key questions would then be framed as indicators, which will give an idea of the progress made in relation to meeting the overall objectives at the different levels of effort, effect and change.

The key question posed to the participants was 'What change to the present situation would you expect to see if each of the outputs has been fulfilled or reached'?

The participants worked in small groups explored what the outputs meant, and during the process answered this key question. The facilitators helped the participants focus their thinking by adding the following supplementary questions:

**Effort** – what interventions have been started to address the situation?

**Effect** – how have these interventions been used and received by the target population?

**Changes** – what evidence is there that the situation has changed?

The number of key questions, and subsequent indicators, was strictly limited in order to keep the system manageable. In developing a monitoring system the number of indicators should decrease as one moves from assessing effort through to effects and change. The same principal applies for the development of key questions. In this case participants were asked to develop one or two key questions for each output.

Once the key questions had been identified, the next step was to consider what **indicators** it might be appropriate to look at in order to answer these questions.

We were not looking for objectively verifiable indicators so much as signs which give some evidence that we were moving towards achieving the outputs.

As mentioned above, an important factor in developing the indicators was to try and keep them down to a minimum and resist the temptation to develop a system which would collect information on everything. Rick Davies' comment on overly complex data collection systems is a good reminder of their effect:

'The 'fate' of many M&E systems which seem to slide from:

'**extensive attention**' to the detail of setting them up



to **modest concern** for data generation



to **less interest** in their use and



ultimately to a **minimal' interest** in them as instruments of evaluation<sup>8</sup>

An example of the key questions and indicators developed during these workshops is highlighted below – note that there were initially far too many indicators and the list below is the 'raw product' from the first workshop:

### Revised outputs and drafted key questions and indicators

Outputs	Key questions	Indicators
<b>Output 1</b> Strengthen the organisational capacity and independence of existing and new partner support and coalition NGOs.	Do coalitions, alliances and networks have legitimacy among NGOs, CBOs and government and are they valued by the sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantity of members</li> <li>• Degree of active participation of members</li> <li>• Level of conscious participation</li> <li>• No. of appeals; no. of activities; quality and quantity of information manuals</li> <li>• Information flows</li> <li>• No. of registered coalitions</li> <li>• No. of initiatives in coalitions (regional, national, local)</li> <li>• No. of non-registered but active coalitions</li> </ul>
	Are the services provided by NGOs appropriate, high quality and demand-led?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of appeals and degree of satisfaction</li> <li>• No. if issues solved</li> <li>• Acknowledgement by clients</li> <li>• Image of the organisation</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> Davies (1995), 'An Evolutionary Approach to Facilitating Organisational Learning', in *Outcomes and Impact*. Oakley, Pratt and Clayton, INTRAC 1998

	What organisational capacities and skills have been strengthened?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values of an organisation</li> <li>• Structure</li> <li>• System of work</li> <li>• Management</li> <li>• Levels of transparency and accountability</li> </ul>
<b>Output 2</b> Enhance the development related knowledge, skills and critical thinking amongst NGO support organisations and NGO support personnel.	What evidence is there that the enhanced development related knowledge, skills and critical thinking benefit NGO support organisations and CBOs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of programmes, trainings and visits answering the following requirements: taking into account international experience; adapted by local experts; the results of local research (opinions of the local community)</li> <li>• Increased participation</li> <li>• NGOs, CBOs initiated more programmes on local problems</li> <li>• More government, business and mass media participation in project programmes</li> </ul>
	Does the content of the development material produced reflect the need to promote civil society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased public awareness in development issues</li> <li>• No of NGOs and CBOs with improved skills and becoming more sustainable</li> <li>• A corps of local experts</li> </ul>

## Phase two

### 3.10.1 Developing tools and collection methodologies

In February 2003 a review meeting was held with the INTRAC staff to refine the indicators and provide a basis on which to develop the new M&E system. During this meeting discussions were held around what specific tools would be needed to collect the data, and to reach initial agreement on data collection locations. The entire system would be derived from this in due course. It was agreed that it was now time to integrate the indicators drawn up for the six programme outputs into a monitoring plan which would then be used to collect data and form the basis of an annual output report.

This review process was repeated with all key stakeholders in order to continue the processes of ensuring ownership, involvement and critique by all involved. The NGOs and support organisation staff involvement in the process to develop the system were linked to workshops on M&E (focusing on reporting), meetings with an NGO reference group and meetings with the INTRAC regional team, so that the indicator framework, tools and locations could be agreed and cross checked by different stakeholders. This phase was important as it dealt with the concept of triangulation of tools, data sources and perspectives.

The triangulation approach was taken to developing tools and locations since it is recognised that it is a means of addressing the issues of reliability and validity, as the bias in any one method is offset by using another. This does not mean that different methods are randomly selected and put together, but rather they are chosen so that they counteract the threats to validity identified in each. The key here is the systematic application of qualitative methods. Triangulation can be applied by using a mixture of methods, tools, and perspectives, for example working in teams and using multiple data sources. The purpose of this is to give an acceptable degree of objectivity to the subjective perspectives.

