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**The Newsletter of the
International NGO
Training and
Research Centre**

CONTENTS

viewpoint Advocacy from the Grassroots	1
New Publication	2
ALNAP Global Study on Participation	2
Integrating Advocacy into Development Practice	3
letters to the editor	3
 capacity building news	
Supporting Southern Advocacy	4
Conference Report: International Forum on Capacity Building	5
Civil Society and Policy Development in Kyrgyzstan	6
Learning from NGO Experiences of Advocacy	7
INTRAC People	8
INTRAC Open Training	8
10th Anniversary Conference	8

viewpoint **Advocacy from the Grassroots**

An advocate can be defined as someone who organises for a cause; a supporter or defender who argues on another's behalf. Advocacy is undertaken on behalf of the voiceless; the **voice** in advocacy needs to be broadcast, heard and acted upon. This appears quite simple initially, but when the concept of advocacy is applied in practice its complexity grows. On behalf of whom do we advocate, to whom do we advocate and what implications does this have for practice at community level? Advocacy takes place in different contexts, but the **grassroots** is potentially the most powerful arena. Individual campaigners rarely match organised public opinion, and organised Northern public opinion cannot equal organised Southern popular mobilisation (Keet 2000). When advocacy is viewed as an integral aspect of empowerment, it is not simply a question of NGOs 'speaking out on behalf of the poor and marginalised'. Instead, advocacy is a natural outcome of a process of mobilisation and conscientisation of the poor (DFID 1999).

There is an emerging international division of labour in the organisation of advocacy. A potential strength of NGOs is their ability simultaneously to reach up to states and international institutions and down to local communities. However, NGOs often create an artificial divide, viewing development as a local process and advocacy as a national or international process. In fact it is important to see the linkages between local, national and international levels of advocacy, particularly in the context of **integrated strategies** between Northern and Southern NGOs. As Chapman (2000) found in relation to the Ghanaian babymilk campaign and the campaign against child labour in the Indian carpet industry:

dedicated individuals and micro-organisations at the grassroots were active and taking a key role in these high profile international campaigns. In many cases, these people had no knowledge of the international work and had no idea that people elsewhere might change their habits as consumers because of the issues... Without them, real change at the grassroots would have been harder, if not impossible, to achieve.

By having one foot in the North and one foot in the South, Northern NGOs are in a good position to build on their experience in the South to inform their advocacy and policy work in the North. However, Northern advocacy needs to start by involving Southern partner organisations. This is not just a question of legitimisation, but also of being in touch with grassroots realities. After all, the Ogoni of the Niger Delta or the Dalits of India did not wait for Northern consciences to wake up before they started to organise and take action for themselves.

Photo: Simon Heap



5 June 2001. Central Park of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Civil Society in Central Asia project, 73 year old and Bermet Stakeeva, INTRAC's local researcher.

continued on next page

Also in this issue: Rick Davies reflects on the effectiveness of NGO engagement in advocacy; Peter Oakley proposes ways of integrating advocacy into programme and project practice and Indrani Sigamany reports on the Workshop 'Supporting Southern Advocacy'.

continued

Accountability, legitimacy and credibility are three standards by which many NGOs measure everyone but themselves. NGOs often take these standards for granted given that they have moral authority based on the fact that they work for social improvement, not for financial profit. Yet when asked the question 'To whom are you accountable for your advocacy work?', almost half of the NGOs in one survey responded in terms of upward accountability to line managers, donors, trustees and boards of governors, rather than in terms of downward accountability to those whose interests they claim to promote (Hudson 2000). Legitimacy increases the **persuasiveness** of advocacy, which in turn increase its **effectiveness**. Is the grassroots advocacy legitimate, backed with any amount of power and on an issue that is urgent? If an NGO only brings one of these factors into play, the target public or private sector organisation can ignore the NGO. By contrast, if an NGO can mobilise two of these factors (with the possibility of leveraging the third), then it cannot be ignored.

