

viewpoint

Missing the Point?

Capacity building is not just the flavour of the month — it has become the flavour of the decade. Donors and international NGOs continue to invest heavily in capacity building of civil society. Many are looking for civil society to deliver predetermined and measurable results. Resources are spent on research and conferences dedicated to discussing the technical challenges we face in this work. But have we lost the vision of the ‘transformational’ — the challenge to the status quo that will lead to *fundamental changes* at all levels in our societies and in ourselves? Has our moral outrage at the injustices and inequities in the world been blunted by the search for a ‘robust’ practice? These are critical questions facing all of us who are engaged in this work. Finding a meeting point between our values and our practice may be the crucial issue that we need to address at this moment.

Has our moral outrage at the injustices and inequities in the world been blunted by the search for a ‘robust’ practice?

This edition of *Ontrac* explores the discussions and reflections from INTRAC’s Anniversary Conference on civil society capacity building, which brought together 150 participants from over 40 countries.

The dominant approach

In the last few years, the official bilateral and multilateral agencies and the Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD) governments have invested increasing amounts of time and resources in capacity building. The ‘Good Governance’



A clear focus on vision and values is needed to address global inequity and poverty

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programmes of some official agencies aim to build civil society capacity to hold governments to account. The security and ‘War against Terror’ agendas of certain governments

have led to a focused effort to invest in reform and capacity building programmes in parts of the world previously considered a low priority. Ongoing efforts to push towards the Millennium Development Goals and ensure more effective humanitarian action have also led to the sustained importance of civil society capacity building.

The dominant model of capacity building in these initiatives is highly instrumental. It views civil society actors as fulfilling roles largely predefined by others (service delivery, policy influencing, ‘watchdogs’). Support is offered, but is conditional upon the recipient’s contribution to the donor’s objectives. Success is measured in terms of donor-defined targets, indicators of capacity development or other

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In this issue:

Brenda Lipson calls for a realignment from the current practice-focused thinking to a values-based approach • a case study from Sri Lanka illustrates collective ownership and a commitment to context-specific change • Rick James argues for a people-centred focus for implementing change processes • an Oxfam Novib perspective on the issues around capacity building today • an example from Macedonia demonstrates sustainability through organisational development rather than project funding.

‘deliverables’. Timeframes, resource allocation and implementation mechanisms are almost exclusively defined according to the needs and interests of the donor.

A recent survey of 68 INGOs showed that this instrumental approach was not confined to official agencies.¹ INGO support for capacity building clearly reflected their own organisational interests, with an emphasis on the ‘fit’ and contribution that this work would make towards their own, broader development targets. In the majority of cases, the implementation role of INGO staff did not appear to be under question, and there appeared to be little commitment to investing in sustainable, local capacity to support the development of civil society organisations (CSOs).

The importance of vision and values

INTRAC believes that CSOs are critical actors for change and development *in their own right*. This means that they should have the confidence and capacity to make their own choices about whether or not, and how, they engage with the state or other actors. An intrinsic part of this process is the freedom to choose whether to fundamentally challenge the existing status quo of power relations — either in society at large, or within the microcosm of the organisation or community. This vision and value-set shape INTRAC’s motivation for capacity building — the ‘why’ INTRAC is engaged in this work. The vision and values should also inform our choices about which ‘good practice’ principles will guide us, which methods we use, which relationships we develop and which formal arrangements we agree to.

Others may not share this vision and set of values. Yet those of us engaged in civil society capacity building ought to discuss our distinct visions of change and related values. We rarely articulate them, or

express what is important to us, for example by means of ‘value statements’ for our capacity building work. Instead, we confine our discussions to the less contentious questions about the ‘how’ of capacity building — the ‘good practice’ principles, conceptual frameworks, innovative methodologies and practical tools. We seek common ground and shared lesson learning, and we talk increasingly of building a ‘robust’ practice. This is all necessary, but in doing so, we may be coming dangerously close to a technocratic approach — an overemphasis on the technical at the cost of the moral or

We are now faced with a critical challenge ... to clearly articulate our stand on the power dynamics in our capacity building initiatives. It is not a question of fine-tuning: we need transformation.

values base to our work.

A transformational approach?

