

IDR Reports

Research and Education to Promote Voluntary Action for Just and Sustainable Development

1993 Volume 10, No. 4

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SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS WITH ASIAN NONGOVERNMENTAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

by L. David Brown

L. David Brown is President of the Institute for Development Research and Professor of Organizational Behavior at Boston University. This paper was written for a Special Issue of Human Relations. This paper owes much to the comments of Jane Covey, Mark Leach, and Rajesh Tandon, who have also been key to the creation of the IDR Fellows Program. The comments and challenges of my colleagues in the Special Issue and the reviewers for Human Relations have also been extremely helpful. The Ford Foundation has supported the Fellows Program and other efforts to strengthen the voluntary development sector.

ABSTRACT

"Participatory action research" has been acclaimed for producing new knowledge as well as solutions to organizational and social problems. But the term has quite different meanings to different audiences: The "Southern" tradition is committed to community transformation through empowering disenfranchised groups; the "Northern" tradition is concerned with reforming organizations through problem-solving. This paper describes a series of collective reflections that brought together leaders of development agencies from Southern and Northern settings to consider the roles of nongovernmental development organizations (NGOs) in promoting sustainable development. The results of these reflections, in terms of new knowledge and new action strategies, are illustrated. Critical processes for such collective reflection, including the management of value and ideological differences, the definition of participation, and the organization of joint inquiry are discussed. The paper also discusses the implications of such reflections for redefining the social realities of key actors in the development drama, and so catalyzing major changes in development theory and action through relatively small interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Almost ten years ago, a colleague and I characterized action research and participatory research as traditions of inquiry grounded in different ideologies and political economies, even though they often utilized similar methods (Brown and Tandon, 1983). We argued that both approaches could be useful, given the right context.

In the ensuing decade many researchers have written about "participatory action research," implying a synthesis of the two traditions. Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) and Whyte, Greenwood, and Lazes (1991) have recently described participatory action research as an activity that generates new knowledge and constructive change. But the two volumes also demonstrate that the traditions remain separate. Rahman and Fals-Borda emphasize conscientizing and empowering the oppressed to achieve community transformations and social justice in developing countries. Whyte *et al.* emphasize improving organizational performance and generating social science theory in industrialized countries. They share only one reference in their bibliographies; Whyte *et al.* do not cite work of Rahman or Fals-

Borda; Rahman and Fals-Borda mention Whyte *et al.* in a footnote (1991, p. 34). The two traditions continue to operate in different intellectual as well as geographic worlds.

Are the traditions fundamentally at odds? Or can they inform and enrich each other? They differ in several important ways, including their levels of analysis and their theories of social change. The "Southern," developing country tradition of participatory action research is concerned with understanding and changing communities and societies, while the "Northern," industrialized country tradition has been more concerned with work groups and organizations.¹ The Southern tradition has been committed to working with grassroots groups to promote fundamental social transformations, while the Northern tradition has worked with organizational decision-makers to support organizational reform. Thus the two traditions fit in different cells of Table 1.

Table 1: Differences in Level of Analysis and Change Theory

	Reform from the Top	Transformation from the Bottom
Organizations	Organizational Reform (Northern Tradition)	Organizational Transformation
Communities and Societies	Societal Reform	Societal Transformation (Southern Tradition)

These differences help explain why the Northern and Southern traditions do not interact with each other. Differences in level of analysis and change theory make communication difficult. In addition, these differences are associated with quite different ideological perspectives: The Southern tradition identifies with oppressed grassroots groups and rejects organizational reforms that may prop up unjust societies; the Northern tradition is more concerned with contributions to scientific knowledge and rejects grassroots work that is "unscientific" or excessively radical.

Some problems, however, require work at both the organizational and societal levels and involve both powerless and powerful constituencies. The process of inquiry described in this paper brought together researchers and activists from Northern and Southern countries to explore how nongovernmental development organizations (NGOs) can contribute to just and sustainable development. The participants in these "collective reflections" grappled with theory and practice at both organizational and societal levels. The paper will examine the results of this inquiry, in terms of new theory and knowledge and new action options, and the processes for addressing the special problems posed by participatory action research with such diverse participants and purposes.

The next section describes briefly some issues that are important in combining the two traditions. The paper then describes the collective reflections of the Asian NGO Leadership Fellows Programs, the results of those reflections for knowledge and action, and key processes in the reflections.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND: COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS

In some circumstances constructive change can be catalyzed by interaction among groups with different interests and perspectives, particularly when problems have proved intractable to ordinary forms of social problem-solving (see Gray, 1989; Brown, 1991). The collective reflections described here focus on the roles of NGOs in promoting sustainable grassroots development. They resemble the Southern tradition of participatory action research in their commitment to fostering social transformations that strengthen grassroots groups; they resemble the Northern tradition in bringing together diverse participants to work together on problems.

As a form of participatory action research the collective reflections should produce two kinds of results: (1) new concepts, theories and knowledge about NGO roles in development, and (2) new strategies and action options that can solve development problems. The participation of different constituencies potentially allows use of a wider range of resources, information and perspectives than would otherwise be available, but it also introduces new challenges (e.g., Greenwood, 1991).

These collective reflections must cope with at least three issues that are not treated in detail by either tradition. First, bringing together diverse groups requires dealing with differences in values and ideological standpoints. The importance of values and ideologies in research that is linked to action is recognized in both the Northern (e.g., Rapaport, 1970) and Southern (e.g., Hall, 1972) traditions. The Southern tradition is explicitly committed to social equity, self-determination, democratic participation, and the reinforcement of popular knowledge. The Northern tradition is more concerned -- often implicitly -- with organizational problem-solving and efficiency, and with the development of social science (see Brown and Tandon, 1983). Exploring and managing such differences is central to joint inquiry by diverse participants.

