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# Capacity Building from a French Perspective

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## Abstract

This Praxis Paper depicts how French NGOs perceive the notion of capacity building, and how they apply the concept in practice – both in their own organisations and in the South. An introduction to the large and diverse French NGO sector and its changing relationship with the State is followed by a mapping of French capacity building providers as well as a synthesis of current capacity building needs, trends and challenges in France and in the South, as expressed by a sample of French NGOs.

It is remarkable to note that the French NGOs in the study did not at the outset perceive capacity building to be applicable in their own organisations. Capacity building is primarily seen as an activity undertaken in the South. As a consequence, partnership and capacity building are linked as two inseparable concepts. Another significant finding of this study is that capacity building by French NGOs in the South is mainly conducted as an integral part of development efforts, with a strong emphasis on improving project implementation by Southern actors. Few strategies with a capacity building focus are established in practice. There is also a tendency among French NGOs to include various local actors in capacity building activities rather than exclusively targeting and supporting Southern NGOs. This appears to be related to the local development strategies to which French development NGOs contribute.

Capacity building is perceived by French NGOs as an anglophone concept. Apart from the practices of the ‘semi-anglophone’ Canadians whom they consider as role models in this area, French NGOs have had little exposure to anglophone approaches to capacity building. There is scope for more elaborate exchanges in the future with the increasing French participation in international NGO networks.

## Résumé

Ce document Praxis développe la manière dont les ONG françaises perçoivent la notion de renforcement de capacités et appliquent ce concept dans la pratique – dans leurs propres organisations aussi bien que dans les organisations du Sud. Une introduction au secteur large et divers des Organisations de Solidarité Internationale ainsi que ses relations changeantes avec l’Etat est suivie par un aperçu des prestataires de services français dans ce domaine et un compte rendu des besoins, tendances et défis actuels du renforcement de capacités en France et dans le Sud, exprimés par un échantillon d’ONG françaises.

Il est intéressant de noter que les ONG françaises dans l’étude n’étaient pas au départ de l’avis que le renforcement de capacités soit une approche applicable à leurs propres organisations; cette approche étant principalement considérée comme un renforcement des organisations du Sud. Par conséquent, le partenariat et le renforcement de capacités sont deux concepts étroitement liés pour les ONG françaises. L’autre découverte principale a été que, le plus souvent, le renforcement de capacités effectué par les ONG françaises dans le Sud fait partie intégrante des efforts globaux de développement, avec un accent mis sur l’amélioration des capacités des acteurs du Sud à réaliser des projets.

Des stratégies se focalisant uniquement sur le renforcement de capacités sont rarement mises en place dans la pratique. De plus, une tendance importante parmi les ONG françaises est d'inclure des acteurs locaux variés dans les activités du renforcement de capacités plutôt que de cibler et d'appuyer les ONG du Sud seulement. Il semblerait que ceci est une expression des stratégies de développement local auxquelles contribuent les OSI.

Le renforcement de capacités est ressenti par les ONG françaises comme un concept anglophone. Hormis les pratiques des canadiens 'semi-anglophones' que les ONG françaises considèrent comme des modèles dans ce domaine, ces dernières ont été peu exposées aux approches anglophones. Cependant, des opportunités futures se présenteront pour de plus amples échanges sur ce sujet avec la participation croissante des ONG françaises dans les réseaux internationaux.

## List of Abbreviations

ABONG: Associação Brasileira das ONG (Brazil)  
ASI: Association de Solidarité Internationale  
CCD: La Commission Coopération-Développement  
CECI: Centre Canadien d'Etude et de Coopération Internationale (Canada)  
CIDSE: Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (Belgium)  
CRDA: Christian Relief and Development Association (Ethiopia)  
HCCI: Haut Conseil de la Coopération Internationale (France)  
INTRAC: The International NGO Training and Research Centre (United Kingdom)  
M&E: monitoring and evaluation  
MCNG: Mission pour la Coopération Internationale (France)  
NGDO: non-governmental development organisation  
NGO: non-governmental organisation  
ONG: organisation non-gouvernementale  
OSI: Organisation de Solidarité Internationale  
VANI: Voluntary Action Network India (India)

## French Capacity Building Terminology Explained

Apprentissage: learning  
Appui-conseil: support and advice  
Appui institutionnel: support to organisational strengthening (literally 'institutional support')  
Augmentation de pouvoir: empowerment (literally 'power increase')  
Autonomisation: rendering independent, autonomous  
Capitalisation: transforming experiences into lessons  
Co-responsabilité: shared responsibility  
Développement local: local development  
Développement institutionnel: mainly seen as organisational development (literally 'institutional development')  
Développement organisationnel: organisational development  
Diagnostic organisationnel: organisational assessment  
Education au développement: education for development  
Formation: training  
Partenariat: partnership  
Professionnalisation: enhancing organisational effectiveness, mainly by strengthening staff competencies  
Qualité: quality  
Renforcement de capacités: capacity building  
Renforcement de compétences: skills building, strengthening of competencies  
Renforcement des organisations: organisational strengthening  
Responsabilisation: rendering responsible  
Transfer de compétences: skills transfer  
Transfer de savoir: knowledge transfer  
Valorisation: turning lesson learning into action and knowledge

## Organisations from the French NGO Sector (interviewed in October 2003 and January 2004)

### **Action Contre la Faim (ACF)**

Action Contre la Faim is a large humanitarian organisation that intervenes in emergencies and severe crises such as wars and famines, as well as risk prevention. Primary intervention areas include health care, nutrition, food security and water supply. Highly specialised experts work on the ground with the help of more than 340 volunteers and 4500 local employees trained on the ground. ACF has an annual budget of 42 million euros.

#### **Interview with Benoît Miribel, Executive Director**

Website: [www.actioncontrelafaim.org](http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org)

### **Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD)**

CCFD is the largest Catholic development NGO in France. The organisation has two main objectives: support to development projects in the South, and development education of the French population. The NGO works in more than 70 countries and provides support to more than 600 projects. Key areas of intervention include: civil society strengthening and local development, human rights and peace building, food security, micro-finance, and women's groups. CCFD has an annual budget of 35 million euros.

#### **Interview with Christophe Courtin, Head of Projects and Programmes**

##### **Department**

Website: [www.ccfid.asso.fr](http://www.ccfid.asso.fr)

### **Centre International d'Etudes pour le Développement Local (CIEDEL)**

The university institute CIEDEL describes itself as a mediator between reflection and action, between grassroots development and government policy (via the local development focus), and between Northern and Southern NGOs. The institute offers training courses in local development for Northern and Southern development practitioners, and undertakes research and consultancy work in the South. CIEDEL is a member of the regional network RESACOOOP, as well as the international local development network PROFADEL.

#### **Interview with Christophe Mestre, Executive Director**

Website: [www.ciedel.org](http://www.ciedel.org)

### **CIMADE**

CIMADE is an ecumenical association and social movement with a membership-based network. The International Solidarity Department at CIMADE works to strengthen civil society, to support peace building and to improve the conditions of suppressed, marginalised, and displaced people – especially through support to human rights organisations. CIMADE has no projects in the South, but strong partnerships with local community based organisations and co-operatives in the South and the East whose projects they support with human and financial resources.

#### **Interview with Latifa Tayah, Programme Manager, International Solidarity**

##### **Department**

Website: [www.CIMADE.org](http://www.CIMADE.org)

### **Coordination SUD**

The NGO umbrella organisation, Coordination SUD, is a federation of six NGDO networks (Centre de recherche et d'information pour le développement, Comité de liaison des ONG-volontariat, Comité pour les relations nationales et internationale des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire, Coordination d'Agén, Forum des associations de solidarité internationale issues des migrations and Groupe Initiative) as well as 30 individual NGDO member organisations. The umbrella organisation has the double mission of, on the one hand, supporting and strengthening its member organisations, and on the other hand, representing the NGOs and promoting their values vis-à-vis the public and private sector. The network works in four strategic areas: international relations and advocacy support; financial support and capacity building; information, communication, and lesson-learning; co-ordination and governance of its members collective activities.

**Interview with Florence Lécluse, Capacity Building Officer,  
Fabrice Ferrier, International Cooperation Project Manager**

Website: [www.coordinationsud.org](http://www.coordinationsud.org)

### **Frères des Hommes (FDH)**

Frères des Hommes is an NGO with a small headquarters in France, and a large network of partners. The organisation takes a partnership-based approach to development and provides support to civil society organisations in the South for projects in four key areas: democracy and participation; local development; income generation and poverty alleviation; lobbying for debt relief. The support is mostly based on specialist advice, capacity building, and moral support rather than financial contributions. FDH also campaigns and contributes to the development education of the French population.

**Interview with Tom Ashwanden, Programme Manager for Asia,  
Rosa Miriam Ribeiro, Programme Manager for Latin America**

Website: [www.france-fdh.org](http://www.france-fdh.org)

### **Groupe de Recherche et d'Echanges Technologiques (GRET)**

GRET is a non-profit support organisation that operates at the interface between research and development. Contract-based field projects are systematically undertaken with local partner organisations, and represent two-thirds of the organisation's activities. Capacity building of the Southern development practitioners is conducted as part of this process. GRET produces publications based on documentation and analysis of its field experiences. The organisation also conducts research, and takes part in the public development debate. GRET is a member of several networks, including Groupe Initiative and Impact. GRET has an annual budget of 12 million euros.

**Interview with Philippe Lavigne-Delville, Research Director**

Website: [www.gret.org](http://www.gret.org)

### **Institut de Recherches et d'Applications des Méthodes de Développement (IRAM)**

IRAM's areas of activity cover four interdisciplinary fields: agricultural policies, local development and management of natural resources, microfinance and professional associations. Development programmes are carried out with local partners to whom IRAM provides capacity building support. These activities form the basis for research projects on methodology, comparative studies, and lesson-learning. The organisation

also engages in consultancy. IRAM is a member of the network Groupe Initiative, and has its own network of research institutes and training centres.

