

contents

viewpoint

Diversity and Inclusive Development: Do NGOs Engage Effectively with Diverse Populations? 1

INTRAC Publications 2

Diversity and Transition: Challenges for the NGO Sector in Kazakhstan 3

INTRAC People 3

Praxis News 4

INTRAC Conference 2005 *Civil Society Support: Is Community Development the Way Forward?* 5

Building Capacities for Mainstreaming Gender and Diversity within NGOs 6

countryfocus

Ethiopian Women's Participation: The Reality of Practice in NGO Programmes 7

INTRAC Training 8

viewpoint

Diversity and Inclusive Development: Do NGOs Engage Effectively With Diverse Populations?

Two central tenets of NGO 'good practice' are that NGOs should be rooted in a particular constituency or target group and at the same time reflect diversity within the community. In reality, these tenets are frequently contradictory. NGOs, and the civil society they form part of, are subject to and reflect the prejudices of their own culture. This is especially true in societies where people limit their trust to close affiliations of kin, race and class, as for instance in the Balkans, where there is arguably the greatest need for NGOs to repair the torn fabric of society, find remedies for injustice and corruption and redress inequality and discrimination. Instead, NGOs in such transition countries are all too weakly connected with any constituency at all, let alone a diverse one.

This contradiction is not exclusive to the former Communist states. Very few cultures can claim to be genuinely free of discrimination. The problem also extends to 'high trust' societies where belief in institutions is strong and the state can be held more accountable to its citizens. Despite better conditions, even such high trust societies fall short of equal opportunity for all. The threat of social exclusion means that racial or religious minorities and other discriminated social groups all have to continually apply pressure in order to establish and assert their rights to equal treatment. In order to do so they often need to establish their

own organisations because mainstream NGOs cannot adjust to emerging needs any better than governments. In this respect, the growth of single-issue (or single-constituency) solidarity groups is an indication of existing NGOs' weak response to diversity in society.

There are other factors that prevent NGOs from engaging effectively with diverse populations. Across the world, NGO staff are drawn increasingly from the professional, managerial middle classes, for whom grassroots participation is all too often an alien concept. In extreme cases the middle class can act as gatekeepers and actually discourage participation by the poor and discriminated. NGOs that genuinely reflect and embrace their diverse populations are exceptional. For example, between 1989 and 1995, NGOs drawn from the majority populations throughout Central Europe managed to overlook the virtual socio-economic collapse and segregation of up to 6 million Roma people, reversing gains achieved under Communism.

When it comes to ethnic or religious discrimination the stakes are particularly high. International law and NGO codes of conduct coincide in declaring principles of impartiality. In civil wars, for example, the international community has a duty to impose peace agreements that proscribe the logic of territorial separation by ethnicity. But in these

In this issue: John Beauclerk discusses the themes of diversity and accountability to constituencies within the NGO sector; Indrani Sigamany reflects on current debates on gender within NGOs; Esther Mebrahtu provides a case study of women's participation from Ethiopia and Simon Forrester writes about the Kazakh experience of addressing the need to build an inclusive and equitable society post-Communism.



Uganda, Save the Children Denmark Child Rights Programme

complex environments, NGOs are prone to error of both omission and commission. For example, democratisation programmes implemented by international NGOs in Bosnia earlier in the decade attempted to operationalise the concept of social capital. Their crude attempts at enforcing impartiality resulted in otherwise sound applications being turned down for not representing more than one ethnic group. Similarly, reconciliation programmes that oblige 'networking and exchange' to no particular purpose have also alienated NGOs of all types across the Balkans.

The evidence that self-organising associations of citizens can have a healing effect on divided societies demonstrates that the effort is worth making and it is possible to get it right. Indian researchers have found, for example, that communal violence between Hindus and Muslims occurs in some cities and not in others as a result of the intensity of inter-communal engagement in civic life. Where membership of associations – especially business associations – crosses religious and cultural divides, a kind of 'institutionalised peace system' is possible.