Because the INTRAC Central Asia programme was primarily concerned with qualitative changes it was essential to take a primarily qualitative approach. The main tools the participants decided to use were focus group discussions, meetings with key informants, analysis of secondary data and, observation. In addition it was also agreed to use some questionnaires – recognising that they would need care in their development and application<sup>9</sup>. Also, qualitative data collection tools require skill in order to be used properly and effectively. The key question to address was: 'do they provide reliable and valid data of sufficient quantity and quality?'. Other tools such as mapping and ranking could be used, as long as they fulfilled the criteria above and were not used in an extractive fashion. The output indicators, proposed data collection tools, and locations for collecting the information were all now entered into a traditional log frame format.

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<sup>9</sup> Questionnaires were developed but were subsequently dropped as they had a very low response rate despite numerous attempts to get the information.

## Institutional Development of Civil Society in Central Asia

### LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Description	Objective verifiable indicator	Means of verification	Assumptions/risks
<b>Outputs</b>			
1. Organisational capacity, independence and effectiveness of <b>existing</b> and <b>new</b> partner NGO support organisations and NGO coalitions significantly strengthened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced sustainability of NGO support organisations and NGO coalitions – measured financially and organisationally</li> <li>Increased number of services and diversity of activities of NGOs and numbers of members of NGO coalitions</li> </ul>	Semi structured interviews with NGOSOs in Kyrg, Uzbek and Kazak – indic 1&2 Round table discussions with NGOs/NGO support organisations in Kyrg - indic 1&2 Questionnaire to graduates of courses - indic 2 Analysis of secondary data - indic 2	
2. Development-related knowledge, skills and critical thinking promoted amongst NGO support organisations and NGO support staff (in relation to issues including participatory development, role of civil society, poverty elimination and gender)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numbers of graduates on INTRAC training/seminar activities who show an ability to provide similar services to their target groups six months after completing training</li> <li>Numbers of graduates of INTRAC activities who develop action research activities and produce materials relevant to issues raised, six months after training</li> </ul>	Questionnaire to graduates - indic 1&2 Analysis of secondary data - indic 2 Include analysis of outputs from research training (ASTP).	The political situation allows for NGOs to develop gender strategies.
3. Strategies for working with CBOs developed and implemented	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-depth analysis of work with CBOs completed and results discussed with stakeholders in Central Asia</li> <li>INTRAC partners develop better CBO support programmes based on participation and results of in-depth analysis provided by INTRAC</li> </ol>	Analysis of reports - indic 1-5  Documentation of programmes	CBOs are willing and able to work with INTRAC

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Regional seminars held to share experience on CBO strategies including their dissemination to other CA countries</li> <li>4. Increased numbers of NGOs/NGO support organisations participating in INTRAC programmes of CBO support</li> <li>5. Participation of CBO representatives in NGO support organisation/NGO seminars etc</li> </ol>	Evaluation reports from seminars	
4. Effective working relationships between NGOs, local government staff and beneficiary groups promoted in selected target areas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase in the number of INTRAC facilitated discussions between NGOs, NGO support organisations and local government, providing opportunity for reflection and debate</li> <li>2. Increase in the number of joint projects initiated between NGOs and local government</li> </ol>	Reports - indic 1&2	Beneficiary groups willing to put their trust in CBOs/NGOs Government officials prove willing to work with local CBOs/NGOs Govt allows independent NGOs/CBOs to play a constructive role in the CDF process NGOs do not develop into an anti-government sector
5. Communication and understanding between NGOs and donor community significantly improved	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An improvement in communication and mutual understanding on issues related to donor policies in the region (which are more sensitive to the needs of civil society)</li> <li>2. Increased use by donors of local expertise and materials provided by INTRAC partners</li> <li>3. Number of materials and capacity building activities carried out which assist analysis of an effective donor – civil society relationship</li> </ol>	<p>Semi structured interviews (informal) with donors in Kyrg - indic 1&amp;2</p> <p>Focus group discussions - indic 1&amp;2</p> <p>Analysis of secondary data - indic3</p> <p>Research papers published.</p>	NGOs/CBOs prove able and willing to articulate their needs to donor organisations Donors are willing to continue to work with INTRAC
6. Programme of activities regularly reviewed and modified to take account of emerging knowledge and opportunities, and the changing political situation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regular review and modification to take account of emerging knowledge and opportunities and the changing political situation.</li> <li>2. Provision of effective support to those NGOs, CSOs and coalitions advocating for legislative change and working for a better civil society environment.</li> </ol>	<p>Reports - indic 1. Need to provide the overview. To include political analysis of the five countries with input from country managers. Updated regularly.</p> <p>Roundtable discussions - indic 2</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews - indic 2</p>	

### 3.11 Collating and storage of information

A vital part of the M&E system is the collation and storage of the information once it has been collected so that it is easily available for analysis and reporting against. To facilitate the process the researchers were provided with the following outline structure, which they could adapt for their basic monitoring record sheets. Each time a monitoring tool or instrument was used, the following information was recorded:

- Tool – What method was used to collect information?  
Source – Who provided the information? – name of interviewee, type of interviewee, number in group etc.  
Date – When was the tool used? - date or range of dates if used over a period (e.g. weekly diary may have been used between 1/5/02-30/6/01)  
Relevant indicators – What indicators was information gathered on?
- Results – For each relevant indicator, what did the monitoring process show about the indicator? Make sure that you include negative or no change results as well as positive changes in the indicators.  
Other observations – Any other observations or results which show some evidence of progress in meeting the objectives but which are not included in the list of indicators.

