

The Baring Foundation

**Sitting on Chairs:  
Observations on Capacity  
Building in Developing  
Countries**

**John Twigg**

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## About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation is an independent grantmaker which was set up in 1969. Since then it has given almost £100 million. The Foundation's purpose is to improve the quality of life of people experiencing disadvantage and discrimination through strengthening the voluntary organisations that serve them.

The Foundation currently has three main grant programmes: Strengthening the Voluntary Sector; Arts; and International Development run jointly with the John Ellerman Foundation. In addition there are smaller Special Initiatives on Parents with Learning Difficulties and their Children; Intercultural Dialogue; and Climate Change and the Third Sector.

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## Foreword

It is not easy to think of a synonym for 'development'. It is partly to do with better governance and peace and security; with access to education and health; with economic growth. But in the search for a single word you could do a lot worse than 'empowerment'.

Access to chairs – just sitting on them in order to participate in a discussion, never mind owning them – is a powerful symbol of this type of empowerment, and one which this excellent publication takes as its starting point. It lies, too, at the heart of its recommendations, encouraging international agencies to value and respect local partners by involving them fully in decisions which affect them; by recognising the constraints they face; and by committing to a long-term relationship which stimulates rather than dictates change – in short, by empowering them.

There are important messages here too for the international NGOs, not just about questions they should think about in building relationships with partners, but also in addressing their own capacity-building and organisational development needs. Empowerment, like many of the other best things in life, begins at home.

**Professor Myles A Wickstead CBE**

Chair, Baring/Ellerman Foundations' Joint International Development Committee

# **Sitting on Chairs: Observations on Capacity Building in Developing Countries**

*Before we were in a group like this, we wouldn't have been allowed to sit on chairs and to answer questions like this. And who would have thought we would own chairs like these?<sup>1</sup>*

(1) Member of women's group in South Sudan, quoted in South Sudan Women Concern evaluation: 12.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASI	Anti-Slavery International
CBO	community-based organisation
CSO	civil society organisation
DDP	Disability and Development Partners
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ICA	Institute of Cultural Affairs
ICT	information and communications technology
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
RFP	Richmond Fellowship Peru
SSWC	South Sudan Women Concern
TDA	Tigray Development Association
TOR	terms of reference

## Executive Summary

This report reviews the work of the Joint International Development Grants Programme of the Baring and John Ellerman Foundations and its impact on improving the effectiveness of non-governmental and community-based organisations. It is a desk study, based primarily upon independent end-of-project evaluations of 12 completed projects in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, which ranged from regional projects covering several countries to local initiatives working with a few hundred families. Although not a comprehensive review of the projects, it does highlight significant issues relating to building organisational capacity in developing countries.

By and large the International Programme supported local organisations with substantial capacity development needs. Many were working in areas with high levels of social deprivation and in difficult operating contexts.

International Programme funding helped organisations to become more 'professional' in their governance and administration, to broaden their thinking and take on new ideas; yet organisational development is a long process, subject to many influences. The International Programme and its UK partners can take credit for giving local organisations support as they travel this path, but many need much more time and nurture to become fully independent, effective and resilient.

Southern NGOs, many of which operate on very small budgets, rely on a handful of donors and lack fundraising capacity, are very vulnerable financially. One-off grants can provide skills and increase capacity to raise funds successfully, but the prospect of local organisations that are financially self-sufficient through local funding mechanisms still looks very distant.

The importance of organisational skills training should not be underestimated where lack of formally acquired skills and experience can be a major stumbling block to a local organisation's effectiveness and growth. In these projects, the emphasis was usually on training key individuals within an organisation, but the extent to which individuals passed on skills to others in their own and partner organisations was sometimes open to question. There was also a tendency to see training as a one-off event rather than the longer-term educational process that is required to make skills and understanding really stick.

The dilemma of choice between focusing on provision of technical assistance and skills, on the one hand, and organisational development and capacity building on the other, is very real to operational agencies that want to help communities with pressing social and economic problems. There were many examples of the direct benefits of technical assistance work with communities, especially in livelihood and small enterprise support, which led consistently to increased income, ability to send children to school and to buy food, clothes and medicines, as well as to setting up new businesses. But there were cases where the pressures, or ambitions, of technical assistance activities to meet immediate social needs were allowed to dominate the project, and the strategic capacity-building needs of the local partner organisations were not addressed sufficiently.

The logical extension of building local NGO capacity is that the NGO then seeks to empower community organisations, both to facilitate collective self-help efforts and to help marginalised people to stand up for their rights and achieve better recognition from decision makers and society at large. The evaluations provided a number of instances of projects stimulating such developments, which can be seen as one of the most significant consequences of the International Programme's support.

Women did form the main focus of attention in a few projects but gender did not feature as a significant issue in most of the evaluation reports. This can only reflect a lack of attention to the subject by the partner agencies concerned. Where this issue was addressed, the immense value of stronger communal organisation to women's livelihoods, position in society and self belief was evident.

Acquisition of basic literacy is a pre-requisite for successful local organisations and a vital step towards autonomy. Low literacy levels present a major barrier to group creation and administration; this appears to be a widespread problem in the development of community organisations. It is also very easy for a project run by educated professionals to overestimate the level of technical skills in their local and grass-roots partner organisations; more attention should be paid to this. Study or exchange visits between organisations and groups are a highly effective way of sharing ideas and transferring skills.

All the projects were, to a degree, filling significant socio-economic development gaps left by the limitations of state provision or the incapacity of local civil society. Civil society organisations place high value on their working relationships with government, and local government in particular. In most projects, government barriers to progress came not so much from obstruction but from weaknesses in bureaucratic capacity and the length of time needed to change entrenched attitudes.

Working with government might require both operational collaboration and advocacy. For operational organisations, advocacy relating to changes in law, policy, social attitudes and practices is not separate from other kinds of project activity and is a natural extension of work on the ground. This need not be confrontational: constructive dialogues can shift attitudes and stimulate action. The expertise that civil society organisations possess in their specialist fields is not unwelcome to government. Official moves to update laws or fill legislative gaps offer significant opportunities for civil society influence. Whether formally or loosely structured, networking was effective in bringing different organisations and groups together to tackle common problems.

The prime component in a successful relationship between an international NGO and its local partners appears to have been transparency on the part of the UK organisation about the project's objectives and activities, management processes and budgets. Accompanying this was a consultative approach that led local partners to feel they were involved in project decisions, development and review. Where relationships between the UK NGO and a local partner did break down, this appeared to be due either to a lack of shared aims or poor communication of project objectives.

In some cases, the role of the UK partner was relatively minor and principally concerned with passing on funds and a little advice; in others, much more hands-on support was needed in the form of training, technical backstopping and the like. A very important role played by some UK partners, especially in regional and advocacy projects, involved assistance in making contacts with international agencies and forums – in other words, helping the local organisations' voices to be heard on a bigger stage.

Almost every project took longer to complete than originally planned. The reasons varied, but the main ones were security problems, transport difficulties, funding or payment issues and staff turnover. All of the projects reviewed were operating in difficult conditions, sometimes in very difficult and even dangerous ones.

The International Programme is unusual among donors in allowing UK applicants to use some of the grant to strengthen their own organisational effectiveness, with applications to strategic, long-term capacity building welcomed. But few applicants take advantage of this opportunity: it is more common for them to use the 'core grant' for short-term expansion of capacity to carry out particular tasks such as advocacy.

# 1. Introduction

The Joint International Development Grants Programme of the Baring and John Ellerman Foundations seeks to improve the effectiveness of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) in Sub-Saharan Africa to address problems arising from the long-term forced migration and displacement of people. It accepts applications only from registered charities, voluntary and constituted not-for-profit organisations in the UK, but these need to show that they have close working relationships with African civil society organisations (CSOs). The International Programme has gone through occasional modifications since it was launched in its present form in 2001<sup>2</sup> but its basic aims have remained constant. Since 2001, the programme has made 32 grants to 30 different organisations.

From time to time, reviews have been commissioned so that lessons can be learnt about the way the International Programme has worked and what it has achieved. In 2001 the Baring Foundation published a review of lessons about capacity building from its earlier International Programme, which had made only small, one-off grants (Twigg 2001). In 2005, a workshop for the programme's UK, African and South American partners led to a collection of case studies called *Filling Gaps and Making Spaces: Strengthening Civil Society in Unstable Situations* (Twigg ed., 2005). A further review in 2007 looked at the grant-making process, the programme's aims and the relationship between the two foundations and their partners (Silkin 2007)<sup>3</sup>. The Baring Foundation was also part of a group of foundations that commissioned a study into the role of UK trusts and foundations in international development funding: one finding of this research was the important role played by foundations in supporting civil society organisations in the South (de Las Casas and Fiennes, 2007).

This report takes a fresh look at the programme's work and impact, based primarily upon *independent* end-of-project evaluations of 12 completed projects (see Table 1). This is not a systematic review of all the relevant issues, as both the reports and the projects themselves are too diverse to permit this. Instead, it offers some observations on organisational capacity building and related issues. In the future, as more projects are completed and a greater body of report and evaluation evidence accumulates, more focused studies of particular themes may become possible.

(2) Initially it supported work in Latin America as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, and the grants were for up to three years instead of the current five.

(3) All of these documents can be found on the Baring Foundation's website, [www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)



## 2. The Evaluations and their Methods

*The programme's aim and theme present particular challenges to monitoring and evaluation. (i) the line from capacity building for NGOs/CBOs to improved welfare outcomes is a long one, and the links are not always clear or quantifiable. (ii) there is a general lack of recorded experience of development work with displaced people (as distinct from humanitarian responses), where the programme can situate itself and from which the programme can learn. However, these challenges can also be seen as opportunities for the programme to invest more in monitoring and reviewing the work and learning from joint reflection on achievements and challenges. (Silkin 2007: 2).*

Independent evaluations formed the principal evidence base for the study<sup>4</sup>. Evaluations were normally undertaken by a single independent consultant, though sometimes by two or more, with some 10-20 days allocated to the work. The evaluation methods were also fairly standard: a desk review of project and agency documents, semi-structured interviews with key informants (mainly from the international NGO (INGO) and its local partners, also with other stakeholders such as government officials and other NGOs), and field visits, often relatively brief, involving observation, interviews and group discussions with beneficiaries. A few evaluators were lucky enough to attend workshops involving project partners – a good way not only to meet a number of stakeholders but also to hear their views openly expressed during their peer group discussions. The Rainforest Foundation's evaluator facilitated a self-evaluation workshop for staff from the project's three main national partner NGOs. One partner, South Sudan Women Concern, was permitted to carry out a self-evaluation as its work had recently been evaluated by two other donors.

