CIIF Experience Sharing Session
Review of Progress and Discussion on Site Visit Arrangements
22.04.2004

The session was held with over 40 project teams and attended by Dr Raymond Wu Wai-yung, Chairman of the CIIF Committee and Ms Sophia Kao and Mrs Julita Lee who are Members of the CIIF Committee. Experience in implementing CIIF-funded projects were shared and results of the discussion were summarized below:

1. **Critical success factors and areas of achievement (as reported by the CIIF Project Teams):**

   ■ **The project teams were most proud of achievements such as:** when Service recipients were successful in becoming service providers and helpers instead; NGO's management levels were beginning to empower the teams and provided support for the social capital (SC) concepts; the CIIF had become a common language between different NGOs; development of different networks especially with business sectors; and the building up of the SC concept in the community.

   ■ **The critical successful factors included:** successful examples are the best promotion; good internal communication within the NGO; important to make sure the project concepts were clear, once the concepts were clear implementing the CIIF projects would not necessarily generate heavy workload; NGOs buy-in of the SC concept; and experience-sharing to broaden understanding of SC concept

   ■ **Adopting an effective promotional strategy** both within and outside the agency is crucial for its success. The most effective means to promote the project is by "word of mouth" by the participants. Dissemination of information in relation to the project within the agency is also important. One project staff reflected that it was through referral from other departments in the agency that they were able to link up partnerships from the business sector.

   ■ The **Project Coordinator**'s clear understanding of, commitment to and endorsement of the project objectives would make a critical difference to the project's success. The Project Coordinator should not feel over burdened; instead, he/she should mobilize resources in the community and empower the participants so that they can "own" the project.

- A successful project was one that could mobilize **volunteers** from different social backgrounds and different sectors - develop and extend the talents of the volunteers, build up linkages between the "haves" and the "have-nots".

- Mobilize **community resources**, involve neighbours, use the talents of individuals within the community, and encourage bottom-up solutions to address common issues.

- Use **"successful cases"** as demonstration. It was more persuasive for the ex-service users to use their own experience to render peer support to those in similar conditions.

- Be **adaptable** to changes.

- **Know the community/**district well. Do a detailed analysis of the district that you are going to serve and dig out its real needs. Involve the community in coming up with a project that can really address the issues with strategy that is viable and practical.

2. **Experience for participants, staff and organization through implementing the CIIF projects:**

- We were very happy to see the **participants building up their capacity**, and our **staff had been learning to do things in a more systematic and effective manner**, and that the **organization was getting richer experience in social service delivering**.

- We can no longer do things in a traditional way. **Innovation** is what we need and this was particularly true if we want to engage the business sector.

- **Be flexible.** Take our project as the example: as our collaborator cannot provide us with the venue for starting the classes, so we turned to a secondary school for help. And in turn we can even make use of the teachers-parents association to help the recruitment. Therefore the initial problem opened new doors for us.

- Collaboration between NGOs was proven successful. Trust and communication channels were established between different agencies.

- **Keep improving:** as the "post-natal mentor" concept became more popular, and

several districts (or even within the same district) started similar initiative, creating more competition.   But competition drives us to do a better job if we want the project to sustain.

3. **Difficulties encountered and solutions attempted**

◼ **It's tough starting a new project from scratch.**   Try to build on the current strengths and networks of your organization and that will help move things forward. Whenever problems arise, look into them and review your strategy from time to time to make necessary adjustments.   There would be problems encountered throughout the implementation.   Do have faith in what you are doing as that generated energy to deal with whatever difficulties, turning threats into opportunities, and gaining evidence that it was actually not a mission impossible.   Having the best people to form the nucleus of a volunteering team and they will help spread the seeds.

◼ **Launching the CIIF projects required mind-set changes.**   But new concepts, and mindset changes need time to get established.   Both the Project Coordinator and the participants should adopt new and innovative strategies instead of using a traditional service delivery model to run the project.

◼ **No more labeling.**   Sometimes difficult to break down the stereotypes and attitudes of the participant groups; e.g. some groups would not mix with other, and some ethnic groups started off with negative expectations of themselves and others.   In response, the Project teams had to give clear messages that the Projects aim to bring different groups to work together, and not there to provide specialized services just for anyone specific group.   Getting more different groups' participation in the projects from the start would help.   The projects should emphasis the talents and potentials of individuals.   One agency reflected that the enrollment of some of the programs was very low if they over emphasized new arrivals as the target group.   Hence, Some participants may find it difficult to grasp the concept of social capital e.g. self-help and mutual help. The suggested way to overcome this difficulty is to have some successful cases as demonstration.

◼ **Review and adapt:**   Sometimes we (the project teams) had difficulties adhering to the progress plan as the external environments kept changing.   Problems do arise from time to time and not always be able to foresee. The unforeseen situation, such

as the outbreak of SARS, might affect the implementation of the projects. The solution involved reviewing the operational plan regularly [the reason for the quarterly reports] and negotiate the necessary adjustments in strategies when encountering difficulties in implementing the project. There was no need to be completely restricted by the original proposal, and the CIIF Secretariat will try their best to provide guidance and assistance if needed.

- **Some community-based projects cover too big an area**. Sustainability of the project is difficult and there are ample needs in the community. One way to overcome these difficulties was to focus on changing the status of the service recipients to service providers and mobilize resources in the community so that these needs could be better addressed.

