Civil Society Support: Is Community Development the Way Forward?

18–20 April 2005 in Amman, Jordan

INTR▲C

International NGO Training and Research Centre

Summary

This very successful conference brought together 78 participants from 33 countries from across the Middle East, Central and Southern Asia, the Americas, Europe and Australasia.

A number of general issues around the twin conference themes were presented in the opening plenary. More in-depth and specific discussions were prompted by papers presented by conference participants in thematic working group sessions on the second day of the conference. Summaries of presentations and the debates they sparked are presented in subsequent sections of this paper.

Day One

The conference began with a [welcome](#) from INTRAC's Executive Director, Brian Pratt and a [presentation](#) from Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bint Talal, the head of JOHUD, the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Development. In this presentation HRH Princess Basma centred some of the theoretical debates that the conference would address in the context of the Middle East.

Following on from the official welcome short presentations from a panel of experts from across the development sector addressed some of the questions set out in the background paper and presented further issues for the participants to consider:

- [Dan Owen – World Bank, Washington](#)
- [Geoff Prewitt – UNDP Bratislava](#)
- [Jo Beall – DESTIN, LSE, London](#)
- [Sadiqa Salahuddin – Indus Resource Centre, Pakistan](#)
- [Eman Nimri – Queen Zein Al Sharaf Institute for Development, Jordan](#)

The afternoon session of the first day was given over to geographic sessions, in which participants divided up into groups according to the geographic area in which their work was most closely focused. These groups were Africa, the Americas, Asia, Eastern Europe/Former Soviet Union and the Middle East. After group work, the conference participants reconvened in plenary to hear feedback from the geographic-focused discussions. Summaries of each session are set out below.

Africa

Participants in the discussions on community development in Africa concluded that certain elements of the concept, where people engage in mutual assistance, is inherent within African society. By contrast, civil society is an alien concept to Africans and has the connotation of people in Europe helping out their governments. It was argued that community development is about social entrepreneurship whilst civil society is about political entrepreneurship. The community (or rather self-help groups) should be at the centre of civil society.

Discussions also raised the point that people's affinity to a community (and hence their identity) comes both from within, but also as a result of labelling in colonial times, and it is not necessarily constructed by geography. Identification with a community and an understanding of values gives greater insight into community development than donor driven aid programmes. In Africa, the middle-class is based on strong ethnic affinity and transfers between urban and rural areas (as city dwellers always have a strong respect and connection with their area of origin).

Community development has come to have a renewed prominence in recent years in reaction to the erosion of state services. But there are also examples of neighbourhood and women's organisations that have been active for a long time. Whether communities claim rights or not, depends on the issues at hand (there are plenty of examples of land rights advocacy) and also on the extent to which communities perceive their needs as rights. In addition, the reality is that people have very little time. There followed an interesting debate on whether people who refuse to pay taxes, have the right to claim rights.

Finally, participants reflected that there is a big group of African consultants who are now bypassed by the World Bank's Community Driven Development programme. It was thought that this situation could aggravate the loss of communal values in aid programming.

Marjolein Brouwer, Novib

The Americas

Points arising:

- Problems with the concept of civil society were raised. To date this concept has related to civil society organisations operating within the formal arena. This definition has failed to include 'indigenous' organisations and informal networks.
- The crisis of civil society in Latin America was discussed at length. Community-based organisations (CBOs) were repressed by authoritarian governments in the 1970s, local NGOs were criticised for being subversive as they presented alternative models and policies. Ironically, since then the state has been responsible for trying to 'create' civil society institutions and co-opting them.
- A discussion ensued about the extent to which community-based organisations are articulated with civil society organisations.
- 'Local' issues: It was acknowledged that there is much regional diversity in relation to issues concerning community development and civil society strengthening. In Peru for example, it was argued that as peasant unions and trade unions were quashed, there is now an institutional vacuum in terms of civil society organisations. There is much protest from different groups but little agreement as to a common agenda and little articulation between them.
- 'Universal' trends: Throughout the region the role of the Catholic Church had been very important in creating networks to mobilise people. There is much distrust of politics and politicians and a crisis of the state is visible, characterised by very weak institutions. Local government is not seen to represent community-based organisations. Another trend has been the spontaneous emergence of civil society actors (especially social movements) but it is not clear how we are to characterise these groups in all contexts. At times there seems to be little unity or shared interest between them. Similarly, there often seems to be a divorce between CBOs and civil society activism. Thus, the following questions were posed: How important are community level programmes to civil society activism? Is community development the right vehicle for creating an active civil society? What factors hinder or help community organisations to strengthen civil society?
- It was added that promotion of 'democratic' principles such as accountability and transparency is difficult given the weak institutional structure that presently characterises Latin American states.

Katie Wright-Revolledo, INTRAC

Asia

This working group had a very diverse and stimulating initial discussion around language. This centred not only on the languages of the region but also on the language of development and how it can disempower communities. Community development assumes that communities have an option to negotiate. However, the delegates agreed that poor communities have no options: they do not understand the 'jargon' used by development workers and they need the resources being offered. Linguistic innovations are developing all the time and we should all be aware that language fads create problems for communities.

