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A Hands-On Guide to Increasing Social Capital in Georgia

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This guide suggests a number of practical ways for social entrepreneurs and donors to increase formalized collaboration in Georgia. Undertaken as part of a social capital research project, this guide complements three documents: the final report with comprehensive recommendations from the point of view of donors; the briefing paper on the situation of social capital in Georgia; and a literature review that provides the relevant academic background. All of these documents derive from a research project initiated by USAID, organized by World Learning/FORECAST, and conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in December 2010.

The guide is divided into two sections. The first section provides specific recommendations based on the research conducted in Georgia. The second part highlights suggestions based on international research.

Please direct your comments to hans@crrccenters.org.

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INTRODUCTION

The Briefing Paper identifies four main challenges that must be addressed in order to mobilize social capital in Georgia today: Popular Apathy and Disbelief, Active Distrust towards Leaders, Free-riding, and Reluctance to Institutionalize. This guide provides practical, hands-on recommendations for how associations can meet these challenges. The first part of the guide is based on examples identified by social entrepreneurs in Georgia. These are strategies that have been tested and proved successful for certain Georgian associations and that can be expanded to other associations. The second part is recommendations based on international research, produced by the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC).

INTRAC is at the forefront of research and trainings aimed at strengthening civil society globally. They undertake applied research to further the understanding of key issues around the role of civil society within international development. Through a wide variety of research programs INTRAC provides top-quality, hands-on research onto a range of issues directly affecting civil society organizations and have produced hundreds of publications covering a broad range of topics in the areas of civil society strengthening, development and aid. INTRAC was specifically contracted to synthesize international research on good practices in bridging social capital, focusing on examples that are relevant for the Georgian context.

The findings from the Georgian and international research are in many cases overlapping. Nevertheless, the international research adds nuance to the Georgian findings. Therefore the Guide to Action is divided in two parts: first findings from the Georgian research and then the international findings. The findings from international research are complemented with good practices for donors on how to facilitate and accelerate the development of social capital, and what not to do to avoid unintended consequences.

FINDINGS FROM GEORGIA

Meeting Challenge 1: Popular Apathy and Disbelief

- **Identifying tangible material benefits members can receive**
 - Associations should identify the tangible benefits members can receive, and the benefits should directly reflect the interests of the members, especially potential economic benefits.
 - Offering legal advice, training and certification (and even discounts at holiday resorts, made possible through collective bargaining) helped to persuade teachers to leave their ineffectual, Soviet-era organization and join the syndicate.
- **Creating intangible benefits such as prestige; gaining trust by providing free services**
 - Some associations provide more intangible benefits. The Georgian Federation of Professional Accountants and Auditors has strict selection criteria (members are required to pass exams), which means that members are in very high demand professionally, and that Georgians working in this sphere actively seek membership.

- These associations exist not to provide tangible, material benefits to members, but to advance causes that members believe to be important. In cases such as these, achieving a set of goals in the organization's specialty or niche appears to overcome problems related to apathy and disbelief. Members of an organization devoted to providing free photography classes to young people said that being able to organize an exhibition in the grounds of Sameba Cathedral that featured the work of their students helped to dispel doubts about the efficacy of the organization.
- **Drawing members in by giving them first-hand experience**
 - Giving people first-hand experience is another way in which the public can be energized and apathy overcome. The head of the Education Leaders' League created a project called "Let's Manage the School Together" which saw parents take a hand in running their children's schools for two days at a time. After seeing the education process close up, parents took much more active parts in the life of the school. The project has been repeated around the country.
- **Publicity – insufficient information equals low membership**
 - Ensure that success stories are covered extensively in the media. Newspapers, journals, magazines and TV should focus on how people overcome particular obstacles, not just a general celebration. These how-to stories of successful collaboration are often influential and inspiring even if readers and viewers do not realize it.
 - Associations have problems advertising themselves to potential members. According to the English Teachers' Association of Georgia many English teachers have not heard about the association and its services. The association's president thinks many would be 'delighted' to hear that such an organization actually exists.
 - Even small, poorly-funded organizations such as the Foundation for the Revival of Villages have been able to combat apathy with good publicity.

