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'Top-down' – 'Bottom-up'?
A Study of Women's Participation in
NGOs in Kyrgyzstan

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DFID	Department for International Development
Forum	The Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GID	Gender in Development
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGOSO	NGO Support Organisation
NOVIB	Dutch bilateral partner agency
PA	Programme Assistant
PM	Programme Manager
PO	Programme Officer
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WID	Women in Development

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Beneficiaries: a term used by some to describe the 'target group'
Members: women who are members of an NGO, and who may also be part of the target group population
Stakeholders: people who have a vested interest in the outcome of a project or an activity
Target Group: women, men and children who are the target population of NGO activities

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1   Description of NGOs involved in the study
Table 2   Summary of women's participation in 6 NGOs in Kyrgyzstan
Table 3   Origins of NGOs
Table 4   Management structure and decision-making
Table 5   Leadership
Table 6   Participation framework
Table 7   Empowerment framework

1. INTRODUCTION TO KYRGYZSTAN: WOMEN, NGOS AND PARTICIPATION

Some argue that the legacy of communism in Kyrgyzstan (part of the Former Soviet Union and now part of Central Asia) has resulted in an emerging civil society that is fragmented and lacking cohesion (UNDP 1998a). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) continue to operate with an inherited top-down management style, where decisions are made by a few, and leaders are characterised as being autocratic, dominant and undemocratic in leadership style that does little to assist co-operation. Within this context of a transitional and fast changing environment, politically, socially and economically, the NGO sector, often regarded as a key indicator of democracy, is currently flourishing with approximately 1,000 NGOs registered (Counterpart Consortium database 2001(www.cango.net)). But while this may be an appropriate quantitative indicator of democratic change, it provides little indication of the processes of democracy. For that reason this study focuses on participation as an underlying notion of democratisation which may provide more qualitative indicators of social change.

The Dutch Development Agency, NOVIB (1999:12) states that *'The predominant feminisation of the vocational professions in the Soviet system matches the emerging profile of **a heavily feminised NGO sector**'.* This indicates that the type of third sector now emerging is welfare-focused, service-oriented and fills a gap in government social service provision as the country moves from communism to multi-party democracy. A heavily feminised sector, therefore, does not imply that women's strategic needs are being met in the process of transition, but perhaps more the fact that women are continuing to be seen in more traditional roles as family carers and reproducers. A fundamental question to ask, therefore, is how far does the proliferation of women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan contribute to women's empowerment?

At the core of women and development has been the concept of women's empowerment, a transformatory concept based upon processes of conscientisation, democracy, solidarity and participation. This study has taken participation as a fundamental process towards empowerment. It assesses present participatory processes and practices within six women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan as a means to understanding how the proliferation of women's NGOs may be contributing to women's empowerment. In support of this, the study has attempted a participatory process, both as a learning method and as an underlying methodological principle.

Chapter 2 reviews the concept of **participation** both as a **'means'** and as an **'end'** to development. It explores levels and types of participation as a basis for the conceptual framework. It then briefly examines the concept of empowerment as an ultimate purpose of participation. In particular, it looks at feminist literature on women's **empowerment** and refers in particular to the work of Naila Kabeer (1995), and her notion of the 'power within' and 'collective power' and Maxine Molyneux (1985) and her work on practical and strategic gender needs. Finally, participation is placed in the context of the NGO, drawing on management and organisational

development literature to provide a framework for my analysis on participation. The chapter's conclusion sets the analytical framework that will be used in the study and the research hypothesis. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and the strengths and weaknesses of the process. Chapters 4 and 5 present and analyse the data.

In the concluding analysis, key findings of the research are drawn together within the context of NGOs. It concludes that the concept and levels of participation within the women's NGOs studied is influenced by factors such as how the organisation began, how it is managed and led and how decisions are made. Those NGOs which originated as community-based organisations (CBOs), and whose leaders are also original members of the target group/membership, show greater levels of participation in NGO management. However, when assessing NGO activities and the extent to which they meet practical or strategic gender needs as a means to women's empowerment, the findings of this study reveal that participation of the target group within NGO management may not need to be a prerequisite to women's empowerment. Indeed, the one NGO which had maintained a 'top-down' management approach showed an ability to facilitate women's empowerment at a strategic level similar to the two most participative 'bottom-up' NGOs.

1.1. BACKGROUND TO KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan is one of five independent, former Soviet States in Central Asia, bordering China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Its economy is heavily agricultural, with cotton and tobacco in the south, grain in the north and pasture land in the mountain areas. It has a small and obsolescent industrial sector concentrated around the capital, Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan has traditionally relied on Russia and other CIS countries for trade and industrial input, including most of its fuel. Since 1990, the economy has contracted by almost 50% as subsidies from Moscow have vanished and trade links with other former Soviet republics have eroded. At the same time the Kyrgyz government has maintained tight fiscal policies. Although it has drastically reduced state control over the economy, restructuring has proved to be a slow process (UNDP 1998a).

Based on a July 1995 census, the population of Kyrgyzstan is approximately 5.8 million. The estimated population growth rate is 1.5% per annum. About half of the women are of childbearing age indicating a high birth rate. In 1993, for example, there were 26 still-borns per 1000 births. The fertility rate is 3.31 children born per woman. General life expectancy is 68.13 years and is longer for women than men by almost 10 years (72.56 : 63.92 years) (UNDP 1998a).

Based on the Gender Related Development Index for the Kyrgyz Republic in 1996, the literacy rates for women and men are 96.2% and 98.6% respectively. The total proportion of women and men enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education is 66% and 67% respectively. Women make up 50.6% of the total population and 46.5% of the 'economically active part' of the population. The ratio of women's wages to men's wages is 73% (UNDP 1998a).

Kyrgyzstan presents an ethnically mixed society of more than 80 nationalities. Figures vary but the ethnic make-up of the people of Kyrgyzstan is approximately 50- 60% Kyrgyz; 15-20% Russian; 13% Uzbek and others. The predominant religion is Muslim at 70%, followed by Russian Orthodox at 28%. It is believed that the Muslim population is on the increase, however, due to the departure of many Russians and an influx of Kyrgyz refugees from neighbouring countries, in particular Tajikistan. There is also migration from rural to urban areas which poses problems for increasing unemployment rates (UNDP 1998a).

1.2. WOMEN IN KYRGYZSTAN

Women's rights and freedom are protected by law in Kyrgyzstan, and there is a high level of education and a high percentage of women who participate in public life. However, the transition reveals evidence suggesting negative effects: an increase in female poverty, an increase in maternity and infant death rate, an increase in violence against women, a concealed discrimination and a general trend towards a reduction of the percentage of women in state authority structures (Shukurov 1995:76). During the Soviet period women held over 30% of government posts. Usually the third secretary of a department was female, and women were particularly evident in the departments of culture, education, art and policy implementation. To a certain extent a **'female elite'** was established within the party and these women representatives also headed up women's movements, financed by party authorities which at the same time, controlled these movements.

Current evidence, however, suggests a reverse trend, and that there existed, even under Soviet power **'the glass ceiling' phenomenon**, as described in the free market economies of the industrialised nations. During the Soviet period certain quotas were envisaged for women in the party and state leadership, but currently this system no longer exists in the new government and it is not officially endorsed. Therefore the number of women in higher management positions has declined; only 4% of Kyrgyzstan parliament members are women. Shukurov (1995:78) suggests two reasons for this: firstly that within a patriarchal society women are not recognised as natural leaders and secondly women are themselves reluctant to take on such roles. However, Tokhtakhodjaeva and Turgumbekova (1993:234) and others write that *'passivity is a symptom'* from the Soviet system, which has affected men and women alike. It is clear, therefore, that the position and conditions of women in transitional Kyrgyzstan are changing, with cause for concern.

1.3. THE NGO SECTOR IN KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan represents the most liberal and developed NGO sector in Central Asia. The NGO sector has grown and changed significantly since the early to mid-1990s. In terms of political discourse, the appearance of was indicative of the level of democratisation. NGOs are increasingly considered as barometers for such unmeasurable conditions as civil rights, freedom, democracy, and pluralism (NOVIB 1999:8).

Since independence, **two main types of NGO** have been established**: transformed Soviet social organisations** and **new NGOs sponsored or funded by foreign agencies**. The first is characterised by privileged links with government structures, (sometimes referred to as Government NGOs or GONGOs) with easy access to facilities such as offices and regional branches, but hindered by a lack of funds. During the Soviet period 'public women's organisations' flourished under state support and were headed by senior female party members, largely to implement government policy. The majority of these organisations have either disappeared over the last few years or exist in name only, although they have found new forms of activism. These NGOs are described by NOVIB (1999:9) as very often unable or unwilling to change, continuing very Soviet-style management systems and activity structures. They maintain rigid top-down approaches to target groups. A second type of NGO has proliferated since 1994 and is the subject of this study. NOVIB (1999) reports that there are now 1,500 NGOs registered at the Ministry of Justice. This figure includes a wide range of associations such as dance clubs and circuses. However, according to statistics maintained by Counterpart Consortium, an umbrella NGO, approximately 1,000 NGOs are registered, 236 of which are women-focused NGOs, although many more are headed, managed and administered by women.

A recent UNDP study (1999:116) emphasised the need for greater institutional capacity-building among local NGOs, including that of management and leadership, particularly centralised management. 85 out of 110 NGOs involved in UNDP's 'capacity assessment' study thought that operational management and decision-making power belonged to the leader and one or two permanent staff, including the Executive Director and bookkeeper. NGO leaders rarely reported to their members or to their target group. Only 8.6% of NGOs interviewed had discussed financial issues collectively. Moreover, many NGO members could only name projects implemented by their NGOs as they had no knowledge of the substance of these projects. The NGO members found this relationship or organisational arrangement quite acceptable. It seems that this type of management practice and its acceptance can be partly explained by the long-term history of centralised management in the FSU and which is now continuing in development NGOs.

The standard practice for forming these newer NGOs has been the setting up of an organisation by a highly dynamic leader who has then initiated activities in a particular field of interest through subjective perceptions of problems or needs. The role and profession of the leader was the most important factor for these new NGOs. NOVIB (1999:10) characterises this type of group as urban-based, led and staffed by 'elite' individuals. They refer to themselves as 'white blackbirds'; pioneers in a new era. However, even when leaders opted for a more democratic and inclusive internal organisation, they still viewed the NGO as fundamentally 'theirs'. NOVIB concludes that many NGOs are currently too young and too dependent on their leaders' drive and skills to have a more open and inclusive approach to the management of the organisation. This description of the management and leadership of these NGOs undoubtedly affects participation, both as a concept and practice within the NGOs.

1.4. PARTICIPATION AND NGOS IN KYRGYZSTAN

The UNDP 'capacity assessment' report of NGOs also examines participatory approaches of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, where UNDP describes participatory development as *'An approach used to plan, implement and manage development projects. It aims at involving all segments of the population in making decisions about the nature, quality and quantity of development services people want for themselves which results in people taking ownership and responsibility for collective management of these services*' (UNDP 1999:22). This approach to participation is project-oriented rather than aimed at accomplishing structural change and long-term empowerment. However, UNDP's report highlights interesting findings in relation to the conceptual clarity and understanding of participatory development in NGOs, but should be viewed in the context of its programme focus.

The NGO capacity assessment revealed that there are few NGOs in Kyrgyzstan that have a clear understanding of their role in participatory development; the majority of NGOs lack the conceptual clarity of participation. Yet, 'common rhetoric' among NGOs is that they have the freedom and independence to lobby for citizens' rights; they can influence government decisions and public opinion as well as promote sustainable human development due to their better understanding and knowledge of local needs. However, the report states that beyond this rhetoric there appears to be little understanding of what participatory development means. The study revealed that these NGOs see themselves more in the position of power and authority, arguing that they work 'for' people (not 'with' people). For example, a common response was *'we can help them because we know, they can not do anything, what do they know?'* (UNDP 1999:19). Many NGOs interviewed neither inform the local community of their activities nor do they explain their purpose. These NGOs see themselves as 'providers' of services, and people as recipients of services which supports the findings of a consultation reported by Mellon (1998) and the hypothesis that few NGOs involve the target group in participating in their own development.