**Interview with Christian Fusiller, Executive Director**

Website: [www.iram-fr.org](http://www.iram-fr.org)

**Médécins du Monde (MDM)**

Médécins du Monde is a large humanitarian organisation that provides relief to vulnerable populations in France and worldwide. The organisation implements three types of projects: emergency, rehabilitation, and longer-term development, primarily through health care and community work. Médécins du Monde works with local partners such as hospitals, local authorities, community groups and local associations. The organisation has an annual budget of 46 million euros.

**Interview with Michel Brugière, Executive Director**

Website: [www.medecinsdumonde.org](http://www.medecinsdumonde.org)

# 1. Introduction

Capacity building is becoming an integral component of most development activities, whether as a means to improve programme and project implementation, or as an end in itself, corresponding to a vision of empowered and autonomous Southern development organisations. For many donors, the incorporation of capacity building elements is currently a precondition for accepting funding proposals, and donor pressure is becoming a strong incentive for development actors to engage in capacity building activities. This has led to the appearance of an increased number and diversity of capacity building providers in the development arena<sup>1</sup>, and hence many different ways of conceptualising and practising capacity building. In developing countries which host a wide variety of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the North, each of whom have their own particular capacity building approaches, such methodological diversity may impede development efforts by local organisations that concurrently receive support from several Northern NGOs. Encouraging mutual understanding (between NGOs from different cultures and contexts) of the capacity building concepts and methods which they use might lead to improved co-ordination between Northern agencies providing capacity building support to the same Southern NGOs. It might also enable Southern NGOs to be more selective about the ways in which they co-operate with Northern NGOs and the type of capacity building activities which they choose to engage in. Finally, reversed capacity building efforts could be envisaged, with Southern NGOs adopting the role as support providers to Northern NGOs in specific areas. As the paper will show, some attempts at the latter have been made in partnerships between French and Southern NGOs.

Despite international recognition that capacity building is an essential part of development, little non-Anglophone material on capacity building exists. In France, this may be partly explained by the fact that barely any literature has been written on the French NGO sector. Exceptions include a study by Edith Archambault on the French non-profit sector (Archambault 1996), as well as Deler, Fauré and Roca who have written *ONG et développement* on French non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) and their work in the South (Deler et al. 1998). However, the origins of the capacity building concept appear to be primarily anglophone. So far, research on and analysis of capacity building activities implemented by French development actors have been limited, as has the dissemination of capacity building-related information in French, whether in France or in other francophone parts of the world (North or South)<sup>2</sup>. This could be an indication that the notion of capacity building has not been adopted in the francophone context to any significant extent. In addition, it would appear that the degree of co-operation and exchanges with anglophone development agencies is low. It therefore seems important to initiate dialogue between anglophone and non-anglophone NGOs on capacity building, and document the outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Praxis Directory of Civil Society Support Providers, [www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org)

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian development agencies are the exception to the rule, as they tend to produce capacity building material both in English and French. However, it could be argued that their methods are Anglophone rather than Francophone.

The focus on human and organisational transformation which characterises most capacity building approaches is closely connected to cultural and contextual specificity. It is therefore critical to study the transferability<sup>3</sup> of capacity building concepts and approaches from one situation and context to another, as well as the influence of culture on the way these approaches are being applied and the reactions with which they are received. The purpose of INTRAC's Praxis programme is to link research and practice in the field of organisational capacity building. One key programme objective is to explore the factors that facilitate or block transfers of capacity building concepts and approaches, as well as the ways in which these are applied and adjusted to fit specific situations, contexts, and cultures<sup>4</sup>. In October 2003, the Praxis programme carried out a study to explore French approaches to capacity building, as a first attempt at illustrating and clarifying how capacity building is perceived and applied in the francophone world. This paper seeks to provide a synthesis of the study. It is hoped that the findings will feed into a workshop with francophone capacity building practitioners from both the North and the South. This workshop is to take place in Paris later this year as a co-production by INTRAC and Coordination SUD, the French NGO umbrella organisation.

## 2. The PRAXIS Study: Research Methodology

The purpose of the study is to explore the conceptualisation and practical application of capacity building approaches by French NGOs, and to provide a synthesis of current capacity building themes, trends and challenges in the French NGO sector. Initial desk research and extensive internet searches were conducted prior to the field research period. Subsequently, two field visits were undertaken in Paris during the month of October 2003. The first visit consisted of individual interview sessions with representatives from French development NGOs, while the second included consultation of three documentation centres in Paris specialising in development as well as civil society and NGO issues. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main method of data collection in order to gather the most recent data possible, but also because little written material exists about capacity building of and by French NGOs. Information obtained after the principal field research phase, at training courses and meetings at Coordination SUD, has been used in the paper to complement the primary data.

The author asked to interview staff in charge of capacity building activities and/or resource persons on capacity building issues. In many cases, the informants suggested were executive directors or programme directors, reflecting the lack of institutionalisation of capacity building as a separate activity in French NGOs. In order to reflect the diversity of the NGO sector in the interviews, different types of

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<sup>3</sup> Definition of transferability: the extent to which a model or approach developed in one situation, context, and culture to serve a specific purpose can be successfully applied to a different situation, context, and culture. (Praxis document on transferability forthcoming 2004)

<sup>4</sup> See for example PraxisNote 3 by Terry Jackson and Mia Sorgenfrei on transferability of cross-cultural management and NGO capacity building in the African context, [www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org)

development NGOs were included in the sample, representing the three generations referred to above, as well as non-profit organisations specialising in capacity building, and the main NGDO network, Coordination SUD<sup>5</sup>. In addition to the NGOs in the sample, at times other organisations are referred to in this paper in relation to particular capacity building aspects. Information about these organisations has been derived from the interviews, as well as other oral communication and written texts indicated in the bibliography.

The interview-guide was established based on INTRAC's broad and holistic notion of capacity building which combines efforts at individual, organisational, inter-organisational and societal level, and incorporates dimensions of internal organisational dynamics, programme performance, and external linkages (James 2001; 2002). The initial translation of capacity building chosen for the interview questions was '*renforcement de capacités*', but as demonstrated below, the French NGO jargon contains a variety of expressions. These terms have been explored in detail (see Section 6)), based on the assumption that they reflect the capacity building approaches of French NGOs. Furthermore, early in the interview process, it became clear that most informants related capacity building directly to the notion of partnership. It should be noted that while French capacity building texts are few and far between, literature about partnership is far more developed. For example, organisations such as Frères des Hommes, CCFD, and CIMADE have all produced material in this area<sup>6</sup>. As the partnership focus appears to be one contextual specificity that deserves attention, it has led to a stronger emphasis on partnership in this paper than originally envisaged.

### 3. The NGO Sector in France

The total budget of French NGOs was over 700 million euros in 2001, and they thus affirmed their identity as major actors contributing to French development efforts, according to Emmanuel Fagnou from Coordination SUD. The mobilisation of private resources has led to an increase within the last 10 years from approximately 230 to 440 million euros, constituting more than 60 per cent of total NGO revenue. The second largest contribution to French NGOs comes from the multi-lateral donors, notably the European Commission. This source has tripled during the same period and now represents 26 per cent of their total revenue. Seen in this context, the contribution by the French State is minor: despite the fact that France, together with Germany, is the most significant financial contributor to development assistance in Europe, the subventions from the French State to the NGO sector in France remain among the lowest in Europe, representing 0.6 per cent of the official French development assistance, and only 8.4 per cent of the total financial resource base of French NGOs (DGCID 2002, CCD 2003).

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<sup>5</sup> To complement this interview round, an additional interview was conducted with the Lyon-based university institute, CIEDEL, in January 2004, perceived by many of the informants as one of the key capacity building providers to French NGOs.

<sup>6</sup> See bibliography

The NGO sector in France is large and very diverse, both with respect to the type and size of different organisations. This has resulted in a range of different views on and needs for capacity building which are apparent in the synthesis below of interviews with a sample of French NGOs. The sector includes less than 20 big organisations with budgets above 30 million euros such as the humanitarian organisations (Médécins du Monde, Médécins Sans Frontières, Action Contre la Faim), Handicap International and CCFD, as well as a wide variety of over 100 small organisations (CCD 2003; Coordination SUD 2004).

### 3.1 Three NGO Generations

The different types of development NGOs in France are said to belong to three generations (Deler at al. 1998). The first wave of development NGOs appeared in France in the mid-1960s. True to the spirit of this period, they adopted ideals of solidarity and partnership which have remained key to their vision of development work ever since. This generation includes organisations such as Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD), Frères des Hommes (FDH), and CIMADE. The subsequent wave in the 1970s consisted of humanitarian organisations with a clear emergency focus, beginning with Médécins Sans Frontières (MSF), and later Médécins du Monde. Until then, the Red Cross was the only organisation of this kind in France. The third generation arrived in the 1980s headed by Action Contre la Faim and Handicap International. They strongly emphasise professionalism in their organisations as well as in the field (e.g. ACF 2003).

These different groupings have sought a common identity under the terms 'Organisations de Solidarité Internationale (OSI)' or 'Associations de Solidarité Internationale (ASI)', which have replaced 'Organisations Non-Gouvernementales (ONG)<sup>7</sup>' as the official reference, reflecting the perceived need to focus on solidarity rather than the non-governmental notion which has Anglophone roots. The quest for a stronger identity has grown, as NGO credibility has decreased, not least due to corruption scandals<sup>8</sup> which have damaged the NGO image considerably. Added to the general mistrust of NGOs by the French population that has contributed to a reduction in the number of volunteers in recent years, the current social and economic crisis in France has brought its citizens to concentrate on the country's domestic problems rather than development issues. In the light of these developments, it is understandable that French NGOs are concerned about their current and future legitimacy.

### 3.2 The State–NGO Relationship

Historically, the relationship between the French State and NGOs has been characterised by distance, constraints and a mutual lack of trust (Pujolle 1997). For years, official development assistance was channelled through the public administrations in the South or through direct technical interventions and service

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<sup>7</sup> The equivalent in English would be 'Organisations/Associations for International Solidarity' versus 'Non-Governmental Organisations'

<sup>8</sup> For example, Association pour la Recherche contre le Cancer in 1996

delivery. Since the French colonies obtained their independence, France has maintained close links with these countries – both economically, politically, and culturally. French NGOs were not incorporated into this geo-political government strategy, nor did they wish to be. They therefore had to mobilise their funds elsewhere. This allowed them to preserve a high degree of autonomy, but equally limited their involvement in policy-making.