This example shows that efforts to improve NGO standards of inclusive development may be more successful if they approach the issue of reconciliation obliquely. Rather than blanket countries with reconciliation and multi-cultural awareness-raising and education programmes, integrating these with practical support for grassroots credit and savings movements and other enterprise-

related associations may be more successful. The question is whether NGOs – international or national – are up to a task that requires a thorough understanding of the political context as well as civic needs and capacities.

Does poor performance by NGOs in identifying and reaching discriminated groups warrant minimum standards for diversity and development? The acceptance by humanitarian NGOs of self-regulation certainly increases the pressure on NGOs to accept a **greater degree of accountability**. Governments and the private sector are increasingly required to accept measurement against international standards or corporate codes of conduct, and they are unlikely to accept criticism from 'watchdogs' that are free from such constraints. For example, the latest edition of the UNDP's Human Development Report explores the theme of cultural liberty and diversity, highlighting these challenges:

Accommodating people's growing demands for their inclusion in society, for respect of their ethnicity, religion and language, takes more than democracy and equitable growth. Also needed are multicultural policies that recognise differences, champion diversity and promote cultural freedoms, so that all people can choose to speak their language, practice their religion, and participate in shaping their culture. (UNDP 2004).

There is still much room for improvement in the ways in which minorities and other discriminated groups can participate in the work of NGOs, especially concerning the degree to which beneficiaries are active in NGO decision-making processes. This edition of **ontrac** explores the theme of diversity and answers the question: 'Have NGOs progressed towards more inclusive development?' from a number of perspectives. Indrani Sigamany reflects on current debates on gender mainstreaming within NGOs from around the world, whilst Esther Mebrahtu provides a case study of women's participation from Ethiopia. Simon Forrester writes about the experience of a transitional country facing the challenges of diversity and inclusion within the Kazakhstan context, both at government and civil society levels.

Written by John Beauclerk

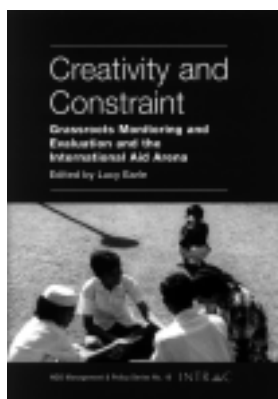
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INTRAC Publications



Creativity and Constraint: Grassroots Monitoring and Evaluation in the International Aid Arena

Lucy Earle (ed.)

October 2004, NGOMPS 18, ISBN 1897748-81-7

This book captures the dynamics and discussions from INTRAC's fifth international conference on monitoring

and evaluation (M&E). It shows the lack of fit between the rhetoric of participation currently employed by many development actors in the North and the pressures on practitioners in the South to conform to strict reporting systems. It addresses theoretical concerns as well as presenting short case studies of innovative M&E experiences.

The Implications for Northern NGOs of Adopting Rights-Based Approaches: A Preliminary Exploration

Emma Harris-Curtis, Oscar Marleyn and Oliver Bakewell

December 2004, Occasional Paper Series No. 41, ISBN 1-87748-77-9

This paper presents the experience of Northern NGOs in engaging with rights-based approaches. Based on research carried out by INTRAC and South Research among 17 Northern European NGOs, it focuses on the particular challenges international NGOs face when translating rights policies into operational reality. The authors explore the different

ways NGOs interpret rights-based approaches, how they have put them into practice, and the organisational implications.

Who Benefits? The Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Programmes in Central Asia (Second Annual Conference Report, INTRAC in Central Asia, April 2003)

Charles Buxton (ed.)

November 2004, Occasional Paper Series No. 42, ISBN 1-87748-79-5

This conference report explores some of the key issues surrounding the monitoring and evaluation of civil society, challenging practitioners to bring beneficiaries, civil society organisations and the general public into the process.