The UNDP report (1999:22) states that while some NGOs use words such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), strategic planning and community participation, the responses given and approaches used in their work do not demonstrate a clear understanding of participatory development concepts. It asserts that these findings are not surprising considering that the concept of participatory development is fairly new to the country, after a long period of top-down development interventions.

Other evidence from the report suggests an extremely encouraging and optimistic view of the voluntary sector in the country, namely the CBOs (Community Based Organisations). These groups mostly confine their activities to within the village or around the location in which they live. Some of them function formally, as a registered body, others continue to function without formal registration. Although the assessment did not implement a separate evaluation of the activities of these groups, discussions with various project implementing government and international

agencies as well as documentary analysis revealed numerous examples of the small but significant efforts made by these groups throughout the country. These CBOs are engaged in what can be described as strong and intensive interaction with the local communities in building local initiatives. The groups develop from within the community in which they live by responding to the specific problems the community is facing. They encourage communities to take on responsibilities and elicit local contributions as proof of a community's interest in self-development. These groups identify local problems, assess beneficiary needs and build on local knowledge. Their localised presence not only helps in building and winning the trust of the community they work with, but also results in greater accountability to that community.

This evidence suggests that participation at the grass-roots level existed pre-communism and possibly to some extent during the communist era but in a different form. **'Ashar'** is the name of a centuries-old Kyrgyz cultural tradition which continues to this day (Ashar 1999). According to this tradition, the community takes collective decisions to resolve the specific problems it is facing by collective contribution of labour. A gendered analysis of Ashar and how CBOs operate is not known but if such a system existed in Kyrgyz culture for community participation, and even if it was abandoned during the communist period, it is possible that with the resurgence of cultural traditions, such processes will begin to re-emerge. It is also worth noting here the findings of the UNDP study – that CBOs showed high levels of participation – as this supports the findings in this research which indicates that participation was practised more by those NGOs which originated as community groups.

According to a consultation process carried out in 1998, which involved INTRAC and other NGOs, both local and international, it was stated that NGO activities rarely developed from a grounded process of consultation and analysis with the target group. According to a report by Mellon (1998), a frequent response to the question 'How are needs identified?' in the consultation process was 'we know these people, we know what is needed, we live here too'. While this may be partly valid, it does not account for the differing perspectives, diversity and power relations within any community or group of people, nor a gendered analysis of the situation. This also supports the previously stated findings from the UNDP study carried out in 1999. The NGOs present in the consultation agreed to challenge 'passivity and change the way people think' by mobilising people to take action to improve their situation. The former Soviet regime had encouraged this attitude in people and therefore it was difficult to challenge and change it. The consultation also revealed a 'mismatch' between major problems identified in a locality as defined by focus group participants and the activities of the NGOs themselves. The NGOs concluded that more could be done to provide NGOs with factual information about the needs in a local situation, and although government officials did provide certain information about a locality, it may not always have been adequate or verifiable.

With regard to the understanding of women's needs in Kyrgyzstan, Diamond, a women's resource centre, believes that gender research has become more active. Although research is partly hampered by funds, the increasing number of women's

conferences, workshops, literature and assistance to women suggests that women are on the agenda of at least some organisations. These organisations are predominantly around the capital Bishkek, yet most of Kyrgyzstan's population lives in the rural areas. It is thought that women in the south of Kyrgyzstan are particularly discriminated against since in that region, the Muslim religion dictates female seclusion. Shukurovi argues that the women's movement does not yet enjoy broad social support, due particularly to the patriarchal family system (Shukurovi 1995). This is supported by interviews with Kyrgyz women, carried out by Tothtakhodjaeva and Turgumbekova, which reports differing views among educated women regarding support for women's equality and the needs for a women's movement. These ranged from those who felt a women's movement was not needed and that feminism had no place in Kyrgyzstan to those that thought the time was ripe for a women's movement (1993:182-4).

NGO resource centres, such as the Forum of Women's NGOs and Diamond, play a valuable role in bringing NGOs together for training, seminars, information-sharing, collaboration and networking. However, in this study NGOs themselves recognised that they still knew too little about each other's activities. There were few examples of joint working, and it was clear that information sharing and effective collaboration required further analysis. NGOs constantly cited lack of information as a concern, yet NGO databases and newsletters do exist. Perhaps NGO support centres such as the ones in this research study need to review current methods of sharing information to determine more effective approaches. The practical difficulties of communicating, however, need to be recognised. In rural and semi-urban areas, poor telephone lines, power cuts, transport problems all hinder communication. These realities must be considered when making recommendations about effective information exchange and comprehensive participation. There is very little interaction between NGOs and other civil society organisations such as farmer associations and former state organisations working in the social welfare sector. The NGO perception is that former state organisations are either not functioning in reality, or if they do, they work in an autocratic way, making co-operation difficult.

1.5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Over the last few years, NGOs have begun to reflect and conduct internal reviews around the issues of membership and target groups. Prompted by the progressive familiarisation with participatory practices as both investigative and organisational tools, a number of NGOs increasingly identify the interdependency between programme effectiveness and a more inclusive approach with the target group. Nevertheless, according to the UNDP report (1999), there is a still a gap between the use of participatory methodologies and the building of 'legitimacy from below'.

The report states that while '*not all NGOs which have been exposed to participatory methods have agreed to adopt them, it is interesting to note that PRA is more used and better understood among those NGOs which present a heightened grass-roots profile, and which are working more closely with local communities, in particular in*

rural areas, in other words among NGOs where there is an overlap between staff and target groups'. The research in the next chapter will support this thesis.

On the other hand, the report states that participatory processes are less frequent and viewed with less consensus among NGOs which are further removed from the constituencies or communities on behalf of which they are conducting a programme. From interviews it appeared evident that one of the results of using participatory methodologies on the part of grass-roots type NGOs was that of building consensus and legitimacy from below, in the local community. However, when questioned about legitimacy, NGOs still linked it exclusively to the approval of their activities on the part of local government or other power structures (UNDP 1999:24).

From the consultation process carried out with local NGOs documented by Mellon (1998), recommendations were made which indicate a recognition for the need to involve the target group and membership in decision-making and needs assessment. For example, they identified the following key abilities for a local NGO to possess:

• Ability to determine the needs of people they are there to serve.
• Ability to establish and maintain external and international relations.
• Ability to access information about its constituents and members.
• Ability to work participatively with constituents to assess needs.

In addition, the women's resource centres, such as the Forum, with whom the study and a subsequent field visit was closely linked, have identified key requirements in order for them to provide a better service to their member NGOs. Examples include: information about analysis of the social and economic situation; an understanding of participatory development processes; local, regional and international; and an approach and attitude of 'accompanying' NGOs, talking to them and their beneficiaries about needs and programmes.

Conclusions from the various studies previously carried out, which have been drawn on in this chapter, signify the need for greater participation of the target group and members of NGOs and indicate that a 'top-down' approach still prevails. On this basis this study will ask the following questions:

1. How is the participation of members and/or the target group built into the structures and practices of NGO management?

2. Which structures and practices allow for greater participation of members and/or target groups?

3. To what extent do the more participative NGOS in terms of management structures and practices, reflect more participative methods according to the continuum of information sharing, consultations, active participation and ownership?

4. To what extent do those NGOs which demonstrate greater levels of participation through their management practices and structures and their methods of participation facilitate women's empowerment?

Briefly, the conclusions from the study of six women's NGOs appear to indicate that the two consistently more participative NGOs, in terms of their management structures and practices, demonstrate a greater ability to facilitate women's empowerment at a strategic level. However, the consistently least participative NGO, in terms of its management structures and practices, also demonstrates an ability to facilitate women's empowerment at a strategic level. The argument is, therefore, that there is no systematic correlation between participation and empowerment, but that other factors, such as the conscious awareness of the strategic gender needs of women, are important to the extent of women's empowerment. This implies that the extent to which the proliferation of women's NGOs contributes to women's empowerment is dependent upon the collective conscientisation of the practical and strategic needs of women and the forces for positive change within women's NGOs.

2. REVIEWING THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION

2.1.

INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPATION

Miller and Razavi (1998) state that 'participatory' or 'bottom-up' development is not a new item on the development agenda. Interest in participatory approaches has nevertheless been rekindled in recent years, and institutions have taken steps to change their centralised top-down working procedures which have been called into question. In particular, some researchers highlighted the marginalisation of women as a key, contributing factor to the failure of development processes in the past. For example, one of the root causes of the decrease in food production in Africa was thought to be the fact that research and implementation had ignored female farming practices (Bryceson 1981 cited in Nelson and Wright 1995:3).

'Participation' has been interpreted and practised in a variety of ways. It is an ideology, not specifically dedicated to development practice. For example, popular participation and political participation in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s was of great academic and political concern (Parry 1972 cited in Nelson and Wright 1995:2). There was concern that local government was not fulfilling its role as a democratic means of organising local affairs. Popular participation meant only how a larger number of people could be persuaded to get involved in public decision-making, resulting in newly formed groups such as tenants' associations and pressure groups. However, these groups were not necessarily asked to share in decision-making, more often they were consulted on policy proposals or asked to help implement them (Nelson and Wright 1995:2). This example is worth noting because of its parallels with participation in the political democratisation of Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s.

Participation is also context-specific and often viewed as a Western ideology. Certain participatory development practices are more common and appropriate in certain regions. For example, in the Central Asian context, emerging from an authoritarian, top-down political system, it is assumed that participation has not been on the agenda until quite recently. Exploring the notion of participation through the case studies of the NGOs will provide an insight into this question.

2.1.1. Meanings and Interpretations of Participation

Williams argues that *'participation like community is a warmly persuasive word, which seems never to be used unfavourably and never to be given any positive or opposing or distinguishing term. Yet it can be attached to very different sets of relations'* (cited in Nelson and Wright 1995:2). Since the late 1970s, there has been a range of interpretations of the meaning of participation in development. The following are two examples:

'Participation is concerned with … the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control' (Pearse and Stifel 1979 cited in UNDP 1998b)

'Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. Participation in this sense necessitates the creation of the organisations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant!' (Ghai 1990 cited in UNDP 1998b)

These definitions and others represent an interpretation of participation as a process of development. While there are no universal interpretations or models of participation applicable to all development programmes and projects, the above provide some common conceptual ideologies based upon notions of power, control, responsibility and self-reliance. In other words, participation provides a 'voice' to the individual and community. Transferring and applying such definitions to the Kyrgyzstan context immediately begs questions of power relations between civil society, citizens and the State. To what extent can the concept of participation fit in a transitional country or is there a mismatch? While the role of the state is clearly important to notions of participation, this will not be dealt with in this study.

2.1.2. Participation as a 'Means' or an 'End'

Nelson and Wright (1995:5) state that *'Participation, if it is to be more palliative, involves shifts in power, distinction between participation as a means, i.e. to fulfil project aims and participation as an end, i.e. for groups of people to control their own development.'* Both imply different power relations, between community, state and agencies. The extent of empowerment and involvement is more limited in the first approach.

Participation in development has been interpreted as these two broad and distinct areas. Participation as a '**means**' is viewed as a process whereby local people co-operate or collaborate with externally introduced development programmes or projects. In this way, participation becomes the means whereby such initiatives can be more effectively implemented. People's participation is sponsored by an external agency and it is seen as a technique to support the progress of the programme or project. This approach is widespread and essentially promotes participation as a means of ensuring success of the activities undertaken.

Participation as an '**end**' is regarded as a goal in itself which can be expressed as the empowering of people in terms of their acquiring skills, knowledge and experience to take greater responsibility for their development. People's poverty can often be explained in terms of their exclusion and lack of access to and control of resources, which are necessary to sustain and improve their lives. Participation is an instrument of change and it can help break that exclusion and provide poor people with the basis of more direct involvement in development initiatives (UNDP 1998b). Within the context of this study, the focus will be on participation as both a means and an end and their contribution to transformatory development and empowerment.

2.1.3. Frameworks of Participation

Certain frameworks for participation attempt to combine the '*means*' and '*ends*' paradigm as a continuum or a ladder of hierarchy. White (1996 cited in UNDP 1998b:5) synthesises the range of interpretations of participation along a continuum on which participation moves from being merely nominal and representing little meaningful and direct involvement in development, to a transformative participation which results in people's empowerment and in direct and effective participation.

