

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY



Contributions
of Support
Organizations
in South Asia

Strengthening Civil Society: Contribution of Support Organizations in South Asia

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Strengthening Civil Society: Contribution of Support Organizations in South Asia

PREFACE

This report marks the culmination of a five year period of collaboration between PRIA and IDA to strengthen NGO support organizations concerned with providing information, technical advice, training, and organizational capacity-building assistance to the NGO sector. This Program began with a conference that brought together support organizations from the Asia region in New Delhi in March 1990 and then offered a workshop on organizational strategy and capacity-building for support organizations in December 1990.

In response to feedback from participants, the Program then emphasized work with support organizations in specific countries to develop national strategies and capacities for sector development. In India, for example, work centered on PRIA's successful effort to create a national network of regional support organizations that could expand initial support activities to a wider range of regions and languages. In Bangladesh, IDA and PRIA worked closely with the Participatory Rural Initiatives Program (PRIP/PACT) which sought to develop human and organizational resources to strengthen small NGOs, local support organizations, and NGO networks and forums. That program of activities is producing materials for assessing NGO effectiveness and programs for training NGO consultants in participatory organizational diagnosis and development. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, PRIA worked closely with local support organizations to develop a participatory needs analysis process to develop a shared diagnosis of sector needs, and then worked with relevant partners to develop training programs and educational activities to meet those needs. In Pakistan, PRIA worked with local support organizations to make materials available and to adapt programs to fit the Pakistani context so that a few dynamic new support organizations could have widespread impact in a short time. The organizations involved in these national initiatives made up the bulk of the participants in the 1994 Kathmandu Conference on Support Organizations.

During May 10-12, 1994, a conference in Kathmandu, Nepal brought together leaders of NGO support organizations from South Asian countries to review their activities of the last several years and to consider the future plans and capacity-building needs of support organizations in their countries. This conference was designed to build on the deliberations of NGO support organizations that attended the 1990 Conference on Support Organizations

in New Delhi, as reported in "Strengthening the Grass-roots: The Nature and Role of Support Organizations" (IDR/PRIA, October 1990).

The 1994 Conference brought together more than twenty organizations from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Some of these organizations participated in the 1990 Conference; others had emerged as support organizations in the interim period. The 1994 Conference was focused on South Asian countries in large part because NGO communities in those countries had been particularly interested in strengthening support organization activities during the past four years.

While many of the organizations participating in the 1990 Conference offered support services as a supplement to their primary tasks of providing services to grass-roots populations, the 1994 participants were virtually all organizations dedicated primarily as providing support to NGOs and grass-root organizations. We were quite impressed with how much the "support organization" concept had become a living reality in South Asian countries, especially in areas where little or no such support was available four years earlier, such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. In each of those countries, participants suggested that emerging support organizations were playing important roles in the rapid development of NGO communities.

We noticed some important differences in the thrust of support organizations of South Asia during this Conference, in comparison to 1990. In some important ways, these differences represent the growing maturity and impact of Support Organizations (SO) over these years.

For example, SO participants in 1990 were concerned about articulating their own strategies and developing capacity-building programs that would establish their bona fides with potential NGO clients. By 1994 the participants were concerned with meeting expanding demands for more diverse and advanced services from an expanding population of NGOs. The relevance of support organizations to NGO communities was no longer an issue.

In terms of relations with government agencies, in 1990, policy analysis and advocacy were seen as a critically important capacity. By 1994 the participating organizations were conceiving their needs in less adversarial terms, such as skills for cross-sectoral relations and dialogues. They were also concerned with a wider range of external constituents: competitors and donors as well as government actors and other support organizations.

A third shift in emphasis has been an increasing concern with support

organizations' capacities to innovate, to build new perspectives on complex issues, to develop advanced competencies in key areas, and to take advantage of "stage-of-the-art" technologies (such as new information technologies). This concern with advancing knowledge and practice in the NGO sector is very consistent with the emerging roles of support organizations as key players in the evolution of the voluntary development sector - a role that was less articulated or understood as a possibility four years ago.

In short, the Kathmandu conference suggested that the role of support organizations - newly emerging in 1990 - has broadened and deepened in the last four years. The participants in this conference were more clearly focused on support organizations programs and problems, more balanced and thoughtful about the roles of their and other sectors, and more sophisticated about future possibilities for catalytic action by NGOs and other institutions of civil society. Many of the participants in the 1990 Conference had used the ideas and opportunities presented at that Conference to take bold initiatives in their own national contexts. We were impressed with the possibilities for similar initiatives that might grow out of this meeting as well.

In the next several years, we expect this program to expand in several ways. IDA and PRIA expect to provide continuing support to many of these support organizations as they develop the programs and expand their activities to include new programs and NGO groups. We have also begun to work with support organizations in other regions, such as Eastern Europe and Southern Africa, where the lessons learned in Asia may have relevance to newly emerging NGO communities. It has also become clear with the rise of international networks like El Taller and CIVICUS that there are large potentials for joint learning and mutual strengthening in contacts among support organizations across national and regional boundaries. We have begun to develop with colleague support organizations from many regions ideas about how more sharing can be accomplished across these boundaries.

This report presents a detailed account of the context of Kathmandu Conference, the evolution of SOs in different countries of South Asia and the emerging challenges for SOs in the coming period. We hope that the Report can stimulate other Support Organizations to link up with this process in South Asia in order to address issues globally.

We are grateful to Ford Foundation, PRIP/PACT, World Education, SAP, Sri Lanka, ASPBAE and many others who have actively supported this Conference and the Program over the past five years. Special thanks are due to Ms.