A second issue is defining the boundaries of participation. The two traditions agree on the importance of participation, but participation by whom? The Southern tradition includes poor and oppressed groups and excludes elites; the Northern tradition includes organizational leaders and others relevant to the problems at issue. Large-scale social change may involve participation by a wide range of participants, but too much diversity can undermine effective inquiry or action. Defining the right combination of participants is very important.

A third issue is organizing and managing joint inquiry. Any research activity needs the support and guidance of some social infrastructure. Research in the Northern tradition is often guided by norms and structures established by participating organizations and research methods, sometimes modified by negotiations between researchers and organizational participants (e.g., Whyte *et al.*, 1991; Clark, 1976). These norms and structures help to define problems, regulate the use of information, and allocate power and resources for action. Research in the Southern tradition, in contrast, may have to create new norms and structures that support participation and shared control, since existing expectations tend to promote one-sided dominance of resources and decisions by high-status groups like researchers (Hall, 1981; Tandon, 1981). Involving multiple constituencies in collective reflections can mobilize information and resources that would not otherwise be available (e.g., Goulet, 1989; Cernea, 1989), but it can also challenge the capacity of existing social infrastructures to cope constructively and creatively with differences. Collective reflections by multiple constituencies needs social infrastructures that enable "democratic dialogue" (Gustavsen, 1985) or "bridging" functions (Brown, 1991) across political, economic and cultural chasms.

These issues -- differing values and ideologies, the boundaries of participation, and the organization of joint inquiry -- can undermine participatory action research that tries to combine Northern and Southern traditions. We will return to discussing these issues in a later section.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis focuses on collective reflections in the Asian NGO Leadership Fellows Program at the Institute for Development Research (IDR). These reflections brought together researchers and activists from Northern and Southern settings. The reflections were intended to promote frank exchanges of views and explorations of alternatives. It was hoped that they would catalyze the emergence of new perspectives on the roles of NGOs in social change and development. While the participants in the reflections were individuals, they all held leadership positions with the potential for significant influence on key NGOs and NGO communities in their countries. This paper examines both the processes of collective reflection and their results for individuals, their organizations, and larger networks of NGOs.

Data on the processes of collective reflection were generated from participant observation by IDR staff, who convened and facilitated them. Further information about those processes has been gathered from interviews with participants and by evaluation questionnaires administered at the end of the Program.

Data on results comes from several sources: participant observation, presentations on Fellows' future plans, evaluation questionnaires, and ongoing correspondence and meetings. IDR's Program Director also visited Fellows in their countries in the summer of 1991 to discuss Program long-term impacts. He met with two-thirds of the Fellows and discussed the Program's impacts on them, their organizations, and the NGO sectors in their countries. These data have all contributed to the descriptions of the Fellows Programs that follows.

COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS IN THE FELLOWS PROGRAMS

The Asian NGO Leadership Fellows Programs were created to strengthen key NGOs doing innovative work in developing countries. The Programs provided a one-month sabbatical for chief executives of NGOs. They offered Fellows an opportunity to reflect on the strategies of their NGOs, the evolution of the NGO sector in their countries, and their own development as leaders. They also provided chances for dialogues with policy makers from international NGOs (e.g., OXFAM-America, CARE) and development agencies (e.g., World Bank, U.S. Agency for International Development, UN Development Program) about key issues of development policy and strategy. The Program was devised by the Institute for Development Research (IDR), an independent, non-profit research and education center organized to strengthen voluntary action for economic development and social justice.

IDR began to provide consulting and research support to development NGOs in the early 1980s. By the late 1980s many agencies began to recognize the potential of NGOs for making important contributions to grassroots development in developing countries, especially in organizing and empowering poor populations (Drabek, 1987; Paul & Israel, 1991). After conferring with several NGO leaders about the need for some sort of sabbatical program that would encourage experienced NGO leaders to reflect on their experience and plan future strategies, IDR secured funding for two pilot Fellows Programs from the Ford Foundation. IDR hoped that the Program would enable NGOs to use their scarce resources more strategically, and so multiply their impacts in catalyzing sustainable grassroots development.

The Program was designed as a mutual education seminar, in which diverse participants could learn from each other in collective reflections. Thirty-four Fellows from six countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand) participated in the four Programs described here. Collective reflections were free-flowing discussions, facilitated by IDR staff or by Fellows, that focused on topics like NGO strategies, or the evolution of the NGO sector in Bangladesh, or the policies of the World Bank. Most reflections involved Fellows and IDR staff; others were dialogues with representatives of Northern NGOs or development agencies as well.

Figure 1 portrays the immediate participants in the Fellows Program -- Fellows and IDR staff. Dialogues involved even more diverse participants, usually with IDR staff in a mediating role. The Programs were expected to affect the Fellows, most directly, but it was also expected that the Fellows' subsequent activities would affect their NGOs and the NGO sectors in their countries, as indicated by the arrows. It was also expected that the Programs might influence IDR's activities with other NGOs and development agencies, as indicated by the arrows.

The First Fellows Program: April, 1988

The first Program brought together ten leaders of national and regional associations of development NGOs, selected and recruited through contact with leaders in the Asian NGO community. IDR staff met most of them at a conference in Thailand a few months prior to the Program, and some of them had read IDR staff publications..

