

viewpoint

Capacity Building and the State

'Building real capacity entails the ability to sustain a dynamic and productive interaction among leaders, the institutions of government and civil society.'

The shifting discourse on capacity building has all too often been led by the needs of donors rather than being based on the needs of civil society and local community. There is growing concern that despite the rhetoric about equitable relations over the past decade, practice belies the rhetoric, with donors continuing to dictate what kind of capacity is to be supported and how.

This issue of *Ontrac* explores some of the dilemmas associated with capacity building programmes in recent years in the context of general budget support and the new aid architecture.

Current ideas about capacity and building capacity have been influenced by major shifts in development thinking since the early nineties. Despite the complexity of the topic, whereby changes in context affect the way capacity building is undertaken, there have been attempts to create basic standards of good practice, particularly with regard to partnerships. There is growing interest, for example, in trying to ensure that North–South capacity building processes are premised upon local ownership of programmes and on genuine partnerships between donors and recipients.

These ideas have arisen from an awareness of the pitfalls of one-way functioning and the failure of official development programmes to generate sustainable cooperation. Subsequently, there was a gradual transition from old forms of capacity building which

emphasised raising individual technical capacities, to those that have emphasised a developmental approach that places primacy on the relevance of the broader environment.¹

The current donor approach (through the Paris Declaration) emphasises the need to strengthen the State and institutions, after two decades of downsizing of the public sector, through policies of neoliberalism. During this period, capacity building concentrated on NGOs and civil society. Much was achieved there not only in terms of embedding development programmes, but also in strengthening civil society to act as a channel for distribution of public resources and in representing the voice of marginalised communities.

This most recent transition in donor policy — reversion to support for state institutions — appears to have been led by concerns over the implementation of major initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals, or the Commission for Africa.²

As argued in *Ontrac* 33 (Aid Harmonisation: Challenges for Civil Society), it would seem perfectly reasonable to channel donor funds through the State in order to increase 'efficiency' and reduce transaction costs. However, there is increasing concern among some NGOs that this dramatic shift in policy has not been clearly thought through in relation to issues of governance and accountability, and over the ability of states to deliver major development programmes without the active engagement of civil society.

A shift in policy also has major implications for capacity building. If

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In this issue:

Kasturi Sen discusses civil society capacity building and the State in the context of the changing aid architecture; Charlie Buxton and Asiya Sasykbaeva outline the challenges of capacity building in Central Asia after the recent revolutions; practitioners at Concern share their perspectives on important capacity issues for poverty reduction; Brenda Lipson acknowledges a home-grown, long-term success story that wouldn't call itself capacity building but fits the capacity-building ideal; and Louis Callewaert discusses the realities of State–civil society capacity building within the wider global aid structures.

one focuses solely on issues of institutional capacity building, it becomes apparent that the neoliberal legacy of contracting out state functions has left most public sector institutions weakened and sometimes dysfunctional. The current policy to reverse this trend by saturating the weakened public sector with donor funds leaves room open for a loss of accountability and encourages poor governance. Some would argue that donors have developed a sense of collective myopia that could result in a return to the unsustainable days of dependence and a donor-driven agenda for development.

There are some who would argue that the donor agenda has *always* been geared to supporting the status quo. As some of the articles in this issue of *Ontrac* indicate, few of the major policy initiatives of recent times have allowed any sort of autonomy, though they give the impression of doing so (Callewaert). The fact that donors are suddenly keen to create effective, autonomous and magnanimous 'states' is part of the process of collective dishonesty, and as NGOs we should perhaps not be deluding ourselves.

If one were to examine, for example, some of the core themes of the agenda of reform such as better governance or accountability and the targeting of initiatives to support these, one would quickly discover that such themes sit uncomfortably close to the dominant discourse (promoting markets and the corporate sector) and hence *most* measures to strengthen capacity are geared towards this.