Most of the delegates agreed that the role of NGOs from both the North and South is to act as intermediaries which align themselves to the community and provide mechanisms of mediation.

The second major point raised was around the political environment within which all communities are functioning. It was fully agreed that both donors and external NGOs should ensure that they understand the nuances of both the social and political environment in order not to support power struggles and maintain the power base of community élites. It was also suggested that community development initiatives need to be introduced into an environment where communities are able to respond: if a government is in conflict with civil society then no amount of community development initiatives will prevail.

The third major point raised was the considerable diversity of work being called 'community development'. Of the five presentations delivered during the panel session on the first morning, it appeared that the first three presentations (from the World Bank, UNDP and an independent academic) were coming from totally different perspectives. It was as if the second two presenters (from NGOs in Pakistan and Jordan) were speaking a different language. The freedom of local governments is being squeezed by macro-politics and what is becoming clear is that 'community driven development' (as put forward by the multi-lateral institutions) is not the same as 'community development', the first being interlinked with macro-politics and the second with local communities.

Finally the group felt that macro-level interventions by the multi-lateral agencies should remain at the level of influencing or creating an open space with central government: local civil society actors could then enter the space to influence macro-level policies with a much clearer understanding of the micro-level needs of communities. The link between micro- (experience) and macro- (structural) level development is not understood by national governments and there should be a two-pronged approach to ensure that understanding is developed.

Anne Garbutt, INTRAC

Middle East

Iraq

The terms 'community development' and 'civil society' are new. The understanding of the term civil society is 'the government puts in place and the people do'. There is as yet no perception of a middle layer of NGOs. The scene is set for a 'Ministry of Civil Society', and discussion of the terms of reference is underway. However, would this not be a contradiction in terms?

3 distinct historical periods:

- Pre-Security Council Resolution (SCR) 986 was the 'golden period' when Iraq was self-dependent.
- During SCR 986. This Resolution affected everyone in that they became very dependent on outside help. Previous community-based organisations became contractors for distribution of commodities.
- Post-SCR 986 – since 2003. Iraq is now in a state of conflict. There is a lot of 'movement', many new organisations are being set up and the country is 'shaping up'.

There are now approximately 5000 NGOs either registered or in the process of registration. The Ministry of Planning registers everyone applying to set up an NGO. The risk now is that the community is filled with 'briefcase organisations', which are local, created by external funds and with no effective monitoring of their activities. In addition, there is the risk of political manipulation in the current climate.

Palestine

Palestine has been under occupation since 1948. The only initiatives came either from a military government or community 'grass-roots' level, which over the course of time became more specialised and experienced. The first government formed in 1994 with the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA alone could not cope due to lack of resources and lack of outreach capacity. It was soon realised that NGOs are also needed and these in turn became government-orientated in an official advisory capacity. A platform for policy dialogue between NGOs and the government was created, and a Commission for NGO affairs exists in the PA. After over 50 years of activity, NGOs in Palestine are seen as experts in their activities. They have developed sophisticated networks, in-depth strategic knowledge, robust structures and as a consequence are relatively powerful. They have now started to group themselves, and international NGOs have emerged to partner local NGOs in service delivery exchanges. The risk here is that the 'grass-roots' voices have become muffled with the 'NGO-isation' of the community.

Sudan

A group of disabled people came together in 1970 with the aim of changing the community and the government's attitudes to disability – previously not high on local agendas. The group grew in number and set up the Sudan organisation for the disabled. This was partnered by the international NGO, Action for Disability and Development and this organisation now has an in-country representative. The scope was then expanded particularly to women and children. There is now a rehabilitation

centre in every state of Sudan. There is a media network in Sudan, television and newspapers, through which popular support was gained. Activities include advocating for human rights at times of war and developing new programmes. The government attempts to stop the organisations and intervene, but they are strong because of support from the international development community.

Syria

NGOs in Syria work under the government umbrella. The government puts together a participatory policy for social development and provides the umbrella for the 3 sectors – government, private and NGO – to work together. This is felt to be the only way this can happen as the governmental authorities hold the relevant data, research and knowledge to guide the policy development. Decentralisation is being carried out with more delegation of tasks to community members.

Jordan

Local and international NGOs remain contractors for donor-driven programmes. This does not or may not reflect the true community situation. Government and NGO sectors work side by side but not in a controlling way.

General Discussion

- Across the Middle East there can be said to be autonomy of NGOs whilst remaining in-line with government policy.
- How autonomous can you be whilst you are relying on external funding?
- Some donor organisations are now putting conditions on support, for example requiring the inclusion of 'activities to deter terrorism' .
- The strength of civil society can be seen in its ability to turn down offers of conditional support as above e.g. Palestinian NGOs.
- The term 'Middle-East' is misleading and generalisation is inappropriate.
- Sustainability and capacity building remain big issues of concern.

