

Afterword

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In the final session at the workshop participants discussed some of the issues that they felt had consistently stood out during the course of the previous two days, and focused in particular on what ideas they felt most challenge INGOs' organisation and practice. Some of these issues corresponded quite closely to the questions identified before the workshop and which are summarised in the introduction. Others, however, emerged during the course of the workshop. We have grouped issues from both these categories into five thematic areas:

- Approaches to ethics
- Expectations, roles and obligations of different actors and stakeholders
- Collective challenges and moral divisions of labour
- Accountability, knowing and communicating what works and what does not
- Purpose, direction and ethical challenges for INGOs

We will finish by summarising some thoughts about these themes. We should, emphasise that these ideas are not put forward as conclusions reached by the workshop participants – it was never our intention to try to reach such conclusions. They are, rather, a summary of some thoughts raised in the final session of the workshop, together with some reflections by the editors of this book.

1. Approaches to Ethics

One fundamental question that naturally came up at the workshop concerns what ethical behaviour fundamentally consists of: is it a matter of achieving certain results, such as maximising happiness or minimising suffering; or of sticking to certain principles; or of acting from certain character traits, such as generosity or honesty or courage; or some combination of these things? One traditional role of philosophers consists in articulating and evaluating moral theories, some of which correspond roughly to the answers just given. Thus *consequentialist*, *teleological*, or *goal-based* theories put the emphasis on achieving certain results, *deontological* or *duty-based* theories emphasise acting on certain principles, and *virtue ethics* puts the focus on certain character traits. It would be interesting to see whether INGOs grappling with the kinds of ethical questions discussed in this book would find it useful to engage with these concepts and theories, and with philosophers who are familiar with them.

There was also some discussion at the workshop of a related distinction between two kinds of reasons why something might be worth doing. Consider, for example, the claim that INGOs ought to become more accountable. Why might one think that that would be a good idea? One kind of reason why one might think this is because one believes that certain positive consequences would be likely to result. If INGOs become more accountable, one might think, they would be more likely to fulfill their responsibilities diligently, and contributors would be reassured that their money is being spent wisely. A different kind of reason one might think that INGOs should become more accountable is because one believes that accountability is important in itself (*intrinsically* valuable, rather than merely *instrumentally* valuable, as the point is sometimes put), regardless of any consequences it might have. One might think, for example, that if INGOs appeal

for and take money from people they have a duty to account to those people for how they have spent that money, whether or not anyone benefits from their fulfilling that duty.

Answers to these questions might make a big difference to how INGOs should respond to calls to become more accountable, especially if the consequences of doing so wouldn't be as positive as was suggested in the last paragraph. Suppose that far from helping to ensure that they fulfill their responsibilities diligently, and reassuring contributors, becoming more accountable would, in fact, distract INGOs from fulfilling their responsibilities and/or put off contributors. If so, and if accountability is not intrinsically valuable, then presumably it would not be appropriate for INGOs to become more accountable after all. If accountability is intrinsically valuable though, it might still be the case that INGOs should become more accountable, even if the consequences of doing so would be largely negative. For the duty to be accountable might take priority over the wish to avoid those negative consequences.

The same kind of point applies to many other similar claims often made about INGOs: that they should become more open, honest, or transparent; that they should practice what they preach, in the sense that their organisational procedures should reflect their values; and so on. In each case one can ask whether such changes are supposed to be worth pursuing in virtue of their consequences, or because they are valuable in themselves, or both. (These two answers are not of course mutually exclusive – one might think that INGOs should become more accountable, for example, *both* because one thinks that doing so would have positive consequences, and because one thinks that accountability is important in itself.)

