Beyond NGOs

Civil society organisations with development impact

Case studies compiled by
the AKDN Civil Society Programme and INTRAC

June 2007
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Introduction

One of the problems of working with civil society organisations (CSOs) is that people attach different meanings to the term. Some mean the large, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like World Vision, CARE, OXFAM, Save the Children and so forth. Others have in mind the small village-level groupings which may be worthy, but probably do not make a big impact on development problems.

Late in 2006, the Aga Khan Development Network Civil Society Programme (AKDN CSP) conceived the idea of a series of short case studies to illustrate (a) the range of CSOs that are not NGOs and (b) the important work that many of them are doing. In response to His Highness the Aga Khan’s call to “go beyond NGOs”, the Programme was set up to work primarily with these non-NGO civil society organisations.

At the outset, it was unclear what CSOs could actually do. In order to encourage understanding of their diversity and the range of citizens’ initiatives, the AKDN CSP asked the International NGO Training and Resource Centre (INTRAC) to develop a number of one-page case histories of CSOs which, from very different backgrounds, have proved helpful in development.

The expected outcome of this work was that development agencies influenced by the book would be more open and entrepreneurial in looking for partner organisations, and more interested in looking beyond the larger established CSOs and NGOs. In order to encourage flexible thinking, it was deliberately decided to go outside the range of institutions supported by AKDN.

The AKDN CSP set out the field where examples of development CSOs could be expected:

1. Member-based religious organisations
2. Religious organisations that offer services to the general public
3. Traditional indigenous community organisations
4. Community organisations induced by outsiders
5. Ethnic or tribal organisations
6. Trade unions
7. Trade associations
8. Employers organisations
9. Business associations
10. Civic organisations
11. Sports associations
12. Cultural associations
13. Trusts and foundations
14. Local area development organisations (or hometown associations)
15. Issue-based organisations
The AKDN CSP also set out the framework for documenting the contribution of these organisations, which is shown in each case study.

INTRAC canvassed its staff and stakeholders for their experiences and found many valuable examples. They researched and edited the contributions. In addition to the sources credited at the end of the document, thanks are due to Anne Garbutt, Cornelius Murombedzi, Gurmila Jamanova, Mark Sinclair, Michalis Avraam, Sara Methven, Susie Prince and Chris Wardle from INTRAC. From the AKDN side, thanks are due to Tom Kessinger, from whom the idea originated. The drawings are by Petra Rouendaal.

The collection we have here is inspiring and stimulating. Our hope is that those working in AKDN will be inspired to keep their eyes open for similar examples from their work, and contribute them to this growing body of documentation.

Richard Holloway
Director, Civil Society Programme, 
Aga Khan Development Network

NB: In case the reader feels that the examples we have provided are too optimistic, we have included one CSO which really did not do very much for its members and beneficiaries, but which in turn provides lessons for others. It is Case Study 8.
1. Member-based religious organisations

The Pontanima Choir, Sarajevo

Background of country, region, organisation

The word “Balkanised” when related to countries means to be split to the core along ethnic, racial and religious lines. In former Yugoslavia, the reason for society’s potential to fracture lies in the long history of occupation by the Ottoman Turks over the local Slavs. Preferential treatment from the occupier was a motive for many Slavs to convert to Islam.

Usual work of the organisation

Although the Muslim and Orthodox faiths predominate in the Balkans, there are also significant numbers of Catholics. Over the centuries the Franciscan Fathers have established and maintained small communities to serve Catholic congregations throughout the region.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

As a minority they came under severe pressure during the recent war, refusing to endorse sectarian violence and working tirelessly to maintain civil relations between Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics. The leaders of these congregations were bitterly opposed and encouraged their own followers to support their nationalist leaders – many of them now convicted as war criminals.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

As Milosevic’s forces tightened their grip around the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s, the Franciscans started a choir as a means of keeping some of the old pre-war links of solidarity between the besieged citizens of Sarajevo. Whenever bombardment allowed, residents gathered to sing each other’s holy songs of praise. They carried on all through the war and are still singing to this day. There were members from all ethnic groups of Bosnia. The choir sings music from the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish traditions.

Assessment of impact and success in addressing the problem

The choir was a symbol of resistance against the nationalist hatreds and forces that were splintering Sarajevo and its different peoples. It gave courage to those Serbs who, instead of turning on their neighbours when the Serb troops arrived, threw in their lot with the Bosniaks and Croats and endured the siege together.

After the war the Franciscans realised they had a powerful tool for healing the hatreds of the splintered country. “Let’s not talk about dialogue,” said the founder, Fra Ivo Markovic,
“Let’s make dialogue. Let’s not talk about ecumenism. Let’s live ecumenism.” In 1996, the initiative became the Pontanima Choir and Chamber Orchestra, and an organisation grew up around it – the Oci-u-Oci (Face-to-Face) Inter-religious Service. Pontanima has now travelled throughout former Yugoslavia and has performed internationally in Austria, Italy and the United States.

In 2004 the Pontanima choir was a recipient of the Common Ground Reconciliation through the Arts Award. These awards are presented annually to recognise outstanding accomplishments in conflict resolution, community building and peacemaking. Recipients have made important contributions toward bridging the divides between people, finding solutions to seemingly intractable problems and providing hope where there often was none.

For Fra Ivo, “It’s a successful mission when people see us when we go into nationalistic areas… When we start singing… people become a little embarrassed and surprised and become more respectful.”

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

Inter-religious civic actions like this can create alternative spaces for peace-building and reconciliation which are not available to politicians or religious leaders who may feel constrained by their membership to adopt nationalist or sectarian positions.
2. Religious organisations that offer services to the general public

Armenia Round Table (ART)

Background of country, region, organisation

The identity of Armenia is closely aligned with the Apostolic Church, one of the world’s oldest Christian denominations. Armenia is also the first state to have adopted Christianity as a state religion – in the year 310. Successive heads of the Apostolic Church, known as the Catholicos, have also been credited with such nation-building contributions as the design of the alphabet, the introduction of education and help for the victims of the 1915-1917 forced eviction from Turkey.