For further information about INTRAC's publications please visit our website www.intrac.org or e-mail s.windsor-richards@intrac.org to request a copy of our new Publications Catalogue.

Diversity and Transition: Challenges for the NGO Sector in Kazakhstan

During my first year in Kazakhstan, a friend and local historian tried to help me understand some of the anomalies of modern Kazakh life: 'As people with a nomadic tradition, we are curious to listen to others and are happy to incorporate new "bits" into our own stories'. Thus, he went on to explain how both the values of the Koran and the culture of drinking vodka from Russia can easily sit side-by-side in Kazakh homes. Similarly, the Kazakh State's official website¹ trumpets the ethnic and religious diversity of the country as the bedrock for its post-Soviet development.

However, the period since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the founding of an independent Kazakhstan has offered up an intriguing mix of challenges and contradictions in the promotion and application of diversity. The State has elements of this diversity enshrined in its constitution and various legal codes, but its Executive has a clear nation-building agenda, with instruments in place to allow, for example, the supremacy of Kazakh culture and language, after 70 years of Russian dominance. It has pushed through remarkable economic reforms, giving the State less ownership than is the case in most countries in Europe, and yet the economy has failed to diversify away from extractive industries. It has done much to recognise the environmental damage of Soviet policies, developed strategies to reverse it, and to protect the bio-diversity in the country, yet is unsure of where its resource priorities lie.

The challenges faced by the State are also faced by the growing civil society in Kazakhstan:

Kazakhstan did not have to fight for independence; it came suddenly and unexpectedly due to the collapse of the Soviet Empire... The transition really challenged the formulation and implementation of culturally appropriate models for the development of Kazakhstan that would ensure political freedom,

social justice and building up national identity. (Heap 2003).

These challenges of governance are both multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral. 'Such issues challenge the policy community of any society because (of the very fact that) they cannot be addressed or understood from a single perspective.' (Nymark 1998.)

And so how have NGOs and other civil society organisations (CSOs) in Kazakhstan been facing up to these challenges? In looking at the Kazakh NGO sector overall, it would appear that it has made only a small contribution to widening the political and civil space. According to a UNDP report (2002), the sector is concentrated in big cities and thematically in a 'small number of fields important for the country's development, such as human rights, poverty alleviation, charity, gender problems, vulnerable social groups, and the environment.' However, looking in more depth and at more recent trends, there is growing evidence that the NGO sector is maturing in two important areas that will both promote and reflect diversity, and enable a stronger 'policy community'.

The first trend is one of increasing alliance-building, with NGOs beginning to transcend the confining demands of interest groups. In 2003 a 'Platform' of more than 200 NGOs from across sectors and from across Kazakhstan came together to lobby against a proposed piece of legislation. One component of the draft legislation, if passed, would have attempted to categorise NGOs as either 'socially useful' or 'not socially useful'. The Platform of NGOs was clearly able not only to advocate successfully, but, in its engagement with the Government at the Civic Forum meeting in May 2003, to demonstrate how important it was for Kazakhstan to have legal frameworks which allowed for the development of organisations representing diverse interests, whether they are 'socially useful' or not!

A second shift has been from the dominance of a biased national civil society to a more 'decentralised' civil society. The NGO sector is still very much characterised as urban-based, Russian-speaking and middle class, with a tendency to depend on international donors. However, the sector is increasingly engaging with groups away from this centre. For example, organisations that have successfully provided services to vulnerable groups in the industrial areas of Kazakhstan are now linking to emerging CSOs in rural areas and helping to give voice to their concerns. Many Kazakh-speaking organisations are deliberately not aligning themselves with the nationalist agenda, but rather focusing on how to facilitate more inclusive development. This approach meets much resistance from both Soviet and pre-Soviet 'top-down' thinking.