Another standard philosophical distinction that came up at the workshop is between negative and positive duties. Negative duties are duties *not* to do certain things, such as harming others. Positive duties are duties *to* do certain things, such as helping others. Traditionally, it has been thought that negative duties are more stringent than positive duties, other things being equal. If this claim is correct,¹ it would be interesting to consider what implications it might have for INGOs. Might it imply that they should not do work that would do any harm, for example, even if that work would also do a great deal of good? What if it would not be the INGO that actually does the harm, but some other agent which exploits the INGO's actions? How does one factor *risks* of harm into the equation? Furthermore, how should one handle disagreements – between INGOs and those they seek to benefit, for example – concerning what *is* harmful or not?

Another way in which this distinction might be relevant that came up at the workshop concerns the type of obligations that those of us who live in developed countries might owe to the global poor. Most commonly, those who believe that we have such obligations at all think of them as positive obligations (whether of justice or of beneficence), obligations to help others in need or to help them claim their rights. Some, though, have argued that those of us who live in developed countries are harming the global poor, by imposing an unjust global order upon them. And if that is correct, we also have negative obligations to the global poor, obligations not to harm them in such ways. Such claims are controversial.² If they are correct, though, this would potentially have significant implications for INGOs (see Das in this volume).

¹ Not everyone accepts it. For consequentialists, for example, all that matters are the consequences, not whether those consequences result from doing something or failing to do something.

² For discussion of them, see Pogge 2002, Pogge 2005, and Ronalds in this volume.

As well as making such distinctions, articulating different approaches to ethics, and discussing their merits, philosophers also seek to identify forms of reasoning that are tempting, but fallacious. One example of this that came up in discussion at the workshop is Peter Unger's concept of 'futility thinking'. Unger (1996, esp. pp. 75-7) describes it like this. Take a small group of people in need, group A, who are part of a much, much larger group who are also in need, group B. If one focuses on group A in isolation, disregarding the fact that they are part of group B, Unger suggests, it is likely to be clear enough that there is a very strong moral reason to help them. If one focuses on the members of group A primarily as a part of group B, though, the sense that there is a strong moral reason to help them may diminish. For even if one were to succeed in helping those in group A, doing so would have little or no discernible impact on group B as a whole, and therefore may seem 'futile' – a mere 'drop in the ocean'.

Unger was concerned that futility thinking might affect those potential contributors to INGOs who are discouraged by the sheer scale of world poverty. 'Even if my contribution helps a few people', one might think, 'there will still be millions of other people in need, and so my contribution wouldn't make any real difference'. It is clear, at least on reflection, that such thinking is mistaken. If that contribution would improve the lives of a few people, then it would indeed make an important difference, even if that is not the type of difference that would show up in statistics about world poverty.

Some of the philosophers were concerned that something like this fallacy might also affect thinking about aid and development in other ways, though. It is common now for those interested in aid and development to focus on large and ambitious aims such as social and political transformation or the Millennium Development Goals. There are of course good reasons for doing

so, but there is also the danger that it might lead one to regard measures that ‘merely’ improve conditions for a few people for a while as not worth doing, if they have no discernible effect on those larger aims. And if so, that would again be a mistake. If a certain activity would improve the conditions of a few people for a while, then there may be a very strong moral reason to do it, especially if the conditions those people face are very harsh. Of course, there might be even stronger reasons to do something else, such as some activity that aims at social and political transformation – but only if the chances of success of that activity are high enough. If the chances of success are very low, it might be morally better ‘merely’ to focus on more immediate needs, rather than seeking to ‘change the world’.

2. Expectations, Roles and Obligations of different Actors and Stakeholders

Another issue that stimulated a lot of discussion at the workshop concerns the expectations, roles and obligations of different actors and stakeholders. One aspect of this concerns what kind of voice different stakeholders should have in determining what INGOs do: where they work, what kinds of activities they perform, the details of their programs and projects, who judges their impact, and so on. The answer to this question will of course be constrained to some degree by INGOs’ mission and policy statements, but typically such statements leave room for a good deal of discretion. And in any case, the same kind of question arises in relation to those statements themselves: who should decide what goes into them?