As Tip O'Neill, former Speaker of the American House of Representatives, said, 'All politics are local'. Policy implementation at the local level is a highly contested political process as different interest groups compete for available resources. Thus grassroots advocacy is a political process: it could hardly fail to be, given its people-centred focus and its value-laden tools of information, knowledge and technology. Grassroots advocacy is full of dilemmas, contradictions, dichotomies of actions and results. There are critical choices best made from reasoned, articulated positions based on values and ethics. Advocacy is often defined in spatial terms, creating public spaces for issues to be aired, but time is just as crucial. Advocacy – particularly its grassroots variety – brings motion and speed to issues which could otherwise be smothered by power structures that are backed by unreasonable force.

This edition of 'ontrac' explores the concept of advocacy from the grassroots. In particular, it looks at the respective roles of NGOs in North and South and analyses ways in which advocacy can become integrated

within development practice. INTRAC is currently carrying out a research project 'Advocacy from the Grassroots', and the findings from the research will continue to inform our thinking.

Written by Simon Heap

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Further information about INTRAC's research 'Advocacy from the Grassroots' can be accessed from INTRAC's website <http://www.intrac.org/r-ngo.htm>

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New Publication

KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS: NGOs North and South

Emma Mawdsley, Janet Townsend,
Gina Porter and Peter Oakley
NGOMPS No. 14, forthcoming
September 2001,
ISBN 1-897748-63-9

Development NGOs in the North and the South interact in a global web of relationships. Ideas may be

drawn from the South, but the way in which they are taken up, changed and then re-disseminated is dominated by Northern institutions and agendas and by global waves of development fashion. Based on field research in Ghana, India, Mexico and Europe, this book explores how Southern NGOs can have more of a voice in determining the work they actually do, and how they can get more of their

ideas on to the international development agenda. From the experiences of small and large NGOs, the book reports on their recommendations for overcoming, challenging or bypassing 'information loops' on funding, ideas and networks.

*For further information about INTRAC's publications, please contact Linnea Ploen.
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ALNAP Global Study on Consultation and Participation: Beneficiaries and Affected Populations

INTRAC has been commissioned to undertake this study of humanitarian contexts, led by Dr. Peter Oakley, Research Director. It will involve fieldwork in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sri Lanka as

well as two rapid onset humanitarian situations. The study will begin in October 2001 and the main fieldwork will take place from January to October 2002. INTRAC would like to hear from experienced **consultants**

with good research and writing skills who might be interested in joining the study.

For further information, please contact Jerry Adams, Project Manager at INTRAC.

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ontrac 19

Integrating Advocacy into Development Practice

INTRAC has been involved in a number of major NGO evaluation studies over the past three years. These studies have led us to ask the question: 'how and under what circumstances could programme and project practice be more effectively linked with advocacy initiatives, rather than being seen merely as the scenario for showing the results?' Essentially we were impressed by the number of cases of innovation and experimentation that we observed that were not, however, being used as the basis for launching debate or promoting policy dialogue. For example, in Bangladesh innovative ways of working with the blind were not being used to strengthen local (or national) policy and provision for the blind. Similarly, in Nicaragua examples of low-cost health provision could be relevant to the resource-poor health system and in Tanzania innovative extension systems were being developed to support poor rural families in areas of conflict and enforced migration.

NGO development practice is rich in such examples, and yet they often have little influence beyond the immediate project locality and life span. In this respect NGO advocacy work needs to be concerned not just with seeking to influence policy and decision-making at the macro-level, but with influencing such issues in a more modest and immediately relevant manner from within project and programme practice. This has the following implications:

- identifying early in the project cycle emerging issues or practice that could form the basis for policy change and discussion at the local level;
- beginning the 'advocacy' process early and seeking means whereby project findings can be fed into local structures and decision-making processes;
- encouraging people's participation in this process so as to build up local engagement;

- careful monitoring of these issues or this practice in such a way that a clear understanding of their potential is developed and documented;
- ensuring that key project staff are aware of this dimension of their work and build it into their work schedules.

NGO-supported development projects and programmes usually only account upwards to their funders. Very few seek to insert themselves into local policy formulation and practice. However, ongoing processes of policy dialogue offer, in certain instances, genuine potential for advocacy at municipal or district levels and we hope to be able to support NGOs in achieving such a purpose.