If good governance is defined as guaranteeing political and economic benefits for the whole of society rather than selected groups of individuals, one needs only to look at donor-State-led initiatives such as Structural Adjustment Programmes and more recently PRSPs (see *Ontrac* 32) to see that good governance under the guidance of what Callewaert describes as 'the bourgeois state' has failed rather miserably. It also highlights the importance of terminology — for many pivotal donors such as the World Bank, in

all dimensions of development programming, good governance means 'sound economic management'.³

By implication, the definition of 'bad governance' translates into poor fiscal practices and insufficient economic restructuring. In this context, good governance has been taken as a top-down and often donor-driven approach for public sector reforms, to the exclusion of the social sector and the needs and concerns of poor and marginalised communities who often constitute the largest segment of developing country populations.

In fact, the major development policies of the past two decades have largely been defined in economic terms, and as an essential part of the larger neoliberal agenda they promoted large-scale privatisation of essential services and ensured compliance. Issues of redistribution or accountability of governments to the poor and marginalised, who often fare high in the

rhetoric of making poverty history, seem to have slipped off this agenda again. This will have major implications for the type of capacity building to be undertaken.

It is important for NGOs and for civil society organisations (CSOs) to be able to read between the lines. Capacity building as it currently stands through the Paris Declaration and plans currently being implemented by major donors for aid harmonisation may appear rational on the surface, but there is the growing likelihood that fund-starved CSOs and NGOs will be co-opted to implement unequal and oppressive policies.

In order to prevent this, a redefinition of governance and accountability by the poor and for the poor throughout the world is needed, both in the North and the South.

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¹ Milen Anneli (2001), *What do we know about capacity building?* WHO Department of Health Service Provision. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

² Teskey, G. (2005), *Capacity Development and State Building*. London: DFID Governance and Social Development Group.

³ Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) (2005), *Good Governance Development Reference Programmes*.

INTRAC Conference on Civil Society and Capacity Building CHANGES, CHALLENGES AND CHARTING THE FUTURE

11th to 13th December 2006, Oxford, UK

INTRAC will be holding a major international conference on the subject of the changing environment for civil society capacity building.

Six years into the new millennium the world feels like a very different place from the last years of the twentieth century. For those engaged in capacity building, these changes are felt as increasing pressures for conformity with the orthodoxies of the aid industry. The space for dissent, exploration and experimentation has been shrinking as the harmonisation and aid effectiveness agendas take hold.

INTRAC believes the time is ripe to bring together those who are promoting the new aid orthodoxies with those who are committed to processes of civil society strengthening through self-defined capacity development.

The conference will explore some of the following issues:

- The shifting paradigms in the scenario of aid and the enhanced focus on the State rather than civil society.
- The enabling factors and constraints to achieving a quality capacity-building practice which maintains a vision of equitable social development whilst operating within the increasingly muddy terrain of globalisation and widening inequalities.
- The way that aid orthodoxies are increasingly frustrating civil society efforts to ensure a demand-driven capacity-building practice which is sensitive to context and process.
- The need to chart the future for capacity building and collectively move forward with strength and awareness of rapidly changing aid architectures.

Participants will be a global mix of invited representatives from official agencies; INGOs; trusts and foundations; capacity-building practitioners; and academics/researchers.

Contact Events Coordinator Zoë Wilkinson for more information: zwilkinson@intrac.org

Aid Policy in Central Asia after the Kyrgyzstan Revolution

A study of civil society organisation (CSO) leadership carried out by INTRAC in Kyrgyzstan in early 2006 shows continuing efforts by leaders at all levels to engage with the authorities. Partly this is a matter of tradition — the expectation that the State will or should solve social problems — and partly pragmatism. ‘Working with the government is hard, but we have no option’, said one of the respondents whose organisation is trying to improve the mechanisms for public policy formulation. Indeed, achieving effective networking across sectoral boundaries is one of the main challenges facing CSO leaders in Central Asia today.

The March 2005 revolution in Kyrgyzstan provided a unique opportunity to influence the highest levels of policy. For example, following active involvement in the campaign for fair elections for Parliament and president in 2005, Asiya Sasykbaeva, Director of the NGO Centre Interbilim, became co-chairperson of the Committee, considered changes in the national constitution and became a key player in the coalition pressing for a change in the political system. She claims: ‘Civil society groups would hold that Kyrgyzstan needs to open up political space for all sections of its population. CSOs should take a direct part in decision-making, and hence it is vital that there are people in political life who understand the principles of democracy and know how to listen to the people.’