The Department for International Development (DFID) suggests a **'participation matrix'** which outlines different stages of project management where, at each stage, different types of participation take place. It specifies 'types' or 'levels' of participation as: **inform, consult, partnership, delegation and control** (ODA 1995:99). On the other hand, UNDP (1998b:5) suggests a framework for levels or degrees of participation as follows: **manipulation, consultation, consensus building, decision-making, risk-sharing, partnership and self-management**. It begins with manipulation, where participation is contrived as the opportunity to indoctrinate; then stakeholders are consulted, by attending meetings and participating in surveys, with no assurance that their input will be used. Consensus building then takes into account not only where positions are, but also where vulnerable groups tend to remain silent. From this, decision-making becomes collective and negotiations reflect different degrees of leverage exercised by individuals and groups, and these lead to risk-sharing which analyses the beneficial, harmful, and natural consequences of decision-making. After this, partnerships are formed which entail exchange among equals working towards a mutual goal. Since partnership builds upon the preceding levels, it assumes mutual responsibility and risk sharing; and finally a level of self-management described as the pinnacle of participatory efforts, where stakeholders interact in learning processes which optimise the well-being of all concerned. Although the above example focuses on participation in development projects, the framework is helpful towards understanding different stages of participation, implying a gradation or 'stepping-stones' to a more empowering approach to participation.

UNDP (1998b:18) suggests that people's participation develops along a **continuum**:

- **Passive participation:** the target group basically welcomes and supports the project proposals, but is generally cautious.

- **Increasing involvement:** the target group develops more trust in the project and more contact with its activities and staff; it may also take on some responsibilities.

- **Active participation:** the target group plays the role of active partner in the project's implementation and development and assumes increasing responsibility.

- **Ownership/empowerment:** the target group is both willing and able to sustain and to develop further the initiatives begun by the project.

This continuum is useful as it links participation directly with empowerment and ownership – the ultimate goal. This framework will be the basis of the one used in this study.

2.1.4. Problems with Participation

It is important to focus on problems identified with participation, particularly as it is often constructed as a universal truth. *'One of the implicit assumptions about participation, about which there has been much recent controversy, is that through participatory approaches women are more likely to be heard, and also the needs that they identify are more likely to be met'* (Jackson 1996 and Kabeer 1996 cited in Miller and Razavi 1998:16). Jackson and Kabeer argue that it seems unduly optimistic to assume that participatory techniques will automatically give voice to those who have been hitherto excluded through complex forms of social inequality and discrimination. As Kabeer (1996 cited in Miller and Ravazi 1998:17) points out, participatory assessment, like any other research tool, is as gender blind or as gender aware as its practitioner.

Lane (cited in Nelson and Wright 1995:13) points out that participation is always risky because it will challenge local power structures. Gronow (cited in Nelson and Wright 1995:13) questions the unexamined assumption of many policy-makers that shifting power is both desirable and unproblematic. Scoones and Pretty (cited in Nelson and Wright 1995) warn against creating a parallel structure to that of the state through what amounts to local non-governmental organisations. In addition, they consider that such localised participatory structures can rarely exercise any political clout beyond the local area. This cautionary note is relevant to the context of Kyrgyzstan, where political systems and structures are in a state of flux. The NGO sector has grown rapidly since independence resulting in new players in the political arena. Pressures exist both internally, with the formation of new NGOs bringing new forms of decision-making and participation, and externally from foreign donors.

Robert Chambers (1983), a leading proponent of the PRA method, characterises the professional and institutional authority of researchers and developers as **'holding the stick'**, i.e. a symbol of having knowledge and the right to speak. 'Handing over the stick' is a dominant image in his work about legitimising knowledge of marginalised and hitherto silenced people. Chambers further argues that PRA and other participatory approaches face many traps and problems. He describes power relations in the form of **'uppers and lowers'**, whereby the North (Eurocentric industrialised countries) is the upper and the South (less developed, poorer countries) is the lower. His basic argument is to minimise the inherent power in the uppers to enable the lowers to maximise their power in the relationship. In particular, he states that a basic problem is **'upper-to-upper biases'**, interacting with the local elite and most often men, and missing the poor and women. Nor, he argues, is it enough to identify just one category, such as women, for there are poor

and less poor women and many other differences between groups and categories of people. The poorest, who live far from the centre, who are weak or overworked, or used to being excluded, are easily left out of empowering participatory processes.

Chambers' work is particularly relevant in Kyrgyzstan for two reasons. Firstly, the premise of elitism and bias exists. The educated and/or former communist party officials hold the decision-making power which affects not only the new government but also emerging civil society agents such as NGOs. This will be explored further in the study, in particular exploring the role of NGO leaders. Secondly, PRA has been 'exported' to Central Asia, both by Chambers himself (facilitated by INTRAC) and others. Results from this study and others indicate that PRA methods are being used, but with a view to fulfilling objectives of participation as a 'means' rather than an 'end'. This alludes to another problem with participation in that those initiating participation are often external and do so for a specific purpose. They not only have their own agenda, but also have little time. A fundamental lesson about participation is that as a process, it takes time. This has been a particular learning point in this study process, which will be explored further in Chapter 3.

These drawbacks to participation refer to issues of power relations which lead to what underpins the purpose of participation. In revisiting UNDP's continuum above, the purpose of participation is empowerment or ownership. The following will discuss briefly the notion of empowerment as a means to understanding why participation is important.

2.2. INTRODUCTION TO EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment, like participation, is used in many ways and in a wide range of contexts, hence the interpretation of the term is varied. Like participation, empowerment is a popular, even fashionable word used in development, in a manner that assumes everybody knows what empowerment means. Shetty (cited in Kabeer 1995:224) states that the major international development agencies now routinely refer in their policy declarations to the empowerment of the poor and of women. However, there is no consensus on the meaning of the term and it is frequently used in a way that denies it any political meaning; sometimes as no more than a substitute word for integration or participation in processes whose main parameters have already been set elsewhere. Furthermore, like participation, it is a word that is 'warmly persuasive' because it is innately a good thing, the danger is that it is used loosely and hence abused.

The root to understanding empowerment is **power**. The multiple meanings of key words such as those described above, are or are not negotiated between people positioned differently in *hierarchies*. They not only reveal different theoretical and ideological approaches to social organisation, they also introduce issues of power. Power is both experienced in everyday life, such as within the family, and is a part of systems such as within organisations and politics. There are many different theories of power, and the following is one description which is helpful in understanding empowerment. Rowlands (1997:13) sets out power in different forms:

Power over: Controlling power, which may be responded to with compliance, resistance or manipulation. Nelson and Wright (1995:8) describe 'power over' as involving gaining access to political decision-making, often in public forums. The challenge is for marginalised groups to be treated as equal partners in order to gain long-term access to resources and decision-making.

Power to: Generative or productive power (sometimes incorporating or manifesting forms of resistance or manipulation), which creates new possibilities and actions without domination. Hartsock (1990 cited in Nelson and Wright 1993:9) describes this as generative power, which can realise the capacities of individuals from within, but which can be used in a collective way. This model can use different forms of power to increase control or power, at the personal, relational and collective levels.

Power with: Described as a collective power from the sense of synergy created by group formation and collective action.

Power from within: Based on strength from within, derived from self-acceptance and self-respect which extends in turn to respect for and acceptance of others as equals. Kabeer (1995:229) builds on the concept of the 'power within'. She reasons that 'The multidimensional nature of power suggests that empowerment strategies for women must build on "the power within" as a necessary adjunct to improving their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and make decisions'.

Feminist interpretations of power, like Kabeer's, help us to broaden our understanding of empowerment, for example, by interpreting 'power over' as a means of exploring oppression, both personal and political. Rowlands (1997:14) states *'as feminist and other social theorists have shown, societies ascribe a particular set of abilities to social categories of people. Empowerment must involve undoing negative social constructions, so that people come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions'.*

There are several definitions of empowerment. One is offered by Keller and Mbewe (cited in Rowlands 1997:17):

'A process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.'

2.2.1. Frameworks for Empowerment

There are several frameworks which have been developed to help understand and determine women's empowerment. There is, for instance, Kabeer's (1995) Social Relations Framework; Moser's (1993) Gender Policy Framework, which distinguishes between functional and structural change brought about by policy interventions; and Molyneux (1985) who distinguishes between strategic and practical gender needs.

Afshar (1998) and others warn against a homogeneous approach to empowerment. Afshar (1998:2) states that *'The answers to these questions [of empowerment] may be different in different places and at different times. Policy analysis must incorporate diversity. There are no single answers. Different circumstances demand different strategies, and configurations differ in different situations'.* It is important, therefore, to recognise diversity within the context in which this study takes place and assumptions about empowerment of women must consider the dynamics of social relations and the complexity of women's needs.

While gender frameworks can be useful to determine empowerment, it is important to note that empowerment is a qualitative process of transformation, which cannot be measured in purely quantitative terms. Criteria for defining empowerment needs to be context specific, to allow for difference. Stephen (1997:7) suggests facets of empowerment – psychological, cultural, social, economic, organisational, political and institutional. Examples of indicators of empowerment are suggested such as: establishing personal identity; having time and space for oneself; acquiring new knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; having income security and basic needs such as housing, food, clean water and safety. Others include being part of social leadership and community action; taking action for entitlement/rights; establishing collective power; organisational leadership; accessing/negotiating political power; and changing cultural, social and religious norms.

In order to explore the complex nature of empowerment, this study will draw on the work of Molyneux in more detail. She identifies **strategic gender needs** as those which are recognised as a result of women's subordinate position to men in their society. Meeting strategic gender needs will create a more equal relationship between the sexes. Women's strategic gender needs will vary, however, and are context-specific. Molyneux suggests examples of strategic gender needs as including some or all of the following: the abolition of the sexual division of labour; the alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and childcare; the removal of institutionalised forms of discrimination such as rights to own land or property or access to credit; the establishment of political equity; freedom of choice over childbearing; and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women (cited in Moser 1993:39).

Practical gender needs are derived from women's position and conditions experienced in society. They are directly related to their socially accepted roles in society as mothers, carers, producers and community volunteers. Examples of practical gender needs are adequate food, clean water, employment, housing and healthcare. Meeting these needs, however, will not change women's position in society in relation to men.

Kabeer stresses the importance of taking into account how women's needs are identified and met. Women's practical and strategic gender needs are not separate and dichotomous categories, but are linked through the **transformatory aspects of different strategies for empowerment**. Kabeer goes on to state that transformation depends on the extent to which NGO interventions are organised around the

participatory modes of needs identification and prioritisation rather than through the imposition of their own priorities on those who traditionally have no voice in influencing the course of development (1995:261).

Moser (1993:63) describes **five different policy approaches** to Third World women: welfare; equity; anti-poverty; efficiency, which Moser argues is the most popular approach and finally an empowerment approach which still has limited popularity. Moser describes the equity approach as the original Women in Development (WID) approach which challenged the prevailing assumption that modernisation was equated with increasing gender equity, (and that) capitalist development models imposed on much of the Third World had exacerbated inequalities between men and women. However, the most predominant WID approach since the 1980 debt crisis is the efficiency approach which Moser describes as seeking to meet practical gender needs, and also recognise women' s triple role as producer, reproducer and responsible citizen within her community.

Moser, like Kabeer, writes that the empowerment approach was articulated by Third World women themselves and emerged from the Third World women' s movement, post 1975. This approach supports greater self-reliance among Third World women. It challenges women' s subordinate role seeing it as a problem which stems from her position in society. It recognises women' s triple role, and works from the bottom up through grass-roots mobilisation. The empowerment approach has several distinguishing characteristics. Firstly, its origins lie in Third World women' s movements and not in the West. Secondly, it identifies and recognises the causes, dynamics and structures of women' s oppression. Thirdly, its aim is to change the position of Third World women (Moser 1993:74).

By focusing on women's oppression, the empowerment approach questions power and development. Whereas other approaches to women and development have assumed 'power over', Moser argues that the empowerment approach assumes 'power within'. The capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength, for example, their right to determine life choices and influence change and ability to gain control over material and non-material resources (Moser 1993:75). Although Moser suggests that the empowerment approach is not popular among practitioners, it appears that development practitioners believe they pursue an empowerment approach towards women and development. However, this may only be the rhetoric of policy documents, while in reality, as Moser suggests, they are in fact operating within an efficiency or equity framework.