Discussions in the Program initially focused on Fellows' organizations and their strategies for the future. IDR staff consulted with Fellows in group meetings and as individuals about strategic issues or organizational problems. These discussions sparked a lot of ideas and were seen as useful, but stressful, by the Fellows. Some Fellows expressed concern about how IDR staff might use the information revealed in these discussions, and some were uncomfortable with the challenging quality of the consultation process. IDR staff realized that the lack of experienced consultants foreclosed individual consultation to many grassroots organizations, and they began to think about other ways to make support for reformulating NGO strategies more widely available.

Several world-renowned academic experts participated in Program discussions, but the Fellows largely ignored those who gave long lectures. The Fellows attended the annual Forum of InterAction (the umbrella organization of U.S. international development NGOs) and a university conference on the future of U.S. development assistance. IDR organized meetings with representatives of development agencies (e.g., UNDP, the World Bank, USAID) to discuss NGO roles in development. The Fellows were startled by the widespread naivete about grassroots realities in Asia, and they were repelled by the "the money-hungry" emphasis on finances instead of the problems of the poor. They pressed IDR to undertake work beyond consultation and support to Southern NGOs: "You must educate Northern agencies whose policies may otherwise wipe out all our work."

The Program also provided opportunities for Fellows to reflect on their own experience and to plan for their personal development. Some Fellows found these reflections very useful; others found it difficult to engage in personal reflections in such an unfamiliar setting. The Program climaxed with discussions of Fellows' plans for action on returning home. IDR and the Fellows concluded that strategic thinking about NGO roles was valuable, and that more ideas were needed about the evolution of the NGO sector. The Fellows pressed IDR to put more emphasis on influencing Northern development policies, and IDR staff agreed to think more about IDR's role.

The Second Fellows Program: September, 1988

The second Program brought together eight Fellows from NGOs engaged in grassroots development work. Many of them were recommended by previous Fellows, and virtually all had talked to past Fellows before accepting the invitation. Early discussions emphasized NGO strategies and theories of social change. These Fellows requested more discussion of NGO leadership and organization issues. IDR staff had prepared written materials to facilitate strategy formulation, and some Fellows began to consult with each other as well as with IDR staff.

The issue of sector development was raised with special emphasis by the Fellows from Thailand. They believed that building a sector-wide strategy was essential to strengthening the roles of NGOs in Thailand's development. Their analysis stimulated much discussion among Fellows and IDR staff.

IDR organized a day-long dialogue with policy-makers from development agencies and a similar dialogue with leaders of international NGOs. The Fellows criticized international NGO projects in their regions that emphasized service or relief rather than empowerment and self-reliance. In one memorable dialogue, the Program Director of a large international NGO denied heatedly any need for that organization to have a social change theory. This position was no surprise to the Fellows, who saw her agency as committed to maintaining the status quo rather than promoting development.

Fellows in the second Program became a rather cohesive group. They created a norm of sharing dinners in each others' rooms, and the Program moved to an isolated retreat center for a weekend for personal reflections. This move provided an opportunity for Fellows to cook meals, keep house, and generally live "family style." The resulting relationships encouraged frank exchanges and consultations.

For future Programs the Fellows recommended more "family-style" living. They also encouraged IDR to articulate theories and policies that would support NGO contributions to development. The reactions of the Fellows convinced IDR and the Ford Foundation to undertake a third Program and to explore other ways to support NGO sector development.

The Third Fellows Program: April, 1989

Fellows for the third Program were quite diverse in experience and interests. The Fellows from the Philippines, for example, led national coalitions concerned about national and regional policies. The Fellows from Thailand, in contrast, were grassroots organizers interested in village-level development. That diversity contributed to communication difficulties among Fellows and between Fellows and IDR staff. Questions about each others basic values and ideologies persisted even late in the Program.

In an effort to simplify learning about strategy, IDR staff developed a workbook that Fellows could use to assess their own organizations. The Fellows criticized the workbook as "too mechanical," but they also seemed more comfortable with strategic concepts and more able to consult to each other on strategic issues than previous Fellows.

Discussions of the role of NGO sectors were intense in this Program, and many Fellows expressed interest in NGO influence on national policy. The Fellows from the Philippines stressed the importance of building coalitions across ideological and sectoral differences to enable the NGO sector to influence national development.

Fellows in the third Program visited Canadian international NGOs and development agencies. The Fellows also met with Canadian grassroots activists, and later lobbied IDR for opportunities to meet with US activists. The Fellows again attended the annual InterAction Forum to meet leaders of international NGOs. They joined with leaders of other Southern NGOs at the Forum to write the "Danvers Declaration," which called on the World Bank to support NGO conferences independent of InterAction and other Northern agencies. A dialogue with senior Bank officials was scheduled for a few days later at IDR. The Fellows presented the Danvers Declaration and were initially greeted with a stony silence. After invitations to speak frankly, one Bank representative told the Fellows, "You haven't done your homework! It's politically impossible for us to do what you're asking." A heated discussion clarified some of the constraints and possibilities for Bank support of NGOs, and culminated in a vote of thanks for his openness about pressures that shape Bank policies.

The Fellows and IDR staff agreed that future Programs should emphasize strengthening the NGO sector as well as strengthening specific organizations. Later that year IDR and two Asian partner organizations proposed a program to strengthen NGO sectors by (1) continuing the Fellows Programs for two more years, with emphasis on NGO sector development, (2) capacity-building with NGO's that provide support (e.g., training, research) to grassroots development organizations, (3) case studies and conferences about networks of NGOs and people's organizations that influence national policies, and (4) NGO leadership development programs in South and Southeast Asia. The Ford Foundation agreed to support these activities over the next three years.