CSOs in Kyrgyzstan have become increasingly critical of the way in which international aid is channelled through the state, for example in the national poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs). Successive INTRAC studies have highlighted not only the

distance of donors from CS but also the failure of state bodies to carry through consultation on the first PRS into meaningful decisions, or for a genuine role for CS in implementation and monitoring of results (see Adams, *Ontrac* 32).¹

The situation for CS consultation on the second stage of PRS is hardly better, despite some gains post-March 2005 (for instance, the level of TV coverage and debate on issues of public concern has increased greatly). Donor representatives in Kyrgyzstan admit that due to the past year’s political upheavals, there was almost no public discussion on the next stage of PRS in 2005. In fact, such is the level of dissatisfaction both in government and in CS, that the main debate amongst experts is whether the new strategy should be focused on poverty reduction at all. In spring 2006, a number of influential NGOs came out strongly against the World Bank’s offer of HIPC² status to Kyrgyzstan, arguing that this would mean a generation of further indebtedness and loss of sovereignty. The National Bureau for Human Rights recently published a critique of the top-down nature of the World Bank and IMF policies adopted by the previous president, arguing that their neoliberal policies for privatisation and charges on essential public services do little to stimulate the creation of new jobs, and as such do not reflect the aspirations of the poor in Kyrgyzstan nor the aims of sustainable development. Few CSO and NGO groups have been so vociferous in their criticism.

INTRAC, along with many other INGOs in the region, has worked hard at project and programme levels to build capacity for empowerment of communities. Multiple efforts went

into implementing ‘community-driven development’ and a ‘community empowerment network’ in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. However, the evaluations of these networks suggest that such initiatives can only prosper when CBOs and NGOs have already achieved their own momentum and autonomy.³

INGOs in the region are generally supportive of an increased role for the State in international programmes. In Tajikistan, the director of MSDSP,⁴ which recently opened a new programme linking its network of Village Organisations into local government, commented approvingly: ‘For the first time the authorities are making a cash contribution to each and every project which we set up; that is, there is increasing State buy-in. The programme coordinator of ACTED in Dushanbe gave a reason for this: ‘We cannot simply run parallel systems indefinitely. Our health education work must at some point be taken over by the government — they cannot outsource services for ever.’⁵

Coordination and harmonisation of aid brings some advantages: the earlier emphasis on setting up new government agencies was criticised by many, and the need to increase the capacity (and wages) of government staff is widely agreed. These advantages are offset, on the other hand, where the ‘rolling out’ of successful small-scale empowerment projects into enormous national programmes carries the risks of bureaucratisation and the loss of local control. Furthermore, the poverty level in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan has not been reduced as much as was proclaimed possible.

There is poor understanding of the nature of the new states in Central

¹ These issues are covered in a number of publications from INTRAC’s Central Asia Programme (ICAP), such as Giffen, J. and Earle, L. (2005) *The Development of Civil Society in Central Asia*; Buxton, C. (2004) *Who Benefits? The Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Programmes in Central Asia*; ICAP Regional Conference 2003; and Buxton, C. (2004) ‘Strengthening CBOs for Poverty Reduction Strategies’ in the INTRAC report for UNDP.

² HIPC: Highly Indebted Poor Countries. Statement by NGO Association and NGO Citizens Against Corruption, *Respublika*, June 2006.

³ See Forrester, S. (2005) *CEN Internal Evaluation Kyrgyzstan* (Oxford, INTRAC) and Asia Undeland for World Bank (2004) *CEN Evaluation Tajikistan and Uzbekistan*.

⁴ MSDSP (the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme), funded by the Aga Khan Foundation, employs over 2000 staff and is the biggest NGO in Tajikistan.

⁵ From interviews with MSDSP and Bob Deen, ACTED by the author in Dushanbe, June 2006.

Asia. All through the 1990s, external commentators emphasised the 'authoritarian' nature of regimes in the Former Soviet Union, while neoliberal aid programmes tried to dismantle them. Although presidents and regimes may have tried to be strong, the civil war in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyzstan revolution demonstrated the continuing fragility of these states. In Uzbekistan, a more hard-line regime is struggling with the same problems of poverty, plus a growing movement of Islamic fundamentalism.

