

ontrac

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The Newsletter of the International NGO Training and Research Centre

***** SPECIAL EDITION: INTRAC Celebrates 10 Years *****

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viewpoint 'Changing Expectations? The Concept and Practice of Civil Society in International Development'

INTRAC's 10th Anniversary Conference

In December 2001, international delegates gathered in Oxford to attend INTRAC's 10th Anniversary Conference. The delegates represented a broad cross-section of organisations and individuals involved in international development, including civil society organisations from a range of regions, international NGOs, official donor agencies and foundations. The aim of the Conference was to evaluate and appraise different approaches to supporting, building and reinforcing civil society. In its ten-year history, INTRAC has always sought to play a bridging role between academia and practitioners in international development. It was therefore appropriate that the Conference brought together theoretical debates on the nature of civil society with practical experience, placing an emphasis on panel discussions between a broad cross-section of people.

The Conference was structured around the following five themes with corresponding papers:

1. the **theoretical approaches** underpinning practical civil society strengthening programmes;

2. the nature of the **state** (whether in transition, stable or engaged in internal conflict) and its relation to civil society;
3. the nature of **capacity building** in the context of civil society;
4. the **strategies** and **methodologies** being used to strengthen and support civil society;
5. the **monitoring** and **evaluation** of civil society-strengthening programmes.

Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce set out the parameters of the debate in their paper 'Civil Society: a Critical Interrogation'. This started by tracing the concept of civil society in international development, from its initial unsophisticated use in the early '90s as a synonym for NGOs, to its current importance within development thinking. A distinction was drawn between **mainstream** and **alternative** approaches to civil society as the basis for their critique. The mainstream approach, which dominates donor thinking and research, has viewed civil society as part of a problem-solving agenda for addressing poverty and inequality. This incorporates a **consensual** view of relations between civil society, the market and the state within the context of socially responsible capitalism. Civil society here is seen instrumentally as a benign policy alternative to the developmental state, within a neo-liberal economic agenda.

By contrast, the alternative approach of some radical European NGOs and grassroots movements sees the role of civil society as potentially **conflictual** in counterbalancing the excesses of the state. This stresses the importance of civil society in promoting new forms of participation in decision-making; the critical question posed is how the poor and marginalised can have space for increased political and economic participation. In their critique of the mainstream approach, Howell and Pearce went on to argue that a key weakness in practice has been the lack of contextual understanding of civil society in different countries. The external aid dependence of much civil society strengthening has led to a situation that undermines the long-term sustainability of civil society: 'Civil society does not lend itself to external manufacturing.' This emerged as the central theme of the Conference.

The question of the extent to which civil society organisations are able to retain their autonomy from the state was developed further by John Beauclerk and Simon Heap in their paper 'Civil Society-State Relationships: Models and Actualities'. They started by assessing the shift in civil-society state relations from a static model, where civil society is largely defined in relation to the characteristics of the state. As an alternative, they proposed a dynamic conceptualisation of civil society-state relations which is able to include both the **oppositional** nature of civil society's role, particularly in advocacy on civil and political rights, and its potential to be **complementary** to the state in terms of economic rights and service delivery. Furthermore, the dynamics of the relationship are worked out in different arenas of government from the local to the national levels.

The Conference also explored strategies and methodologies of civil society strengthening in practice. Brenda Lipson's paper addressed the question: 'What are the specific characteristics and challenges of undertaking capacity building at civil society level?' (for further details please refer to 'A Developmental Approach to Civil Society Capacity Building', in **capacitybuilding news**, page 4). Anne Garbutt's paper, based on INTRAC's experience in Central Asia since 1994, synthesised the lessons learned and issues raised from the Institutional Development of Civil Society

Programme. A key theme again was the paramount importance of understanding the particular country **context**. In fact, much donor practice in the region has been based on and informed by models of development experience from very different regions of the world, with a lack of understanding of Central Asian societies. The paper emphasised the need for supporting the emergence of analytical, free-thinking leadership of civil society within transitional countries that will be able to forge its own models of engagement with both the state and the market.