It has been argued that capacity building is not neutral as it inevitably deals with, and reflects, our values and power dynamics in relation to change. (Rick James explores these issues in more detail on p. 4) Many recognise and accept this statement in theory, but do not act on it. We are now faced with a critical challenge. We have to make our values explicit. We need to clearly articulate our stand on the power



Brenda Lipson presents at INTRAC’s civil society capacity building conference

dynamics that we experience in our capacity building initiatives. It is not a question of fine-tuning: we need transformation.

To make such a change, it is important to first explore what characterises ‘transformational’ capacity building practice. The ‘why’ and the ‘how’ are essential and interrelated, and we need to address both simultaneously. The search for this mutual reinforcement may lead us to innovations that encourage a ‘robust’ capacity building practice grounded in strong and *clearly articulated* values.

Concretely, this could lead to:

- an openness to supporting actions which challenge the accepted models of development, and which question the predefined roles assigned to civil society actors (as exemplified in the following article from Sri Lanka);
- a preparedness to be held accountable not just for the results of the capacity building work, but also for the way in which those results were achieved;
- a challenging of the ways in which the resources for this work are controlled;
- a strategic approach to ensure sustainable local support capacity (such as that suggested by Saso Klekovski on p. 6).

Now is the time to search for the collective voice on these matters, and to pool our thoughts, hopes and aspirations to make transformation a reality. If we do not make our voice known, we will miss the point.

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¹ Lipson, B. and Warren, H. (2006) ‘Taking Stock’ – A Snapshot of INGO Engagement in Civil Society Capacity Building. INTRAC PowerPoint presentation. <http://www.intrac.org/pages/cbprogramme.html>

Collective Ownership in Serendip

The experience of Udan Fernando in Sri Lanka illustrates how a rigid donor-defined approach was successfully challenged by collective ownership to bring about a more effective, context-specific programme.

In 1994, on the island of Serendip (an old Arabic name for Sri Lanka), a ceasefire was announced to put a halt to 17 years of war, torture, disappearances, repression and brutality from all three warring factions.

During the ceasefire, Sri Lankan NGOs, both Sinhala and Tamil, could finally plan to fill the space which the government was willing to share, with funding and training support available for a group of 80 NGOs from European partners.

The donor initiative

At this time, nobody was using the term 'capacity building'. The donor INGOs simply wanted to make their local NGO (LNGO) partners more 'appropriate for funding'. The donors distributed a questionnaire to partners to assess their training needs. Based on this, two workshops on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation were arranged by the donors.

Udan Fernando was appointed coordinator of the Steering Committee, and became the link between the LNGOs and donors in this process. The Steering Committee comprised a few trusted, well-known Sri Lankans with pre-existing relationships with the donors. They were not capacity building experts, neither were they from NGOs — rather, they came from trades unions, leftist political parties and from radical religious groups.

'Stealing the initiative'

After some deliberation about the proposed programme, the Steering Committee expressed reservations that the technical training would have no impact unless it was grounded in the LNGOs' everyday context. Steering Committee members visited the LNGOs to have in-depth discussions about the specific issues that the organisations were confronting.

Although LNGOs were asked the same questions as in the donor questionnaire,

they received entirely different answers. The LNGOs had told the donors that they needed technical skills such as reporting, planning and financial management. But with the Steering Committee members, the LNGOs had a different issue, namely how to adapt the reactive strategies of civil society in wartime to the stable, post-conflict Sri Lanka. Out of this consultation emerged the idea of a course in 'Training of Trainers', and a programme that would confront the tensions inherent in their post-war context.

Would the sessions be too politically charged and sensitive, particularly considering the recent end of hostilities?

The INGOs were initially unconvinced by these suggestions. Would the sessions be too politically charged and sensitive, particularly considering the recent end to hostilities? But the Steering Committee argued that, while discussions between Sinhala and Tamil groups might be difficult, they were essential to achieving a worthwhile programme. Ultimately, the donors allowed the Steering Committee non-experts to experiment with their ambitious plan.

Taking a risk

And so the programme began. Some 40 NGO leaders were trained over three years. Significantly, both Tamil and Sinhala participants, trainers and translators were included in the same programme. Over the years, the new trainers used their skills both inside and outside their own organisations, though not necessarily in the way that the donors had intended.

After four and a half years, donor interest in continued funding had waned, as they had envisaged a specific, time-bound event, rather than an ongoing project. But the Steering Committee took a risk and carried on with the process, encouraging participants of the 'Training of Trainers' course to form a pool of 'facilitators for hire'. Gradually, the members began designing their own training and consultancy programmes for other LNGOs.