Meeting Challenge 2: Active Distrust towards Leaders

- **Providing results builds trust**
 - For both leaders and members of residents' associations, the most effective tool to combat distrust is delivery. Successfully organizing and implementing projects and demonstrating hard work is crucial to building trust. Association members tend to trust community-spirited leaders more. One member said that seeing her leader engage in charitable activities – helping poor neighbors, for example – "convinced" her that "he is a good person".
 - One association, talking from their own positive experience, promotes taking "smart, capable" people and have them implement new techniques – for example, using different seeds for potato farming will give a significant increase in production. When people see how a technique works in practice many more will want to do the same. "The importance of tangible results is vital."
- **Giving those who need to build trust a chance**
 - The head of a residents' association sometimes has to gather money from residents in

order to pay for repairs – an operation fraught with distrust and hostility. One leader related how he had specifically chosen the least trusting neighbor in the association to act as ‘treasurer’ and collect the money from the other neighbors. Another leader rotated the responsibility for collecting money throughout the association.

- **Transparency in accounting and decision making**
 - Absolute openness and transparency in all financial matters is held up as key to developing trust by a wide variety of associations. The leaders of residents’ associations recommended accounting for every coin spent as a way of proving credibility.
 - Take minutes at all meetings.
- **Sustained engagement, involvement of leaders**
 - Working with the same people over a long period of time gains their trust.
 - Having the leaders be involved in recruiting members and having a personal link is the key. Several associations spoke of the necessity for potential members to be persuaded, personally, to join the association. The head of a teachers’ union stressed the fact that signaling and demonstrating personal commitment was crucial to the success of his association: “it’s very important for new members to hear about the association directly from its head.”

Meeting Challenge 3: Lack of Information and Free-riding

- **Publicity/dissemination of information concerning the issue of the association**
 - People need to get information about the associations. A focus group participant who has never been involved in residents’ associations said that “if I had more information on my opportunities, my rights, I would probably participate.” “People should know what they can do, and what they cannot do, whom you can ask,” said another.
 - Many associations said that it would be helpful if the media carried more stories about such organizations, so as to introduce their work to a broader public.
- **Consolidate associations around only truly active and committed members**
 - The Georgian Regional Media Association, which provides its members with numerous benefits including office space in Tbilisi, was required to make membership requirements much stricter, and went from forty-two members in 2005 to twenty-four members today. This weeded out members whom the leadership believed to be contributing nothing to the association. Shrinking the association can actually be a good move towards its consolidation: the Association of Georgian Tour Operators, which among other things aims to improve professional standards in the sector, also closely vets members – even going so far as viewing potential new members’ printed materials and publications.
 - The Georgian Professional Federation of Accountants and Auditors is an example of an association that, through combating free riding, has virtually turned itself into an elite club of the profession. It distinguishes between associate members and full members. Anybody with a degree in economics or an interest in the subject can become an

associate member. Full membership is reserved for those who have worked in the field for three years and who have passed stringent exams.

Meeting Challenge 4: Reluctance to Institutionalize

- **Use start-up money to attract members, not obliging fees immediately**
 - A number of successful organizations have managed to overcome the ‘fee hurdle’ by using start-up money provided by donor organizations to prove their efficacy to potential members and thus to attract fee-payers.
 - The director of the Georgian Wine Association, a trade body, agreed, saying that it was essential for such associations to be funded for at least two years before they could rely on membership fees.
 - Another strategy employed by associations is a two-tier membership structure, with only full members paying fees. In this way, potential fee payers were introduced to the workings of the organization, and could see the potential benefits first-hand.
- **Legislation changes to make incentives for forming associations**
 - Getting rid of double taxation.
 - Reorganizing the tax structure to encourage the establishment of agricultural co-operatives would be a clear way of incentivizing collaboration in that sphere.
 - In terms of school boards of trustees, the head of an international education management project said that whilst the state needed to give central support to the boards, it also had to sincerely believe that decentralization would work and “decouple school principals from political management” – a sentiment echoed by the head of the School Principals’ Association.
- **Develop partnerships with state structures**
 - Another significant way whereby government could potentially contribute to the growth of social capital is through ‘outsourcing’ or devolving responsibility to successful associations. The Georgian Ministry of Education already outsources teacher training to a number of organizations (including the English Teachers’ Association of Georgia and the Professional Teachers’ Syndicate) who said that the practice “enables organizations to develop and become stronger economically”.