The approach to project evaluation was almost always qualitative<sup>5</sup>. The results were presented as concisely as possible to make the reports more accessible to staff in the organisations concerned, without the mountains of evidence that research studies might present. The findings of such relatively brief and usually broad surveys often appear impressionistic when read, even when based on an extensive review of documents, in-depth interviews and field visits. This is unfair to evaluators, some of whom were clearly very capable and astute; and it was usually possible to get a 'feel' for the calibre of the evaluator and hence the validity of the conclusions from careful reading of a report.

On some occasions evaluators had been able to disseminate information about a project and its work through their interviews with other organisations. This influencing was probably not widespread, but it suggests an unplanned benefit of evaluation.

(4) Agencies' end-of-project reports were also consulted: these were useful as a source of factual detail but, being written by the grant recipients, tended to overstate the benefits of the project.

(5) Three evaluations included sample surveys (based on questionnaires) as well as qualitative methods: these focused on the benefits of technical interventions to beneficiaries rather than organisational capacity building.

**Table 1: Projects Surveyed**

Organisation	Purpose of Project	Amount £	Year awarded
Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA)	To provide capacity building and institutional support to organisations of nomadic pastoralists in Somaliland.	238,948	2001
South Sudan Women Concern (SSWC)	To provide training resources and materials to enable 20 groups of displaced women in Southern Sudan to build their organisational capacity. It will also improve the capacity of South Sudan Women Concern and other local partners to support this process.	239,850	2001
ICA-UK	To build the capacity of ICA Tanzania to expand its involvement with displaced people and migrant communities. It will also develop the capacity of 20 local groups from amongst the (predominantly) Maasai and Waarusha peoples in Kisongo and Manyara Divisions, Monduli District, Tanzania.	138,565	2002
Reason Partnership	To build capacity within Reason Partnership, its partner organisation in Peru and communities there to respond to the mental health needs of women suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder caused by displacement. It will test a model of effective practice which can then be used more widely in Latin America and elsewhere.	141,294	2002
Tigray Development Association (TDA) UK	To promote conflict resolution as an essential strand running through development initiatives with displaced people in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia through the establishment of a Conflict Resolution Unit within TDA International.	221,000	2002
Anti-Slavery International (ASI)	To establish a permanent network of NGOs in the West African countries of Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Togo, Burkina Faso and Gabon working on the issue of child trafficking.	164,358	2003
Disability and Development Partners (DDP)	To strengthen the capacity of a local partner in Angola to respond to the needs of internally displaced people with disabilities, and their families.	156,000	2003
Rainforest Foundation UK	To increase the capacity of organisations in Cameroon, Congo the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon to address the problems of displaced forest people through policy and advocacy work.	185,000	2003
The Gorilla Organization	Capacity building of indigenous peoples' organisations in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda to enhance their socio-economic conditions and assert their rights.	85,715	2004
Practical Action	Building the capacity of NGOs and CBOs to implement decentralised infrastructure interventions to improve the lives of flood-displaced communities in Mozambique.	202,781	2004
Y Care International	To develop the capacity of Y Care International, grass-roots groups and NGOs to meet the needs of internally displaced former child soldiers in Colombia.	196,642	2004
Village AiD	To support partner organisations in Ghana and Sierra Leone working with displaced and excluded young people.	138,215	2005

Source: Baring Foundation website [www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)

## 3. Observations and Issues

This section presents observations on common themes that emerged from the evaluations and reports. Although not a comprehensive review of the projects, it does highlight significant issues relating to building organisational capacity in developing countries.

The diversity of capacity-building activity undertaken in the projects must be borne in mind. It included organisational restructuring, training in management, administrative and information and communications technology (ICT) skills, and technical backstopping, as well as some material support (e.g. office equipment). Many African CSOs operate on shoestring budgets and can benefit enormously from provision of equipment such as computers, copiers and internet connections; obtaining adequate office space is also important. Access to email was greatly valued by local NGOs, but its value in practice depended on existing personal relationships between users in different organisations or countries.

### 3.1 Outreach and Impact

Being largely qualitative in their methods, the evaluations collectively did not provide consistent measures of projects' outreach, although some impressions can be formed. At one end of the scale were regional projects such as Anti-Slavery International's network against child trafficking and labour in West Africa: this covered seven countries, with key local partners working with and supporting many more NGOs; some were instrumental in national NGO networks with between 5 and 30 members; the outreach of the partners' work was widespread and sometimes national through advocacy work. More local projects would generally reach a few hundred people or households directly, sometimes more: for example, the several components of ICA's Tanzania project tested 119 people for HIV/AIDS, registered 320 adult learners in functional literacy classes, introduced technology to reduce indoor air pollution from cooking in 130 houses, trained 20 women's self-help groups in business and group management, trained 116 paralegal advice workers and advised over 400 people on legal matters, at the same time as building up local organisational capacity to continue and expand the work. South Sudan Women Concern provided skills training to 800 women in 20 women's groups.

It was often difficult to see the impact of the organisational capacity-building work, partly because of the limited time span of the projects, partly because the real benefits of capacity building can be hard to spot, especially in the short term, and partly because so many different factors, planned and unforeseen, interact in influencing the pace and shape of organisational development (see e.g. Edwards 1996). However, the evaluations do provide indicators of such changes.

*For the local partners ADCR and GTA, the two areas of interventions namely: understanding long term response to disasters and also infrastructure service delivery were new. Their involvement in disaster management has been limited to the traditional just after disaster management without the integration of long term development of the communities. (Practical Action report: 4)*

*According to staff and members of ... the organisation, the capacity building they received 'has been very useful, has helped to better understand the respective roles and functions, and has strengthened the organisation.' Staff as well as the president and active members of the organisation have an understanding of the importance of proper planning ... The opportunities offered to attend conferences and visit other organisations have also had an enormous mobilising effect. (DDP evaluation: 19, 26)*

Projects did not start from scratch. There was always preparatory work and in nearly every case they were based on previous and/or parallel collaborations involving at least some of the local partners. The 'new' projects often involved scaling up this work, taking it to new locations or developing it in new directions. But there was institutional novelty, too: the Conflict Resolution Unit set up by the Tigray Development Association (TDA) is a good example, though it complemented other socio-economic development work by TDA and its local partners.

Funding often enabled CSOs to expand their project activities. The outputs of this are easy to identify, in the form of completion of activities (e.g. a training programme or public education campaign); so too are some of the short-term outcomes (e.g. achieving a specific policy change). But extra resources for project work do not automatically translate into organisational benefits. One of the challenges for the International Programme's Committee, in reviewing applications, is to decide if a proposal is serious about capacity building for its own sake or a largely technical project with organisational development elements.

### 3.2 Organisational Development

By and large the International Programme chose to support local NGOs and CBOs with substantial capacity development needs. Many were working in remote places with high levels of social deprivation all but forgotten by governments and international donors. Some were relatively new and those that were established tended to be institutionally fragile (although many had able and highly committed staff or volunteers). Organisations that were already well established and highly capable were generally given support to expand the scope of their work or assist local partners.

CSOs supported through these projects faced a number of serious challenges. The situation facing organisations working on disability in Angola is not untypical:

*Since 1992 a number of organisations have been created, dealing with or representing persons with disabilities, but they have not really gained strength yet, due to weak resources and internal leadership capacity, lack of information, strong cultural, social and economic barriers, and weak connections with regional and international movements. (DDP evaluation: 9).*

The transition of a CSO from its origins in commitment, enthusiasm and largely voluntary effort, to a structured, regulated and 'professional' organisation is an important stage in its development. This could form a key element in International Programme support.

*Until the restructuring exercise the organisation for 6 years had operated without full-time or paid staff, highly dependent on the MC [Management Committee], because it was using members as part-time workers. There was, however, a felt need to change the operational methodologies to be able to use resources more effectively and be accountable and transparent to members, partners and donors ... the restructuring of the organisation also turned it more professional: today at the executive level of the organisation persons have had different professional backgrounds and trainings and quite some experience in the area of disability. There are persons who have been working within state structures dealing with disabilities, economists, social workers and persons with teaching/training experience and expertise in the mobilisation of people. (DDP evaluation: 13).*

Alongside these organisational developments are less tangible but no less important shifts in attitudes towards development.

*The approaches have changed – and are still in the process of changing – from one [of] ‘doing for people’ to one of ‘doing with people’. This is an important change process, which will certainly still need some time to get deeply rooted, because there is quite a strong tradition of so called ‘assistentialism’ in Angola. (DDP evaluation: 14-15).*

Whilst it would be too much to claim that International Programme grants alone are responsible for such shifts, which are often longer-term and more of an organic than a directed nature, the programme and its UK partners can take credit for giving CSOs support as they travel this path. However, newly formed organisations (and networks) need time and nurture to become independent, effective and resilient.

*Three years was not sufficient time to give CBOs the necessary skills, means and confidence to achieve self-management. With hindsight, AIMPO and Gorilla Organization staff variously estimated that anything from six to ten years would be needed to achieve this target ... Although progress has been made it is difficult to talk about the CBOs’ sustainability as they are still fragile. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 25-26).*

Where possible, and particularly at community level, it often made sense to work with existing group structures or customary approaches to collective action, illustrated by Richmond Fellowship Peru’s use of mutual assistance groups (Grupos de Ayuda Mutua – GAMs) in Lima, Peru. This was not only known to be effective – the approach had already been used successfully in helping drug addicts – but was also based on modes of communal activity that were traditional among the Andean communities from which the displaced people had come. Another advantage of the GAM method was that

*The participants are able to strengthen the social relationships that are the foundations of a community. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 8).*

At grass-roots level, establishment of community organisations can have a ‘snowball effect’ in that it may be easier to build new groups and activities where community members are already involved in collective endeavours and where smaller actions to meet immediate needs gradually build up into bigger change processes.