Usual work of the organisation

ART was founded in the early 1990s with the financial support of the Geneva-based World Council of Churches. ART is essentially the development organisation of the Apostolic Church of Armenia, although it also has representation of minority churches on its governing board.

The church sustained its reputation throughout the communist years and has taken an active role in the country’s difficult transition, in which Armenia finds itself blockaded on all sides except Russia, via Georgia. With support from the Armenian Diaspora, the Bishops have undertaken massive programmes of reconstruction (following the 1988 earthquake in Shirak Marz) and have made major efforts to prevent the declining provision of educational and social services. The unresolved conflict of Nagorno Karabakh, with Azerbaijan, has reinforced popular support for the church, which enjoys higher credibility that any other institution of civil society, or of the state.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

The key development problem ART faces is a country in which economic growth sits alongside extremes of new poverty and inequality – conditions that a corrupt and centralising government, wedded to a “trickle down” approach, is unwilling to address.

Over a decade ART has stimulated innovation in agricultural practices, in education methods, in awareness-raising around HIV/AIDS and disability, and provided professional training for emerging associations. Thanks to ART, subsistence farmers are growing organic fruit and vegetables and marketing them internationally under Fair Trade schemes; there is support and treatment for returning migrant workers infected with HIV/AIDS; computer training is available at vocational centres throughout the country; and mainstream schools are supported in successfully enrolling disabled children.
Assessment of impact and success in addressing the problem

Armenia is one of 16 countries potentially qualifying for the Millennium Challenge Account, a US fund that rewards good governance with massive support to priority sectors. In 2006, Armenia’s civil society organisations elected their representatives to the MCA Council, a joint governing body chaired by the Prime Minister. One of the representatives was the Director of ART, demonstrating the credibility in which the organisation is held by its peers. The other civil society representative was the director of a combative human rights organisation.

Notable lessons to be learned from their experience

Development work by religious organisations often attracts popular support because their values are considered more reliable than those of other institutions. But religious organisations are often best run separately from their church structures, which can be conservative and may be tempted to set up services separate from the state. ART has always seen its role as developing new ways of addressing problems and urging the state to fulfil its own commitments. In one of its most effective interventions, ART has ensured that these innovations are promoted and sustained by an informed clergy, by teaching development in the seminaries.
3. Traditional indigenous community organisations

A. Association of Zimbabwe Traditional Environmental Conservationists (AZTREC)

Background of country, region, organisation

The Association was formed in 1985 from an alliance of chiefs, spirit mediums and war veterans in the south of Zimbabwe. This alliance dates back to the colonial period, when the country was named Rhodesia. The traditional leadership was then in the hands of the village chiefs, who depended on mediums for their spiritual and ancestral guidance and on their warriors for the defence of their interests.

Usual work of the organisation

This alliance was politically and militarily important during the colonial wars and the final war of liberation from minority rule. With the end of the wars in 1979 and the increasing centralisation of the post-independence state, the association risked losing its reason for existence. Rather than wind up its activities, the alliance decided to adapt with the times.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

The main problem was no longer autonomy, but making independence work for the communities and people. The members decided to defend local environmental interests and protect local approaches to development. The alliance now considers it its mission to revive the lost cultural heritage and the conservation of ecological resources.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

AZTREC builds community capacities to revive and develop indigenous knowledge, techniques and skills in order to meet the requirements of sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. It implements training programmes with communities in Masvingo province and is currently expanding into Mashonaland and West Matabeleland. Based on its experience, AZTREC has further developed methodologies that enable communities and organisations to start the process of endogenous development in other parts of Zimbabwe and Southern Africa.

Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

The Association has found willing supporters amongst northern NGOs looking for partners with a commitment to development from within the local community. With this support and its effective activities in the communities, AZTREC has become a leading environmental organisation in Zimbabwe.
AZTREC has used this position to stimulate further action by establishing a network of environmental NGOs in the SADC countries and subsequently by facilitating the Pan African network for Enhancing Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge in Africa (ENIAKA). In the process it has become a registered NGO itself. At the same time the Alliance has extended its membership beyond spirit medium, chiefs, war veterans and elders, to include women groups, youth, innovators and traditional practitioners.

**Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience**

AZTREC’s success is due to the fact that its activities are based on indigenous tradition and leadership rather than “expert” or “modern” inputs from the outside. As a result the population was willing to support its environmental activities. Realising that the Association had local credibility, international donors were also eager to provide financial support.
B. Iddirs – Burial Societies of Ethiopia

Background of country, region, organisation

Iddirs are the dominant form of autonomous and voluntary indigenous associations in Ethiopia. Their roots lie in traditions of rural self-help which migrants adapted to the requirements of urbanisation from around the beginnings of the 20th century. As civil society actors, Iddirs have proved to be great survivors within a centralised and often suspicious state. They were courted by officials of the Empire, supplanted by the Dergue and are now acknowledged as the voice of civil society in development efforts. There are over 4,000 registered Iddirs in Addis Ababa alone.

Usual work of the organisation

The basic function of the Iddir is to help families bury their dead. It does this by providing tools and labour for digging graves; tents for the mourners; money to meet the burial costs; financial support for the needs of the family; and emotional support for the bereaved. To benefit from these services household representatives pay regular dues and take active part in the ceremonies.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

As one of the poorest countries in Africa, successive governments have sought to engage the population in self-help activities. While this was originally motivated by the governments’ desire to shift the burden of service provision, it became essential from the 1960s onwards when Ethiopia’s donors began to press for the involvement of non-state actors in development. For Government, the Iddirs were the acceptable solution to this new donor requirement.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

International NGOs have harnessed the potential of Iddirs for literacy campaigns, formal education, micro-credit operations, slum rehabilitation, HIV/AIDS awareness and many others causes. ACORD, which specialises in Iddirs, has worked with 220 groups covering 10,200 households in Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa since 1999.