There is still a long way for the NGO sector in Kazakhstan to go before it can challenge itself on a range of social equity issues. For example, there appears to be a lack of understanding of womens' rights and gender roles (Earle 2004), meaning that conservatism prevails on topics such as sexuality and the family. However, in a country that has a history of competing khanates and empires, and is currently undergoing transitions of spectacular proportions, the sector would seem to be well placed to ensure the 'Kazakh story' includes all the 'bits'.

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INTRAC People

The international profile of our Oxford office has recently been enhanced by some new colleagues: Svetlana Duncalf, Management Accountant, is from Azerbaijan, Gabriela Romo, Programme Support, is from Mexico and Agnes Daizi, Administrator, is from Zimbabwe. We have also welcomed other new members of staff from the UK: Stacy Hennessy, Finance Assistant, Zoë Wilkinson, Conference Organiser, and lastly Eliza Hilton, Programme Development Officer.

A move to The Hague has meant that we sadly said goodbye to one of INTRAC's Researchers, Barbara Brubacher, and we wish her well for the future. Rebecca Blackshaw has returned to university to undertake an MSc in Development Studies at Reading University and Charlotte Hursey is now working with INTRAC as a researcher on a consultancy basis. We wish both Rebecca and Charlotte well.

Appreciation is extended to Claire Cody who has joined as a volunteer whilst studying for an MSc in Social Anthropology and to Rania Sabbah, from Jordan, who adds another dimension to our international profile as she works with us until December whilst completing her MSc in International Development at the University of Bath.

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Praxis News

In autumn 2004, INTRAC's Praxis Programme focused on two key events: a seminar on 'Capacity Building in the Francophone Context' in Paris in September, and the Catalyst Group Meeting, which this year took place in Cape Town, South Africa, in October. In this issue, Praxis News will therefore provide an account of key themes arising from the debates during these events. Reports on the two events are available from INTRAC's website visit (www.intrac.org). The seminar report is available in both English and French.



The Catalyst Group. Photo: Rebecca Wrigley

1. The Catalyst Group Meeting 2004

The Catalyst Group (CG) is the international advisory group for the Praxis Programme. Its function is to provide strategic guidance to INTRAC's Praxis team to ensure that the Programme's work is built on capacity building practitioners' current and emerging needs. On this basis, Praxis provides support to practitioners in the form of opportunities for exchange, development and increased dissemination of innovative, creative and alternative approaches to organisational capacity building. At the meeting, the Catalyst Group called for the Praxis Programme to go further in pursuing innovation, as this is crucial to Praxis efforts to reinforce the link between research and practice. It was suggested that this emphasis on innovation implies a need to take risks, dare to be controversial and push boundaries. The Group also urged Praxis to be more explicit about the values on which INTRAC's mission is based, and how these values underpin Praxis Programme activity. Finally, it was seen as important to promote the quality of relationships between actors in the capacity building arena, and to build synergy with related initiatives undertaken by other organisations.

Emerging Issues

Value-Driven Capacity Building

There was a general consensus among the CG members that in order for capacity building organisations' activity to remain focused and make a difference in the long term, capacity building needs to be developmental and driven by organisational values. Currently, there appears to be a tendency among capacity building organisations to neglect this connection to their own values, as capacity-building strategies are aimed at delivery. While it is of course vitally important to satisfy clients' needs, a neglect of underlying organisational values may gradually undermine the sustainability of capacity building organisations and their work. This is in terms of the quality of service provision, the coherence of the approaches employed, and the way in which the organisation comes across to its stakeholders.

Applying Organisational Learning in Practice

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are becoming increasingly aware of the need for their organisations to learn and improve. The CG members emphasised the importance of dedicating the necessary

time and space for such learning to take place, and ensuring that learning contributes to empowering people as well as organisations. Furthermore, there appears to be a difficulty in ensuring that reflection is linked to action, i.e. that lessons learnt are actually applied in future practice. Praxis can play a role in investigating organisational learning mechanisms and processes that help improve practice, by gathering and analysing CSO experiences in this regard.