One view might be that it is entirely up to each individual INGO to determine its own priorities and practices. INGOs are voluntary associations, after all, and are focused on doing good of one sort or another. Such a view can be challenged, however, from at least two different

perspectives. First, though donations to INGOs are typically regarded as not being obligatory, many philosophers have argued that those of us who live in developed countries are in fact morally obligated to do something to assist those living in extreme poverty in developing countries (Singer, 1972, 1993, ch.10, and 2009; Unger 1996; Pogge 2002; Cullity 2004). Given that we can't discharge those obligations by ourselves as individuals (or at least that we can't do so efficiently), we turn to INGOs to discharge those obligations on our behalf. From this perspective, then, INGOs would be seen as executors of the obligations of their contributors and supporters.

If this sort of view is correct, both contributors to INGOs and those INGOs themselves would be constrained by the content of the obligations in question. Contributors would be obligated to give to INGOs that they have reason to believe will achieve the aims set by those obligations, rather than being free to support whatever cause they choose (or none at all if they prefer). And INGOs would be required to use those funds as efficiently as possible to realise those aims, rather than being at liberty to determine their own priorities and practices as they see fit. If, for example, the aim were that of improving the conditions faced by those who are worst off, globally speaking, then INGOs would be obligated to use whatever funds in whatever way would be likely to be most effective in realising that goal.³

A different reason why one might think that it is not entirely up to each individual INGO to determine its own priorities and practices stems from the perspective of those that aid seeks to benefit. It is of course commonplace to argue that men and women in this position should participate in determining how any aid intended to benefit them is used, how that aid is

³ For a strong statement of this kind of position, see Pogge 2007, 218-22.

evaluated, and so on. One might think that they should have a greater role than this, however, especially if one thinks that aid is owed to them as a matter of justice. If I owe you \$100, then normally at least I should simply pay you back if I can, and leave it to you to decide what to do with the money. I shouldn't offer to pay you back only on condition that you agree to use the money in some way that I consider appropriate, or suggest that we sit round together to decide how you will use it. If, then, there is some relatively robust sense in which we in the North can be said to owe aid to the global poor, this might suggest that INGOs should simply hand over any resources they have at their disposal, or at most just offer advice and support to help those they seek to benefit achieve what they want to achieve with those resources.

There are of course several real-world complications, though. In some cases, there may be persistent disagreement among the 'recipients'⁴ concerning how the money should be spent. If so, the INGO wouldn't simply be able to do what 'they' say. In other cases, there might be broad agreement amongst them, but the INGO may believe that they are making a mistake. In some of these cases, the disagreement may concern only the means to ends that are accepted by all. Even in such cases, the INGO may have to tread very carefully. They may have good reasons to believe that their experience and knowledge puts them in a better position to determine the best means than the 'recipients'. There may be a constant temptation to over-estimate the extent to which this is so, however, and so this is an area which requires great sensitivity.

The harder cases, though, are those in which the INGO disagrees with (at least some of) the community they are working with about the ends that should be aimed at. What if the INGO

⁴ We have tried to avoid using the word 'beneficiary' and where-ever possible have tried to use a term that does not label people as objects of charity or development. Where this has proved difficult or misleading we have used term 'recipient' in quotes to denote our unease with the term.²²

thinks that any resources should be used to help men and women gain secure access to certain basic rights, for example, but they would prefer simply to divide any available resources amongst them to use as they choose? Who gets to say what happens then? Does it make a difference if the INGO takes itself to be acting on an obligation to help secure people's rights? What if the 'recipients' want to use those resources in ways the INGO considers positively harmful, because of environmental reasons, for example?