The Fourth Fellows Program: April, 1990

The fourth Program recruited leaders of national NGO sectors. Discussions again addressed organizational strategies but increased emphasis on the evolution of NGO sectors. Previous Fellows had asked for earlier discussion of "where people stand", and IDR staff proposed that participants introduce themselves by describing how they came to be in this work. The author offered a ten-minute description of his history and the Fellows asked follow-up questions ("What did your father do?" "What books influenced you?" "Why did you want to go into the Peace Corps?") for an hour. A process planned for one or two hours took two days, but it produced a level of trust that took weeks to develop in previous Programs.

More trust led to more discussion of differences, especially about appropriate strategies. Proponents of services, such as health or income-generation programs (labelled "veg" -- for "vegetarian" -- strategies), were challenged by proponents of more political activities, such as community mobilization or policy advocacy ("non-veg" strategies). It became clear that "veg" strategies could be used for "non-veg" goals, and that insisting on ideological purity could retard the formation of coalitions essential to influencing national policies.

The Fellows again joined leaders of other Southern NGOs at the InterAction Forum to assess Northern policies and challenge InterAction members. After the Forum, the Fellows discussed policy advocacy with U.S. development lobbyists and spent a day with World Bank officials concerned with Asia. The Fellows were frustrated by the difficulties of influencing Northern participants in these dialogues.

The Fellows were intensely interested in meetings with grassroots organizers of poor communities in Boston. They perceived clear similarities in the problems faced by poor people around the world, and suggested that IDR should build links among activists in industrialized and developing countries.

RESULTS OF COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS

Have these collective reflections made a difference? Collective reflections that are successful as participatory action research would be expected to produce new knowledge, such as concepts or theories or explanations, and new action options, such as plans or programs or specific behaviors. The Fellows Programs are intended to catalyze results far beyond the boundaries of the immediate collective reflections. If they succeed, new ideas and new actions may be generated in NGOs and NGO sectors thousands of miles away. The results reported here are necessarily illustrations that may represent the tip of a much larger iceberg.

The collective reflections were particularly prolonged and intense for Fellows and IDR staff, so more conceptual reorientations and changes in action might be expected from them than from participants in the brief dialogues with other Northern organization representatives. Table 2 presents illustrations of theory and action results reported by Fellows, IDR, and dialogue participants.

Table 2: Results of Fellows Programs

Parties	Theory Results	Action Results
Fellows: Personal Organization NGO sector	New perspectives on personal development. New concepts of NGO and sector leadership. NGO strategy and organization can multiply social change impacts. NGO sector is important actor in national development. Capacities of strong NGO sector.	Create and act on personal development plans. Take on sector leadership roles. Refocus NGO strategies. Reorganize NGOs to carry out strategies. Build support organizations. Build national networks. Seek policy influence.
IDR: Education Research Consulting	Recognize limits of consulting model and need for capacity-building. Northern policy as critical element of sustainable change NGO sector as key component of democratic civil society policy.	Develop strategy workbooks. Encourage Fellows as co-consultants. Policy research on roles of development NGOs. Consult with key sectoral NGOs. Strengthen NGO sector support organizations.
Dialogue Participants:	Recognize potential of NGOs for promoting development.	Build relationships with key NGO leaders. Invite NGOs to join in project design and implementation.

Did the collective reflections alter Fellows as individuals? Many Fellows reported substantial changes in the ways they understood the organization of their NGOs, their strategies, and the possibilities of sector-wide action. Some of these changes are described in the context of organizational and sectoral change below. Some Fellows also reconceptualized their own roles as leaders of development NGOs. Several decided in the course of the Program to pursue further education, given the leadership demands they foresaw in the immediate future. Others revised their views of how NGOs could influence national and international policies and took on new roles. One Fellow became the coordinator of a nation-wide coalition of NGOs in the Philippines; another now convenes an international network of NGOs concerned with Indonesian development policy; several are developing regional networks of NGOs and grassroots organizations in India. Some Fellows from each country have moved from organizational to sectoral leadership responsibilities; one has taken a leave from her NGO to help start a worldwide network of NGOs concerned with sustainable development.

At the organizational level, Fellows' NGOs have also been affected by ideas and action options generated in the Programs. New perspectives on NGO strategy and organization have provided the base for new initiatives. One Indian Fellow, for example, refocused his NGO's strategy to attack ecological problems that constrain local food production, and organized a coalition of local NGOs to promote more ecologically sustainable development activities. A Fellow from Indonesia encouraged his organization to foster the development of small NGOs rather than proliferate its own programs to serve many diverse regional groups. Almost all the Fellows carried home new ideas about what their organizations might do to increase their development impacts.

Other Fellows changed their views of the NGO sector and the importance of building sector capacity, creating coalitions, and influencing national policy. In Thailand, for example, a coalition of Fellows promoted links between grassroots organizations and a national NGO network and mobilized international resources to support NGO sector development. Fellows from the Philippines built alliances across ideological differences that fragmented that NGO community, and fostered joint initiatives among Philippine NGOs on issues like environmental problems, voter education, and land reform. Fellows have helped shape the NGO community's role in the democratic transition in Bangladesh. Many Fellows participated in the Voluntary Action Network in India, which has taken initiatives to influence government policy, to coordinate donor policies, and to educate the Indian public about voluntary action for social development. In short, collective reflections in the Fellows Programs have stimulated new perspectives on the roles of NGOs, and the Fellows have elaborated and acted on those perspectives within their national contexts.

