

**STOPPING AS SUCCESS:  
TRANSITIONING TO LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT**

# **CASE STUDY: MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIP AND ACCOMPANIMENT APPROACH IN KOLKATA**

October 2019

Kiely Barnard-Webster, CDA Collaborative Learning



## STOPPING AS SUCCESS

This case study was developed as part of Stopping As Success (SAS), implemented by a consortium consisting of Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, and Search for Common Ground, with support and funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). SAS is a collaborative learning project that aims to study the dynamics at play when ending a development program, and provide guidelines on how to ensure locally led development. In doing this, SAS looks beyond the technical aspects of an exit strategy to identify examples that demonstrate a transition toward locally led development. The case studies produced by the project highlight the past and present realities faced by international non-government organizations (INGOs), local civil society organizations (CSOs), and local NGOs, focusing in particular on how partnerships evolve during transitions or devolvement to local entities.

### I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This case study examines the Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) work in India, supporting a variety of development and peacebuilding initiatives in Kolkata and its surrounding areas. The case was selected as a result of feedback received from participants during several external engagements.<sup>1</sup> In particular, participants queried whether the SAS collaborative learning project would diversify and enrich existing case study evidence of exits and transitions by documenting a sustained long-term partnership model. This case study is a direct response to this suggestion, examining why MCC implements projects through partners, rather than directly, and how these working relationships take shape over time. Insights from MCC's experience in India may serve as guidance for international and local aid actors looking to better understand how longer-term partnerships can help enable ongoing efforts at locally led development.

The report was produced using qualitative methods, with a total of 16 individuals – comprising six community partners, nine MCC staff, and one international partner – participating in semi-structured key informant interviews conducted in Kolkata and the United States. External experts with knowledge of the country's civil society context were also interviewed separately. Also utilized were an analysis of MCC's programmatic documents,



#### CONTENTS:

Acronyms	2
Stopping As Success	2
1. Introduction and Methodology	2
2. Context	3
Aid and Indian civil society: a brief history	3
Indian civil society and the state	3
Foreign assistance	4
Civil society achievements in India	4
Emerging trends in aid	5
3. History of the Mennonite Central Committee	5
MCC in Kolkata	5
4. Partnership and Accompaniment Approach	7
5. Key Lessons	10

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work and contributions of Ajay Mittal have been invaluable to the development of this case, lending incredible richness and perceptive insight. This case study would also not have been possible without the thought partnership, support and contributions of Gordon Zook and his MCC India colleagues in Kolkata. Additionally, a warm thank you to Susmita Choudhury in the desk review phase of this project, and Kshiti Gala, for contributing thorough and informative civil society background research. Thank you to all for your thoughtful additions and committed partnership.

#### ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CSO	civil society organization
HNI	high net-worth individual
INGO	international non-governmental organization
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
NGO	non-governmental organization
PUCL	People's Union for Civil Liberties
SAS	Stopping As Success

## TYPE OF TRANSITION

Rather than having a clearly defined exit or transition, MCC India's approach is based on a steady transfer of funding, ownership, and responsibility over the course of a long-term partnership. This "accompaniment model" ensures efforts are genuinely locally led, embedding a mindset of transition from the outset.



interview notes, as well as lessons drawn from a 2017 online consultation led by SAS, and a thorough literature review published by the group in 2018. The Context section was put together by an Indian research partner based on both a thorough desk review and lived experience.

## 2. CONTEXT

India, "... already the world's third largest economy in purchasing parity terms,"<sup>2</sup> currently operates with a GDP "... expected to grow at well over 7 percent per year" and, with just over 1.3 billion people, has been deemed the world's largest democracy by the World Bank.<sup>3</sup> Civil society in the country is diverse and has been a driving force for change, irrespective of economic growth patterns. In the years immediately following independence, marginalized and remote rural areas could often not be reached by the state, meaning civil society was crucial in enabling last-mile delivery of development programs and services.

Today, civil society continues to play an influential role as intermediary between communities and government officials. The funding landscape for foreign assistance in India is beginning to change, due in part to recent legislation stipulating greater restrictions on international funding. As a result, civil society will increasingly have to rely on diversified funding streams and locally-sourced contributions to sustain itself.