In May 2005, the Andijan revolt led to enormous loss of life. In its aftermath, the US was evicted from its military bases in Uzbekistan, and many foreign-funded CS programmes closed. For agencies such as INTRAC, which has tried to build CSOs in Uzbekistan and could see first-hand how their leaders tried to work both with traditional communities and local government, this was a sad moment. The division of Central Asia into aid-funded or unfunded; US- or Russia-aligned regions is unhelpful, as

only close regional cooperation can bring prosperity — and once again underlines the iniquities of the transition period. In the space of 15 years, this region has seen huge new divisions between rich and poor, to the extent that some members are being offered EU membership, and others HIPC status.

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Poles Apart? Community Development and Local Governance in the Former Yugoslavia

Since the new states which emerged from the bloody break-up of the former Yugoslavia have passed through the phase of post-war reconstruction, the attention of international donors has turned towards stimulating local efforts to achieve long-term development goals. These efforts focus on reforming state institutions to effect government decentralisation, and promoting rights-based approaches to public administration, as well as capacity building for integrated long-term economic planning. Support to civil society is being redefined and redirected towards initiatives that aim to improve interactions between citizens and government institutions.

NGOs, especially those aspiring to operate at the national level, continue to attract donor support for activities that seek to influence government performance such as advocacy, policy dialogue and monitoring, and building institutional relationships — networks, partnerships and coalitions. At the municipal and neighbourhood level however, donors have increasingly targeted support to initiatives that encourage the wider and more informal mobilisation of members of the community by establishing community-based organisations (CBOs).

As a result, support to aspiring professional NGOs for service delivery projects is declining. The trend now is to offer resources for process-oriented

assistance to enable communities to identify and articulate their problems, develop solutions, organise and advocate effectively for action at the municipal level. In the main, this work is carried out by INGOs and international development agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as part of wider programmes for strengthening local governance or promoting sustainable return of refugee communities. A number of national NGOs are also emerging as key players in promoting community mobilisation and development in the region.

The most commonly applied approach, drawing upon the previous Yugoslav model of grassroots representation via the Commune, is the initiation of community boards or councils in villages and neighbourhoods whose members are selected by local inhabitants following participatory exercises. Council members are offered training and facilitation, as well as initial mediation with local authorities in support of efforts towards community planning and improving access to municipal services. Other INGOs have sought to promote user groups within a local institution that aim to influence service managers or relevant municipal departments. These include citizens' health committees, parent-teacher associations and initiatives involving citizens, the police and civil servants to improve public safety. A more sophisticated technique, applied by the

United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the problem of the marginalisation of youth and their interests, has been facilitation of municipal youth-group forums for the exchange of ideas to establish mechanisms for creating youth policy.

Attaining increased government responsiveness through greater communication and cooperation between municipalities and citizens is a tall order in societies whose people are still struggling with the social, economic and emotional dislocation of bitter nationalist struggle. Their municipal authorities often lack basic administrative capacities, and de facto decision-making power remains concentrated in the hands of a few local (nationalist) elites.

A mid-term evaluation of a community development project undertaken by the Italian NGO International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP) in ten municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina suggests that community facilitation, while creating valuable opportunities for empowerment of the grassroots, is insufficient on its own to improve interaction between citizens and municipal authorities. On the other hand, village councils that have received regular process facilitation and technical training have developed into effective bodies for identifying collective needs and developing action plans for community improvements. And while

it is extremely difficult to overcome residual apathy among citizens and motivate them to participate regularly in meetings and events, these elected councils are widely recognised as legitimate and representative. Village councils are also often successful in mobilising community resources for self-help projects, and they have been encouraged, through training and mentoring, to turn to municipalities for support in resolving community problems.

Increased community–municipality contact has not, however, translated into improved governance with respect to more equitable resource allocation, responsive municipal planning and better service delivery. A poorly developed ethos of public service among municipal officers, a lack of municipality-wide needs assessment and development planning, and political concentration at the national

level, all militate against substantive cooperation between citizens and local authorities. In particular, municipalities have no mechanisms for encouraging public participation, rarely consult directly with communities, and decision-making power tends to be concentrated in the person of the mayor. Approaches by individual communities to local authorities are considered on a case-by-case basis without reference to wider and longer-term planning of municipal services. This encourages unseemly competition between villages and interest groups, strengthening the prevailing culture of reward to political and nationalist allies, and deepening the sense of marginalisation among minority communities. In addition, municipal civil servants often lack basic administrative and management skills, are ill-informed or do not understand their roles. Many are demoralised by the lack of funds and are unconvinced that

the municipality has the power to change things. Interestingly, in most project locations, other international development agencies and donors are carrying out capacity building activities directly with municipal authorities in order to strengthen local governance.