Brian Pratt, INTRAC's Executive Director, presented a paper on 'The Monitoring and Evaluation of Civil Society Support Programmes'. Monitoring and evaluation are important in terms of answering the critical conceptual questions: does a stronger civil society actually lead to improved democracy? Does democracy lead to improved services, greater equity and less oppression of key social groups? Therefore, does strengthening civil society actually result in pro-poor policies?

A key challenge in developing monitoring and evaluation is, first and foremost, the lack of conceptual clarity on which many civil society strengthening programmes are based. In terms of developing methodologies, three specific challenges were identified:

1. **Attribution**: given the long chains of causation, it is difficult to know what effect can be attributed to the intervention.
2. Being **realistic** about goals and setting clear objectives within the resources available.
3. Clarity over **time frames**: too many programmes are very short-term in design and in vision. It is important to distinguish between short and longer term objectives and the methods to monitor them.

The thematic presentations were complemented by contributions from four keynote speakers. Dr. Alan Fowler, a Founder Associate of INTRAC, provided the opening address, arguing that civil society is not in fact a sector with clear-cut boundaries. Rather, he proposed the need for an organic and institutional view of civil society. Dr. Rajesh Tandon of Participatory Research in India (PRIA) built on this critique by suggesting that civil society strengthening is actually about analysing the space and restrictions for civil society participation in decision-making and finding ways of extending that space. Further addresses were given by David Begg of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, based on the Irish experience of social partnerships, and by Sue Unsworth of DfID, UK, who presented DfID's approach to strengthening civil society in the South.

The Conference had deliberately set out to include a range of participants by type of organisation and region. On the second day, panel discussions were led by representatives of different types of agencies (such as official donors, foundations, international NGOs and other civil society organisations) who answered questions about their own organisations' policies and experiences in relation to civil society and its strengthening. On the final day, there was a further round of the panel discussions focusing on regional perspectives.

The in-depth and stimulating discussions provided much important reflection for INTRAC as it looks ahead to the next ten years. INTRAC will continue to engage in this debate and will also take forward the suggestion of developing case studies of

civil society strengthening in order to identify appropriate roles, responsibilities and mechanisms at different levels. The Conference closed with a memorable celebration of INTRAC's 10th Anniversary at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. INTRAC wishes to express its appreciation of everyone who helped to make the Conference a success.

Written by Vicky Brehm

For further information about the Conference, please contact Ceri Angood, Conference Administrator, at INTRAC. Email: c.angood@intrac.org

A Tribute to the Late Dr. Peter Oakley (1942 to 2001)

Peter Oakley was one of the those rare people who managed to balance a strong academic reputation with a grounded and respected career in international development agencies, in a field which is often polarised between the two. Born in Liverpool in 1942, he never lost contact with his hometown and remained a dedicated Everton football supporter. Peter was a relaxed and popular lecturer and taught in several British universities, as well as being a natural fieldworker who enjoyed dealing directly with people. He worked for several major agencies such as OXFAM, Save the Children Fund and latterly with INTRAC.

Peter was engaged in the early discussions that led to the founding of INTRAC. Indeed, in the late 1980s he was a part of a group of people who felt that there needed to be a more independent space available to NGOs apart from the dominance of thinking of the large official agencies. Peter continued to collaborate with INTRAC as an Associate, and finally joined the staff as Research Director in 1999. During his time in this post he organised the Fourth International Workshop on Evaluating Social Development, with its emphasis on empowerment. He also led several major consultancies including an impact study for Danida and Danish NGOs and a review of Norwegian aid to Nicaragua.