### AID AND INDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY: A BRIEF HISTORY

Civil society in India, commonly associated with "local NGOs" (although community movements and civic activism often take broad and diverse forms), has evolved significantly over the last fifty years, and is credited with numerous political and social achievements.

Following the Bengal famine (1943/44) and the Bihar famine of the 1960s, Indian development planners were forced to re-think their strategy of self-sufficiency. To keep itself afloat during multiple famine crises, India accepted aid from the US as a part of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954. This was commonly known as PL-480, or Food for Peace. However, aid came with conditions, and was ultimately used as a foreign policy lever to temper Indian criticism of US policy regarding the Vietnam War. In order to prevent a tradeoff between foreign policy sovereignty and dependency on agricultural aid, it was imperative that Indian development planners shift their focus away from industrial growth strategies toward policies that would meet the basic needs of food security and food sovereignty.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, several NGOs focusing on poverty alleviation among the Indian rural poor emerged. These NGOs were funded by international agencies, or by central and state government programs, such as the Integrated Rural Development Program.<sup>5</sup> During this period, NGOs began to question the development approaches adopted by the state.<sup>6</sup> While the state continued to fund NGOs – especially welfare-oriented organizations, for example those delivering services in drought- and flood-prone areas, or working with refugees in the aftermath of the 1971 India-Pakistan war – funding was restricted for NGOs that openly criticized the state.

This situation largely remains the case even now. Frequently, cause-based work (for example, increasing access to education or reducing malnutrition) gets funding and resources, while rights-based NGOs do not (for example, those working for the rights of marginalized communities in India).

### INDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE

India's constitution mandates that the government work toward a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic, upholding the fundamental rights of its citizens. As mentioned above, after independence, the state could not initially reach many of its most marginalized citizens living in remote rural areas, resulting in civil society taking on a crucial role in development programs and services. Over the years, while the state has increased its outreach to remote areas, it is still not extensive. Hence, state and civil society continue to work in synergy, complementing each other's needs.

NGOs differ widely with respect to their relationship with the state. While many make international headlines protesting at international forums such as World Trade Organization summits and the World Economic Forum, there are also those that function as “... non-antagonistic, bureaucratic government agencies.”<sup>7</sup> This constantly evolving and dynamic relationship between government and civil society can determine the nature of NGO advocacy.

In this context, it is often important that NGOs develop systematic engagement and cordial dialogue with the government. Sometimes, however, in undertaking causes close to the people they are representing, NGOs must actively protest, leading to an at times antagonistic relationship with the state.

## FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

The 1980s saw the emergence of “participatory development,” as it became clear that centrally planned development strategies were not, in fact, reaching “beneficiaries.” The key focus of India’s First Five-Year Plan was the agricultural sector, while the Second Five-Year Plan focused on the industrial sector.<sup>8</sup> Over time, India realized that development strategies based on grassroots initiatives were more likely to connect with communities’ needs and realities.<sup>9</sup> During this time, there was an impetus for close collaboration between NGOs and international funding agencies.

There have also been shifts in the state’s relationship with foreign funders. In 2015, for example, the government cancelled Greenpeace India Society’s registration under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), stating the NGO was “... working against the country’s economic progress.” This effectively ended foreign funding to the group.

In addition, since India’s independence on 15 August 1947, there have been numerous attempts to implement “good governance” – that is, governance characterized by transparent, accountable, and participatory decision-making processes, enabling greater visibility of rights-based CSOs. This national shift among CSOs from a welfare-oriented approach to a rights-based approach has signaled to international funding agencies that Indian NGOs are capable, committed, and willing to be held accountable for their initiatives.

## CIVIL SOCIETY ACHIEVEMENTS IN INDIA

Collectively, civil society has succeeded in bringing about important legislative change in India, especially during the past two decades. One example is the strong grassroots movement that led to the formulation of the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005. This landmark act has meant greater accountability and transparency from the Indian government, especially regarding public information and finances. NGOs such as MKSS (Majdoor Kisaan Shakti Sangathan, or the “Wage Workers and Farmers Collective”) played an important role in pressuring successive governments, so much so that the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) made enacting the RTI an explicit promise in its election manifesto of 2004.