Naglaa Shams, INTRAC board member

Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union

The former socialist region is very diverse, and it is very difficult to generalise about community development programmes and civil society promotion. The experience with these projects is different in the Balkans, Ukraine, Central Asia and the countries of the Caucasus. Moreover, individual experiences of specific countries within these regions are also different.

The former socialist region is very unique because of the prevailing institutional and cultural legacies of a socialist past. Thus Soviet type institutions still prevail and determine the rules of the game in these countries. Clientelistic relations and the lack of participatory orientation by the authorities restrict citizen participation.

The experience of community development in the region has been mixed. On the one hand, many community development projects helped people solve their immediate problems and significantly improved access to important local services. On the other hand, these projects did not have a significant effect on empowering local communities and promoting civic participation. Participation of local communities in these projects was mostly instrumental, i.e. it was restricted to contribution of cash, materials and labour. The existing projects were successful in promoting participation of ordinary community members in decision-making and management of local projects.

Building political capabilities of local communities is very important for empowering individuals and allowing them to participate in the public space. At the same time, attempts to reverse the existing power structures may result in tension, disagreements and even violence. Any attempts to politicise community development should be done carefully so as not to undermine social cohesion in the local communities.

Communities at the local level have weak institutional capacity. On the one hand, local governments in most transition countries have little revenue base, which prevents them from actively promoting local development. In Central Asia, decentralisation reforms have been half-hearted, and local governments have limited fiscal and administrative freedoms. On the other hand, organisational skills and technical knowledge at the community level are often weak. There is a need to deepen decentralisation reforms and strengthen local organisational capacity.

Community development projects and programmes can often create parallel structures. Thus in Central Asia, traditional institutions such as *aksakals*, *hashar* and *mahallas* have survived and play an important role in sustaining local livelihoods, solving problems and helping individuals to pursue their needs and identities. It is important that community development programmes capitalise on the existing traditional institutions instead of establishing new structures, which in the Central Asian experience proved to be unsustainable in the long run.

Babken Babajanian, London School of Economics and Political Science

Day Two

The day began with a presentation from Rajesh Tandon on some of the history of community development, with particular reference to the Indian sub-continent.

The rest of the day concentrated on thematic group work. Four sessions ran concurrently in two sessions.

Strengthening the Organisational Capacities of CBOs (Praxis Session)

- Babken Babajanian, LSE: 'Capacity building in CDD: Elite capture? Case study of the Armenia Social Investment Fund'.
- Prudence Kaijage, MS Training Centre for Development, Tanzania: 'What type of capacity building interventions at community level can contribute towards strengthened civil society?
- Katie Wright-Revolledo, INTRAC: 'Overview of issues: Building capacity of CBOs'.
- Schirin Yachkaschi: Organisational Development as an Approach to CBO Capacity Building in South Africa

Points arising from presentations:

- Deeper issues underpinning working at the community level: (i) The need to assess the existing institutional landscape; (ii) Targeting CBOs is a political act, knowledge transfer and information sharing – need to ensure incentives are in place for this to happen; (iii) Group dynamics – need for more anthropological understanding of the actual cultural, power relations at work in groups, adverse incorporation, need to understand local power dynamics and exclusionary practices in the wider community and how these are reflected in and impact on development outcomes in CBOs; (iv) Threats to the loyalty to groups need to be understood (particularly increased socio-economic differentiation and the move from collectivism to individualism).
- Need for more understanding of the theories of collective action and the main drivers of change that push people to collaborate.
- Need better conceptualisation in our programmes of 'capacity for what?'.
- Importance of NGOs acting as facilitators not as implementers, even though CBOs push for the latter; CBOs need to be encouraged to understand the reasons behind this paradigm shift; the environment in which NGOs work is very chaotic thus flexible strategies are required in terms of timing; space needs to be provided for members to work through conflict and negative feelings; problems encountered in 'scaling-up' CBOs and professionalising them – e.g. proposal-writing remains very hard for them.
- The following practices are important: care in translating concepts to local languages; sustaining motivation and ensuring follow-up; encouraging South–South learning; grants are often too focused on short-term implementation; there are various strategic, conceptual and operational challenges that need to be overcome.
- It is assumed that capacity building will be provided in such a way that includes participation, the generation of social capital and empowerment. Yet there is a problem of capture of capacity building by élites and leaders who are articulate

and skilled. By contrast, members are often passive and suffer from low self-esteem. Attention must be focused on the theoretical framework of project design – this may be instrumental or may incorporate a rights-based approach. There is a need for the re-politicisation of capacity building as it should encompass more than simply increasing capabilities. Importance of building upon what people already can be and do.

