
Praxis Series Paper No.5

May, 2018

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Strengthening civil society through training national consultants:

Lessons from the Consultants for
Change programme

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ABOUT THE FUNDER



NAMA Foundation is an international grant provider supporting sustainable development. NAMA Foundation aims to empower communities through the development of the education sector and the capacity building of civil society, focusing on youth development and volunteerism. To find out more visit <http://namafoundation.org/>.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With many thanks to the people who have helped shape this text. Firstly, to all the participants, mentors and organisations who gave up their time to participate in the evaluation that have informed this paper. Rick James, Bill Crooks and the rest of the design team for their creative inputs and fascinating insights into the programme design and implementation. Edna Chilimo for offering open-heartedly her personal reflections on her learning journey from the C4C programme. The evaluation team, Max Wilder and Dan James, who conducted countless interviews and compiled the survey analysis. Finally, Nicole Titera and Peter Allen at INTRAC for their practical management of the publication.

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First produced in 2018 in the UK by

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Suggested citation: Hayman, R. and N. Simister. 2018. 'Strengthening civil society through training national consultants: lessons from the Consultants for Change programme'. *Praxis Series Paper No. 5*. Oxford: INTRAC.

INTRODUCTION

Does civil society benefit from a better supply of national consultants?

In early 2015, the NAMA Foundation approached INTRAC with a problem. They said: “Since 2004, we have been supporting civil society work in five priority countries – Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Palestine and Tanzania. But we are concerned that the lack of capacity of our partners is limiting the impact of their work. We have been unable to find good local consultants to help them address these capacity constraints. Can you help us develop a cadre of quality national consultants in these five countries?”

This resonated with INTRAC’s concerns that a shortage of high-quality, specialist, local consultants is a serious constraint for the development of a strong, vibrant and capable civil society.

The Consultants for Change (C4C) programme was born out of these shared concerns and commitment. An 18-month pilot programme started in early 2016 with the first cohort of ‘consultants with soul’ (see Box 1) graduating in late 2017.

This paper presents some key findings from the final evaluation undertaken in November and December 2017, reflecting on:

- What have been the changes in knowledge, awareness, practices and capacities of the participants?
- What were the benefits to CSOs in the programme countries?
- What are the longer-term prospects for change beyond the pilot programme?

While it is obviously too early to identify lasting impacts on civil society, we can see changes in how the participants approach their work with civil society organisations (CSOs), including using new tools and more reflective practices. Client organisations, who received consultancy from those trained, gave positive feedback. This all augurs well for replication and expansion of the C4C model into the future.

BOX 1: CONSULTING WITH SOUL

A key element of the C4C programme was the *‘consulting with soul’* concept. This was conceptualised as supporting the programme participants to:

- focus on the change that is required, not the contract or even the client’s satisfaction;
- ensure the client genuinely owns and drives the process of change;
- get to the heart of the matter and engage with the inherently emotional elements of change; and
- be their own best instrument for inspiring change, honing their commitment and character, not just their skills and tools.

OVERVIEW OF THE C4C PROGRAMME

The C4C programme set out to produce a cadre of 25 skilled NGO consultants across the Nama Foundation's priority countries through targeted capacity development support. It included:

- three residential modular workshops (held in Malaysia and Kyrgyzstan);
- coaching and mentoring;
- written and practical assignments;
- self-learning materials;
- peer-to-peer action learning sets;
- webinars.



C4C participants and trainers at the first face-to-face training in Malaysia, October 2016.

The team also developed new e-learning materials and blended learning approaches.

Ten mentors worked on an individual basis with the participants, two for each country. Mentors came from INTRAC's pool of staff and associates, all experienced consultants with knowledge of the countries and regions covered by the programme.

The vision of change

The core idea is that: as consultants apply their learning about change and consulting with soul, they become more trustworthy, making them more compelling agents for change. CSOs therefore receive higher quality services that are more likely to catalyse genuine change. As CSOs improve, this contributes to a stronger civil society. The benefits from C4C will be sustained as consultants continue to apply their learning to their future work.