IDR began the Fellows Program on the theory that consultations could improve NGO strategies and capacities and so promote constructive social change. That theory has been elaborated and transformed by collective reflections, and IDR's subsequent activities reflect those changes. For example, IDR staff recognized existing organizational consultant resources could not meet the potential demand, so IDR fostered co-consultation in the Fellows Programs, limited IDR consultations to a few important NGOs, developed materials to train NGO leaders and consultants on strategy and organizational change, and promoted the development of NGO support organizations to work with grassroots NGOs. In essence the collective reflections helped to move IDR from a focus on building organizations to a focus on strengthening civil society and the role of NGOs as a sector (see Bratton, 1989; Wolfe, 1989).

IDR's theory of social change was challenged by Fellows for too little emphasis on Northern policy-makers. IDR expanded its strategy to include a "North-facing" component, and undertook analyses of the development roles of NGOs and their implications for major donors (e.g., Brown & Korten, 1991). As collective reflections focused on the importance of NGO sector evolution, IDR revised its social change theory to emphasize sector development as much as organization development. As a result IDR undertook programs to strengthen NGO sector support organizations (Brown and Tandon, 1990), to learn about strategic networks, to analyze collaborative problem-solving between NGOs, people's organizations, governments, and international agencies (Brown and Tandon, 1991), and to build capacity for NGOs to influence national and international policies.

The dialogues were brief and their participants are subject to myriads of influences. Nonetheless, reactions of some dialogue participants suggest that participation stimulated new ideas and actions. The World Bank, for example, has sent senior staff representatives to all the dialogues, repeatedly invited Fellows to visit the Bank, asked several Fellows to join the World Bank-NGO Liaison Committee, and supported and published IDR research on the

development roles of NGOs. The Bank has dramatically increased the participation of NGOs in its projects over the last several years (Beckmann, 1991: 137). InterAction, the umbrella organization of U.S. PVOs, has invited increasing numbers of Southern NGOs to participate in the Forum guest roles pioneered by the Fellows, and has invited past Fellows to help plan future Forums. Program dialogues with leaders of Canadian NGOs stimulated invitations for Fellows to visit Canadian NGOs and government agencies, and those dialogues sparked long-term collaborations among Canadian and Philippine NGOs. The dialogues stimulated new ideas and perspectives and some subsequent activities as well.

These collective reflections have not tested new hypotheses or solved well-defined problems, as have some participatory action research projects in the Northern tradition. They have not reappropriated grassroots knowledge or empowered poor villagers for development initiatives, as have some participatory action research projects in the Southern tradition. However, participants in these collective reflections have experienced changes -- sometimes profound reorientations -- in how they understand the roles of development NGOs and how they can act on that understanding. The Programs have stimulated significant reconceptualizations of social change theories and major new strategies and programs for IDR, for many Fellows, and even for some dialogue participants. An unanticipated side effect of the Programs has been a brisk demand for consultations from IDR and from Fellows on how other institutions can carry out similar collective reflections on a variety of topics.

KEY PROCESSES IN COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS

The collective reflections in the Fellows Programs are fleeting and trivial events in the "Asian Drama" (Myrdal, 1972), which involves years of struggle for billions of people. But the Programs have encouraged diverse individuals to share perspectives in ways that significantly affected their subsequent actions -- actions of national leaders in a sector that can play a leading role in the development drama.

This section returns to the special problems of collective reflections that bring together interests and resources as diverse as the Fellows, the IDR staff, and the dialogue participants. It will focus on how the collective reflections managed values and ideological differences, defined and bounded participation, and organized joint inquiry. These issues are central to participatory action research with diverse constituencies on controversial issues like promoting social change.

Values and Ideologies: Negotiating Truces and Solidarity

Differences in values and ideologies can produce destructive conflicts (e.g., Brown and Brown, 1983), and participants in the Fellows Programs were very diverse in their perspectives. The collective reflections depended on negotiating some minimal ideological truce; when participants could find little or no common ground, they argued or withdrew. Thus the Fellows stopped participating in conversations with academic resources seen as too condescending or PVO leaders perceived to be more interested in money than in development. Table 3 presents some of the issues related to value and ideology differences encountered between Fellows, IDR staff, and participants in dialogues.

Table 3: Values and Ideology Differences

	Within the Program	In the Dialogues
First Program	Initial credibility from IDR writing, referrals, direct contacts. "Why are IDR consultants asking these questions?"	Dismiss "money-hungry" NGO leaders and academics. Curiosity about concerns of development agencies.
Second Program	Credibility from referrals by past Fellows Discussion: "Why are you doing this?" "How will IDR consultants use information about our NGOs?"	Challenge to Northern NGOs with no social change theory. Questions about real goals of development agencies, given impacts of national programs.
Third Program	Fellows diverse in ideologies. "Can we discuss basic values and goals?" "How will IDR consultants use information about our NGOs?"	Solidarity with Canadian NGOs. Solidarity with Southern NGOs on Danvers Declaration Challenge of World Bank: "You haven't done your homework!"
Fourth Program	Discussion: "How did I come to do this work?" "Veg" and "non-veg" strategies.	Confront Northern NGOs and USAID at InterAction Forum. Visit and challenge World Bank. Solidarity with US grassroots activists.