There may be changes ahead. The French Government and the NGO sector are currently debating the future shape of a so-called partnership between Government institutions and NGOs. It should be noted that such debate was already initiated in 1991 with the Husson report (CLED, CNAJEP et CNJD 1991; Husson et al. 1991). At the time, it was pointed out by the NGOs that in order for them to enter into a real partnership with the State, new development programmes would have to be created in collaboration between the two parties: NGOs could no longer be reduced to implementers of publicly financed development projects; and the State would have to take seriously its role in strengthening the NGOs by providing support (financial and otherwise) to their organisational management and administrative functions, in addition to co-funding projects. Now, ten years later, the intentions of the Government may have changed, but the discussions appear to be much the same. The synthesis of a plenary session held by the High Commission for International Development<sup>9</sup> in April 2000 stated that with the contributions to at least 15 per cent of the costs of co-funded projects, French NGOs had acquired sufficient legitimacy as development actors to participate in both the conceptualisation and implementation of French official development assistance. This was seen as particularly important with respect to the political decision-making regarding the inclusion of emerging development actors such as *collectivités locales*<sup>10</sup>, trade unions and migrant associations, as well as local producer and peasant associations.

In recent years, the French Government has recognised that NGOs play an important role in French official development assistance<sup>11</sup>. This has led to a restructuring of the funding system for NGOs and the establishment of a mechanism with the specific purpose to allocate funds for NGO projects; la Mission pour la Coopération Non-Gouvernementale (MCNG)<sup>12</sup>. Government grants primarily contribute to the NGO funding base through ‘co-financements’, i.e. co-funding of development projects. Meanwhile, certain NGOs have recently obtained untied programme funding. One significant constraint to a closer State–NGO partnership is the existence of not one, but several Government agencies with which NGOs must negotiate for financial support and project funding. French NGOs receive financial resources directly, through MCNG, or indirectly, through agencies such as Agence Française du Développement or various French ministries<sup>13</sup> by which NGOs may be paid for services provided to Governments in the South.

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<sup>9</sup> An agency with a governmental advisory function

<sup>10</sup> Communes, departments, regions

<sup>11</sup> Plenary session at The HCCI (Haut Conseil de la Coopération Internationale) 18 April 2000 ([www.hcci.gouv.fr](http://www.hcci.gouv.fr))

<sup>12</sup> [www.france.diplomatie.fr](http://www.france.diplomatie.fr)

<sup>13</sup> For example the Ministry of Health, Education or Agriculture

The Commission for Co-operation and Development (CCD)<sup>14</sup>, which constitutes a platform for exchanges between the French Government and NGOs, has existed since 1983, but it would appear that more effective and open consultations on political decision-making now take place in this forum. CCD also organises working groups on themes such as development education<sup>15</sup>, EU development issues, and volunteerism. The French Government seeks to provide incentives for greater professionalism in the NGO sector by offering training opportunities to French NGOs. This has raised some concern among NGOs about loss of independence and fears of co-option, although such training for NGO staff is in great demand, and the NGOs themselves are often unable to mobilise the resources required to cover training costs (Franco-British Council 2003).

Might this be the beginning of closer collaboration between governmental and non-governmental institutions? – a move from government rhetoric to practice? At present, the French State appears to encourage State–NGO co-operation in principle, but the funding relationship influences the evolution of such efforts. The continuously low levels of financial contributions from the French State to NGOs, as well as a certain instability in funding flows may undermine the limited trust that the State has been able to build with the NGO sector<sup>16</sup>. As pointed out recently by the President of Coordination SUD, Henri Rouille D’Orfeuil, the Government needs to follow up the general increase in French official development assistance with a parallel increase in the financial support to French NGOs working in the field of development, if these are to live up to the demands of greater expertise and competencies, as well as more organisational stability<sup>17</sup>. Such concrete measures would most likely reinforce the relationship between State and NGOs.

#### 4. The Evolution of Capacity Building Activities: Rhetoric versus Practice

Support to capacity building of NGOs in France was originally perceived as the responsibility of the State. With the beginning realisation that French NGOs needed to improve their performance, in the early 1990s negotiations took place about the ways in which the State could contribute to strengthening NGOs (e.g. Husson et al. 1991). Moreover, an assessment<sup>18</sup> of NGO competencies in areas such as project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, lesson-learning and the application of lessons in practice<sup>19</sup>, was undertaken on a sample of ten NGOs<sup>20</sup>. This did not however lead to significant capacity building activity in the following years. Although capacity

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<sup>14</sup> La Commission Coopération-Développement was created in 1983 and is headed by the Development Minister (Ministre délégué à la Co-operation et la Francophonie).

<sup>15</sup> See Section 5.4.

<sup>16</sup> Plenary Session at the CCD, December 2003

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Mission technique sur les savoirs-faire des ONG 1992

<sup>19</sup> Etudes, montage, mise en oeuvre de projets; appui et suivi, évaluation; capitalisation et valorisation

<sup>20</sup> CICDA, GRDR, CIDR, GRET, IRAM, AFVP, CIMADE, ISF, IRFED, HI

building appears to have been on the agenda throughout the 1990s, it was articulated in the development rhetoric rather than carried out in practice. The past few years have seen an increased focus on capacity building in France, which may be linked to the perceived need for French NGOs to prove their ability to carry out development activities of high quality, as well as the pressure to seek funding from multi-lateral donors who demand to see capacity building as an integral part of development proposals. Furthermore, the NGOs themselves are beginning to recruit capacity building specialists, mainly to assist partner organisations in the South<sup>21</sup>. Finally, capacity building of French NGOs has been included as an objective in the Foreign Ministry's most recent strategic plan for development from 2003 (Lécluse 2004), and is thus seen as a political priority in the official development strategy.

Two NGO networks, F3E and Coordination SUD have gradually adopted the function of capacity building provision to French NGOs. They currently unite their forces to provide training for NGO employees. F3E was established in 1994 with the objective of improving dialogue and providing a forum for consultation between the French Government and NGOs. They channel government funding for NGO evaluations as well as cross-cutting thematic studies to extract lessons learnt from evaluations - and more recently, they have started to finance training courses and methodological guides<sup>22</sup>. Coordination SUD is the umbrella organisation for NGDOs and constitutes the primary platform for these organisations to meet and exchange knowledge and experiences about issues which they perceive as critical.

In 2000, Coordination SUD established a Funding Commission with the aim of enhancing the quality of NGO performance. They have recently set up a resource centre, and within a year two capacity building officers have been employed. While one of these officers is in charge of capacity building initiatives for French NGOs, the other is focusing on improving capacity building activities undertaken by French NGOs in the South. In the summer of 2003, a survey of over 40 French NGOs was conducted by the resource centre, with the aim of determining the nature of their current needs. It was concluded that capacity building support was to be provided in four areas: governance (related to leadership, management, vision and strategy), organisational structures and processes (including finances, human resource management, organisational learning, internal and external communication, legislation and tax expertise), resource mobilisation (public and private), as well as skills development (aimed at enhancing NGO staff competencies). The first phase of Coordination SUD's capacity building strategy will focus on skills development and knowledge management through:

*Training:* the NGOs expressed a great demand for training; despite the fact that there is a widely perceived need to 'professionalise' NGO staff, the NGOs themselves have difficulties finding the time and mobilising the resources which would be required.

*Extracting lessons learnt:* although efforts have been made by various organisations to record experiences and explore innovative methods from the field through processes of

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<sup>21</sup> For example Gret, Handicap International

<sup>22</sup> Promotion pack from F3E (le Fonds pour la Promotion des études préalables, études transversales, évaluations), as well as their website: [www.f3e.asso.fr](http://www.f3e.asso.fr)

*capitalisation*<sup>23</sup>, no system has been put in place to synthesise, analyse and disseminate such information in a more co-ordinated way in order to improve the effectiveness of French NGOs.

It is thought that the two studies conducted by Coordination SUD and INTRAC may complement each other as a basis for future initiatives to strengthen French NGOs through capacity building in areas identified as crucial.

## 5. The Notion of Capacity Building

At the outset, the respondents were asked to explain the meaning of the expression 'capacity building' and provide synonyms for the term. This resulted in the coverage of a wide variety of capacity building aspects, reflecting the diversity of the NGOs in the interview sample. The points below illustrate significant areas of consensus.

### 5.1 A Development Activity in the South

French NGOs primarily perceive capacity building as a development activity which takes place in the South. As a consequence, the partnership concept was rapidly introduced by most informants to explain the reasoning behind capacity building interventions. When it was suggested by the author that capacity building might be relevant to French organisations as well, the initial reaction was astonishment. Although most informants recognised that French NGOs have weaknesses in areas such as organisational learning, co-ordination and consistency in strategies and approaches, as well as human resource development, these were mostly seen as untouchable areas which only directors could address. Some informants indicated that it might be inappropriate for French NGOs to conduct capacity building in the South in areas where they themselves needed strengthening.

### 5.2 Focus on the Capacities of Individuals

It was also clear that capacity building, to most informants, was synonymous with technical training and skills development of individuals, primarily of staff in their Southern partner organisations. Although capacity building was not perceived as applicable to French organisations, *professionnalisation* was frequently referred to as the strengthening of staff competencies internally in the French NGOs, in order to develop high levels of expertise both at headquarters and in the field – and hence, the emphasis was again placed on the individual rather than the organisation.