In addition, in order to help establish the chain of evidence and make cross referencing easier, each record should show where the data was collected and have a **unique reference** which will allow cross referencing to this piece of data at every level. An appropriate format for the unique reference may be as follows:  
Country/year/output number and partner ref. e.g. Kyr Yr1 Output 2 SCCA

The filing system was organised as follows:

INTRAC M&E ⇒

INTRAC Programme Details

INTRAC Yr 1 Analysis and Summary

INTRAC Yr 1 Country Summaries, Analysis and Detail –  
Kyr, Taj, Tur, Uzb, Kaz⇒

Following the February 2003 workshop the INTRAC team started collecting data, both individually and with partners. Two months were set aside for this phase as it was hoped that we could then have a major review of the data with partners in September. The data collection process took far longer than had been envisaged as it had to be fitted into the busy schedule of the INTRAC regional team.

Between August and the end of September the data from the various interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus groups was sent to Jerry Adams to be entered into a standard reporting framework. This was done using a software package (QualDM – a specialist package for managing qualitative data). The process was very time consuming as a number of individual reports had been merged together and it took time to classify the information (according to their topic and origin).

The use of a qualitative data software system was designed to provide an opportunity to analyse and use the information and give ongoing accessibility to different stakeholders. This was proposed in order to try and address the problem of monitoring and evaluation systems locking information down so that it is not accessible or in formats which could be used by different stakeholders. The process was carried out but did not become a major part of the system as the focus of the work was put on developing and modelling a participatory approach to M&E rather than primarily focusing on the short-term collection and analysis of data. The use of the software system proved to be a problem in itself in that Jerry Adams, who designed the software, also provided all the inputs. This meant other stakeholders had no ownership of the process at all.

At the end of the data collection and analysis phase we took the opportunity to review what we had achieved over the year and whether we were achieving our objectives.

Draft reports were produced which took the information submitted and produced summaries for each country (at this point Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan). These country reports were subsequently discussed in detail with the INTRAC regional team and partner representatives. These discussions set out to address the following:

- The content of the summaries and analyses; how much they reflected the core documents
- The validity of the information; did it give an accurate picture of the situation in each country?
- The appropriateness of the tools and proposed data locations; was too much or too little information being collected?; how could the tools and data collection process be refined?

Out of this reflection, as well as a refinement of the methodology – tools and data locations, there came a request for more support in the process of selecting and applying different tools – in effect putting the concept of triangulation into practice. A number of workshops focusing on this were developed in late 2002, early 2003. There were also requests for help in collating data and writing reports

A major learning point had been that the process of working through the operationalisation of the M&E system needed to develop in a slower fashion than we had expected and probably that the donors might have liked, but by slowing down and spending time with the stakeholders and addressing their concerns we were able to regain their commitment. This was invaluable in increasing the quality of information gathered.

The participants were gaining a stronger understanding of the issues and problems that came up when developing a monitoring and evaluation system. This should be seen as an everyday part of any project or programme that can assist the people doing the work to carry it out more effectively.

### 3.11.1 Attempt to use QualDM software

There are many issues that need to be considered when using software, and especially in applying it to a participatory M&E process. In particular is the importance of investing adequate time into developing the M&E system together with key stakeholders.

#### **Introduction**

Many studies and evaluation reports have highlighted the problems of data collection and analysis. This has become especially evident with programmes focusing on social development and the need for more qualitative information at the level of outcomes and impact – what actually happened and what changed as against what people did. It is recognised that this is a complex problem with a number of issues:

- qualitative information is more dense, with long reports and notes of meetings, in comparison to quantitative information which can present results in a condensed form such as a set of figures
- qualitative information takes more time to analyse. The process requires that people spend time going through the data, reviewing it and drawing out the key points
- qualitative information can be in many different forms – including notes, recordings, drawings and photographs
- objectives of social development programmes can be very complex, especially when applied over different regions and countries as well as the different levels of outputs, outcomes and impact.

The use of software was as a means to address these issues by providing a means of collecting data in a form which would provide ease of analysis at different levels, the facility to write reports and access for the stakeholders to be able to investigate the datasets for themselves and to learn from them. The software programme enabled users to structure their main objectives and indicators in the form of a tree. Information could then be gathered, summarised and analysed. An important feature of the programme was the capacity to structure reports dependant on the users' needs. In this respect information collected was to be regarded as 'live and useful' rather than fixed and inaccessible.