Points arising from the discussion:

- We need to consider the drivers of change that encourage people to collaborate. Alan Fowler proposed the following model: (i) Biological reproduction (the need to reduce the vulnerability posed by this); (ii) Relational issues (the quest for identity and broader political recognition of this); (iii) Meaning (spiritual needs).
- Are we being conceptually sloppy in referring to community-based groups as organisations rather than as institutions?
- Questions were raised as to the real impact of community development on poverty alleviation and what the indicators of impact should be. Why should we be doing capacity building of CBOs when the effects of this are not necessarily felt by the wider community? Questions were also raised about the hidden agendas behind wanting to build the capacity of CBOs (e.g. selfish motives of leaders who want particular training). Perhaps more than training CBOs *per se* we need to raise their voice within the political arena.
- Capacity building as human development. It was pointed out that the sustainability of CBOs is not necessarily important, since capacity building has more indirect impacts such as conscientising of individuals. Groups form, die, and reform around constellations of issues, but conscienticised individuals remain. Our focus should thus not exclusively be to cast attention on ensuring the sustainability of CBOs, particularly as the future of these groups to some extent will be to take their own course and we cannot (and should not) direct this.
- Fowler proposed a model of levels of development of a CBO to a civil society organisation such as that of the 'virtual spiral' used by BRAC: (i) Group formation; (ii) Achieving the objectives it sets out to achieve; (iii) Diversifying resource base; (iv) Detachment from the organisation that initially encouraged it to set up; (v) Engagement with local government including election of group members (i.e. political engagement). This model is a useful way of thinking about how we can strengthen groups but it was criticised for being rather linear.
- Donors such as the World Bank voice an interest in service provision and delivery of CBOs but seem to be most interested in maintaining the status quo, since as soon as a CBO becomes too politically challenging, they pull out.
- Concern over the fact that CBOs are under pressure to be registered in order to get funding. Impact of counter-terrorism measures on CBOs.

Katie Wright-Revolledo, INTRAC

External Mobilisation versus Empowerment from Within

- Steve Brescia, World Vision, Latin American Region: 'An NGO's support for community development initiatives and their contribution to strengthening citizenship and social capital'.
- Nina Kolybashkina, University of Oxford: 'Community Development in Ukraine: Case study analysis of Crimea Integration and Development Programme'.
- Belinda Mericourt, University of Western Australia: 'Capacity building in child protection in Fiji as a way of strengthening civil society'.
- Robert Ogilvie, University of California: 'Community development as civil society development: The difficulties of empowerment by invitation'.

The session examined the tension between the idea of genuine autonomous community development and continued need for external assistance. It opened with a presentation by Steve Brescia talking about the lessons learned from a community development programme of World Neighbours. The programme is focused on rural development of marginalised communities often in ecologically fragile areas with limited government services. While working on meeting basic needs, like food and health, the programme is also concerned with local capacity building to promote motivation and enthusiasm and nurture local leadership. Steve emphasised the importance of understanding and accounting for the local context and power relations and interest groups within the communities, and the need for developing the capacity to propose, not just to oppose. Based on the lessons learned from the programme implementation Steve proposed a comprehensive model for social change, grounded in the local context and focusing on local capacity building to inspire collective action, which does not only produce tangible outcomes for well-being, but also influences policy and institutions, and ultimately alters the context.

Nina Kolybashkina presented a case study of a UNDP Crimea Integration and Development Programme in Ukraine, providing an analysis through the use of theories of social capital and civil society. The programme addresses the needs of formerly deported peoples returning from places of exile, and facilitates the reintegration process through social and economic development, local governance and capacity building, as well as support for communal infrastructure. The presentation described various approaches that have been used by the programme since it started almost a decade ago, including area-based development, institutional strengthening and finally social mobilisation, each of them defining local participation differently. Post-project evaluation of one of the sub-components of the programme, dealing with pre-school education, was performed to investigate the impact of the projects on the local community, and it has shown that most of the initiatives did not survive beyond the project life span. Nina suggested that the results of the intervention could be described as 'imported social capital', arguing that while the projects have provided some tangible benefits for the communities, they were largely defined by imported normative frameworks, creating parallel structures that did not receive wide support on the grass-roots level. She has also suggested that in the post-Soviet context civil society is not in opposition to the state, but is instead a complimentary actor, and both require strengthening.

Belinda Mericourt's paper was prepared in collaboration with her Fijian counterpart Laisani Peterson. The Pacific Children's Program of AusAid was used as a case study. The programme is active mainly in informal education, working with the local social service providers as well as community members, themselves facilitating focus group workshops for the purposes of education and training, aiming at empowerment

of marginalised groups. The wider challenge is in 'unlearning' and 'unpacking' colonist development and reinforcing values of group solidarity and harmony in a situation where the communities are wavering uneasily between competing frames of reference of the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. Participatory approach, building on the existing values and practices, and strengthening self-confidence, allows building social capital in this context.

Robert Ogilvie talked about community development in the United States, drawing both on his experience as a researcher and lecturer on the subject, as well as practical experience of design and implementation of a community development programme in the city of San José. He talked about the challenges to participation and mobilisation and issues related to cultural and ethnic diversity.

The discussion that followed concentrated around the endogenous forms of community development, the power of definitions and the two-way dynamic of the learning relationship between the development actors and targeted communities. All of the speakers also agreed that external mobilisation does not necessarily contradict empowerment from within.