Prolific as always, we have published posthumously the book jointly written with a team from Durham University (*Knowledge, Power and Development Agendas: NGOs North and South*) as well as the findings of the Fourth International Workshop (*The Monitoring and Evaluation of Empowerment*). At the time of his death we were working together on INTRAC's 10th Anniversary Conference. A short memorial service was therefore held during the Conference to mark his contribution not only to INTRAC but also to the development work of many other agencies.

Peter died of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) whilst working in Indonesia. In light of the concern over DVT associated with long-haul flights, INTRAC has circulated guidelines to staff, Associates and others with advice on mitigating the possibilities of suffering from its effects.

Many students, colleagues and friends throughout the world will miss Peter. His many books will remain a memorial to his ideas. We express our deepest

condolences to his wife, Maria Cristina Garcia, and his three daughters Gabriella, Louise and Taciana.

Written by Brian Pratt, Executive Director, INTRAC

New Publications

EVALUATING EMPOWERMENT:

Reviewing the Concept and Practice

Peter Oakley (ed)

NGO MPS No 13, ISBN 1-897748-62-0 £15.95

This is the fourth book in a series from the International Workshops on the Evaluation of Social Development. It is based on the Fourth International Workshop held in Oxford in April 2000 and includes commissioned papers as well as papers presented by participants. Also included are regional presentations from Southern Africa, Asia, Central America and the Middle East, and institutional statements by DfID, SIDA, Action Aid and Cordaid. In conclusion, the book draws together participants' perceptions of the current practice in the monitoring and evaluation of empowerment.

STRIKING A BALANCE

A Guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of NGOs in International Development

Alan Fowler

Russian version now available: ISBN 1-897748-65-5, £14.95.

At a time of rapid global change, development NGOs are having to scale up their impact, diversify their activities, respond to long-term crises and improve their performance on all fronts. *Striking a Balance* offers both analysis and a practical guide on how NGOs can fulfil these demanding expectations.

NEW IN THE OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES (£8.95 each):

OPS No 34 'Top-Down' – 'Bottom-Up'? A Study of Women's Participation in NGOs in Kyrgyzstan

Martina Hunt

(ISBN 1-897748-60-4)

An INTRAC study in association with the Forum of Women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, this paper looks at women's participation in women's NGOs and the extent to which this participation contributed to their empowerment.

OPS No 36 Practical Guidelines for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Capacity Building: Experiences from Africa

Rick James

(ISBN 1-897748-64-7)

Based on experiences with three organisations in different parts of Africa, this publication presents guidelines to assist NGOs and donors involved in capacity

building work to develop appropriate, cost-effective and practical systems for monitoring and evaluation.

OPS No 37 Evaluating the Internet as a Medium for the Dissemination of Development Research Findings

Jon Taylor

(ISBN 1-897748-67-1)

This is a helpful document for international development organisations who are looking to evaluate their own website. It aims to support the evaluation process so that websites can be improved as a medium for communicating research to an international audience.

For further information about INTRAC's publications, please contact Kirsty Andrews. Email: k.andrews@intrac.org

Our full Publications Catalogue and order form are on our website at <http://www.intrac.org/pubs.html>

capacity building news

Welcome to Capacity Building News No. 10. INTRAC's Director of Training and Capacity Building, Brenda Lipson, reflects on the state of practice in capacity building at the level of civil society. This article summarises the presentation made at INTRAC's 10th Anniversary Conference 'Changing Expectations? The Concept and Practice of Civil Society in International Development'. Drawing on principles and experiences from the field of organisation development, Brenda Lipson proposes an integrated and developmental approach to strengthening civil society.

A Developmental Approach to Civil Society Capacity Building

This article sets out to explore the question: 'What are the specific characteristics and challenges of undertaking capacity building at the level of civil society as a sector (rather than at other levels of intervention such as that of the organisation or individual)?' In assessing the critical factors, the article proposes that there is a need for a more developmental approach to capacity building at civil society level, drawing on INTRAC's experiences of working with organisational change. In particular, interventions aiming to build the capacity of civil society need to move beyond short-term, compartmentalised and donor-driven approaches. Instead, such interventions need to be based on a deep contextual analysis of the state of civil society development in a given country combined with an understanding of the nature of organisational processes, both internally and in terms of external relations between organisations.

