

**Submission by ‘Small’ International NGOs to the
House of Commons International Development Select Committee
for its Meeting Scheduled for 9th September 2003**

1. INTRODUCTION

Small International Non-Governmental Organisations (small international NGOs) seek to be judged on the quality of their work and not on the size of their organisations. Their aims are to work better and smarter, to increase the impact of their work and to be significant partners for development good. To those ends, they seek to have their work, values and roles acknowledged and to receive the support of the UK Government’s Department for International Development (DFID).

This paper therefore looks at DFID and its relationship with small international NGOs from two perspectives:

- It makes the case for the continued involvement and relevance of small NGOs
- It critically evaluates DFID’s development policy and practice.

Small international NGOs appreciate the role played by DFID in highlighting global poverty and raising awareness of global inequalities and recognise the creation of DFID as a declaration of intent. It was seen as an indication that the current government was serious about international development as exemplified by:

- Its poverty focus;
- The increased allocation of the State’s budget towards international development;
- Its commitment to the internationally endorsed 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- The steps taken by DFID and the Treasury to address the debt issue.

DFID’s realisation that development takes place in a political context is encouraging and, by definition, is an acknowledgement of relations of power. All this was a challenge to existing unequal power relations between the North and South.

However, the current policy and practice by DFID are a matter for concern, not only to small international NGOs; but increasingly to the global poor to whom they listen and with whom they work in partnership, but do not claim to represent.

2. STATEMENT

DFID has achieved a great deal, but it fails to recognise the value of the contribution of small international NGOs to international development and their diversity of views and practices. This demonstrates DFID’s reluctance to accept development alternatives that do not fit its predetermined model. There are also major inconsistencies between DFID’s declared commitment to addressing global poverty, and its policy and practices.

3. THE CASE FOR SMALL INTERNATIONAL NGOS

Small International NGOs are often formed in response to specific issues and have developed not in size but in terms of their targeted impact. Their major advantage is that they can be more responsive and innovative in addressing people’s specific needs.

3.1 Diverse Approaches

Similarities exist in the nature of poverty throughout the world. This masks the considerable differences in local contexts. Potential solutions will need to be different in their application. However, the nature of government is to seek simple, universally applicable, systematic models of development. Based on the experiences of small international NGOs, this runs contrary to what poor people need and want. Small international NGO's have the ability to bring a diverse range of methodologies, approaches and solutions to poverty.

Case Study 1

Several of Action Village India's (AVI) partners have complained that they cannot rely on large western NGOs or governments to support work which meets local felt needs and which is proving to be effective. The main problem is the relatively rapid shift in large western NGOs' funding priorities, such as from women's projects, to HIV/AIDS, and now on to advocacy. Small agencies, like AVI, which work with NGOs they know well, are more committed to long-term support for the programmes they initiate.

3.2 Empowerment of Marginalised Communities

Smaller international NGOs play a positive role in the empowerment of grassroots communities. They facilitate local ownership, successful project implementation and sustainable improvements in the quality of people's lives.

Case study 2

In 2001, the African Refugee Community Health and Research Organisation (ARCHRO), in collaboration with the Catechist Centre in Gulu, northern Uganda, set up a project for women whose lives had been destroyed by 15 years of war. The women are former abductees, who spent most of their youth in captivity following abductions by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group fighting the government of Uganda.

The two organisations worked together to set up income-generating tailoring and pottery projects for former female rebel soldiers. It started with 34 former abductees, now it has 98 women who were rescued/escaped from the LRA rebels. In 2002, the management of the project was handed over to the women who constituted themselves into a co-operative. Since then, the project has continued to expand without any further support from the two organisations, or any other organisations. The tailoring project is now the main supplier of cassocks to the Catholic Church in Uganda, following the Uganda government's ban on import of used clothing. Its annual turnover in the last financial year was Ushs 3.5m (£1,166.60). The initial investment was under £10,000.

The primary benefits of the project are improved quality of life of former rebel abductees through skills training, project management and income that supports their basic necessities; in other words, self-reliance and independence of women,

3.3 Specialist knowledge

Small international NGOs have specialist knowledge and expertise, which can be used to influence governmental thinking and policy in a very direct way. Their expertise could be mobilised in country and when information is needed on the country in question. The example below is a case where DFID support enabled a small NGO to have a major impact.