Nina Kolybashkina, University of Oxford

Relationships in the Aid Chain

- Lawrencia Adams, POSDEV, Ghana: 'The impact of development relationships (multilateral, bilateral, INGOs and ANGOs) on community development, civil society strengthening and the sustainability of African development institutions'.
- Ghassan Kasabreh, PNGO Project, Palestine: 'The Partnerships Grants Project, Palestine'.
- Denny Morgan and Tony Cleobury, Coventry University: 'Relationships in the Aid Chain: West and South Africa'.
- Elizabeth Mboizi, CDRN, Uganda: 'Relationships in the Aid Chain: A Ugandan case study'.

This was a well attended session with a high proportion of participants from donor agencies. The first paper came from Lawrencia Adams and had a specific emphasis on Africa and what at times seems to be a dysfunctional aid chain. She questioned whether the mix we have at present is best for aid effectiveness or whether it creates unnecessary competition for resources. In addition to the points in her paper she noted the weakness/absence of any continent-wide civil society organisations, which weakened the negotiating position of African CSOs and NGOs regarding major donors.

In the discussion period one 'showstopper' question was whether the transfer of resources has really had any major impact in Africa. In part this question related to the prevalence of tied aid and 'round-tripping' from certain donors, which reduced real impact of assistance. There was also discussion regarding the effect of relatively weak institutions in Africa on their ability to be effective. The high delivery costs (sometimes donor procedures, other times African weaknesses) further weakened the delivery of assistance. Finally there was considerable condemnation of Northern groups looking for 'partnerships' in Africa when in reality these were virtual relationships designed to get a signed piece of paper from an African body so that the Northern agency could win a bid or access resources.

Tony Cleobury and Denny Morgan also raised concerns that some aspects of the aid chain barely outweigh the net cash flow it brings. They also noted several polarities starting with the gaps between rhetoric and reality, roles and functions of different actors and so forth. In questions, it seemed that what was required in future is better 'joined up' thinking/practice, more mutual sharing and less competition, isolationism and territorialism. It was noted that sometimes NGOs, in particular, have become victims of their own success, with a continued role expansion but weakened focus.

The third paper from Ghassan Kasabreh of the PNGO project, Palestine, discussed a system of mentoring whereby larger NGOs mentored grants to smaller NGOs in Palestine hence the term 'partnership grants'. It was hoped that unlike other programmes it would be able to tie funding and capacity building together and enable the programme to expand its outreach to smaller groups. Many of the questions focused on the mechanisms that ensured the larger did not swamp the smaller groups, and how the funding decisions were not tied to the capacity building through mentoring process. Questions were also raised about the ways in which the programmes were evaluated by both checking whether capacities had been enhanced in the small groups and whether there was real impact on the intended beneficiaries/clients of the grants.

The fourth and final paper took us back to Africa with a paper by Elizabeth Mboizi of CDRN, Uganda. The case study followed one of CDRN's partners who suffered from several changes in policies and commitments from their donors. The apparent contradictions and arbitrary nature of the donor decisions regarding this Ugandan group provided the centrepiece for reflections on the aid chain. In addition it was noted that the high costs of administering donor funds were not fully allowed for in donor contributions and less so as reporting became more stringent. It was also noted that longer-term goals of the local agency were overridden at regular intervals by changes in donor policies and procedures.

During discussions other points were noted including:

Whether it was possible to provide serious monitoring of goals if funds come from contracts, rather than grants for the support of the aims of the organisation. Does strategy mean much at all in such circumstances?

The role of groups such as CDRN was also discussed:

- Do such support groups fall into the danger of acting as the police for donors?
- Should they speak more bluntly to donors themselves?
- If not, what value is there in providing organisational and other support which can be undermined so easily by donors?

Overall, the session benefited from the three presentations but also went beyond these cases to question whether the aid chain was a chain or a mangled web of relationships. The fact that donors were not homogeneous was also discussed. This led on to discussion as to why there seemed to be insufficient recognition that there are good and bad ways of being a donor! In turn, the group recognised that certain approaches were more or less likely to assist either community groups or civil society organisations. Poor donor practices relegated community organisations to the labour providers for externally determined programmes, and civil society organisations to the contract managers. Meanwhile the failure across the board to take sufficient account of impact reduced the ability to argue cogently in favour of good donor practice.

Brian Pratt, INTRAC

Community, Identity and Social Capital

- Alexander Cheryomukhin, Azerbaijan Psychological Association : 'Multi-track approach to civil society'.
- Jane Cooper, Aga Khan Foundation, Tajikistan: 'Drawing Lines in the Sand: Re-defining the line between 'us' and 'them' through community development'.
- Mohammed Fareed Waqfi Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance, Afghanistan: 'Challenges faced by CHA in Afghanistan'.
- Mehman Karimov, Save the Children: 'Civil society through community development in post-Community Azerbaijan'.