The software programme used addressed some of the difficulties of evaluating complex objectives in a multi-country, multi-level programme. In addition to helping the organisation of such a large project, the software had the capacity to integrate different types of information and data and, consequently, allowed for the use of different research instruments. The latter not only increased the validity of the findings, but also the potential for reflecting 'the richness and variety of organisations, experiences and judgements made in this varied programme'.<sup>10</sup>

#### **What happened**

Whilst the decision to use software had been made in the early part of the programme, its actual application was delayed due to the excessive workload of Jerry Adams, and so

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<sup>10</sup> Comment from Charlie Buxton, INTRAC Central Asia Programme Manager

slowed up the process of developing the participatory M&E system. A number of decisions were made which had a significant impact on the process:

1. Whilst the software was shared with the different stakeholders and they were able to see its use, no time was spent with them in working through how they would use it. This was primarily due to lack of time, and any time available was prioritised for finalising the methodology in order to be able to move into the data collection process.
2. At this stage of the programme – May 2002 – the focus was on finalising the methodology of which tools to use, the data locations and a plan for who would be involved in the process. As six to seven months had been lost we attempted to regain some time by carrying out the data collection process between June and August (even though a number of people would be taking time off for holidays).
3. Also as time was so limited Jerry Adams proposed that if all of the data was translated and sent to him that he would put it into the software. A limitation which we had to work within was that the software could be used in English. It was possible for a Russian language version to be used but it could not be developed without far more time being invested in training and support – which was not available.

The results of these decisions were that when the data was collected and analysed, despite its richness and usefulness, we had lost the participation and ownership of the key participants and stakeholders. Almost without realising and ostensibly for good reasons we had moved from them being central to the process to them being passive actors who would carry out our requests.

This was even more significant because we were trying to regain people's trust and involvement in the process. Our attempt to 'save time' had actually done exactly the opposite and moved us the other way! Our response was to decide to leave the use of software for the time being and to focus on building the capacity of the stakeholders through developing, using and modelling the M&E system by providing regular support, workshops and mentoring.

### **Lessons learnt**

The lessons learnt from this experience raised the question of 'who is interested in a more detailed and richer M&E report?'. The following criteria could be employed when deciding whether to use software or paper-based reporting systems:

- issues of time
- ownership
- presentation of information
- involvement of partners and key stakeholders
- accessibility of the system
- skills in using the system

The use of the software was not effective because it added to the impact of the delays and the loss of ownership of the process.

### 3.12 Reviewing the M&E development process

The process of developing a M&E system with the full participation of partners was a challenge, and it was often hard to keep the priorities balanced. It was especially difficult not to fall into **the trap of developing and managing the system externally** (i.e. by INTRAC staff in order to get things finished quickly). As we moved into the next stage the onus of both owning and managing the process was focused on INTRAC partners in Central Asia. It was essential to assess what support was appropriate and necessary and when and how it could be provided.

It was clear that adopting this approach to developing and managing the system was providing some very important lessons and directions for the future of M&E. With the focus on capacity building initiatives and rights-based approaches, the lessons gained from this work would hopefully feed into a greater understanding of how M&E systems can be developed which have methodologies with these characteristics:

- the necessary rigor for data to be reliable and credible
- data to be useful to all stakeholders – therefore addressing issues of accessibility
- for M&E systems to be balanced in terms of the time needed to manage them and not a burden to those using them
- providing timely information (at the right time for decision making purposes)
- for participation by different stakeholders (with a working definition of different types of participation)

At the end of Year 1 the following findings were agreed on, and adjustments were made to the programme so they would not arise in the following two years.

- **Limited participation.** The participation of key partners in the process was not followed through in the data collection process. In part this was due to the loss of momentum due to delays in getting the indicator framework developed, but also, and more importantly due to a lack of clear roles for partners. It is essential that their participation be defined through the development and use of clear roles and responsibilities. Linked to this is the need to clarify the importance of the purpose of participation for partners and the benefits for them.
- **Selection and use of tools.** The use of a questionnaire needed to be revised. All tools needed to be reviewed and any semi-structured interview frameworks or questionnaires needed to be developed and tested before they were used in the data collection process. In addition there was a need for more training on how to select and use different tools.
- **Data classification.** There was a need to have an agreed system for saving data (computer classification) that could be used by all, not just the software developer.
- **Supporting documentation.** The need for all participants to have a clear understanding of the process and different elements – INTRAC agreed to develop a manual which would be translated into Russian.

- **Defined working group.** All of the participants in the meeting were keen to be involved as they saw clear benefits for their organisations. The definition of who would be on the working group, what their responsibilities would be and the importance of their role as resource people and disseminators to their organisations was seen as key to maintaining their active participation.
- **Support network for the group.** In order to provide support during the process of data collection the working group proposed that they should hold one or two support meetings in each country to discuss interim results and issues related to the collection of data and use of the different tools. This approach would ensure that there were no gaps in information at the review process stage.
- **Build in dissemination and feedback.** Building on the above point was seen to be essential for the working group members to share lessons about the process (not the data) to their own organisations so as to build up the capacity of their organisation's M&E processes.
- **Language.** It was difficult for partners to be fully involved in the process of reviewing the reports as they had been written in English and not translated into Russian. This was to be addressed in Years 2 and 3.

Therefore the work was revised to take into account the needs of the partners.