Another inspiring example of civil society’s long-term impact made is that of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (“Save the River Narmada”) movement. As a result of the movement’s advocacy, the threatened displacement of millions of people and “washing away” of thousands of tribal villages due to large-scale, government-funded dams in Central India was avoided. Ultimately, the state was forced to conduct an environmental impact assessment and commit to providing compensation to any displaced communities.

In Kolkata, decades of community activism succeeded in saving a unique ecosystem: the East Kolkata Wetlands. Thirty years ago, a sanitation engineer, Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, curious to discover where Kolkata’s 750 million liters of wastewater had disappeared to (given the city did not have a single treatment plant at the time), stumbled upon the “kidneys of Kolkata.” This network of wetlands organically converts the city’s sewage into food for fish, which was at the time sold back to the city. Today, Kolkata is a city where sewage frequently becomes a nutrient rather than a pollutant. As a result of Ghosh’s activism and dedication, the East Kolkata Wetlands have since been designated a Ramsar site, protected by the 1971 UNESCO “intergovernmental environmental treaty” and Ramsar Convention.

In addition, civil society has played a crucial role in the upholding of political and civil liberties in India. When an internal emergency was declared in 1977, it was organizations such as the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) that collectively articulated the need for democratic values and freedom of

expression: "... when the state erred, civil society stepped in to administer the necessary correctives."<sup>10</sup> Established in the 1970s, PUCL continues to hold the government and police accountable for human rights violations, especially of women and children, Dalits, tribal communities, and religious minorities.

## EMERGING TRENDS IN AID

Foreign assistance to India has declined over the last eight years, due in part to legislation limiting this type of aid, as well as the country's strong economic growth.<sup>11</sup> Given this, Indian organizations have increasingly sought support from private companies and high net-worth individuals (HNIs). This shift in funding sources became clearly apparent during data collection for this case study, with one HNI supporting local organizations and individuals stating: "I don't even think of foreign funding anymore." Additionally, Indian companies with strong networks will sometimes act as "channelers" to connect local organizations to national funding bodies. As the HNI mentioned above reported: "They channel money because they have relationships with the government ... They find the CSOs are doing really good work." Change-makers today seem more open to moving from aid-driven models to local social enterprises, or exploring means of becoming financially sustainable by aligning programs with government initiatives and relevant state funds.

## 3. HISTORY OF THE MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

MCC is a "worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches" that supports communities through "responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice."<sup>12</sup> In 2020, MCC will celebrate a century of service to communities, with its work focused on five strategic areas. These are, in the words of its website:

- Caring for the lives and futures of uprooted and other vulnerable people.
- Providing water, food, and shelter first in times of hunger, disaster, and conflict, then education and ways to earn income.
- Working with churches and communities to prevent violence and promote peace and justice.
- Investing in opportunities for young people to

serve in Canada, the US, and around the world.

- Serving with humility and in partnership to meet local needs with local solutions.<sup>13</sup>

MCC is supported by members of many different groups within the Anabaptist denomination, and is a relief, development, and peacebuilding agency, rather than a mission agency, meaning it does not establish churches. MCC upholds the value of working alongside others, regardless of religion or affiliation. The organization operates in more than fifty countries and each year allocates some US\$55.5 million, with relief services and support for community development the foundational pillars of its work.

## MCC IN KOLKATA

Though Christianity is a minority religion across India, in eastern India it has a rich history. Perhaps the best-known example is Mother Teresa, honored in the Roman Catholic Church as "Saint Teresa of Calcutta," who spent her adult life serving the communities of Kolkata and the region. Historically, Mennonite congregations in India have been relatively numerous.