The value of community-based approaches to local development and strengthening governance is limited in environments in which local government is poorly capacitated and without effective sanctions against the corrupt use of power. The challenge for the future is to build municipal structures and capacities for encouraging public participation parallel to, and coordinated with, community capacity building.

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Concern Practitioners' Perspectives of Capacity Building

International NGOs are perceived, perhaps erroneously, to be moving away from grassroots support to a greater focus on policy gains for the poor. Concern is also moving to work more strategically, but we would suggest that engagement on the ground has to remain a core part of our role in development.

Building the capacity of local organisations to drive civic-led development remains integral to our overall strategy when we develop partnerships with institutions at all levels — from micro to global. The lessons and trends we have noted in capacity-building practice over recent years can be summarised under three broad headings:

The focus of capacity building

1) Capacity building seems to be increasingly directed towards 'managerialism' and organisational development, and away from a developmental approach focusing on

positive change in poor people's lives. We should not lose sight of the end we are trying to achieve: poverty reduction.

2) While learning is happening on a continuous basis, learning about management processes seems to be prioritised at the expense of learning about what actually improves the lives of poor people.

3) Our internal organisational orthodoxies are sometimes fundamentally capacity inhibiting — preventing our national staff from contributing their rich, culturally appropriate or challenging perspectives.

Linking civil society and government

1) We need to specify what part of 'government' we mean. We tend to throw many different elements of the State together — civil servants, technical services, politicians, local councils — without analysing how differing capacities at different levels

might best be developed. With a better understanding of government we can work to improve civil society–State interaction on both sides. An important component of capacity building is the linking of institutions for mutual and public benefit.

2) There is a need for government agencies and civil society to analyse, together, the underlying causes of poverty. Currently, separate analysis leads to separate mindsets and planning and advocacy, and does not build mutual trust.

The view of civil society

1) Civil society is often viewed as a cluster of individual civil society organisations, as opposed to a broader space for (especially poorer) citizens to debate, act and link their own development needs to those of the nation. Furthermore, INGO support to local NGOs often undermines their critical role as 'facilitator of the development of the poor'. We seem to

be pushing local NGOs to deliver services instead of linking poor people to existing services.

2) The emerging focus on public-private partnerships in service delivery might benefit from the thinking behind the Irish 'Social Partnership' model, where key institutional stakeholders (the government with trades unions,

employers and farming organisations, and the voluntary sector) are forced to negotiate mutually beneficial ways forward. Here, institutions which are effectively 'unions of the poor' would need to be involved, and there would be much work required to support these, especially in Africa.

In summary, our capacity building has often been too instrumentalist in

nature and has not always fostered a deeper analysis of the roles of multiple local actors and their contexts.

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El Triunfo? Organic Capacity Building in Rural Honduras

It started over 30 years ago in some 20 rural communities in southern Honduras. The people involved were not part of an aid chain. There were no local NGOs, international NGOs or back-donors striving to prove themselves by means of targets reached or projects or programmes effectively managed.

The facilitators of the sessions dedicated to analysing the lived experience of the participants had never heard of a logframe. There were no expectations that in one, two or three years' time the results of this initiative to build local leadership would show 'measurable results evidenced by changes in government policies leading to improved living standards'.

Instead, there were aims shaped around a slow and steady strengthening of social and political awareness and analysis. There was an emphasis on dialogue and exploration, on relationship building and on seeing the whole picture. The work was based on fundamental values of solidarity, volunteerism and communal action and these values were made explicit at every opportunity.