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<sup>23</sup> Refers to 'capitalisation d'expériences', i.e. transforming experiences into learning and lesson-sharing that is subsequently fed into action and knowledge (Revel and Lafon 1996, p.9)

### 5.3 Capacity Building for and by Local Development Actors

Several informants insisted that capacity building should not exclusively be perceived as an NGO activity, but rather as an activity relevant to all development actors. In this regard, capacity building is primarily seen as community strengthening through relevant groupings and organisations in the specific context. For example, the *collectivités territoriales* (communes, departments, and regions)<sup>24</sup> in France and their counterparts in the South are seen to contribute increasingly to integrated development activities in the local communities, in most cases alongside or in collaboration with the NGOs. Consequently, it was argued that such development actors should not be excluded from an analysis of capacity building approaches. Also, professional associations<sup>25</sup> are seen to play an important role in development, and should therefore be included as target groups for capacity building efforts according to most informants in the study. It should be noted that the anglophone definition of civil society organisations (CSOs) appears to be more narrow than the French, according to which CSOs include NGOs, migrant organisations, trade unions, associations, *collectivités locales*, as well as university and research institutes<sup>26</sup>.

This way of thinking appears to be linked to the logic of the *développement local* approach which has been central to French development policy in recent years, together with the deconcentration and decentralisation efforts. Several French organisations have specialised in such ‘local development’, including CIEDEL and IRFED. *Développement local* relates to areas such as community development or civil society strengthening, but it is ideally based on local initiatives, includes elements of capacity building, and incorporates institutions and structures that will enable co-ordination of activities and enhancement of competencies at community level, i.e. of the different actors in the community.

### 5.4 Development Education

*L’Education au Développement* is a concept which refers to the wide variety of activities carried out to inform and teach the French population about development. This is seen as more and more essential, as their awareness of and interest in development activities undertaken in the South gradually decreases. Such activities range from inviting people from Southern partner organisations to give presentations for faith-based organisations (such as CCFD), in their members’ parishes, to providing orientation in schools, and organising public campaigns to inform the population about trends in development. Some even see the opportunity for French citizens to volunteer for development work as a type of development education. This type of ‘capacity building’ has implications for French society as a whole, and several informants qualified development education as one form of capacity building.

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<sup>24</sup> Collectivités territoriales are considered by the French State as ‘partners’ with the State just like the NGOs. With the legislation from 1992, as well as recent legislative changes, the collectivités territoriales (or collectivités locales, as they are also called) are encouraged to co-operate with their peers in developing countries (Pujolle 1997, Assises de la coopération et de la solidarité internationale October 1997, HCCI Plenary Session April 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Such as peasants’ organisations in West Africa

<sup>26</sup> HCCI Plenary Session April 2000

## 5.5 Different Perspectives on Capacity Building

It should be noted that the informants tended to explain capacity building from their own perspective, and hence were influenced by the origins, strategic focus, and internal dynamics of their respective organisations. While informants from humanitarian organisations that depend on the competencies of expatriates and volunteers to a great extent saw capacity building primarily as skills development aiming for professionalism and high quality operations, representatives from NGOs with a focus on long-term development and social transformation emphasised organisational and relational aspects linked to partnership and empowerment. The third and largest group of NGOs focused on the implementation of development activities, and hence those capacity building efforts (whether targeted at individuals, organisations, or inter-organisational relations) which would support such implementation.

## 6. Capacity Building Terminology

The term ‘capacity building’, or ‘*renforcement de capacités*’ in French, is seen as vague, ambiguous and imprecise by most informants. In France, as elsewhere, there seems to be no clear consensus-based definition of capacity building. However, the French NGO world has dealt with this problem to some extent by applying different terms to describe different aspects of capacity building. Apart from generic terms such as *renforcement de capacités* or *capacity building* (pronounced in French), words signifying support, such as *appui* and *soutien*, are also frequently applied to describe capacity building.

### 6.1 Competencies

As mentioned above, French NGOs tend to focus on the individuals as the core of the organisations; capacity building strategies should take their starting point in strengthening the competencies and technical skills of the human resources that carry the organisation (see also Lécluse 2004). Therefore, several expressions refer to capacity building for the individual organisational member: *renforcement/transfert de compétences* (skills transfer or development), *transfert de savoir* (knowledge transfer), *formation* (training), and the notion of *professionnalisation*, which has seen a particular emphasis in the newest NGO generation, as explained previously (see also Action Contre la Faim 2003). According to Roca, *professionnalisation* and the strengthening of technical competencies are seen by French NGOs as closely related to increased legitimacy with the French State and population as well as with multilateral donors<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Roca, P.J.: Regard Critique sur l’Action des OSI, in: CCD 1999

## 6.2 The Organisational Dimension

The key terms used to describe capacity building for organisations were *renforcement/développement/appui institutionnel* (institutional strengthening/ development/ support). It was explained that this is NGO jargon, and does not reflect the traditional French meaning of institution which relates to the institutional key pillars in society such as the State and the Church. Some informants recognised the ambiguity of applying institutional at the organisational level, when it might equally be used to describe the dynamics between different actors in a community or society. However, it was also mentioned that *la collectivité* was a useful way to refer to the sum of individuals who do not necessarily operate within the formal institutional framework, but may contribute to or be included in development and capacity building efforts. The direct translation of organisational strengthening or development (*renforcement des organisations/développement organisationnel*) is less frequently used, although Anglophone material in French translation tends to contain these expressions.

## 6.3 The Partnership Discourse

Apart from *partenariat* (the direct translation of partnership), other partnership-related terms were also mentioned by most informants: *autonomisation* (to be rendered autonomous) and *responsabilisation* (attribution of responsibility) relate to the anglophone discourse of ownership, while *augmentation de pouvoir* refers to empowerment. These expressions emphasise the outcome of successful capacity building efforts. Especially those informants working in NGOs with a long-term development vision found that the notion of partnership was inseparable from any form of capacity building. It should be noted that *partenariat* is also used to describe co-operation across sectors, and hence may include partnerships with public institutions, as well as private companies or foundations.

## 6.4 Capacity Building Within French NGOs

When questioned about capacity building efforts in their own organisations, the informants tended to use words referring to quality (*qualité*) rather than the notions of organisational effectiveness and performance which are often emphasised by anglophone organisations; and terms covering different aspects of learning. *Apprentissage* refers to individual learning, while *capitalisation* concerns systematised, institutionalised learning from experiences, and *valorisation* refers to the value added when applying such learning in practice. More generic terms with private sector origins, such as *management* and *leadership* etc. were also introduced (pronounced in French). However, these words are not necessarily attributed the same meaning as in an anglophone country. Reflecting the hierarchical logic in most French organisations, one informant explained leadership as a leader with followers: ‘the boss who has the power, who is in front, bringing the others with him’. He thus placed the emphasis on the individual leader rather than the process of leadership.

No terms were spontaneously mentioned which corresponded to the inter-organisational or societal dimensions that anglophone capacity building specialists

might include (e.g. Eade 1997). When this issue was specifically addressed, most informants said that these dimensions were related to the notions of partnership and local development rather than capacity building.

## 7. Capacity Building in France

### 7.1 Capacity Building Needs of French NGOs

The primary capacity building needs which French NGOs articulate are related to survival and sustainability: French NGOs aim to improve quality and *professionnalisation*; resource mobilisation and access to funding; as well as monitoring and evaluation. French NGOs are under increasing pressure to document the quality of their programmes and projects, and demonstrate their legitimacy – not only to the French population and State<sup>28</sup>, but also to multi-lateral donors<sup>29</sup> with bureaucratic procedures and complicated tendering processes. To French NGOs, project funding has a high priority as a primary source of income, and they are faced with the time consuming challenge of proposal writing and searching for alternative funding sources. It was suggested by some informants that French NGOs could benefit from co-operating in this area.

At present, there seems to be little self-awareness among French NGOs of their own organisational needs for capacity building. According to Coordination SUD, improved organisational management is seen as a long-term concern, and hence is perceived as less vital to the NGOs than short-term financial pressures and project activities. This is especially the case for the many small NGOs with 5–15 employees and budgets of less than 3 million euros. Some informants pointed to the fact that the diversity of the French NGO sector raised questions about the appropriateness of current capacity building efforts taking place in France, and the need to adjust service provision to specific groupings with particular needs related to their size and specialisation. It was even suggested that restructuring of current networks through divisions in those groupings might lead to stronger French NGO voices, nationally and internationally, than is currently the case, and hence strengthen the capacity for policy influencing and advocacy.

In the interviews, questions about internal organisational issues appeared to be slightly sensitive. Organisational change is in most cases perceived as the privileged responsibility of directors. This may be seen to reflect the hierarchical structure, formal as well as informal, which still prevails in most French organisations (although there are exceptions, like IRAM's participative and co-operative structure<sup>30</sup>). It was recognised that approaches such as human resource management were not part of French culture. However, when questions were posed about needs for organisational strengthening, a strong demand for improved institutionalisation of lesson-learning

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<sup>28</sup> Notably the French Foreign Ministry and the French Development Agency

<sup>29</sup> Such as the EU, the UN and the World Bank

<sup>30</sup> The precise French term is *structure collégiale*

*(capitalisation)* was articulated, confirming one of the key findings from the assessment undertaken by Coordination SUD. There is an expressed need for more systematic analyses to derive lessons from experiences, as well as more cross-cutting organisational co-ordination internally to ensure coherent organisational learning and improvement. Finally, informants from the '1<sup>st</sup> Generation NGOs' (with a partnership focus) highlighted an urgency to improve the capacity for advocacy, campaigning, and lobbying in order to better represent their Southern partners in the North.

## 7.2 Key Providers of NGO Capacity Building

Apart from training course organisers such as Coordination SUD and F3E, and facilitators such as GRET and CIEDEL, the informants had difficulties naming and describing capacity building providers in France. CIEDEL was put forward by most informants as a key support provider with much credibility, because the institute has gathered field experience via its consultancies, but does not engage in project implementation. CIEDEL's training centre has many students from the South, and hence the staff is continuously confronted with development issues and challenges from the Southern perspective. In addition, it must be assumed that their organisational identity as a university institute provides them with a certain degree of neutrality, as they are not perceived as competitors for or dependent on funding. The renowned university institute Sciences Po was mentioned as another source of theoretical back up. Larger NGOs clearly find that they do not need support from non-profit capacity building providers in the third sector as regards their internal organisation: they see themselves as experienced organisations with effective management and sufficient resources to train their staff in-house; much like large private companies. Some, however, have bought specific services from private consultancies in areas such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E) or human resource management (HRM).