*Belonging to a group has allowed some women to return to Sudan and establish themselves, at times leaving their children in the camps in Uganda but returning to bring them as soon as they have a minimum of capacity to feed them. Later returnees from Uganda found women already active in groups and joined for solidarity and also to receive support; women reported being inspired by other women making progress and this motivated them to join. Belonging to a group also gave a certain degree of security, a sense of not being alone, when the area remained sparsely populated and unstable. (SSWC evaluation: 7).*

In this it is clearly also important to encourage inclusion.

*In the early stages some participants were reluctant to integrate fully with the group. They asked to be allowed to listen from the door and joined the group half way through the session. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 9).*

### 3.3 Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability and independence of local partners are commonly stated aims of INGO capacity-building projects but it is hard to achieve this. Southern NGOs, many of which operate on very small budgets, rely on a handful of donors and lack fundraising capacity, are very vulnerable financially. The importance of acquiring fundraising skills and the need for local fundraising to complement international donors was noted in some evaluations.

However, these were broad-brush recommendations. It was beyond the evaluators' remit to explore the particular kinds of fundraising skill required or assess the likelihood of additional funding, local or international, becoming available – both are important issues that require careful consideration.

Projects funded by the International Programme commonly provided salary support to their partners, seemingly with the expectation that this would continue through new grants at the end of the project. This strategy is risky, even allowing for the fact that the UK INGOs had often been working with their partners for some time before securing the International Programme grant and did not intend to abandon them. Renewed or additional funding cannot be guaranteed.

*The salaries are contributing to excellent work from AIMPO staff on the important project at Ngwenda ... With the withdrawal of the programme funding, a problem may [a]rise if salaries are reduced. Indeed, to transform the CBOs into sustainable autonomous bodies long-term engagement of AIMPO staff and more support are required. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 19, 27).*

*Not being able to raise enough funds through private means other than partner development programmes leaves the organization in suspense on how to maintain the staff and offices as all activities are ending almost at the same time. (ICA report: 6).*

However, some NGO partners appeared positive about local fundraising opportunities and there are indications that well-directed fundraising training or support could achieve strong results – at least, where the institutional and funding context was favourable.

*AIMPO have continued to liaise with the Imbaraga Farmers Union, with whom they gave introduction to sustainable, organic farming to the Batwa communities in Rwanda in 2006. From this they developed a proposal together with the Gorilla Organization, which has secured funding from the European Commission for training Batwa in sustainable organic agriculture and further capacity building. (Gorilla Organization report: 3).*

*Other agencies like CARE have entrusted their organization with projects for implementation. (Village Aid evaluation: 12).*

There were also occasional instances of entrepreneurship by local NGOs. Simli, Village Aid's partner in Ghana, set up a profit-making internet café. DDP's Angolan partner LARDEF was planning to buy land on which to build houses and offices for rent.

It was impossible to estimate how realistic some of these expectations were. The prospect of local organisations that are financially self-sufficient through local funding mechanisms still looks very distant. Nevertheless, projects were essentially unfinished business: part of a much longer programme of work. Every project was expected to continue, in some form, once the International Programme's grant came to an end – and in a few cases, the UK INGO returned to the Foundations with a request for further funding. Longer-term post-project reviews would provide valuable insights into local organisations' financial sustainability and the trends and events that affect it.

It is also important to bear in mind that some of the UK NGOs were themselves vulnerable financially. Most of the International Programme's grants have gone to smaller NGOs that depend on unpredictable grant income (larger NGOs have a public funding base). Three of the organisations whose projects are discussed here encountered serious funding difficulties during the grant period; one was forced into drastic retrenchment and another bankrupted.

### 3.4 Training

Skills training was the main element of organisational support in most cases, addressing organisational management, project cycle management (planning, monitoring and evaluation, etc.), financial management and reporting, fundraising and ICT skills. The importance of such training should not be underestimated where lack of formally acquired skills and experience can be a major stumbling block to a local organisation's effectiveness and growth.

*The training in Kampala helped [local] Gorilla Organization managers to acquire better knowledge of project management. Before the programme they only had school knowledge of accounting and no knowledge of M&E techniques. The training has increased their confidence in managing larger programmes. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 10).*

Technical skills training enabled local NGOs to improve and expand their work and could lead to cross-fertilisation between projects.

*Enhanced understanding of displaced community needs and capacity building of partners has led ADCR to develop a proposal to work with 3000 families in Chibuto who are currently threatened by another form of displacement to give way to the titanium mining operation. (Practical Action evaluation: 13).*

Carrying out training exercises could also have a reverse benefit in helping the INGOs to understand the work and needs of their partners better.

Field visits were found to have a very positive impact in increasing understanding and commitment and there are strong hints in some evaluation reports of a causal link between the frequency of field visits by implementing partners and the quality of the relationships between different local stakeholders. The attitude of project workers was therefore a crucial success factor: extensive personal contact with beneficiaries and expressions of solidarity helped to dissolve the barriers between NGOs and communities and by doing so created the possibility of real synergy in their joint efforts.

The extent and type of training and technical support given varied widely. By and large training seems to have enabled local partners' staff to acquire valuable job skills and use them where they felt confident enough to do so. Usually, the emphasis was on training key individuals within an organisation.

*Overall, Practical Action's human resource development strategy was found to focus on individual 'empowerment' and the use of individual skill as part of a deliberate organizational capacity development strategy. (Practical Action evaluation: 21).*

This is a legitimate approach, but the extent to which individuals passed on skills to others in their own and partner organisations was sometimes open to question. Where existing organisational systems and culture were strong, as in the case of some national NGO partners or local offices of INGOs, effective acquisition and sharing of technical skills were more likely. Future proposals for the 'cascading' of skills should be scrutinised very carefully, especially where the initial recipients of training are very few in number.

There is still a general tendency to see training as a one-off event rather than the longer-term educational process that is required to make skills and understanding really stick.

*However, on the job training, combined with long term supportive supervision and coaching lacked. Training lacked follow up and a gradual weaning process. There was no process or strategy to evaluate if the trainee had mastered desired behaviours and professional practices. This experience and feedback from trainees was expected to help in improving and modifying project strategy. (Practical Action evaluation: 21).*

*... the training has not been adopted as fully by the Rwandan programme manager as by his counterparts in DRC and Uganda ... Because he found the training had introduced so many varied concepts that it was difficult to implement them all, it was also he in particular who requested a refresher course. (Gorilla Organization report: 1).*

It is also very easy for a project run by educated professionals to overestimate the level of technical skills in local and grass-roots organisations. More attention should be paid to this.

*... the AIMPO field staff were not sufficiently computer literate to benefit from Powerpoint training. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 11).*

But perhaps the greatest problem with this personal/technical skills approach is that it can lose sight of the big picture.

*In both cases of CBOs and partners, CD [capacity development] emphasized human capacity development centered on individuals and committees and totally ignored institutional development matters. ... Human capacity development is no panacea in CBO development. What is required is an approach that addresses both human and institutional development capabilities if ever CBOs are to remain effective. (Practical Action evaluation: 23, 25).*

### 3.5 Organisations or Projects?

The International Programme's purpose is two-fold: to improve the effectiveness of NGOs and CBOs and hence to address problems arising from long-term migration and displacement. Throughout the programme's history, funded agencies have found it difficult to strike an appropriate balance between capacity building and project implementation. The dilemma of choice between focusing on technical assistance and skills, on the one hand, and organisational development and capacity building on the other, is very real to operational agencies that want to help communities with serious and immediate social and economic problems. It can be difficult to justify spending a lot of time, money and effort on NGO management training, for example, when villagers do not have clean water and there are boreholes to be dug. It is therefore not surprising to find agencies veering towards interventionism.

*... all of those interviewed mentioned the necessity to respond to immediate needs of the indigenous populations while they continue to address the strategic needs of the beneficiaries through policy dialogue and advocacy to ensure their rights. They mentioned that some communities do not even have the basic necessities, such as food for the day to meet their daily needs; it becomes therefore hard to consult them on issues of rights. One partner said, 'advocacy work cannot be done when the stomach is empty'. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 25).*

In these situations, organisational capacity building can become almost an add-on to a technical assistance project, thereby missing out on the strategic potential that an International Programme grant offers. There were cases where the pressures, or ambitions, of technical assistance activities were allowed to dominate the core capacity-building needs of local partners.

*The PENHA [Somaliland] staff was severely stretched in their final year, due to a general lack of capacity ... staff development and training opportunities were ... few and patchy; sufficient funding and time to adequately train them were always limited. (PENHA evaluation: 43).*



*There is a risk of civil society organizations taking on more than they can chew, and hence diluting their efforts. They have to reflect on their mandate and have clearer strategic direction, in order to avoid being driven by situations. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 33).*

Problems are more likely to arise where projects are not clear about their main purpose or try to bundle too many different activities together. In many cases it seemed that the UK agencies involved had not thought this issue through properly and did not have a clearly articulated view of where to strike the balance. Further discussion of this issue would benefit agencies and funders alike. Where UK partners' interests were primarily with other project outcomes, the evaluations they commissioned were likely to focus on these rather than the organisational gains. It was sometimes necessary for the International Programme to remind partners of the importance of organisational capacity building when they were drawing up TOR for evaluations and even then this aspect did not necessarily feature large in the reports.

Another disadvantage of an excessively project-focused approach to capacity building is that it is difficult to weigh up cause and effect linkages. Even relatively small African CSOs are likely to be involved in several projects simultaneously, funded by different donors, which may also be helping to build their capacity. Disentangling the International Programme's contribution to capacity building in such cases is near impossible.

On the other hand, the immediate results of technical training (e.g. in farming, small enterprise, construction) carried out by projects were more easily visible than the changes to groups and organisations. The number of people benefiting directly (for instance, through training, loans, technical and other practical assistance) ranged from a few score to a few hundreds, depending on the nature and scale of the project. The indirect impact on others – as members of the same communities, users and purchasers of goods and services, or through such activities as training and advocacy – is incalculable, but in every case likely to reach many more people.

There are many examples in the evaluations of the direct benefits of technical assistance work with communities, often shown through individual testimonies rather than statistics. The main area of such assistance, livelihood and small enterprise support (such as group formation, business and technical skills training and provision of micro-credit), led consistently to increased income, ability to send children to school and buy food, clothes and medicines, as well as to setting up of new businesses.