Analytical and Adaptive Capacity

The levels of analytical and adaptive capacity appear to impact significantly on an organisation's effectiveness and sustainability, and the two types of capacity are closely interlinked. It is increasingly recognised that adaptive capacity is necessary for an organisation to survive, and for its work to remain appropriate and effective. However, this adaptation process relies on the analytical capacity to read the continuously changing environment and reflect on how the organisation should adjust its strategies and behaviour. This is an area that needs to be further examined, and Praxis was encouraged by the CG members to contribute to the expansion of the existing knowledge base in this regard.

Alternative Governance Models

Alternative models of organisational governance structures and processes need to be developed, as experience has shown that the board model (based on Western notions of democracy) is not always applicable or appropriate. Different forms of leadership and participation in decision-making should also be identified, and experiences analysed to uncover appropriate practice that could be promoted.

Innovative Dissemination Mechanisms

There is a need to explore existing and innovative mechanisms for dissemination which may address blockages to communication between practitioners at various levels. It is important to recognise

that knowledge is power, and therefore the choice and use of communication tools can result in either empowerment or disempowerment. Praxis should also find ways to stimulate South – South and cross-sector communication. Meanwhile, these activities should be based on an initial mapping of who communicates with whom in the capacity building arena and how.

Systems-based Impact Assessment

Systems-based approaches to impact assessment that take a longer-term view and explore the connectivity between different elements, but are simple enough to be operational, may be the way forward. Furthermore, achievements, lessons learnt and results should be communicated in more effective ways to a wide variety of CSO stakeholders. It is useful to distinguish between **tools for the assessment of capacity** on the one hand and the **evaluation of capacity building interventions** on the other hand, and more ground should be covered on the latter area. The CG members also found it valuable to examine how donor practices in evaluation influence the organisational effectiveness of CSOs.

2. The Seminar on Capacity Building in the Francophone Context

The aim of this seminar was to provide an opportunity for exchange between practitioners from the Francophone North and South on capacity building issues, as well as to identify emerging capacity building needs and ways to move forward in the future. It became clear that the role of CSOs both in the North and the South must be adjusted to gradually changing circumstances. The **legitimacy** of Francophone CSOs should be reinforced vis-à-vis their stakeholders, in particular by improving their links to the grassroots and taking the needs of organisations at community level as the starting point, ensuring **authentic representation** of local organisations at national and international levels, but also by renegotiating their relationships with the state.

The participants also emphasised the need for those working in the capacity building arena to get organised collectively in order to **make capacity building a priority** in the Francophone context. Finally, it was felt that the limited access to capacity building **tools and materials in French** as well as the development and dissemination of **approaches developed by Francophone practitioners** need to be addressed.

3. Update on Praxis Dissemination

Recently, two more *Praxis Notes* have been added to the series:

Praxis Note 6 ‘Using African Proverbs in Organisational Capacity Building’ by Chiku Malunga with Rick James.

Praxis Note 7 ‘Working without Words: Exploring the Use of Cartooning and Illustration in Organisational Capacity Building’ by Bill Crooks.

Both are written by capacity building practitioners and reflect an attempt by the Praxis Programme to make the *Notes* more practitioner-oriented. The Praxis web pages have been updated, and the new Praxis Objectives as well as information about the Praxis Interchange Scheme can now be found on INTRAC’s website (http://www.intrac.org/INTRAC/PraxisProgramme_en.html).

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INTRAC Conference 2005

Civil Society Support: Is Community Development the Way Forward?

Monday 18th – Wednesday 20th April 2005
Amman, Jordan
Final Registration Deadline: 1st March 2005

The aim of this conference is to open up debate on the issue of **community development** and the recent resurgence of interest, on the part of international bilateral and multilateral agencies, in engagement at the grassroots. In particular, the conference wishes to examine the link between support for community development initiatives and broader aims of **civil society** strengthening.

Target Audience:

Individuals who have experience of community development and/or civil society strengthening work.
Community-based organisations and other grassroots bodies.
Local and international NGOs.
Bilateral and multilateral institutions.
Governments.

