Towards inclusive development,
The power of civil society as changemakers

Report on the DFID launch of PACS and IPAP: 10 December 2009

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) launched its largest civil society projects in India on 10 December 2009 to an audience of over 200 representatives from government, the donor community including World Bank, UN, media, academia and civil society organisations in New Delhi. The event focused on inclusive development and the power of civil society as changemakers. DFID’s two civil society projects, Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme (PACS) and the International NGO Partnerships Agreement Programme (IPAP), represent a UK commitment of £45 million (Rs 360 crores) over the next five years.

Michael Anderson, Head of DFID India, gave the welcome address and, noting that the event took place on International Human Rights Day, stressed that DFID was working in partnership with civil society to support excluded communities to claim their rights and entitlements.

Addressing the audience, Mark Lowcock, Director General, Country Programmes, DFID emphasised that civil society ‘is part of the solution in fighting discrimination and exclusion and realising human potential for all’ and how DFID wishes to partner with them in this process.

Lowcock recounted the story of the discrimination faced by a five year old dalit girl called Sita whom he heard about in Orissa. Whilst Sita is enrolled in school she was not allowed to join her peers in the classroom and instead was made to sit on the veranda of the classroom. ‘For many dalits in India, discrimination is still a daily fact of life,’ he observed. It was the direct intervention from a civil society organisation that has ensured that Sita can now take her rightful place in the classroom.

He outlined the causes of discrimination as arising ‘firstly because of a lack of awareness of rights and entitlements, secondly from a lack of voice for people at the margins and thirdly a lack of responsiveness and accountability on the part of those who wield power whether political or administrative’.
Lowcock noted India’s fine tradition of social activism but understood the challenges that remain in ensuring voice and accountability for excluded communities that face discrimination. Lowcock emphasised DFID’s global commitment to support civil society and went on to articulate the three key roles that DFID sees civil society performing:

- Delivering services where governments cannot or will not, specifically in fragile states, especially in piloting innovations
- Advocating pro-poor policies to governments in particular for ‘those most excluded are often the least willing or able to engage in the political process’, and
- Helping citizens to hold the state to account

He also expressed DFID’s increased expectation on tangible results that deliver transformational change. Equally, he encouraged CSOs to challenge and contest DFID’s [programmes and policies]. He concluded by saying that ‘India has travelled a long way on its development path’ which has translated into better lives for many people but there are a ‘massive set of unmet development challenges that remain.’

Joining Mark Lowcock and Michael Anderson for a panel discussion were Dr Syeda Hameed, Member of India’s Planning Commission, Professor Sukhdev Thorat, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, and Mr Amitabh Behar, Co-convenor of the National Social Watch Coalition.

In her opening remarks, Dr Syeda Hameed wished PACS and IPAP projects well as they forge new partnerships for change across India. Dr Hameed shared her long-term belief in the role of civil society as change makers. Drawing on her experience at the Planning Commission and her visits around the country, Dr Syeda urged that ‘all must demand from your government’ and that ‘people are not aware’ of their rights and entitlements. She shared her experience of visiting Palamu district in Jharkhand and the ‘divide’ between the developed and non-developed was clearly visible. Dr Syeda also affirmed the need to engender the plan and to see it through ‘a gender lens’.

On PACS, she expressed her ambition for the PACS programme to ‘empower people to make their demands’ and to improve access to schemes that ‘deliver for them’.

Professor SK Thorat articulated that the PACS programme recognises that the poor are not a homogenous group and how the denial of rights to certain groups aggravates poverty. Professor Thorat explained that research on the analysis of poverty has demonstrated that one common factor in consistent and chronic poverty is the ‘denial of opportunity on the basis of identity’.
Professor Thorat stressed how the lack of access to education, employment, health and participation in decision-making perpetuates poverty. Professor Thorat saw a vital need for policies and action that go beyond access but also tackle discrimination in employment and education. He illustrated this with the example of women who have buffalos but are unable to sell milk in the market because of the discrimination they face. Addressing CSOs wanting to be part of PACS, he issued them a challenge to ‘think about how they encourage inclusion’. He also said that both PACS and IPAP programmes provide excellent and historic opportunities to address issues of exclusion induced poverty both in public, market and private domains.

In his address, Amitabh Behar highlighted the watchdog role that CSOs have in making states accountable to its citizens and in challenging the structures that perpetuate inequality. He talked to the design of IPAP and PACS and how both projects can address issues of inclusion. He stressed that CSOs have a larger mandate than delivery of services and that their focus should be on enabling people to claim rights and entitlements. Behar spoke about the ‘shame of manual scavenging’ and highlighted the worsening sex ratio in India. He ended his remarks also with a challenge to CSOs to become more inclusive themselves.

Following the opening remarks of the speakers, there followed a lively debate with a series of questions and comments from the audience. One audience member challenged the panel on the issue of dalit girls and women who are doubly discriminated against on account of their gender and caste.

One audience member quoted Dr. Ambedkar whilst emphasising the need for achieving equality in political, economic and social areas and how the discrimination faced by excluded communities in the land and market need to be addressed. Another member requested the panel to see how Special Economic Zones (SEZs), in India, are displacing the poor and excluded from their land.

The event, managed by the IFIRST consortium, concluded with an exhibition where visitors could find out more about the IPAP and PACS programmes. Exhibition stands from IPAP’s seven international NGOs – ActionAid, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children, Skillshare International, VSO and WaterAid – highlighted their focus areas that include children, disability, social exclusion of adivasis and dalits, violence against women, and water and sanitation.

The PACS exhibition stand highlighted the goal of the programme to reduce the welfare gap between women and socially excluded communities, and the general population with the aim of improving the
uptake of entitlements by five million socially excluded people and their households in 120 targeted districts across seven states.