Written by Peter Oakley
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letters to the editor

Civil Society Strengthening

Dear ontrac,

In Simon Heap's and Brian Pratt's articles on Civil Society strengthening (ontrac 18) a distinction is made between American versus European approaches to Civil Society strengthening. My experience suggests that the labels are the wrong ones. I would venture that governments and foundations have more in common as groups than nationalities. But I wonder if even that is useful for analysis. What is useful is the type of intervention, underlying assumptions and the quantity of dollars behind it. I would welcome a piece of research along these lines.

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Capacity Building or Empowerment?

Dear ontrac,

I would like to respond to Rick James' article ('Wave Watching? The Monitoring and Evaluation of Capacity Building', ontrac 18) and the theme of capacity building, which I prefer to discuss in terms of empowerment. Empowerment or strengthening of power can be interpreted in different ways. It is a process whereby individuals, communities or local groups acquire power as well as the capacity necessary to have influence on power. In other words, being able to shape their lives and the society they live in, being capable of taking independent decisions that will affect their situation and acting as a pressure group or counter to power. It results in the growing capacity of individuals,

groups, organisations and communities to influence others who decide in their place, and to determine their own future with increasing autonomy.

Empowerment must be considered at different levels within society and it must take into account the cultural differences experienced by men and women. It also entails the ability to give meaning and direction to people's lives within society.

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The opinions expressed in letters to the editor are those of the contributors and not necessarily of INTRAC. Contributions are welcome from ontrac readers. INTRAC reserves the right to edit letters for brevity.

capacity building news

Welcome to Capacity Building News No. 9. In this issue, Indrani Sigamany reflects on the nature of North-South NGO partnerships for advocacy, drawing on a recent INTRAC workshop. INTRAC's Director of Training and Capacity Building, Brenda Lipson, reports on the recent Conference of the International Forum for Capacity Building.

Supporting Southern Advocacy

In April of this year, INTRAC ran a workshop in London on 'Supporting Southern Advocacy' for staff from a number of European NGOs. The workshop focused on the promotion of successful advocacy in partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs. The participatory methodology of the workshop generated considerable discussion, and this article highlights some of the key questions that were raised.

What Drives Advocacy in Northern NGOs?

The questions of why NGOs are involved in advocacy and what factors drive it within organisations are critical. Advocacy is perceived by Northern NGOs as a means of tackling the root causes of inequality. Furthermore, a general growth in political awareness and a move towards adopting a rights-based approach or an empowerment approach are seen to be forces driving advocacy within Northern NGOs. The recent focus on the role of Civil Society, particularly in the context of transition, has also pointed organisations in the direction of advocacy. A more cynical view would suggest that advocacy is also driven by donor self-perpetuation and fashion.

The Capacities Needed within Northern NGOs to Support Southern Advocacy

In order to strengthen advocacy capacities within Northern NGOs, a clear understanding and commitment to the particular organisation's vision, mission and advocacy strategy is vital. Furthermore, the organisation's central advocacy strategy should be integrated into country and regional or thematic programmes. At the same time, it is important for advocacy strategies to be partner-led and to develop mechanisms for learning from the South. This illustrates the critical balance that Northern NGOs need to maintain in integrating partner-led priorities from the South into centrally-defined advocacy strategies.

It is important for an organisation to identify both strengths and gaps in its own capacity at both head office and field levels. Research and access to specialist skills and knowledge are important to an organisation's capacity for advocacy, as are communication and facilitation skills. Some NGOs favour having one person to 'drive' each advocacy issue and retain coherence, whilst others believe that advocacy should be anchored with programme officers.

Ideal versus Actual Relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs

Ideal relationships would be characterised by **equality**, with both partners feeling powerful, and with an element of **trust** in decision-making. Partners would identify what they wanted, and strategies would be culturally sensitive. Northern NGOs would listen to and take on board what Southern partners had to say, without claiming to speak for them. **Collective learning** would take place, and there would be mutual accountability and agenda setting. There would be control of and access to resources on both sides. Partners would move away from discrete, project-based interventions to **longer-term strategies**, with a commitment to relationships and capacity building within which funding would be secure and mistakes would not be fatal to relationships.