Finding common ideological ground between Fellows and IDR was critical to many reflections. Fellows initially "checked out" IDR's credibility from a distance before deciding to come to the Program: They sought referrals from NGO leaders acquainted with IDR; they observed IDR staff in other settings; they asked previous Fellows. The exploration of values and ideologies continued within the Programs. The first Fellows, all leaders of national associations, had considerable international experience and also had opportunities to meet with IDR staff before the Program. They continued to investigate IDR staff perspectives in early discussions of IDR activities. In the second Program, some Fellows asked IDR staff directly, "Why are you doing this?" and provoked an extended discussion of IDR's values and goals. In this Program Fellows also questioned how IDR would use information from collective reflections. The diversity of Fellows in the third Program made it difficult for Fellows to talk to each other, let alone to IDR staff. Eventually Fellows in this Program confronted IDR directly about use of information and called for more discussions of "basic values" and differences as a way of improving trust. Direct discussions of "How I came to this work" in the fourth Program speeded up the exploration of ideological differences and paved the way for more frank debates of issues like "veg" and "non-veg" strategies. Fellows in several Programs reported long discussions of whether IDR staff were particularly subtle CIA employees, but most found it difficult to understand how the Program could be serving the CIA's interests. While reputations and referrals helped bring Fellows and IDR staff

together, direct discussion about values and ideologies were critical to building mutual understanding and trust. These conversations sometimes enabled parties to negotiate ideological truces across differences; sometimes they generated better mutual trust and a sense of solidarity; on a few occasions they identified differences in culture, wealth and experience that were difficult to surmount.

Finding common ground in the dialogues with other groups was often more difficult. Many participants brought negative reputations and stereotypes of the other parties to the dialogues. For formal meetings that IDR convened and moderated, IDR's credibility with Fellows and guests could be used to focus on key issues and encourage constructive engagement. Even when those dialogues produced considerable heat, as in the confrontation with Bank staff over the Danvers Declaration, the outcomes were often seen as stimulating and constructive by all the parties. In the less formal contacts between Fellows and Northern NGOs or development agencies, as at the InterAction Forum or the university conference of the first Program, Fellows saw the other participants as more interested in money or self-aggrandizement than in development or social justice. A few Fellows raised those concerns directly, but most withdrew in disgust.

It is possible to span differences in values and ideologies, but it is not easy. Reputations and referrals help, especially from credible sources in the NGO community. The Fellows Program experience suggests no substitute for bringing the parties together and exploring their differences in person. When ideological truce or solidarity can be negotiated in face-to-face contacts, the participants can expand exchanges of information and understanding even on controversial and sensitive issues.

Third parties credible to both sides, like IDR in the dialogues, can be useful catalysts and mediators for managing ideological differences. But bridging roles can challenge the values and ideologies of the bridging organization itself. When value and ideological differences are large, participants often pressure third parties to join their positions. IDR staff often felt torn between "fighting" for the oppressed at the risk of alienating Northern participants, and "facilitating" relations with powerful groups at the risk of losing credibility with Southern participants. Pressures on bridging organizations may take subtle or blatant forms of political or financial cooptation (by wealthy and powerful parties) or ideological cooptation (by poor and powerless parties). Helping to span ideological differences calls for bridging organizations to understand the perspectives of all the parties, to articulate common or complementary interests, and to be very clear about their own roles and limitations. IDR staff concluded after some discussion, for example, that strengthening grassroots participation supersedes facilitating communications with Northern agencies, even though the latter remains an important priority.

Defining Approaches and Participants: Widening and Bounding Participation

The Northern and Southern traditions agree that participation is important, but they define who should participate differently. The Southern tradition works primarily with and for poor and oppressed groups, and the Northern often works with any constituencies, including decision-makers, that are relevant to improving organizational performance. In these Programs, IDR has been concerned both with promoting grassroots participation in development, like the Southern tradition, and with promoting joint problem-solving by many diverse participants, like the Northern tradition. The collective reflections, in short, have pursued multiple agendas, to which quite different constellations of participants have been relevant.

Table 4 summarizes the participants involved in the Programs and the dialogues. Quite different participants are relevant to different elements of the Program. In initial discussions of organizational strategies, individual Fellows and IDR consultants were key participants, with other Fellows as observers. In later Programs tools were developed -- consulting groups, strategy workbooks, co-consultations by staff and Fellows -- that enable wider participation in strategy discussions. Initial discussions of NGO sector evolution depended heavily on initiatives from Fellows, since they had most of the relevant information, with supplementary conceptual inputs from IDR staff. IDR staff prepared a self-managed process for personal reflection that was supplemented in later Fellows Programs by personal feedback from other Fellows and IDR staff. Participation deepened, in the sense of dealing with more sensitive and difficult issues, as trust and ideological solidarity increased within the Program. This was particularly true for personal reflections. By the fourth Program, Fellows initiated requests for personal feedback on their leadership skills and problems from other Fellows and IDR staff.

It was often more difficult to create effective participation in the dialogues. In the first Program, although the Fellows enjoyed conversations with some leaders of international NGOs, they generally felt alienated from the "money-hungry" Northern NGO leaders and academics that they met. They agreed that it was important to influence such agencies, but they requested IDR to take on that task. In the second Program Fellows expressed affinity for some of the "empowerment-oriented" Northern NGOs, but they also reiterated the request that IDR take on a liaison role between North and South. In the third Program, Fellows had a series of meetings with Canadian NGOs that produced some continuing collaborations, and they worked with other Southern NGOs at the InterAction Forum to create the Danvers Declaration. The subsequent confrontation with World Bank staff produced some mutual understanding of political pressures on the Bank. These Fellows also pressed IDR for more contact with U.S. grassroots groups to discuss international development issues. By the Fourth Program, Fellows were increasingly challenging Northern NGOs and donors, and increasingly interested in discussions with Northern grassroots groups. As some Fellows summarized in retrospect: "We're tired of using our sabbatical to educate Northern agencies instead of learning things we want to know."