*Women Groups are becoming more and more business oriented. A very good example is that of Mwangaza Women Group of Majengo that sells ripe bananas. Before the training they were selling these bananas in one location and were not selling profitably. Now, they are hiring a pick-up as a group and selling the bananas on open markets in different market locations such as Karatu, Minjingu and other areas. This has increased the profit-making capacity of their business. They are helping husbands to pay school fees for their children and have considerably improved their diet at home. (ICA evaluation: 6).*

*In contrast to their lives in the camps or immediately post flight, women reported having a lot of food now and lower levels of disease amongst themselves and their children. Livestock has allowed those that have received goats to gain income from sales (paying school fees was the most frequently mentioned benefit). Over the 3 years the needs of women gradually changed to emphasis on income having achieved some level of food security. (SSWC evaluation: 11).*

There is a cumulative effect to livelihood strengthening and local economic activity, as the following example from South Sudan shows:

*After receiving agriculture training, women said they were able to produce healthy crops. In particular the knowledge to grow vegetables (onion, tomatoes, beans and eggplant) was reported to have been very useful. Suddenly women found traders and ordinary people from Moyo coming to Kajokeji during market days to buy vegetables and other food crops. (Moyo in Uganda about 20 kilometres away is the nearest sizeable market to the people of Kajokeji.) Women from Uganda come to local markets on foot to buy crops. Traders started to come on bicycles. In 2002 SSWC mobilised women's groups to repair potholes on the roads by gathering stones. This women said created change in their lives ... potential traders had access to the area and were coming every market day. Some traders from Moyo have built shops in the market where there was none before ... This new development encouraged the women to open stalls in the market where they sell their produce on a daily basis. (SSWC evaluation: 12).*

This seems to back up Nabeel Hamdi's 'small change' idea of development, which argues against top-heavy planning and for the importance of discrete 'multiplier' actions at the grass-roots level that lead to a progression of local changes and improvements, many of which may be unplanned and even unforeseen (Hamdi 2004).

### 3.6 Community Empowerment and Autonomy

*The most important thing is that we learned about our rights and how to struggle for them, because before we were considered persons without any importance. (beneficiary in Moxico, Angola, quoted in DDP evaluation: 26).*

The logical extension of building NGO capacity is that the NGO then seeks to empower more local and community groups. For example, ASI's partner in Benin, ESSAM, an established national NGO, used its funding to set up child protection committees in rural areas. Development and support of CBOs is a vital element in an effective civil society. In addition to facilitating collective self-help efforts, CBOs help marginalised groups to achieve better recognition from decision makers and society at large. The evaluations provided a number of instances of projects stimulating such developments, which can be seen as one of the most significant consequences of the International Programme's support: for this reason, several examples are given here.

*The general attitude towards people with disabilities in Angola has certainly created a strong feeling of discrimination and low self-esteem. The overall experience of the poor for a long time has been that they could only live on charity, because if ever there was any program, it very rarely aimed at the development of self-help-capacity. The attitude of expecting help from outside rather than organising themselves is certainly not easy to change. But during the field visits there were some very impressive examples that the project approach is bearing fruit and in general the local representatives of the PwDs [people with disabilities], elected by the communities in the process of organising themselves, appeared to be very committed, active and respected by the communities. (DDP evaluation: 21).*

*On a practical side, the various interventions that the project has undertaken have enabled not only the Pygmy communities but also the Bantus to strengthen their organisational capacity in the management of their micro-projects initiated by themselves. The Baka pygmy communities are in a process of managing their own communal shops. Pygmy communities have created their own associations and are in a process of legalising them. Some members of pygmy associations hire their labour to the Bantus, and this is marking a gradual end of free labour to the Bantus. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 11).*

*RFP has organised its groups so as to give their members a feeling of belonging. Displaced Andean women have found a space (physical and in time) that now belongs to them. It can be clearly perceived that they now feel more valued, more dignified with the ability to give their opinion and disagree without fear of censure or criticism. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 20).*

*Women entrepreneurs said they were now able to change money in the market and negotiate the amount of taxes demanded of them by the local authorities ... the very fact that women have turned into taxpayers from being displaced (receiving relief food) created a big influence in the community and boosted women's confidence (SSWC evaluation: 12).*

*There have been a number of activities to encourage members to stand up for their rights, which have shown some success. Two examples: In one community parents of disabled children together managed to get the service of a physiotherapist within the community after some protest, because they could not afford the transport costs to town to attend treatment. Families of ex-militaries in another community, who were given houses without zinc sheets by IRSEM, got together and managed to get, what had been promised long ago. (DDP evaluation: 23).*

*In Rwanda much progress has been made, and there is evidence that the CBOs are making a real difference to their members' lives. The evaluation has found that the CBOs have given to their members the knowledge and confidence to approach state authorities and claim their legal rights. This is an outstanding result given the history of discrimination faced by the Batwa and their tendency to avoid contact and/or conflict with authority wherever possible. (Gorilla Organisation evaluation: 6).*

*Women's groups reported that they continued to mitigate the adverse impact of soldiers' movement in the area. The leaders organised 4-5 visits to the front line to speak to soldiers ... They persuaded soldiers not to take food by themselves but to request instead. As a result it was reported that soldiers often moved without harming anybody. (SSWC evaluation: 14).*

*In Mondikolok the local court confiscated 5 goats belonging to a member. They said the goats were taken as punishment to her son who married a local girl without paying enough dowry. When this was reported to the women leaders in the centre, they went to the local chief and negotiated a settlement. (SSWC evaluation: 15).*

Ideally in development assistance, there should be a move towards greater autonomy at all levels, from the INGO through the various layers of local partner NGOs to communities, but research suggests that there are considerable constraints on this process (Wallace *et al.* 2006). In some projects, where the decentralisation and devolution process was transparent and articulated clearly, at all levels, it did appear that local organisations became more independent and responsible, acquired skills and confidence, and in a sense 'owned' the project.

*Devolution has increased accountability and efficiency in the IDISP by reducing or shortening the distance between the beneficiary community and playmaker. The shortening of the distance has arguably increased the voice of communities. (Practical Action evaluation: 14).*

This was not necessarily a simple process: great effort might be needed to overcome mistrust and suspicion and to convince local stakeholders that they were genuine partners in development. Neither the agency reports nor the independent evaluations were always clear about the extent to which local partners, NGOs or CBOs, had achieved this kind of result although the general direction of change towards autonomy was usually apparent.

The ability to interact with other organisations, including funders, is an important indicator of independence and capability. Participation in workshops with NGOs, government and other organisations appeared to be a confidence booster, especially to smaller NGOs and CBOs that had hitherto been quite isolated. Greater recognition – or in some cases, simply recognition – of local organisations by governments, international agencies, the media and other actors (including the private sector) was an important outcome in several projects. In some cases one can see a growing web of relationships and interconnectedness with considerable latent power for driving future initiatives and dialogues.

*During the consultative phase within the framework of the elaboration of a new law, local pygmy communities have been consulted and exposed to the discussions on their rights. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 12).*

*National coverage of PENHA and partners' activities, and networking through civil society forums, has helped to raise the prominence of Pastoralist issues, and has stimulated other organisations to express an interest in working with PENHA on Pastoralist problems. (PENHA evaluation: 15).*

*Amina Shaban of Mwangaza Women Group had this [to] say: 'The ICA-Tanzania small business skills training gave me the courage to request a loan from WEDAC, now I am sure I can pay back without any problem as everything is done according to the business plan and budget.' (ICA evaluation: 6).*

*The women reported that, since the workshops, there have been continued contacts between the micro-credit project Pastoralist women participants and other women's groups under the auspices of partner agency NAGAAD. (PENHA evaluation: 26).*

*The skills in leadership training and business skills gave the communities such confidence that the project started to observe heightened interaction between community leaders and the local authorities in demanding of services. This was clearly demonstrated when shelter and water point rehabilitation activities were being carried out. (Practical Action report: 3).*

Opening a bank account is a key indicator of autonomy, regarded as very significant by CBO members.

*Some CBOs ... managed to sell some of their crops after 3 to 4 years and to open a bank account. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 23).*

Legal standing is another important issue for all local CSOs.

*AIMPO is not registered in DRC and has therefore more limited access to authorities than it should, especially at higher level. The Gorilla Organization regional manager says that his office has to intervene to give AIMPO institutional support in its dealings with the state. AIMPO's reliance on the Gorilla Organization for this access limits its growth towards autonomy. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 13).*

### 3.7 Gender

*Negative traditional attitudes and practices have made women subordinate to men. In South Sudan girls are look[ed] at as [a] source of wealth and not members of the family. The women argue that had women been considered members of the family, their parents and family members would take into consideration the girl's well being, welfare and education. However this is not the case in the majority of households in the project area. Traditionally once a man could afford a girl's dowry or bride price, he paid and the girl is given up to her marital home to continue her subordinate existence. For example she cannot become a member of the husband's clan, which is a*

*crucial qualification for land or indeed any property ownership within the clan. Traditionally therefore dowry payments are made and it was not habitual for women to own property or assets. In most cases a married woman was most likely to be regarded as part of the family's dominions that allowed the head of the family to prosper (get children, receive bride prices from girl children and the woman's labour). Girl's education was not a priority in this context. As a result a large majority of every group interviewed had had no education at all. (SSWC evaluation: 6).*

Improving gender relations and the position of women in society is a fundamental development challenge, acknowledged by aid agencies great and small. Yet gender did not feature as a significant issue in most of the evaluation reports. This neglect can only reflect a lack of attention to the subject by the partner agencies who commissioned the evaluations. The International Committee has also been concerned at the proposal stage that applicants have not given enough thought to the particular needs of women or other vulnerable groups within communities.

Women did form the main focus of attention in a few projects: for example Reason Partnership's partner Richmond Fellowship Peru's work in Lima with displaced victims of conflict, most of the displaced households being headed by women; and South Sudan Women Concern's programme in Kajokeji county in South Sudan where

*60% of women are reported to be living as widows and female heads of families for those whose men folk are believed to be alive at the front lines fighting with the SPLA (SSWC evaluation: 5).*

Several other projects contained activities directed at meeting gender needs or improving gender roles (e.g. small enterprise and micro-credit programmes targeted at women, provision of clean water supplies leading to reduced labour in fetching water, reduction of indoor air pollution from cooking stoves, promoting gender balances in CBO committees).

*Walking time to water points was reduced from an average of 2.5 hours in the two Districts to 25 minutes in Massangena and 45 minutes in Chigubo Districts. (Practical Action report: 5).*

The value of communal organisation to women's livelihoods, position in society and self belief can be immense.