There seemed to be general agreement at the workshop that such issues concerning how to balance and reconcile the expectations, roles and obligations of different actors and stakeholders are among the most difficult facing INGOs, and that they would therefore provide a very important area for further research. It is perhaps also worth noting here that the recognition of the need to balance different accountabilities has led to the rise of 'Collaborative Initiatives or Multi-sector partnerships' that according to some 'are emerging as a 21st Century institutional innovation to address development' (Litovsky & MacGillivray 2007, p. 21). These partnerships may help to develop new forms of mutual accountability, and may therefore offer hope for the future. There is also the danger, however, that they 'mirror the relative bargaining power of donors and recipients' unless participants are sensitive to unequal power relations and take specific steps to address them (ibid.). This challenge, then, may be a particularly important focus for further work.

Whilst these issues are not new to INGOs, the workshop indicated how ethical thinking is useful in providing different perspectives on dealing with these tensions and dilemmas.

3. Collective Challenges and Moral Divisions of Labour

A number of papers presented at the workshop raised the issue of collective problems and responsibilities faced by INGOs. This led to a number of discussions about different forms of collaboration, as well as what a moral division of labour might look like in different circumstances (recognising that collaboration doesn't necessarily mean all doing the same thing).

In the first instance, it was argued that INGOs need to be clear about what their aims are. As noted in Cullity's contribution to this volume, by acting in certain ways an INGO on its own might manage to do some good itself, but several INGOs working in such ways might do less good overall than they could do by acting in some other way, or even do harm. For example, a certain competitive form of fundraising might increase funds for an individual INGO, which would enable that INGO to do more good. Doing so might however reinforce a view amongst the general public that INGOs are wasting money in competing with one another for dollars, and if so the net result might be that less funds are raised in total, and so less good is done overall. In cases like these, the action that would lead to INGOs individually doing most good (practicing the form of fundraising in question) would not lead to most collective good being done overall. In view of such possibilities, each INGO needs to think about whether its most fundamental aim is that of doing as much good as it can as an agency, or acting in the way that leads to most good being done overall.⁵ This in turn will shape the priority given to processes of collaboration and collective action.

⁵ For more discussion of such cases, see Pogge 2007: 241-5.

A number of different collective challenges were debated. These included:

- Cases where individual actions may be ‘good’, but collective action could produce even greater benefits. One example might be for agencies to pool funding to conduct collective (rather than individual) base-line research or monitoring – for example of mortality and morbidity rates in a refugee camp – which would allow for a consistent assessment of the combined impact of all the agencies involved.
- Cases where individual actions may in themselves be ‘good’ but the combination of those individual actions ‘bad’. One example might be the situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa in the 1990s, where some argue that the collective presence and action of INGOs and others allowed the perpetrators of genocide to regroup and manipulate relief supplies and other refugees.
- Cases where if everyone acts purely on an individual basis, with no reference to what consequences might result if all or most INGOs act similarly, all are worse off. For example, if there is no consistency across agencies about willingness to pay bribes, the result may be that all agencies face the demand to pay bribes.

In connection with these circumstances philosophers also pointed out the distinction between cooperation for prudence (in order to lessen collective risks) and cooperation for altruism (in order to achieve a greater good). These distinctions are important in that they derive from different motivations and are liable to break down for different reasons, and thus need to be encouraged in different ways.

From the discussion a number of useful questions emerged which might help in addressing these challenges, namely:

- **What collective are we a part of?** Is it just the INGO community or is it other actors? Are we part of a wider collective that also is causing harm? For example, as an Australian agency with many staff who are Australian citizens, are we part of an Australian community that has elected a government whose trade, aid or foreign policies might be detrimental to particular groups overseas? And if so, do we have different obligations as a result?
- **What would be a more effective moral division of labour or collaboration?** For example, if speaking out on human rights abuses was critical to affording protection to particular groups in Darfur, and the circumstances made this impossible for an agency providing relief on the ground, would collaborating with and passing on information to a specialist Human Rights organisation, such as Amnesty International, be even more important than collaborating with other relief agencies in the refugee camps on the ground?
- **What might individual agencies do to promote collaboration and collective action where that is not yet happening?** In certain circumstances INGOs might have the opportunity to play a leadership role in creating opportunities for collective action, which would then make it more likely that others can see the benefits of cooperation. Too often the incentives of individual organisations and the difficulties and challenges of cooperation make the non-collaboration option easier.