2.2.2. Collective Empowerment

It is important to emphasise the significance of empowerment derived from collective relationship building. Moser and others discuss personal dimensions of empowerment, and other gender writers such as Kabeer refer to the **collective dimensions of empowerment**. Within the context of NGOs in Central Asia and women's NGOs in particular, collective empowerment is crucial to understanding the future prospects for women in Kyrgyzstan. Scoones and Pretty (cited in Nelson and

Wright 1995:14) argue that local-level organisations could join together in federations 'scaling up' to carry greater political influence. They emphasise the need to institutionalise processes whereby those with newly acquired 'power to' can negotiate with those with 'power over'. The need for collective action as a means to empowerment is not characteristic of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan and it is a major weakness in the future of not only women's development but civil society in general. Having reviewed the broad concepts of participation and empowerment, the following section briefly reviews more specifically the context in which these concepts will be analysed; that of the organisation.

2.3. ORGANISATIONAL ANALYSIS

Organisations rely upon the passive or active participation of people. Whether through coercion or voluntarily, people do come together and organise towards a common goal. Organisational forms, in order to achieve this common goal, vary dependent upon a number of factors, both external and internal to the organisation itself. External factors which affect an organisation include the socio-political, cultural, economic and technological environment within which the organisation operates. Internally, factors such as the goal, purpose and activities of an organisation, plus its leadership style, people and culture all affect its development, identity, structure, systems, practices and resources. Because of these many elements, **organisations are not static entities but dynamic, changing ones**. Participation within organisations is dependent upon the interplay of these factors. This study will examine the origins of an organisation, its management structure and decision-making processes and its leadership.

The **origins of an organisation** are key to their identity and their work. Fowler asserts that the origins of NGOs arise from, and mirror, a context of indigenous oppression. He states that it is not safe to look at the identity of NGOs devoid of context and history (1997:36-37). In analysing the concept of participation in a post-communist context, it is important to learn why and how NGOs were established. He provides examples of why organisations have arisen including: from political affiliations; from personal inspiration; to promote particular ideologies; from the motivation of social groupings and other measures. Schein (1992:246) asserts that *'Founders often have strong theories on how to organise for maximum effectiveness. Some assume that only they can ultimately determine what is correct; therefore they build a tight hierarchy and highly centralised controls. Others assume that the strength of their organisation is in their people and therefore build a highly decentralised organisation that pushes authority down as low as possible.'* These statements clearly indicate that the origins, the leader and the founder influence the structure and decision-making style of an organisation. Each element of the organisation cannot be explored in isolation, but is interdependent. This in turn will affect participation, both the concept and practice within NGOs.

Fowler (1997:57) argues that there are important factors in power distribution and participation in organisations. He states that *'generally speaking more controls mean less flexibility, which is bad for participatory development'*. He summarises this in a

table reproduced below (Fowler 1997:57). The table identifies characteristics that should be evident in organisations if participation is to be an existing and practised concept. It will be useful to assess NGOs against these characteristics as a means of addressing study questions one and two outlined in Chapter 1.

Important relationships in power distribution and participation

Shared identity	Leadership	Trust	Authority	Controls	Flexibility	Effect on Participation
strong	consultative	high	decentralised	relaxed	high	positive
weak	autocratic	low	centralised	firm	low	negative

Reference to organisational structures often evokes the image of an organisational chart (organogram) depicting job titles and departments. Invariably it involves a hierarchy of reporting levels to the Chief Executive at the top. NGOs are no exception to this, but if 'participatory development' is at the heart of their organisation, the more pyramidal the NGO the greater the distance between the top and bottom. Fowler (1997:58) claims that unfortunately for many NGOs, centralisation is the rule rather than the exception. Leadership can be highly personalised and autocratic, therefore trust is neither created nor valued and identity is weak. He further states that there is often a cultural block to power sharing, especially between genders. These cultural blocks, plus a predisposition to a leadership type, tend to favour hierarchy and male centralisation. However, he states, evidence suggests that for authentic participation, the authority should be delegated as far down and out as possible, consistent with the principle that the NGO periphery is the centre of development action.

Fowler (1997), Brown (1992) and others argue for alternative structural forms which maintain efficiency and effectiveness, but with less centralised control. Flatter organisations, states Brown, can operate effectively within certain contexts through a process of **'distributed leadership'**. Where such principles of equality and participation are core values of the organisation, then flatter structures, with participants skilled in organising, can create a productive social order (Brown 1992:165). Brown draws on Likert's principle of **'supportive relationships'**, which de-emphasises status differentials observing that *'hierarchical status acts as a strong deterrent on the willingness of group members to "speak up"'* (Likert and Likert 1976 cited in Brown 1992:40).

On the other hand, Fowler does not argue for a flatter structure to enable greater participation, but rather a structure based on **'delegated authority'** which can produce **'structured flexibility'** involving localised responsibility and accountability (Fowler 1997:59). Although both approaches are different, both are nevertheless concerned with effective participation. It should also be noted that such approaches are context-specific. Fowler, for example, is describing a structure based on large international NGOs, while Brown's context is concerned with women's centres. What these examples indicate is the need to examine pyramidal structures when examining the concept of participation within NGOs.

Finally, the following considers the issue of leadership and participation within organisations. Fowler notes that *'of all the factors which make up an organisation, leadership and management are often considered to be the most important for effectiveness and viability'.* He makes a connection between authority within and authority outside an NGO, stating that in many cultures, authority is co-determined by the logic and need of the (cultural) situation, rather than an enduring organisational principle. Consequently, many local NGOs are known by their leader's name rather than by their proper name. This is certainly true where leadership is highly personalised (Fowler 1997:74).

Leadership within emerging NGOs in a nascent stage of development requires different skills and abilities to those organisations which are more mature. The NGO sector in Kyrgyzstan, now in its eighth year of existence with increasingly more NGOs being registered, has attracted certain types of leader, as described in Chapter 1. It will be particularly important to note their impact on participation within NGOs.

2.4. OVERARCHING ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Having discussed the broad concepts of participation and empowerment in the context of NGOs, the following overarching analytical framework (exploring participation, empowerment and NGO management) has been developed to form the basis of the study's assessment of the participation of women in NGOs in Kyrgyzstan.

2.4.1. Organisational Framework

As the nature of the study focuses on NGOs, an organisational framework will be used to assess both participation and empowerment. The following criteria will be used to analyse the above concepts:

• Origins of the NGO
• Management and decision-making structure
• Leadership

2.4.2 Participation Framework

The study will then assess women's participation within the NGOs by using the following continuum showing increasing participation from information to ownership:

• Information sharing
• Consultation
• Active participation
• Ownership

2.4.3. Empowerment Framework

Finally, in assessing women's participation, the study will explore whether levels or ways of participating in NGOs contribute to women's empowerment. Firstly, the analysis will be based on the extent to which the organisation meets the practical gender needs of women. Secondly, it will examine the extent to which the organisation operates at a more empowering level of meeting the strategic gender needs of women (after Molyneux 1985).

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

As the thesis of the study concerns participation and empowerment, it is important to manifest such concepts in the research process. Maynard, Purvis and others write that reaching conclusions is a social process and that interpretation is a political, contested and unstable activity. They state that as feminists, *'there is no technique of analysis or methodological logic that can neutralise the social nature of interpretation. The researcher can only explain the process of decision-making which produces the interpretation…. (which) entails acknowledging complexity and contradiction, which may be beyond the interpreter's experience, and recognising the possibilities of silences and absences in data'* (Maynard and Purvis 1994:7). This assists in understanding the role of the researcher and the dynamic nature of the inter-relatedness between the research and the participants in the research. Furthermore, it helps in realising limitations, responsibilities and dangers in carrying out research.

3.1. CONDUCTING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The objective in carrying out participatory research was a hope that it might be a joint learning process for the researcher and for the Forum. The study was not intended to be solely a source of data, but a building up of trust where information and interpretation could be shared and, to a degree negotiated. Maynard argues that there are three major and related concerns confronting feminist researchers. These are to do with the experience the researcher brings to the research, that is her background, values, beliefs, cultural, social and educational history; the importance of diversity including race and ethnicity and the question of objectivity (Maynard and Purvis 1994:23).

3.1.1. Preparing and Planning the Research

Previous baseline surveys and ongoing discussions with the local NGO sector in Kyrgyzstan were revealing interesting issues which could have been potential research topics for the study. These included; information needs of NGOs, participatory approaches with target groups and communication between NGOs and government. However, the underlying principle for INTRAC was that the research should be a joint process carried out with a local organisation or researcher. Given this, the preparation and planning for the research and the final decision on the research topic was possibly the most important stage in the process. The Forum of Women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan was approached as INTRAC had previously worked with them. The Forum was interested and requested more information and an initial proposal as a basis for discussion.

As INTRAC had a programme in Central Asia, it gave the research a well-grounded context with the hope that the research might also be applied in the future and would contribute to INTRAC's understanding of NGO's within Central Asia. There was an opportunity to meet three of the members of the Forum of Women's NGOs of

Kyrgyzstan while they were on a study tour in the UK. This was a good opportunity to learn more about the context of Kyrgyzstan and the work of the Forum itself. This contact proved invaluable in the working relationship that developed for the research process.

3.1.2. Direct Engagement and Negotiation

From January 1999 there was more active involvement and engagement with the Forum. At this point the research focus changed from the Forum's data gathering, analysis and usage to focus on the member NGOs themselves and their relationship and communication with their members. The Forum thought this would enable them to have an improved understanding of the needs of their members. The Forum's active involvement in designing the research topic at this stage was very important, enabling more opportunities for joint ownership.

In order to ensure a joint process, our preference was to conduct a field visit involving focus group discussions and interviews. However, as it was still unclear whether funding would be available for field work we also discussed using an email questionnaire as an alternative option to the field visit but this would have been less than satisfactory and not one favoured by the Forum.

It is important to note two process issues at this stage: **power dynamics** and **ownership**. Kelly et al. (cited in Maynard and Purvis 1992:37) state that *'simplistic notions of participation and empowerment also mask other aspects of the power and responsibility of the researcher… it is an illusion to think that, in anything short of a participatory research project, participants can have anything approaching "equal" knowledge to the researcher'*. These conclusions are context-specific (part of Kelly et al.'s own ethnographic research), but it is worth noting here. The issue in this case seemed more one of 'equal' knowledge but in different spheres. However, awareness of the institutional power relations between INTRAC and the Forum is important to recognise, as although there was not a 'donor recipient' relationship, INTRAC provided institutional support to the Forum such as training/information and organisational development.

3.1.3. Research Funding

In July 1999 the proposal was accepted for funding by the Central Asia Programme Manager, based in Oxford, UK, for the following reasons. Firstly, long-awaited funding had been provided by DFID for the Central Asia programme and secondly, another NGO, NOVIB (a Dutch bilateral partner agency) had recently carried out an evaluation of the INTRAC programme, which while excellent, stated that a weakness of the programme was:

'INTRAC has no specific or targeted focus on gender despite statements in its proposal. Incidentally working in a sector which is heavily feminised is not equivalent to a specific gender focus. INTRAC should reflect on its gender policies and strategies and make a consistent effort to include them in different aspects of their activities and strategies. While other criticisms moved so far to the Programme have been partial and have built upon activities and strategies felt not to be at their full

potential, the issue of gender is much more serious. No evidence has been found of any policies or activities in any direction and at this stage this can be considered the most serious Programme failure. Such an absence has many implications on different aspects of the programme activities and it is of crucial importance that INTRAC develops both a gender framework for Central Asia and that it includes it in its consultations, training, research and literature dissemination activities.' (NOVIB 1999:29).

This experience of INTRAC is not unique as many organisations face similar weaknesses, and strategies for redressing gender issues need to be taken at both a practical and strategic level simultaneously (Macdonald 1994; Goetz 1997; Porter et al. 1999). Carrying out a joint evaluation of the Central Asia programme with the donors may have provided the impetus for change on gender issues within the programme as well as provide the impetus for more strategic thinking on gender analysis with the organisation.