The curriculum therefore focused on helping participants:

- to understand the value, role and contribution of consultancy to civil society and NGO strengthening and improvement;
- to learn about best practice in consultancy and the qualities of a good consultant;
- to acquire core skills for managing a consultancy assignment competently and delivering outcomes to a high standard;
- to help clients and their stakeholders to engage with and drive their own organisational change and development; and
- to acquire skills for carrying out their own learning, personal critical reflection and self-development.

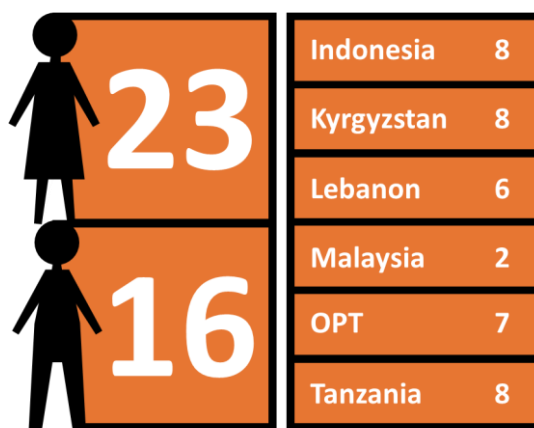
The participants

The success of the pilot rested on recruitment of the right people and so the programme management team invested considerable resources in the selection process (James 2018; James 2003). NAMA and INTRAC developed joint criteria, looking for participants who:

- were deeply committed to their own learning and improvement;
- had the potential to become high quality consultants;
- were prepared to invest themselves in the learning process and the application of the learning, including through giving 15 days pro bono consultancy time; and
- were prepared to commit to providing on-going services to NGOs after graduation.

To identify participants, the management team advertised through existing contacts and networks, then shortlisted and interviewed candidates, as well as engaging them in group discussions. NAMA also asked for several staff from its partner agencies to be included. The rigour of the recruitment process set the tone for the rest of the programme, resulting in high-calibre participants with demonstrated commitment to civil society.

38 participants graduated from the course, with only one dropping out. The full cohort of 39 was made up of 16 men and 23 women from six countries.



By the end of the course, out of 34 who completed a survey as part of the evaluation, 13 of the participants identified themselves as full-time consultants, six carried out part-time consultancy alongside full-time or part-time employment, and the remaining 15 were in full-time employment.

BOX 2: COMMITMENT, COMPETENCE AND CHARACTER

Trustworthy consultants are **committed** to the client’s change. Effective CSO consultancy is much more than being able to tell a client what to do. It’s about understanding how organisations change, and knowing what will catalyse this particular CSO to do things better on their own in the future. CSOs need consultants who share their values and are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of the poor and marginalised. Without genuine commitment to civil society, consultants will quickly tire of the rigours and demands of working with CSOs and look for greener pastures in the more lucrative commercial sector. Consultancy needs to be a vocation, not a financially oriented career choice.

CSOs need highly **competent** consultants in whatever sector or field they operate. Consultants have to be good at what they do. As well as having the necessary technical expertise, CSO consultants also need both knowledge and understanding of human and organisational change, and skills to be able to catalyse change through consultancy.

As well as commitment and competence, being a trustworthy consultant requires **character**. To be trusted and therefore able to make a difference to CSOs requires consultants who are self-assured and confident in their own identity; flexible and patient; humble enough to really listen and accept that, while they have something to bring, they do not have all the answers; honest in keeping their word and sticking to deadlines; and courageous enough to speak truth to power, even when it might cost them the contract.

Adapted from: James, R (2017). *Consulting for Change*, edition 2, p6-8

BUILDING UP THE CADRE: PERSONAL CHANGES

What makes a consultant with ‘soul’? According to the programme designers, a trustworthy consultant shows commitment, competence and character – the ‘3 Cs’ (see Box 2).