The first two presentations, both from Azerbaijan, stressed the importance of awareness and understanding of local culture, context and mentality in work that seeks to help the development of civil society. Alexander Cheryomukhin looked at the links between individual psychology and broader networks of trust and co-operation. He posited the legacy of totalitarianism as a barrier to the development of civil society, since it has created a mentality in which alternative thinking is seen as generating conflict, and participation is not considered to be effective. According to Cheryomukhin, a culture of hopelessness is being reproduced in families and schools. He called for better leadership within the civil society sector, above all for leaders who can overcome narrowly individualist attitudes and have the creative skills needed to generate new visions of the future.

Mehman Karimov also considered the social fallout from the break-up of the Soviet Union, and the trauma that this created along with the war with Armenia and the resultant number of internally displaced people. While steps have been made within the country to move from relief to development work, including through community development, the speaker emphasised that Azerbaijan needs to take its development at its own pace, and find culturally appropriate ways to stimulate the growth of civil society.

Jane Cooper's presentation was more theoretical and focused on individual versus collectivist cultures. It generated a great deal of debate. She compared low power-distance cultures which are also often individualistic with high power-distance cultures which generally have an emphasis on collectivism. Community development work differs considerably between these two types of culture, but it is generally individualist countries in the West that are funding community development in collective cultures in the developing world. The challenge in the developing world is to encourage communities to be more inclusive. In Tajikistan, for example, the narrowing of identities led to civil war. In Azerbaijan, as refugees return, they find that they have to draw up new identities, as those they left behind no longer exist.

Discussions that followed raised a number of points:

- People have elements of both individualism and collectivism, and will use different identities according to their situation.
- In particular, resorting to the community can be a way to minimise vulnerability.
- In collective cultures there is a growing desire to emulate the individualist and capitalist culture of the West and with it, to destroy the collective, whilst those in the West are searching to belong to a broader community.

- Ironically, in the West, empowerment is seen as reducing dependency, while in developing countries the drive is to empower communities to support each other.
- 'Desirable' social capital as viewed by external actors means that there is pressure to break up social capital based on extended family connections and to put in place new types of network that will supposedly build up trust.
- Civil society cannot operate purely horizontally at the community level, and there is the need to build a broader sense of community at higher levels.

Lucy Earle, INTRAC

Community Development and Governance

- Babken Babajanian, LSE: 'Promoting institutional change from the bottom-up: Case studies: Armenia, Brazil, Zambia, Malawi and Jamaica'.
- Ebenezer Obadare, LSE
- Reza Sheikh, Hamyaran Centre, Iran, and Charles Buxton, INTRAC: 'Management of Community Based development projects. Case study of urban marginal settlement: Nodeh, Mashad'.
- Diego Zavaleta, University of Oxford: 'The National Dialogue in Bolivia'.

All participations mentioned the importance of macro-level structures in affecting the dynamics of participation at the micro-level. State institutions have a key role shaping civil society. Thus evidence from Eastern Europe and Africa demonstrates that the failure of the state to provide essential services, engage with the citizens and create an enabling environment hinders the development of a vibrant civil society and community activism.

International aid agencies do not adequately address the issue of governance. The existing understanding of development is 'economistic' and neglects structural and political factors that affect development and policy outcomes. It is important that community driven projects recognise that civil society is a political concept and that they more explicitly incorporate the issue of governance in the project design and implementation. The meaning that donors attach to the word 'governance' is not necessarily radical in its political transformatory sense.

In the Latin American context, donors attempt to support political goals of democratisation by encouraging civic activism and civil society strengthening programmes. However, it is not clear whether civil society actually promotes democracy, or in fact serves narrow political agendas of various societal groups. These programmes run the risk of undermining the authority of the state and creating societal fragmentation. It is often the case when the state is 'captured' by donor supported civil society organisations, which promote their own agendas at the expense of wider societal goals.

As the Iranian case demonstrates, the involvement of donors does not necessarily make local development more effective. Thus in Iran donor activities are almost non-existent. However, through building coalitions with relevant stakeholders and bringing local governments on board, local NGOs can successfully achieve their objectives. Indigenous solutions to local problems can often be more contextually adjusted and effective.

Babken Babajanian, London School of Economics and Political Science

Impact of Community Development on Gender Relations

- Jude Howell, LSE: 'Gender and civil society'.
- Katie Wright-Revolledo, INTRAC: 'Reflections on gender relations and community development' .

Points arising from presentations:

- Lack of a conceptual framework relating gender relations and civil society. Need more of a focus on how women organise in civil society and whether men organise differently (e.g. leadership tendencies). The former model of understanding civil society included mention of the household but this has been omitted from the civil society literature. Conflicts within households need to be understood (too often they are idealised). Kin-based forms of association also need to be understood but these are often ignored as civil society frameworks fail to incorporate them. Links between household and state need to be better understood but civil society frameworks are not used to link these. Similarly there is very little gender analysis of civil society, for example issues relating to racialised-class are not mentioned. Links between the household and entities outside it are not made. We need a better understanding of gender norms and practices facilitating or making difficult women's participation in civil society organisations. Other issues that need attention include: Are men getting into politics more easily than women? How does this vary across countries? How do gender norms in households reverberate in civil society? In what ways is civil society structured along gender lines? What are the interests of donors in reproducing particular understandings of gender? How do we examine the professionalism of women's organisations? What processes of democratisation lead to the de-radicalisation of gender?
- Need for practitioners to experiment with qualitative methodologies to capture and assess the 'wider' or more indirect and unexpected gender impacts of community development initiatives. Also a need to understand how gender pathologies impact on development outcomes. Gender impacts are complicated to measure – one framework to examine these is to investigate both the positive and negative impacts across different domains of change: material, cognitive, relational, perceptual, behavioural and institutional. In the case of microfinance in Peru cognitive change involved: the strengthening of capabilities, less fearfulness managing a loan fund, confidence in speaking in public, strengthening of belief in own capabilities. Positive relational change included: breaking down of social isolation, building trust and solidarity, generation of more equitable relationships and the development of leadership capabilities. Positive behavioural changes included challenging processes of gender inequity and altering processes of social differentiation. Negative relational impacts included: abuse by leadership, the straining of kinship ties and adverse incorporation into groups. Similarly, gender pathologies limited the impact of microfinance programmes aimed at women. In particular these included the fact that the point of departure for men and women is different; difficulty of accessing male-dominated markets; pressure to sustain kinship obligations meaning loans are often used for consumption or to help out a relative, gendered dimension of healthcare, exploitation and self-exploitation implied by microfinance activity.

Points arising from the discussion:

- When discussing gender and civil society organisations, how do you avoid privileging a Western hegemonic view? The truth of the matter is that the term 'gender' is diversely used in the West and the rejection of the concept of gender is also a Western phenomenon. We need contestation around these terms and to challenge the drivers around their use. It is a matter of presentation of these terms rather than an issue around West versus South?
- Should the household be in or out of the concept of civil society? Is it part of the public or private sphere, or both? This was something of a missed opportunity by gender theorists.
- In South Asia some prefer to speak of social relations (incorporating caste, race and gender) rather than to use the term 'civil society'.
- How far are NGOs agents of social change? How is change brought about? The importance of factors such as the women's movement in driving social change and this being more influential than the work of NGOs.
- How far is community development pushing particular responsibilities and burdens back onto women?
- How do we measure change in gender relations? We need to explore the use of qualitative methodologies in a way that is cost-effective to examine the more indirect, unexpected social outcomes of our development programmes.
- Microfinance can have both positive and negative outcomes in terms of gender outcomes in cognitive, behavioural, relational and institutional domains. Credit-plus programmes (including provision of savings services, attention to the strengthening of self-esteem, the provision of legal aid to women etc.) are more effective than more minimalist kinds of credit provision. In Asia there are examples of active social mobilisation around issues beyond the microfinance group and group members are sometimes elected into local government. It can also lead to changes in attitudes and behavioural change. Nevertheless particular entrenched gender pathologies can constrain women in what they can do and be, through their microfinance activities.

Katie Wright-Revolledo, INTRAC

Local Level Work on Rights and Advocacy

- [Marjolein Brouwer and Nuria Pensa Sosa, Novib/Oxfam Netherlands: 'Community development and strengthening rights'.](#)
- [Huda Hakki, ZENID, Jordan: 'Building Sustainable Livelihoods Using Rights Based Approaches'.](#)

Huda Hakki of ZENID (Jordan) gave an illustrative overview of ZENID's work with women. Poverty is the main obstacle to equal access to assets. Poor people often lack confidence, knowledge and skills to claim their rights and poor women are doubly excluded. There is also a serious lack of connection between poor people and institutions, even though this is crucial if people are to access their rights. Using a rights-based approach (RBA), ZENID has been working on access to essential services (referral and claiming rights); promoting rights in the workplace; promoting self-help groups and collective action and promoting multiple strategies. They have discovered that the policy implications of RBA include the need to support public sector reform and a client-centred approach, as well the promotion of equal access, transparency and good governance. The need to focus on the poor, which is part of RBA, requires a focus on inclusion and on building local partnerships with the poor.

In their WEDGES (Women's Empowerment, Democracy and Governance) Programme, ZENID is developing a resource bank of materials informing citizens of their rights and entitlements (especially social and economic rights) as well as working on the appropriate knowledge, skills and systems that women need in order to advocate for better access to their community rights. ZENID facilitates active monitoring of women's rights at the local level through collection of gender disaggregated data. With this information, they inform policy-makers about the priority needs of poor women, so that services are tailored to meet their needs and so that women can overcome obstacles to access. Finally ZENID stimulates two-way information flows between poor women and the providers of essential services at community, municipal and governmental level.