For further information, please contact Zoë Wilkinson, Conference Organiser.
Email: z.wilkinson@intrac.org

Building Capacities for Mainstreaming Gender and Diversity within NGOs

Building capacities for integrating a gender perspective into the broader work of NGOs was the main aim of a recent Gender Planning workshop held by INTRAC in London last October. The workshop provided a platform for eclectic discussions on the complexities of gender mainstreaming for the participants, who all work in the field of development, and represented a dozen countries around the world. If mainstreaming gender is the strategy or process towards achieving the aim of gender equality, the capacities that need to be developed are not only 'how to' arrive at a gender analysis, but also a clearer understanding of 'why' it is important to achieve gender equality, and within what context. Since the late 1990s, whilst the notion of gender differences in experiencing poverty is still accepted, the analysis of gender and inequality has become more complex and nuanced. This in turn is influencing poverty elimination strategies by a more gender-aware approach (Catagay 1998).

The participants on the course brought out continual reminders of the diversity of the politics, sociological framework, and cultural contexts of their respective countries. This very diversity itself requires relentless innovation and creativity in order to develop 'relevant' gender sensitivity. It also depends on a space for action to materialise and for change to take place. In order to access this capacity for change, we need to reach deep into the motivational structures of the individuals, organisations and the communities we work with. Refuting the traditional theory that the intricacies of change can be accomplished only if the stakeholders themselves have the capacity to change, it was suggested that capacities themselves are not inherent, but can be developed through raising awareness, and gaining knowledge of the skills required for gender analysis. Imperative to this process is the will to take decisive action for change.

One of the debates related to the difference between 'gender equality' and 'gender equity'. At the 1995 Beijing Conference, it was agreed that the term equality would be used in preference to equity, because equity 'denotes an element of interpretation of social justice, usually based on tradition, custom, religion or culture, which is most often to the detriment of women,' therefore rendering it unacceptable. At this conference, the term equality was clarified as the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals, which would not depend on whether they are born male

or female: 'Equality ensures that the perceptions, interests, needs and priorities (of women and men) will be given equal weight in planning and decision-making.' (OSAGI 2001).

Social change of this nature necessitates an assessment of the extent to which traditional thinking would be hostile to innovation. Since gender mainstreaming has been on the agenda for more than two decades, there is a tendency to take for granted that individuals have different starting points and understandings of the inequality that fuels the need for change. It is however necessary continuously to correlate data relating to the tensions created by the impact of change, especially because discussions around gender can be emotive. These emotions stem from the value-laden behaviours affecting us both as individuals and as organisations.

The difficulties inherent in the process of creating opportunities for change call for innovation and structures suited to particular cultural and political contexts of different geographical regions. The historical development of social and political movements in different countries serves as an important reminder that striving for equality is not a new phenomenon. For example, one of the oldest feminist movements originated in Iran. Though successive political leadership has done much to disguise this movement for change, the movement itself does not vanish but resorts to enormously creative ways of keeping the ideologies alive despite prevailing constraints. This creativity needs to be recorded and the lessons emerging could serve as useful tools for introducing mainstreaming methodologies.

The colourful diversity, on a micro-scale, of an INTRAC gender training course highlights the varied factors that people are working with in their respective communities. Amartya Sen (1992) writes that the 'pervasive diversity of human beings intensifies the need to address the diversity of focus in the assessment of equality.' This brings out the question: equality of what? In the field of international development, gender equality is seen with reference to the context of poverty: the bottom line is a better

distribution of resources. However, what 'resources' does this refer to and in what contexts? And how does this relate to factors such as basic human needs, basic rights, political voice and influence, responsibilities, opportunities and a rebalance of power?