MCC was established in Kolkata in 1943 in direct response to the Bengal famine of that year. In the 1970s, the organization started focusing more closely on providing food security support to partners in five states surrounding MCC's office in Kolkata: West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.<sup>14</sup> Each of these states is easily accessible by an overnight train ride from Kolkata. Today, MCC staff, alongside the organization's partners, support a variety of development and peacebuilding initiatives in Kolkata and its surrounding areas. The organization is funded through multiple small grants (approximately US\$25,000 per grant), which cover MCC's peacebuilding and development projects.

MCC tends to be selective about where it works, given the organization's mission aim of sustaining a long-term presence and partnerships. Given that it does not implement programs directly, MCC India has intentionally resisted becoming an Indian organization. Rather, it feels its role should be to support existing local organizations working on development and social justice issues. At present, MCC India has two international staff "Representatives" and approximately a dozen Project Officers, each of whom work with four to five partners.



# Mennonite Central Committee India

## 2017-2018



### EDUCATION

- Tomorrow's Foundation (TF)
- Development Action Society (DAS)
- Barrackpore Avenue Women's Cultural & Social Welfare Society (BAWCSWS)
- Serving And Learning Together (SALT)
- Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI) - Core

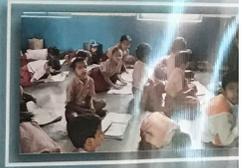
### EDUCATION PROGRAM

- West Bengal Education Program
- Vocational Training Program
- Community School Program



### HUMAN RELIEF AND DISASTER RECOVERY

- Small Project (Individual/institution)
- EHA - Begusarai - FFD
- ERDS - Cyclone Relief
- EHA - Fire Relief Kishangang



### FSSL-WATER

- Brethren in Christ (BIC-Orissa)
- Institute of Social Action & Research Activities (ISARA-Orissa)
- Indian Social Action and Research Association (ISARA-WB)
- Economic Rural Development Society (ERDS)



### HIV/AIDS

- Little Flock Fellowship (LFF)
- Nazareth Hospital
- West Bengal Voluntary Health Association (WBVHA)
- Centre for Social Development (CSD)
- Arunima Hospice



MCC 2017-2018 strategy displayed in the front lobby of MCC's Kolkata office

## 4. PARTNERSHIP AND ACCOMPANIMENT APPROACH

**Partnership and accompaniment are interchangeable concepts at MCC.** To accompany a partner is to listen carefully to what they say about their needs and the wellbeing of the communities they serve; provide complementary support to fill gaps; and improve the quality of work by better understanding the local context and reporting. MCC works exclusively through partners in most contexts, including in India. Accompaniment, or “partnership,” moves far beyond the provision of training or similar services. Rather, it involves in-depth work that aims to support holistic organizational and programmatic growth. Some of the key methods used are explored below.

**Unrestricted financial support.** MCC country teams face few restrictions when determining what to fund and develop with partners. For example, they are able to fund both direct program expenses and, at the discretion of MCC Representatives, non-program costs (e.g. administrative costs). As one staff member stated: “... [our focus is on] what the project needs ... how will you know how much administrative costs are needed?” Funding is provided to partners according to need, ensuring both operational and programmatic support is covered.

**Individual accompaniment.** MCC India’s Project Officers work closely with partners, paying them (at least) quarterly visits in order to monitor the projects being implemented and identify areas requiring further support or consideration (though, as described by an MCC Project Officer: “we don’t ‘monitor’ – they tell us!”). They also work alongside different groups in planning two- to three-year projects, and provide support with regard to reporting requirements and timelines, as needed. Several of the Project Officers interviewed mentioned that they had worked with the same people for years, even decades. At least one senior program officer had herself been a recipient of MCC support as a child.

**Social capital and partnering through networks.** In the majority of cases, people and organizations find MCC through Project Officers, who all come from the areas where partners operate. A memorandum of understanding is signed annually with each partner, listing the mutually agreed responsibilities of each signatory. Project Officers aim to remain engaged

with organizations and communities through to the long-term, supporting their initiatives and maintaining relationships. As a senior Project Officer stated: “You’re dealing with lives and cannot just walk away. I had teachers come up and say they remember me and want to keep up a relationship.” In addition, MCC brings all its partners together annually for capacity building and to create opportunities for networking. One MCC Representative described this as “... more of a family kind of approach for partners, [you see this when] we have annual meetings to bring partners together.” Though no “exit strategies” exist when it comes to ending partnerships, there have been instances – though few in number – in which the organization has ended a partnership. These are navigated on a case-by-case basis.