Now, three decades and two generations later, we can see the footprints of this initiative led by the grassroots church in collaboration with the 'escuelas radiofónicas'¹ of the time. We can see the fruits of a Freirian-inspired² civil society capacity building initiative that would never have called itself by that name at the time. We can witness the outcomes of a slow and steady building of awareness of the structural causes of poverty, of rights and responsibilities and of the strength that lies in collective action: action that is identified and led by the people most affected — the communities themselves.

So it is that these twenty or so communities have access to roads, primary schools and functioning water committees whilst their neighbours lack such infrastructure. The families from these communities have actively engaged in pushing for agrarian reform and have benefited from the resulting changes in systems of land tenure.

The commitment, the values and the vision of a strong and autonomous actor for change has passed down the generations. Currently, for example, the

granddaughter of one of the original participants is a key figure in a campaign against gender-based violence. This, perhaps, encapsulates the essence of sustainable civil society development.

So what do we learn from this story? What can we take away for reflection? Firstly, a greater investment in capturing and analysing these stories of the long-term impact of civil society capacity building is needed. Furthermore, it is for the civil society actors themselves to define the answer to the 'capacity building for what?' question, and their answers may lead us in many different and unforeseen directions. Lastly, we should learn that not everything can or should be defined in terms of predefined targets and outcomes which increasingly are centrally driven, and which relegate civil society actors to being instruments of delivery or watchdogs of government.

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Thanks for the original information on El Triunfo are due to Sally O'Neill, Regional Director of Trocaire in Central America.

¹ A network of radio schools spread across Latin America in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s who were dedicated to at-distance literacy and 'conscientization' programmes.

² Paulo Freire — a Brazilian educationalist whose works, such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, generated a major movement across Latin America of non-formal adult education focused on linking increased 'awareness' with social action for change. At the core was 'conscientization' — developing a consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality.

Multilateral Aid Reforms: an Opportunity for Civil Society to Address Real Problems?

The introduction in 1999 of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes was the result of a self-critical reflection within (some parts of) the development cooperation community. It stated that neither the investment policy with public and private projects (c. 1965–1985), nor the first structural adjustment period, the Washington Consensus (c. 1985–1995), were successful in obtaining generalised poverty reduction, let alone widespread development of the Third World.

Indeed, in many countries, poverty increased in such a way that it became, as Michel Camdessus (former MD of the IMF) observed, a ‘systemic risk’: a risk provoked by the system that threatens its own survival. The cooperation community replied with (i) the PRS process that underscores the need for an explicitly organised and focused anti-poverty plan, (ii) a renewed promise to increase official development assistance (ODA) to 0.7 per cent of the donors’ GNP (Monterrey 2002) and (iii) the Paris Declaration (PD) of March 2005 aiming to improve the effectiveness of aid.

Because of capacity problems within many developing countries, most of the first generation of PRS papers (PRSPs) were developed in donor headquarters. This approach contravened one of the essential lessons learned during the structural adjustment period of the 1980s: policies should not be the result of a ‘one size fits all’ approach, nor be imposed from abroad. Nations and governments must take ownership of their proper development policies — ideally, these should be home-grown. At the moment, the PRS process is producing its second generation of papers, which allows some opportunity to rectify former errors.

We now know that developing countries should own their development policies and that donors should stop interfering in the initiation of developing-country policies,

focusing instead on their cooperation policy. It is also accepted that donors should harmonise between each other in the interests of the development of the partner, instead of competing against each other. Furthermore, donors should align their cooperation policy to the development policies of the partner and the implementation of their ODA should go through the partner’s institutions. Hence, ownership, harmonisation and alignment have become three new crucial concepts in today’s cooperation business systemised in the PD, which proves that the cooperation community is making some progress in its understanding of the problems of aid effectiveness.

Putting this theory into practice, however, presents various problems for all sides. Donors have difficulties in adapting their practices, and, though they would deny it, they compete between each other and continue to use aid as an instrument for their own short-term interests. Developing countries also struggle to focus on the long-term development interests of the population and the fight against mass poverty.

Many bourgeois development counterparts want to continue to use aid as an instrument for their own short-term interests, such that, instead of being accountable to their own population, they choose rather to be accountable to their donors and align with short-term donor interests. Those bourgeois counterparts do not want to use the opportunity from the PRS process to elaborate home-grown policies enough. In many cases it is de facto the World Bank, along with the country’s Minister of Finance or Minister of Planning who create the PRSP, and gently impose it on the colleague ministers and the national Parliament. Civil society should contribute to this PRS process, but rarely receives the opportunity and mostly does nothing. So claims that the PRSPs are transparent are largely false.