For the purposes of this article, civil society is defined as organisational forms that exist outside the state and the market. It broadly incorporates informal expressions of **civic association** that may not fall within a legalistic definition of civil society 'organisations' per se. Furthermore, this definition is informed by power analysis; civil society is not seen as homogeneous and consensual, but rather interpreted as an

arena where actors play out their different interests both in **competition** as well as in **collaboration**.

The term ‘capacity building’ is defined here as an ongoing process of helping people, organisations and societies to improve and to adapt to the changes around them. The distinctive characteristic of capacity building is that it is based on a conscious intervention. This article looks in particular at interventions that explicitly set out to develop the capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs), either as a specific programme or as a component of a broader programme.

Approaches and Methodologies

The critical question in the capacity building of civil society is: ‘capacity building for what purpose’, and in turn ‘who defines the answer’? In practice, this depends on the **power balance** between resource providers (that is Northern donors, whether official or non-governmental) and the subjects of the intervention. Capacity building programmes are often shaped by the donor’s own requirements for effective project implementation and reporting, and based on the donor’s sectoral priorities (such as poverty reduction, democratisation, environmental change or conflict reduction) and regional focus. This results in a tendency for civil society capacity building interventions to be compartmentalised and short-term, failing adequately to assess the totality of the environment in which civil society organisations exist and function.

An alternative approach sees the strengthening of civil society as an end in itself: the end is for CSOs to strengthen their ability to achieve their purpose. In other words, there is an element of **empowerment** in capacity building, enabling civil society to fully develop its role of being a counterbalance to the state and to market forces (Clayton 1996).

Thus, donor strategies towards capacity building at the level of civil society are shaped by their own conceptual approach, in particular how they view civil society and whether they adopt an approach based on consensus or conflict-analysis. Their conceptual approach in turn influences the methodologies they use for capacity building interventions. Some critical issues to highlight include:

- the degree to which the design of the intervention is truly reflective of the context and civil society in question, rather than a pre-determined agenda or set of donor interests;
- the strong influence on the intervention as to whether the donor sees strengthening CSOs as a means to an end or an end in itself;
- the absence of appropriate capacity assessment methods at the civil society level;
- the extent to which design and planning methods are open and flexible.

Core Principles in a Developmental Approach

By applying core principles from the field of organisation development, this article proposes an overall **developmental approach** to civil society strengthening initiatives, rooted in an integrated understanding of CSOs and how they develop within a particular context. This is based on the following key factors:

- a clear **contextual** analysis of the nature of civil society and its stage of development in the country or region in question;
- a contextualised understanding of **organisational life cycles** and how these influence the capacity of CSOs to engage in proposed interventions;
- an integrated analysis of **linkages** at all stages during the capacity-building intervention, recognising and working with vertical and horizontal linkages between society and the individual;
- addressing issues of behavioural and organisational **change**. This involves not merely accepting cultural norms such as attitudes to authority, decision-making and gender relations, but also changing them;
- clarity concerning how the intervention will incorporate learning and knowledge management throughout its timespan;
- openness on the part of resource providers to articulate their own agenda and make themselves part of the capacity building process; in others words, a willingness to change. Donors need to adapt very different tools and timeframes in strengthening civil society to those used in the more familiar output-oriented projects and programmes.

It may therefore be possible to suggest an **organisation development approach** to civil society capacity development, based on these core principles from organisation development experience. Furthermore, the essential ingredient for a truly developmental approach to civil society capacity building must be for the subjects themselves to be the principal protagonists.