Maria Lourdes Almazan-Khan in assisting in the planning, conducting and documenting this Conference; Ms. Carmen Madrinan Atwood for her assistance in drafting the report of the workshop.

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Section - I

Historical Context

The development of Voluntary Development Organizations and NGO movements throughout the Asia-Pacific region is deeply embedded in the particular historical developments of each of their nations. They do, however, share common visions of social change with other popular movements outside their borders as they are often linked by similar philosophical and ideological threads.

Critical of development strategies which are based on unlimited growth models and which discount long term social and environmental consequences, popular voluntary movements share the common mission of building a more equitable society through alternative strategies. The political space within which these movements function contributes to their unique character and their form, scope and direction. This has given great diversity and vigour to the voluntary sectors of the Asia-Pacific region.

Testimony to the viability and relevance of these organizations is found in the degree in which they have grown and flourished. Over the last five years their operations have become more complex: many have federated into larger formations, and quite a few have expanded their scope from village concerns to provincial, even national levels. Many have taken on more specialized functions in technology development, natural resource management, alternative finance and trading, disaster-preparedness and management, among others. They engage in policy research and seek broad-based consensus on alternative development policies and paradigms. They have become active contenders in the development debate and a significant force in the economic, political and social arenas.

This movement of popular initiatives has found various expressions and institutional formations. One which emerged in the mid-80's was the **support organization**.

Support Organizations (SOs) historically have shared the same roots and motivations that inspire other types of NGOs. They have, however, evolved into institutions whose myriad functions are primarily aimed at assisting and solidifying the initiatives of grassroots groups and their constituencies. Their work has focused on training, research, documentation, advocacy, networking, and in some cases, funding.

Identified with grass-roots groups and sharing with them a search for alternative strategies for more equitable participation and distribution of resources for the poor and marginalised, Support Organization linkages and initiatives have focused on building the professional capacity of individual NGOs and on creating inter-organizational collaboration for more effective action.

At the outset, support organizations were viewed with suspicion and cynicism. Some felt such organizations were too removed from direct work with the people. Others believed they would abuse opportunities to represent local groups and play advocacy roles. The support organizations themselves faced uncertainty and confusion regarding their nature, role and relations with other development actors. There were no precedents for this type of NGO function and much of the conceptualization of their role and scope of work was painstakingly formulated through a series of participatory discussions that required considerable time.

These consultations helped crystallize wider appreciation on the mission and role of support organizations. They helped to reassert the link of support organizations with the broad popular movement of NGOs, people's organizations, individuals and groups engaged in defining visions of an alternative society and global community; they helped to place the work and identity of support organizations firmly alongside other popular movements in a partnership relationship; they helped to focus support organizations on strengthening the over-all capacities of development NGOs and people's organizations.

Lastly, they assisted in identifying the critical support functions as: Information-sharing and dissemination; documentation; research and evaluation; technical assistance; training and human resource development; organizational capacity-building; networking among NGOs; linkages to donors and government agencies; and policy advocacy and influence.

It is interesting to revisit the definition of Support Organizations generated in 1990:

"These are the organizations which do not necessarily work at the grass-roots level alone, directly with the poor and marginalised. These organizations support other grass-roots NGOs in a variety of ways through research, training, documentation, advocacy, networking, and so on. Support organizations are part of the broader movement of

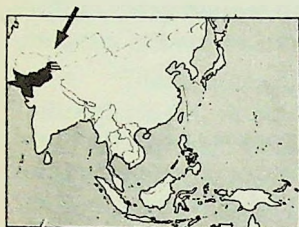
voluntary development NGOs in a given context, country or region; they have a world-view of their own; they have a vision of a new society and they share some of the philosophical and ideological underpinnings which guide the voluntary development NGO movement in many of our countries and the region. They are inspired by a vision of social change and it is within this vision that they see a role for support functions. Therefore, the manner in which they carry out the support function, the relationships they build with the recipients of that support is consistent with this broader framework and vision of social change and its philosophical underpinnings. Thus support organizations are not mere service-providers; they are partners in the broader movement of social change. They have philosophical principles and futuristic aspirations similar to those to whom they provide this support. This does not mean that support organizations do not offer competent services. They are meant to provide certain types of support services on a professional and competent basis. This professionalisation of the support function need not necessarily imply commercialisation of their perspective and approach. This distinction is critical in understanding the nature of support organizations that are being discussed in this report." (Strengthening the Grass-roots; Nature and Role of Support Organizations. PRIA/IDA 1990).

We have said that the "political space" of each nation profoundly affects the evolution of the NGO sector and its support organizations. Yet even when political space is restricted, groups of the civil society are utilizing opportunities to forge alliances of peoples groups which can join in the building of an alternative society. The role of support organizations in providing needed inputs to these NGOs and peoples organizations and in assisting in the creation of horizontal linkages among them has been firmly articulated and legitimized over the last several years. As they amplify their position in "the middle", support organizations face new issues and challenges.

Section - II

SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

Participants in the conference made detailed presentations of their context and work. These presentations revealed the vigour of voluntary sector in the region, their expanding role in their societies, and the important place that support organizations occupy.



Pakistan

The tradition of individual social work in Pakistan goes back to figures such as Sattar Edhi and Miskin Jahan Khan Khoso. Its organizational form, however, is of more recent origin. Having evolved from Anjuman forms of social welfare which provided immediate assistance to the needy in the form of medicines or books, NGOs today remain primarily welfare-oriented.

The availability of donor assistance for groups and institutions outside the traditional partners or aid agencies (i.e., government institutions or bodies) led to the rapid proliferation of NGOs. Within a relatively short period of time, their numbers grew so that today it is estimated that there is one NGO for every 5,000 persons in Pakistan.