3.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured interviews were used throughout the research process. Questions were drafted under each research question. In total twenty-five women were interviewed using two key interview methods – informal, conversational interview and interview guide approach (Patton cited in Mikkelsen 1995:103). The semi-structured interview approach, particularly using the two above methods allowed for a more participatory process.

Informal conversational interviews provided important background information to the context. This method was used mainly in taxi rides to and from meetings. These conversations were not taped and were mainly conducted with a translator. These were opportunities to test out certain hypotheses and conclusions that were emerging from previous dialogues and observations.

The interview guide approach was the main source of data gathering. The purpose of the interviews and the broad framework was introduced and the a series of open, closed and probing questions were asked which varied depending on the interview. Some questions were asked to cross-check information received in previous questions. For example, 'How are members involved in decision-making?' and then 'Can you describe how members are involved in the NGO?' Interviews ranged from 'one-to-one' to a group discussion with six people (with the translator and Forum representative present).

In all interviews, open questions were asked which allowed for a great deal of information to be shared. The interviews were conversational and relaxed, interviewees were happy for the conversation to be taped and detailed notes to be taken. The relaxed atmosphere, meant that interviewees were happy to talk, although most discussions were 'positive' in overall tone and that problems identified were more context-related (e.g. lack of funding) rather than specific to the research topic. The shortest one-to-one interview was forty-five minutes, and group discussion interviews took between one and four hours. Limitations included being dependent on availability of interviewees, time built in to transport to and from

different meetings and time taken for translation. It is worth noting here Chambers' (1993) comment that 'outsiders' while often initiators of participatory development never have time to carry out participatory methods.

We were fortunate to work with an excellent translator, who was able to translate from both Russian and Kyrgyz. Because she was Kyrgyz she was also able to share valuable knowledge about her perspective on both the context and history of the region and issues related to women. Her background may have influenced her translation and understanding of the topic being researched, but it was difficult to assess this in more detail. However, our discussions on politics, religion and education facilitated an understanding of her position on such issues which was helpful.

As this was a joint research process, it was important to work closely with the Forum at all stages. **Briefing and de-briefing meetings** had been set up to assist in the joint process. At the briefing meeting, we discussed the purpose of the research, clarified issues that were unclear and began to plan a process. A number of meetings had already been set up with a number of member NGOs offering a diverse perspective on women's NGOs. These were the choice of the Forum. We discussed types of questions based on the broad framework. They suggested we also ask about any change that has taken place (i.e. impact of the work of the NGO). The debriefing meeting in the original proposal had been scheduled to be longer and more thorough but due to time commitments this meeting was held informally, over lunch with two members of the Forum and the translator, which disadvantaged the ideal of joint ownership.

3.2.1. Research Interview Questions

In order to assess women's participation in women's NGOs, the following questions were asked to participants in interviews and focus group discussions:

- Why and how did your organisation begin?
- What is the purpose of you organisation?
- What is the management structure of your organisation?
- How are decisions made in your organisation?
- How do women participate in the organisation?
- How are needs of the membership/target group assessed?
- Do you have any contact with other organisations/bodies and what is it?
- What change has taken place since being involved in the NGO/ since it began?

The following is a brief outline of the field visit timetable:

Day One   - Arrival, orientation
Day Two   - Briefing and preparation with Forum, field visit to Alga
Day Three   - Visit to Forum, meeting with members, visit to Crisis Centre
Day Four   - Visit to Refugee Centre, preparation for debriefing
Day Five   - Writing up field notes (transcribing)

Day Six   - Debriefing with Forum
Day Seven   - Meeting with President of Forum, Visit to UNDP Gender Focal Point
              and GID/WID Bureau and Diamond organisation.

3.2.2. Problems and Strengths with the Research Process

In planning the process in more detail it was evident that very general questions needed to be asked, firstly to gain background information at each meeting or interview before asking more specific questions concerning participation. On reflection while the framework used seemed most appropriate, pre-meetings or preliminary questionnaires to obtain background information to the organisations involved would have been helpful.

Working jointly with the Women's Forum of NGOs throughout the research process was extremely valuable as the research seemed less 'externally imposed' and more collaborative. As a collaborative process at each stage of the process the Forum gave comments and the research proposal was revised. However, there are several reasons which hampered a truly jointly owned process:

• The initiative was suggested by the UK researcher, it did not come from the Forum.

• The Forum have been less involved in the analysis stage of the research due to logistical and funding reasons.

• The researcher did not have a research counterpart. Knowledge about research methods was held by the INTRAC staff member. At our debriefing meeting however, the Information Officer of the Forum commented that she had learnt a great deal from the process, particularly about research methods.

The role of the UK researcher was multi-faceted in this process. Patai states *'it is the very existence of privilege that allows the research to be undertaken'* (cited in Gluck 1991). And with this such *'knowledge brings with it elements of control'* (Wright 1997). While the researcher can introduce measures to minimise this through a participatory research process, inevitably more control of both the content and process rested with the principal researcher.

Being a UK researcher meant also being an **'outsider'**. Recognising difference is fundamental to the research process (Reay, 1996), and the tensions this brings. This can be summarised with the words of Holland and Ramazanoglu (cited in Maynard and Purvis, 1994:135) where they state that *'researchers seek reciprocity in the research relationship and are sensitive to intrusion into women's lives … To this end some attempt to involve the researched in the entire research process, starting with setting the agenda for the research, undertaking it in a reciprocal relation, through to interpretation and writing up of results … there is a conflict between the requirements made of a researcher through their membership of an academic community and the needs and interests of women they research'.*

4. ASSESSING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN NGO MANAGEMENT

This chapter provides the background information to the six NGOs involved in the study. We focus on to what extent women are involved in the management of the NGOs by examining the origins of the NGO, the management structures and decision-making processes and the leadership. This enables us then to explore participation and empowerment of women within the NGOs in the following chapter.

Below in Table 1, we present the six NGOs involved in the study who are members of Forum. Details of the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan is found in Appendix 1. In the following analysis, CBOs are often community initiated, community-based groups with similar interests or needs. 'Members' refers to those women who are members of an NGO. 'Target group' is the preferred term used by the Forum and its members to describe men, women and children who are the 'beneficiaries' of the NGO, such as recipients of credit and welfare assistance. Members may also be the target group, such as in the case of the Refugee Project where the members are also from the refugee community.

This chapter begins by focusing on the initial assessment of the management practices of the six NGOs. It concentrates on the first contact the NGO had with the members and target group as this is an indication of how relationships were developed, how decisions were made and what conditions were set for participation. It then moves on to question whether participation has contributed to the empowerment of the target group or members. Table 2 summarises the analysis of participation of the six NGOs.

Table 1: Description of NGOs involved in the study

Organisation	Leader	Mission	Register Date	Activities
1. Alga	Zhanaeva Olga	Rendering moral-psychological, social help to village women	01.07.97	Establishment of a social centre and psychological support for women and work with refugees; small business support, credit schemes, reproductive health advice.
2. Refugee Association 'Hairinisso'	Dzhurabaeva Hairinisso	Adaptation of refugees and migrants, coming from the Tajik Republic and those living in the Zhailskom region, to local conditions and social improvement	11.09.97	In 1998 the district received on credit a mini-bakery from Mercy Corps established in Sosnovke Okazano. Co-operation with Kara-Dyube area to renovate a school. Gives humanitarian assistance to refugee families. Lobbies for refugee citizenship.
3. Culture Association (Women's League for Creative Initiatives)	Musabai Gulnara	Formation of new democratic understanding and system for restructuring of human rela-tionships. Supporting and developing culture, protection of democracy, rights of women and children	30.01.95	The league gives help, especially to the vulnerable sectors of the population (talented village children, families with few men, children's corrective-labour colonies, refugee children, women). The league held a competition for children (1996-7), ecological seminar 'Women and ecology' and an exhibition 'Women: East-West' (1995) 'The reflection of women's vision' (1998) .
4. Agriculture Association 'ZhNPO'	Makeva Batigul	Preparation and introduction of strategic collective survival and development of women in the Chuiskoi Oblast	03.06.99	Establishment of a list of families with 'few men' or under-supported families. With financial assistance the project set up 'Organisation of food for pensioners' established in S. Akbashat area. Undertook project with the assistance of the Know-How Fund (tractors for working the land).
5. Association for the support of Kyrgyz women artists	Mambetalieva Orozkan	Revival of the best traditions in national art. Social and material help for women working in the arts, who are undergoing difficulties in realising their artistic potential	03.01.94	Material assistance for disabled children, assistance in the formation of professional skills for working with disabled children, exposure to the arts for disabled children. 8 March celebration, held an exhibition at the House of Artists and in the Salon store of the Union of Artists. Posters and invitations were distributed.
6. Crisis Centre for women 'Sezim'	Risulova Byubyusara	Human rights protection of women-legal, social, economic, psychological. Rehabilitation of women exposed to violence	14.01.98	24-hour support line, establishment of a project to create a shelter for women, exposed to violence. Organised individual consultation with lawyers, child psychologists, psychotherapists, family psychotherapy groups, (bi-weekly) artistic therapy, dispute club 'Protection of one's rights', club for women 'My year ...' (30 members) from June to August 1998. Organisation of protection of women exposed to violence during court cases.

Table 2: Summary of analysis of women's participation in 6 NGOs in Kyrgyzstan

	Self-initiated group	Target group involved in decision-making	Members involved in decision-making	Leader is from target group	Leader is original founder	Information sharing with target group/ member	Consultation with target group/ member	Active Participation by target group/ member	Ownership by target group/ member	Practical needs of women met through participation in NGO	Strategic needs of women met through participation in NGO
1 Alga	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
2 Refugee Association	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐
3 Culture Association	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	U	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	p
4 Agriculture	p	U	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	U	U	⌐	p
5 Artists	⌐	⌐	⌐	⌐	U	⌐	?	?	?	⌐	p
6 Crisis	x	x	⌐	x	x	⌐	x	x	x	⌐	⌐

U - Unknown   ⌐ - Yes   **X** - No   **P** - Partly   **?** - Unclear/ambiguous

4.1. ORGANISATIONAL ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

This section focuses on the first two study questions: *how is the participation of members and/or the target group built into the structures and practices of NGO management, and which structures and practices allow for greater participation by members and/or target group?*

4.1.1. Origins of the NGO

In order to analyse the origins of an NGO, the study distinguishes between self-initiated, partly self-initiated and externally initiated NGOs. How an NGO was established may determine, and have a long-term impact not only on participation within an NGO but also on its ownership and control. For example, '**externally initiated**' NGOs, those set up by foreign donors or those other than the target group themselves are less likely to have processes of participation which are 'empowering' (the power from within). It is more likely that participation is a 'means' rather than an 'end' in itself, to fulfil project objectives. On the other hand, NGOs initiated by the members and/or target group ('**self-initiated**') themselves are more likely to have participation and therefore ownership from those who are most important – themselves. However, such a dichotomy is not always realistic as NGOs rarely operate in isolation and external pressures such as funding, sharing scarce resources and conditions of change affect how an NGO develops. So the origins of an NGO may be a combination of both internal and external factors. In this case, the term '**partly self-initiated**' is used. In addition, other issues such as leadership, cultural diversity and political context will also affect participation. For example, an NGO which is started by the target group itself, may have a leader who does not have a participatory style which will influence the level of participation of her peer group.

The Forum has a particular role in initiating NGOs, as it works with CBOs, offering training on how to become an NGO and providing support in doing this. It is not clear whether in all cases there is a CBO in existence before this process begins. Of the six NGOs in the study, three had been 'initiated' by Forum as NGOs, i.e. partly self-initiated, two of these had been community groups beforehand, started by the target group themselves. Of the remaining three NGOs involved in the study, two were founded by the target group and one was not.