Efforts towards achieving 'equality' are tempered by diversity and difference, both sociologically and within the approaches that are adopted: 'Even though such rhetoric (e.g. 'all men are born equal') is



NGO Workshop in Iran. Photo: Catherine Squire

typically taken to be part and parcel of egalitarianism, the effect of ignoring the interpersonal variations can, in fact, be deeply inegalitarian, in hiding the fact that equal consideration for all may demand very unequal treatment in favour of the disadvantaged.' (Sen 1992.) Thus the dual rationale endorsed by the UN for promoting gender equality is that equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and social justice, and that at the same time greater equality between women and men is a precondition for sustainable people-centred development.

Within the timeframe of the sort of short training course that INTRAC offers it is only possible, at most, to discuss generic theories, tools and models. The skills involved in shaping these to fit the diverse environments in which the participants work is dependent on individual and organisational commitment and creativity. In order for capacity building for gender mainstreaming to happen, learning has to take place at an organisational level. How is the learning from a short course disseminated into the other layers of an organisation, what methods are formulated for this to happen, and how does new information flow? The organisational environment that is most conducive to learning also has to have mechanisms that reward learning, and create a safe space in which errors are admitted and can be analysed, and where change can be reinforced gently.

Gender discussions can be intimidating if the concepts are too alien, and technical terminology can mystify rather than clarify debates within an organisation. Every organisation will react differently to assumptions being challenged, including assumptions pertaining to gender. The challenge in seeking entry points for gender equality is to manage these

reactions in a way that creates changes within an organisation's learning system to become part of its fibre.

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countryfocus Ethiopian Women's Participation: The Reality of NGO Gender Policy in Practice

NGOs have often been enthusiastic to embrace notions of 'inclusive development' and 'participation', although such concepts have often lacked a clear definition. Furthermore, the participation of women and of the very poor are stated as priorities for NGOs. But, in practice, how much commitment have NGOs made to greater gender equity? A recent study of participatory monitoring and evaluation in Ethiopia included an assessment of the extent to which a group of eight international NGOs (INGOs) have addressed gender issues within their policies and programmes. In particular, the study looked at the nature and extent of participation by local women in INGO programmes at field level.

Within the group of INGOs studied, 'gender' was often still seen as referring to the position of women rather than a broader analysis of the power relationships between men and women. Furthermore, 'women' were often grouped together and not broken down according to socio-economic and other differences of ethnicity, religion, culture, language and so forth. In most INGOs, there were no clear policies, guidelines or procedures on the promotion of women's participation. Whilst a few organisations had developed a gender policy at the international level, there was a lack of clear and systematic application of this at field level.

The challenge of translating a gender policy into practice in a culturally resistant country such as Ethiopia should not, however, be underestimated. The study found that the training of country programme staff in gender issues was not always sufficient to overcome cultural barriers and negative attitudes. In fact, training sometimes led to gender issues becoming a battleground as some male staff felt the concepts were impositions from outside. This highlighted the need for culturally-sensitive training materials,

as well as the development and use of gender sensitive tools for planning, monitoring and evaluation processes.

The actual participation of women within INGO programmes and projects was subject to a general context of cultural constraint and low literacy levels, particularly in rural areas. The study found that the notion of participation as a means (not as an end) still dominates the interactions between INGOs and local women. For example, participation is often limited at field level to mean women taking part in PRA exercises at the beginning of projects for information-gathering and consultation. In fact, local women generally had very limited control or decision-making influence over project activities.

The study took an actor-oriented approach to explore in depth the role of INGO field workers and also the local women's own agency in their participation. It was striking that across the projects visited the fieldworker took on an important **role as mediator** between the different interest groups in projects, including different groups of men and women. Some fieldworkers became resistant to culturally sensitive issues such as gender equity, and did not internalise the ideas and values of their organisation's gender policies and programmes. Examples were even found of fieldworkers acting to block women's participation. On the other hand, there were also cases of field-workers manipulating situations in order to overcome local male resistance to proposed activities that would benefit women within the community.

