

Brief Case Study - C.I.R.D.S.

Community Integrated Rural Development works in 18 village development committees in the Dhading District of Nepal. The organization has an impressive track record of projects including the development of two community schools, which operate similar to charter schools with a management committee comprised of parents, a women's savings and credit cooperative with over 300 members, a school for blind students to learn to read braille and several agricultural projects.

C.I.R.D.S. is hampered by a number of factors. As no one on staff can read, write or speak English well, the organization must partner with a larger NGO based in Kathmandu in order to bring its projects to the donors. The NGO in Kathmandu gets a substantial commission and unfortunately maintains all contact and reporting to donors, leaving C.I.R.D.S. in perpetual dependency.

Recently Mountain Fund's executive director, Scott MacLennan, organized a one day workshop for the organization that focused on the mission, vision and goals of the organization. It was quite an eye opener to discover that the organization had really no connection to the mission and vision statements it was using but had been provided by one of the larger, intermediary NGO's it relies on to bring its local projects to the donor market. With no ownership of the mission, vision or goals, the organization isn't able to measure if its actions are relevant within the context of its mission.

Furthermore, as the one-day training progressed it was clear that the staff really did not know anything about westerners and how to present themselves and their projects to donors. That was all being handled by the intermediary NGO for them. There were clearly disconnects about what comprises a project description in the western context. We tried our hand at a summary statement for several and came away with a litany of issues that plague the constituents of the organization but few could articulate how what they proposed to do related to the problem or to their mission.

In addition to learning English, this organization needs to work out a new understanding of its mission and vision and how to recognize the connections between its mission and its actual work. The organization needs a great deal of training as to how to state its goals and objectives in a way that make sense to western minds. In short, it needs basic work on its own identity and a strategic plan to work from or it will always find itself at the mercy of the intermediary NGO who has the donor connections.

One clear downside to the dependency on the intermediary NGO is that truly grassroots, community requested projects are shoved aside in favor of what is the latest hot trend in funding. If HIV is getting funding, C.I.R.D.S. needs to develop and HIV program, with no need having been found in the community or requested by the community but rather the requests are being generated by the intermediary who says, in essence, "I can find money for X, so give me a program for X. That defeats the purpose of strong community based NGO's entirely.