INTRAC will continue to monitor and reflect on approaches to capacity building at the level of civil society, and will continue to emphasise the need for a greater contextual appreciation of the development of civil society in order for capacity building programmes to be effective.

Written by Brenda Lipson

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*End of Capacity Building News ******

countryfocus Civil Society in Iran: Facing Rapid Change

A recent project to compile a directory of NGOs in Iran identified over 3,000 organisations. In fact, the number was so much greater than expected that the project ran out of funds before the directory could be published! The project organisers had used a very inclusive definition of NGOs, more reflective of civil society

organisations (CSOs) as a whole, and had included a huge range of organisations from writers' associations, to religious credit and loan groups, to 'modern' NGOs such as the Green Front of Iran. The main point of the directory was to try and gather some basic facts about the fast-evolving civil society sector in Iran. There are two key factors that explain the rapid rise of CSOs over the last 5 years: the election of President Khatami in 1997, and the demographic bulge of young people born during the early 1980s when contraception was banned.

President Khatami was elected with the help of millions of young voters (the voting age is now 16). One of his key policies was to promote the participation of people in the political process. He eased restrictions on the press and public expression, and pushed through the creation of democratically elected village, town and district councils. Above all, he created the possibility and space for people to feel that they could be involved in activism, working in groups, and participating in social issues. With around 60% of the population now under 25 years of age, young people are having a big impact on Iranian society. Iranian youth are well educated, politically aware and have high aspirations. Most NGOs involve young people either as beneficiaries, volunteers, or as supporting members. The education system in Iran strongly promotes religious and civic values in public and personal life, and thus it is not surprising that young people have been a key force in the expansion of CSOs.

In fact, Iran has a long tradition of active citizens' participation in alleviating poverty, promoting educational opportunities for the poor and informal credit schemes. There is a wide range of charitable religious organisations, cultural institutes, community groups, associations and co-operatives. This diversity reflects the variety of activities undertaken, as well as the array of legal frameworks available for registration of non-profit, public and mutual-benefit organisations. These traditional areas for charity work are now being complemented by NGOs that focus on newly-emerging social issues such as activities for young people, the prevention of problems such as drugs and runaway children and campaigning on environmental issues.

NGOs in Iran have evolved along quite different lines from their counterparts in other parts of the world. One major reason for this is that for the last 20 years Iranian NGOs have been virtually cut off from funding and influences from international aid and development organisations. Fewer than half a dozen international NGOs have projects or partners in Iran. Funding from foreign governments through the major aid donors (such as DfID and SIDA) is virtually unknown. Foreign funding is still regarded with suspicion, especially when it comes from government channels, and in principle NGOs can be prosecuted and accused of serving foreign powers if they accept such funding.

As a result, Iranian NGOs are strongly **independent** and **self-reliant**. Most Iranian NGOs do not employ professional staff, but rather rely almost exclusively on volunteers. They have strong fund-raising skills: holding bazaars, raising money from wealthy individuals and tapping into the very supportive Iranian diaspora in California, Germany and other places.

Perhaps because Iranian NGOs have had few international contacts over the last 20 years, many of them are keen to benefit from the experiences of other NGOs around the world. They are tackling new problems in their own society and these require new

methods of community mobilisation and programming. They also want to be able to take their place in the world community of NGOs and to share their own strengths and experiences with others. However, they face a number of difficulties: few people speak good enough English to be able to network effectively internationally, many NGOs lack computer and e-mail facilities, NGOs are fragmented and there are few resources for capacity building available to NGOs within Iran.

For NGOs seeking international contacts there is also the question of Iran's identity. Iranians often stress the uniqueness of their culture and heritage, but this can also make them feel very isolated. Iran is a Muslim country, but it is Shiite and not Sunni; its script is Arabic but its language is Indo-European. It is sometimes grouped with the Middle East and at other times with the 'Caspian Region', but in fact it has much closer cultural, religious, and language ties with West Asian countries such as Afghanistan. What models of civil society development can be useful here? The Central Asian experience? Eastern Europe? Pakistan?