The broader scope of Iddir activity has made capacity building a necessity for leaders and members alike. ACORD therefore provides training in formal procedures, governance, financial transparency, project management and latterly, advocacy.

The higher profile and ambitions of Iddirs have signalled the need for umbrella organisations. In 2000, the Tesfa Social Development Association (TSDA) was formed as a coalition of 26 Iddirs representing 4,000 households and a population of 29,000. TSDA’s original vision was to help Iddir members who had fallen behind with their dues. Its current activities include upgrading slum housing, assistance to elderly and orphans, sponsoring skill training and job creation, credit and savings, providing health services and kindergartens, and advocacy against harmful traditional practices.
Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

With a relatively enabling legal environment, Iddirs have enjoyed explosive growth in urban areas since the 1960s. This is a reflection of migrants’ needs for new forms of self-organisation to address the multiple challenges of the new urban environments.

Once based on ethnic affiliation or locality, there are now more than a dozen different types of Iddir, each with a different membership. Newer Iddirs are composed separately of women, youth, displaced peoples, squatters and mosques.

Modern Iddirs have now found their way back to the rural areas from which their inspiration came, and no development activity is conceivable in modern Ethiopia without engaging the Iddirs as partners.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

Iddirs used to face criticism that they attend to the dead rather than the living. The lesson of their success is, however, that social movements must have at their core an issue that is of burning, common interest to a population. In Ethiopia, that has proved to be burial.
4. Community organisations induced by outsiders

Revival of the Commune in Kosovo

Background of country, region, organisation

Before 1990 the socialist system in Yugoslavia provided for participation at the village level through elected and representative communes. The successor republics generally left the communes out of their post-transition administrative set-up, largely on the grounds of budget and efficiency. The result is that villagers throughout the Balkans take very little part in local development initiatives, beyond periodically lobbying the distant municipality for investment funds.

Usual work of the organisation

During the 1990s commune-type associations were a key element of the parallel structure that Kosovars raised in defiance of oppression from Belgrade. At the local level, they managed alternative education, welfare and health systems and were funded by taxation of the Kosovan Diaspora. Despite their achievements, the commune was not a feature of the post-war administrative settlement.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

In the face of widespread local apathy for reconstruction, the international donor community tried to stimulate democratic governance at local levels. In 2000 the UN Mission in Kosovo decreed that all municipalities “shall stipulate the form of cooperation between the municipality and villages, settlements and urban quarters”. International NGOs began to shift their focus from creating local NGOs to identifying and supporting community-based organisations (CBOs).

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

Mercy Corps, which had been active in Kosovo since the early 1990s, developed a programme in the municipality of Prizren, which has 76 villages. The objective was to promote community mobilisation and greater village-municipality interaction.

Lokvica village is a good example of its work: Mercy Corps’ assistance facilitated the formation of a five-man committee directly elected by the village with over 80 percent turnout. This has achieved some notable successes, including the installation of a water supply, the rebuilding of a primary school and the building of a youth centre-cum-general culture house. In all cases, work was coordinated with the municipality with the bulk of financial resources donated from international donors.
Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

In the villages of Prizren, elected committees are widely recognised as legitimate and representative, and are also often successful in mobilising community resources for self-help projects. But in the absence of official recognition for these committees, this has not resulted in increased contact or understanding between community and municipality. The committees look to the international NGOs and not to the municipality for resources and facilitation.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

Rural communities tend to be loyal to local institutions with a track record. Replacing them with new organisational forms is rarely possible within the short life-span of the development project.

The challenge for the future is to reintegrate communes into the administrative structures of the new countries resulting from the collapse of Yugoslavia. This should be accompanied by stronger municipal capacities for encouraging public participation parallel to and coordinated with community capacity building.
5. Ethnic or tribal organisations

The Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Forest (AIDESEP)

Background of country, region, organisation

Peru is a country of 22 million inhabitants, most of whom are highland Indian or mixed race mestizo. The bulk of the population is already urban, with six million alone settled in the capital of Lima, on the Pacific coast. Around 200,000 other Amerindians occupy the country’s Amazonian region, which is currently facing large-scale colonisation and intensive extraction of its natural resources.

For the last 30 years AIDESEP has represented the 64 ethnic groups of the forest region. Its membership consists of 48 federations which represent 1,350 self-managed communities. This Apex association is entirely run by forest Indians elected for a specific term of office, and derives its mandate from more than 80 percent of the forest Indians in the country.

Usual work of the organisation

The objectives of AIDESEP are fourfold:

i. To represent the current and historical interests of the forest peoples of Peru;

ii. To guarantee the preservation and development of cultural identity, territory and values of each of the 64 indigenous groups;

iii. To give expression to the right to self-determination;

iv. To promote sustainable human development.

AIDESEP runs health, bilingual education and distance education programmes. The organisation is however primarily focused on territorial defence, which is the major preoccupation of all lowland indigenous communities. The leadership argues that natural forests are essential for the prosperity of their people and for the survival of Amazonia itself.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

Fifty years ago there was little practical interest in the Amazon region, most of which was beyond the reach of the Peruvian state. These isolated lands were left largely to their indigenous inhabitants. Since then the needs for land of a rapidly expanding population and resources for investors have fuelled the dramatic expansion of the Peruvian “frontier”, accompanied by large-scale destruction of the forest.

As a result, Amazonia faces an environmental catastrophe. Loggers strip the forest of hardwood species before settlers clear the land for subsistence crops and coca, the only viable cash crop. The entire lowland area has already been partitioned into logging and hydrocarbon concessions.
In defence of its membership, AIDESP has mounted a vigorous campaign against the despoliation of Amazonia.