**Expecting mutual transformation.** MCC India is very transparent about the fact that, given its annual budget of approximately US\$1.3million (relatively mid-sized compared to other NGOs in India), it has to rely on providing other resources relevant to its partners. As such, MCC is intentional about its staff being used as a resource by partners. Several interviewees mentioned “... we usually send people alongside the money” provided to partners. This choice is also symbolic of how MCC staff believe they should relate to those in the communities around them, helping and learning from one another. MCC India Representatives refer to this as “mutual transformation.” This approach to accompaniment is central to the organization’s mission and was evident in conversations with MCC India staff. As one Representative said: “Sending people means we work daily with staff and partners. We hear, smell, experience what is going on and programming is more grounded in reality.” Another comment made was: “We don’t have [the authority] on knowing things, on the truth.”

In India, MCC has recently had two international staff serve as country program leaders, referred to as “Representatives” rather than directors. The implicit message of this is that MCC (as an organization) values cross-cultural connections and is interested in understanding people rather than “directing” them. Though MCC Representatives do in fact share responsibility for directing programs (not people), this often seemed a secondary or even tertiary priority. Of perhaps more critical importance was listening to partners and understanding their programs and histories, as well as serving as interlocutors between MCC partners in India, the US, and Canada. As one MCC India



Flower garden on the grounds of one of MCC's partners in Kolkata

staff member described it: “We are known as humble in our approach and don’t direct things. One partner, we had an MCC Officer go to their village and they sat on the ground, not in a chair. They saw MCC as an equal!”

**Commitment to national staff.** As one of MCC India’s international Representatives stated: “Our institutional history is carried by national staff. We are just the facilitators.” Project Officers in MCC India had, on average, spent 20 years working for the organization. Staff mentioned that over this time MCC had provided multiple opportunities for them to develop professional skills and build on existing knowledge.

Rather than simply hiring staff with years of technical experience, MCC India’s approach has often been to prioritize employing staff looking for career changes or new experiences, and who are keen to develop relevant knowledge and skills within their program roles. This is partly due to the fact that the salaries MCC offers are generally less competitive than those at larger INGOs.

For example, one recent MCC recruit had government experience but was looking for a career change prior to joining the organization. Others had previously obtained master’s degrees in social work or social sciences, but had lacked specific technical skills. Some staff have also obtained master’s degrees while working at MCC. An MCC India Representative commented: “Many are committed to service, family, and value how they are treated; they could get higher salaries elsewhere!”.

**Clear expectations of international staff.** International staff must be “faith screened,” meaning they must, first, be Christian; second, be a participating member in a local congregation; and, third, affirm their commitment to nonviolence. MCC’s US and Canadian executive directors are authorized to make exceptions to this requirement in limited circumstances – MCC’s program in India is one of these exceptions. The MCC India team believes the effectiveness of their work is increased by working with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and other faith communities. Non-Christian

staff working for MCC India are expected to respect the values of the organization and share its goals.

**Joint-program planning.** Jointly planning programs can often be a long process, spanning one to two years. MCC Representatives, aware of their five-year commitment and the lengthy history preceding their residency, will, upon arrival, sit and listen to communities' stories and lessons, in order to better understand the local context. For example, a nun at a school that was receiving funding from MCC stated: "... they are more flexible in their approach – they even funded socks and shoes for students! We wouldn't ask others ... we wouldn't think to ask them."