## 7.3 Service Provision by Private Consultancies

Service provision to French NGOs in the field of organisational strengthening appears to be covered mainly by private consultancies (such as Ernst & Young or BDPA) that have units specialising in the non-profit sector but charge their usual fees. In addition, initiatives to provide less expensive services have been taken in recent years, by consultancies such as Consultants Sans Frontières, Partenaires et Compétences, Euréquipe, or Algoë. These private consultancies are perceived to be highly specialised organisations with much expertise, which few non-profit support providers can compete with. Several of the larger organisations included in the study have undergone periods of organisational change and restructuring assisted by private consultancies. Although it was recognised that private sector experts might not fully understand NGO values and their strategic implications, the argument was presented that it is advantageous to be faced with external criticism addressing areas such as organisational performance and effectiveness that would otherwise be overlooked. However, some informants found that there is a gap in the service provision with respect to the revision of strategies and missions, as this demands an in-depth understanding of NGO culture and values, which no service providers in France appear to have at the moment. It was argued that private consultancies generally have the

appropriate tools and methods, but they may not pick up the subtleties unique to the NGO sector.

#### 7.4 Lesson-Learning in Networks

While mutual exchanges of experiences and information among French NGOs via the NGO networks were mentioned as a primary source of capacity building, it was not felt that guidance on organisational issues could be found through exchanges with peer NGOs in these networks. It is clear from the interviews that French NGOs share little knowledge about internal organisational constraints and strategies. These types of exchanges currently tend to focus on operational issues such as evaluation methods and fundraising, or partnership strategies. For instance, CCFD has shared experiences about their partnerships with its peers in the Coordination SUD network, while Médecins du Monde has provided insights into NGO legislation and taken the initiative to a quality synergy project for co-members. Centre de Recherche et d'Information pour le Développement (CRID) was mentioned as another large NGO network with working groups, but it was indicated that this network used to be more active than at present<sup>31</sup>.

Networks including development actors both inside and outside the NGO sector (such as research institutes, private consultants, donors, and in some cases partner organisations from the South) as well as international NGO networks (such as CIDSE) were mentioned as other forums allowing French NGOs to enhance their capacities. Furthermore, some French NGOs have received support from their partner organisations in the South. For example, partners were consulted during the reformulation of Frères des Hommes' vision and asked to provide feedback about the organisation's strengths and weaknesses; and CCFD has invited Southern partners from Latin America and Lebanon to assist them in the evaluation of their gender mainstreaming efforts.

#### 7.5 Collective Reflection on Experiences

As mentioned previously, *capitalisation* is a means of collective lesson-learning that French NGOs highlight as an area which they hope to develop further. The two NGOs, GRET and InterAide,<sup>32</sup> have initiated activities in this area, notably through the specialised networks to which they adhere: together with IRAM, GRET belongs to 'Groupe Initiative', a network of eight organisations which constitutes a forum for co-operation and exchanges of practical experience. Groupe Initiative has been in place since 1993 and produces a publications series called 'Traverses' in which the member organisations present analyses of and methodological considerations about experiences gathered in the field. InterAide created the web-based network 'Pratiques' in 1997 together with Essor and Initiative Développement<sup>33</sup>. The idea behind 'Pratiques' is that practitioners from the organisations' field programmes are able to record interesting experiences from project implementation, and through the exchange of information

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<sup>31</sup> For example, CRID contributed actively to the discussions about capacity building of French NGOs in relation to the Husson Report in the early 1990s.

<sup>32</sup> Interaide is not included in the interview sample

<sup>33</sup> See [www.interaide.org/pratiques](http://www.interaide.org/pratiques)

with other practitioners contribute to improving the overall quality and impact. Until 1996, CIEDEL published the newsletter 'Histoires de Développement' together with Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme (FPH) with the aim of reflecting on and learning from experiences, and FPH now continues this activity in their own working paper series (see Bartoletti 1997). The NGO network, F3E, provides resources for NGO evaluations and subsequently synthesises lessons learnt in reports on specific thematic areas. These reports are accessible from their website. It would seem that processes of 'capitalisation' are already taking place among French NGOs – so why is the demand in this area so strong? Might the transition from *capitalisation* to *valorisation* be the missing link from recording and reflecting on experiences to disseminating and applying the lessons learnt in practice?

## 7.6 Limited Dissemination

A particular gap identified in the provision of capacity building is the lack of dissemination of innovative methodology and lessons learnt (despite initiatives such as 'Traverses' and 'Pratiques' described above). It was stated by one informant that capacity building of French NGOs to help them develop their own capacity building methodology does not take place; this is an area that is not taken seriously enough. The capacity building conducted by French NGOs in the South is therefore purely a result of gradually gathered experiences, and learning-by-doing. Furthermore, due to their already stretched capacity and tight resources, few French NGOs<sup>34</sup> produce publications. This severely reduces the possibilities for dissemination of experiences. In addition, only a limited number of relevant French texts are to be found on the internet, although this was mentioned by some as an obvious space for NGO capacity building.

## 7.7 Internal Capacity Building Activities

Many of the informants mentioned that capacity building efforts for collective learning within their own organisations, such as internal training workshops, were very limited. Staff training appeared to be more emphasised by the humanitarian organisations that continuously expatriate staff on missions in the field for technical operations, but mostly with a focus on individuals as mentioned above. Some learning was attempted in certain French NGOs in the form of systematisation of lesson-learning from experiences (*capitalisation*) across country units and departments at headquarters through oral presentations, reports, publications and exchanges via the internet. However, no reference was made to the institutionalisation of learning behaviour or collective processes of learning within the organisations. Organisational learning appears to be an area unfamiliar to French NGOs – yet another approach with anglophone origins? Although few initiatives have been taken in this respect inside the NGOs (by top management or otherwise), NGO staff seem very interested in discovering more about organisational assessment and development, as illustrated by the great demand for the training courses in organisational assessment (*diagnostic organisationnel*) held by Coordination SUD in November 2003, and co-facilitated by GRET and INTRAC.

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<sup>34</sup> GRET, CIEDEL, FPH are amongst these few organisations

## 8. Capacity Building by French NGOs in the South

Generally, French NGOs aim to strengthen the capacity of Southern organisations to implement activities in the field, in order to make the most of the financial support which they provide, although longer-term objectives of building sustainable institutions, and indirectly contributing to strengthening civil society and democracy, were also articulated. Capacity building is thus primarily seen as a means for enhanced field operations, especially with regards to project implementation and management. While short-term interventions such as training can be seen as separate capacity building efforts, the strengthening of individual and organisational capacities seems to be an integrated element in longer-term development activities and partnership strategies. This may be one explanation why capacity building does not appear to be a commonly used key strategy among French NGOs. Most French NGOs still see their primary role as funding providers, implementers, or advisors rather than facilitators of capacity building. It should be noted that research about capacity building perceptions in other European NGOs reveals a similar unclarity among NGO practitioners about how to operationalise capacity building in practice.

### 8.1 Capacity Building Activities

Each organisation appears to have its own customised approach to capacity building: For example, IRAM combines different forms of *support*<sup>35</sup> during longer-term development interventions: needs assessments are followed by regular interventions such as training (workshops with case studies adapted to the organisation in question), information dissemination, technical support, field visits, shared experiences between organisations from neighbouring countries, exchange visits between the organisations from the South and IRAM. In addition to such interventions, IRAM is also at the disposal of their long-term partners for advice by phone, e-mail or, when possible, in the field. As IRAM, Frères des Hommes never implements activities without local support partners with knowledge about the local context. They provide minor funding, but their key efforts take the form of moral support, advice, regular communication during the entire project cycle, contact creation between local organisations, and the facilitation of debates at local level. They also assist self-assessment of their partners' needs for organisational strengthening and programme support. In environments favourable to the NGO sector, Frères des Hommes seeks to start a cascade of capacity building efforts by supporting a small group of NGOs that are likely to disseminate the lessons learnt to their network of other civil society organisations, notably community based organisations – and hence support should ideally reach the grassroots.

### 8.2 Linking Capacity Building and Community Development

As pointed out previously, French NGOs are very conscious about contributing to community development by collaborating with the most relevant local development

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<sup>35</sup> Support is used as the translation of 'appui' or 'appui-conseil' (support and advice)

actors on specific projects, as opposed to working with partner NGOs exclusively. The point was made by GRET that the notion of development is closely linked to strengthening the capacity of actors in society as a whole (whether public or non-profit). For example, organising peasants in rural water associations in Cambodia equally contributes to creating opportunities for policy influencing. CIEDEL drew attention to the limited dialogue between development actors (i.e. practitioners from NGOs and public institutions) and the grassroots, which impedes capacity building efforts from reaching the local level. However, the situation appears to be improving, as grassroots leaders increasingly enter the sphere of influence by becoming leaders of rural community based organisations or entering into politics.

### 8.3 Improved Implementation or Organisational Sustainability

Most French NGOs focus on building the capacity of Southern partners to implement projects. This situation is likely to be reinforced by the funding system of co-financing development projects and programmes. Organisational administration and management are rarely financed directly by donors, and therefore many NGOs concentrate on improving the quality of service delivery, to inspire the goodwill of their donors. Contrary to this general tendency, CCFD (the largest Catholic Development NGO in France) seeks to strengthen its partner organisations through capacity building efforts aimed at enhancing internal organisational procedures and practices. Increasingly, CCFD dedicates financial support to improving the management and administrative functions, and making the internal decision-making processes more democratic in NGOs and community based organisations (notably in Africa). Meanwhile, convincing its own constituency of the relevance of such investments in organisational capacity building is an ongoing process, as the 29 member organisations (church movements and services) look for tangible project outputs.

The capacity building efforts of the humanitarian organisations are concentrated around technical skills, logistics, and management structures that allow the specialists to work in their area of expertise, as they are essential for humanitarian action. However, they also engage in continuous support to selected partners, as explained in the partnership section below, and tend to focus on groups of vulnerable individuals. Organisational strengthening may thus apply to organised groups of individuals in the public, private, or non-profit sector.

Furthermore, the humanitarian organisations may complement their principal emergency activities with the strengthening of institutions or communities where the state fails to live up to its obligations – longer-term capacity building in the humanitarian context tends to be closely linked to service provision for the population in areas such as health, water and sanitation.