**Description of the work undertaken by the organisation**

AIDESEP has made good use of the landmark 1974 Law of Native Communities, which for the first time since the arrival of the Conquistadors gave the Indians the right to own land collectively. By long-standing agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, AIDESEP has overseen the titling of 1,200 communities across the lowlands. By ensuring that the frontiers of these community lands are joined, the organisation has often succeeded in demarcating entire territories.

Thanks to an alliance with the Ministry of Environment, AIDESEP has also succeeded in creating very large communal reserves – environmental buffers which are under the protection of the local indigenous population.

**Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem**

Altogether 20 percent of Amazonia is now legally owned and self-managed by the lowland communities of Peru and their indigenous organisations there is little doubt that indigenous ownership of land is an effective way of protecting the environment. Only recently AIDESEP helped the Achuar of the northern forests with a court order against an Argentinean drilling company from pouring 55 million gallons a day of toxic production waters into the Amazon River system.

**Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience**

In their new role on the frontline of environmentalist activism, ethnic and tribal organisations are most effective when there is legal space for self-determination. The alternative model of tutelage, as in neighbouring Brazil, is a poor substitute.
6. Trade unions

Public Service International – the Water Dialogues

Background of country, region, organisation

Based in France, close to Geneva, PSI is the global federation for public sector trade unions. It represents some 650 affiliated trade unions in 150 countries. Together, these unions organise more than 20 million public sector workers, providing services in central government, health and social care, municipal and community services, and public utilities.

Usual work of the organisation

As well as representing members in global fora, PSI has campaigned for the interests of public sector workers. Since 1907, when it was founded, PSI has coordinated public sector struggles for workers’ rights, social and economic justice, and efficient and accessible public services.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

The provision of water and sanitation for the world’s poorest people is a central plank of the United Nations Development Programme’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The question is how to achieve this ambition. On the one hand, the World Bank promotes Private Sector Participation (PSP), in the form of multinational water operators, as the surest way of achieving water for all. On the other hand, PSI promotes public-public partnerships (PuPs) with labour and civil society involvement in decision-making.

The dispute has brought meaningful progress towards the MDGs to a standstill, sometimes, as in Cochabamba, Bolivia, provoking general strikes and toppling governments.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

At the International Freshwater Conference in Bonn, 2001, PSI joined the international NGO Water Aid to launch a stakeholder dialogue to investigate whether and how the private sector can contribute to the delivery of affordable water supply and sanitation, especially to poor communities. Welcoming the initiative, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) offered to support the process financially on the grounds that “it could lead to a better understanding of successes and failures”.

The dialogues have now grown to include trade unions, governments, private operators, universities and NGOs from Brazil, Britain, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa and Uganda.
Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

Though fraught with difficulties, the process so far has resulted in a global scoping of experience and detailed reviews in South Africa and Brazil on PSP in water provision. Research has just started in the other three countries of the South. ASSEMAE, the Association of Brazil’s municipal public operators has joined with PSI to propose to the UN a global mechanism of not-for-profit cooperation between water operators.

Thanks in part to the Water Dialogues, the threat of imposing privatisation upon poor countries through aid, trade or debt cancellation conditions is receding.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

Without some agreement on what works and why in water provision, the water MDG will fail miserably. Lessons from the Water Dialogues will generate information that can contribute to the development of sector strategies by governments and support for these strategies by international donors.
7. Trade associations

The Surat, India Chamber of Commerce

Background of country, region, organisation

Surat is a port city of entrepreneurs in the south of India’s Gujarat State. Historically it was a stronghold of guilds. In the 1920s it was a major centre of production of Gandhi style kadhi cloth. In the last decade it has expanded into popular man-made fibres. The decentralised form of production has eclipsed the large cotton mills, to make Surat the capital of small-scale textiles in India. This success has attracted waves of labour migrants. The migrants have settled in sprawling slums and shanty towns around the old city and there is very little social integration between the old and new.

The “old” is characterised by a multitude of business associations which come together under the Surat Chamber of Commerce, which was established in 1941.

Usual work of the organisation

The main purpose of the Chamber of Commerce is to ensure the prosperity of the city and its business associations. This involves looking for new production and marketing opportunities, and making sure that multiple transactions between the thousands of small producers continue to function on traditional trust rather than the contract basis more common in Indian business practice. The Chamber also maintains the traditional integration of Hindu and Muslim businessmen within the same associations – rather than organising them separately according to religious affiliation.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

Until the destruction of the Babri Mosque in December 1992, Surat had the enviable reputation of the “bastion” of harmony between Hindus and the 15 percent Muslim minority. All that changed in four days of bloodshed during which 197 people were killed – 22 Hindu and 175 Muslim. What had gone so badly wrong?

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

When the threat of violence had become apparent, the Chamber of Commerce and its members joined the local authorities in forming Peace Committees, the purpose of which was to defuse incidents wherever they arose. The committees were successful throughout the old city but failed in the slums, where all the killing took place.

The massacre of Surat prompted research into why violence between Hindus and Muslims occurs in some situations but not in others. Five other Indian cities were also studied. Surat emerged as the location with the most intense form of inter-communal business association.
The researchers noted that tragedy had not occurred where the business associations were strong, but in the slums where there were no established forms of association at all. The conclusion was that vigorous and communally integrated associational life can serve as an agent of peace by restraining those, including powerful politicians, who would polarise Hindus and Muslims along communal lines.

**Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem**

Unfortunately for Surat, the need to integrate the slums coincided with a period of associational decline in Gujarat. Its once powerful trade unions were silenced, the NGOs were mainly focussed on the rural areas and disreputable but wealthy businessmen ("bootleggers") filled the vacuum with spurious civic organisations.

**Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience**

Strong associational forms of civic engagement, such as integrated business organisations, trade unions, political parties, and professional associations, are able to control outbreaks of ethnic violence. The lesson from the slums of Surat is that marginalised urban populations constitute a priority for fostering appropriate associations so that they can also defuse tensions when they occur.
8. Employers organisations

Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad – BCS Tea Planters Association of Bangladesh

Background of country, region, organisation

When the British started to export Indian tea, they introduced the iniquitous system of indentured labour to harness low cost workers for their new plantations. The system persists to this day. Although most of the “tea gardens” are now locally owned, the workforce is the fourth generation of migrants who originally came to find work from the tribal areas of India. Despite their long residence in the plantations, the workers still lack basic amenities and services in comparison with non-plantation labour.

The Association of Tea Planters was founded in 1951 and was later renamed the Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad (BCS). It represents 125 tea estates and is prominent in the Employers Federation of Bangladesh.
Usual work of the organisation

As an Employers Association the main task of the BCS is to promote the tea industry in and beyond the country. It is mainly preoccupied with the relatively low productivity of Bangladeshi plantations, a consequence in part of low re-investment and ageing shrubs. The BCS is also responsible for negotiating an annual settlement with the two trade unions that have plantation worker membership. The largest of these, Cha Sramik, has 70,000 members.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

The poor conditions of the workforce contribute to low productivity and threaten to give the industry a bad name amongst European consumers, amongst whom Fair Trade tea is becoming popular.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

From 1999 to 2002, the BCS cooperated closely with a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) family welfare and reproductive health education programme for tea plantation workers. In agreement with the settlement of those years, it included financial incentives for litigation and vasectomy as permanent forms of birth control to arrest the rising population amongst the workers. The programme received a reasonably positive evaluation. Thanks to the good employer-union relations, Cha Sumrik had also started Women and Children's Clubs in 1988 focused on nutrition education. By 2001, the union had established 100 clubs.

Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

An International Labour Organization (ILO) survey of 2002 has suggested that social dialogue has delivered limited benefits to tea workers, pointing out that 86 percent of women surveyed could only sign their name, 47 percent of men were illiterate, and schools, housing, water supply, waste disposal etc were inadequate.

Very few women knew about the Women and Children's Clubs, yet most of the women belonged to traditional savings groups, which they managed amongst themselves. Neither men nor women had any detailed understanding of their trade union. The prevailing opinion was that it mostly benefited the employers.

Given these outcomes it does not appear likely that the BCS will achieve its ambitions of higher productivity, given that conditions remain fundamentally unchanged.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

In the case of exceptionally marginalised workers, half measures in the form of top-down health programmes and related initiatives are simply not enough to turn conditions around. Nor are good union-employer relations of benefit if they deliver neither higher productivity nor improved working conditions. A much more serious attempt to raise plantation workers’ awareness of their union and civil rights is in order, combined with initiatives that start with the structures that the women actually use and are familiar with – such as the savings clubs.
9. Business associations

- Tsunami Relief by the Rotary Club of Colombo Regency, Sri Lanka

Background of country, region, organisation

Two-thirds of Sri Lanka’s coast received the brunt of the 2004 tsunami, destroying homes, buildings, lives and livelihoods over a very wide area. Even for a country with a 20-year civil war this was the worst man-made or natural disaster in its history.

Rotary is a worldwide movement of business professionals aimed at service to the community, high ethical standards in business and international understanding. The Rotary Club of Sri Lanka has 37 clubs with 1,700 members. The Colombo Regency Club was set up in 2002 by young professionals, the main office holders being women.

Usual work of the organisation

The main emphasis of the club is community service and projects range from adopting underprivileged schools and providing them with libraries, health camps, environmental awareness programmes including field trips for children of the adopted schools, a programme to assist street children – to numerous projects centred around provision of necessities, care and attention for orphans and children with disabilities.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

The problem posed by the tsunami was the sheer scale of the damage and disruption, with all the operational difficulties of making a useful and relevant response.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

Rotary sprang into action, creating APEX structures to coordinate operations and advise the Clubs on the main technical areas of response, such as construction, health and income generation.

The new Rotary Club of Colombo Regency was one of the quickest to respond, setting up a successful web log for assistance, information and fundraising. Through the web log the Colombo club raised sufficient funds to invest $US 750,000 in two schools that needed building from new in Batticaloa.

It was given lead responsibility for a 500-pupil school and was nominated Associate Club in a second school. It engaged the Institute of Architects on what it thought was a pro bono basis for the plans, only to discover that it faced payment at the last minute.

On appeal to the APEX Committee, the Rotary Club ruled that Clubs could only use architects willing to donate their time free of charge and made available a Rotarian volunteer who came up with the plans without delay.
The new Club's plans to build 100 new houses close to the Batticaloa school also ran into trouble when it found that the land set aside by the authorities had been allocated to an NGO. The problem was solved when a business friend of a Rotarian (with land in the area) donated sufficient acreage for the construction of 72 houses.

**Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem**

By quickly leveraging Internet and electronic payment technology, the Colombo Regency Club was able to secure the budget it needed for its ambitions at an early stage. On a completely voluntary basis it has steered through complex reconstruction projects to completion. The Batticaloa school was completed in February 2007. The first 45 houses were built and handed over in October 2006. The Rotarian’s success in project delivery has been noticed by external evaluators who lament the difficulties faced by international emergency NGOs working on the tsunami.

**Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience**

Business associations like the Rotarians are best known for their (worthy but often staid) project support to deprived communities. However, go-ahead new groups like the Colombo Regency can make significant contributions to national emergencies as well. Members have local knowledge, business know-how, contacts and coordination – crucial advantages in emergency and long-term aid.
10. Civic organisations

“Otpor!” Student Resistance Movement of Serbia

Background of country, region, organisation

In the year 2000 all Serbia had to show for a decade of fratricidal war was defeat on all fronts and a million displaced people to look after. Instead of the grand dream of a Serb-led successor of Yugoslavia, it woke up from the nightmare of international disgrace.

Worst of all, the country was still in the firm grip of Slobodan Milosevic, an indicted war criminal who had blighted the prospects of a whole generation of Serbian youth.