So did the participants change as a result of the programme? To assess this we posed questions about changes in knowledge, awareness, practices and capacities from several angles and a variety of perspectives, including participants themselves (see Figure 1), trainers, mentors and clients who worked with the participants over the course of the programme.

There is comprehensive and consistent evidence showing that almost all the participants benefited, whatever their starting point in commitment, competence and character. For some the changes have been incremental, for others life-changing. Indeed, during an impact grid exercise done with a selection of participants, almost all described a ‘life-changing’ moment resulting from the programme.

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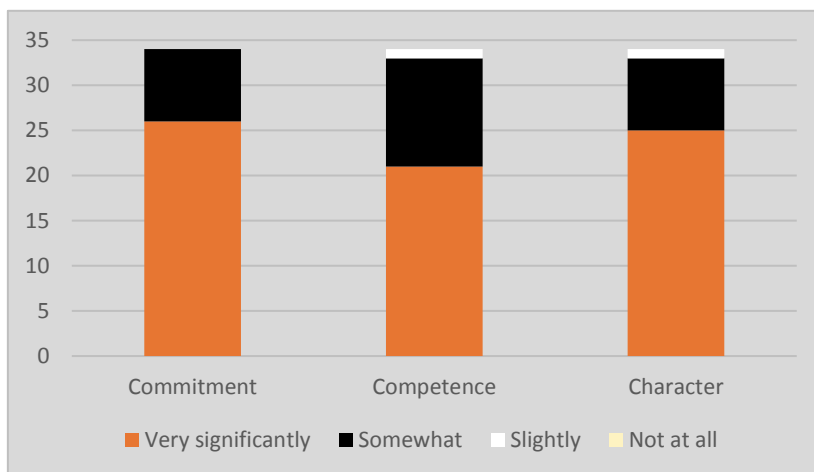


Figure 1: The 3Cs - participant self-assessment of changes during the programme

The scores from the 34 respondents to the survey were very high overall. The programme had a ‘*very significant*’ influence over their commitment (76%), character (74%) and competence (62%). No participants said the C4C programme had not influenced them at all in any of the three areas. When asked in interviews what changes they had seen in themselves, all said they had experienced a lot of positive change, particularly in relation to character. Participants noticed themselves becoming more confident, reflective, self-aware, and emotionally intelligent (see Box 3 for personal reflections from one participant). On a practical level, participants highlighted improved skills in negotiating Terms of Reference with clients, applying monitoring and evaluation and Theory of Change tools, and in facilitation. The concept of ‘*consulting with soul*’ was referenced by many.

“I am now a lot more reflective and have gained more emotional intelligence. I can now sit down and reflect on what is bothering me. I now plan my approach and methodology in much greater detail.”

“I have learnt how to bring change to an organisation and I learnt how to be myself in order to bring those changes.”

BOX 3: LEARNING THREE TRAITS OF A TRUSTWORTHY CONSULTANT FROM A BROODY HEN – REFLECTIONS FROM EDNA CHILIMO, C4C PARTICIPANT, TANZANIA

Change is a delicate process. Change agents therefore need to develop special character and competence to handle it with great care and efficiency. Nature offers good prototypes of change processes from which we can learn a great deal.

My recent reflection on the change process was triggered by a photo of a newly hatched chick standing beside the broken eggshell that once housed it. The photo was put on the floor as part of a reflection exercise during C4C. This particular photo captured my attention and imagination. My first reaction to the photo was ‘what a miracle’ - from a seemingly dirty brown egg to a snow white fluffy chick. A couple of questions ran quickly through my mind: how did this change come about? Who facilitated this delicate process? I took time to ponder on egg-hatching and I reflected that a broody hen is a classic example of a change agent with 3 Cs (i.e. character, commitment and competence). Taking time for reflection is something the C4C programme has taught me.