FINDINGS FROM INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Meeting Challenge 1: Popular Apathy and Disbelief

- **Identify common interests and disseminate information**
 - In contexts of drastic economic decline and deterioration of social services, such as in the former Soviet Union, service delivery, especially water, sanitation and health, might be important in encouraging community associations. In such contexts, people are

willing to organize around rebuilding infrastructure and improving social services (INTRAC 2005, 22).

- In contexts where people are not aware of their rights, creating resource banks of materials about citizen's economic and social rights and promoting awareness of rights in the workplace is a valuable approach (INTRAC 2005, 21).
- Creating urban–rural links; disseminating information and doing research beyond the capital city; and translating development jargon or civil society concepts of community activists into a language intelligible for the target audience are essential for any community-building or motivation program (Garbutt and Heap 2003, 35, 47; INTRAC 2005, 10).
- **No politicization of community development**
 - “Community development initiatives need to be introduced into an environment where communities are able to respond: if a government is in conflict with civil society then no amount of community development initiatives will prevail.” (INTRAC 2005, 6) “Any attempts to politicize community development should be done carefully so as not to undermine social cohesion in the local communities.” (Ibid, 9)
- **Gather people around the issues relevant to them**
 - In Bangladesh, people were motivated to participate in community action around the issue of landlessness; in Malawi, around the failure of the Parliament to adopt a new budget; and in Brazil around the right to decent housing (forthcoming Beauclerk, Pratt and Judge 2010). In order to facilitate the emergence of social capital, one should ask: What is of key importance to citizens in this particular country, in this region, in this village etc? For instance, the agenda of democracy promotion and human rights might be problematic in the states where the history of violent conflict is associated with democracy promotion (Zharkevich 2010, 43).
- **Do not neglect local capacity (Tukker and Pelje 2010, 3), ‘communal’ or traditional forms of civil society.**
 - Support groups which already exist and have valuable initiatives, without undermining the commitment and independence of these groups (forthcoming Beauclerk et al 2010, 72). These can range from mutual support groups of people affected by HIV/AIDS and parents’ associations, to environmental groups that emerged from within the local society.
 - Understand local forms of social capital: “There are myriad types of self-help groups, other forms of reciprocal labor, local groups helping neighbors in distress, savings clubs, credit circles, parent-run pre-schools, church or mosque-based welfare and educational services, health committees around local clinics, representational and membership groups. Sometimes the mere mapping of voluntary organizations can be a major task in itself. Such exercises can form a prelude to capacity building programs and offer opportunities to further encourage voluntary groups, or identify which ones are willing and able to participate in specific developmental activities” (UNV 2002, 19).
 - Do not ignore social capital based on extended family connections, or clans, castes and ethnic associations (especially in rural areas) which often perform the role of safety nets and mutual support in times of crisis. Build on the existing forms of informal

institutions ranging from housing associations, youth and women's groups, to forms of traditional reciprocal labor which form a good basis for creating self-help groups (Beauclerk et al 2010, 19; INTRAC 2005, 7; Buxton et al 2007, 8-9).

- Pay special attention to creating links or probing work with trade unions, business associations, and lawyers groups, which in many contexts have proved to be the most active elements of modern civil society that are not extensively funded from abroad.
- **Raise the prestige and status of local volunteering or national volunteering**
 - “There need to be more programs that encourage local level volunteers and promote their status as important actors in developmental activities. In some cultures, prizes and awards are used to show recognition of volunteers, while in others, faith-based organizations provide support. What is most appropriate and effective will probably be culturally specific, but once programs are implemented the volunteers will more than repay the limited investment involved. The promotion of volunteerism and the involvement of local volunteers clearly contribute to the development of locally sustainable structures and service” (UNV 2002, 16).
- **Invest time in identifying local leaders**
 - In societies based on hierarchical principles, the figures of local authority, ranging from school directors to the head of the local village, might be a key in facilitating people's engagement in community action and overcoming inertia (Babajanian 2005, 216-217). Select potential leaders within the community and provide coaching and/or mentoring, only on the condition there is a motive for change and interest in such coaching (Dean et al 2006, 14).