### 8.4 Canadian Role Models

Several informants highlighted the importance of Canadian NGOs, such CECI or Oxfam Quebec, as good capacity building allies during field operations, for example in West Africa. Their strength is seen to be the combination of French language and

Anglo-Saxon approaches which is well received by partner organisations in the South as well as by donors. There appeared to be agreement among the informants that much could be learned from Canadian NGOs.

### 8.5 Capacity Building of Networks

Coordination SUD does not only support the South indirectly through their members. The French NGO umbrella organisation also assists partner networks in the South with respect to exchanges on strategic reflection, lobbying and advocacy, as well as dissemination of information regarding French and international developments. Among their current partners are CRDA from Ethiopia, VANI from India, and ABONG from Brazil. In the longer term, Coordination SUD hopes to expand and intensify their capacity building efforts in the South in order to help partner networks initiate capacity building activities for their local members. The French NGO network have already had requests from several Southern networks in this regard. Organisations such as Frères des Hommes support exchanges in networks in a more indirect way by encouraging their partners to participate in such initiatives.

### 8.6 Capacity Building Experiences in Different Contexts

There was a general consensus among the French NGO representatives interviewed that their capacity building approaches in the South varied significantly depending on the type and maturity of the organisations in question, the level of their capacities, the space allowed for civil society by the state in the particular country, as well as the wider historical, cultural and economic context. The informants gave the following examples: capacity building work in Africa often has to start from scratch by building basic capacities such as literacy, and in organisations where individuals have certain capacities, management competencies are poor, and quality of performance low. In more developed regions such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or Latin America, the emphasis is placed on resource mobilisation, fundraising, and establishing local networks. For example, Chile has a skilled human resource base and formal democracy, but support is provided to allow the NGOs to constitute a critical counterforce and control mechanism of the Government, while remaining independent societal actors. In Palestine, capacity building efforts may focus on improving long distance communications with strategic partners as beneficiaries, as geographical mobility is limited. The informants also provided examples of different capacity building approaches for different types of NGOs: Human rights organisations ask for support to travel and network with peers, as well as training in information dissemination, lobbying, advocacy and policy influencing – while local grassroots organisations need to build physical capacity and learn about project management.

Cultural barriers have inhibited capacity building activities implemented by French NGOs in the East and the South. In many Eastern European countries, capacity building efforts have been impeded by a less developed analytical and critical capacity, as well as a different notion of individual responsibility – and in Cambodia, it has proved difficult to engage people at the grassroots in active learning, as they are not used to making decisions individually. It was thus emphasised by many informants that

contextual and cultural differences do affect capacity building practice, but it is important to avoid generalisations with regards to different continents or even countries. Although many African countries were seen to suffer from a widespread lack of expertise, exceptions such as Mali and Burkina Faso were put forward. In Latin America, traditionally seen as a more developed continent hosting experts in many fields, countries such as Peru and Bolivia still need support in field operations in addition to organisational capacity building. While some French NGOs attempt to reduce the cultural barriers by co-operating closely with local capacity building actors, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule. This appears to be linked to the great variation from one context to another with regards to the type and quality of local support provision available. In many cases, local support providers are not seen to be competent or professional enough to contribute in appropriate ways, and in some contexts few organisations of this type exist.

## 9. The Partnership Focus

Most informants perceived capacity building as closely linked to the notion of partnership, because they primarily saw capacity building as a development activity taking place in the South. The types of partnerships vary depending on the specific situation and context in the partner's country. Where partner organisations are already relatively strong and autonomous, co-operation on equal terms may be possible. Some French NGOs have even entered into consortia with partners in the South. Where existing organisations are small and weak, organisational strengthening may take place. Finally, French NGOs help establish organisations where civil society is weak or emerging; in some cases NGOs, in other cases trade unions, professional associations or micro-credit centres.

There were diverging views about the extent to which the majority of French NGO partnerships with organisations in the South were essentially financial, or provided opportunities for other forms of support or exchange. According to Coordination SUD, during the interviews for their needs assessment many NGOs expressed a wish for a clearer conceptualisation of the partnership idea, as well as approaches to partnership building. It is clear that even within each NGO, there are diverging notions about partnership. Coordination SUD has followed up on this demand by establishing a working group on partnership for their members, and taking the lead on the partnership issue in the European network of NGO umbrella organisations, CONCORD.

A workshop reviewing the partnership concept was held by Coordination SUD in April 2004<sup>36</sup>. The minutes from this workshop provide further insights into the aspects which French NGOs find essential to the partnership debate: the partnership definition<sup>37</sup> which

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<sup>36</sup> See bibliography

<sup>37</sup> 'the relationship between...organisations during the implementation of a project (short or long term) in co-operation, respecting the equal powers of the parties, based on mutual exchange, trust, respect of commitments, transparency and reciprocity. It is a dynamic process that must be integrated in the long term, with the relevant competencies and a shared vision and objective of development and international solidarity' [approximate translation]

was proposed is centred around short- or long-term co-operation on projects rather than focusing on the relationship between partners, corresponding to the explanations which most informants have given during the interviews for this study<sup>38</sup>. In addition, the definition also incorporates values such as trust, reciprocity and equal power balance, as well as shared objectives which were similarly echoed by most informants in this study. Interestingly, among the criteria suggested for good partnership practice were aspects such as transparency (possibly reflecting experiences of corruption and ineffective partnerships, which some informants referred to), as well as complementarity of competencies and means, and the human relationship between partners, thus emphasising the importance of the interaction between individuals from the respective organisations (although it was pointed out during the workshop that such dimensions should apply to organisations rather than individuals). One participant suggested adding a specific element of partner capacity building to these criteria. Despite the specific points of consensus referred to above, the diverging views expressed during this workshop correspond to the picture of the French NGO sector which this study portrays.

### 9.1 Operational versus Strategic Partnerships

When asked about the meaning of partnership, the explanations ranged from operational to strategic types of partnership; from short-term partnerships as means to carry out development projects to long-term partnerships aiming to lead the Southern partners towards autonomy and facilitate social transformation of civil society. This seemed to depend on the ways of working and the philosophies of the French NGOs in question. For instance, GRET tends to set up short-term partnerships for specific projects, while Frères des Hommes has had a strong partnership with Haiti Solidarité Internationale for thirty years without ever co-implementing a project. It was suggested by several informants that a discrepancy between the partnership discourse and reality prevailed in many French NGOs, particularly with respect to the operational–strategic continuum. Several informants made somewhat contradictory statements by articulating an official partnership strategy aiming at partner autonomy, while giving examples of partner strengthening related to project implementation.

CCFD, referred to by informants from other NGOs as an organisation with an exemplary partnership approach which they might learn from, has formulated a partnership policy (CCFD 2002). This document highlights the fact that a partnership can take many forms, from the funding of activities and projects in the field to networking and exchanges of experiences, advocacy and lobbying, participation in international events, as well as development education (see Section 5.4) in the South. CCFD explicitly states that they take a particular interest in supporting partners with innovative initiatives, as these organisations may prove to become local actors of social change. The NGO, Eau Vive<sup>39</sup>, is currently leading its partners down the path of complete financial and strategic autonomy, and it will be interesting to follow their lesson-learning from experiences during this process.

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<sup>38</sup> This was pointed out by one of the participants in the workshop, illustrating the diverging views on the notion of partnership.

<sup>39</sup> Not in the sample (see Pajot 2004)

## 9.2 The Financial Dimension

The level of financial support given by the different NGOs varies considerably. Some organisations donate significant sums, while others provide modest or no funding at all. This is bound to affect the equality and power balance of the partnerships, as it was argued by one informant. Furthermore, it was pointed out that donor conditions placed constraints on the equality of partnerships between French NGOs and organisations in the South. For instance, it seems contradictory to ask the Northern partner to be accountable to the donor in terms of finances while the local partner is expected to take responsibility for the implementation of a project. In addition, donors do not often accept that the inclusion of local partners in implementation may lead to lower effectiveness and efficiency in the short term, and demand additional resources and time dedicated to capacity building.

## 9.3 Establishing Partnerships

The descriptions of partnerships ranged from contractual arrangements and formal agreements of mutual engagement between two partner organisations to less formalised, continuously negotiated processes and networks. There was a general consensus that partnerships should ideally be based on trust; equality and exchange; reflection and dialogue. CIMADE and Frères des Hommes highlight the importance of *co-responsabilité*, referring to a relationship of shared responsibility (CIMADE 2003; Frères des Hommes undated). The criteria for the selection of partners were not very specific in most cases. Some informants suggested that it seemed inappropriate to set up permanent criteria which the French NGOs themselves might not always live up to. Partners tended to be selected based on recommendations by existing partners or other contacts in the local context, as this increased the likelihood of finding credible and transparent organisations that were recognised as legitimate in their country and represented a constituency. In addition, it was indicated that much depended on the views, intuition, and personal relationships of the local programme manager. This led to a certain inconsistency for French NGOs internally in the way their partnerships were built. Some partnerships would in fact be based on relationships between individuals rather than organisations.

Building gradually evolving and long-term relationships, and sharing responsibility for successes and failures were seen as critical factors in order to face the challenges and crises which most partnerships were confronted with at some point – although the contrasting reality was that few partnerships actually survived longer than a particular project or programme. Many of those partnerships that did survive seemed to undergo a transition from operational to strategic alliances. While the financial dimension would diminish, emphasis would increasingly be placed on exchanges of information, expertise and learning. Time would eventually eliminate the power imbalances to a great extent.

#### 9.4 Partner Perceptions

The French NGOs' perceptions of partners appear to be influenced by the extent to which the partnerships are operational or strategic. Most informants saw Southern partners as weak organisations whose capacities needed strengthening. By some, it was suggested that it was unhealthy to talk about equality in relationships where one organisation provided capacity building to another. They felt it was more honest to recognise the unequal levels of capacity and competency, while preserving and reinforcing relations of mutual respect. Others described their partners as experts in the local contexts, and saw it as their responsibility to provide strategic support to these partners to help them build relationships and gain a voice in Europe. They emphasised the strengths of their partner organisations compared to many French NGOs, for instance in terms of adaptability to rapidly changing situations.