Case Study 3

The Britain Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT) is a small international NGO that has a long-standing agreement with the Government of Nepal to assist in health improvement of poor and disadvantaged people. It has an income of around £600,000 per year, of which 95% comes from funds tied to specific programmes from a small number of international and UK donors. DFID is one such donor.

With DFID support, BNMT has influenced local governmental health services to take on the major responsibility for TB control for a population of around 22 million. In 2002 BNMT applied for grants of £1m under the Civil Society Challenge Fund to maintain capacity building of local health services, both governmental and non-governmental, to improve access for and responses to poor people, for infectious diseases, reproductive health, and essential drug supplies. A complementary application sought funds to assist community empowerment and local advocacy for improved access and innovations. The concept notes were accepted by DFID, but both full proposals were rejected in March 2003.

BNMT appealed to DFID in Nepal for support. Consequently, they were invited to submit proposals to support the National Tuberculosis Programme via WHO for 3 years. The submission was successful and a grant of around £800,000 has been awarded.

DFID in Nepal has sought also to support the 'Peace Process' between the Government and the Maoists through rehabilitating basic health services, facilities and drug supplies. Local recognition by DFID of BNMT's capabilities has supported the Trust's financial viability and continuity of strategic objectives.

3.4 Innovation and Responsiveness

In many cases, small international NGOs develop the type of relationship that contributes to effective longer-term development. Many small international NGOs are innovative and responsive and have a flexible and direct approach to development work.

The effective manner in which many small international NGOs pursue partnerships enables closer contact between partner organisations and the top management of small international NGOs.

Case Study 4

KwaNgwanase Farmers Union - Established in 1994 to address the problems facing low resource farmers in the marginal farming conditions of Eastern Maputaland, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa the KwaNgwanase Farmers Union (KFU) is a local grassroots organisation. The KFU serves as an implementer of an agricultural programme that offers a support service to farmers but also attempts to influence the nature of state agricultural support services from the perspective of farmers. In its efforts to 'end poverty and fight the demotivation that perpetuates it', the KFU is attempting to: raise awareness and stimulate the use of traditional seed; organise its membership so as to meet their needs; develop agriculture (crop and animal production) through the application of appropriate methods of farming; promote better community health through the consumption of traditional foodstuffs; market locally produced crops and conserve the natural resources of the area. The KFU manages a seedling nursery, employs local farmers as part-time agricultural facilitators and is engaged in a process of dialogue with the Ministry of Agriculture.

However, what the KFU is especially proud of is its diversified approach to solving farmers'

problems. In the words of its Chairman, Johannes Ngubane: ‘In the whole district under the Tembe Tribal Authority, we were the first to have a farmer’s co-operative and a seedling nursery. We were the first to tell people to return to their roots and remember their culture. We did research on collecting wild spinach and fruits and we collected and multiplied our seeds so new generations can have access to seeds and information. We are proud of ourselves as a committee which can manage all these activities and remain accountable to our members.’

Without the support of Find Your Feet, which has been funding the KFU directly since 1997 as its sole donor, this would not have been possible.

3.5 Involvement of the UK Public

Small international NGOs representing specific communities can link defined constituencies in the UK with grass-roots organisations in the developing world. Many small NGOs represent or seek to represent and involve certain constituencies in the UK in international development. They can work with these constituencies to educate them about international development issues. In a recent DFID survey it was noted that only 5% of respondents had heard of the MDGs and only 1% could say what they were. In contrast to this, the same survey noted that 70% of people were concerned about poverty in developing countries. DFID’s message is clearly not being heard. People will listen to an organisation they trust and with whom they have developed an affiliation in some way. This is the optimal way of encouraging knowledge of the issues involved in international development.

Case Study 5

UK Jewish Aid & International Development (UKJAID) has an income of around £200,000 per annum. It seeks to mobilise Jewish resources for international development. It has a defined constituency.

One example of its work is the link it has forged between a synagogue class in Brighton and a small village school in Nepal. The children correspond and the synagogue has adopted the project.

UKJAID has accessed funding from the Development Awareness Fund and is working with other faith-based NGOs such as Muslim Aid, Islamic Relief and Christian Aid to get the message out to the respective constituencies.

Support for this sort of linking projects would allow the DFID message to become reality for many different constituencies. This is an example of a faith-based organisation, but there are many other types of organisations representing certain constituencies which, with specific access to project funding rather than just development awareness funding could bring home the DFID message to a greater proportion of the UK public.