Table 4: Defining Issues and Participants

	Within the Program	In the Dialogues
First Program	Strategy: IDR staff consult to Fellows. Personal: Fellows self-regulate. Sector: Fellows reject lecturers.	Reject "money-hungry" NGOs and academics. Interest in InterAction CEO. Ask IDR to influence Northern policy-makers.
Second Program	Strategy: IDR staff consult and groups co-consult. Sector: Subgroups (Thailand). Personal: All share struggles with life; weekend retreat.	Favor Northern "development" over "relief" NGOs. Encourage IDR analysis of NGO roles for development agencies.
Third Program	Strategy: Workbooks, IDR and other Fellows consult. Sector: All join discussion. Personal: Weekend retreat; more discussion.	Join Southern NGOs to write Danvers Declaration at Forum. Confront World Bank staff and learn about Bank politics. Seek contact with Canadian NGOs and grassroots groups.
Fourth Program	Strategy: IDR and other Fellows consult; debates on types. Sector: Examine world changes; sustainable development. Personal: Group discussions and personal feedback on leadership.	Challenge and dismiss Northern NGOs and World Bank. Join Southern NGOs for Baltimore Declaration. Solidarity with grassroots activists in Boston.

The boundaries of participation in these collective reflections evolved over time. In some cases, participation widened to include new people, as in the expansion of the strategy consultations from a Fellow-consultant pair to include many co-consultants from the Fellows. In some cases participation also deepened to include more difficult and sensitive issues, particularly after the parties came to terms with values and ideology differences. At least two elements appeared to contribute to this widening and deepening.

First, some initial agreement on the problem and the ideological base for participation is important. The Fellows basically did not engage with participants seen as too distant in values and ideologies, such as "money-hungry" NGO leaders. They also did not engage with participants whose interaction styles were very different. Even though they had information of interest to the Fellows, some guest experts made abstract and academic presentations that the Fellows rejected. They also objected to some of the more blunt challenges posed by IDR strategy consultants. In retrospect a key element in widening and deepening

participation appears to be the establishment of mutual respect. The Fellows were willing to engage with World Bank representatives who were quite challenging, once they were invited to be frank, and they tolerated blunt questioning from IDR staff once good relationships had been developed.

Second, decisions about who should be included in collective reflections are influenced by the nature of the problems at hand. Participants that bring skills, information, and other resources relevant to mutually accepted problems may be welcomed, even if they have some stylistic or ideological rough edges. The experience of Fellows from other countries, for example, was often very relevant to developing new NGO strategies and organizations, and the gradual inclusion of more Fellows as co-consultants reflected recognition of that resource. The World Bank representatives offered useful information about the Bank's priorities and political vulnerabilities. By the same token, some dialogues with Northern agency representatives was undermined by a very general mutual education agenda that failed to define important problems for which the participants all brought relevant resources.

The Fellows recognized that some ideologically or stylistically distant actors also possessed critical resources. They did not want to invest their own time and energy to deal with those parties, but they were also reluctant to ignore them. They proposed to engage agencies like the World Bank and USAID through what might be called "delegated" participation: "IDR should invest more resources in influencing the policies of Northern agencies!" This proposal has the advantage of using IDR's resources and access, by training and location, to Northern development agencies, and it appeals to IDR's interest in playing a bridging role. Delegated participation depends on high levels of trust among the parties involved, but it may be an important tool for including many geographically dispersed perspectives in future reflections.

Organizing Joint Inquiry: Mutual Influence and Authorization

Assuming some agreement on values and ideologies and on who should participate in collective reflections, how can they be organized? In the Southern tradition, joint inquiry may require creating organizational arrangements that represent poor and disenfranchised groups or balance the power of high-status researchers (Tandon, 1981; Hall, 1981). For the Northern tradition, joint inquiry may require loosening organizational arrangements of existing systems to release information or enable change (Clark, 1972; Brown, 1980). The Fellows Program called for organization that would facilitate collective reflections by Fellows and IDR staff in the Program, and by even more diverse groups in the dialogues.

Table 5 describes how various activities in the Fellows Programs were organized. IDR took the initial responsibility for organizing Program activities. IDR staff presented the preliminary Program design to the Fellows and requested feedback for changes to better meet their needs. Over time Fellows played increasingly central roles in organizing and managing Program activities. Within Programs Fellows became more active about posing alternatives and raising issues for program and living arrangements. For example, many Fellows found the hotel accommodations too formal. They organized evening meals in each others' rooms and recommended moving future programs to "family-style" accommodations. Fellows encouraged IDR staff to give lectures on topics of special interest and to develop materials, such as the strategy workbook, that would enable Fellows to work independently. They also questioned IDR staff consulting styles and proposed program revisions. Within the Programs a process of mutual influence emerged among Fellows and IDR staff by which the Fellows authorized IDR to organize initial activities and IDR authorized Fellows to revise or elaborate

that design. The resulting collective reflections were a joint product that catalyzed ideas and actions that no one could have predicted at the outset.