Most Pakistani NGOs continue to pursue welfare-oriented activities. They operate with few professional skills and competencies and often lack the organizational and human resources to address more complex development problems. More than half of the NGOs in the country work at the community level and seventy one percent of all NGOs are urban-based. Only twenty eight percent work on a district level, and a mere five percent are working on development issues at the national level.

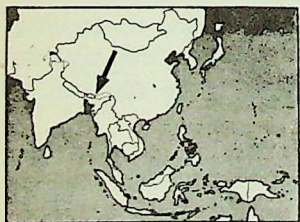
At the community level most NGOs have functioned as project implementors. Due to their limited experience and poor institutional support, these organizations have not always been able to effectively plan and carry out their programs. Reflection on the accumulated experience of NGOs has led some organizations to identify capacity building for NGOs and building

linkages among community-based groups as key priorities for the future. Recognition that providing NGOs with financial and material resources is insufficient to establish them as effective and sustainable players in the social arena has inspired the creation of support organizations in Pakistan.

NGO Resource Centre of the Aga Khan Foundation (NRC-AKF) : was established in 1990 to provide support to NGO's in Pakistan. Their key strategies include information dissemination, liaising and networking; partnership through dialogue and policy research, and advocacy. They provide assistance through training and other capacity-enhancing activities, based on the needs and requirements of their partners. The NRC/AKF works with 18 partner NGOs in Karachi, and is currently expanding to include community-based NGOs in rural areas.

The Centre actively liaises with government, and advises specially on policies directly affecting NGO development and promotion. They undertake policy research and advocacy on key issues in Pakistan and disseminate their information to community based groups and NGOs.

Strengthening Participatory Organizations (SPO) : in its early years, functioned as an intermediary NGO for a bilateral aid - assisted government infrastructure programme in rural areas of the country. Like a number of NGOs in Pakistan, SPO was created to channel financial and material support to villages and communities. Three years into the programme, SPO realised that the provision of resources to communities and their groups cannot be sustained without complementary capacity-enhancing mechanisms that would enable the community themselves to manage, control, maintain and develop these resources. SPO thus refined its strategy to focus on the training of its partner CBOs, especially in the areas of project management, financial management, human resource management, and gender sensitization. SPOs deliberate policy of mobilizing and training women has resulted in the formation of the first community-based women's organization in Sindh.



Bangladesh

Bangladesh is home to a large number of NGOs. Within this NGO network there exists tremendous variety in function and purpose. The NGOs in Bangladesh may be divided into welfare-oriented NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and development-oriented groups or private voluntary

development Organizations (PVDOS). The former would be inclined towards service-delivery and material/resource support to communities; the latter, towards social mobilization, awareness-raising and local advocacies. Another distinction may be drawn between foreign-funded and locally-funded NGOs. Some sections of the NGO community in Bangladesh reject funds from foreign donor agencies as inconsistent with their philosophical persuasions or as threats to their independence. In spite of this, the number of foreign-funded NGOs in Bangladesh has risen from 400 to 800 in recent years. Many of those which are locally-funded are religious-based (Islamic), such as the assistance to the Rohingya refugees from Burma.

There are approximately 10 large, 60 medium and 700 small NGOs in Bangladesh. Among the big NGOs are BRAC, PROSHIKA, Grameen Bank and CARE. Tension between the large and small NGOs has grown over the last few years. Big NGOs have grown larger, capturing more donor funding. Smaller NGOs as a result have become marginalised. Dependency on donor funding has grown and again smaller NGOs have found themselves at a disadvantage vis a vis bigger NGOs who are better positioned and equipped to gain diversified funding or self-financing and sustainability.

NGOs operate throughout Bangladesh, now covering areas previously outside the reach of voluntary organizations. After the 1991 cyclone, for instance, NGOs began working in the South-east region of the country where NGO presence was previously sparse. New NGOs have also emerged and many more have become women-led. With the growth and development of indigenous NGOs, many international NGOs operating in Bangladesh have shifted roles from implementing programs to providing support functions.

Previously disparate or loosely-connected NGOs in Bangladesh today participate in systematic networks. Several issue-based NGO networks have emerged, such as the NGOs involved in the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan, those involved in education and literacy, or those working on regenerative agriculture, aquaculture and credit. It is now possible to speak of distinct NGO movements in the country, conscious of their collective character and potential.

Restrictive government measures mounted in 1992 and growing threats of fundamentalist attack have made NGOs more conscious of the need for public education about their work. These changes also emphasize the importance of promoting dialogue with other significant sections of Bangladeshi society, such as, business, government, political parties, parliamentarians, and the media. NGOs have come to realize that to survive

and thrive, they need to educate different segments of the society about their work and build multiple support for their operations. NGO linkage-building and networking is aimed at exploring possibilities for collaborative work and mutual support.

Participatory Rural Initiatives Programme (PRIP) : Is a support organization created in cooperation with PACT. PRIP provides various forms of assistance to NGOs in Bangladesh in order to enhance the effectiveness of PVOs at the grass-roots. PRIP conducts trainings on leadership and group formation, and on participatory methodologies of research, training and evaluation. Complementing their training, PRIP offers a facility for small grants directed at funding projects for 'experience-building' or learning by application.

PRIP promotes the interaction and collaboration of similarly motivated NGOs. They assist in the formation of NGO networks and provide secretariat support to these networks. It specially supports ADAB, the apex body of various NGOs in Bangladesh. Finally, PRIP actively promotes NGO relations with Government, business and other sections of civil society. Recently, PRIP facilitated a dialogue between a group of NGOs and representatives of the business community for an initial attempt at acquaintance, trust building and exploratory discussions on future avenues of cooperation.