3.6 Appropriate Advocacy

Small international NGOs that focus on specific issues can often be more effective than larger organisations. Through concentrated efforts in partnership with local communities or tribal groups, small international NGOs can have a great impact on the development of policies that advocate for change, while respecting the rights of local communities.

Case Study 6

In Andhra Pradesh, India, in partnership with a local NGO, the International Network for Development has helped initiate schooling in the local tribal language. Previously, education had taken place in the state language, meaning that often children had no help in developing a command of the official language, as teachers had no knowledge of the tribal mother tongue and the children were taught as first language speakers. There was a fatal mismatch.

Relationships have been developed with the linguistic departments at the universities in Hyderabad and with the Tribal Welfare and Education Departments of the State Government. The Indian Secretary for Education has agreed that this project should be implemented and all support from Government and universities should be given. This project is now in the initial stages of developing a multilingual education programme, which will have a great impact on education in India.

The DFID Social Challenge Fund decided that the project did not focus enough on empowerment of the poor and suggested it was more on the service provision side.

4. DFID POLICY AND PRACTICE

4.1 The consultative capacity of small NGOs

Small international NGOs have a wealth of knowledge that could support and strengthen DFID's strategic goals; but it is not being tapped presently. Consulting small international NGOs could provide DFID with a cost-effective forum for generating knowledge and could greatly complement the current knowledge generated by consultants and Universities contracted by DFID.

Case Study 7

The Caledonia Centre for Social Development has much experience in management of land rights, social land, common property and land ownership information. They could be of great value to DFID, which currently prefers to use organisations such as the Natural Resources Institute, Oxfam and Wye College.

4.2 Lack of Consultation and Information

It is acknowledged that requests for meetings with DFID advisers by small international NGOs, both in country and in the UK, are usually granted. Such consultation between DFID and individual NGOs on specific issues is usually satisfactory, but is restricted to dealing, for example, with a specific desk officer on a particular programme, and generally not on policy issues. In other words consultation, when it does occur, is ad hoc and appears, when policy is involved, to be after the fact. In general, DFID fails systematically to include small international NGOs in consultation processes and therefore does not benefit from their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm.

Whilst it is recognised that small international NGOs are a large and diverse body and that it would be inefficient and unrealistic to expect consultation with individual organisations, DFID makes little effort to address this problem and does not consult systematically outside the five large NGOs. Small international NGOs could be organised to facilitate dialogue along thematic or sectoral lines and BOND might well prove to be an effective conduit for such dialogue.

There is also a marked lack of visibility and access to important information held by DFID that is of interest to small international NGOs - such as data on applications for grants, the results of the evaluation processes and the outcomes of supported programmes. Making such information available on the web site would be invaluable to small international NGOs, improve the standard of applications and inform consultation with DFID.

Nevertheless, there are good examples of collaboration, particularly where these are formed around the achievement of specific targets, including the MDGs. The following case study highlights one such collaboration.

Case Study 8.

In 2002, DFID set up a working group on gender and education that brought together DFID advisers and representatives of NGOs – both large players such as Oxfam, and smaller specialist organisations such as the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). Meeting bi-monthly, the group focused on joint approaches towards achieving the 2005 MDG of Gender Equity in Education. It provided a unique opportunity for DFID to consult with NGOs and learn from best practice on girls' education, a point made by the DFID representatives involved. From the perspective of smaller NGOs, it opened up important opportunities to contribute expertise to high-level debate and policy formulation. In the case of CAMFED, it led to its involvement in the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), enabling it to bring a practical grassroots perspective to international level.

This working group provides a model for how DFID and smaller NGOs can successfully come together, and may be something that can be more widely replicated to achieve broad and valuable collaboration between DFID and civil society.

4.3 The Role of contractors

There is an important role for the private sector in development. However, DFID's move towards privatisation has impacted adversely on small international NGOs in two specific ways. Firstly, the use of private sector contractors to vet proposals has led to growing dissatisfaction. These contractors often fail to understand the objectives of the sector and appear to lack the experience to comprehend the processual nature of the work. Secondly, the increasing conditionality of donor aid linked to privatisation has led to social outcomes that do not represent the interests of the poor, either in the scope of their activities or in the manner in which they are implemented.