Some say that all this is beautiful in theory, but inoperable in practice as political will, governance and the technical capacity to implement the intended structures are not in place. They reject the PRSP process because, ‘poverty reduction is only a new approach of the Washington Consensus’. They say that the 0.7 per cent issue is only propaganda. They state that the PD talk about ownership, harmonisation and alignment is unrealistic, considering the realpolitik of donors and their local counterparts. Much of this reasoning can be true. But what alternatives are there? Yes, a three-year PRSP is not the same as a five-year Development Plan. Yes, the PD and the budget aid philosophy behind it can lead to (neocolonial) dependency. Yes, the global capitalist relations are not altered either by the PRSP or the PD.

But so what — are we to seek refuge in the beautiful desert or wait for solutions to fall from the sky? Those delusions should be cast aside. We must acknowledge that change for the better requires ideological, political and technical strength, and a dialectic relation between long-term vision and short-term tactics. The PRS process and the PD can provide space and means to build technical and governance capacity and perhaps even political will. But this is only a possibility not a guarantee.

It is clear that capacity building is essential in many countries whose budgetary and even technical policies are full of gaping holes, and it must be undertaken by the few institutes and CSOs that correctly identified capacity building as their objective. This may not guarantee positive results, nor is it a risk-free approach, but it remains a correct way forward. The alternative is a search for refuge in corners of absolute safety and risk-free correctness — a fruitless search.

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INTRAC Publications

Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict
Jonathan Goodhand, 256pp, £15.95, ISBN 1-853396-32-X

Supporting the Capacity of Organisations at Community Level: An Exploration of Issues, Methods and Principles for Good Practice
Katie Wright-Revolledo, OPS 48, £8.95

Mapping the Terrain: Exploring Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation of Roma Programming in an Enlarged European Union
Zosa De Sas Kropiwnicki and Fran Deans, OPS 47, £8.95

Official Agency Funding of NGOs in Seven Countries: Mechanisms, Trends and Implications
Brian Pratt, Jerry Adams and Hannah Warren, OPS 46, £8.95

NGO Leadership Development: A Review of the Literature
John Hailey, Praxis Paper 10, £5.95

Civil Society Capacity Building in Post-Conflict Societies: The Experience of Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo
Bill Sterland, Praxis Paper 9, £5.95

Building Organisational Capacity in Iranian Civil Society: Mapping the Progress of CSOs
Catherine Squire, Praxis Paper 8, £5.95

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9–13 October 06

Impact Assessment — Non-Residential, London
25–27 October 06

Organisational Learning — Non-Residential, London
8–10 November 06

Creative and Strategic Thinking — Non-Residential, London
15–17 November 06

NEW! Participatory Methodologies for Development — Non-Residential, London
29 November–1 December 06

For more information and bookings contact training@intrac.org or +44 (0) 1865 263040. Also check our website: www.intrac.org for more information on these and other courses.

INTRAC People

We have welcomed several new members of staff since the last edition of *Ontrac*. Kennedy Mbevi has joined as Finance Administrator to help the hard-working finance team and Phil Dines has taken over from Jackie Smith as Publishing Manager. Jackie has moved on after two and a half years with us; we miss her but wish her well in her new role in a larger organisation. We also said goodbye to Jenny Owen, who will begin a Masters in International Development; she is replaced by Gabriella Guzman, who returns to INTRAC after a year studying for a Masters in Forced Migration. Meanwhile, our Open Training Manager, Gaby Romo, will start her six-month maternity leave in September — we wish her the best of luck and happiness with her baby. Olga

Savage will join us to provide maternity cover in Open Training. Elery Algma has also left her post as Office Administrator for a role in finance at the University of Oxford; her efficient work and dry sense of humour will be greatly missed, but we are pleased to welcome Ghislaine Safari into this role. We are also delighted to congratulate Resources Manager Shelagh Windsor-Richards on her recent graduation with an MSc in Responsibility & Business Practice from the University of Bath.

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