### 3.13 Lessons learnt

INTRAC's 'Institutional Development of Civil Society in Central Asia Programme' has grappled with many challenges related to developing a participatory M&E system over the three years. There were a series of workshops, meetings, training delivery and data gathering exercises during which partners and INTRAC staff from Central Asia and Oxford developed and used a monitoring system. The outcomes have included a series of objectives, indicators and findings that not only measured the progress of the work, but provided adequate information for all the stakeholders to be involved in the evolutionary development of the programme.

Whilst feeling satisfied with the final outcomes of the work it is important to share some of the lessons learnt and some of the weakness of the process that may help other practitioners embarking on developing a participatory M&E process.

#### **Implications for taking a participatory approach**

In retrospect it was clear that the ownership and momentum which had been visible at the start of the programme was compromised at times. A critical look at the framework of participation which we were using would suggest that we moved back from 'ownership and empowerment' to 'increasing involvement' and even at times 'passive participation'. This highlighted the high cost of an individual driver in taking a participatory approach and that a challenge in such an approach is not just in achieving a desired level of participation but also in maintaining it, which is very time intensive in the early stages.

### **The time-consuming nature of the process**

At the same time it raised the issue of supporting such a time consuming process when we did not have a full staff complement in region. This put a very heavy burden on a few key Oxford-based INTRAC staff which became very difficult for them maintain when other pressures were put upon them.

It took considerable time and effort to arrange meetings between stakeholders in five very different countries. Already at the end of Year 1 it was becoming clear that some stakeholders would not be able to participate fully and that the project would probably focus on a smaller number of partners in three countries (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan).

### **Differences across three countries**

In addition it was clear that there were differences in the three countries in trying to implement the process and that a negative effect of trying to make up for lost time was that the INTRAC staff were not listening to the different needs of the different stakeholders. The time proposed for mentoring and support became squeezed.

### **INTRAC pleasing the donor**

In order to try and make up on lost time in developing the indicators and monitoring plan, less time was allocated for collecting the first set of field data. INTRAC regional staff became more central to the process of collecting the data and, after a brief explanation, the software system was set up to be able to collate and review it, with the work done remotely by Jerry Adams in order that reports could be developed for DFID. A management meeting in the region nine months into Year 1 that reviewed the process noted that there had been a critical shift from taking a participatory approach to developing an M&E system to using the stakeholders as data collectors. The benefit of the process in terms of mentoring and capacity building of their skills was being lost and a radical revision was needed. On reflection we had unwittingly fallen into the trap of seeing the provision of reports for an external donor as more important than the process for the participants. A key lesson learnt was that when taking a modelling approach other imperatives such as accountability needed to be seen and worked out in the light of how they would affect the approach, i.e. the staff were more concerned about completing the process for the donor then ensuring a fully participative approach.

### **Accountability and learning**

Participatory M&E systems cannot put the same priority on both accountability and learning. The needs of each need to be defined and agreed, with a clear understanding by all the stakeholders

In order to take on the challenges that continually arose the programme needed to be re-designed to put the participation of stakeholders and the modelling of the M&E system as a central objective. At the end of the first year data collection process a series of review meetings were carried out. Support was given to two main groups of stakeholders comprising of representatives from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in one group and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in a second group.

### **Institutional memory**

The PME approach to the programme added strength to INTRAC institutional memory in Central Asia. INTRAC had been in the region for many years prior to the phase three programme and yet it was the close work done with partners helping them to monitor and evaluate their work that truly gave the INTRAC team insight into both the strengths and weaknesses of our partners, some of which had been partners since INTRAC's early foray in 1994.

### **3.14 Conclusion**

INTRAC has gained a great deal of knowledge from the Central Asia programme, particularly from the experiment of using the programme as a model to develop learning on monitoring and evaluation. We made many mistakes and fell into the traps that so many busy project managers fall into. However, it was an enriching experience for both INTRAC staff and our partners; our experience is clearly shown in this paper. Appendix 1 provides an understanding of the partners' experience. It is a detailed report on the process written by a group of Uzbek participants and describing what they learnt.

## Appendix 1

The main review at the end of Year 1 clearly highlighted the need for INTRAC to hand the monitoring and evaluation process, including the documentation, over to the partner organisations. This was done with one group from each from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan Turkmenistan and the Kyrgyz Republic (with some participation from Kazakhstan).

To ensure the reader can follow the process to the end of the programme the following notes were produced by the Uzbekistan M&E group, documenting the process they took and the lessons learnt from the process.

### Uzbekistan M&E group process documentation

This final section highlights the commitment possible where modelling the process and learning are seen as the key drivers. The following extracts are taken from a comprehensive report that certainly assisted INTRAC in ensuring the programme was on track. The report and a subsequent process report were completed and translated. The following notes give the reader a feel for the partners' feedback on the participatory process they were involved in.

#### Establishing M&E working groups

The work in Uzbekistan started with the objective of drawing together a small number of participants who would be interested in and committed to the process. In order to achieve this a selection of potentially interested partners were invited to a training workshop aimed at improving their skills and knowledge in choosing and using different tools for data collection. This was based on a request for this input at the end of year review. At the end of the workshop the process of developing a participatory M&E system was explained so that they could assess the benefits and costs – primarily in terms of the time they would need to commit to the process. The participants were invited to consider whether they wanted to be involved.