Hindu Tsunami survivor camp in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, a Tamil region.

© 2005 Todd Shapera, Courtesy of Photoshare

Lessons from Sri Lanka

- Dependency on donor funding can restrict openness and produce a distorted perspective of the type of capacity building required.
- Trainers and consultants must have strong leadership qualities and be respected by the community that they are trying to change.
- Internal discussion and consensus among NGOs can produce a stronger, unified voice to convince donors of the legitimacy of improved plans for effective capacity building efforts.
- Capacity building is not a static concept, but should evolve with the changing environment and the beneficiaries' needs throughout the process.

So in the end, how successful was the process? In terms of the initial donor purpose — to 'professionalise' these organisations and to streamline a funding relationship — the project appears to have failed. However, in the long run, the trainers became very effective leaders in their respective regions — some on a national level. This shows that capacity building processes should be flexible enough to respond to serendipitous opportunities, which can result in more effective and far-reaching outcomes than those planned at the outset.

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The Praxis Note by Udan Fernando on which this article is based is accessible from <http://www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisNote29.html>

Breathing Life into Capacity Building

We already know a great deal about good practice in capacity building, so why then do we fail to follow what we know? Personal experience tells us that change is a complex, dynamic, emotional process. But when we approach organisational change, we forget all this. We treat organisations as lifeless objects — logical machines, not living systems. The jargon we use implies capacity can be built from outside, as easily as a house. To make a difference, we need to put ‘life’ — the human dimension of change — into our capacity building practice.

This perspective came through strongly in a recent INTRAC review of capacity building practice (James, 2007). Over the last four years, practitioners from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe documented evidence of their learning in 20 Praxis Papers and 32 Praxis Notes.

Think for a moment about your life. How have you come to be who you are today? We are products of many influences, including:

- our own desires,
- outside influences and events,
- opportunities,
- friends and mentors,
- family support.

The Praxis review revealed similar influences in capacity building.

Wanting to change

Our own desires are at the heart of how we have developed over time. Individuals — and similarly organisations and societies — will not change for the better without a strong internal desire to do so. The most common fault of capacity building is that the motive for change is external — recommended by an outsider, often the donor. The ‘client’ (civil society organisation [CSO]) often does not really feel a particular need for change, but accepts what is suggested.

We all know from New Year's resolutions that planning to change and actually changing are not the same thing!

Such acquiescence is not the same as ownership. We need authentic ownership because change requires commitment. Capacity building shifts relationships and power, which disturbs the comfortable status quo.

People at the centre

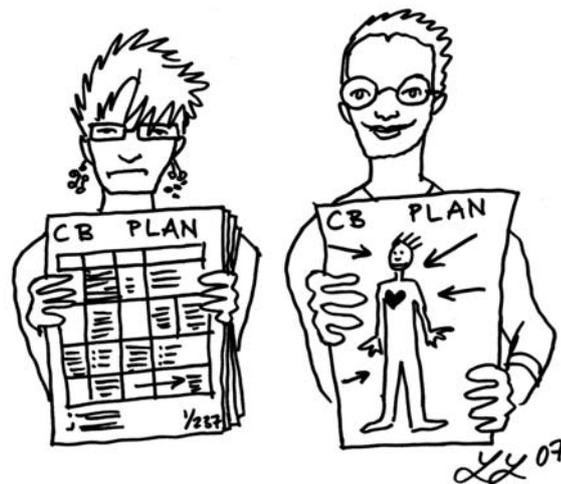
Outside influences and events also shape who we become. The importance of the personal is clear from the Praxis experience of capacity building.

There are clear benefits from using methods that develop the desire for change from within; are people-centred and deal with relationships; engage with people's values and emotions; use a variety of methods (including experiential approaches where appropriate); and explicitly adapt to the particular context and culture.

Making change happen

In our own lives, we change as a result of taking opportunities. But in capacity building, we frequently overlook the need to create the opportunity to implement change. Participants return inspired from training, but do not have the authority to change things. Organisations plan to focus their strategy, but get overtaken by funding demands. We also may assume that once an ‘event’ has taken place, capacity has been built. But we all know from New Year's resolutions that planning to change and actually changing are not the same thing!