Of course this ideal differs from the reality. In fact the North often imposes its latest understanding of development and processes on the South, in ways that may not be culturally appropriate or indeed right. Furthermore, relationships are vulnerable to changes in Northern NGO ideology and strategy, with gaps in understanding of issues and methodology on both sides.

Funding from the North brings power and influence, and can therefore create pressure and reinforce dependence. This is exacerbated by a one-sided requirement for accountability from the Southern NGO, to some extent reinforcing colonial relationships for some partners. Relationships are focussed on results, and can be inflexible in areas

continued from page 4

such as finance. Northern NGOs can be too demanding in aspects such as the need for information, and Southern partners may feel used. Moreover, the agenda of Northern partners is not always transparent, and can be non-consultative. However, some positive developments are shared such as the North encouraging democratic and **non-hierarchical** structures in Southern NGOs.

The workshop on 'Supporting Southern Advocacy' was facilitated by Indrani Sigamany of INTRAC and consultant Ian Chandler. By the end of the workshop, the participants had spontaneously established an advocacy 'network'. They decided to share new advocacy developments and experiences, using this network as a platform for learning from each other. Meanwhile INTRAC will continue to explore the issues raised through its ongoing research into North-South partnerships.

Written by Indrani Sigamany

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Further information about INTRAC's research 'Promoting Effective North-South NGO Partnerships' can be viewed on our website: <http://www.intrac.org/r-ngo.htm>

Conference Report: International Forum on Capacity Building

In May of this year people from a multitude of diverse organisations gathered together in Washington D.C. to review the experiences of the first three years of the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB). This ambitious multi-stakeholder initiative was established in order to facilitate debate and innovation on conceptual approaches, policies and practice for capacity building interventions. The Conference aimed to share lessons learnt, examine the implications of donor policies and plan for the future, all with a strong emphasis on South-South collaboration.

Interesting case studies were presented in relation to the multi-stakeholder dialogues taking place in some countries as well as the experiences of working in alliances and networks. There was also rich debate in the small group sessions amongst organisations with quite different viewpoints on themes such as local self-governance, policy research and advocacy, organisational sustainability and leadership development. Most striking was the resonance across the continents of the question '**capacity-building for what?**' The response of most of those present was to emphasise capacity building for a stronger '**voice**' over and above more donor-oriented responses.

The Forum faces a number of challenges ahead:

- It is evident that the initiative is making good progress at individual country level, but it is unclear what the specific role of work at the regional and global levels should be. A possible way forward may be through learning and dissemination on the identified key themes, supported by the regional focal points.
- The initiative needs to deepen the 'technical' debate on capacity building. Whilst the 'catch-all' terminology used initially allows many participants to join in the

dialogue, it also risks losing any real meaning and consequently leading to disillusionment with the very concept of capacity building.

- There were two regional groupings noticeable by their under-representation at the Conference, raising the question of how to engage them in the debate. The first group consists of organisations from (re)emerging Civil Society working in contexts of socio-political and economic transition. The second, perhaps more difficult, grouping was that of the European NGOs. Their very poor attendance at the event possibly reflects a loss of momentum in pan-European reflection and debate on these issues. INTRAC is currently in dialogue with other NGOs present at the Conference on how best to address this.

INTRAC would like to congratulate the organisers of the event and to confirm our commitment to the initiative. We express our best wishes to the regional fora and focal points, and to the new Global Secretariat (hosted by ALOP, Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones Populares) and remain open to supporting the IFCB in the most appropriate ways.

Written by Brenda Lipson

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Civil Society and Policy Development in Kyrgyzstan

INTRAC has recently entered the second phase of its Civil Society Strengthening Programme in the five Central Asian Republics. The Programme aims to strengthen the capacity, independence and effectiveness of Civil Society organisations (CSOs), including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), coalitions and support organisations. The Programme also aims to improve the environment within which these organisations function by assisting CSOs to develop their role in advocating for change in the government policies that affect them. This article highlights some of the issues related to engaging CSOs in government policy planning in the specific context of the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) initiative.

