NGO Service Delivery and Promotion of Democracy: Two TMI Initiatives in Nepal and Peru

The Mountain Institute

Analysis of NGO Service Delivery Capacities in Nepal in Times of Conflict and Uncertainty (2002–2007)

Project background

The traditional models of country project implementation and service delivery are changing rapidly throughout the world, sometimes as a result of conflict or uncertain situations. Adapting and responding to these situations, based on a solid understanding of their root causes and their prospective solutions, is critical to the success of future poverty reduction and development programs throughout the world. The purpose of the research project was to determine exactly how effective NGOs have been under contemporary situations of conflict in Nepal; what new challenges have impacted their ability to implement projects; and how their service delivery and monitoring capacities can be strengthened in spite of violence and uncertainty.

The research paper

Methods included literature reviews, field visits, and key informant interviews involving TMI staff, local NGOs, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Topics covered include the background and historical context of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal; the evolution of TMI and other INGO implementation models over time; results of the focus group discussions and interviews; analysis of key findings; and lessons learned and recommendations for the future.

The study documents how INGOs and NGOs have used a variety of techniques to continue field activities, safeguard their field staff, and maintain workable relationships with the conflicting parties, even within a situation of civil war. These include lowering their field profiles; developing flexible implementation plans; promoting transparency, impartiality, neutrality, and community ownership; strengthening the capacity of carefully chosen local partners; using local staff; strengthening cooperation/collaboration among stakeholders; and focusing on poor and marginalized groups. Several NGOs, INGOs, and donors interviewed suggested that given the current situation, development activities must first address people's immediate needs by providing quick, tangible results, such as bridges, buildings, or other infrastructure activities.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that working through NGOs is indeed an effective means of building the local capacity and sustainability of program activities, and it was for this reason that many international organizations started working through local NGO partners well before the current conflict. The conflict itself, however, was found to have been a catalyst for encouraging INGOs to become more focused on actually strengthening in-country NGO capacity, and for local NGOs to focus more on the strengthening of their diagnostic, participatory planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting skills.

Additionally, it was found that whether or not an INGO works through local NGOs is less important than the details of how the programs are carried out. Key features of effective project design

and implementation under situations of conflict included:

- The degree of community participation and ownership;
- The degree of transparency;
- The maintenance of neutrality and impartiality;
- The careful selection of partners and associates;
- The delegation, transparency, and inclusiveness of decision-making;
- Social inclusion; and
- The conduct, behavior, and dedication of staff members, regardless of who employs them.

Following more than 2 years of training and counseling, the capacity of TMI's NGO partners was found to have increased significantly, but the cost-effectiveness of this strategy remains unknown and in need of further analysis. Regardless, the study suggests that it is essential to assess the skills and developmental stage *before* hiring NGOs in order to develop a suitable plan for concurrently strengthening their skills, effectiveness, and capacity. As the capacity of NGOs increases, their ability to determine their own additional training needs also tends to increase.

While NGOs represent the most promising means of service delivery in conflict situations, the study suggests that, at present, most local NGOs are weak in terms of technical, analytical, and management capacities. For continued progress in overall sustainable development in Nepal—particularly given the current atmosphere of uncertainty—significant and accelerated investment in NGO capacity building should be anticipated.

At the same time, the importance of community participation, transparency, neutrality, partner selection, and other key features mentioned previously cannot be

understated. Study results conclude that these features are fundamental components of project success whether a project is implemented by a private voluntary organization (PVO), local NGO, or local community-based organization (CBO); that they are critical to the continuation of service delivery during times of conflict and uncertainty; and that the key features are instrumental to the improvement of development practices during times of peace.

Private Sector and Local Community Relationships: The Role of PVOs and Local NGOs in Promoting Democracy, Conservation, and Sustainability in Peru

Project background

Peru is a mountainous country with a long tradition of NGOs working in rural development. NGOs operating in the highlands of Peru were nevertheless unprepared, from their previous institutional experience, to address the threats, opportunities, and challenges posed by the rapid expansion of mining investments beginning in the mid-1990s. This unprecedented growth of mining investment in Peru followed the establishment of modernization policies, as well as the demise of the Maoist "Shining Path" movement in the early 1990s. In 1990, the government still controlled 50% of mining production with approximately 3.7 million ha staked as mining claims. By 1998, there were 32,000 mining claims covering approximately 19 million ha, with the state controlling only 1.5% of these claims. Unfortunately, this dramatic increase in mining exploration and operational investments has been paralleled by a similar increase in social conflict between the private sector and local communities. Local communities are concerned that mining operations threaten their environments, food security, and livelihoods without providing new job opportunities. In this context, it is important to

understand the roles that NGOs and international PVOs can play in strengthening local institutional capacities, democracy, and improved environmental governance along with other actions required to promote local sustainable development in areas affected by mining growth.

The research paper

The objective of "Private Sector and Local Community Relationships" is to investigate the ways in which conflicts emerge and evolve among communities and mining industries in the Ancash region of Peru. The key research questions are:

- What is the nature of the conflicts that occur in the vicinity of mining operations and communities of the Conchucos area?
- What types of stakeholders can intervene in the conflicts, and what roles can they play in each case?
- What factors operate as conditioning and triggering elements of conflicts in the area?
- What factors operate as palliatives, or as elements that contribute to the promotion of cooperative approaches in the area?

Methods

Key informant interviews, stratified random sample survey interviews, and group discussions were conducted with a range of stakeholders that included mining companies, NGOs, government agencies, and community representatives. The history and role of NGOs and PVOs as facilitating and conflict mitigating agents is investigated, as well as the role in promoting cooperative approaches that can transform these conflicts into opportunities for development. The study also identifies and describes key factors that influence cooperation among mining companies, NGOs, and local communities, and assesses the present capacities of stakeholders (eg companies, NGOs, communities) to deal with conflict, conflict management, and mitigation.

Conclusions

The case of Peru presents a context of emerging social conflicts in mountain areas in which the growth of local NGOs could prove crucial to the evolution of democratic societies. This environment, characterized by increasing complexity and social, political, and environmental uncertainty, is typical of many other regions in the world undergoing similar processes of rapid social change due to a host of phenomena associated with globalization.

TMI and NGOs need to develop far more detailed and explicit conceptual definitions of conflict, the diversity of conflict situations, the range of mitigation and conflict reduction tools available, and a greater focus on sharing and exchanging experiences.

PVOs and NGOs, especially those working in the conservation sector, need to carefully analyze and explicitly state their positions regarding mining, its impacts upon the environment, mining conflicts, and their own roles as prospective facilitators. This is necessary in order to avoid confusion among stakeholders expecting a more activist stance against mining. Although participatory approaches to conflict resolution are endorsed, they are not sufficient alone to mitigate or transform conflicts; this demands the use of additional and more sophisticated mechanisms, including dialogue and negotiation.

PVOs and NGOs need to better distinguish between conflicts at differing scales, eg between small-scale conflicts that arise within the context of the integrated conservation and livelihood projects that they implement, and the larger-scale issues involving more complex power brokers. Likewise, PVOs and NGOs need to thoroughly assess at which scale of conflicts they are willing and best prepared to play an active role.

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