We need to focus on the process of implementing change, not just its planning. This may mean more follow-through, in the form of return visits to the client, for example. It may also mean a modular approach, such as splitting



People-centred capacity building

training and consultancies into a series of events over a longer timeframe.

Supporters

Just as we are influenced by friends and role models in our own lives, so Praxis highlights the important contribution of the people who provide capacity building (consultants, coaches, trainers). They can inspire, challenge and give ideas. They should encourage people and organisations to question who they want to be and what they want to do. They need to earn the respect of clients and have the skills and attitudes to facilitate change processes in others.

Investment

One final input into our personal development is our own education. Our families have usually covered the cost in taxes or fees. In the same way, the cost of capacity building needs to be met by far-sighted donors. For them, capacity building should be an investment in the interests of the CSO, not a risk management exercise for themselves. They should be prepared to relinquish control of the targets, as well as the timeframe, if necessary.

Determination, courage and humility

So good practice principles of capacity are fairly clear. The real capacity building mystery is why we do not implement

them. There are undoubtedly constraints on resources, both skills and money. But more importantly, what is lacking is the will to put these principles into practice and a clear understanding of the dynamics of relations within organisations.

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Local CSOs, capacity building providers and donors must all take responsibility for their contribution to capacity building. For local CSOs, it may mean facing hard truths about themselves. The common excuse of 'if only we had the money' needs to give way to a passion for self-improvement. For capacity building providers, it means developing the people-centred skills and attitudes needed to help clients effectively over the long term. For international NGOs and donors, it means being prepared to fund and catalyse, rather than to control change.

All this takes determination, courage and humility. Not easy, but absolutely essential, life-giving elements in any process that brings change for the better — including capacity building.

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This article is adapted from 'Praxis Paper 18: Investigating the Mystery of Capacity Building: Learning from the Praxis Programme', available from <http://www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisPaper18.html>.

'Taking Stock': An Oxfam Perspective on Capacity Building

Marjolein Brouwer from Oxfam Novib describes her reflections on the capacity building conference and suggests some next steps to be taken forward.

I was very happy to attend the capacity building conference organised by INTRAC to mark its fifteenth anniversary. Not only was it a great moment to catch up with old acquaintances and meet new and interesting people, but above all it was great to have some time to familiarise myself with a subject that is relatively new to me. This may come as a surprise to some, as within Oxfam Novib, I am the main capacity building (CB) resource. This is all the more noteworthy as Oxfam Novib is one of the happy few named in INTRAC's 'Taking Stock' paper as the 'smaller "core" of responses that have a more complex understanding of the realities and potential of civil society capacity building work.'¹

I might suggest that we should also develop guidelines for good consultancy practice

The Oxfam Novib approach

Oxfam Novib conducts CB through strategic funding relationships with over 800 counterparts. Where counterparts identify a need for CB, we are the first ones to encourage them and to finance it. Sometimes this need emerges after an appraisal through the use of our Toolbox, which identifies risks and opportunities when engaging with Oxfam Novib. But the need could also arise separately. In any case, we see it as our task to make CB happen.

This is the heart of our way of working and is exemplified in the three success stories of CB that were shared during the conference. What struck me most is that the essential elements in all the success stories was the organisation's 'ownership' of CB, and the fact that CB addressed organisations' specific needs, through an

understanding of the context in which it operates.

Conference next steps

One idea that was proposed at the conference is creating a trust fund for CB. This fund could be used to fund CB efforts that take ownership issues seriously, which could provide a platform for learning. One forum for this might be the Dakar Declaration (which will be drafted in 2008, three years after the OECD adopted the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness), which might even contain Overseas Development Assistance pledges for such a trust fund. To encourage this to happen, contacts should be made in different countries where civil society and authorities already meet (e.g., through the CIVICUS Civil Society Index process). Oxfam Novib is happy to facilitate this, but the real drive in my opinion should come from those organisations that are determined to achieve (and would benefit from) good quality CB practice.

One final word: not only should donors be aware of good CB practice, but consultants who advise on and run CB programmes should also understand the essence of CB practice. They are an important resource when it comes to accompanying organisations who want and need CB, and could thereby help instigate standards for good practice. And might I suggest that we should also develop guidelines for good consultancy practice, to add to the list of conference recommendations that we should all look to implement over the months ahead.