The CDF approach in Kyrgyzstan aims to formulate and implement a long-term strategy to address current development problems and to stimulate effective action, utilising the country's present and potential human resources. The Kyrgyz Government claims that the approach has been agreed by the nation as a whole through a series of wide consultations at most levels of state and Civil Society and has been adopted by the President. The NGO community in Bishkek, on the other hand, has had mixed reactions to the process. While some NGOs are very positive that the Government is now asking them to get involved in the country's policy decision-making processes, others believe the whole exercise has been a sham set up by the Government to help them gain access to World Bank and IMF funding. Some argue that the World Bank has forced the process in order to get people involved in borrowing their money.

The process has raised some important issues that need to be debated by all sectors of society when the implementation phase commences during the latter part of 2001:

- Many NGOs who were asked to be involved felt they were not given enough time to digest information and papers before each meeting. For example, the Government presented the paper on March 6th but nothing was sent to the NGOs in advance.

To some extent, these concerns are understandable given that this is the first time a wide group of Civil Society organisations (albeit mostly NGOs) have been asked by the Government to become involved in developing a countrywide strategy. Furthermore, the concerns are influenced by a culture of post-Soviet fear and suspicion.

Whatever the reasons underlying Kyrgyzstan's involvement in the CDF process, it has generated dialogue between the Government and Civil Society at a public level and this can only add to the enrichment of Civil Society development. There will continue to be many problems within this process, including suspicion on both sides, but it is encouraging that they are discussing the same topics. Perhaps the gap between Civil Society and the State is not as wide in these transitional countries as has been assumed.

Over the next three years INTRAC will continue to follow the CDF process and will encourage Kyrgyz NGOs to examine their suspicions and further develop their dialogue with the Government. This will assist in developing a better understanding of the respective roles of the Government and Civil Society.

Written by Anne Garbutt
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Further information about INTRAC's Civil Society Strengthening Programme in Central Asia can be viewed on our website: <http://www.intrac.org/civil-ca.htm>



June 2001 (left to right) Bakyt Baimatov, Bermet Stakeeva (INTRAC local researchers) and Lola Umatalieva (Administrative Assistant, INTRAC Central Asia Programme).

Learning from NGO Experiences of Advocacy

Few people may realise that almost 50% of the UK's official aid budget, managed by the Department for International Development (DFID), is subsequently channelled through multi-lateral organisations. The largest recipients are the European Community, the World Bank group and the United Nations Agencies. Since 1997 DFID staff have developed a series of institutional strategy papers analysing the way particular multi-laterals function and identifying changes DFID would like to take place. As part of this process, DFID is reviewing its approaches to influencing multi-laterals and has commissioned two studies on how other organisations assess the impact of their advocacy activities. DFID is deliberately trying to learn from the experiences of NGOs and companies.

From May to June 2001 DFID contracted Dr. Rick Davies to conduct a review of the way in which NGOs monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their advocacy work. A preliminary summary from the work highlights a number of areas where DFID could learn from the NGOs interviewed; some of these points may equally apply to NGOs involved and interested in advocacy work. The main implications of the review are summarised in this article.

First of all, it is important to develop a more specific terminology to describe activities under the generic label of 'influencing'. Capacity building needs to be differentiated from advocacy. In the case of capacity building, agreement on objectives is a precondition. By contrast, in advocacy **disagreement** is the starting point and agreement is hopefully an outcome. Lobbying versus campaigning approaches to advocacy also need to be separated, recognising important differences in the complexity of the communications that can be involved. Influencing strategies need explicitly to recognise the political dimension of advocacy activities. Bi-lateral donors such as DFID will be a target of influence as well as an agent of influence, and this process needs to be tracked as well. Furthermore, donors such as DFID need to think in terms of being part of a **network** of influencers rather than a sole or primary actor. Allies need to be identified at global and recipient country level.