Commitment

A broody hen stays on her nest both day and night for 21 days, leaving the nest box only 1-2 times per day to eat, drink, poop, and possibly take a dust bath. A broody hen may pluck out her own chest feathers in order to provide more humidity and warmth for the eggs. She is committed to seeing her eggs are hatched and transformed to chicks. As consultants we have to demonstrate that we have clients’ best interests at heart. It means being prepared to be in for the long haul and to go the extra mile. CSOs trust consultants who they believe are not going to abandon the task when it becomes too difficult.

Character

A broody hen demonstrates a strong desire to successfully hatch her eggs. She is therefore protective of her nest and eggs. She is not easily discouraged and will not quit the nest before the eggs hatch. She can sit on a nest, with or without eggs, and refuse to come off. Consultancy work all starts with character – who we are, because who we are shapes everything we do and everyone we touch. How much an organisation changes will be influenced by us, our actions and our character. We trust people who we believe have integrity, who stick to their values in situations where they may be tempted to compromise in order to make short-term gains or to bow to external pressure.

Competence

The hen will turn the egg regularly during incubation to ensure that the embryo doesn’t get stuck to the shell membrane, that gases move around and that the temperature is evenly distributed. After 18 days, the chick will then start ‘pipping’ or breaking through the shell. The mother hen then clucks to encourage the chick out. She does not force the chick out of the shell. She only provides the right environment for the process to take its natural course. The hen waits until the chick starts pipping before providing any help. Similarly consultants need the skills and knowledge to create the right conditions for the client to change itself. We need to be aware of what we bring to an assignment and give the client confidence.

Our effectiveness as consultants depends on how trusted and trustworthy we are. People will change depending on how much they trust us. We can only be trusted if we have commitment, competence and character to do a good job. This is what makes us both trustworthy and effective. Just like in the natural egg hatching process, only a mother hen with broody traits is capable of incubating eggs until they are hatched.

Several mentors highlighted how participants had grown in confidence. This was folded within ‘character’, but perhaps deserves a heading of its own – the fourth ‘C’. The mentor who ran a group discussion in Indonesia stated that, when discussing commitment, competence and

character, it was often through the lens of increased confidence. For example, some participants are now applying new or existing skills with clients where they would previously have stuck to more conventional methods. Some feel empowered to say ‘no’ to contracts that would result in them being overworked, or that are not aligned with their values.



Figure 2: Influence of the C4C programme on capacity

The survey also asked about capacity in five areas (see Figure 2). In the two areas directly related to consultancy work – ‘*core skills for managing a consultancy assignment and delivering outcomes to a good standard*’ and ‘*understanding of the value, role and contribution of consultancy to civil society*’ – we found that a higher proportion of participants engaged in part or full-time consultancy work claimed that the programme had very significantly helped support their capacity compared to those in employment.

A tentative conclusion from these findings is that those already working as CSO consultants benefitted more than those in full-time employment.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?

Both NAMA and INTRAC wanted the programme to strengthen CSOs. In reflecting on the findings from the programme and evaluation, we considered two dimensions: benefits for NAMA partner organisations in the five countries; and benefits for a wider range of CSOs. While the second dimension was not an explicit objective of the programme, it was an implied goal. Judging such benefits is not easy, and the longer term impacts will only become evident over a longer period of time. However, there are some encouraging signs, even at this early stage.

Evidence from the programme

We asked participants in the survey how many consultancies they had carried out during the programme period, and how many of these had been with CSOs (see Figure 3). Between them they had undertaken 204 assignments, 164 of which were with CSOs.

The highest numbers were from Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan, where one person had done 25 assignments. The lowest percentage of consultancies with CSOs were also in these two countries. In Tanzania and Lebanon, over 90% of consultancies were with CSOs. Of course there are many questions to ask of these statistics – how many were pro-bono consultancies, what was the nature of the assignments, were they all with different organisations or repeat activities with the same CSOs – but this gives us some sense at least of the how participants in the programme are actively engaging in consultancy work with CSOs.