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¹ Lipson, B. and Warren, H. (2006) 'Taking Stock' – A Snapshot of INGO Engagement in Civil Society Capacity Building. INTRAC PowerPoint presentation. <<http://www.intrac.org/pages/cbprogramme.html>>

The Long Road to Sustainable Development

Saso Klekovski, Executive Director of the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, shows how CSOs can adopt a long-term approach to achieve sustainability through organisational development rather than project-based funding.

It was when I visited Georgia in 2002 that I first made the realisation that what may appear from the outside to be an excellent capacity building initiative, can in fact be nothing more than a disparate 'conglomeration of projects'. It is interesting to note how much easier it is to perceive the true situation from an outsider's perspective. With this new

What may appear to be an excellent capacity building initiative, can in fact be nothing more than a disparate conglomeration of projects

insight I returned home to Macedonia and started to analyse the local situation.

My organisation, the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, (MCIC) has been active in strengthening civil society in Macedonia since 1995. MCIC believes in the need for 'champions' of civil society as role models. However, these 'champions' are a heterogeneous group. They comprise 'home-grown' membership organisations and issue-based organisations such as Megjasi, a lead organisation for children's rights. By contrast, there are also organisations supported by international agencies, such as the Association for Democratic Initiatives, the Centre for Civic Initiatives, and OXO, an advocacy NGO.

Within this heterogeneous group of organisations, regardless of whether they are civil society organisations or supported through development aid, the sustainability problems that they face are often very similar.

Organisations not conglomerations

Identification of capacity building within an organisation usually starts from an acknowledgment of the need for action. Both the member/activist organisations and the foreign donors largely prefer to have strictly project-based allocation of financial resources. The interest in offering financial support for wider, organisational needs is small or nonexistent. This leads to a situation in which the action or project is overemphasised at the expense of the organisation itself, in a phenomenon that I will call 'the conglomeration of projects syndrome'.

Here, mid-term and long-term planning and strategy are neglected, as are good governance, organisational structures, alternatives to prevailing leadership styles and so on. The external relations with the target group or donors are only moderately developed. Such a situation is unsustainable. Sustainability requires greater balance between the different parts of the organisation.

Investment for the long term

MCIC has developed the organisational support approach for civil society strengthening in Macedonia. The basis of this approach is to provide finances for organisational support or core funding. The funds are related to tailor-made plans for every organisation, over a three-year period, providing a medium-term perspective. These plans harmonise the organisation's focus, and compensate to some extent for the lack of income from membership fees, philanthropy and economic activities. Instead of focusing entirely on action, (or a new project) time and resources are allocated for organisational development. Such support is followed by capacity building activities according to the individual needs of the organisations. These include training and study and exposure visits to neighbouring countries which have recently joined the EU (Macedonia is a candidate country).



Conglomeration of projects syndrome

The road to sustainability

The organisations faced many common problems but overcame them in various different ways. Confronted with the withdrawal of major donors, many membership and issue-based organisations are now turning to mobilising volunteers to achieve sustainability, while support organisations are oriented towards EU accession funds.

Organisations also have to improve their transparency and democratic governance and management. MCIC experienced resistance on both of these issues, partly because of issues around leadership and partly due to a lack of financial management knowledge. In 2003, only two organisations had positive audit reports. To date, thanks to coaching of senior-level employees by MCIC, all seven organisations now have positive audit reports, with established procedures. Since 2005, these organisations, with MCIC and several other NGOs, are jointly publishing their audit reports in daily newspapers to promote their own credibility, but also to pressure the government to do the same.

This approach has helped develop the organisational capacities of certain civil society organisations in Macedonia, and represents one step forward on the road to increasing their sustainability.

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INTRAC Publications

Rethinking Monitoring and Evaluation: Challenges and Prospects in the Changing Global Aid Environment

Esther Mebrahtu, Brian Pratt, Linda Lonnqvist and Jerry Adams, £17.95



Bilateral development aid is shifting towards an increasingly technocratic, state-centred approach, such as the aid effectiveness agenda. Consequently, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) worldwide is directed away from its focus on qualitative outcomes and poverty alleviation impacts. Within this context, Rethinking M&E provides insights into several aspects of M&E as it relates to advocacy, NGOs as donors, humanitarian work and the role of the media. In emphasising Southern perspectives, it covers a rich variety of experiences, focusing on implications for poverty-focused, innovative, participatory M&E.