Secondly, in terms of monitoring and evaluating advocacy the following points emerge:

- Monitoring and evaluation procedures need to fit the task and the environment. The use of pre-defined indicators needs to be **balanced** by monitoring of **unexpected changes** and **conflicting opinions**. The use of multiple and changing objectives needs to be disciplined, with explicit prioritisation and documentation of the reasons for the changes that are made. As well as defining the end result, the expected process of influence also needs to be clearly defined. This is in order to test plausibility, to guide the search for evidence, and to weight any evidence of partial achievement of those objectives.
- NGOs have developed more methods of monitoring campaigning activities than they have for lobbying. Indicators of meeting processes have been identified but these need further development and testing.
- The pursuit of immediate objectives needs to be part of a longer-term strategy of securing a sustainable process of improvement in the multi-laterals concerned. For example, bi-lateral donors such as DFID can help build the capacity of other organisations to influence multi-laterals and help to establish a political space for influencing.

■ Despite the chaotic and political nature of much policy formulation, the normative aspects of the **process** should be emphasised and then monitored. For example, policy should be based on evidence, policies should be implemented, implementation should be monitored, and so forth.

- **Budgets** (and associated expenditures) should be treated as very important expressions of policy. Their public accessibility should be monitored as well as the nature of specific changes. The latter needs to be contextualised by reporting overall rates of changes, areas of greatest increases and decreases.
- Problems in the **attribution of policy changes** to a specific organisation's interventions need to be dealt with **realistically**: by requiring contextualised reporting (of changes caused by others), by being willing to expose those claims to external audiences, and by explaining tacit and informal knowledge of how changes came about.

So far DFID is viewing this review of NGO approaches to monitoring advocacy as part of a wider learning process about influencing work. If this review has made a useful contribution then we should see some responses to the issues raised above, either in the form of changed practice, or further inquiry into how those issues are being dealt with already either within DFID or by other bi-laterals. Stay tuned.

Written by Rick Davies,
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Website <http://www.swan.ac.uk/cds/rd/rd1.htm>
A final version of the report will be made public on the Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS website at <http://www.mande.co.uk>

Note

See http://www.dfid.gov.uk/public/search/search_frame.html

INTRAC People

We were sad to say goodbye to Meryl Newbould earlier this year, who left to pursue her career in osteopathy. She has been replaced by Bobbie O'Neill as the Central Asia Programme Administrator. Bobbie joined us in June and has previous experience with Help the Aged. Carol Sahley has been appointed Interim Programme Manager in Central Asia. We also welcome a new Administrative Assistant to our Bishkek office: Lola Umatalieva now holds the position previously held by Nazira Toktalieva, who left in May.

We offer our thanks to Emma Farley for her recent assistance with the INTRAC-NGO Research Programme as a volunteer researcher.

Written by Susan Owen

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INTRAC Open Training Programme

We are currently taking bookings for the following courses:

Relations with the Private Sector

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

Non-residential workshop, London, 29th to 31st October 2001

Organisation Development and Change

Gain an understanding of organisations and how they work, develop and adapt. Explore the implications for your own organisation and its work.

Residential workshop, Oxford, U.K., 19th to 23rd November 2001

For further information and application forms, please contact Susan Owen at INTRAC. Email: s.owen@intrac.org ■

INTRAC's 10th Anniversary Conference 'Changing Expectations? The Concept and Practice of Civil Society in International Development'

INTRAC's 10th Anniversary Conference will critically review the use and operationalisation of the **concept** of Civil Society and its strengthening in the practice of the international development system, through the evaluation and appraisal of the different approaches to supporting and reinforcing Civil Society. In the past 10 years there has been a massive growth of funding and support for programmes designed to strengthen Civil Society, especially in transitional countries. The degree of analysis these programmes have received is less clear. The Conference will provide a platform for the sharing of experiences, discussion and comparison of different approaches.

Despite what should be some challenging questions posed by key note speakers, the Conference will be based more on small groups than the presentation of academic papers. The stress will be on hearing people's experience rather than ideal theoretical models. There will also be an opportunity in parallel panels to hear from major donors in the field, activists, practitioners, and academics.

Time and venue: December 13th to 15th 2001, Balliol College, Oxford.

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<http://www.intrac.org>