Using ingenious techniques that operated under the radar of the intelligence services, a group of determined students set about mobilising the country’s high school and university students in non-violent, Gandhian style opposition to the regime. The students called the organisation “Otpor!”, the Serbian word for resistance.

Usual work of the organisation

Though it had links to students’ unions, the organisation was created around the single issue of getting rid of Milosevic. There was no formal leadership of “Otpor!”, so the authorities could not stifle the movement through strategic arrests. It ran entirely on volunteers and was fuelled by a politicised youth culture with a clear vision.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

The problem was that Milosevic controlled a battle-hardened army, a tough police force and most of the media. His propaganda was so effective that the bulk of the population shared his conviction that Serbia, far from perpetrator, was the victim of an international conspiracy. There was every possibility that Milosevic would manipulate the August 2000 elections again, thus securing himself another five years of idiosyncratic and deadly power.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

“Otpor!” branded itself with a stylish clenched fist that soon appeared stencilled on every public building. “Otpor!” then used its networks to organise concerts throughout the country to publicise its slogan “He’s Gone!” The concerts also gave speakers a platform for the Serbian talent for ridicule. Jokes spread from the students into the wider population, subtly undermining the authority of the police and the ruling parties. “Otpor!” also played a leading role in encouraging the opposition parties to canvass in the streets and eventually shamed them into forming a united opposition to Milosevic.

In their cat and mouse game with the police, students were regularly arrested. The strategy was to assemble en masse at any police station that held students in court arrest. The brutal response of the police against teenagers aroused their parents and the students’
courage inspired others to overcome their fear. Mass protests of citizens, students and human rights and pro-democracy activists eventually forced Milosevic into calling early elections.

Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

When Milosevic refused to accept his defeat at the polls, the people responded with a general strike. As normal life ground to a halt, hundreds of thousands descended on the capital. They took parliament on October 5th. Milosevic was arrested and extradited to the Hague in June 2001.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

The success of “Otpor!” suggests that oppressive leaders can best be toppled not by outside military force, but by grassroots movements from within the country. The success of the “Otpor!” student resistance movement went on to inspire regime-changing social movements in Ukraine and Georgia.
11. Sports associations

The Feyenoord Football Academy of Ghana

Background of country, region, organisation

Football Academies are a new form of sports association that is spreading rapidly from West Africa. They exist to provide young hopefuls with star-quality football training as well as an education. The Feyenoord Football Academy of Ghana is an example. Its name and much of its support derives from the famous Dutch Club.

Usual work of the organisation

The Academy’s purpose is to produce top rate footballers for the country’s national team. Applicants for places are also tempted by the possibility of international stardom with a European Club. The Feyenoord Academy aims to turn out all-rounders who can hold their own in the field and also in the challenging world of star celebrities. So students work on their studies as well as on their foot play.
Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

As elsewhere, communicating the dangers of HIV-AIDS amongst youngsters is a challenge in Ghana. There is a shortage of credible messengers but teenage footballers have great potential as role models.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

UNICEF has helped train a group of adolescents about HIV/AIDS and how to reduce the danger of infection. When they go home on holidays, they are welcomed by their peers as heroes and have a receptive audience for their health training materials. They do the same when they attend matches and recruiting tournaments.

While HIV/AIDS prevention is the goal, the initiative also helps adolescents develop important problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking and communication skills. It also helps them handle peer pressure while building their self confidence. Essentially, it encourages young people to choose healthy lifestyles as they grow into adulthood.

Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

The peer educators at the Feyenoord Football Academy have over 2,000 young people with information on how to protect themselves and their friends from HIV/AIDS. When students from the Academy travelled recently to Lesotho and South Africa for matches, they used the opportunity to share their knowledge with their international colleagues.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

The size of football fan clubs and the receptivity of members to messages from their heroes make footballers the ideal social marketers of HIV/AIDS prevention. Since 2002, UNICEF has developed a Sport for Development programme to mobilise peer communicators.

In 2003, the UN developed a strategy to take full advantage of sport. As the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan explained, “The aim of the UN activities involving sport is not the creation of new sporting champions and the development of sport but rather the use of sport in broader development and peace-building activities.”
12. Cultural associations

#### Chitalishte – Culture Centres of Bulgaria

**Background of country, region, organisation**

Literally “reading rooms”, the *Chitalishte* represent Bulgaria’s first manifestations of an active and organised civil society. The first appeared in 1856, launched by progressive entrepreneurs and craftsmen of the Bulgarian Enlightenment. The main function was to educate. It achieved this by providing information on the great discoveries of the time in Europe and the opportunities to debate and apply them in Bulgaria. From libraries they gradually developed into cultural centres with facilities for choirs, music, ballet and theatre.

The centres rapidly became an essential feature of municipal life. Even small towns aspired to their own and found benefactors. Communist Bulgaria continued the tradition, harnessing the *Chitalishte* to its own purposes of exerting control over the thoughts and behaviour of society and of providing cheap and universal access to culture. By 1989 there were 4,000 centres – just 1,000 less than the number of churches in the country.

**Usual work of the organisation**

Since the Second World War the main work of the *Chitalishte* has been library services and training in the performing arts. The centres retained professionals in these fields, paid by the Culture Committee of the central Government.

**Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it**

The *Chitalishte* fared badly during the onset of transition to a market economy. By 2005 the number of centres had fallen to 3,600. Government subsidies were reducing, the population was too poor to pay for culture, and the staff had no experience of running a civil society organisation. With the help of UNDP, the Ministry of Culture set about making the centres relevant to the new democracy.

This would be no easy task. A needs assessment classified most of the centres as “museums” with no intention of changing their services; some as “laboratories”, open to but fearful of exploring new activities and approaches; and only a handful as “entrepreneurs”, which saw democracy and the market economy as welcome opportunities.