- **Under what circumstances do the costs of collective action outweigh the benefits?**

This was not really a question addressed at the workshop. However, the experience of INGOs suggests that there are times when the inordinately complex processes of inter-agency collaboration can result in time-consuming, inconclusive processes that stymie creativity, delay responses and lead nowhere. Having clear criteria and decision-making processes for when the costs of collective action outweigh the benefits, then, would be very useful.

4. Evaluation and Accountability

The importance of being able to assess and communicate the impact of INGO work was a recurrent theme in several of the papers and in the ensuing discussion. Several of the INGO participants, however, stressed that the pressure to demonstrate impact (particularly to institutional donors, or within their own hierarchies, often using inappropriate tools and methods based on linear cause/effect thinking) is having a detrimental effect. It is doing so, in particular, because it increases bureaucracy, reduces flexibility and can alienate partners. A number of the philosophers felt that clear measures to assess and communicate achievements were important, however, in order (a) for INGO themselves to arrive at effective and ethical decisions about how to use their resources, (b) to allow other stakeholders – especially private supporters – to make informed decisions about whether or not to support INGOs in general, or a particular INGO, and (c) to be transparent about their performance.

In the debate there was some recognition from all parties that the question of assessing impact and performance is complex and needs a variety of approaches, tools and methods. It was also

recognised that there may be a number of proxies of impact that may provide some reassurance that impact is liable to be achieved as these proxies correlate closely with effective programs. In this sense there may be methods of improving accountability without necessarily being able to demonstrate impact. These might include adherence to certain codes or standards derived from research and evaluative work, such as those developed by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) or by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) through its work on quality and effectiveness (see Roche in this volume). Similarly, a number of participants felt that the most important challenge in this area was to improve the accountability of INGOs to those they ultimately seek to benefit, and to incorporate their perspectives and views much more centrally into consideration of impact. (Indeed, the HAP standards are designed precisely to assess the degree to which organisations are really doing this.)

However, there remained a certain reluctance amongst INGO participants to fully commit themselves to agreeing that clear metrics, adherence to codes or standards (particularly related to processes), and greater accountability to communities they seek to benefit could resolve the Epistemic Problem raised in Horton's paper (that is, the difficulty of arriving at an estimate about the effects of the work aid agencies do that one has at least some good reason to believe accurate). There seems to be a number of possible reasons for this. Firstly, as Dennis Rondinelli suggested (1993, p. vii) some time ago, there are very good reasons why practitioners are wary about rationalistic techniques of planning, management and evaluation. They often see these as constraining their ability to practice the 'flexibility, experimentation and social learning that are crucial to successfully implementing complex and uncertain development activities'. Secondly, many INGO staff fear that the nature of the power relations which are inherent in the donor/INGO/community nexus means that the voices of the least powerful in this relationship

will always remain marginal. There is also a tendency to believe that those with the most power will turn off the funding tap if poor performance or negative results are found. These beliefs can lead to INGOs either being 'economical with the truth' about mistakes, or simply working with those groups, or on those activities, where the risks of failure are less. This is liable to mean increasingly working with the less poor or vulnerable and in more secure environments. And thirdly, there is the view that the plethora of codes, standards and standardised planning and evaluation methods are (a) increasing bureaucracy and reducing the time for the 'real work' that needs to be done; (b) reducing the role for staff's professional judgement and acting as a disincentive for learning and being honest about mistakes; (c) increasingly leading to formulaic responses independent of context; and (d) undermining the development of effective relationships between INGOs, their partners and communities which are key to effectiveness (Isbister and Kelly in this volume).