Examples were also mentioned where partners had provided advice to the French NGOs with regards to strategy and methodology. Latin American partners were said to have a particular strength in M&E and lesson-learning, and be more advanced than the French in the field of advocacy and policy influencing. It was pointed out that Southern NGOs also have opinions about entering into partnerships. Especially mature NGOs in the South know how to impose themselves; they are familiar with donor conditions, the politics of co-financing and so on. CIMADE gave an example of an organisation in Sudan that had made the decision to refuse any type of funding, as they did not wish to be constrained by the reporting conditions of Northern donors.

#### 9.5 Partnerships with Whom?

Although the key partners of most French NGOs are Southern civil society organisations (primarily NGOs, but also community based organisations and professional associations), one informant indicated that some of the most effective partnerships were actually those with local authorities rather than local NGOs. At times, local authorities may be seen as more appropriate operational partners when the common goal is to carry out specific development activities. Another informant saw partnerships as much broader; including many types of development actors such as communities, local authorities, donors (bi-lateral, multi-lateral, and international NGOs). Here, shared responsibilities for a common goal was seen as key to partnership.

The respondents from the humanitarian organisations, Médecins du Monde and Action Contre la Faim, did not feel concerned by the partnership issue to the same extent as their colleagues from development NGOs, as they do not explicitly pursue partnership strategies. They aim to reach the local communities more generally, and also seek to co-operate with decision-makers at local level. However, they do at times engage in partnerships with local NGOs in sectorally related areas, and often contribute to building sustainable emergency units and nutrition centres that eventually become autonomous. In countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone plagued by long periods of conflict, long-term relationships with local emergency partners have evolved over time.

## 9.6 Parallels to Partnership Debates in Other European NGOs

It should be noted that many of the partnership issues discussed above are similar to those emphasised by other European NGOs. This becomes apparent when comparing the findings in this paper with the partnership study undertaken by Brehm et al. (2004) based on interviews with informants from 10 NGOs in Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Most importantly, the continuum between operational and strategic partnerships referred to above is echoed in Brehm's findings: she distinguishes between a functional approach where partnership is perceived as a means to an end, and a solidarity-based approach in which partnership is seen as an end in itself. Another interesting parallel is to be found in the ambiguity about whether partnerships are relationships between individuals, groups or organisations.

## 10. Differences between Anglophone and Francophone Approaches

To the informants, capacity building was a concept with anglophone origins. The organisations included in the sample had had little exposure to anglophone concepts and approaches, and were therefore hesitant to propose comparisons between anglophone and francophone approaches. There appears to be little co-operation and few exchanges with anglophone organisations. The general impression among the informants was that the diverging notions of development and the implications for the objectives pursued as well as the methods and approaches adopted are closely linked to history, culture, and social practices. NGOs with anglophone origins are seen to adopt more direct, pragmatic approaches that are action- and result-focused, while the French tend to spend much energy on negotiating the process. As mentioned previously, Canadian NGOs are perceived as good capacity building providers, because they are able to combine Anglo-Saxon approaches with French language skills and an understanding of francophone culture.

### 10.1 Individual versus Collective Support

There was general agreement that anglophone countries seemed to be more advanced in the areas of capacity building (for instance, reference was made to the HR focus among American NGOs), while the French felt that their strength was to be found in their partnership approaches. It was suggested that a key distinction between francophone and anglophone capacity building approaches might be 'individual versus collective support'; francophone approaches tend to target the individual through mentoring, training, and personal advice for project management, while the anglophone approaches are more conceptualised with collective training and analysis at resource centres.

## 10.2 Diverging Values

Diverging values were seen to be a second factor leading to variations in capacity building activities by francophone and anglophone development actors; especially when comparing French and American approaches. Communication with American NGOs about partner selection had revealed that they emphasised material outcomes, logistical effectiveness and the level of security in the area where implementation was to take place – while the French tended to focus on values linked to human rights, partner legitimacy and autonomy, as well as opportunities to extend the space for civil society. It was felt that French organisations were more responsive to their partners' needs than the Americans.

## 10.3 Differing NGO Sectors

It was suggested that the differences between NGO sectors in different countries, as well as the State–NGO relationships, influenced development practice; and hence, capacity building. The informants felt that the space allowed for civil society in countries such as the UK and the US was much greater than in France, where the state structure was centralised and traditionally hesitant in trusting NGOs. This was seen to affect NGO behaviour significantly. While many anglophone NGOs had promoted participation for years, the French tended to emphasise control and assessment to a greater extent. In this regard, it was argued that both approaches had their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, participatory methods, often portrayed as purely beneficial, carried risks of manipulation through exploitation of power imbalances.

Some informants indicated that the francophone/anglophone divide is only one out of several factors causing variations in capacity building methods and activities. First, the point was made that the francophone/anglophone divide is dissolved in some instances at field level, when practitioners co-operate across cultural barriers. Secondly, it was noted that, in addition to national differences, organisational culture plays a role in determining the types of capacity building utilised: organisations like Oxfam with a long history and more experience than the younger French NGOs were likely to approach capacity building in a different way. Reference was also made to the three generations of French NGOs who differed in their ways of working, in particular with respect to partnership relations. Finally, it was argued that humanitarian NGOs tend to focus less on organisational capacity building than development NGOs due to the urgency of emergency situations, but emphasise individuals' technical skills highly. In turn, development NGOs working with partner organisations on a long-term basis will necessarily focus on implementation through the entire project cycle, and hence (directly or indirectly) contribute to organisational strengthening and sustainability.

It should be noted that the comparison between anglophone and francophone approaches was intended to help the informants distinguish the characteristics of their own approach from others. However, the author wishes to point out that differences may also be found between for instance British and American capacity building approaches, between organisational approaches in the same country (as explained above) or even between capacity building interventions undertaken by individual staff members from the same organisation. Furthermore, approaches are likely to be adjusted

to the particular situations in which capacity building is needed. This highlights the difficulty of measuring cultural and contextual differences, and the challenge of transferring capacity building methods and approaches from one culture, context, and situation to another.

## 11. Future Prospects for Capacity Building in the French Context

Capacity building is gradually becoming a part of French development practice, and it must be expected that more emphasis will be placed on acquiring and developing specific capacity building methodology in the coming years. In addition, the French State and NGO networks are increasingly pushing for capacity building of the NGOs in France, to improve the quality of their activities. After more than ten years' capacity building rhetoric, it would appear that the time has come to focus on the application in practice. This, however, is happening at a time when public opinion is favourable to prioritising domestic social issues over investments in overseas development, and NGOs are struggling to prove their comparative advantage over other types of development actors.

French NGOs are concerned about their future. Many are conscious of the necessity to revisit their visions and reflect on their *raison d'être*, if they are to survive. They must initiate long-term organisational change processes which may transform their identities – or cease to exist. In the short term, most respondents appear to see improved M&E practices and resource mobilisation as the answer to their prayers for sustainability. Meanwhile, it was pointed out by some that capacity building in areas such as organisational and financial management is needed for French NGOs to improve the quality of their work and increase their legitimacy. Moreover, cultural sensitivity and adaptability should be developed, as numerous examples have been seen of poorly adjusted methods and inappropriate behaviour in NGO work with local community based organisations in the South.

### 11.1 The Future of the French NGO Sector

Several informants envisaged a scenario of a radically changed NGO landscape in France: there will be fewer organisations with different types of expertise. Within the next ten years, they expect some types of NGOs to disappear, in particular organisations with paid employees, as it will be increasingly difficult to mobilise the resources to finance the functioning of big organisational structures. However, the strong membership-based organisations will continue in a more professionalised form, but with an increased use of volunteers – and small village associations with local constituencies and twin relationships with villages in the South may also remain. One respondent predicted that the NGO sector will no longer exist in 20 years, as they will be replaced by other types of development actors. Even internationally, the space for NGOs may shrink drastically, and they will no longer have a place among the

implementers, as donors are more likely to use specialised private companies and consultancies in the South for direct delivery by the local well-educated élites that are taking over more and more development work. Several respondents saw a need for French NGOs to engage more in the international debate, exchange and co-operation, especially at the European level. More co-ordinated capacity building efforts should take place, including both Northern and Southern Europe, as this was perceived to be the only way to create a united force and build the capacity to influence international policy-making. Such co-ordination might also lead to more integrated development efforts in the South.

## 11.2 Future Capacity Building Efforts in the South

The diversity which characterises the French NGO sector is reflected in the different perceptions of the direction which capacity building should take in the future. While organisations with a strong emphasis on partnership and relationship building seek to help their partners become self-sustainable, and expect to concentrate their efforts on advocacy, networking and policy influencing in the future, organisations undertaking field operations see it as crucial to keep sending out expatriates to provide assistance. However, rather than operating in isolation, these organisations envisage future efforts to co-operate with local groups, build the capacity of local organisations and increase their autonomy. Even those organisations seeking to become more involved in advocacy work highlighted the need to remain in continuous contact with the field to avoid becoming disconnected, and continue to base their work on analysis of developments and challenges in the field.

CIMADE pointed to the fact that the third sector in the South is evolving rapidly. Southern NGOs are becoming stronger, more aware of their needs, and very direct in their requests to Northern NGOs for specific capacity building efforts and support. Increasingly, initiatives to create NGO networks are taken in the South, and hence, NGOs as a group are able to learn from each other and influence policy-making. The internet is another source of dissemination and exchange which is being used by Southern NGOs to build their own capacities. CIEDEL and GRET felt that the best way for French NGOs to complement and support the work of their Southern partners in the future would be to focus on methodological and thematic innovation, not least in the area of capacity building, and further develop the research and learning dimension. They also pointed out that the experience of practitioners both in France and in the South should be recognised and analysed, and that lessons should be learned from organisational and structural change in the South.