**Description of the work undertaken by the organisation**

From 1997 a two-year pilot capacity building project introduced 41 *Chitalishte* to NGO ways of working and gave them the opportunity to design and implement small-scale projects. This was sufficiently promising to scale up the programme (with funding from The Netherlands and USAID) to 300 centres across the country.
Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

The injection of seed-funding and know-how has had the desired effect of stimulating creativity amongst the Chitalishte, which are once again beginning to respond to the needs of the communities. While retaining their core function of providing libraries and training in music and dance, they have computerised, become accredited for delivering distance education, facilitated new associations for bee-keeping, wine growing, horticulture, crafts and others, developed mediation skills between citizen’s groups and the local authorities, become trainers in organisational development, provided space in their buildings for local NGOs, set up links between schools and services for the elderly, and so on.

A second phase of the project has set up a Chitalishte Development Foundation for research, promotion and fundraising and is developing a network of regional centres for taking forward the most successful innovations.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

Civic institutions that the state takes over are extremely hard to revert to non-state management. The lesson for civil society organisations is to make sure that any support they receive from the state is on their own terms and does not undermine their autonomy.
13. Trusts and foundations

Vaqf and Bonyad – the Endowments and Foundations of Iran

Background of country, region, organisation

From time immemorial rural communities of Iran have established cooperative ways of working against their two major threats: scarcity of water in the Iranian plateau and oppression by invaders, bandits and despotic rulers. Dissatisfaction eventually spread to the cities, leading to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911. This enfranchised all Iranians for the first time, allowing modern forms of civil society to take root.

Civil Society was driven underground in the years after the Second World War, as the power of the monarchy and the military increased. In the absence of a free press and political parties, the expression of non-state autonomous activity was reduced to professional associations (midwives, writers, professional women, doctors etc) and religious organisations. The influence of the state over religious organisations was, however, weak and this permitted them to extend into the political sphere in the 1960s and 1970s.
Usual work of the organisation

Vaqf, an endowment for public works such as bridges and libraries, is the oldest form of religious foundation in Iran. As religious influence extended, sandogh-e quaez-ol-hassaneh, interest-free loans funds, were established, initially, as a safety net for opponents of the Shah who were dismissed from their work. These grew from the first in 1970 to 3,000 in 1988 and 10,000 in 2005. Often run from the mosque, the sandogh loans are guaranteed by businessmen in the bazaar.

Bonyad, foundations, originally associated with Shiite shrines and the donations of pilgrims became major sources of social development funds after the 1979 Revolution. For example, the Bonyad-e-Mostazafan va Janbazan (Foundation for the Dispossessed and Handicapped) was set up with confiscated assets of the Shah and the court. In 1998, it claimed a turnover of $US 3.5 billion. At least 120,000 families received pensions, health education and housing services from the foundation.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

Despite its oil wealth, Iran under the Monarchy was a nation of neglected and impoverished villages. Massive popular support for the Islamic Revolution of 1979 presented religious leaders with an opportunity to address the problems of the Monarchy, especially rural poverty.

Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

Notwithstanding his fearsome reputation for religious extremism, Ayatollah Khomeini applied the participatory civic principles learned during the opposition years to the rural problem. His Jihad e Sazandegi or Reconstruction Crusade mobilised people from all walks of life to bring the benefits of modern infrastructure to the Iranian hinterland. Funding for government-led rural development projects rose from 9 percent to 26 percent of total government expenditure by 1983.

Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

Within 14 years the Jihad had brought water systems to 3,700 villages and doubled the number of villages on the national grid. It also built roads, public baths, irrigation systems, bridges and other infrastructure. The movement was institutionalised in 1983, but it continued to work in an innovative way, leading the way in using participative processes such as Participatory Rural Appraisal and working in partnership with rural development NGOs.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

Iran is rarely identified with progressive civil society. But in traditional societies the power of the church to mobilise the civic arena against oppression should never be underestimated.
14. Local area development organisations (hometown associations)

The Guraghe People’s Self-help Development Organization (GPSDO)

Background of country, region, organisation

Guragheland, Ethiopia is a harsh and isolated area south-west of Addis Ababa covering 4,000 square kilometres. It is home to an enterprising population of 1.5 million that is ethnically distinct from the dominant Amharic elite. The Guraghe People’s Self-help Development Organization (GPSDO) was established in 1989. It is an umbrella organisation that embraces seven autonomous development associations (each with a chapter in Guragheland and Addis Ababa). The general assembly has 980 members. GPSDO has 80 paid staff and 3,000 volunteers between the Secretariat, based in Addis, and the branch in Woliket. The organisation is the biggest and oldest of its kind in Ethiopia.

Usual work of the organisation

The current work of GPSDO revolves around social services such as education, health, drinking water and electricity. However, it began its institutional life in 1961 as the Guraghe Roads Construction Organization (GRCO). This was established after 15 years of intense struggle in 1961.

The organisation is unusual in that until the mid 1990s it was able to sustain itself without the support of international or national donors. For this it relied on cooperation in communal affairs, which is the basis for Guraghe associational life in the form of self-help. The Guraghes are credited with a long history of organised mutual support and most forms of Ethiopian associational life began amongst them. These include Iqqub, the rotating savings and credit association, usually practised by Guraghes and the Iddir, or burial societies that provide social and financial support in times of bereavement.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

From 1945, unchecked population growth made sedentary agriculture with hoe techniques no longer viable in Guragheland. The Guraghes adopted migration as a survival strategy. However, true to traditions of active participation in communal affairs, people who settled outside Guragheland were still expected to maintain close contact and regularly visit.

The problem for a mobile and entrepreneurial population was the appalling state of physical infrastructure. Roads were completely non-existent and migrant workers had to travel long distances by foot over rugged terrain.
Description of the work undertaken by the organisation

These problems led to the formation of the Guraghe Roads Construction Organization which over 27 years of operation built hundreds of kilometres of roads through self-help. Not only did the roads link Guragheland to Addis, but they also connected the area’s major towns. Trade soon flourished and, since the roads were privately built, the Guraghe could set tolls for their use. This generated a constant source of revenue which allowed for expansion of development activities.