Alga was formed from a community group of five/six women living in neighbouring villages outside Bishkek. Due to unemployment, the effects of agricultural reform, and pensioners' rights being abused, a support group was formed. Their initial activity concerned their legal rights, as land reform after the Soviet era resulted in women losing their land. During an interview, the President of Alga stated that *'Although it was a national tradition to meet and complain, as they were used to living under the state system it was often difficult for them to see a way out of their problems for themselves'.* However, the women wrote a report to the senior officials at the local 'White House' (district authority). This attracted national attention as other community movements were also campaigning for land rights. The actions of

the movement resulted in a change in the law which was more favourable to women and which left them feeling very 'powerful' and with a sense that they could 'move mountains'. This feeling of strength was derived from their success. This is an example of how 'power within' and women participating in identifying and solving their own problems affects their image of themselves and enables them to feel empowered. Subsequently, after being in operation as a CBO, the group then became a registered NGO after attending a training course at Forum. Alga's origins are identified as self-initiated by the target group and part-initiated by Forum.

The *Refugee Association* was a community group that became an NGO with the support of Forum. The original fifteen female members formed a group in order to solve community problems. They were led by a strong personality who had motivated other refugee women to organise. This woman is now the head of the NGO and the NGO is named after her - 'Hairinisso'. The group identified problems within their communities and explored ways to solve them. The initial problem was the lack of work for refugee families and so the community had to think in terms of job creation. Upon implementation of a questionnaire survey, it was decided that a mini-bakery would help to alleviate the unemployment problem. They obtained humanitarian assistance to set up the bakery on a credit system with Mercy Corps. The group has expanded to sixty-three members, three staff and a council of elders in twelve villages with whom they work. The bakery is now self-financing and offers full-time employment to ten women. Hairinisso is similar to Alga in that it was initiated by the target group and then formed as an NGO through Forum's help.

During the Soviet era, the *Cultural League of Women* was part of a public organisation, but in 1995 it became an NGO when it was realised that the government was no longer overseeing arts and culture in Kyrgyzstan. The group sought funds not only from international donors but in collaboration with the private sector as well. They have thirteen members, some from the original public association. This NGO, although initiated by the target group, has some affiliation with government given its history as a public association in the Soviet era.

The *Agriculture Association* heard about Forum through the Refugee Association. They attended a workshop on 'becoming an NGO' run by Forum, which according to the leader 'to this day opened my eyes'. Subsequently she and others began to organise women in their areas to form groups. The leader stressed how they had learnt how to write project proposals in order to obtain funding for their activities. They now have fifteen members – ten staff and five volunteers. This NGO was initiated by Forum. It is unclear whether it was formerly a community group.

The *Artists Association* was set up by members wishing to offer mutual support to each other as artists. 57% of members were based in Bishkek, where it originated, but it spread to the regions and expanded to over one hundred and thirty-three members in four years. The organisation involves itself in many joint activities with other Forum members. This NGO was initiated by its members.

The *Crisis Centre* was initiated by women from government, university lecturers and teachers as part of the League of Women, a former Soviet party public association. The idea was formed by a female politician who was also President of the League of Women. The members of the league were not, however, part of the target group of the Crisis Centre, but rather women who were interested and concerned about violence against women in society. The target group was composed of women who had suffered domestic violence, although none were members of the League, nor were they involved in decision-making and management of the Centre. The origins of this project and the way in which it was initiated clearly has affected how the members worked with the target group and the participation of the target group in the NGO.

The Centre has ten places, the busiest time being in the winter. Approximately four hundred women have stayed over the last two years (an average of four per week). The staff provides support and advice to the residents. They have close relations with the law enforcement bodies and local authorities from whom cases are often referred. Often there are few residents, mainly because of the social stigma attached to such centres for families, and because of media and publicity. One of their goals is to educate people about the Centre and the issue of violence against women, especially students and rural women who arrive in Bishkek. This NGO is described as externally initiated. Table 3 summarises the origins of the six NGOs.

Table 3: Origins of NGOs

	Initiated by target group	CBO to NGO	Initiated by Forum	Initiated by government/ govt. person	Initiated by foreign donor
Alga	✓	✓	✓		
Refugee Association	✓	✓	✓		
Cultural League of Women	✓				
Agriculture Association			✓		
Artists Association	✓				
Crisis Centre				✓	

4.1.2. Management Structure

The management structure and the decision-making processes within the six NGOs have also affected the participation of members and the target group. Where structures were less hierarchical, the involvement of the target group seemed greater. However, what appeared more important than whether the structure was flat or pyramidal, were the links between the levels, i.e. the decision-making processes in place and whether they enabled or disabled participation. All the NGOs had developed different decision-making structures. Those initiated by the target group themselves maintained a strong structural link to the target group for decision-making purposes. However, formal management structures may not necessarily reveal underlying, more informal processes of decision-making, which can sometimes be more powerful. Although the study was not able to establish such detail, it is worth noting here.

Alga was formed from an original group of five/six women in the communities of neighbouring villages, one is now the group's President and another a long-standing member. They have four other staff members: a legal advisor, a financial controller and two trainer/consultants dealing with small business advice. Alga also has twenty volunteers mainly from the target community. Monthly meetings are held and outreach work is carried out in the community by the staff and the volunteers. They have a suggestion box at the front entrance of the 'White House' which they now share with the local district governors and they have another suggestion box in the office. They also have questionnaires, usually after training events that take place in the community. Both the questionnaires and suggestions (which can be anonymous) are used to help in decision-making and future work. Photographs on the wall of the offices show meetings taking place, such as the annual general meeting (AGM) and training sessions. Management and volunteers meet to discuss matters concerning the work of Alga. The Management Committee is made up of members and staff.

The ***Refugee Association*** has a three-woman management committee, two of whom are from the original refugee community group, including the original leader, Hairinisso herself. The third woman, although not a refugee, is from the local community in which the refugees have now settled. The committee makes the day-to-day decisions about the NGOs, but there appeared to be an extensive structure for consultation and decision-making. For example, there were village councils, made up of village elders, both men and women (predominantly men). This is 'unusual', as village councils are generally all male. The two management committee members interviewed suggested that this was because the original women of the project in the twelve villages had shown a strength that gained them respect within the communities. It may also be possible, though this was not discussed during the research, that the councils were both male and female due to funding criteria placed upon the NGO by external donors (i.e. to have representation of men and women on the councils). Besides the councils, there were also bakery and agricultural committees.

The management structure was displayed on a wall at the centre, illustrating a comprehensive decision-making structure with various committees reporting to the management committee. They reported that they all met regularly to make decisions and all were involved in the annual general meeting. However, unlike Alga, it seemed that major decision-making regarding the NGO was taken by the staff management committee of three, which although composed of original target group members, does not include those who are not also staff members. The voices of the wider refugee communities are heard through the village councils and other committees. Participation of the target group relies, therefore, on the decision-making process within each committee.

Due to lack of time, it was not possible to obtain information on the management structure and decision-making processes of the *Cultural League of Women* for this study. However, it is understood that the membership is involved in decision-making about the activities of the NGO. The same applies to the *Agriculture Association* regarding lack of time in gathering information for this study. However, the President confirmed that members of the NGO were involved in decision-making on the activities of the NGO. To what extent the wider target group is involved in the NGO is unknown.

The *Artists Association* had recently taken decisions at its AGM to change the management structure and number of members in order to improve decision-making and increase membership involvement. The group felt the need to reduce membership from one hundred (having already reduced it from over one hundred and thirty) to a much more realistic figure of thirty or forty more active participants. They also decided to change the decision-making process to make it more participatory, by having a 'Co-ordination Board'. In the past only three people have been involved in making decisions. These three, however, wish to extend involvement, especially as there are now more activities to manage, such as exhibitions and outreach work. They have adopted the management structure of Forum who divides responsibilities into different directorate functions. Both the reduction in membership and change in the decision-making structure was suggested to the members and put to the vote. The rationale for the new structure and the reduced membership was to increase involvement in the decision-making. While this demonstrates a participatory process of consultation and voting on decisions, it is unclear how such a reduced number could be arrived at without some members feeling disenfranchised. Also, adopting another organisation's structure may not always be the appropriate for an organisation with different needs.

The members who run *Crisis Centre* take decisions locally. For example, the ten members responsible for running the Centre from administration, counselling and support to residents all took part in a weekly meeting, if they were available. Residents' cases were discussed as well as the management of the Centre. It was unclear how much autonomy the management group had in relation to the original founder (the politician and the other members of the League). None of the residents, i.e. target group, were involved.

Table 4 summarises the findings from exploring the management structure and its links to decision-making processes within the six NGOs. In four of the six NGOs the target group was involved in decision-making in different ways, as discussed above.

Table 4: Management structure and decision-making

	Target group involved	Members involved
Alga	⌐	⌐
Refugee Association	⌐	⌐
Cultural League of Women	⌐	⌐
Agriculture Association	U	⌐
Artists Association	⌐	⌐
Crisis Centre	X	⌐

⌐ - Yes   X - No   U - Unknown

4.1.3. Leadership

This issue is important, although it is partly covered in the previous paragraphs on origins and management structure of the NGOs. However, it impacts on participation sufficiently to warrant its discussion here. Management writers such as Handy (1995) indicate that the leader or founder of an organisation is fundamental to the life and growth of the organisation. The leader may have both a positive and detrimental effect upon the organisation. Very often leaders of younger organisations are more prominent, as at this stage the leader is often the founder. They may have started as volunteers themselves and have a personal investment in the future of the organisation beyond that of a job. Common characteristics contributed to leaders are that they are dynamic, strategic, visionaries, motivators, highly committed and entrepreneurial. Some may have good communication and management skills others may not. What leaders are not measured by are their skills in participation or their understanding of the concept of participation. This means that leadership 'qualities' are very often personal and so either they have such skills and knowledge and attitudes as a leader or they do not. Some leaders are regarded as good leaders, for example if they are autocratic, others if they are democratic, depending upon the context. What this implies is that not all leaders will have competencies that allow for participatory development.

Kyrgyzstan is a case in point. Due to its previous history, the style of leadership promoted in the Soviet era was often autocratic, top-down decision-making. This is a

model of leadership which continues today (not exclusively in Kyrgyzstan) and which is copied in local NGOs. In addition some NGO leaders are former Soviet leaders who have made the transition from one structure to another 'non-governmental' structure, while maintaining the same skills, competencies and attitudes. In field work this was not overwhelmingly evident, although secondary data set out earlier in this chapter and anecdotal discussions indicate this is the case in many NGOs, and is a central issue for participation.

It is also a contributing factor that some leaders are more educated than some of the members and target group. Many were or still are attached to the universities or are teachers. Although this study did not specifically focus on this aspect of power and participation, experience from working with other women's CBOs and NGOs suggests that leaders in general are often more educated. However, a distinction can be made between those who are more educated but from the same target group (e.g. a more educated refugee woman, who represents her peers) and those who are more educated but from a different social background, ethnic origin and are not from the same target group. In the latter case, it is very likely that education plays a more important role in differentiating between the leader and other members or target group.

It was not possible to gain insight into the personal leadership styles of the leaders of the six NGOs studied. However, some of the issues raised above concerning the context within which these NGOs operate will have some impact on the management style of the NGOs. Instead of assessing personal characteristics, the study assessed potential for participation of the target group based upon whether the leader is from the target group and whether she is the original founder. Where the leader is the founder and is from the target group there is likely to be more participation of the target group than where the leader is the founder and not from the target group. Of the six NGOs in the study, it is known that the founders of three of the NGOs were also from the target group. Two of these three NGOs showed more evidence of participation from the target group.

However, it is important to note here that founder members who are also from the target group does not always imply increased involvement of the target group. Factors other than the founder being a member of the target group affect participation such as management style, skills, knowledge and attitudes. The original founder as leader may often hinder participation, as ownership of the NGO is retained by the leader (see Chapters 1 and 2). Table 5 shows that five of the six NGOs have leaders who are also members of the target group and three of these are also the founders of the NGO. One NGO has neither member nor founder who is of the target group. This affects how it participates with its target group.

Table 5: Leadership

	Leader is from target group	Leader is original founder
Alga	⌐	⌐
Refugee Association	⌐	⌐
Cultural League of Women	⌐	U
Agriculture Association	⌐	⌐
Artists Association	⌐	U
Crisis Centre	X	X

⌐ - Yes　　　X - No　　　U - Unknown

Having applied the organisational framework as a context for analysis of women's participation in the six NGOs, the study proposes to expose the following – *Do the NGOs which have been self-initiated by the target group or members, where the target group or members are involved in decision-making through the formal management structure and where the leader is also a member of the target group, show more evidence of participation of target group/members?*

The hypothesis is as follows:

Origins of the NGO: Alga, the Refugee Association, the Cultural League of Women and the Artists Association are more participative; the Agriculture Association is less participative and the Crisis Centre is least participative*.*

Management and decision-making structure: Alga, the Refugee Association and the Artists Association are more participative; the Crisis Centre is less so and participation is uncertain in the Agriculture Association and the Cultural League of Women due to incomplete information.