*Many women spoke of the psychological support gained from belonging to a group; tools to clear and work the land were important assets for women; seeds and livestock were clearly valued inputs. Women frequently sang songs that exemplified how their self perception and the way they are perceived by others has changed (SSWC evaluation: 7-8).*

*More women have built their confidence as there was an increase of women who have become leaders and some still want to become leaders in the ongoing elections. (ICA report: 2).*

*Another woman reported that her children respected her more because of the security goats and seeds had afforded their family; also her husband had valued and respected this stability leaving her at home instead of moving her to the frontline area. (SSWC evaluation: 12).*

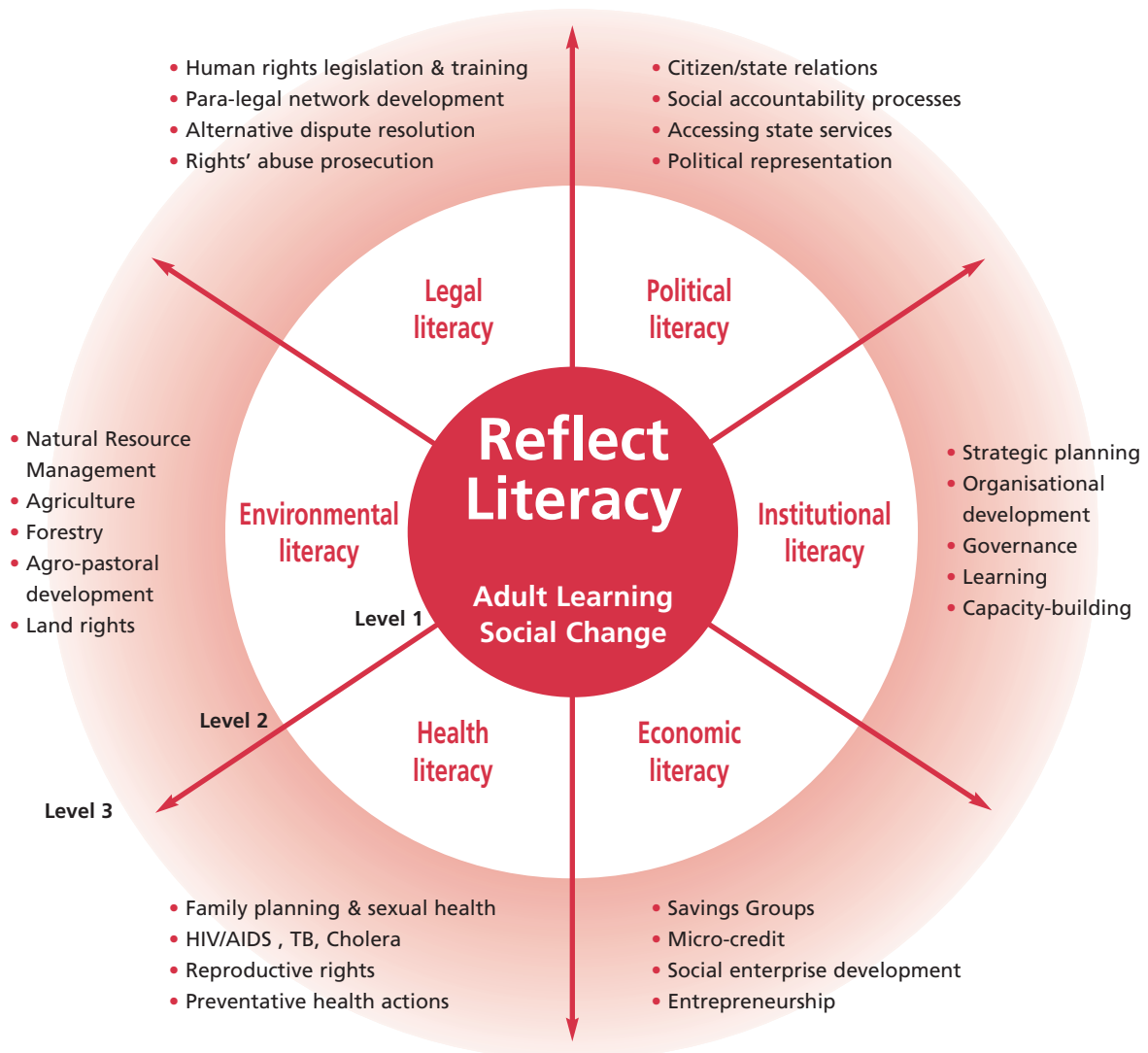
Such shifts in status can be resented, however.

*In 2002 my husband left me because he said I was becoming too powerful but this year he came back. (Ester Poni, women's group member, quoted in SSWC evaluation: 24).*

### 3.8 Literacy

Promotion of literacy is not a specific goal of the International Programme<sup>6</sup>, but illiteracy is widespread among children and adults in many developing countries. Literacy is fundamental to development because it enables people to acquire knowledge and skills, to organise and communicate more effectively and, ultimately, to challenge the power structures that keep them marginalised and in poverty (see Fig.1).

Fig.1. Value of Literacy for Development



Source: Village Aid, *Literacy for Life: a Village Aid learning paper* (Village Aid, undated), p.4.

(6) In its recent grant-making rounds it has supported some educational projects: Africa Educational Trust's literacy work with displaced people in Somalia; a project by Children in Crisis delivering educational services in Democratic Republic of Congo; Camfed's support to girls' education in Zimbabwe.

Acquisition of basic literacy is a pre-requisite for successful local organisations – ‘a vital step towards autonomy’ in the words of one evaluation. For this reason, Village Aid uses literacy as a vehicle for developing community organisations, starting with semi-formal ‘learning circles’ that are gradually transformed into CBOs with independent governance structures and systems.

Low literacy levels present a major barrier to group creation and administration, especially to the formal apparatus of management committees, constitutions, rules and accounts. To judge from the number of projects in which literacy was an issue, this is a widespread problem. There were occasions when projects were held back because of the literacy levels of those with whom they were working.

*Most of the committee members told us that they were unable to write (let alone type) a project proposal or to do proper accounting. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 25).*

*In both CBO cases, the first concern was that all treasurers were illiterate. (Practical Action evaluation: 23).*

*The majority of these women were illiterate. SSWC had to begin by providing literacy training. (SSWC evaluation: 9).*

*Some of the counsellors were illiterate and this limited their capacities. (TDA evaluation: 87).*

Functional literacy classes therefore formed an important element in some projects (e.g. ICA in Tanzania, South Sudan Women Concern), particularly among women. The classes’ impact went well beyond equipping students for the basics of group administration.

*The (57%) adult learners now able to read and write can make informed decisions – like participating fully during the forthcoming general elections – by voting for a candidate of their choice since they can read the names, something they could not do before. Keep records of business transactions read important documents including such things like HIV/AIDS brochures write letters and read letters written to them. Before the programme intervention they could only communicate orally and where necessary ask somebody to help them write or read for them. (ICA evaluation: 9-10).*

*Treasurers and Chairladies said they were now able to remit and sign out their money from the bank. The committees are now able to keep records, negotiate and make payments on behalf of the groups ... all the management committee members could now read and write well in Bari (local language) and write some few words in English ... Women were fiercely proud of the little English they had mastered. (SSWC evaluation: 9, 16).*

*I myself was illiterate before SSWC started literacy classes in our Centre. Now I can read and write. I can even sign the group’s cheque when we go to Moyo to draw money. Last year the bank manager used to complain that we (women) did not know how to sign properly. As a result we used to sign several times before the bank could accept the cheque. This problem is no longer there thanks to the literacy classes. (Josline Yobu, chair of women’s group, quoted in SSWC evaluation: 24).*

Literacy teaching should not, however, be seen as a ‘quick fix’. Appropriate targeting and delivery of courses is not a given; it requires skill, planning and persistence.

*The DDDR programme includes educational support, both in formal education classes and in private tutoring. However, demobilised youth face challenges in learning, including insecurity and lack of self-esteem in a learning environment, frustration, difficulty adapting to the school environment, and rejection by peers and others in*

*the system ... According to educators and youth care workers, demobilised youth become easily frustrated and demotivated by the hurdles they need to overcome to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills. They experience low self-esteem as academic learners, aware that they are unable to do things that much younger children normally learn in school. (YCare International research study: 6, 28).*

*The team observed that functional literacy is one of the most difficult activities to implement in villages. (ICA evaluation: 31).*

### 3.9 Exchange Visits

The value of study or exchange visits to other organisations and groups has long been recognised as a highly effective means of peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge and experience in a range of practical matters, a finding borne out by these evaluations. This being so, it is a little surprising that agencies do not place more emphasis on this approach.

*This [study visits] has been the least costly spending and has had a high impact (e.g. the new agricultural methods learned by AIMPO staff). Such visits are a necessary and useful way of increasing the knowledge and contacts of AIMPO field staff. They are also very cost effective. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 20).*

*Through these visits, the lead partners have been able to share information and experiences by learning from each other, hence getting new insights on how best they could improve their implementation strategies. For example, after visiting ITDG-supported projects in Kajiado, which were successful in mobilising communities to adopt modern technologies such as bee-keeping technology, fireless cooker and modern stoves. The lead partners from Monduli district have started teaching the community members the new technologies; and it has registered a very high impact (ICA evaluation: 27).*

*... the women related to their members about their visit to the market in Arua, Koboko and Owino where they saw Uganda[n] businesswomen selling vegetables. Women also related their experiences during a visit to see growing of onions by women farmers in Uganda. The result of these visits convinced women farmers in Kajokeji that they too could feed their families and improve their income through farming. As a result 2004 saw an increased crop production and increase in family incomes. (SSWC evaluation 10-11).*

*Another impact of the exchange visits was the friendships women developed between themselves. When asked leaders said they no longer felt isolated. They could visit, be visited and call upon the help of women from villages they never visited before the war. (SSWC evaluation: 11).*

### 3.10 Local and National Government

All the projects were, to a degree, filling significant socio-economic development gaps left by the limitations of state provision or the incapacity of local civil society. One of the findings of the International Programme's 2005 workshop and case studies was the importance to CSOs of their relationships with government, and local government in particular (Twiggs ed. 2005). Without sound government-CSO working relationships, development projects cannot proceed; with good relations, there is the possibility of expansion and take-up by other institutions. This impression was echoed in these evaluations and reports, which again placed high value on working with government where possible.