In the current international context, it is even more important for Iranian civil society to be building bridges, and to identify with regional and international networks of NGOs. Recently, CIVICUS (the World Alliance for Citizen Participation) published a Joint Civil Society Declaration on the Tragedy in the United States. The Declaration was taken up by Iranian NGOs, translated into Farsi and published in a national newspaper along with the website address for NGOs to contact and sign up. This is just one example of Iranian NGOs' new awareness and desire to be part of the international NGO community. This desire needs to be fostered and supported.

Written by Catherine Squire

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INTRAC has been working in collaboration with the Iranian NGO Support Organisation Noavaran and hopes to develop these links further over the coming years.

INTRAC People

We have had a number of staff changes in the Oxford office over the last few months. We said goodbye to Linnea Ploen, Finance and Contracts Administrator, in September 2001. This position has since been filled by Kirsty Andrews, who started in October. Susan Owen left INTRAC after a number of years' service to travel in Australia, and Rebecca Blackshaw has now taken up the post of Administrator. We offer our congratulations to Carolyn Blaxall who has had a baby girl called Catherine, and welcome to Lorraine Collett who is covering the post of Office Manager/PA to the Executive Director during Carolyn's maternity leave. Ceri Angood joined the team mid-August as our Conference Administrator. We welcomed Tania Kaiser as the new Senior Researcher for the ALNAP Study and Michael Davis as Research

Assistant in October. We would also like to say a big thank you to Laura Jarvie, Joan Powell and Tim Ramsdale for the faithful and invaluable help that they give us as INTRAC volunteers.

There have also been a number of changes in INTRAC's **Central Asia Programme**. In September Lola Abdusalaymova joined the Programme as Country Manager for Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and in October Simon Forrester joined as Country Manager for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Finally, Charlie Buxton joined in November as Programme Manager. All three are based in Central Asia.

We welcome these new staff to INTRAC.

Written by Natasha Thurlow

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INTRAC Open Training Interim Programme for February and March 2002

INTRAC is in the process of developing a new Open Training Strategy that will be launched in April 2002. Until then, we have developed an Interim Programme which consists of the following two courses:

An Organisational Development Approach to Capacity Building 18th – 22nd February

This course takes an organisational development approach to capacity building, focusing on the strengthening of the organisation as its central theme. In particular, the importance of understanding organisations and the process of change and development within them will be addressed.

Managing a Participative Monitoring and Evaluation Process 18th – 22nd March

Donors' demands for greater accountability, together with the need to learn from and build on experience, have led to rapid developments within the field of monitoring and evaluation. Participatory methods have grown in importance as the development community recognises the necessity of involving all stakeholders in the process of development, in order that learning can take place and contribute to sustainable development processes.

Each course will cost £785.00 (price includes course fees, accommodation and meals) and will take place in Oxford, UK.

For further information and application forms, please contact Rebecca Blackshaw at INTRAC, PO Box 563, Oxford OX2 6RZ, UK. Email: r.blackshaw@intrac.org

Senior Appointment at INTRAC: Research Director

INTRAC (the International NGO Training and Research Centre) is involved in training, consultancy and research within the international development sector.

INTRAC wishes to recruit a new Research Director to replace Dr. Peter Oakley who sadly died in August last year. The Director will lead the growing INTRAC Research Team. Our key areas of interest are: Civil Society, Organisational Capacity Building and Participatory Development. Further details of our research are on our website or available from INTRAC. The successful candidate should have an established international reputation, experience in international development and applied research. The Research Director is a member of INTRAC's Senior Management Team.

Closing date: **Friday 1st Feb.** Interviews will be on or around **25th February** in Oxford. For full details of the post and an application form please write to: Personnel, INTRAC, PO Box 563, Oxford OX2 6RZ, UK.
E-mail: l.collett@intrac.org

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