After 27 years of uninterrupted work the Guraghe wound up the Road Construction enterprise and launched the GPSDO with a broader mandate to improve the conditions of the population. It implemented water and sanitation and electrification programmes until it lost the right to levy tolls on Guragheland roads.

Instead it developed such imaginative measures as a small surcharge on passenger fares by agreement with the Guraghe-owned transport companies. This revenue allowed the organisation to generate counterpart funds for rural development programmes co-funded by international NGOs such as Oxfam, Save the Children, ActionAid and PACT.
Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

Not only has GPSDO maintained the transport infrastructure developed in GRCO’s 27 years of operation, but it has continuously expanded social and other services to the Guraghe population over 18 years. The organisational staying power and scale are truly impressive. With some justification, the Guraghes pride themselves on creating a new model of development based on ethnic affiliation.

Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience

The lesson for marginalised rural areas is that organised migrants can be more effective than states in initiating local area development. They have a greater stake and more staying power.

But, without strong partnership, commitment and support from influential Guraghies in Addis, it would have been very difficult for the rural elders, who initiated the concept, to establish an organisation that managed complex transport infrastructure development and operations. The first initiative in 1945 was not successful until Addis residents joined. They included high-ranking Guraghe elites well placed in the military and civil service.
15. Issue-based organisations

Diabetics Association of Kazakhstan

Background of country, region, organisation

As elsewhere in Central Asia, Kazakhstan’s shift from a centrally planned to a market economy in the early 1990s came at a severe cost to especially vulnerable groups. Entirely dependent upon a medical model of disability, the country’s 140,000 diabetics were used to receiving all their treatment needs from a welfare state. By the mid 1990s this infrastructure had all but collapsed. The Diabetics Association of the Republic of Kazakhstan (DARK) emerged in Almaty in response to the ensuing crisis. It was formed in 1995 as an association of 21 societies aimed at improving the quality of life for people with diabetes. Located in major cities, they covered all 14 oblast or areas of the republic.
Usual work of the organisation

DARK has a staff of five, three of which are engaged in developing policy to support advocacy and campaigning. Activities cover a wide field of issues of crucial interest to those suffering from diabetes, including:

- Lobbying and protection of the rights of people with diabetes;
- Linking medical profession and patients to influence national policy in areas of prevention and modern treatment;
- Improving socio-economic conditions of patients to extend life expectancy;
- Providing equal opportunities for full enjoyment of daily activity;
- Supporting medical professionals working in the field;
- Developing civil society and involving it in the process of forming new legislation;
- Charitable support for patients and medical institutions.

Development problem and why the organisation focussed on it

Early in transition the Government introduced health sector reforms that covered the cost of treatment but not of medication. To make matters worse, Kazakhstan imports all its insulin but in 1995 failed to make adequate provision. Lack of finances made it possible to meet only 20 percent of the country’s needs.

The result was catastrophic. Many lives were put at risk, especially amongst children and the elderly. Desperate relatives mobbed local authority buildings and when children started dying, threatened to kill their doctors.

Activists responded by convening a conference that resulted in the foundation of DARK. The Association immediately resorted to the international media in a successful appeal for emergency supplies.

Assessment on impact and success in addressing the problem

DARK’s determined and timely reaction saved thousands of lives and gave the organisation the credibility it needed to represent diabetics at the national level. By 1996 it was recognised by Government as a legitimate partner in improving policy for diabetics. The President of the Association was appointed as permanent civic observer on the insulin procurement commission and since then has advised the Government on quantities of insulin required. DARK then set about addressing the problem at its roots and a series of landmark achievements followed.

In 1998, DARK addressed Parliament to raise awareness of the need for new legislation. By 2000, the decision was reached in principle to provide every diabetic with insulin free of charge and a national register of diabetics was established at the Ministry of Health. In November 2000 a public hearing was held at the level of the republic. It ended with the Prime Minister approving DARK’s proposal for a comprehensive three-year Diabetes Programme. By 2003, compulsory provision of insulin free of charge was made law.
Once they have achieved their main objective, many single issue organisations decline. DARK however refused to accept second best for its members and set about eliminating the medical model of disability that kept diabetic children away from school and adults tied to the surgeries of their general practitioners.

In her own words, the dynamic President of DARK, Nataliya Tukalevskaya, sets out the current advocacy agenda and the way to achieve it: “We show people with diabetes that they can have an active life. We find activists amongst youth in the diabetic community. We prove to the Government that children with diabetes can and must participate in children’s camps… and other amenities.”

In 2007, DARK expects every diabetic to be able to check his or her own blood-sugar level and self-administer the necessary dose of insulin. The Association’s track record suggests that it will indeed achieve this – and then go on to make sure that diabetics can take full advantage of their new opportunity for a full life.

**Notable lessons to be learnt from their experience**

In transition countries where there are many competing demands, the rights of certain vulnerable groups can be ignored unless they associate to undertake vigorous campaigns that get the public and politicians on their side.

However, not all groups benefit equally. For example, the elderly are often in pitiable conditions throughout the former Soviet Union, and have campaigned ceaselessly for fair and humane treatment to little practical effect.
Postscript

This collection of case studies and the format for the case studies are not exhaustive. Indeed, I hope that the case studies only represent a very small selection of the inspiring stories that exist. What they are meant to be is exemplary of the kinds of work that CSOs do, and a way to encourage readers to keep their eyes and ears open for more examples of the same kind.

In order for development workers to be aware of the possibilities of CSOs, we need a lot of examples so that people can find easily examples from countries that interest them and themes in which they are working. Please consider yourself as a researcher in this field and as you go about your business, please look for more examples, write them up in the same format as these and send them to:

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John Beauclerk at the International NGO Training and Resource Centre (INTRAC)
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## Some sources of information for the case studies

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