Leadership: Alga, the Refugee Association, the Agriculture Association are more participative, the Crisis Centre is less so and participation within the Artists Association and the Cultural League of Women is unclear, due to lack of information*.*

4.2. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Alga and the Refugee Association are consistently more participative on all organisational criteria, i.e. origins of the NGO, leadership, and management structures and practices. Both leaders are from the community and founders of the NGO. The target group and members are involved in management decision-making through formal structures and systems. However, the Crisis Centre is consistently less participative on all organisational criteria and indicate a more traditional 'top-down' management style. The founder is also the leader but is not part of the community/or target group which it serves, unlike Alga and the Refugee Association. The target group at the Crisis Centre is not part of the formal management structures and systems. The Artists Association, the Agriculture Association and the Cultural League of Women show intermediate levels of participation for different reasons - the Artists Association brings into question its participative approach because of its exclusion of a significant section of the original membership. Moreover, the data available for the Cultural League of Women and the Agriculture Association is insufficient to make an appropriate assessment.

These findings form the basis of the next chapter, which explores more specifically types or forms of participation within the NGOs and the extent to which they facilitate empowerment.

5. ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY METHODS AND EMPOWERMENT

5.1. PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK

This chapter refers to the third study question: *To what extent do the more participative NGOs, (based on the above organisational analysis), reflect more participative methods according to the participative framework (information sharing, consultation, active involvement and ownership)?*

5.1.1. Information sharing

A common reason for information sharing is to ensure people participate and are empowered by the information they receive and share. However, sharing is a particular problem in Central Asia (see Mellon 1998) as information is regarded as a powerful instrument. This is thought to be left over from Soviet times when information was not shared openly. This is not necessarily a specific condition of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) but can be in general: knowledge/information is power. In Kyrgyzstan, while information may be shared within organisations, it does not seem to be the case that information is shared between NGOs, thus collaboration is rare. For example, the study found that several organisations working towards the same goals and with similar activities had not shared experiences and ideas. This may be due to their understanding of information as a tool but it may also be due to competition for resources. Experience from the UK international sector suggests that competition results in organisations withholding information from one another.

The following are examples of how the organisations studied share information.

- **Newsletter:** Alga produces a newsletter for its members.
- **Visual displays:** Alga and the Refugee Association had displays, which gave a visual image of how people are involved in the organisation. The study was not able to observe how meetings were conducted, for example, but it was useful to see photographs of such events. As it was not possible to visit the Cultural League of Women and Artists and Agricultural Associations' offices, it remains unknown as to whether or not they had visual displays. On a visit to the Crisis Centre, there was no evidence of visual displays.
- **Meetings:** All six NGOs hold meetings with the target group. For example, the Crisis Centre hold one-to-one counselling meetings; and Alga, the Refugee and Agriculture Associations hold village meetings with the target group. The Cultural League and the Artist Association meet with members to discuss planning activities. Alga, the Refugee Association, Agriculture Association, Cultural League and Artists Association all hold AGMs.

Different types of information is shared depending on the purpose and need. For example, the Refugee Association holds meetings to share information about

refugee rights with other members of the community. They also work with non-refugee communities to raise awareness about refugees. The Artists Association and Cultural League inform members of events and funding opportunities and provide them with publicity. Alga and the Agriculture Association provide information about rights, funding and training.

As well as the above participatory methods used for information sharing, other methods were employed. For example, five of the six NGOs, (the exception being the Crisis Centre), use small group discussions, both informal and formal. Alga, the Refugee Association and the Agriculture Association hold 'small business' training-seminars. Alga and the Refugee Association use questionnaires to gain information about their target group, and both have a 'drop-in' centre for the target group. The Crisis Centre has a telephone 'hotline' offering advice on domestic violence and holds awareness-raising seminars for female students and women from the rural areas coming to the capital. Alga and the Refugee Association do outreach work and field visits, using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods. The Cultural League and Artists Association share information with the general public and their members through publicity and exhibitions. These different methods of information sharing are evidence that all six NGOs operate at this level of participation.

5.1.2. Consultation

Five of the six NGOs studied said that they consult with their members and target group, the exception being the Crisis Centre, who consults with members but not its target group. Alga consults through a flatter management structure, while the Refugee Association consults via a process of councils. The Artists Association had recently restructured to enable better consultation with members and had reduced membership size to facilitate and centralise communication. However, it is questionable how participative this consultation is when the majority of its members are effectively excluded from the Association. The Cultural League consulted with its members on future activities. The Agriculture Association consulted with the target group on needs assessment and future activities.

5.1.3. Active Participation

Active involvement in project management existed in two organisations: To what extent they were 'actively' involved was more difficult to assess. For example, little is known about the capacity of the village councils to involve their community members in problem-solving and decision-making. The Artists Association and the Cultural League both have active involvement of some members and also some that are not involved at all. For example, many former members of the Artists Association may no longer wish to be an active participant in their NGO if they have been excluded from membership due to a reduction in membership size. In addition, this NGO finds it difficult to communicate with its members in the regions, which may be a hindrance to active participation. The data gained is insufficient to conclude the extent to which the target group of the Agriculture Association actively participates in the

organisation. The target group of the Crisis Centre does not actively participate in the organisation of the Centre.

Active participation seemed to be more on an individual level rather than as a result of an explicit organisational participation strategy. For example, two of the original refugees are now part of the management team at the Refugee Association. Sherapat, an active volunteer and a refugee at Alga, actively participates by advising with other refugees. It can also be assumed that the leaders of Alga, the Refugee Association and the Agriculture Association have actively participated in managing the transition from a community group to an NGO. Although the target group of the Crisis Centre does not actively participate in the organisation, it actively participates in decisions regarding their own lives and their future through the counselling sessions.

5.1.4. Ownership

Ownership is assumed to be by the target groups themselves. As Alga, the Refugee Association and the Cultural League were all self-initiated, so it is more likely that they are self-managed and therefore 'owned' by the target group. The Artists Association was also self-initiated but as its membership was reduced, those that were excluded will feel little ownership. Ownership of the Agriculture Association by the target group is unknown. The target group of the Crisis Centre would not hold ownership of the Centre as they are not involved in its organisation or management.

Each organisation is highly dependent on external funding, which can often be counterproductive to self-management and ownership. While certain projects, such as individual micro-enterprise and credit schemes may be self-managed, at the organisation level, funding was not diverse enough for the NGOs to be entirely independent. Their actual autonomy is, therefore, limited by funding constraints and accountability.

It is also clear from discussions with the target groups and members that their enthusiasm, determination and pride in their organisations is indicative of a high degree of responsibility and therefore ownership of their NGOs. At Alga, in the focus group discussion, one member stated that *'Alga had made her conscious of how to run organisations and be proud of its successes'*. Another, Sherapat, visited Alga everyday, indicating a high degree of commitment and care about the organisation. At the Refugee Association, one of the refugees, who is now a member of the Management Committee stated that she was *'very proud to be a member of such a group which had done so many positive things for refugee villages in twelve areas'*. Two members of the Cultural League said that all members had shared responsibility for the organisation. As the membership is small (thirteen), it is more likely that they will all feel some ownership of the organisation. The study did not gain personal evidence from the target groups and/or members of the other three NGOs, the Crisis Centre, the Artists Association and the Agriculture Association. A summary of participation in the six NGOs is illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: Participation framework

	Increasing participation			
	Information sharing	**Consultation**	**Active participation**	**Ownership**
Alga	✓	✓	✓	✓
Refugee Association	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cultural League of Women	✓	✓	✓	U
Agriculture Association	✓	✓	U	U
Artists Association	✓	?	?	?
Crisis Centre	✓	X	X	X

? - Ambiguous, unclear   ✓ - Yes   U - Unknown   X - No

This section has explored the various types of participation evident within the six NGOs. All six NGOs operate at the lowest level of information sharing. There is evidence for four NGOs that the target group/members are consulted. There is evidence for three NGOs (Alga, the Refugee Association and the Cultural League) that members/target group are active participants in the organisation. Finally there evidence suggests that in two NGOs (Alga and the Refugee Association), members/ target group feel some ownership of the NGO through their involvement. In summary the six NGOs have been ranked as follows:

Most participative to least participative NGOs:

1. Alga
2. Refugee Association
3. Cultural League
4. Agriculture Association
5. Artists Association
6. Crisis Centre

This ranking supports the hypothesis set out earlier in the chapter. Alga and the Refugee Association, who are consistently more participative using the organisational framework, show more evidence of increasing levels/forms of participation in their organisations. The Cultural League ranks third because it shows

active participation from all its membership of thirteen women. The Agriculture Association has a middle ranking with the Artists Association, the former due to lack of data, the latter due to a recent reduction in membership, which questions their overall participation strategy. Finally, the Crisis Centre ranks last in the participation league, due to its target group not being involved in the management of the Centre. The following section focuses on empowerment, asking the fourth study question: to what extent does women's participation in NGO management facilitate women's empowerment?

5.2. EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

In order to analyse whether the more participative NGOs contribute to the empowerment of women than do the less participative NGOs, the study uses a framework based upon practical and strategic gender needs analysis as set out in Chapter 2. Table 7 summarises an assessment of how the six NGOs contribute to women's empowerment, where meeting women's strategic needs is more empowering than meeting women's practical needs. The participation ranking has been used to sequence the NGOs.

Table 7: Empowerment framework

	Practical gender needs met	**Strategic gender needs met**
Alga	Credit, housing, clothing, business skills, social and emotional support, confidence building	Improved land rights for women, awareness-raising and campaigning on refugee rights, husband changing attitude to wife attending meetings, women running organisations, negotiating with district councils
Refugee Association	Credit, skills development, small business support, social and emotional support	Lobbying for refugee citizenship, awareness-raising of refugee rights, direct action by refugees, reproductive health education, women running organisations, women on village councils, working with other refugee organisations
Cultural League of Women	Support to women in arts and culture, social and emotional support	Women running organisation
Agriculture Association	Food provision, technical inputs, e.g. tractors, care for the elderly and female headed households	Women running organisation
Artists Association	Art materials provision, exhibitions support, social and emotional support	Women running organisation
Crisis Centre	Shelter, counselling, advice, social and emotional support	Awareness-raising of domestic violence, legal protection to women at court of law, majority of women from centre seeking divorce after abuse

Table 7 reveals that all six NGOs meet the practical gender needs of women who operate consistently and more extensively at this higher level of women's empowerment. Alga and the Refugee Association, the most participative NGOs, meet women's strategic gender needs through a range of activities such as campaigning for rights, awareness-raising of women's issues, lobbying government. Surprisingly, the Crisis Centre also meets women's strategic gender needs through awareness-raising, protecting women in court and supporting women to make choices on divorcing their husbands. This implies that in the sample, there is not necessarily a correlation between the more participative NGOs and empowerment. The following example is a personal story told by Sherapat, through the translator. Sherapat is a refugee from Tajikistan and an active volunteer at **Alga**.

Sherapat's story

Sherapat came across Alga when she approached a member called Kalbuba who suggested that as a refugee she could get assistance for herself and her family. Initially she received clothing for her family and then received credit in the form of one bag of flour which she sold to buy more flour and pay back her credit. This continued and she then began to bake bread and sell it. She is now renting land through credit which she is paying back in Coms (local currency).

Originally her brother-in-law did not like her receiving assistance and attending meetings (he was an Imam) although her husband who was not so against it, was influenced by his brother. Alga also asked her if she would like to become more involved with the organisation because she would be able to assist other refugee women and be an example to them. They asked her to attend a meeting in Osh Oblast, but her husband would not allow this. However, after he had seen the benefits that being part of Alga has bought to his family (e.g. now his child goes to school, they rent land and his wife bakes and sells bread) he has grown supportive of Alga and has even become involved himself. The Imam has since moved to another area. Currently there are nine refugee families being assisted by Alga. Sherapat now likes to visit Alga daily and visit other refugee families and discuss problems with them. She likes to share experiences.