Case Study 9

The Development Alternatives- PriceWaterhouse Coopers Consortium (DA-PWC) has been contracted by UK DFID to manage and administer its Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme (PACS) in India. The selection criteria used for identifying organisations to receive funding are unsystematic and subjective, leading to some weak NGOs being selected. The large amount of funding available has attracted NGOs whose credibility and work is questionable. DA-PWC are behaving like a large international funder and are out of touch with the grassroots realities of the organisations and work that they are funding. There is a lack of understanding within DA-PWC of NGO culture and perspectives; most staff have an urban background and lack experience in grassroots field realities. To date DA-PWC has not consulted with the Indian Government or NGOs, although this is now starting to happen.

Programmes are being funded without a proper needs assessment being conducted; base-line surveys are poorly carried out. This has led to poor programmes and much duplication of

work since other NGOs are already working in the areas being funded. Large funding has been provided to umbrella organisations; projects of organisations already known to them have been funded to the exclusion of many small organisations that have a greater need for the funds. These umbrella organisations appear to want control over the whole PACS programme.

4.4 Privatisation and Water Development

Access to clean water was officially recognised as a human right by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights on 4th Dec. 2002, when it declared: "Water is fundamental for life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a healthy life in human dignity. It is a pre-requisite to the realisation of all other human rights." Also, the World Bank announced in January 2003, at a preparatory meeting in Tokyo for the Third World Forum taking place in Kyoto that it: "foresees a significant increase in the need for financing water resources infrastructure in the developing world"

In much of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the water sector is starved of investment from cash-strapped governments and is generally in a bad state of disrepair. Water privatisation is largely donor sponsored and the release of aid funds is often conditional on the privatisation of water. Water privatisation in SSA has always required a foreign investor, therefore the international dimension of privatisation requires extra vigilance, particularly since water provision is a 'natural monopoly'.

Small international NGO's would question the efficacy of the market for those who lack both endowments and entitlements. The emphasis on market provisioning is a bias against process-led development practices that empower the poor and runs contrary to rights-based development.

Case Study 10

Since its formation in 1985, Christian Engineers in Development (CED) regularly received support from the ODA/DFID Joint Funding Scheme (JFS) for that part of its work involving the provision of water supplies, primarily to villages in sub Saharan Africa. However, since 2000/01, such support has been declined (quoting Para. 3.7 of the CSCF Guidelines for Applicants dated 6 May 2002) because such service provision is declared inconsistent with DFID's human rights approach to development.

4.5 Rights-Based Development

DFID has subscribed to a 'rights-based approach' to addressing global poverty. The rights-based approach presupposes that development actors, including donors and borrowers, respect, protect and fulfil human rights through all their development practices. Small international NGOs support this commitment to human rights but have two concerns. Firstly, there is considerable evidence that DFID is inconsistent in its application of this approach. The rights-based objectives of the CSCF are not reflected in much of DFID's work abroad. There is no consensus amongst DFID personnel on the precise nature of a rights-based approach in practice, and there are considerable differences in opinion and interpretation on its relevance amongst DFID country offices. DFID emphasises that principles contained in its public policy documents relating to human rights and indigenous people are not binding on its

staff and have no operational status¹. Instead, they are meant to publicise DFID's overall approach to development and, as such, are aspirational strategic documents that shape overall priorities for UK official overseas development assistance. At the same time, the rights-based and sustainable livelihood guidelines are supposed to inform staff decisions and practice in project design and implementation. Secondly, DFID's understanding of rights can be too narrow to meet the diverse needs of the poor.

Small international NGOs agree that a complete emphasis on service delivery is insufficient to address social injustice; poverty is multi-dimensional in nature and requires a multi-faceted solution: service delivery, capacity building, awareness raising and advocacy are all important – each has its time and place. There is, therefore, a growing realisation inside DFID that rights-based and livelihood approaches can complement each other. For example, 'The CSCF above all else is for improving the lives of poor people' (Para. 3.11 of the CSCF Guidelines for Applicants dated 6 May 2002) while 'initiatives which consist primarily of service delivery ... will not be eligible' (Para. 3.7). Yet access to clean water and a sustainable livelihood are fundamental and indispensable human rights. Rights are indivisible – civil, economic, social, political and cultural rights in combination. For DFID truly to claim that it has adopted a rights-based approach to development, it should at least have a binding human rights policy with an accountability mechanism. For consistency, the UK Government should be advocating the rights based approach within international development fora, in its multilateral lending programmes and in the policies and programmes of multilateral institutions. DFID should adopt a binding policy on indigenous peoples.