Criteria for selection of the participants were:

- desire to participate in the process
- desire to develop skills in the concepts and practical skills of PME
- support from their organisations to allow the designated staff to participate in all training workshops, meetings and data collection and analyses processes.

The data collected from these groups would be used as a basis for monitoring and evaluating the INTRAC programme in Uzbekistan.

The aims of the initial evaluation were:

- (a) to gather information on the activities of the INTRAC programme and analyse the extent to which these realised the expected outcomes (outputs)

- (b) to examine the role that the INTRAC training programme played in the transformations that the NGO and NGO support organisation community underwent during 2001-2003
- (c) to collect data and review the programme with respect to CBOs
- (d) to assess the impact that the programme had on relationships between NGOs and State bodies
- (e) on the basis of the data collection and analysis, develop recommendations for INTRAC on how to improve future programme activity with regard to the expected outputs.

## Addressing the principle of ownership

In the first workshop with the M&E group, the newly selected members were brought together, presented with the Terms of Reference and logical framework of the INTRAC programme, and organised into teams. Geographical vicinity constituted a key criterion for creating the teams, as it was deemed essential that the teams would be able to communicate and share experiences without any additional expenses. The outputs, which each team had to evaluate, were distributed on a random basis.

First team – Tashkent - Termez  
 Second team – Golden Valley  
 Third team – Silk Road  
 Fourth team – Khorezm - Nukus

The teams were given the following outputs:

### **Tashkent - Termez**

Output 1. The organisational capacity, independence and effectiveness of available and new partners of NGOs, support organisations and NGOs coalitions have been considerably strengthened.

Output 3. Strategy for working with CBOs has been developed and implemented.

### **Golden Valley**

Output 2. Knowledge, skills and critical thinking, connected to development processes (relevant to the problems including the development of participation, the civil society role, the eradication of poverty and gender), of NGOs support organisations have improved.

Output 3. Strategy for working with CBOs has been developed and implemented.

### **Silk Road**

Output 2. Knowledge, skills and critical thinking, connected to development processes (relevant to the problems including the development of participation, the civil society role, the eradication of poverty and gender), of NGOs support organisations have improved..

Output 5. Contacts and mutual understanding between NGOs and donors' communities have considerably improved.

### **Khorezm - Nukus**

Output 1. The organisational capacity, independence and effectiveness of available and new partners of NGOs, support organisations and NGOs coalitions have been considerably strengthened.

Output 5. Contacts and mutual understanding between NGOs and donors' communities have considerably improved.

In addition, the members of the working group made the following preparations for the stage of the secondary data analysis. Each team:<sup>11</sup>

- (a) formulated in-house working rules
- (b) appointed a coordinator for the teams
- (c) reviewed the Terms of Reference
- (d) developed an action/work plan that outlined the overall responsibilities of the group, how these would be divided among the team members, and the timeframe in which they would be fulfilled
- (e) analysed the secondary data that INTRAC provided them .

The teams were also encouraged to reflect on techniques and tools for gathering information and on potential formats for writing reports on the contents and procedure of the evaluation project.

An example of one team's outline is given below:

### **Silk Road team**

**Aim:** Evaluation of the effectiveness of the INTRAC programme in Uzbekistan according to previous activity. Current activity. Outputs 2 and 5 (from the log frame)

**Users:** INTRAC and constituency

**Use of evaluation:** Gathering information, providing feedback to make adjustments; participants gain knowledge, skills and experience

#### **Evaluation areas:**

- Contributions
- Lessons learnt
- Outputs
- Effectiveness of the activity

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<sup>11</sup> The term 'working group' is used here to refer to all the members that were selected to form the (overall) group that would evaluate INTRAC's activities in Uzbekistan. The term 'team' refers to the sub-groups that were created within the working group and that were responsible for evaluating specific outputs.

- Efforts made
- Changes
- Impact (people, organisations, society)

**Participants:** key informants

- Participants of PRA training
- Participants of the other training
- Participants of conferences
- Publications, instruction manual
- Members of working groups
- Donors
- INTRAC offices/staff

**Timetable of evaluation:** March–May 2003.

**Resources:** People, communications, field equipment, partners, consultants, specialists of the other organisations, money for accommodation and meals, fees for specialists involved, stationery

**Area:** Samarkand, Navoi, Bukhara, Tashkent

**Evaluation criteria:**

- To have skills in using tools
- Communicative skills
- Ability to work as a team

**Contents of report about the activity**

- Title page
- Introduction – to include: aims and objectives of evaluation, timetable, brief information on evaluators, Information on techniques and tools of evaluation
- Survey and information analysis
- Conclusions and recommendations

Second section with information about the process to include:

- Challenges met by the group
- Whether aims and objectives are achieved, what was done successfully? What was a failure? Why?
- Lessons learnt
- Cooperation of team members
- What helped it to work