Within INGO programmes, achievements in terms of promoting gender equity and improving the socio-economic position of local women often did not take place through formally established project mechanisms. Rather, they were the result of the agency of local women who made strategic use of the opportunities and

spaces that opened up from project activities. For example, women often sought to avoid direct confrontation with local men and thus preferred activities that were not seen to be threatening to traditional male roles. Thus, the women participated more actively in 'women only' activities and were able to take control of them and organise co-operation amongst themselves. Often such separate activities were more successful in improving women's livelihoods. Of course, this practice goes against the position that some INGOs have adopted in terms of taking an integrated approach to gender and development (GAD); sometimes keeping women's project activities and group work separate proved to be more effective than trying to integrate women's needs and priorities into mainstream activities.

In conclusion, the evidence from Ethiopia suggests that INGOs need to develop clear, operational definitions of the concept of participation. They also need to develop specific operational plans for implementing gender policies in practice, particularly at field level. This should include paying particular attention to the role of frontline staff as mediators, equipping them with practical, gender-sensitive tools for project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

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This article is based on an extract from Mebrahtu, E. (2004) Putting Policy into Practice: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation in Ethiopia. Oxford: INTRAC. Copies can be ordered from INTRAC (email_publications@intrac.org).

INTRAC Training

We are pleased to announce our programme of short courses for January to March 2005:

Strategy Development

12th to 14th January 2005. 3-day non-residential, London.

The aim of this course is to enable participants to be responsive to changing circumstances, and to make choices from a longer-term perspective, taking into account how the investment of limited resources may have the greatest impact.

Supporting Southern Advocacy

19th to 21st January 2005. 3-day non-residential, London.

NGOs are increasingly looking to develop their advocacy strategies and capacity. This course is aimed at staff from NGOs in the South, North and East, and donor organisations who are increasingly involved with advocacy campaigns.

Managing Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

24th to 28th January 2005. 5-day residential, Oxford.

This course introduces approaches to managing a participatory monitoring and evaluation process within NGOs, and covers the limitations of more traditional linear, cause and effect interpretations.

Impact Assessment: How do we know we are making a difference?

9th to 11th February 2005. 3-day non-residential, London.

As the profile of NGOs has increased, so too has the need for them to assess the long-term impact of their work. This course will explore the current state of the debate surrounding impact assessment and review current practice and methodologies.

Organisational Development

14th to 18th February 2005. 5-day residential, Oxford.

This course aims to provide participants with a framework for exploring the nature of organisations, from analytical models to designing organisational development interventions for change.

Capacity Building: An Organisational Approach

28th February to 4th March 2005. 5-day residential, Oxford.

Capacity building takes place at various levels, from the individual to the broader societal level. This is an introductory course focusing on understanding the process of capacity building and strengthening from the perspective of effective organisations.

Managing Change within Organisations

7th to 9th March 2005. 3-day non-residential, London.

Conceptualising change as a continuous process that can be managed, this course raises awareness of the need to respond to a changing environment and recognises that internal change is essential for organisations to maintain effectiveness.

Advocacy and Policy Influencing

14th to 18th March 2005. 5-day residential, Oxford.

This course aims to give participants a thorough understanding of the policy formulation process and how individuals and organisations can influence it by becoming effective advocates for change.

For further information please contact the Training and Logistics Co-ordinator at training@intrac.org or visit our website www.intrac.org

ontrac is the newsletter of INTRAC (the International NGO Training and Research Centre). It is published three times a year. The contents of the newsletter may be freely reproduced and translated, providing the source is acknowledged. INTRAC wishes to thank the following organisations for their contributions towards the production of *ontrac*: Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Cordaid, DanChurchAid, MS Denmark, Novib, Save the Children Denmark, Save the Children Norway, Save the Children Sweden, South Research and World Vision UK.

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ISSN 1476-1327

Editor: Vicky Brehm, Researcher, INTRAC

Design: Sophie Johnson, Colophon Media

Printing and Distribution: Warwick Printing Ltd.

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