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) : was one of the first efforts at NGO networking in response to the call for Total Eradication of Illiteracy in Bangladesh. It was an attempt among NGOs to revive the spirit of volunteerism in addressing the problem of illiteracy in the country when government-initiated efforts in building a literacy movement failed.

CAMPE offers training support to NGOs and assists in curriculum and materials development, documentation and information dissemination on literacy. They provide financial support to strengthen local grassroots initiatives.

CAMPE coordinates with donors, government agencies and the media to facilitate literacy campaigns. They have sponsored journalist forums in different parts of the country, bringing together NGOs and media personalities from different regional newspapers. Issues regarding the role of the media, its potential in the campaign to eradicate illiteracy and its capacity to promote non-formal education, are discussed in these fora. Through sustained coordination with various development actors in the country, CAMPE has successfully promoted an integrated approach to literacy.

CAMPE also conducts policy research and actively influences policy makers in the areas of adult and nonformal education and literacy. They played a key role in the formulation of the governments' Continuing Education Strategy. CAMPE has membership in the Nonformal Education Committees of the government of Bangladesh and of the World Bank.

Forum for Regenerative Agriculture Movement (FORAM) And Bangladesh Rural Reconstruction Association (BARRA) : FORAM/BARRA is an NGO network of groups promoting the development and practice of sustainable agriculture through research, training and exchange. They work with a diverse set of groups- big NGOs and small NGOs, community based groups and government agencies. They train project managers, community women and key NGO staff on regenerative agriculture techniques. Their programs combine training, research and demonstration. They have 381 demonstration sites at the farm level in 319 villages throughout the various districts of Bangladesh. In addition they compile and document technical information on regenerative agriculture and in particular have given attention to studying indigenous agricultural practices and knowledge. Through their newsletter they disseminate technical information and encourage sharing of practical experiential learning. A library and related support services facilitates research and access to a wide network of regional and international resources in this area.

Aquaculture And Fisheries Forum In Bangladesh (AFFB) : The AFFB brings together NGOs in Bangladesh involved in aquaculture promotion or the development of coastal communities. They sponsor training programmes among their members, conduct research, pilot alternative techniques, and provide technical support and assistance to their affiliates. A special concern of the network has to do with identifying possibilities for maximizing NGO resources to generate income and reduce their dependency on donors.

The AFFB conducts study tours and exchange visits to allow for collective sharing and validation of new technologies and emerging strategies. Regular meetings among the network's member organizations are convened to provide opportunities for discussions on relevant social and technical issues.

The AFFB maintains decentralized, regionalised operations. They encourage the setting up of regional coalitions to address the concerns and issues peculiar to these areas. This allows for a greater reach of the network and more involvement of groups outside the centre (Dhaka).

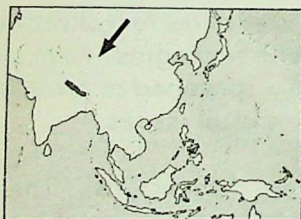
Women's Development Forum (WDF) : designs and promotes training and capacity enhancing methodologies which enhance the sensitivity and

responsiveness of organizations to women's special needs and realities. They work with women's organizations at the grassroots, implementing organizational development, group formation and leadership training. Over the years, they have convened leaders of various women's organizations for joint action on identified issues.

They also seek to popularize and mainstream discussions on women's issues and problems. They have conducted gender focused discussions with various NGOs, political parties, government agencies and donors to bring more attention to the issues facing women in Bangladesh. WDF has recently produced a conceptual paper on women and self-governance underscoring the profound contributions of women in the development of their communities and the need to ensure their genuine and direct participation in policy making.

Institute For Law And Development (ILD) : provides legal education and assistance specially in the areas of women's rights and the rights of minors. They have campaigned actively against sexual trafficking, revisions in divorce laws of Bangladesh (i.e. to allow women to initiate divorce against their husbands), changes in dowry laws, and for the promulgation of laws protecting minors from child marriages.

Bangladesh Development Partnership Center (BDPC) : is devoted to disaster related training and networking. It trains personnel of all levels for disaster management. Emphasis of research and technical training is evenly directed towards prevention, preparedness and response to disaster. They network extensively with other groups in the region and internationally who are involved in disaster training and management. Some of their partners include the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, The Citizens Disaster Resource Group, PACT/PRIP as well as UN agencies, UNICEF/UNDP.



Nepal

Before the 'Democratic Revolution' of 1990, NGO activity in Nepal was tightly controlled by government through its Social Welfare Council. NGO activity and other popular initiatives were not encouraged and the registration of local NGOs was highly restricted. Civic work or grass-roots development initiatives were largely facilitated through international aid agencies and

NGOs who functioned as implementing agencies of development projects and programs, even at the village level. Action Aid, PACT, SAP, SNV were started in Nepal as project implementors in the absence of viable local partner organizations.

With the 'freedom of association' enshrined in Nepal's new Constitution, NGOs and CBOs proliferated. To date, there are about 4,000 registered NGOs operating throughout the country. Some have been initiated by the government, or donor agencies, others by individuals, groups, or families. 'Freedom' in Nepal has created 'political space' for the voluntary sector and a tremendous increase in the number of NGOs.

Many of the new groups that have come into existence lack experience in running programs and managing the resources now available to them. Due to their limited capacity for program planning and development they have been unable to articulate appropriate strategies and approaches for their communities. The adoption of top-down development models or donor-driven programs has wasted resources and produced few results. Some NGOs have expanded far too rapidly, coaxed by the euphoria of 'democratic space' and the availability of donor assistance.

In this new context, international NGOs have started moving away from an implementing function to a support function. Thus support organizations started emerging in Nepal in the 1990s in response to the unfolding challenges and needs facing the growing NGO community.