When determining needs, MCC staff do not just rely on conversations with partners, but also ensure that "communities say what we should be doing" as well. As a Project Officer reported: "When partners bring proposals, we go to [their communities], not just their office. We go to the village, speak to community members and ask, 'what do you want?' Then compare, 'is this what the participant is asking for?' We make sure all are happy! Is this the real need in the village?" As planning continues, MCC "... will give input to partners and our partners give input on what to do." At a macro level, newly arrived MCC Representatives will often make small changes to the work they inherit: "... we [may] figure out what to increase or drop ... [we] keep a lot, but make some changes for example, maybe adding child protection, adding this to a school, etc."

MCC does develop a five-year strategic plan to guide its work. Typically, project cycles and action plans are developed with three-year timeframes, although these are often followed by additional project phases.

**Support for capacity development, networking, and peer-to-peer exchange.** MCC mainly provides support for planning and reporting processes, and to ensure partners have the opportunity to get to know each other. As an MCC India Representative said: "We have week-long workshops annually. Partners say 'MCC has a different approach' ... [They] know when our son is getting married. Staff know about partners." Additionally, MCC staff "... will learn from partners" and support such peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.

**Financial decisions and communication.** "Warm money versus cold money" is how MCC India staff articulate their thinking about their role as "funders"

(although they are careful not to label themselves as such). In essence, "warm money" comes from and with people, delivered to communities that use the funds for development and change. "Cold money" is simply funding sent without accompaniment. As one staff member stated: "... we don't agree to just give stuff away, we won't just give seeds."

Communication about where funding originates is also part of the "warm money" concept and messaging. As an MCC India Representative noted: "MCC has a video on how money is raised. It shows people giving, though not the 'wealthy' necessarily. It comes from people who care."

Though MCC's mission is based on having a long-term presence, this has not precluded the organization from considering options should it be forced to exit or transition out of India. Project Officers working with partners could, in this potential scenario, face financial and ethical conundrums such as "... [project] salaries are low, but if we stepped away, how would this salary be sustained?" Understanding the financial realities local communities face enables MCC staff to have more open discussions about how to adapt in the event a shift in funding occurs.

Communication about funding is direct, but considerate, with a senior Project Officer saying: "We will come and check [our partners] books. If they need to correct their books, I will email them kindly and give them six months to improve." Several MCC partners also stated that MCC is "... careful to see that every penny is being used properly." From the outset, MCC jointly designs activities and programs with partners, then once costs and activities are decided on, MCC staff maintain strict financial accountability processes. To a few partners, while this is acceptable, it can at times feel frustrating and inflexible.

When MCC Representatives were asked if they felt their long-term approach created dependency, their answer was transparent and illuminating: "Yes, I think we do create some. We have partners where if external funding stops, they won't exist. But, they are serving poor communities who will not have funding. There is no local funding. When we talk about sustainability – we want impact to continue even if the organization does not continue, or the project doesn't." Clarifying this further, it is clear that while MCC believes financial dependency does exist in this respect, technical dependency does not. Though organizations may not be capable of paying staff or implementing select

activities without funding, MCC's accompaniment approach ensures that communities are the holders of the technical expertise required to continue any work that has been begun by an organization.

**Overall decision-making.** A senior MCC India Representative noted that there are very few directives at headquarter-level requiring partners and programs to follow a particular agenda or strategic path. Instead, "... what we do is mostly determined by staff and partners."

**Relationship management and transparency.** MCC India has had several partners over the decades with whom it has maintained an "on-again, off-again" relationship. Roughly seven years ago in Odisha, for example, an MCC partner asked to

leave in order to experiment with other projects. Recently, the partner came back to MCC with plans to expand a larger, better project involving a consortium of NGOs and government partners. MCC is currently determining if it can re-fund this partner.

MCC is also transparent with partners when it comes to their internal organizational evaluations. For example, a partner interviewed for this case study had discovered, upon reading MCC's most recent evaluation, that it had influenced MCC's work and partnership processes: "There are never abrupt changes, but there is continuous learning; MCC India has external evaluations every five to six years." At the time of this case study, MCC India was in the process of adapting approaches to programming in response to evaluation recommendations.