Other trends for capacity building in the South as well as areas in which efforts ought to be intensified were mentioned by different informants. IRAM emphasised the need to strengthen both informal organisations that do good work, but go unnoticed because they have no official status, and more professional local organisations (whether NGOs or private consultancies) that may contribute to capacity building of other local organisations in the long term. French official development assistance has recently been granted to capacity building programmes with this aim, but it is still very rare. According to GRET, the relationship between state, market and civil society is shifting in the South, and capacity building may need to be provided to strengthen the state as

an institution and improve its relationship with other actors. CIEDEL emphasised the importance for NGOs of taking more part in collective development efforts together with other actors such as schools and hospitals. The emergence of new faith-based organisations, especially Islamic associations, and the return to a stronger focus on religious values for those organisations that have taken a more secular turn, was perceived by Médecins du Monde who have seen examples of this in Eastern European countries such as Bosnia. This tendency was highlighted as a factor that should not be ignored in future capacity building efforts. Another new development is the transition between emergency situations and longer-term development in areas like the Middle East and the Balkans. In this regard, Médecins du Monde expressed the need for new types of capacity building interventions that take their point of departure in this transitional environment (CCD Plenary Session December 2003).

## 12. Concluding Remarks

The perception of capacity building among French NGOs is clearly one of efforts aiming to strengthen the weak capacity and limited competencies of groups of individuals in the South. In many cases, these groups of individuals belong to Southern NGOs, but frequently they work in associations, informal community groups, or local government institutions. The idea of applying the capacity building concept in the French context does not resonate with most informants, possibly because they see their organisations as highly professional organisations with specialist staff. However, there is widespread agreement that French NGOs need to improve their competencies and systems in areas such as monitoring and evaluation, fundraising and resource mobilisation – activities that may help them increase legitimacy, build stronger constituencies, and convince the State and multilateral donors to continue to provide funding to NGOs. The urgency of enhancing performance in these areas is exacerbated by the fact that public opinion in France is turning its focus to domestic social problems, and hence away from overseas development issues. It should be noted that some informants did realise the implications of such developments for the longer-term sustainability of French NGOs. These informants highlighted the importance of strengthening the internal organisation and revisiting the strategic visions of French NGOs, but they also emphasised the need to encourage innovation, and enter into collaboration with actors outside the NGO sector.

Systematised lesson-learning from experiences in the field and improved dissemination of the findings (i.e. *capitalisation*) is another form of capacity strengthening which most informants wished to see developed further in the future. However, it is interesting to see that such activities are already in place in several NGOs. As this is an area of consensus, there may be a potential to build on existing initiatives through increased exchange and co-ordination between French NGOs. However, it appears to be crucial to move away from an exclusive focus on *systems* for learning (e.g. systems for thematic cross-learning across departments), and recognise that behavioural change and the processes through which learning is acquired are as important. Systems will have little impact, unless staff are encouraged to learn individually and collectively

through incentives such as the attribution of adequate resources and time, and through organisational learning processes led by internal or external change agents through the entire learning cycle. It would seem that a particular blockage lies in taking the step from lesson-gathering to applying such lessons in practice, and hence a stronger emphasis needs to be placed on *valorisation*, i.e. performance improvement based on these lessons.

Meanwhile, internal organisational change appears to be a sensitive and confidential issue in the French context. It is interesting to see that Coordination SUD is not planning to look at such questions in the first phase of their strategy for the capacity building of French NGOs. Raising awareness about organisational capacity building activities taking place in other parts of Europe may be a useful way to make French NGOs realise that capacity building inside their organisations might help trigger change and improvement. Moreover, it might encourage NGO staff to look more critically and constructively at how to contribute to transforming their own organisations, and participate actively in organisational change processes rather than leaving this to senior management, as is currently the case.

The unified affirmation by all informants that capacity building is an Anglophone concept may explain why capacity building takes place more frequently as an integrated part of development efforts rather than as a separate and hence more visible activity. On the other hand, there is a definite push towards incorporating capacity building more explicitly in the strategies and structures of the French NGOs as illustrated by the capacity building posts which have been created in several organisations in the last couple of years. This is likely to be related to donor conditions and the encouragement by the French government of such initiatives, but it may also be a result of increasing (although still limited) French NGO participation in international networks.

Whether there is a French NGO approach to capacity building is a matter of definition. It would seem that certain cultural and contextual factors have significantly influenced the strategic focus of NGO activities such as the strong emphasis on partnership and solidarity, as well as the historically distant and ambiguous relationship with the State. It may also be argued that the differences in working methods indicated by the informants are culturally determined: the French process-orientation and concurrent emphasis on control versus a more pragmatic and outcome-oriented 'anglophone' approach; the French focus on individual competency development versus an 'anglophone' approach of collective learning.

The author hopes with this paper to have provided some insights into capacity building, as it is understood and applied in the French NGO sector as well as by French NGOs operating in the South. Much can be learned from the multiple French experiences in setting up and sustaining North–South partnerships built on reciprocity and trust. Furthermore, the emphasis of French NGOs on integrating capacity building into community development by being less exclusive about who they provide support to and co-operate with in the specific development contexts may also inspire NGOs from other countries to reflect on the way in which they include communities when implementing capacity building activities.

While the key purpose of this study was to explore capacity building issues, a positive side effect has been the establishment of initial contacts between INTRAC and French NGOs, notably via Coordination SUD, which will hopefully lead to further exchanges on the topic. As revealed by the interviews, little co-operation is currently taking place between anglophone and francophone NGOs, and French NGOs are only now beginning to take part in international exchanges. However, it would seem that there are many shared areas of concern; similar pressures from donors, and similar fears about the future and sustainability of the NGO. Increased co-operation between NGOs from different countries might lead to better co-ordination in the field, and help promote opportunities for learning and innovation. Moreover, greater involvement in international networks might place NGOs in a better position to argue their case to donors and engage in policy-influencing at the international level.

It is also clear that the dissemination of lessons from capacity building experiences needs to be enhanced (e.g. by improving access to such information or expanding the number and types of dissemination channels, for instance through increased dissemination on the web) – even more importantly, the application of lessons in practice must be encouraged. This paper has exemplified how important lessons can be learnt through studies of non-anglophone approaches to capacity building. A greater emphasis should be placed on translation in order to facilitate mutual learning at an international level; provide more equal opportunities for dissemination worldwide; and reduce the anglophone dominance in the capacity building arena.

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## Appendix: Guide d'entretien, Octobre 2003

### Le renforcement de capacités effectué par et dans les ONG françaises

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Organisation:

Personnes interviewées:

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**Q1:** Que signifie pour vous l'expression 'renforcement de capacités'?

- capacités des individus, des organisations, de la société civile?
- en France, dans les pays en voie de développement?

(d'autres expressions similaires ou équivalentes? développement institutionnel, renforcement des organisations, 'capacity building'...)

Comment traduire 'capacity building' en français?

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**Q2:** Quels sont les acteurs principaux en France qui travaillent dans ce domaine (théorie/pratique)? - ONG, instituts de recherche, autres?

**Q3:** Quels sont les thèmes actuels dans le domaine du renforcement de capacités parmi les ONG françaises?

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**Q4:** Que fait votre organisation pour renforcer les capacités des ONG/ des associations du Sud? (organisations paysannes, associations villageoises rurales et urbaines, autres? - sur le plan individuel et organisationnel, dans la société?)

Ce renforcement, est-il général ou lié à des thèmes particuliers?

- capacités techniques des individus? (dans quels domaines?)
- développement des ressources humaines? (comment?)
- structures et procédures?
- gestion et stratégie?
- relations externes?
- adaptation aux changements dans l'entourage/ l'environnement?
- processus de changement dans l'organisation?

Et par quelles méthodes? (formations, conférences, stages, ateliers...)

**Q5:** Ces activités, constituent-elles une partie intégrante de vos activités dans les secteurs et les projets de développement, ou sont-elles effectuées de manière indépendante?

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**Q6:** Que fait votre organisation pour renforcer les capacités internes de votre propre organisation?

**Q7:** Qui vous assiste dans ces activités?

- Une institution externe ou des experts externes? (gouvernement/ bailleurs de fond, institut de recherche (universitaire ou indépendant)/ ONG ou organisation à but non-lucratif spécialisée)
  - Un département interne ou des experts internes?
- 

**Q8:** Quelles sont les similarités et les différences entre les besoins de renforcement apparus dans les différents *pays en voie du développement* avec lesquels vous travaillez?

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**Q9:** Quelles sont les similarités et les différences entre les besoins de renforcement apparus parmi les différentes *organisations* avec lesquelles vous travaillez?

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**Q10:** Que signifie pour vous le terme 'partenariat'?

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**Q11:** Pourriez-vous décrire les partenariats que vous avez avec les ONG/ organisations professionnelles ou paysannes/ associations de base dans le Sud?

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**Q12:** Jusqu'à quel point vos activités de développement sont décentralisées/ effectuées par les organisations du Sud?

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**Q13:** Quels besoins et quelles stratégies de renforcement sont apparus à cause de cette collaboration ou partenariat?

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**Q14:** Pourriez-vous décrire brièvement ainsi qu'expliquer l'évolution dans le domaine du renforcement de capacités dans le secteur des Organisations de Solidarité Internationale en France?

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**Q15:** Comment voyez-vous l'avenir dans ce domaine, dans le contexte francophone et en général?

**Q16:** Quelles capacités seront importantes pour les organisations du Sud et du Nord dans l'avenir?

**Q17:** Quelles sont les différences entre les approches de capacity building anglophones et francophones?

## Praxis Papers No. 1

# Capacity Building from a French Perspective

By Mia Sorgenfrei

This Praxis Paper aims to fill a gap in the capacity building literature by depicting how French NGOs perceive the notion of capacity building, and how they apply the concept in practice. It provides a synthesis of current capacity building needs, trends and challenges in France and in the South. Partnership and capacity building are perceived as two inseparable concepts, as capacity building is seen by the French as an activity undertaken in the South. Capacities are strengthened as an integral part of development efforts, mainly to improve project implementation by Southern actors, while few actual capacity building strategies are pursued in practice. French NGOs include a variety of local actors in capacity building activities rather than exclusively supporting Southern NGOs. Capacity building is perceived by French NGOs as an Anglophone concept. However, NGOs have had little exposure to Anglophone approaches to capacity building, and there is scope for more exchange in the future.

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