Marjolein Brouwer presented a paper written with her colleague Nuria Pena Sosa. In the fight against poverty and injustice, community development should always include and ensure access to justice. The right to equal protection before the law for everyone is an internationally recognised objective, and a focus on poverty should not be used as a way of ignoring or marginalising this entitlement. Hence the need for intermediary groups, such as human rights groups and associations of lawyers. Evidence from Asia and Africa shows that intermediate organisations can indeed play a role, drawing upon the proven strengths of community-based organisations (such as participation and good knowledge of the local context and constraints), and training people as paralegals. Furthermore, community-based organisations, once convinced of the feasibility of 'success' of a case, can with the help of professional lawyers, take their demands to a higher level. In this scenario, paralegals play a crucial role in connecting between practices at the community level and policies at the national level. Their success rate is high and there is great potential for an even higher rate of success. Therefore good practices with public interest litigation should be sought and shared. If they are not available, new practices should be developed. For this, partnerships of community-based groups, intermediary organisations and donors could be set up. By linking community development (including legal services to women and men living in poverty) to initiatives that are aimed at enforcing changes at other levels of society, true empowerment could begin to emerge.

Marjolein Brouwer

Community Development and Service Delivery: Building Blocks for Civil Society?

- [Anara Choitonbaeva and Chris Wardle: 'Community Development in Transition Countries: Practical Experiences and Lessons from the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation project in Kyrgyzstan'.](#)
- [Ivar Evensmo, NORAD, Norway: 'Experiences of Area Development in Tanzania'.](#)

The main question arising from the presentations was: is service delivery an end in itself or can it also be a means for community empowerment? It was felt that these two aims are not mutually exclusive. However, the principles of how they are achieved are crucial.

Discussions noted the following points:

- Service delivery programmes can be an important focus for community association around rebuilding infrastructure – especially where contextual factors have constrained this in the past such as in the Former Soviet Union. In considering their potential impacts on both community development and building civil society it is important to recognise and respond to the social/cultural/economic/political context in which the programme is embedded and be flexible, so as to adapt the approach used accordingly. E.g. in some cases this might include using public/private initiatives.
- It is important to consider whether people have a right to expect adequate services such as water, sanitation and health to be delivered, but also their responsibilities relating to this right.
- In terms of the process used it is vital to spend the time to define common expectations and clear roles with all those involved from the beginning, in both the short and long term. This includes developing a close relationship with existing structures at community level – both government and traditional. Setting any change within the sustainable institutional context and social structures and taking a long-term view will help to ensure the continuity of whatever impacts are achieved but also contribute towards making a link between service delivery and wider civil society strengthening. This also requires donors to take some longer-term responsibility for the programmes they establish beyond their initial timeframes.
- There needs to be a realistic balance between the needs expressed by the community and the realistic opportunities that are available, e.g. in some cases World Bank programmes may not be ideally designed but may be the only source of much needed investment in services.
- Service delivery targets can be both positive and negative for community development. Positive where they act to provide a focus for people to organise, for diverse teams to work together, to achieve concrete results, to use limited resources efficiently and to promote a sense of ownership. They can be negative where they provide an excuse for technicians to disregard community participation, where there is an attitude/mentality that the state is obliged to provide everything, where donor rules are not always consistent with community development.
- Large service delivery programmes may also provide an opportunity to leverage change in government by encouraging, or obliging, them to support community association.

- Ultimately is was questioned whether this approach is putting an additional burden on communities which are already facing considerable pressures in order to fix problems that were often not even of their own making.

Rebecca Wrigley, INTRAC Praxis Programme

Day Three

The final day of the conference began with a [presentation](#) from Alan Fowler that sought to synthesise the salient issues from conference presentations and discussions of the previous two days. These were presented in 'Seven Lists' that were drawn up with particular reference to the feedback from thematic group work on the second day. These lists were entitled 'Community development for the capacity building of civil society organisations' although it was argued that, equally, these lists could be entitled 'Civil society capacity building for community development'. These lists dealt with seven key factors that were seen to be behind positive experiences of community development as an aspect of civil society. These factors included the drivers for collective action, for example aspiration and a sense of common identity, the institutional landscape, in terms of the types of community-based organisations and civil society groups that are already in place and the cultural, political and social context in which community development is occurring.

Each conference participant was given a copy of the lists. They were then organised into 15 groups of four, to begin 'cascade' discussions. The cascade methodology involved dividing up all the participants into random groups of four, who then spent around one hour discussing what they believed to be the key factors behind community development, in its fullest sense. They were required to write down four factors on four sheets of paper. After this each group of four joined one other group, and looked at the eight factors between them. At this stage the participants had to negotiate and decide, what combination of four factors, out of the eight in front of them, that they would take into the next level group. Finally, groups of 16 were formed, and again participants negotiated their priority four factors. These were then presented in plenary. Factors included enhancing existing community strengths, creating a flexible and appropriate aid architecture and gaining an understanding of arenas/contexts (political, socio-cultural, economic) within which CBOs can promote awareness about values, interests and issues. For further discussion please see the report by Brian Pratt.

The conference ended with short presentations, in plenary, from 'four wise people'. These were participants who had been asked, on the first day of proceedings, to be ready to speak about their impressions of the conference as it closed.

[Jane Cooper](#)
[Naglaa Salem](#)
[Charles Mbeeta Businge](#)
[Elizabeth Mboizi](#)