## 5. KEY LESSONS

**Good ("dedicated, dynamic") leadership is critical among partners.** The partnership and accompaniment approach works best when MCC's partners demonstrate strong leadership. As noted by an MCC India Representative: "Leadership means passion or vision, and they have to be able to hire good staff, empower them, get away from doing it all themselves." Language matters: the way funding is framed can bolster a sense of true partnership. An MCC India Representative explained: "Through informal conversations, we can tell [communities] it is not a problem if things are late, how can we justify this, let us work it out [together]." Also, how funding is framed and the processes by which funds are distributed matters. The Representative further noted: "We frame the funding we provide that each rupee is the pocket money of individuals, not governments."

**Strategies and projects should, without exception, be developed with communities.** Joint strategizing and planning is preferable to more traditional, top-down approaches that seek to plan every aspect of a project in advance. As explained by one of MCC's partners: "Even if the project is only fifty percent correct, go do it. In thirty years, it will be seventy percent correct. Many organizations have the mindset to do it the traditional way."

**International and national partners should consistently question notions of ownership and "sustainability."** NGOs and CSOs globally are often dependent on private and public donations, grants, and myriad other types of funding. MCC India staff focus less on discussing financial dependency with partners, choosing instead to monitor how comfortable partners feel with their approach to programming, and whether they believe they are on their own path to achieving longer-term impacts. MCC Representatives explained that sustainability is about ensuring that impact continues. When partnering, MCC Project Officers have learned it is important to not only understand the needs of partner organizations, but also ensure communities hosting programs understand and have agreed to participate.

**Expecting mutual transformation is critical for healthy partnerships.** MCC Representatives and Project Officers repeatedly mentioned that they learned from partners and supported frequent peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. Many felt this mindset to be at the root of an equal, productive partnership.

## ENDNOTES

1. These included a 2018 case study review meeting and a 2018 InterAction Forum presentation on case study work in Washington, DC.
2. World Bank, “The World Bank in India.” [www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview)
3. World Bank, “The World Bank in India.” [www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview)
4. Alnoor Ebrahim, *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 35.
5. Alnoor Ebrahim, *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 36.
6. Alnoor Ebrahim, *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 37.
7. Joan Mencher, “INGOs: Are They a Force for Change?” *Economic and Political Weekly* (1999) 34(30):2079.
8. N.A. Sarma, “Economic Development in India: The First and Second Five Year Plans,” *Staff Papers* (International Monetary Fund) (1958) 6(2):180–238.
9. Alnoor Ebrahim, *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 38.
10. T. K. Oommen, *Crisis and Contention in Indian Society*, London: Sage Publications, 2005.
11. The FCRA “... regulate[s] acceptance and utilization of foreign contribution[s].”
12. MCC, “Vision and Mission.” <https://mcc.org/learn/about/mission>
13. MCC, “Vision and Mission.” <https://mcc.org/learn/about/mission>
14. Altogether, there are over 300 million people in Kolkata, West Bengal, Bihar, Harissa, and Chhattisgarh.
15. Sometimes as a result of “financial irregularities” and/or “ruined trust.”
16. Between 2005 and 2009, over 6,000 recipients of aid were interviewed for the book *Time To Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of Aid*. Though assistance was often received well in the short term, one of the book’s findings was that, in the long term, aid effectiveness reflected the “... gulf between the rhetoric of partnership and participation and the reality of power imbalances between donor and recipient.” Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, *Time To Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of Aid*, Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012; Poverty to Power blog, “What Do 6,000 People On the Receiving End of Aid Think of the System? Important New Book.” <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-do-6000-people-on-the-receiving-end-of-aid-think-of-the-system-important-new-book/>
17. MCC Representatives were aware that such timelines are unrealistic (“... three years to end food insecurity!?” as one Representative incredulously stated) but are beholden to the timelines of their donors, which include some Canadian government funding streams.

This document was made possible by the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this case study are the sole responsibility of Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning and Search for Common Ground, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

All photos by Kiely Barnard-Webster

Cover Photo: Lunch in Kolkata with MCC staff and SAS case study team. Manjula Patnaik, MCC Peace Sector Coordinator, Ajay Mittal, SAS case writer and Independent Consultant, and Prakash Thankachan, MCC Project Officer