For some of the philosophers this position was problematic for a number of reasons. First, it seems to mean that decision-making and judgements about who to work with and where are liable to be haphazard. One result of this might be that questions concerning whether INGOs could have been more successful somewhere else are simply not asked. Second, if there is a level of inter-subjective agreement amongst INGOs about some of the processes and proxies that lead to effective work – e.g. the ACFID quality and effectiveness work – then why not be more systematic about ensuring that these lessons are properly learnt and implemented? And third, if INGOs don't provide a more convincing, honest and independent assessment of their performance, then private individuals have no means of making well-informed judgements about whether to support INGOs. This is clearly problematic in itself, but may also lead in turn to a

number of further ethical problems, notably that people may be being asked to contribute to activities that, unknown to them, do people harm.

Despite this difference of opinion there were a number of areas where most participants agreed progress could and should be made. These include:

- Being clearer about **negligence standards** – i.e. those things that INGOs would definitely seek to avoid doing and for which there could be mechanisms for redress and complaint. Such an approach is less limiting than codes or standards that try and prescribe what INGOs must or should do, and thus it potentially allows for more flexibility and adaptation to local context.
- Being clearer about **burdens and standards of proof** of effectiveness, and the admissibility of evidence. Part of the problem with debates about evaluation and impact assessment is that different stakeholders have different criteria for evaluating the methodology and findings. Being clearer about this would help reduce this problem as well as potentially help in developing a more appropriate set of criteria for judging effectiveness than those found in criminal courts (beyond reasonable doubt) or in scientific enquiry (statistical significance).⁶
- Developing more **transparent processes** for the dissemination of evaluation findings – for example by developing clearer policies for INGOs about what they do or do not put on their websites.

⁶ For discussion of such issues in a different but related context, see Barry 2005.

- Exploring **new institutions or mechanisms** for feedback and accountability, such as Ethics Committees or Councils related to individual INGOs or INGO umbrella groups, Aid Ombudsmen, and complaints mechanisms.

5. Values, Purposes, and Institutional Issues for INGOs

Some of the discussion that provided the greatest interest and challenge to INGO participants at the workshop related to INGOs as institutions. This is perhaps unsurprising in that much of ACFID's quality and effectiveness research indicates that institutional values and culture play a key role in determining how, in practice, INGOs field operations are implemented (Kelly in this volume).

There was an important debate stimulated by Lenneberg's paper about how to manage the ethics of cross-cultural relationships and dealing with cultural differences, for example. This discussion raised the 'big' issue concerning the degree to which INGOs do, or should, respect the culture of those they seek to benefit – sometimes seen as a core value of these organisations. Indeed, this is explicit in some of the codes of conduct they have signed up to, such as the Red Cross Code of Conduct.⁷

Some of the philosophers suggested that one could usefully distinguish between respecting a *person* and respecting their *beliefs*, and also between *respecting* someone's beliefs and *agreeing*

⁷ The 5th of the 10 elements of the Red Cross Code of Conduct states, 'We shall respect culture and custom', and more specifically, 'We will endeavour to respect the culture, structures and customs of the communities and countries we are working in.' See <http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57JMNB>.

with those beliefs. One can respect a person but want to change their beliefs, for example, even if it is often hard to separate the two things. If that is right, then trying to support change in society may not be inconsistent with proper forms of respect. Furthermore, some cultural practices that we don't share nevertheless have a justification that we can accept while others do not. Others argued that one can also overstate the case for respect of local culture or customs, for (a) there are sometimes situations where communities or groups have been traumatised through exploitation, colonisation and so on, which can lead to dysfunctional behaviour that is clearly causing harm to some, even if it is defended in the name of culture; (b) culture is not completely monolithic or static – certain groups and interests will be seeking to change practices and can be supported without that support necessarily taking the form of promoting 'alien' values; and (c) there are also situations where the powerful in a given group or community will use the banner of culture to maintain their privilege and position at the expense of others.