Table 5: Organizing Joint Action

	Within the Program	In the Dialogues
First Program	IDR proposes program and invites input from Fellows. Fellows describe NGOs and use IDR strategy consultants.	IDR convenes and moderates formal meetings. Joint preparation and Fellows present Southern issues. Fellows initiate informal contacts.
Second Program	IDR proposes program and invites inputs from Fellows. Fellows co-consult on strategy and lead sector analysis. Fellows organize "family-style" meals and parties.	IDR convenes and moderates formal meetings. Joint preparation and Fellows present issues for discussion. Fellows challenge social change theories of Northern NGOs.
Third Program	IDR inputs on program, sector, and strategy workbook. Fellows co-consult on strategy, lead sector analysis. Fellows manage informal living at retreat center.	IDR organizes formal dialogues. Joint preparation, Fellows present. Fellows initiate grassroots contacts. Fellows organize Southern NGOs at Interaction Forum.
Fourth Program	IDR inputs on program, sector, strategy. Joint analysis of strategies, sector evolution. Fellows manage living at center. Fellows call for personal feedback.	IDR organizes formal dialogues. Joint preparation, Fellows present. Fellows organize Southern NGOs at InterAction Forum. Joint contacts with grassroots groups in Boston.

The dialogues with other actors seldom achieved the same intensity and richness of collective reflections within the Program, given their short duration and the diversity of participants. In spite of these problems, the dialogues did provide new perspectives to many participants. IDR convened and facilitated the formal dialogues with other development actors; others happened informally at conferences and forums. By and large dialogues organized by IDR were more successful than informal contacts, since IDR could prepare participants and facilitate discussions to emphasize issues of interest to both. In such loosely-organized social systems, bridging organizations like IDR can identify important constituencies, convene them under neutral conditions, regulate their interaction, and help interpret and implement shared perspectives (e.g. Brown, 1980; Gray 1989). For the more

informal contacts, between Fellows and Northern development actors, it was easy for loose organization to result in conflict escalation or mutual withdrawal.

The organization of the collective reflections among IDR staff and Fellows was initially proposed by IDR staff. Within and across the Programs, however, responsibility was increasingly shared with Fellows for developing and implementing program activities. Fellows also took responsibility for initiating contacts with grassroots groups, Southern NGOs, and other like-minded groups. To a large extent each Program eventually developed capacities for mutually authorizing initiatives and for mutually influencing decisions that enabled joint choices and shared exploration of important issues. Given a common value and ideological base within the Program and with like-minded other groups, important problems could be defined and explored relatively easily.

The dialogues with more ideologically and experientially-distant agencies depended more on IDR as the convener and facilitator. IDR had ongoing contacts and more understanding of the perspectives of those agencies than most Fellows. IDR was also more committed to promoting constructive dialogue with those agencies than many Fellows, who were inclined to see them as more part of the problem than part of the solution. In retrospect it appears that more organization, as in more definition of important problems that demanded the resources of Fellows and guests, might have enabled these reflections to progress beyond mutual education. The experience with informal contacts between Fellows and other agencies without IDR participation, however, suggests that bridging organizations can play important roles in organizing constructive collective reflections among such diverse participants.

CONCLUSION

Participatory action research in both Northern and Southern traditions generates new theory and knowledge while it promotes practical problem-solving. But the research described here brought together NGO leaders from the South with researchers and policy-makers from the North -- an aggregation quite foreign to both traditions. The resulting collective reflections encouraged both the Fellows and IDR staff to rethink their theories of social change and their action programs.

These collective reflections faced several problems associated with bringing together such diverse participants. Managing differences in values and ideologies is key for collective reflection among diverse groups, and face-to-face exploration and negotiation is probably essential for developing ideological truces or solidarity. Defining the boundaries of participation depends on both mutual respect and recognition of resources relevant to problem-solving among participants. The social infrastructure for joint inquiry needs to allow mutual authorization and mutual influence among participants, and bridging organizations may play important roles in creating such conditions among very diverse participants.

The problems of social change and development often involve complex, ill-defined and loosely-organized constellations of factors and institutions. Conceptual frames are essential to guide the application of inevitably scarce resources to catalyze constructive change in such problems. Concepts and frameworks that provide new perspectives and action options may fundamentally alter development policies and programs. New organizing concepts may be especially critical for intractable problems or at times of rapid change.

Although they vary in their emphases, both the Southern and Northern traditions of participatory action research are concerned with knowledge in the form of answers to specific problems and knowledge as a transformation of consciousness. Collective reflections that bring together leaders with diverse perspectives to examine social change problems are small-scale events that may have large-scale consequences. The norms, expectations and assumptions that shape and give meaning to human behavior -- the "social reality" -- are constructed and maintained through the interactions of social actors (e.g., Berger and Luckmann, 1973; Strauss, 1979). Such social realities at once constrain and enable the

behavior of the people that create and maintain them. Collective reflections can produce the seeds for reconstructing social realities in several ways: They integrate diverse perspectives to generate new understanding; they mobilize diverse resources for new action; they create new relationships among actors who can do things together that they cannot accomplish alone.

The Fellows Programs created new social realities within the Programs and, to a lesser extent, within the dialogues. The reverberations of such events are spread through the social roles of their participants -- and those reverberations may carry far when the participants play leadership roles in catalytic development agencies. Some concepts discussed in the Fellows Program, like the importance of NGO strategy and the need for NGO influence on policy, have become "ideas in good currency" (Schon, 1971) that can affect the lives of millions. Participatory action research that brings together such diverse and strategic constituencies may make important contributions to a more just and sustainable world.

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ENDNOTES

1. For convenience I will use "Northern" and "Southern" to refer to the two research traditions here, but the underlying differences have more to do with power and wealth than with geography. There are "Southern" (poor and powerless) populations in Northern countries as well as "Northern" (rich and powerful) groups in Southern countries.