World Education - Nepal : began work in Nepal in 1978, through a collaboration with His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), in its National Literacy Programme. World Education assisted the Ministry in developing and implementing this programme - an attempt to address the glaring problem of illiteracy in the country. To date, World Education continues to provide technical assistance to the MOEC, to further improve on and expand the reach of its Literacy Programme.

Since 1991, several NGOs in Nepal have started implementing literacy and non-formal education (NFE) programmes all over the country. World Education runs an NGO Strengthening Programme - a training programme geared towards improving the technical and managerial capacities of Nepali NGOs involved in literacy and NFE. They have further developed a programme to encourage and equip NGOs to implement functional literacy programmes for women. In cooperation with the Ministry of Health of Nepal, they have trained women community health volunteers and village level 'Mothers Groups'

who implement health, nutrition, family planning and income generating activities for women. World Education conducts periodic evaluation and continuing research to appraise the impact of literacy and NFE programmes in Nepal and to ensure their continuing relevance and effectiveness.

World Education has also launched a programme on 'Community Education in Support of Democratic Structures' - an education programme designed to promote community involvement in maximizing the space of the country's democratic structures and processes.

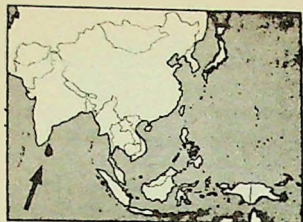
World Education regularly liaises with local and international NGOs, government departments, and aid agencies in the conduct of its work.

Action Aid-Nepal : offers financial, management and technical assistance to voluntary organizations in Nepal. It focuses on supporting NGOs involved in education through curriculum development, teacher training, educational evaluation methodologies and action research strategies. Regional resource centers assist in documentation and networking among partner NGOs.

SAP-Nepal : Participates in the consortium of Canadian NGOs, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and South Asian countries of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka known as South Asia Partnership (SAP). The aim of SAP-Nepal is to enhance decentralized and participatory NGO-based grassroots development in rural Nepal. It works in cooperation with 150 NGOs in the areas of management, social forestry, watershed management, cooperatives development and renewable rural energy alternatives. Education, training, documentation and communication form the core of its strategy. In addition it has given considerable attention to building and supporting linkages among its NGO and CBO partners at the national and regional level.

SNV-Nepal : The Netherlands Development Organization works with number of NGOs in Nepal. It focuses on supporting NGOs working with poor landless rural populations and the urban poor through a combination of education and technical support, long term follow-up and co-management. Technical assistance is primarily in the areas of mini-project technology, sustainable building and water schemes, management and evaluation.

In the recent period SNV has initiated a number of workshops to address the opportunities and challenges that NGOs face in Nepal as a result of recent political changes and to explore further the possibilities for building alliances among area-based, issue-based and regional NGOs.



Sri Lanka

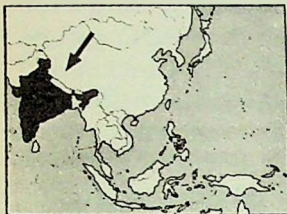
There have been significant developments in the NGO community in Sri Lanka over the last few years. Many have progressed from promoting short-term welfare-oriented programs to planning and implementing long-term sustainable development initiatives. One example comes from NGO groups who are promoting capital formation through group savings mobilization and credit extension programs, thus accelerating and solidifying the process of financial sustainability of local projects. This shift from a 'loan culture' to a 'credit culture' among NGOs and their partners is significant. Other NGOs have been working to expand their reach, building horizontal partnerships with other groups working at the grassroots level, and organizing and mobilizing more women from marginalised communities. As a result, in recent years there has been a distinct increase in women's participation and decision-making power in development activities at the grassroots.

Poverty-alleviation has been another key focus of NGOs in Sri Lanka. The Government has supported this effort by setting up a Jana Savya Trust Fund to finance poverty-focused activities of NGOs and CBOs. This has resulted in the mushrooming of organizations all over the country. There are approximately 100,000 CBOs in 35,000 villages of Sri Lanka.

SAP Sri Lanka : The association of Canadian and South Asian Voluntary Organizations was initiated to foster self reliant integrated development by supporting and strengthening the capacities of small, people-based organizations in Sri Lanka. Initially it provided financial grants for community based projects but subsequently developed a strategy that focuses more on capacity building of partner NGOs and on 'cluster development'. Recognizing the importance of building links among people and communities, its program is directed towards establishing linkages among neighboring village organizations to form cluster groups for effective participation and action in development. The foundation of the Cluster Development Program of SAPSRI rests on a blanket training program that covers aspects of social and organizational development and on mobilization of group saving strategies and investment.

Peoples Rural Development Association (PRDA) : provides support services to small enterprise development projects in the rural sector of Sri Lanka. Its

program consists of technical training and education in the development of group savings and revolving fund credit schemes for small enterprises. In addition, the Association has elaborated formal links with local banks to facilitate loans for medium scale projects and identified entrepreneurs who serve as advisors on enterprise development, financing and marketing. They research and promote the use of local materials in enterprises. They have developed an extensive network to explore alternative financial mechanisms and links to international markets.



India

The global developments which have shifted power relations throughout the world have had profound implications for all sectors of Indian society. India and its NGO community are grappling to find new strategies for addressing the manifestations of these developments: increasing globalization of markets, shifts in aid allocation and donor priorities, escalating threats of violent reassertion of ethnic and cultural identities, and the continuing spectre of poverty.