Praxis Paper 19: Leadership in Transition

Charles Buxton and Kazbek Abrialiev

Praxis Paper 18: Investigating the Mystery of Capacity Building

Rick James and Rebecca Wrigley

Praxis Paper 17: Organisational Learning in Civil Society

Susie Prince and Rebecca Wrigley

Praxis Paper 16: We're Too Much in 'To Do' Mode: Action Research into Supporting INGOs to Learn

Maaike Smit

Praxis Paper 15: Organisational Capacity Building in Central Asia

Lola Abdusalyamova with Hannah Warren

Printed copies of these and other Praxis Papers are available to buy for £5.95. For further information about INTRAC's publications, and to download Praxis Papers, visit the INTRAC website at www.intrac.org/pages/publications.html or email info@intrac.org to request a copy of our new 2007 publications catalogue.

INTRAC Training

This year INTRAC is holding a two-week residential **Summer School: Advocacy Plus** in Oxford. Please check our website for further details <http://www.intrac.org/news/00065.html> or send us an email (training@intrac.org) to be included in the mailing list for updates.

23–25 May 07

NEW! Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Development Non-Residential, London

Learn the principles, approaches and recognised good practice of ICT (including mobiles, computing, online tools and platforms, and broadcast technologies such as radio and TV) in different development sectors.

4–8 June 07

Introduction to Strengthening Civil Society, Partner Capacity Building, and Organisational Development Residential, Oxford

An introductory course bringing together the concepts of civil society strengthening, partner capacity building, and organisational development.

20–22 June 07

Organisational Learning Non-Residential, London

Find out what organisational learning means in the NGO sector and how to become an effective learning organisation. Discover how individuals and organisations learn and develop the skills and practical tools to establish a sound strategy around organisational learning.



25–27 July 07

Managing Change within Organisations Non-Residential, London

Learn to analyse forces which drive change, and to manage the change process. Explore helpful tools on how to understand and deal with different interests, manage resistance and work productively with your colleagues.

For more information and bookings, contact training@intrac.org or +44 (0)1865 263040.

INTRAC People

Senior Management Team welcomes new Programme Director

Spring is a time of growth and we have expanded our Senior Management Team to include a Programme Director, Rod MacLeod. Rod joined us in March from Progressio, where he was International Programmes Director for the last couple of years. Prior to this he gained considerable experience in international programme work with Concern Worldwide, Redd Barna and Y Care International.

M&E Specialist

Ian Patrick moved all the way from Australia to strengthen INTRAC's ability to respond to the call for our expertise in the area of monitoring and evaluation. Ian brings over 20 years of experience in

development which, in addition to working as an M&E consultant, has included teaching and research in Australian universities and some broadcasting on development and refugee issues.

Consultancies

The consultancies team was strengthened in February when Amber De Vries joined as our Consultancies Manager; Amber takes over from Michael Richards who left to do more of his own consultancies in March. We wish Michael well in his new endeavours. Our work in Cyprus began in earnest in the new year and we were, therefore, glad to welcome Dawn Sheridan-Kasaj to the team as

Consultancies Administrator and Lorraine Marriott as Project Coordinator.

Finance and Publications

Our former Finance Manager, Svetlana Duncalf, left to work for a large international organisation; we wish her success and happiness. She is replaced by Tom Travers, who brings many years' experience working within development organisations and, more recently, the NHS. All good wishes also go to Phil Dines, who has moved on to a small research foundation, from his role as Publications Manager.

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INTRAC Conference 2007

Security for Whom? Counter-Terrorism Measures, Security and Development Worldwide

The Netherlands

6-7 September 2007

INTRAC will be holding an international conference analysing the effects of security priorities on development cooperation. This conference aims to generate dialogue between civil society representatives, NGOs, donors and policy makers.

The emerging trend of national security priorities infringing development policy provides the context for this conference. The conference agenda will be based on the central issues arising from a

series of regional workshops discussing counter-terrorism measures and civil society work that have been held throughout 2006 in Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and the US.

These workshops investigated the impact of counter-terror strategies on the operations and relationships of NGOs and CSOs. The forthcoming conference provides a rare opportunity for each party to disseminate the outcomes of the regional workshops to other interested Southern and Northern actors, to learn from each other, and to form a global view of recent trends.

For further information, please visit INTRAC's website at:
<http://www.intrac.org/pages/conferences.html>