Meeting Challenge 2: Active Distrust towards Leaders

- **Do not come with preconceived agendas to people: listen to what community members have to say**
 - Organize “Reality Checks” – research studies, described as a listening exercise, aimed at “listening to, trying to understand and convey poor people's reality”. This involves sending community activists, development workers and government officials in different sectors to stay in poor people's homes for several nights and days and holding informal in-depth conversations with them (INTRAC 2009, 10). “The main idea is that officials will develop respect and interest in people's voices and lives. Immersion has had some success in demonstrating to government officials the importance of listening. Many had never previously interacted with poor men and women whose lives they were supposed to improve. ” (forthcoming Beauclerk et al 2010, 37).
- **Train a cohort of volunteer community activists and local community leaders**
 - These are likely to be perceived as “not just in there for themselves” or development salaries. If possible, choose community activists from the local areas, and choose leaders who are embedded in the life of the region under consideration. There is evidence that suggests that most successful in encouraging community development are leaders with strong ties to the community in terms of residence, participation in local structures and identification with the community (Babajanian 2005, 218).

- **Bring in intermediary figures, such as lawyers doing pro bono work for common citizens**
 - Pro bono legal work or the work done through specialized lawyers' associations can assist distinct members of the community in solving their problems and filing complaints to the local/regional authorities. The case of Tajikistan shows that such voluntary legal assistance can range from work helping to safeguard the rights of conscripts, to filing complaints against overrated utility bills (Zharkevich 2010, 31-32).

Meeting Challenge 3: Free-riding and Basic Rules

- **Involve people in the implementation of community development projects: make them part of the process**
 - An example is the involvement of the community members in building of water supply system in one of the villages in Tajikistan: whilst the resources and planning was provided by NGOs, villagers were giving their work as part of the project (INTRAC 2005, 22). A further example is provided by self-help groups in Central Asia where people come together to decide how to lobby the local governments on issues of interest to their communities (Buxton et al 2007).
- **Support locally inspired initiatives of indigenous civil society rather than long-term projects of INGOs**
 - "In South Asia, for example, there exists a strong tradition of older local volunteers devoting considerable time and energy to passing on their own experience and skills to community, social welfare and other groups"(UNV 2002, 15).

Meeting Challenge 4: Reluctance to Institutionalize

- **Promote the culture of local volunteering**
 - In Iran, due to the fact that no funding from abroad was possible, many civil society organizations relied almost exclusively on volunteers as well as different fundraising activities, ranging in scope from holding bazaars, to raising money from businessmen and Diaspora members (Squire 2002). In India, improvement of community services through voluntary action has proved to be a successful approach employed by one NGO, TAGS, which mobilized thousands of women activists who later on expanded their activity to peace activism in Northern India (Beauclerk et al 2010, 21).
- **Encourage volunteering by local professionals**
 - "The classic example of the local bank manager volunteering as honorary treasurer to a community group provides a model which can be replicated in many societies and contexts" (UNV 2002, 16).
- **Invest in creating self-help groups (SHG) based on local avenues of mutual support**
 - "SHGs have shown that they are a useful tool for empowerment at individual and group level. Members feel that their understanding of local issues, their involvement in decision-making has improved. They have had an opportunity to tackle economic and social problems. Their attitude to life has become more positive, and for isolated groups

like the elderly people SHG membership has been a way out of loneliness” (Buxton et al 2007, 62).

- **Recognize the diversity of local channels which can generate social capital beyond group networks**
 - The more inclusive groups can range from burial societies (Ethiopia) and parents’ associations, to faith communities across the world which unite rich and poor as equals. The cases of the Apostolic church in Armenia which enjoys a great degree of popular trust and the Pontanima Choir in former Yugoslavia can serve as important examples (Beauclerk et al 2010, 53). Self-help groups also have a potential to unite people of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Meeting other challenges: Engaging people from different socio-economic circumstances