The forging of new global political alliances has been accompanied by a supportive commitment of funds. As aid budgets are used for strengthening countries newly entered into the democratic fold and the market economy, the competition for an ever-shrinking fund of development assistance mounts. In this climate NGOs are increasingly challenged to prove their effectiveness and accountability and to address donor priorities tied to funding. Donor agencies interested in maximizing their aid assistance through NGOs' are gravitating toward large and medium-sized NGOs who can provide better accountability and extend their reach more rapidly. This emerging trend in India concentrates donor assistance in medium and large NGOs. The result has been a phenomenal increase in the number of medium-sized NGOs in the country over the last five years.

Financing for the operations of NGOs in India, like most of the NGOs in the region, is dependent on donors (mostly foreign). Little has been done to tap indigenous funding sources or income-generating potential, although there is a growing recognition of the need to do so. Despite this, inter-sectoral relations (NGO-NGO, NGO-Business, NGO-church) have remained informal and sporadic. There are relatively few NGOs engaged in networking, advocacy and policy research.

Over the last few years, the role of support organizations in the Indian context has been solidified. With the increasing demand for NGOs to prove their effectiveness and accountability, support organizations have been called upon to assist in capacity-building activities (information technologies, organizational development, strategic planning) of their partner organizations. Donors have also called upon support organizations to assist in the planning and evaluation activities of small grassroots based NGOs.

Clear on the role they play within the NGO community and in the development arena in general, SOs in India continue to work to forge alliances among peoples' organizations and with other sectors. In doing so, they face many challenges which require their sustained and in-depth deliberation.

Janamitra- Peoples Learning Centre : is an organization working with NGOs in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It provides training in participatory methodologies of evaluation and training and develops and produces supporting materials in regional languages for use in the field. It trains NGOs to utilize popular cultural forms for consciousness raising and social change through a unique program that combines modern street theater techniques and folk arts.

Centre for Communication Resources Development (CENCORED) : has been involved in developing non-formal education materials for adults and children in the state of Bihar. It works with a wide range of NGOs in the state but has focused its attention on tribal areas over the last five years. In particular they have concentrated on the development of educational materials which reflect a respect of tribal cultural and social traditions and which facilitate two-way communication. Their bilingual- bicultural materials for literacy training and education are a major contribution. They have also been actively involved in training local panchayat level functionaries in microplanning and decentralized participatory development.

Centre for Collective Learning and Action (SAHAYI) : was established with the express mission of serving as a support organization to NGOs in the state of Kerala. Its programs include training on organizational management, group formation and group dynamics as well as workshops on participatory methodologies for training, evaluation and appraisal. Sahayi also offers NGOs programs in book-keeping, accountancy and reporting. A special program has been designed to develop womens' competencies to enhance their participation in the political space opened by the Panchayat Raj institutions. This program includes components on motivation and leadership training, networking and advocacy.

Several research projects have been initiated by partner NGOs with the assistance of Sahayi. A study of Mahila Samajams in Kerala is currently underway. Finally, Sahayi acts as a clearing house for information on issues and actions relevant to the work of NGOs in Kerala and publishes materials for use in the field as well as a quarterly news bulletin in Malayalam.

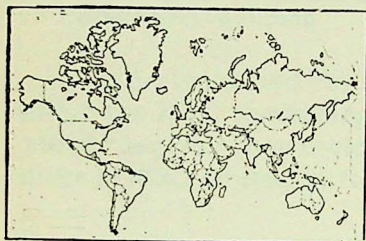
Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK) : works with partner NGOs in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. It provides educational support in areas of program planning and proposal conceptualization and writing, accounts and financial management, leadership training, and training of trainers. It is also active in environmental education and training for natural resource management. SSK works closely with other NGOs to coordinate activities in the three states where it works and further extends its network of training and communication through publication of field manuals and two periodicals, Sakhi Varta and Spandan.

Organization for Development Education (UNNATI) : seeks to extend educational support to grassroot development organizations through training in areas of staff development, team building, programme documentation, gender sensitization and perspective building. It disseminates information and convenes grassroot activists to mobilize action and research on policy issues of national and international importance. UNNATI also prepares popular educational materials which complement their training and strengthen the work of NGOs working in isolated environments to revitalize village level institutions.

Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) : has worked with a wide network of NGO partners all over India in the area of participatory training and evaluation. It has pioneered training programs in the development of organizational mission, strategy and structure to strengthen NGOs. In addition PRIA has initiated national and regional level workshops to provide NGOs with an opportunity to reflect on the changes they are experiencing, plan strategies of action, and forge partnerships that strengthen their work and increase their effectiveness on issues of importance. The above listed SOs and PRIA together form a Collaborating Network of Regional Support Organizations in India.

Center for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness- (CHETNA) : has developed a variety of innovative educational projects and materials which focus on women and child health. They work with functionaries and supervisory personnel of NGOs and government organizations to build their knowledge and technical capacity to address educational issues of women's and children's

education and health. Its support function to other organizations takes place through two resource centres. The Child Resource Centre (CHEITAN) and the Women's Health And Development Resource Centre - (CHAITANYAA). Cheitan utilizes a child centered approach in its comprehensive program. It includes training and materials in preschool education and early childhood care and development as well as interventions with school age children and adolescents. Chaitanyaa's programs are in reproductive health, occupational health, psychological dimensions of health, women's nutrition and adolescent health. Their focus is advancing the empowerment of women to gain control over their own health and development concerns. Chetna works with a wide range of partner institutions. Their collaborations with other NGOs have directed them into programs and activities on traditional medicine and practice, indigenous science of nutrition and water and sanitation projects.



International

In the last five years many international agencies have turned to NGOs and civil society as important development actors, at least in part because of disillusionment with the performance of the institutions of the state and the market as agents of sustainable improvements in the lives of the poor. Interest on the part of bilateral and multilateral development agencies in turn has focused attention on the importance of capacity-building for civil society organizations, and on international support organizations that can serve as bridges between the concerns and resources of Northern development agencies and Southern organizations that provide support to grassroots NGOs and CBOs.