Case Study 11

The future of agricultural development in Andhra Pradesh, India is one of modernisation, hence Vision 2020: a world in which farmers become knowledge workers and information technology and biotechnology are the norm. Public infrastructure will be provided to attract private investment: growth rather than poverty alleviation becomes paramount. Supported by DFID grants to the State Government of Andhra Pradesh, the vision is one of the industrialisation of agriculture, now the lifeblood of the economy and characterised by small farms. Land consolidation will lead to landlessness and farmers will lose their livelihoods. Local knowledge will become obsolete and biotechnology in the form of genetically modified crops will displace the tremendous range of crops and varieties currently under cultivation. Cultural and biological diversity will be lost.

Small farmers, comprising 77 per cent of the state's farmers who have landholdings of less than 2 hectares of land will become invisible, having been written out of the script.

4.6 Scale and Cost Efficiencies

Development programmes are not necessarily better because they are larger; the quality of an initiative is much more important than its size. Smallness can be by choice because it can more easily be associated with flexibility and a lack of bureaucracy. Small international NGOs are therefore concerned that DFID has withdrawn from funding smaller stand-alone projects but acknowledge the need for linkages.

¹ For a fuller discussion of this issue see: Forest Peoples Programme Briefing Paper (April 2003), A Failure of Accountability, Indigenous Peoples, Human Rights and Development Agency Standards: a reference tool and comparative review.

DFID's policy is to support civil society - trade unions, faith groups and community organisations. This is to be applauded but the allocation of funds should not be based on percentages and the type of organisations, but on the quality of the projects proposed.

Case Study 12

Village Service Trust (VST) works with dalit women in south India for economic, social and political empowerment. It also has a health programme focusing on poverty related, communicable diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Its main methodologies are to promote people's associations of, for example: poor, dalit women; sex workers; people living with HIV/AIDS and transsexuals and to work through local volunteers and peer educators. VST has worked in the same geographic area for over 20 years.

Village Service Trust has 1 UK member of staff and 3 in India (2 local, 1 expatriate) and an annual turnover of £250k. Since its establishment in 1979, VST has made it a policy to remain small. By having responsibility for both fundraising and programmes, VST's UK staff member is extremely frugal with UK spending and excellently placed to undertake all kinds of fundraising. Communication with India is clear and efficient as UK information comes from one source. An uncomplicated decision-making procedure means VST can respond quickly to partners' needs, resulting in support that is more appropriate. This is feedback received from VST's partners in India, who have experience of a wide range of European funders.

4.7 Conclusions

Although small international NGOs are part of the wider civil society, they differentiate themselves from other groups within civil society because they have:

- A proven track record in development
- Specific and relevant skills
- Long commitment to the Southern organisations with which we work.

The case studies above show some of the positive aspects of their diversity.

The challenge is seen to be to ensure that that diversity is harnessed to help work to relieve poverty wherever there is need. To that end, there is seen to be an opportunity for DFID to:

- Empower local people more effectively
- Use more detailed, culturally specific knowledge to impact on local governments' policies
- Improve innovation and a responsiveness to local issues
- Involve the UK public more directly
- Make a difference at a grass-roots level.

Small international NGOs believe that there is a consensus on the need for development intervention, but they perceive some disagreement on the modes of intervention. It is the view of the small international NGOs consulted in writing this paper that the role of civil society is increasingly one of disengagement from ordinary political processes into the extra-political as governments ignore their citizens.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary areas in need of improvement are those of visibility of DFID information and consultation between DFID and small international NGOs on matters relating to policy development. It is therefore recommended that:

- DFID be invited to release data of value to small international NGOs, probably via their web site.
- A reciprocal consultation mechanism be established between DFID and small international NGOs by which both sides can listen and learn, probably using BOND.
- Recognition be given to the small international NGO sector for its past, present and future contribution to development
- DFID's vision be broadened to acknowledge that there are diverse paths to be followed in addressing global poverty and that, in the end, development is primarily about people, not policies.

In light of the conclusions and recommendations presented above we would like request that the International Development Committee undertake a formal review of DFID's policy and practice in relation to small NGOs.