*... it is important to involve the local government authorities in implementing various intervention programmes. Hence mainstreaming the neglected communities' concerns into the development plans of the district council, [maintaining] close working relationships with the town/council/municipal authorities and target communities in planning, implementation and evaluation is crucial to success, sustainability of the project and accessing resource support. (ICA evaluation: 10).*

*The alliances formed by RFP with civil society and government institutions have been key elements in the successful spatial coverage of the project. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 11).*

Development of new or alternative approaches to acute social problems (e.g. TDA's Conflict Resolution Unit in Tigray, RFP's model of psycho-social recovery for victims of trauma in Peru, and YCare's work on alternative approaches to reintegration of former child soldiers in Colombia) required more than tacit support from government, since they were seeking to change official attitudes towards the beneficiary groups, their needs and the best ways of supporting them. As government institutions tended already to be key implementers of social development or welfare programmes among such target groups, this approach usually required a mixture of operational collaboration and advocacy at several levels.

In these and most of the other projects<sup>7</sup>, one has the impression that the barriers to progress came not so much from government opposition or obstruction but from weaknesses in bureaucratic capacity and the inevitable length of time needed to change entrenched attitudes. Although this was clearly frustrating to NGOs, who tend to be impatient for change, it did not present an insuperable barrier.

*Constant changes in Ministry staff members hindered sustained development of the work. Every time a change in Ministry staff occurred, the Project lost time in updating and training new personnel ... PAR staff required careful training to sensitise them to the fact that people suffering from PTSD have deep feelings of insecurity and fear and that their care requires a high degree of understanding to avoid rejection and increasing their emotional problems. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 23-24).*

*YMCA's youth care workers emphasise the need for public policy and programme changes to provide solutions to the bureaucratic problems and lack of coordination that keep youth in a state of displacement and legal limbo in the context of institutional care. More needs to be done by the Colombian government to address the inadequacy of professional, educational and financial resources to both promote family reunification (in either rural or urban areas) and effective reintegration services and support ... the follow-up process on the young people who have now left the project, is the State's responsibility, and is very weak, and causes difficulty in measuring the real achievements of the project. (YCare research study: 5; YCare evaluation: 9).*

Generally relations with local government were not hostile although the level of government interest and support varied.

*There were constant updates to district officials and authorities. This helped to strengthen the relations between communities and their leadership, with the leadership having a greater sense of accountability to the community members. The District Administrator (DA) successfully lobbied for members of a shelter CBO to be engaged in an irrigation project. (Practical Action evaluation: 15).*

*The training has seen all communities take greater responsibility for project activities, and has given them the capacity to approach the local authorities themselves ... over*

(7) An exception appears in the Rainforest Foundation evaluation, where one country was felt to be generally hostile to allowing civil society a voice.

*the course of the final year, one of the members of the CBO Duterimbere, Peter Ntirivamunda, has been elected into the trustworthy position of being a member of the 'Gacaca' courts that are conducting the trials of suspected perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide. (Gorilla Organization report: 3).*

In countries where government organisations lacked capacity, projects were able to assist government staff by developing their understanding of issues and ability to work with particular communities. This was notably the case in Somaliland, where government resources are very limited: here the NGO PENHA had a close working relationship with the Ministry of Pastoralist Development and Environment and assumed certain functions that might normally have been undertaken by officials. Lack of capacity is even more likely to be found at local administrative and technical levels.

### 3.11 Advocacy

The need for civil society to engage in public discourse and the difficulties of doing so are core issues in any discussion of civil society and its purpose (e.g. Edwards 2004) and featured prominently in the 2005 workshop and case studies (Twigg ed. 2005). For operational organisations, advocacy relating to changes in law, policy, social attitudes and practices is not separate from other kinds of project activity and is a natural extension of work on the ground<sup>8</sup>. This is because the problems facing vulnerable or marginalised communities are interwoven and on different levels. The following quotations, from a project evaluation and research study respectively, illustrate this complex reality<sup>9</sup>.

*The rationale for this project has been the appalling socio-economic conditions and the lack of civil and land rights of the indigenous pygmy populations in the Congo Basin. The resettlement of Pygmies into permanent settlements during the colonial and post colonial era, the extensive commercial logging of the forests in Cameroon and Congo, the establishment of National Parks and other protected areas of wildlife causing evictions, the continued conflict occupying large forest areas by armed factions and foreign armies in DRC have progressively displaced the pygmies from their traditional forest territories pushing them to the lands owned by Bantu farmers. The granting of temporary 'tenure' rights on the Bantu lands have meant poorly paid labour, and in some cases long term 'debt-bondage'. Lacking any form of official recognition – no identity cards in most cases – and land titles meant that pygmies are not entitled to any government services. Their situation is exacerbated by extreme forms of racism which the pygmies experience throughout their daily lives. Moreover, the pygmy communities have very few organisations, in general, which can articulate their problems and advocate for their rights. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 4).*

*Full reintegration of former child soldiers will not be possible until there is a broad-based social debate and campaign to raise the awareness of the general public about the status of former child soldiers as victims of the armed conflict, by being recruited into the conflict and of the denial of most of their rights.*

*Understanding, reconciliation and meaningful reintegration of former child soldiers cannot take place in Colombia without a national process of truth, justice and reconciliation, in which society at large and the many victims of the violence are recognised and reparations made for the massive violations of their rights. (YCare International research study: 7-8).*

(8) For NGO perspectives on this, see the essays in Twigg ed. 2005: 75-86.

(9) International Programme partners were working in such a wide variety of political, institutional, legislative and socio-cultural settings that it is impossible to generalise.

Advocacy need not be confrontational. Sometimes it is simply a matter of raising awareness of a problem, or solutions, through dialogue with local and national government officials and other civil society groups. Constructive dialogues can shift attitudes and stimulate action.

*PENHA joined with VETAID, and the Ministry for Pastoral Development and the Environment, in a workshop to explore how pastoral communities could be involved in the process of decision-making regarding rangeland resource management and utilisation. About 70 people attended, three-quarters representing pastoralist communities. (PENHA evaluation: 34).*

*During the year, a chief conference was held to sensitize people on the plight of young single mothers and together plan a way forward for these categories of people in the community. During the chief conference, important stakeholders such as out-of-school young boys and girls, unemployed youths, district counselors and women leaders were invited. The Ministry of Mineral Resources has responded to the project and is encouraging TACYDA to develop a proposal for them to expand their literacy circle and enable other communities which have devastated pits with a lot of unemployed youths in Kono District to benefit. (Village Aid evaluation: 13).*

In many countries and projects, official moves to update laws or fill legislative gaps offered significant opportunities for civil society influence. The expertise that civil society organisations possessed in their fields (e.g. disability, child trafficking) was not unwelcome.

*In the case of DRC, the great opportunity for the civil society to take part in policy dialogue is the promulgation by the Government of the Forest Code. This has given a great impetus to the multitude of local NGOs and Pygmy associations to come together with a coordinated strategy and to create coalitions and networks at the national level. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 19).*

*PENHA and VETAID joined forces to harmonise the Agricultural Act (administered by the Ministry of Agriculture) and the Range Management Act (the responsibility of the Ministry of Pastoral Development and Environment). The two laws were contradictory and confusing, so PENHA and VETAID have proposed a single, rewritten and integrated act. The recommendation is now with Parliament for approval. (PENHA evaluation: 34).*

The goals of advocacy on behalf of minorities and the poor are likely be achievable only in the long term (unless focused on specific policy or legal changes). In many cases, evaluators could only report on the first or most recent steps along this path, but there was evidence here and there to show what might be achieved over time through sustained effort.

*In Cameroon, as the implementing partner CED has been working since 1996 with the local pygmy communities supported also by other donors, some achievements have been made on access to civil rights and land rights. The pygmy populations are now aware of the issues and in most cases, communities understand the use and procedures for establishing Birth Certificates and National Identity Cards. Pygmy communities are becoming increasingly aware of their rights and are exercising them. When their rights are not respected, they report them to the local authorities. Since pygmy communities started to take Bantus to the tribunals and win their cases, there has been a reduction in abuses committed by the Bantus. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 10).*

Nor was advocacy training and capacity building a process to be rushed.

*There is also a risk that the process being pushed fast, the local organisations involved might not have sufficient time to equip themselves with the tools and the skills necessary for negotiations and dialogue with the major stakeholders. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 20).*

There is an almost seamless link between the different types and levels of advocacy work. In the case of Anti-Slavery International's project with NGOs working to stop child trafficking in West Africa, the work included community-level mobilisation and public education; training of the police, judiciary and government officers in child rights issues; local and national media campaigns, principally using radio and television; and lobbying at national level to establish legal and penal systems to regulate the movement and labour of minors and punish trafficking.

### 3.12 Networks

Networking, in one form or another, was an important component of most projects. National- or local-level projects commonly involved workshops and forums even if only on an *ad hoc* basis. There were a few more formal networking initiatives by projects working across national borders. Networking is full of difficulties, particularly at regional level, and is highly challenging in Africa because of weak communications infrastructures and the limited or uneven capacities of participating CSOs (Starkey 1997). The evaluations suggest that the requisite collaboration and co-ordination for effective networking can be achieved more easily at national and local levels.

Regional networks are costly to maintain and require ongoing financial commitments, ideally from a donor consortium. To judge from the evaluations, they also need first-rate co-ordinators, preferably established, stable and dynamic national NGOs: good regional management cannot be created overnight. The other requirement is for clarity about management roles and responsibilities at the different levels: UK (funder/INGO), regional and national. In one more recent project, management of a regional network was assumed by the INGO after a failure of regional management, but evidence from similar projects suggests that this should be a last resort.

Networking initiatives supported by the International Programme focused mostly on building capacity to lobby for policy and legislative change with governments and international bodies. Inputs took the form of training and information sharing. Where networks already had a clear purpose, the additional resources and support made available through the International Programme's grant could be utilised to give extra impetus to specific initiatives. For example, the extensive translation and promotion of the Code of Conduct on Domestic Child Labour by Anti-Slavery International's West African partners provided a focus of activity for partners' broader efforts to eliminate child trafficking.