One consequence of this interest has been the rise of regional support organizations that provide information, training, and research support to national and subnational support organizations. Such agencies include the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction in Manila, which serves a network of organizations around the world, or MWENGO in Harare, which was constituted to be a reflection and support center for NGOs in Eastern and Southern Africa. In addition global support networks and organizations that serve many different regions, such as the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) or El Taller, which provide services to NGOs and CBOs worldwide, are beginning to emerge.

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Institute For Development Research (IDR), Boston : has been carrying out research and education to strengthen civic organization (especially NGOs), support organizations and civic networks for the last ten years. It has worked with national and regional partner support organizations in Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe, and North America focusing on leadership development, strengthening strategic management capacities, promoting relations across institutional sectors, and building problem-solving alliances across international boundaries.

It has generated new knowledge on strategic roles of NGOs, grassroots efforts to influence national and international policies, and intersectoral partnerships to solve intransigent development problems. In addition, it has pioneered the creation of a collaborative research model that enables combining Northern and Southern perspectives on critical development issues.

Section - III

Major Contribution Of Support Organizations

Support organizations throughout the region have played a critical role in the process of conceptualizing and preparing the NGO sector for the adaptations which they have had to make in response to a rapidly changing economic and political environment. NGOs everywhere have had to assume more complex roles, and expand their functions in response to the emergent needs of their growing constituencies. They have been assisted by partner support organizations who have enhanced their capacities in several ways. The key contributions of support organizations in South-Asia seem to be many.

1. Perspective-Building

In Sri Lanka and Pakistan, support organizations have initiated efforts within the NGO community to review and re-think current NGO perspectives and strategies. They could be partially credited with sparking the emerging shifts in NGO strategies from 'welfare' to 'development'.

In India, support organizations have been at the center of the effort to establish conceptual clarity on the role of NGOs in development. Their contributions in these processes of reflection have sharpened the debate on alternative paradigms of partnership and collaboration among various sectors of society and asserted the relevance of civil society as a key player in the development processes.

Support organizations have also actively promoted a greater gender consciousness among NGOs. Through gender sensitization workshops and training, NGOs have increasingly integrated a gender perspective in the planning and implementation of their work. More women NGO and CBO leaders have emerged in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh over the last years. In Pakistan, these efforts of support organizations have encouraged the formation of more women's organizations at the grass-roots level.

2. Knowledge and Skills Development

Support organizations have continued their efforts to enhance the capabilities of NGOs. They have sponsored more specialized and advanced training along the areas of savings and credit, sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, para-legal assistance and gender sensitization. They launched courses geared to strengthen the institutional capacities of NGOs,

i.e. leadership/ management training, planning, monitoring and evaluation, financial administration and management, among others.

In Nepal and Pakistan, support organizations assisted nascent grassroots NGOs to plan and implement development projects, discouraging the proliferation of short-lived project-driven development NGO initiatives. In India and Bangladesh where the NGO community is more developed, support organizations adapted and promoted the use of several management tools and techniques to enhance NGO effectiveness: Impact evaluation, strategic management, organizational development, financial monitoring etc.

Throughout the region, support organizations continued to pursue research to enrich the knowledge base of the NGO community. They disseminated information relevant to the requirements of their NGO and grassroots constituency through journals, periodicals, newsletters, films as well as more traditional communication media

3. Access to Resources

A sizable number of support organizations in South Asia continued to assist NGOs and CBOs financially. Although an equally large number still maintain clear policies against funding of their partners, preferring instead to build capacities for accessing funds and partner liaisons with various grant-making institutions - private, government, multilateral and bilateral aid agencies. Thus they ensure greater accessibility of funds, especially to small, grass-roots-based groups. In several cases (like in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh), support organizations have provided small grants to their NGO partners to implement ideas and skills they have required through various training programmes. Such small grants are seen as an important contribution to strengthening capacity of grass-roots groups.

Cognizant of the role support organizations have played in assisting CBOs and other grass-roots organizations in their fund-sourcing and fund-raising efforts, even donor agencies have started looking towards support organizations for assistance in more effectively carrying out their donor function. A few have involved support organizations in their project development, monitoring and evaluation activities. Private donor agencies, unable or unwilling to maintain full-time infrastructure in countries where they provide assistance, have begun to see in support organizations, the potential mechanism for their in-country project appraisal, impact evaluation and process documentation activities which could make for their timely, more relevant and cost-efficient intervention.

4. Networking

Recent events in South Asia have prompted the collective response of otherwise isolated and competing NGOs: the rising tides of fundamentalism, ethnic conflict, natural disasters and concern for the environment and sustainable life systems. Several NGO networks and coalitions have been forged in response to these concerns; many have developed towards more long-term, strategic partnerships.

Support organizations encouraged these networking efforts - providing opportunities for different NGOs to meet and plan for collective action, lending infrastructural (e.g., secretariat) support and assisting in resource generation for coalition activities.

In 1993, for example, PRIP/PACT initiated a dialogue between representatives of NGOs and the business community in Bangladesh. Participants were encouraged to talk candidly about their work and their views on development. Bias and misconceptions surfaced and were discussed, opening the way for a dialogue about possible areas for collaboration. PRIP/PACT views this as the start of a series of efforts to expand the arenas for partnership between NGOs and the business sector of Bangladesh.

5. Advocacy and Public Education

Support organizations have successfully advocated policies guaranteeing wider spaces for NGO activity in their respective countries. In Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, SOs have advised their governments on policies for NGO registration, monitoring and control. In India they have advanced the role of the NGO sector in macro-level policy research, thus enhancing the participation of the voluntary sector at the local, national and international policy levels. Indian support organizations have also engaged in systematic public education efforts.