As such, the question of whose cultural values should be respected is usually one of balance, judgement and context, with either of the extremes – total deference, on the one hand, or total rejection of any of 'their' values that conflict with 'ours', on the other – being inappropriate. In the end it was suggested that this matter is inevitably framed for INGOs by their own values, and that therefore these need to be clear. Some of the participants felt that Human Rights approaches provide a useful means of helping to make judgements in this area, whereas others found them insufficient.

This debate is linked to another recurrent theme across the discussions which relates to INGOs' adherence to their values, whether they 'walk the talk' in terms of their rhetoric, how independent they actually are, and the degree to which their growth and 'corporatisation' is

undermining their purpose and direction. This was interestingly as much if not more of a concern for INGO participants as it was for the philosophers present.

Some of the suggestions that emerged from this discussion were:

- To develop more effective **mutual learning** across the sector on ethical questions, and in particular to explore opportunities for professional development of staff that includes ethical components.
- To be careful to **distinguish between instrumental values and intrinsic values**. At the workshop, innovation, accountability and transparency were all mentioned as key values, for example. As noted in §1 above, though, some philosophers asked whether such values were largely instrumental. If that is right, care needs to be taken in promoting these values above those that might be more intrinsic such as the imperative to do no harm.
- To be much clearer about **political legitimacy, agendas and independence**. It was suggested (Ellis in this volume) that a codified recognition of INGOs' political role – including their dealings with, and independence from, donors – would be a powerful statement of what constitutes acceptable behaviour in relation to these issues, and could contribute to an empowering vision of the broader social change objectives of the INGO movement.

- For INGOs to **experiment with more radical changes to their form and the way they work**, changes that are consistent with the rhetoric of partnership, organisational learning and building effective relationships. It was argued, by Kelly in particular, that we know what effective INGO work looks like, and that achieving it is difficult but doable, but that it needs real commitment and leadership within senior levels of INGOs to make it happen. And for some INGOs this might mean becoming ‘brokers of social change’ whereby they see themselves more as catalysts for the exchange of ideas, experience and strategies between activists than as purveyors of development projects, and in so doing help to enhance social movements and transnational ‘monitory democracy’ (Keane 2009).

6. Final thoughts

The bringing together of a number of practitioners with academics was perhaps a somewhat risky exercise. Participants were generally very positive, however, about the experience. Why was this?

Firstly, the process of the preparation for the workshop – in which nearly all participants prepared papers and these were circulated well in advance so that everyone had the chance to read them beforehand – was important. This meant that time at the workshop was not wasted by people presenting or reading out their papers, and that INGO participants had to reflect on their experience, and that of others, before the workshop rather than coming to it ‘cold’ (which is often the case).

Secondly, INGO staff are generally concerned about the degree to which they are behaving ethically, not least because they know that much of what they do raises difficult ethical questions. However, there is rarely the time, nor the expertise, within INGOs, for discussions to be as useful and as profound as INGO staff wish. In this sense having the space and supportive expertise in the room was key.

Thirdly, the exchange between participants was respectful and not overly academic. The philosophers were sensitive to the pragmatic and practical concerns of INGO participants, and prepared to patiently explain things that were not understood, as well as introduce ethical or moral concepts when appropriate. The INGO participants, for their part, were very willing to engage in philosophical argument, were generally not defensive about their work (perhaps in part because many of them knew each other relatively well prior to the workshop and they tended to keep each other 'honest' in the discussions), and were mostly open to fresh thinking and ideas, even when this challenged some firmly held assumptions.

All of which suggests that it may be worthwhile organising similar exchanges or other forms of collaboration between philosophers and INGOs in the future. Ideas that emerged from the workshop, other than this publication, included running an ethics workshop at an INGO conference on Measuring Development Effectiveness in Melbourne in 2007,⁸ which was indeed held, and which proved very popular with INGO staff, and future plans include involving philosophers on forthcoming evaluations of INGO programs. It would seem that there is a hunger for this sort of dialogue and we hope this publication can contribute in some small way to it.

⁸ See <http://www.worldvision.com.au/learn/conferences/me/index.asp>.

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