

Focus :

CONVERGENCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

CONFERENCE

[CP5]

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## HOW TO INCREASE THE INVOLVEMENT OF POPULATIONS AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS?

### MAIN FINDINGS

Although local populations are the first to recognize and understand their own real needs, these needs are not easily understood by donors. A fragmented approach to development projects is gradually making way for an integrated and participatory approach, which brings beneficiaries into the phases of project preparation, implementation and evaluation. This inclusive process is not without difficulties however, particularly because of the divergence between local interests and political challenges. It is nonetheless vital in order to ensure the long-term nature and effectiveness of any project, whether it is within a context of an emergency, a post-emergency situation or development. In order to avoid pitfalls, it is therefore important to make use of already existing local structures, to truly be ready to listen and above all to seek to foment the autonomy of populations.

### SPEAKERS

**Flavio Bassi**

Director, Ashoka South Africa

**Mansour Fall**

Programme Effectiveness Specialist, East Africa Region,  
World Vision International

**Bénédicte Hermelin**

Managing Director, GRET

**Tristan Lecomte**

Founder, Pur Projet

### MODERATOR

**Elodie Vialle**

Editor in Chief, Yophil.com

## SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

### Why and how more inclusive development projects can be set up

Elodie Vialle starts by speaking about an anecdote which is frequently told in humanitarian circles. It is about the representatives of a large donor who, upon arrival in Madagascar, asked the local populations what their needs were. They replied saying they needed goats. However, the experts of the World Bank, convinced that goats bring about deforestation, gave them hens. The people then sold the hens to buy goats.

Mansour Fall explains that over the last seven years, World Vision has gone from using a segmented project approach to putting together a proper set of programmes. For each geographical area, programmes are put together in accordance with the rural community and each programme is set to last between five and fifteen years. Permanent dialogue with the populations is set up, and they actively participate in project design. Community participation allows for local culture, values, potential and needs to be taken into account whilst priorities are being set. For example, when a water point was going to be built, it was the local population who decided where the piping would start from. The permanent presence of the NGO on the ground, without disturbing the population, is also part of the integrated approach. Whether the programmes are based around health, nutrition or water, local populations actively take part in project implementation and evaluation. The community's vision is the highest priority. Moreover, their participation contributes to a relationship of trust being built among all those involved and contributes to effectiveness. However, there remain a large number of problems that World Vision has to face. Among them are competition between NGOs, differences in visions on the role of the private sector, the role of women and questions relating to local politics.

Bénédicte Hermelin underscores the fact that development projects must include population participation regardless of the context, whether it be one of an emergency, a post-emergency situation or development, and that this should be the case for all the different stages: design, implementation, follow-up

and evaluation. GRET is committed to development projects aimed at the most impoverished who are undergoing long-term social change. The aim is not to stay in the field, but to depart, leaving behind a long-lasting project. This is why a participatory diagnostic is carried out. Populations often have diverging interests, therefore it is important to get to know well the social structure of the populations where intervention is carried out, while paying close attention to the true leaders. As a matter of fact, a form of social organization already exists within each community, and this should be used as a basis for any work carried out. By way of example, some international NGOs intended to set up water management committees in the poorest neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince in Haiti, but they were unaware of the existence of the water kiosk management committees which already existed. Another difficulty is posed by the fact that the rules and procedures imposed by donors are becoming more and more draconian. This obliges NGOs to impose these same demanding rules and procedures upon their local partners, and this can be a source of tension or even misunderstandings. What happens is that a difference of one euro in the profitability of the project can take priority over the quality and social usefulness of it.

### The example of local social entrepreneurs

According to Flavio Bassi, setting up partnerships with local social entrepreneurs allows cultural differences among the local population to be taken into account. In the Ashoka philosophy, each individual is a potential agent of social change, and this is why Ashoka helps social entrepreneurs to set up social entrepreneurship projects within their communities. Flavio gave an example based on his experience with Ocareté, a social organization that he created in order to support ethnic groups in Brasil. Ocareté asked indigenous communities in Brasil to speak about a mythical Indian hero, and to say what they thought he would do today if he were faced with a particular situation. Without working on foresight in this way and without giving a symbolic consistence to the project, it could never have been carried forward. It is also essential to respect the internal organizational structure within communities. For instance, this is the case with collective guarantee systems, in which each individual is a guarantor for the management of the joint budget.

Tristan Lecomte explains that Pur Projet is a business which leads reforestation projects in countries such as Peru, Bolivia, Thailand and Indonesia among others. Pur Projet builds partnerships with private businesses that wish to reduce their climate footprint and supports cooperative reforestation projects thanks to funding from businesses that want to be associated with projects which aim to combat climate change. One characteristic of the forestries projects is the way they are organized, given that they are local and participatory. A good carbon reduction project is largely based on factors such as organization, responsibility and community autonomy. This is why it is

important to encourage the internal dynamic which the local population already has, to make the local population responsible and demanding. In achieving this, it is better to listen than to preach, even more so considering the fact that the word of the Westerner is sought after and listened to. In this way, an effective development project does not seek to respond to the needs of the populations at any cost, but rather aims to focus its efforts on developing their autonomy in order for them to find their own solutions. Unearthing the potential of communities is what is needed, advising them rather than carrying out their actions for them or supervising them.

REPORTER

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## MORE ON THE TOPIC

- Médecins sans frontières / Caroline Abou Sada (dir.) 2011. *Dans l'œil des autres. 40 ans d'action d'humanitaire: Comment les populations perçoivent les humanitaires?* Editions Antipodes : [http://www.msf.org/shadomx/apps/fms/fmsdownload.cfm?file\\_uid=0F6754CC-BE21-4468-986C-97789C333925&siteName=msf](http://www.msf.org/shadomx/apps/fms/fmsdownload.cfm?file_uid=0F6754CC-BE21-4468-986C-97789C333925&siteName=msf).