	Total # of people	Total # of consultancies	# of consultancies with CSOs	% of consultancies with CSOs
Indonesia	8	52	35	67.3
Kyrgyzstan	8	69	54	78.3
Lebanon	5	33	30	90.9
Malaysia	1	1	1	100.0
Palestine	5	25	21	84.0
Tanzania	7	24	23	95.8
Total	34	204	164	80.4

Figure 3: Consultancies Carried Out by Country

We also know from the interviews that participants used the skills and ideas learned during the programme with their clients. Every C4C participant reported an improvement in their work, and considered that this had benefitted their clients or employers where they were working for organisations. They mentioned different tools that they had learnt from C4C and were subsequently using, such as appreciative enquiry, participatory approaches, emotional intelligence, traffic lights, the 4D cycle, the training techniques of C4C programme management, various M&E tools, the river of life model, the onion model, and timelines.

This provides some indirect evidence that civil society may have benefited from the programme. Finding direct evidence, confirmed by a client, is harder. Although the M&E system for the programme did not gather views from clients about the work of the C4C participants, we did follow up specific instances of enhanced performance mentioned in the survey and interviews. We looked at eleven examples from NAMA partners and other organisations (one example is provided in Box 4).

BOX 4: BENEFITS TO CIVIL SOCIETY – A VIEW FROM PALESTINE

In Palestine, a participant had worked with the organisation Al Saraya about four years earlier to evaluate a project. The participant was asked to do a market study for training at Al Saraya's Adult Education Centre. This task began just before the first C4C module, but was mostly completed after that.

On returning from the first training workshop in Malaysia, the participant renegotiated the terms of reference with the client (both the donor INGO and Al Saraya). Based on his learning, the participant wanted to try and raise the client's capacity and enable Al Saraya personnel to do the study themselves. He agreed to develop a manual that showed the process of conducting a market assessment, and to produce a report of the findings. He did the research, while providing support on sampling and surveys; he trained volunteers on how to go to the target group and introduce themselves, responding to context-specific needs as people are very suspicious when asked for information.

The Coordinator of Youth and Adult Education at Al Saraya said that from Al Saraya's point of view, the participant was a good listener: *'He can hear and he can understand ... he didn't come from up'*. They felt he wasn't just doing it for the money, but really cared about the outcome.

As far as NAMA partners are concerned, the programme sought to help them in three ways: firstly, NAMA partners would benefit from a proportion of the pro bono support of 15 days per participant, if they requested it (see Box 5); secondly, six representatives of NAMA partners were enrolled onto the programme; and thirdly, the trained consultants would be available to provide support in the future.

BOX 5: WORKING WITH NAMA PARTNERS IN INDONESIA

In Indonesia, the NAMA partner, House of Leadership, is an indirect beneficiary of NAMA. It received project funding through WAFAA Indonesia, which is NAMA's primary country partner in Indonesia. Of three possible applicants suggested by WAFAA and interviewed by INTRAC, one participant was selected to participate in the C4C Programme.

Bachitar Firdaus, House of Leadership Director and line manager of the C4C participant, and Mr Rantala, Programme Director at WAFAA Indonesia, provided feedback on the indirect impact of the C4C programme on their organisations.

Mr Firdaus said he had noted a transformation in the C4C participant's performance over the course of the programme, and a notable increase in his confidence. This manifested itself in several ways, and resulted in him taking on increased responsibility and expanding the scope of his role in the organisation. Mr Firdaus observed: increased productivity, for example in giving training to associate staff in seven regions where they run leadership programmes; increased engagement with programme beneficiaries; and increased involvement in innovation within the House of Leadership, especially around developing a social enterprise model.

Focusing on the wider impact of the C4C participants, Mr Rantala said that the participants had designed a 1.5 day input to WAFAA Indonesia, providing an introduction to logical frameworks, project management and assessment, programme implementation and the C4C Mountain of Change model. Mr Rantala said that the training had been well received, and he hoped for further engagement from the C4C participants in the future to provide training in other areas.