**Action plan**

Steps	When?	Where?	Required resources		Personal responsibility
			Group members	INTRAC	
Collection of	By 1 March,	INTRAC		time	

secondary information (records, reports, questionnaires)	2003	office Tashkent			
Daw up questionnaires (SSI, SI, focus groups)	By 1 March, 2003	Samarkand	time		
Adjustment of plan	4 March, 2003	Tashkent		Organise a meeting	
Draw up a travelling timetable	4 March, 2003	Tashkent		Organise a meeting	
Evaluation	1 April–15 May, 2003	Tashkent, Samarkand Bukhara, Navoi	time, labour	Financial resources for travelling	Working group according to the timetable
Write report	By 30 May, 2003	Working offices	time		Evaluators
Adjustments and presentation of a report	July	Tashkent		Organise a meeting	Working group

## Second stage: secondary data analysis

In a second meeting of the working group and INTRAC (March 2003), the teams:

- (a) reported on their working progress
- (b) identified the data collection methods they would employ – this included discussing the proposition that teams would use similar research techniques, such as SSIs and analysis of secondary resources, and coordinate their work
- (c) revisited and refined their working plans
- (d) selected the regions and key informants for the data collection. The latter comprised of the NGOs that had participated in the training programme of INTRAC, attended its workshops and conferences, and the staff of the INTRAC office in Tashkent.

### **Example of a team's work: The report of Urgench - Nukus team**

The group was formed on the territory basis. Two staff members were involved from the neighbouring Support Centres. Sergey Sultanov and Umid Latipov have been involved in the teamwork after holding working meetings to work out the action plan because of the huge amount of work in three regions of Uzbekistan. The choice of these people was determined by terms of evaluation. While choosing, such factors as mobility that means the possibility of the constant share of information and knowledge, and adjustment of inner teamwork, and also their competence in the area of the project evaluation were taken into account. During the network training (March 24 2003, Charvak), the group discussed house rules, allocated responsibilities, discussed evaluation action plans and evaluation tools.

At the meeting of the working group, the teams presented the reports on the work done. However, whereas INTRAC had some technical difficulties for receiving documents

through email, some teams could not make the analysis of documents. It was decided to prolong the preparation time for developing tools and data collection.

The idea that had emerged at the first meeting about uniting data collection methods among members of the working group, whose outputs were similar according to TOR, was discussed once again. It was decided to accept uniform evaluation tools - SSIs and the analysis of documents. However, it was decided to independently develop tools to be able to compare the data collected subsequently.

It was decided that the INTRAC coordinator would be responsible for the issues on updating and coordinating the trips among teams of the working group. However, the stage of documents analysis and tools development was prolonged so it was decided to discuss this issue at the following meeting.

In the second half of the meeting members of the working group had an opportunity to get acquainted with the basic characteristics of a sample totality and principles of selecting informants. The information was given by Lucy Earle, the INTRAC consultant. This information was very apt as the group was at the stage of selecting regions and respondents for making an evaluation.

Home assignment:

Revision of Action Plans

Secondary Data Analysis

Selection of Regions and Key Informants

Selection of Tools for Gathering Information

Development of Data Collection Tools

Discussion of Issues on Data Collection in Groups

### Third stage: gathering and processing the information

Prior to the data collection phase, a third meeting with the working group was organised (May 2003). The group discussed the following issues:

- (a) progress reports
- (b) data collection tools – the choice of the methods of SSIs and secondary data analysis was reconfirmed
- (c) selected regions and key informants
- (d) coordination of the different trips of the teams
- (e) formats for processing and analysing the data collected – these were mainly provided by INTRAC staff members with expertise in M&E.

In addition, INTRAC staff who attended the meeting proposed additional parameters for the teams to use in order to evaluate INTRAC's training programme, such as the creation or strengthening of partnerships between the State, donors, NGOs and NGO support organisations.

The teams presented information on the work done on the analysis of documents, a choice of regions and key informants for conducting face-to-face interviews. A discussion on choosing and using the appropriate data collection tools was held again. Clearly this

was an important issue. Following these discussions it was agreed to use secondary data analysis and semi-structured interviews.

The working groups decided not to use the focus group discussion tool because of the difficulties that might occur with the selection of participants who had visited the greatest number of events conducted within the framework of the programme. It was also decided not to use questionnaires due to the complexity of coordinating them and the time needed to process the data. Some teams submitted the tools that they had developed for conducting semi-structured interviews.

During the discussion, the key regions, NGOs and NGO support organisations to be evaluated were identified. The groups coordinated the planned trips among themselves.

At the end of the meeting, the group's were provided with tools for processing and analysing the collected information, which had been developed by INTRAC. A system of coding the collected information was also given.

Following this workshop the group's assignments were to collect the information, then process and analyse it.

#### Fourth stage: information analysis and preparation of the evaluation report

The fourth meeting of the working group (July 2003) focussed on information analysis. In addition to addressing the data collection process and its challenges, the following items were discussed:

- (a) general work-in-progress
- (b) analysis of completed forms
- (c) the format of the evaluation report
- (d) the format of the report on the process and procedures of the evaluation.