*Establishing and strengthening national networks on child trafficking has been a hallmark of the project ... Most of the national networks built constructive relationships with the government and international agencies, collaborating with governments to draft national legislation on child trafficking and in the case of Togo on domestic child labour. Almost all stakeholders met by the evaluator confirmed that prior to this project, there was a lack of awareness in the sub-region on the issue of child trafficking in their country. Through intensive awareness raising by project partners and the national networks, the general public and the national governments are more aware of the dangers of child trafficking and the governments in particular are making more efforts to tackle it. (ASI evaluation: 25).*

Where several partners and countries are involved, this may be necessary to hold the project together, but at the same time it may impose artificial constraints on broad coalitions of interest: there are signs of such tension in some regional initiatives involving a number of local partners<sup>10</sup>.

(10) In evaluating networking projects where the networks contain a large number of partners, it can also be difficult to see what the effect on individual members has been.

Be it formally or loosely structured, project networking was effective in bringing different organisations and groups together to tackle common problems.

*The project consolidated more than 25 different alliances with national and local institutions to provide services to the young people. (YCare evaluation: 32).*

*By moving conferences from UK to Ghana and Sierra Leone, VA created the opportunities for all partners to learn from each other in a practical setting (i.e. within rural and marginalized communities). (Village Aid evaluation: 8).*

*The Baring Foundation funded programme has helped to improve working relationships, and has enabled partnership and collaborative work between PENHA Somaliland and local NGOs, CBOs and government ministries. Examples include PENHA Somaliland's collaborative work with Oxfam on intervention on environmental degradation, and working with CSS on the micro-credit programme. (PENHA evaluation: 16).*

Even where official sympathy for a cause or approach was lacking, networks could create openings for change.

*... the network sought to participate, from the beginning, in the programmed scenarios; and then open new spaces for dialog that would permit the interchange of experiences with other institutions and the generation of confidence between the different institutions. (YCare International evaluation: 20).*

Evaluations can provide a sense of the multiple relationships that all project actors have with other organisations, governmental and non-governmental, with interests in a particular field. In several cases the connections were extensive, suggesting the potential for much greater indirect impact from projects through these associated actors than agency project reports revealed. Assessing this 'ripple effect' would not be straightforward and would probably require considerable research, but the results would repay the effort.

### 3.13 Roles and Relationships

Evaluations' TOR generally included roles and relationships between the INGO and its local partners, but coverage of this subject by evaluators was patchy. TOR tended to be overloaded with issues to assess, some evaluators did not explore it in any detail, and it can be difficult to get a proper understanding of a relationship from a few questions and the answers given in response.

The prime component in a successful relationship between an INGO and its local partners appears to have been transparency on the part of the UK organisation about the project's objectives and activities, management processes and budgets. Accompanying this was a consultative approach that led local partners to feel they were involved in project decisions, development and review.

*The partnership framework was developed at the second annual conference. This provided a matrix of roles, responsibilities, expectations and mechanisms for each partner. The good thing about this framework is that it disambiguates VA partners' relationship[s] which could serve as a model for partner relationships with other CBOs. (Village Aid evaluation: 9).*

Where relationships between the INGO and its local partners did break down, this appeared to be due either to a lack of shared aims or poor communication of project objectives.

*During the field mission to Ghana, it was evident to the evaluator that the project partner (ACHD) had done very little with regards to implementing the ASI project. Although ASI maintains that a full handover took place during the change over of partners, ACHD states that no project proposal was shared with them and no formal agreement of obligations took place between ASI and ACHD, which would have helped ACHD to focus on project outputs. (ASI: 27)<sup>11</sup>.*

How do UK-based NGOs add value to the work of their African partners? The projects took different approaches to this, depending on the needs of the local partner. In some cases, the role of the UK partner was relatively minor and principally concerned with passing on funds and a little advice; in others, much more hands-on support was needed in the form of training, technical backstopping and the like. Evaluations also varied in the way they looked at this question, with some confining themselves to the nature of the relationship between UK INGO and African partners rather than the trickier one of added value.

*DDP's role has been crucial in guiding, accompanying, encouraging and improving the work and the functioning of the organisation ... The added value is above all the strengthening of the organisational structure and of the organisation's self-help capacity. (DDP evaluation: 26).*

A very important role played by some UK partners, especially in regional and advocacy projects, involved assistance in making contacts with international agencies and forums – in other words, helping the local organisations' voices to be heard on a bigger stage.

*In all project countries, ASI has worked closely with partners to facilitate strategic partnerships (sharing experiences, joint project activities, technical and financial support) with key international agencies whose mandate is to work on child trafficking and who are active in the region. The project has achieved constructive and cooperative partnerships with agencies such as UNICEF, ILO, IOM, Plan and Terre des Hommes. (ASI evaluation: 6).*

A particularly striking instance of this was the coalition of local and national organisations in Democratic Republic of Congo, supported by the Rainforest Foundation UK, which mounted a challenge to the World Bank over its failure to conform to its own policies on forests and indigenous people in its forestry programme in that country. This included a formal complaint against the Bank, submitted to its Inspection Panel, visits to Washington and accompanying the Panel on its visit to the field. In this process, strong lobbying by partners and networks in country was backed up by the Rainforest Foundation's vigorous campaigning (or 'relentless advocacy work' as the evaluation put it) at international level.

*WB [the World Bank] appears to have stopped promoting commercial logging and is shifting its emphasis from industrial logging to other alternatives for [the] forest sector ... Due to its long years' experiences and capacity in policy dialogue with the international donors, RF's [Rainforest Foundation's] actions in achieving this outcome have been a determining factor. (Rainforest Foundation evaluation: 17).*

International partner involvement in such activities also helped to raise the profile of the national NGOs with their governments and donors, although with a risk of being perceived as agents of an international NGO.

Projects and local partners generally welcomed the interest and involvement of their UK partners, other agencies and the two Foundations, which was felt to increase their capacity (through sharing ideas and experiences) and confidence. A previous review has highlighted

(11) Note that this particular partner's feedback was at variance with the very positive attitude of partners generally in a seven-country project.

the positive view that UK NGOs have of their relationship with the Baring and John Ellerman Foundations as genuine partners in their development efforts (Silkin 2007). This should be regarded as a significant outcome of the International Programme.

### 3.14 Operational Issues

Almost every project took longer to complete than originally planned, though usually only by a few months. The reasons varied, but the main ones were security problems, transport difficulties, funding or payment issues and staff turnover.

All of the projects reviewed were operating in difficult conditions, sometimes in very difficult and even dangerous ones. Some were in countries severely damaged by long-running civil war or insurgency (e.g. Angola, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Somaliland). Insecurity handicapped several projects by slowing or preventing activities. The dedication and courage of field workers in such situations was commented upon in more than one evaluation.

*The planned visit to a Bambuti community in DRC was cancelled due to the deterioration of the political situation between Goma and Ngwenda, where the programme is based. The conflict between government and rebel armies flared up on the eve of the evaluators' proposed visit resulting in fatalities on the road to Ngwenda. (Gorilla Organization evaluation: 7-8).*

*Security, however, remains a primary concern. PENHA staff have to be protected ... at work, and their personal safety must remain an additional worry for them as they carry out their duties. The cost of security is high for all workers and there is a need to have a larger budget for this item to prevent planned programmes being brought to a halt. (PENHA evaluation: 43-44).*

*Recent liberation (from jail) of some former terrorists who have returned to their places of residence and where some participants in the Project live, has generated fear and anxiety among the local populations. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 24).*

*Members reported experiencing difficulties due to the turning up of many young men in their centres. This group is made up of ex-child soldiers. Having left the front lines, they roam in the villages without jobs. (SSWC evaluation: 20).*

Natural disasters were not a problem, apart from PENHA's work with pastoralists in Somaliland, where a severe drought threatened to undermine the livestock-based pastoralist economies that the project was seeking to strengthen<sup>12</sup>.

A high proportion of project activities were in countries or districts where administrative systems, physical infrastructure and other facilities were limited or absent. Some were in remote districts that were difficult to reach.

*The women's groups are accessible through [the] SSWC centre in Jalimo though with the extremely poor condition of [the] roads it can take several hours to reach some groups and during the rains they are not always accessible. (SSWC evaluation: 22).*

*... the establishment of a provincial branch in Moxico, where the practical work was supposed to start, was more complicated than expected, mainly due to logistics (transport problems between Luanda and Luena) ... [the] World Food Program (WFP) ... no longer offered cheap flights for NGOs. National airlines which started flights to Luena, were (and still are) expensive and irregular. As practically all material for the provincial branch had to come from Luanda, this caused a lot of difficulties. (DDP evaluation: 19).*

(12) Practical Action's project in Mozambique was helping people to recover from severe flooding.

Bad weather was a frequent cause of delay, for projects and evaluators alike.

*The late start of the project was due to the fact, that Moxico province, which had been selected for the implementation, was hit by unexpected torrential rains, so that access for weeks was impossible. (DDP evaluation: 18).*

*The survey coincided with the rainy season. There were persistent downpours which either obstructed interview proceedings or interfered with scheduled meetings resulting in delays on the field programs. In addition, the state of the roads was terrible as the predominantly dust roads were slippery or under flood. (Practical Action evaluation: 12).*

Absence of rain also presented problems in arid districts.

*In most cases during the dry season we are forced to close the classes until the dry season ends. The main challenge is the drought season which sometimes results into poor attendance in classes as women are spending most of the time looking for water and youths (male) move to look for pastures. (ICA report: 3).*

Other operational problems encountered by partners included lengthy bureaucratic delays to money transfers. On occasion this was a serious handicap to work in country.

*... the key reason why the network [in Gabon] has not really been operational has been due to lack of resources caused by the delay of the ASI funding. (ASI evaluation: 15).*

*Regrettably, funds sent by Anti-Slavery International ... were misdirected by the Central Bank of Gabon and it took six months for the funds to be located and credited to Vidomegon's account. (ASI report: 1).*

Delays were also caused occasionally by problems in obtaining matched funding (where the total project budget was greater than the size of the grant available from the International Programme).

There was a widespread tendency by the project designers to underestimate actual costs. In some cases the amounts provided to local partners were felt by the partners to be just too small to have a major impact on their work. It seems that applicants to the International Programme are tempted to promise more than they can deliver for the money requested in order to increase their chances of success. This may be calculated or, just as likely, typical NGO optimism.