The bigger and longer-term picture

Organisational change is often complex, intangible and hard to measure. Even where change can be assessed, it can be very difficult to attribute it to the kind of short-term interventions which are commonly made through consultancies.

At INTRAC we often use a *'ripples in the pond'* analogy to look at how capacity development or training support benefits extend over time. In turbulent waters, such as can be seen in the five countries where the C4C pilot programme ran, the rock would need to be either very large or many different rocks would need to be thrown into the pond one after another. We cannot predict whether individual consultants in challenging contexts can make the kind of radical changes that are needed to significantly improve the lives of poor or disadvantaged people. For a start we would need to see evidence of consultants increasing their work with civil society, and providing more effective services to the sector. We would also need to dig deeper into the contribution of the programme itself, gathering more systematic feedback from organisations supported by C4C programme participants over an extended period of time.

Finally, we might hope to see collaboration amongst participants to amplify their impact. The INTRAC team encouraged participants to develop networks and frameworks for working together in the future. Collaboration has been mixed to date, however, and where it has taken place it has mostly been at a national level. Whilst there is clearly a desire to remain in touch and cooperate, it is not clear that this desire will translate into action. Participants are bound to look at their own career and financial prospects when assessing the potential for collaboration, no matter how much *'soul'* they have. One participant from Indonesia interviewed said they saw declining enthusiasm:

"At the beginning we all had grand ideas of collaboration, but now reality is kicking in strongly. This is partly because we are all very busy."

One of the C4C mentors wrote back in 2005 that for organisations to learn they need the means, the motive and the opportunity (Britton 2005). The same can probably be said of the prospects for future collaboration amongst C4C consultants. The motives are probably there already, but the means and the opportunities are by no means a given.

CONCLUSION

The NAMA Foundation and INTRAC developed an innovative programme that shows much promise in contributing to better development consultancy in specific countries. Benefits to the C4C programme participants were substantial and significant, particularly those working actively as consultants. NAMA partners and other civil society organisations have appreciated and gained from working with C4C participants.

Judged as a pilot programme, there is a potentially transformational impact that could benefit civil society. The NAMA Foundation is now drawing on the C4C graduates to continue supporting their partners. And INTRAC is building on lessons from the pilot, replicating key elements within new training and capacity development initiatives in other countries, including Sudan and Saudi Arabia. The interest in the programme from other international organisations and funders is an indicator of demand for investment in building the capacity of consultants who work to support civil society.

Determining whether or not the C4C programme has been successful can only be done over a much longer period. This will depend on finding out: a) whether the C4C programme participants continue to work as consultants and continue to work to support civil society in the future; and b) whether they provide effective support that has been enhanced through the C4C programme's emphasis on building up consultants' competence, character, commitment and confidence.

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BLOGS

- Helen Mealins and Rick James, '[Daring to invest in national consultants to strengthen civil society](#)', 6 February 2018, Alliance Magazine blog
- Mireille Abi Khalil, '[Who dares? Dealing with the ambiguities of consulting 'with soul' in Lebanon](#)', 25 January 2018, INTRAC blog
- Adi Wahyu Adji, '[Graduating from consultancy 'school': reflections on C4C from Indonesia](#)', 14 December 2017, INTRAC blog
- Tamim Amijee, Edna Chilimo and Elias Xavier, '[Soul-searching and funding for local CSOs: reflections from Tanzania](#)', 8 December 2017, INTRAC blog
- Nicole Titera, '[Consultants for Change programme: an update](#)', 25 August 2017, INTRAC blog
- Rick James, '[Consulting with soul](#)', 31 January 2017, INTRAC blog

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on the Consultants for Change programme, visit <https://www.intrac.org/projects/c4c/> or contact Nicole Titera: ntitera@intrac.org



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