#### **Example of a team's input: Golden Valley**

The evaluation was made through going to Nukus and Urgench and conducting the semi-structured interviews with key informants of the following organisations - Public Research Centre, Union for Protecting Aral and Amu-Darya, Nukus Civil Society Development Centre, Khorezm Civil Society Centre, the Society "Al Khorezmi Vambery". Face-to-face interviews were conducted with those people who had taken part in INTRAC events, with regular staff and clients of the organisation.

The Golden Valley team members wrote the report on each organisation separately on the basis of the information collected during the evaluation. After drawing up the individual reports on the organisations, the generalised report was made.

## Lessons learnt by the Uzbek groups

The strong points of working in teams on a participatory monitoring and evaluation were:

- skills of working in a team
- coordinating activities
- sharing experience and skills among members of group
- acquiring practical operational experience in the evaluation group
- opportunity for keeping a team practically without changes during the entire evaluation process
- group participation in the programme.

Despite the inevitable problems the groups managed to fulfil the obligations set in order to carry out a primarily qualitative evaluation. Evidence of their commitment was shown by their desire to pay attention to lessons learnt and to work towards overcoming challenges.

The weak points in the evaluation process were given as:

- significant amount of time needed for the process
- need of constant coordination of the main and individual teams activities
- lack of information on some components of the evaluation
- some participants from the original group could not participate in the evaluation process.

The Uzbek group proposed the following criteria for forming an evaluation team:

- Ensure all participants understand that involvement in a participative evaluation process takes a significant amount of time that can result in reducing the number of people in the originally appointed group and losing some participants.
- Some participants of the group need to be involved in the programme, for example to participate in training, working meetings, conferences etc.
- Some of the group members should have experience in monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes or have some basic skills in research.
- Defining and keeping to the team rules is essential.
- Participants of the group need to be representative of different geographical areas in order to maintain objectivity.

The development of a clearly formulated and coherent data collection strategy and general format for the reports was seen as important in order to ensure that the individual teams' work could be analysed and drawn together into one report.

The working group noted that having a meeting to discuss their individual reports and integrate them into the general report was an important step in the process.

A significant amount of time was spent in carrying out the secondary data analysis prior to the data collection process. It was felt that the group as a whole did not have enough skills in working with documents. They saw this as an issue to address in the future.

The skills needed to choose and use appropriate tools for collecting data needed further support and development, despite the knowledge gained by the group at various workshops. This evaluation process was the first time for many participants to develop questions and formats for the different tools.

The stage of processing the information, despite its complexity, was well managed due to the specific tools given by INTRAC. This helped to structure and analyse the collected information without using complicated software for processing the qualitative information.

Finally, information analysis is a final part of an evaluation. This section demands some practical skills in working with the collected data besides theoretical knowledge, their systematisation, generalisation and presentation in the form of the final report. Challenges at this stage were related to the lack of practical experience by group members but could be overcome with more field experience.

The working group of Uzbekistan came to the general conclusion that involvement in the participatory evaluation process helped them to acquire valuable practical skills. They felt that they were now equipped and motivated to carry out similar work in their own organisations.

## Further resources

### **INTRAC Central Asia material**

Praxis Paper 15 *Organisational Capacity Building in Central Asia: Reflections from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan* by Lola Abdusalyamova (2007)

Praxis Paper 19 *Leadership in Transition: Developing Civil Society Leaders in Kyrgyzstan* by Charles Buxton and Kazbek Abraliev (2007)

Praxis Note 22 *Building Organisational Capacity Through Analytical Skills Training in Central Asia* by Mia Sorgenfrei (2006)

*The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia* by Janice Giffen and Lucy Earle with Charles Buxton (2005)

OPS 42 *Who Benefits? The Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Programmes in Central Asia* by Charles Buxton (2004)

OPS 40 *Community Development in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan* by Lucy Earle (2004)

OPS 39 *Growing Civil Society in Central Asia* by Anne Garbutt and Simon Heap (2003)

OPS 34 *'Top-down - 'Bottom-up'?: A study of Women's Participation in NGOs in Kyrgyzstan* by Martina Hunt (2000)

OPS 33 *Emerging NGO-Business in Central Asia* by Simon Heap, Gulmira Jamanov, Edil Osmorbetov, Syrgak Salmorbekov, Dina Shukurova and Marat Terterov (2000)

### **Participatory monitoring and evaluation material**

*Rethinking Monitoring and Evaluation: Challenges and Prospects in the Changing Global Aid Environment* by Esther Mebrahtu, Brian Pratt, Linda Lonqvist (2007)

Praxis Note 32 'Learning and Accountability: A Monitoring & Evaluation Consultant's Perspective', by Jerry Adams (2007)

OPS 47 *Mapping the Terrain: exploring participatory monitoring and evaluation of Roma programming in an enlarged European Union*, by Zosa De Sas Kropiwnicki and Fran Deans (2006)

*Putting Policy into Practice: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation in Ethiopia*, by Esther Mebrahtu (2004)

*Creativity and Constraint: Grassroots Monitoring and Evaluation and the International Aid Arena*, edited by Lucy Earle (2004)

OPS 36 *Practical Guidelines for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Capacity Building: Experiences from Africa*, by Rick James (2001)