Section - IV

Future Challenges

The debate in Kathmandu identified a number of significant, new and important challenges facing support organizations in the coming period. These challenges are qualitatively different from the ones stated by support organizations in similar analysis in March 1990. This shift also reflects the growing maturity and deepening impact of support organizations in South Asia.

1. Expanding Demands on Support Organizations

In March 1990, many participants felt that legitimacy of support organizations was yet to be established in many countries of Asia. The distinct roles of support organizations within the fraternity of NGOs and voluntary organizations of different countries was yet to be fully appreciated. That situation has changed significantly. There is no longer any question about the value and legitimacy of the contributions of support organizations in countries of South Asia. In fact, the phrase support organization is easily, regularly and commonly used as if the concept were much older than its actual age. The kinds of support services that support organizations have been offering have increased in scope and intensity, in part due to the growth in the community of NGOs. The expansion has also been a response to a wider range and more intensive demand from NGO's and CBO's. The frequency and depth of demands has increased in many countries of South Asia. Many support organizations find it very difficult to fulfill all the requests that they receive.

2. Roles of Perspective-Building

A significant emerging role of support organizations is their contribution in perspective-building. Support organizations have catalyzed and facilitated intellectual engagement around emerging complex issues for NGOs in South Asia. During the last five years, the national and international scenario has thrown up new questions about established approaches, frameworks and ideologies. As a result, clarity of perspective among NGOs and CBOs has become a new and significant requirement. Many NGOs/CBOs continue to engage in programme implementation without perspective on important contemporary issues facing their societies, even when these issues raise serious questions about the efficacy of their programmes. Support organizations have often risen to the challenge of identifying emerging issues and facilitating response by NGO communities, be it in relation to political

environments globally, to new regional blocks, to the new trade and aid regimes, to new technology, ethnic and other tensions, and to new opportunities for decentralized self-government. Within the framework of such emerging issues, the role of support organizations in perspective-building has become a distinctive contribution in South Asia.

3. Relations to the Other Sectors

In 1990, support organizations were seen as a support service to grass-roots NGOs/CBOs. The role of support organizations in relation to other sectors of society was not yet articulated. The experience of the last five years has clearly demonstrated that many support organizations in South Asia have engaged in facilitating linkage building, advocacy and networking with other sectors of society. This has been particularly so in relation to the State and its agencies. Providing services to government departments, agencies and actors has become an integral part of the function of many support organizations. Creating dialogue, building opportunities for partnership and collaboration around concrete issues between government agencies and actors, and NGOs/CBOs has been an important contribution of support organizations of South Asia.

Similar initiatives have emerged with other sectors, like the corporate community in the market economy. In some countries, support organizations have initiated a dialogue between the NGOs/CBOs and institutions of the market. In other countries, initiatives have been taken to build linkage between academia and NGO/CBOs; relationships with media have been another area of work by support organizations. What has clearly emerged is that support organizations have a role in building the relationship between civil society, on the one hand, and other sectors of society, on the other.

4. Relations within Civil Society

One of the important contributions of support organizations in the last five years has been to help build relations with the various actors of civil society. Civil society actors in South Asia are diverse and range from NGOs, community based organizations, citizen groups, people's movements, cultural groups, academia, consumer groups and various other socio-political formations. Historically, there has been no link between NGOs and other actors of the civil society, except local communities where they work. It has become increasingly important to strengthen wider relationships in response to the issues facing societies at large in South Asia. Support organizations have played an important role in bringing various actors of civil society to a common platform around issues such as secularism, democracy, dignity, peace

and sustainable life style, that have become visible in the last five years. Thus support organizations even play a pivotal role in strengthening relations in civil society.

5. Networking among Support Organization

In 1990, little information about other support organizations within the country or across countries in the region was available. Since then, networking across support organizations has increased substantially expanding information exchange and discussion of common concerns. The initiatives carried out by PRIA and IDA in strengthening support organizations in Asia have also increased networking among support organizations. It has become clear that inter-support organization relationships in the coming period is critical to sharing resources and to building capacities and strategies to respond to the increasing demands. In response to this challenge, participants of the Conference decided to formalize the process of networking among support organizations in South Asia and to build a South Asian database. They requested PRIA to play a coordinating role in building and maintaining this network.

6. Coming to terms with the Information Revolution

The new information technology and access to information globally has also reached South Asia in the last few years. As a result, knowledge and competence building functions of the support organizations need to contend with the new information technology and its potential impact. Information dissemination functions critical to the basic activity of support organizations have now incorporated the new information technology and its enormous potential in accessing, processing and disseminating information. This capacity for use of new information technology in a democratic and decentralized manner is the growing challenge for support organizations in South Asia and worldwide.

7. Escalating Requirements for Support Organization Competencies

In light of these challenges and the discussions in Kathmandu, it is becoming obvious that support organizations themselves require strengthened capacities. Their staff require more skills, for example, in information technology, communication, and ability to network inside and outside civil society. Beyond the list of competencies generated in 1990, which focused largely on research, training and documentation, support organizations now need many new capabilities to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

The future contributions of support organizations in South Asia will largely depend on their ability to continue to learn, to build their staff competencies, and to enhance their horizons with a stronger base of mutual cooperation, regionally in the short term and globally in the medium term. South Asian support organizations have much to learn from and much to teach to their cousins in other regions. Building a truly global civil society will offer major challenges and exciting opportunities to support organizations all over the world during the next few years.

South Asian Workshop of Support Organizations

May 10-12-1994

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