Sherapat feels that knowing Alga has given her hope. She also said that her house had been 'saved by Alga's Judicial Consultant' and she has named her child after her. Other changes that have occurred include her child now attending school and her family having land to cultivate. They also now have a house.

The changes that Sherapat described were social and economic, that is those which meet the practical needs of her family, as these are the most important to her. The other women present at the discussion added that Sherapat had also changed, for example she was now more confident at speaking to groups and in meetings which she was not able to do when she first came to Alga. She agreed, but it is interesting to note that it was the other women who saw this change, not Sherapat. The other women said that they were conscious of their own self-development and talked about changes in their understanding and consciousness, as well as understanding how NGOs operate, and how to manage them through being part of Alga.

The work of the **Crisis Centre** is meeting practical and strategic needs of women by providing a refuge for abused women and educating young women on awareness of such issues. Women are provided with information and advice about their rights and are accompanied to court for protection. The member interviewed at the Centre said

that *'most women after staying at the Centre seek a divorce from their husbands and do not return home'.* She also stated that *'for some women the centre provides safety and the first chance they have ever had to think about their own needs without the pressures of abuse and family shame. Slowly through psychological counselling and advice, they can think about their future and make decisions for themselves, without fear'.* This implies that women are being empowered to make decisions and take control over their own lives. The important finding in this example is that the women who were abused did not participate in the decision-making or management of the Centre, yet this does not seem to have affected how the centre contributes to their empowerment. The following will explore more thoroughly the possible reasons why.

Firstly, it is important to look at the abused women's needs. Do they want to participate in the management of the Centre? Is it appropriate that they participate when they are only there for short periods of time? It may be that because the work is so 'pioneering', as stated by one member, and the social stigma of domestic abuse is so great, that the women who arrive or are referred to the centre, are in a desperate situation, unable and unwilling to participate in anything beyond finding a refuge from not only a hostile personal environment but also a hostile public one, where 'she' is stigmatised for making public her abuse. It may also be that the very existence of such a centre (reported to be the only one of its kind in Central Asia at the time) and the fact that women choose to go there, indicates that they are already participating in their own difficult life choices, already making an empowering decision, and so the needs or will to participate in the organisation itself are quite irrelevant in the context.

5.3. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

What is clear from this analysis is that participation in NGO management and decision-making by the target group is not an end in itself. Participation is not therefore, for participation's sake. Empowerment of individuals may be facilitated by such processes of participation in the management and decision-making of NGOs, but it is not essential. Therefore although participative approaches may consistently help to empower women, it is not the only way. This study concludes that apart from participation, which provides a means to empowerment, there are other factors which are critically important to women's empowerment. For example, certain values and beliefs which underpin women's empowerment must be present within the NGO. In the case of the Crisis Centre, the members, while providing a traditional top-down service to other women, do not affect those women's opportunities for empowerment. The value system within which the centre operates clearly centres on changing the conditions and position of women in society by tackling a single key issue of women's rights. The members regard themselves as being 'pioneering' and the Centre had originally been set up by a woman politician who saw the need to address such a difficult issue in society. This implies that the Centre is consciously feminist and gender-aware, as it operates with possibly the most marginalised groups of women, regardless of the shame and hostility surrounding the issue of domestic violence.

The management structures, systems, decision-making processes and leadership style all affect how women participate in NGOs. From the six NGOs studied, women are more likely to have ownership of the outcomes and activities of the NGO which affect their lives, if they participate in management and decision-making processes, but this may not always be appropriate. It appears that there is still a place for more top-down NGO management styles which can also facilitate women's empowerment. In this case, however, the participation is not in the management of the NGO itself but in the women participating in their own decision-making and taking difficult life choices with appropriate support and care.

6. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to gain insight into the extent to which the proliferation of women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan contributes to women's empowerment. Six women's organisations were studied and assessed in terms of how their members and target group participated in the management of the NGO and to what extent this facilitated women's empowerment. By focusing on the NGO itself and how it operates, the study examined women's participation through the conceptual framework of NGO organisational management. It assessed how the participation of members and target groups was built into the structures and practices of NGO management and which structures and practices allowed for greater participation.

The conclusions are that in terms of their management structures and practices, the two consistently more participative NGOs, Alga and the Refugee Association, possessed particular characteristics which facilitated participation of their members and the target group: both have leaders who are from the target group population; both had been the founders of community groups which then went on to become NGOs; and both organisations had well-defined management structures which formally involved the members and target group in decision-making. The three less participative NGOs, the Cultural League, Agricultural Association and Artists Association, showed less explicit participative management structures and practices, due in part to ambiguities in information and lack of data. The sixth NGO, the Crisis Centre, shows the least participative management structures and practices in terms of target group involvement and had what can be termed a 'top-down' management style.

Having identified the most and least participative NGOs in terms of management structures and practices, the study then assessed whether the more participative NGOs reflect more participatory methods based upon a continuum of information sharing, consultation, active participation and ownership. The study concludes that the two most participative NGOs – Alga and the Refugee Association – demonstrate the consistent use of participatory methods, with evidence of ownership of the NGO by members and the target group. By contrast, the Crisis Centre uses the least participatory methods and operates at the level of information sharing only.

Finally, the study examined the extent to which the NGOs which demonstrated greater levels of participation through their management practices and structures and their participatory methods, facilitated women's empowerment. The results were consistent in that the two most participative NGOs, Alga and the Refugee Association, consistently facilitate women's empowerment by meeting both practical and strategic gender needs. The three middle ranking NGOs on the participation scale, the Cultural League, the Agriculture Association and the Artists Association, consistently meet practical gender needs but do not have explicit strategies to meet the strategic gender needs of women. By contrast, however, the consistently least participative NGO, the Crisis Centre, demonstrates that it explicitly meets both the practical and the strategic gender needs of its target group indicating that there is

not necessarily a correlation between participation in NGO management in women's organisations and the empowerment of women. While there is a correlation between the most participative NGOs and their contribution to women's empowerment, what appears to be an essential factor in three cases (Alga, the Refugee Association and the Crisis Centre), is the extent to which the organisation is underpinned by a gender-aware value base.

In terms of the overall objective of assessing whether the proliferation of women's NGOs and the participation of women in NGO's contributes to women's empowerment, the findings of the study suggest that this can only be the case if women's NGOs are consciously working towards women's empowerment in terms of meeting both practical and strategic gender needs. This highlights three main issues to be considered for the future.

Firstly, neither a 'heavily feminised sector' nor the proliferation of women's NGOs implies a greater degree of gender equality or empowerment of women in terms of meeting practical *and* strategic gender needs. On the contrary, an underlying cause may be an NGO sector whose role is to fulfil social services otherwise formerly carried out by the state government. In so doing, NGOs (and the government) are supporting the more traditional role of women as family and social carers, rather than eliminating forms of discrimination and inequalities against women.

Secondly, the notion of women's empowerment, as a collective, transformatory process suggests that there is in place, both an understanding of the differing needs and interests of men and women and an understanding of the difference between meeting practical and strategic needs. This requires an explicit gendered analysis of structural change, supported by policy and practice and 'collectively' a greater collaboration amongst women' s NGOs on such issues.

This leads to the third issue, that gender-awareness implies explicit thought and practice. As Kabeer (1995) suggests, there are three types of gender-aware policy approaches. *Gender-neutral policies*, address practical needs within the existing distribution of resources and responsibilities; *gender specific policies*, meet the differing, practical needs of women and men within the existing distribution of resources and responsibilities and *gender re-distributive policies* meet practical and strategic gender needs with the intention of transforming the existing distribution of resources and responsibilities, to create a balanced gender relationship. These approaches are not mutually exclusive and their appropriateness depends upon the context. However, having such awareness at policy level can offer direction and objectivity.

This suggests certain implications for women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan in terms of their future. Firstly, the building-up of networks and alliances and capitalising on the expertise, skills and commitment of women's NGOs; secondly, the development of explicit gender policy and practice that becomes part of the mission and objectives of the women's NGOs and finally support to women leaders in developing their organisations and the civil society sector at large.

The proliferation of women's NGOs and the strength of women working together can be capitalised upon through collective action and greater collaboration. Competition for funds tends to undermine such practice but could be further encouraged on the part of international donors. A ' scaling-up' of activities, with more collective action on gender-related issues is necessary for the strengthening of civil society. Women NGO leaders are dynamic, resourceful and highly educated. Their role, particularly as institutional capacity-builders and policy-makers can be further supported. Finally, increased gender awareness through developing gender policy and practice within the sector can be supported in terms of training, advocacy and policy development. By providing support in these three areas, NGO support organisations such as INTRAC can assist in the strengthening of a forceful and vibrant NGO sector which can contribute to advance the equality and empowerment of women in the long-term.

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APPENDIX

The Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan

In 1994 a women's conference was held in Kyrgyzstan entitled 'Changes in Central Asia'. Seventeen women's organisations were represented and the outcome of the conference was a decision to meet regularly. At a subsequent meeting it was decided to create a forum of women's NGOs for the purpose of information exchange and mutual assistance and consolidation. In 1996, The Forum become a registered non-profit, non-governmental organisation. It is funded by Hivos and now has over thirty members. The goals of the organisation indicate its role as a support, resource and service organisation:

• Consolidation of women's groups, development of women's network on a local, regional and national level.

• Development of a women's resource centre.

• Information provision to women's groups and women of Kyrgyzstan about events in the Republic of Central Asia, through publications, monthly workshops and networks.

• Consolidation of women's groups' activities of work with women, children, female youth, and old people.

• Publishing materials for and about women (digest, email, newsletter, brochures).

• Consultation and advisory services to local, national and international organisations in the areas of women's development in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

Diamond

A meeting was held with Bermeta Tugelbaeva the President of Diamond. Women scientists and lecturers from Bishkek's higher educational institutions and the National Academy of Sciences established the organisation in 1994. The main focus of the Association's work is *'to develop a woman's personality, protect her rights and health, and promote her high status in politics, society and family'*. Over the past four years Diamond have been involved in publishing four books on women's rights, legal literacy for women, violence against women and women's position in politics in Kyrgyzstan. They also have a newsletter, but at present do not have funding to publish it. Diamond has approximately 50 members who represent a range of other organisations, such as the Association of Women Lawyers.

One of their main research areas has been women and politics. The conclusions from the first phase were that women were not particularly 'politically minded'. Only

10% of women questioned were interested in politics or wanted to be involved in politics and 34% believed that women should participate in political positions. The main reasons put forward for this situation are that: active participation in politics is new to women; women do not have the financial means (e.g. only 1% of new businesses are run by women); and their remains strong cultural stereotypes, where a woman's status depends on her husband which inhibits women's progress. Bermeta believes that the quota system which existed in the Soviet era, is superficial, as there must be the political will for women to be in politics and the tailing off of numbers since independence, she feels signifies this. However, it may also signify the predominance of patriarchy in politics. The second phase of the research is supported by UNDP and is researching women and leadership.

Gender in Development Bureau (GID)

A meeting was held with four women, including Christine Mussisi from GID at UNDP in Bishkek. The GID was established in October 1998. Their mission is 'to contribute to sustainable human development through social mobilisation, promoting women's advancement and promoting gender mainstreaming in policies, programming and implementation'.

There are two strands to the Bureau's work: first, social mobilisation with a focus on strengthening civil society and second focusing in particular on women and gender. The main areas of activity in this latter strand, mainstreaming gender issues, enhancing gender equality through access and control of resources, promoting women's advancement and participation in decision-making and supporting efforts to eliminate violence against women.

Information Focal Points

The government agency responsible for women's issues is the 'State Commission for family and women's affairs at the government of Kyrgz Republic'. This agency was established to co-ordinate cross-sectoral activities of the executive authorities in state policy on family and women's affairs. The national programme until the year 2000 was entitled 'The programme of Improving Women's Status, Family, Maternity and Childhood Protection in Kyrgyz Republic from 1994/5-2000'. This focus implies a firm positioning of women as 'mothers' and guardians of the family, rather than as part of the economic transition of the country. I think it also supports the fact that the 'feminisation of the NGO sector' is a result of women's role being viewed as the welfare provider.