- It was often difficult to **engage** active participation from the participants and collaborators. For instance the business sectors who would rank their business affair first and community participation second. Often the participants' abilities cannot match with business sectors' requirements. The solution involved listening to the needs of business sectors and helping the business sectors to understand SC concept

- Sustaining **volunteers' participation** was sometimes difficult, e.g. when they moved out of the district. Volunteers, participants and collaborators often encountered difficulties in understanding the concept of social capital. As the project teams got bigger, and the ability and commitment of the participants varied. Getting involved often provides the best "explanations" of what social capital was about. Co-ordination and training (for the workers as well as the volunteers) was needed.

- As we are going to start our project, how to engage our participants is our main concern. We tend to focus more on promotion. Viva voce promotion is helpful in promoting the project and concept of social capital in the community.

- Problems sometimes in recruiting or deploying suitable Project staff. The CIIF projects do need co-ordinators of caliber and experience.

- Sometimes, NGOs found that they had to handle participants' own crisis before application of SC concept. Building up mutual help support networks, rather than relying on outside assistance was often more effective in solving problems and meeting emergency needs.

4. Lessons learnt from the project implementation

- Service recipients do have their own talents and potentials. They can contribute to the society as well.
- Take up new challenges and adopt new approaches to run the project.

Volunteers

- Engaging the commitment of the participants first and then let them aligning with the concept of social capital.
- No urgency to recruit a large quantity of volunteers at the initial operational stage.
- Engaging the best volunteers to form the "core volunteer team" and role models to enhance community participation.
- Linking the "haves" and "have-nots" amongst the residents to jointly develop a caring and harmonious community.
- Everyone have their strengths and potentials and no one will be losers forever

Collaborative partners

- Frequent communication with collaborators is crucial
- Face-to-face contact with the head of the collaborative organizations will improve the operational efficiency of the project

The Grantee agency

- It had encouraged review of traditional concepts of social welfare; changing to align with SC concept (e.g. service receivers can become service providers)
- The CIIF projects prompted more studies and analysis on the social needs of the community
- Increased cohesion between NGOs
- Changing the traditional mindset; from regarding the marginalized groups as passive service users to be active service providers

5. Comment on the CIIF Secretariat

- The CIIF Secretariat tried their best in providing assistance to the participating organizations.
- We appreciated the Sharing Forum held last year as it boosted publicity. We look forward to seeing more to come.
- Maintained direct dialogue and close contacts with participating organizations.
- Enhanced communication between NGOs

- CIIF Secretariat should maintain flexibility in handling the applicants' requests
- Provided quick responses to organizations' needs and queries. Overall, we have been receiving timely feedback from the Secretariat. But sometimes the Secretariat is too fast for us, we might not be able to meet the timeframe they have set. Too rush sometimes.   Please do give us a little bit more time to respond.
- Hard working; but how to maintain efficiency of the CIIF Secretariat as the number of projects was increasing?

6.   Comments on arrangement of site-visit

- **The site visit provided one of the b**est ways to evaluate and record the effectiveness of the project; to show the SC concept concretely; provided the chance for grantees to meet with CIIF Committee Members; and strengthen mutual understanding.
- **The** site visits could be made more effective through more participants' sharing their experience directly; participants describing their own and expanding networks; and through more communication.
- **The site** visits could be made more efficient by:
  - ❖ Conducing visits once a year
  - ❖ Small video crew [too many students last time]
  - ❖ Prior arrangements; liaison; and pre-briefing with participants who might be unwilling to be filmed; getting full consent from all participants to be filmed
  - ❖ Not to be too formal in order not to give participants too much pressure

Focus on changes of the participants and the community
  - ❖ The Agencies and the project participants do share the CIIF's purpose of having site-visit.   Sometimes it's a lot more convincing for the CIIF Committee and Secretariat to explain the mission and vision of the CIIF directly to the participants rather than having the Agencies doing it alone.
  - ❖ Using practical example of the participants to illustrate the progress of the project
  - ❖ The videos should capture the community change sand the mindset changes of the participants
  - ❖ Let the participants talk to the Fund about their changes and in what way they felt empowered.
  - ❖ Some of the participants were more vulnerable and might not be suitable for them to face the camera.   The Agencies often took videos themselves with tapes showing moving personal stories.   The Agencies can supply relevant materials and see if the CIIF can produce some casebooks for promotional

purposes.

❖ The quality of production needs to be improved.

7. Comments on CIIF operation

The CIIF was very effective in:

- Enhancing communication between different NGOs
- Strengthening understanding of SC
- Provided support for different organizations to implement project at different districts with different target groups and project themes. This variety helped spread the quality seeds to places all over HK.
- Providing different briefings, conferences, and workshops to participating organizations
- Was flexible enough to renegotiate performance figures if there were good reasons why certain indicators might not be achieved.

Areas for improvement:

- Building up social capital is a concept worthy supporting. Get the involvement of more sectors, other than just NGOs. The concept should be more promoted because it had not yet been cultivated deeply in the community.
- The Fund should gather successful experience from projects. This will help spread the seeds and at the same time the efforts of the organization can be recognized.
- The majority of the approved project themes are related to social welfare. Is it because of the lack of creativity of applicants or because the Committee did not encourage creativity (from other applicants)?
- Consider giving greater support for those relatively small organizations
- Reduce the number of reports to be completed
- Reduce the level of demands on Grantees to participate in CIIF activities, especially for the 1st batch grantees.