- **Mix people of different backgrounds during workshops, training events and volunteering**
 - Mix people of different communities during workshops and training events with the aim of not letting “animosity perpetuate itself” (INTRAC 2009, 7).
- **Organize relational volunteering schemes**
 - This could involve, for example, engaging people from different socio-economic background in carrying out community projects. “Twinning programs can often provide relational volunteering. One such scheme between towns in Senegal and France led to the reconstruction of a local market which in turn drew in people from the rural areas as well as opening the town to trade from outside. The twinning arrangement led to multiple new relationships being built” (UNV 2002, 11). A further example is given whereby people of different backgrounds are brought together in parents’ associations working for children’s educational and health needs (Ibid, 16).
- **Invest in promoting self-help groups**
 - “In SHGs people come together and develop a sense of equality based on the use of set principles and regulations; minorities do not feel socially excluded and decision-making processes involve the majority of voices in the community. People feel diversity in their social lives and livelihoods; through the SHG movement they take part in a range of public events such as festivals, competitions, and exhibitions; and by using SHG savings and credits they generate new income and secure their livelihoods“(Buxton et al 2007, 22).
- **Do not convey radically different messages to people from different backgrounds**
 - This might increase tensions between the groups in question. In Tajikistan, a project aimed at contributing to the peaceful co-existence of different communities in Ferghana Valley, consisted of two components: conflict prevention projects (training in conflict analysis and early warning) “tended in practice to focus on elites, ‘freezing’ society, maintaining status quo, working towards functional harmony and maintaining a position of neutrality”. Whereas the development projects focused on challenging local elites and

transforming social relations, in reality it contributed to potential further deepening of the conflict between these two groups (Goodhand 2006, 117).

Other relevant advice to community activists

- **Invest time and effort in establishing good relations with local officials and governments**
 - CSOs should have strong links with local governments since they are often dependent on them for material resources, political access and funds (Garbutt and Heap 2003, 30). In Tajikistan, CSOs are in the strongest position in the regions where they have developed links with the local government (Zharkevich 2010, 22). In Kyrgyzstan, it has been found that the impact of CSOs' work was greater in areas where there were fruitful partnerships with local councils (forthcoming Beauclerk 2010, 19).
 - “As the Iranian case demonstrates, the involvement of donors does not necessarily make local development more effective. Thus, in Iran donor activities are almost nonexistent. However, through building coalitions with relevant stakeholders and bringing local governments on board, local NGOs can successfully achieve their objectives. Indigenous solutions to local problems can often be more contextually adjusted and effective” (INTRAC 2005, 18).
- **Before focusing on advocacy and campaigning only, one should invest in service delivery**
 - “If we do a good job and show to the government how it can be done, our advocacy message for better services will be much more powerful” (INTRAC 2009, 11).
- **Include volunteerism in capacity development**
 - “Volunteerism should be deliberately and explicitly included in capacity development plans rather than implicitly attributed roles, or worse being completely ignored. A modest investment in national and local volunteering can pay significant rewards in terms of capacity development at many levels, from specific program interventions to enhancing social capital” (UNV 2002, 23).
- **Connect high-profile activism with local forms of community action.**
 - It is important to bridge the “extremes of high-profile activism in state capitals, and value-based services in remote areas, in a new generation of CSOs” (forthcoming Beauclerk 2010, 17).

DONORS: GOOD PRACTICE IN FACILITATING AND ACCELERATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

- **Good donorship entails consciously taking into consideration the effect that northern agencies make on civil society in the South**

Those that already have a presence in the South should try to limit their domination of civic space, and try to create space for local CSO's ability to demand political accountability, by;

- Not entering into competition for funds with local organizations.
- Transferring as many decision making powers as possible to local partners.

- Supporting local organizations, strengthening their capacities and move them to the forefront, even when it is about accessing local EU and other funds.
- Limiting numerical presence to limit power imbalances.
- Keeping similar wage levels to avoid brain-drain (forthcoming Beauclerk et al 2010, 39)

It is important to provide support to a diverse range of organizations of “different sizes, strengths and interests” through different funding mechanisms (Giffen and Judge 2010, 21). “There may be a role for differentiated grant making targeting groups with marginal members and different capacities, and there is a need for experimental funding to nurture coalitions.” In order to avoid privileging a few elite-based NGOs, donors might consider producing accessible information about existing support modalities and ways to access funding; help weaker CSOs to participate and “push the benefits of core funding down through INGO intermediaries to their Southern partners.” (Giffen and Judge 2010, 21-22)

USAID-aided program “Citizen’s Initiatives” in Paraguay is sometimes cited as a successful example of building social capital, albeit in a comparatively favorable context. The program consisted of two phases:

- The first phase involved capacity building beyond the capital area – including that of neighborhood commission, local health councils, disables people’s associations. It then proceeded from institutional strengthening to advocacy on a number of issues: access to information, control over the judiciary, civil society as a watchdog.
- The second phase involved social and administrative institutions, i.e. not only CSOs but also municipality governments; creating 15 advocacy coalitions on distinct issues; 15 nation-wide public awareness campaigns which resulted in increasing cross-sector collaboration, including agreements with local authorities (forthcoming Beauclerk 2010, 22-24).

Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) Village Organization Program in Tajikistan can be cited as a successful attempt to reinvigorate local forms of civil society in remote mountainous areas of Tajikistan. The program invested resources both in local forms of civil society and local governments which made this region of the country the best one in terms of state–civil society interaction. The program involved villagers in the process of determining the needs of the community, setting priorities for plan of action and the process of project implementation. Village organizations were created in accordance with local traditions of self-help, decision-making and conflict-resolution which increased the ownership of the project by local population (Zharkevich 2010, 23).

DONORS: THINGS TO AVOID AS SINCE THEY MAY LEAD TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

- **Politicizing civil society**

This can result in the almost total closure of space for civil society. This is illustrated by the case of Ethiopia where there was virtually no linkage between the politicized NGO world in the

capital, heavily funded by the international donor community, and the wider civil society which did not advocate an immediate transition to the multiparty system but rather organized itself on the level of solidarity groups. The Ethiopian government considered the advocacy of the elite NGO world backed by the donor community as being political with a 'big P', and adopted legislation making foreign funding of local NGOs extremely difficult (Beauclerk et al 2010, 25). Therefore advocacy against local governments by foreign organizations or backed by them is considered increasingly problematic: "you have to have local organizations who will fight the fight with the government" (Garbutt and Heap 2003, 6), whereas INGOs can adopt rights-based approaches in their advocacy campaigns.

- **Creating a parallel social service delivery mechanism by heavily investing in service delivery programs of INGOs and NGOs, whilst bypassing the structures of the state**

This may lead to:

- Turning NGOs into simple contractors and service providers, distorting the nature of local civil society from advocates for social change to sub-contractors of international donors. In Kenya, by mid 1990s, 40-50% of education was provided by NGOs (Agg 2006, 3). In Peru, in the context of the state cutting back on social services, CSOs – instead of lobbying the state to provide resources for the poor – provided such services themselves, essentially running parallel structures of social service delivery (INTRAC 1998).
- Undermining the legitimacy of the state and increasing vulnerability and insecurity in unstable situations. "The wrong kind of capacity building increased structural vulnerability to conflict or hampered resolution (In Moldova, Ferghana Valley, Armenia-Azerbaijan). In Kyrgyzstan, for example, donors, such as USAID, funded NGOs rather than the state. The privatization of welfare services played into the dynamics of rising conflict in the Ferghana Valley". This process of collapse of state service delivery on the one hand and creation of a parallel NGO service provision on the other undermined the trust of people in the state and its legitimacy, making it more difficult for the latter to arrive at a long-term resolution of the conflict (Goodhand 2006, 117).

- **Prioritizing the aid effectiveness agenda by all means possible**

This might have an adverse impact on the diversity of civil society in the South (Giffen and Judge 2010, iii). Thus, "instead of increased effectiveness, lack of duplication, there might be a demise of certain organizations, prioritization of more well-established elite organizations, neglect of grassroots, social movements, and trade unions. Whilst increasing accountability to the donors, it might further endanger accountability to the constituency; as well as the independence of the decision regarding the areas of work that should be carried out" (Pratt 2009, 6).

- **Overloading selected local NGOs with considerable amounts of short-term funding might undermine the diversity of the whole local civil society and sustainability and independence of the externally funded NGOs**

Thus, when the Kyrgyzstan NGO Forum received funding from US-based NDI to work on democracy promotion, it eventually changed its name and stopped performing the function of a coalition body for NGOs (Howell and Pearce 2001, 200). The civil society sector in Latin America in the 1990s has been largely transformed from the actor of change to service deliverer due to the type of projects prioritised by the donors (INTRAC 2008).

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