Many African (and other) NGOs depend heavily on a handful of able and motivated senior staff, sometimes even a single Chief Executive or Director. Southern NGOs tend to keep their staff longer than their international counterparts, but are constantly at risk of losing them to government and international organisations which can offer much higher salaries. North-South projects and partnerships can also be highly dependent on key individuals in the Southern counterparts.

*The evaluator felt that the project relied too heavily on one senior member of the project partner organizations. In most cases, the contact person was the Director of the partner organization and other staff members were not kept informed on project activities. (ASI evaluation: 28).*

*However, during the course of the project, partners were rocked by high staff turn over (GTA resignations and or dismissal of two key project staff and ACDR lost a key staff member). Two Practical Action staff based in Mozambique who had been instrumental in project design and formulation left the organization prematurely at the early phases project roll out. Their departure dealt a great blow to the project as*



*it both amounted to loss of skills invested and derailed implementation progress at the same time. (Practical Action evaluation: 22).*

*... the rotation of professionals in the institutions, continues, whether due to the stress generated by the project or, mainly, due to the opportunity to earn higher salaries in other entities. This causes difficulties in the training processes and in the continuity of the strengthening of the technical capacity of the institutions. (YCare evaluation: 24).*

Personal contacts and understanding were important factors in relationships between project partners and with communities in some of the projects evaluated. Local NGO field staff were key players in encouraging community activities, liaising with officials and other local stakeholders and raising awareness. The Gorilla Organisation's project in the Great Lakes was badly affected by the sudden death of the co-ordinator of its local partner, whose organising ability and excellent local contacts could not be replaced in the short term.

Staff turnover runs at a high rate in many international NGOs and those funded by the International Programme were no exception. On one occasion this did lead to potentially damaging management gaps while a UK-based project manager was replaced.

The following quotations indicate other potentially important issues in implementation.

*15% of participants would regularly leave the group discussion to attend their domestic responsibilities. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 9).*

*The physical spaces used for meeting places were community houses built by the local inhabitants themselves and with which they were emotionally linked and their use created feelings of safety and confidence. (Reason Partnership evaluation: 10).*

*Some of the committee members that were involved in the counseling were walking for hours in order to deal with the issues of the conflict resolution and were not compensated for the energy and time they lost walking. This may affect the counselors from participating in the project full-heartedly. (TDA evaluation: 87).*

*MMYDA attended the partnership conferences in Ghana and Sierra Leone but was unable to attend the UK conference due to issues with visas. (Village Aid evaluation: 11).*

*A key advocacy target was the African Committee of Experts on the Rights of the Child, the leading mechanism on child rights in Africa. However, activities were thwarted in the first instance by constant changes in the dates of sessions combined with the Committee's nervousness with regard to NGO participation. The Committee stopped NGO participation in its public sessions in 2005 while it reviewed its rules of procedure. (ASI report: 3).*

*LARDEF discovered at one point that, during air transport, the tool kits had been broken into and many tools had been stolen. It tried to negotiate compensation for this theft with the airfreight company ... Meanwhile LARDEF had a difficult time with the Sangondo beneficiaries, who were impatient to get the tools, and many thought it was just an excuse to delay and not to deliver them. (DDP report: 12).*

*In 2002, the project was designed to work with and support community organizations set up by the displaced women themselves. Unfortunately, at the start of the project, some of these organizations became suspect for fostering anti-government sentiments and were closed down. (Reason Partnership report: 4).*

### 3.15 Core Funding

The International Programme is unusual among donors in allowing UK applicants to use some of the grant to strengthen their own organisational effectiveness, with applications to strategic, long-term capacity building welcomed. But few applicants take advantage of this opportunity: it is more common for them to use the 'core grant' for short-term expansion of capacity to carry out particular tasks such as advocacy. The value of this kind of support, especially to smaller UK-based INGOs that are vulnerable to fluctuations in funding, merits further investigation.

For the most part, evaluations did not report on this aspect of the International Programme's grant. The example of Village Aid shows how core funding can be used constructively to support projects and the organisation simultaneously.

*Within the first two years VA reported the development of a UK advocacy desk through linkage to local universities, developed a learning platform and provided support to the Ghana conference in year one. In addition, VA reported organizing the partner conference in the UK, including a series of public networking and advocacy activities, developed Terms of Reference with partners and hired a facilitator for a three day partner consultation and developed learning materials which are useful for the REFLECT Literacy. (Village Aid evaluation: 7).*

*Through this year's activities and those of the past two years, VA has managed to establish a stronger network with organisations in the UK such as universities in Sheffield, Nottingham and Derby. VA now host a number of volunteers from Derby University on placements, supporting their learning and work experience who in turn, contribute to the development of VA resources and awareness raising. Furthermore, we have built strong links with lecturers at the University of Sheffield who have encouraged research and learning from students about VA activities and projects. (Village Aid report: 3).*

On the other hand, UK INGOs and their local offices did gain in knowledge and experience from their projects, particularly those which took them into new locations or areas of work.

*Practical Action gained experience of working directly in disaster prone areas, understood better the vulnerability factors, the essential capacities needed in order to cope and recover from disasters, putting the organisation in a better position to design appropriate intervention programmes and projects. Such capacity is evidenced by a one year project implemented in Dindiza in Chigubo district with funds from the States of Jersey Overseas Aid which addressed the chronic water shortage and opened new opportunities for the affected communities. Experience gained was further applied in the sister project, The Gaza Food Security Project in the same districts as well as in the design of low cost housing for people affected by Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe, a consultancy assignment carried out on behalf of the UN-Habitat. (Practical Action report: 4).*

### 3.16 Other Observations

Here and there, the evaluations gave indications of issues that might be important to some projects and to organisational development, although it was impossible to say how significant or common these might be. They included the following.

#### **Prejudice**

Many projects took place in contexts of political instability, official ignorance of or indifference to the needs of particular vulnerable groups in society and – perhaps more telling – public indifference to these groups and their needs. The deep-rooted marginalisation of women in many societies is noted elsewhere. Both the Rainforest

Foundation and the Gorilla Organization in Central Africa were challenging deeply entrenched social prejudice against pygmy forest dwellers. The report on Disability and Development Partners' project in Angola observed that here, as in many developing countries, disabled people are marginalised and excluded. Former child soldiers in Colombia, the focus of YCare International's project, faced widespread public suspicion:

*Despite all this, the biggest challenge to reintegration is the stigmatisation of former child soldiers in Colombia – by neighbours, peers, teachers, employers, and Colombian society at large. Ongoing stigmatisation is the result of fear in the general population – of being caught in the crossfire or targeted by armed groups – and anger – at the continuing conflict and the impunity of 'perpetrators'. Neither of these factors has been adequately addressed by the programme, government or the civil society organisations working with demobilised youth. (YCare International research study: 7).*

### **Private Sector**

The private sector makes its few appearances in these projects as a development problem. For example, people supported by one of Practical Action's partners in Mozambique were being forced out of their homes by mining operations. In Central Africa, logging companies were one of the threats facing forest-dwelling pygmies. CSO responses ranged from picking up the pieces (helping displaced people in Mozambique) to campaigning (against industrial logging). Other interactions were limited, although there were signs that one of Rainforest Foundation's partners in DRC had built on advocacy work to develop a working dialogue with a logging company.

### **Unforeseen Consequences**

There were occasional reminders that not all results of a project are positive or predictable.

*Trained shelter CBO members opted not to transfer skills to fellow community members for purposes of maintaining a firm grip and monopoly on the market ... Some builders are reported to have gone on an exodus to other towns and cities which offered wider economic opportunities rather than stay and serving their communities. (Practical Action evaluation: 20).*

## 4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed principally at international NGOs in their work of building the capacity of civil society organisations in developing countries. They may also help to guide funding decisions.

1. Commit to the long term (five years and more). Capacity building is ongoing and does not fit easily into fixed-term project cycles. One-off interventions are unlikely to have lasting benefits. Organisations need time and nurture to become fully independent, effective and resilient, especially in challenging environments.
2. Be clear about a project's aims and emphasis. A focus on organisational capacity building is different from implementing a technical project with organisational development elements and it needs to be viewed differently. Technical assistance activities should not be allowed to dominate the core capacity-building needs of local partners.
3. Keep the big picture in sight. Over-emphasis on human capacity development can lead to overlooking institutional development issues.
4. Look for opportunities to stimulate change processes in local partner organisations rather than necessarily seeking to direct them. Even small developments may generate significant, and unplanned, multiplier effects.
5. Aim for greater autonomy of partners at all levels but be realistic about the challenges to achieving this and the likely sources of resistance within and beyond your organisation to shifts in the balance of power and control. Empowerment processes should be transparent and articulated clearly, at all levels.
6. Put the quality of relationships with local partners at the centre of capacity-building support. This includes staff making strong inter-personal connections as well as more formal mechanisms of accountability and transparency. Taking a consultative approach makes local partners feel genuinely involved in project decisions, development and review.
7. Give local partners a stronger voice by helping them to make contacts with international agencies and forums.
8. Understand the scale of the difficulty faced by local CSOs in achieving financial sustainability in challenging funding contexts. A more strategic and co-ordinated approach is needed to this problem.
9. Ensure that skills training programmes target whole organisations. Where only a few individuals benefit, it is unlikely that skills will be shared widely and they may be lost to the organisation through staff turnover.
10. Approach training as a long-term educational process, not a one-off event. This is essential to make skills and understanding really stick.
11. Make full use of study or exchange visits to other organisations and groups. This is a highly effective means of peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge and experience in a range of practical matters.
12. Be aware that low literacy levels present a major barrier to creation and administration of groups and organisations. Functional literacy teaching may be essential to underpin a capacity-building initiative. Appropriate targeting and delivery of courses requires skill, planning and persistence.

13. Adopt a networking mentality, seeking opportunities for collective action. Whether formal or loosely structured, networking is effective in bringing different organisations and groups together to tackle common problems.
14. Consider more focused evaluations to provide real insights into the nature and processes of building organisational capacity, instead of conventional broad-brush reviews of projects' progress.
15. In project planning, be realistic about the operational difficulties likely to be encountered and their implications for delivering project targets.
16. Address your own strategic capacity-building and organisational development needs. Make full use of funding that is available for this.
17. Reflect seriously – and openly – on the 'added value' that your organisation brings to projects and local organisations in the South.

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