

Learning Agenda Mini-Case #3

Four Consulting Organizations

1. Uni-Consultancy Services, University of Moratuwa

Outside the office of the Dean of the Engineering Faculty, University of Moratuwa, there is a gold tablet spelling out an inspiring message in bold black letters:

The Mission of the University of Moratuwa is to be an internationally recognized center of excellence in higher learning, research, consultancy and other professional services in Engineering, Architecture and allied professional fields by creating an environment conducive to nurturing the inquiring mind and developing skills for a diversity of challenges, and thus be a leader in contributing to sustainable scientific, technological, social and economic development in Sri Lanka.

The University of Moratuwa is a dynamic national center of engineering and technological expertise. It is the only university with a Faculty of Architecture and a Faculty of Information Technology in Sri Lanka. Its Engineering Faculty is the largest in Sri Lanka comprising 12 departments, such as, Civil Engineering, Electronics and Telecommunication, Transportation and Logistics, Materials Sciences, Mechanical Engineering, Earth Resources, etc. Its teaching, research and project staff hold advanced graduate degrees from universities in the USA, United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, Germany, France, the Netherlands, India, Singapore, Thailand and New Zealand.

The Uni-Consultancy Services (UNIC) office is located on the University of Moratuwa premises. The office has about 10 permanent staff members. A company profile describes Uni-Consultancy Services as *an Association affiliated with the University of Moratuwa, registered under the Company's Act No. 17 of 1982, as a Company Limited by Guarantee carrying its business at the University of Moratuwa.* Professor U.G.A. Puswewala, the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering is also the Chairman of Uni-Consultancy Services. He refers to UNIC as “the private arm of the University” with the flexibility to quickly mobilize consultants and pay competitive fees. UNIC picks its experts from the University of Moratuwa, other Sri Lankan Universities and private industry. 15% of earnings from a UNIC consulting assignment goes to the University of Moratuwa, 15% is retained by UNIC and the rest, 65-70% depending on the assignment, is paid to individual consultants.

UNIC has a good reputation. Its work to-date reflects the capacity to undertake a variety of consulting assignments for the Government of Sri Lanka, donor agencies and private companies. These assignments are usually highly technical in nature, but UNIC is doing or has done soft skills building work too. Some examples of UNIC's consultancy assignments are illustrated below:

- Running a Mobile Research Communication Laboratory for the Dialog Company;
- Doing pre-feasibility studies for eleven fishery harbors for the Ceylon Fishery Harbor Corporation;

- Energy Audit for the Laughs Corporation (a major fuel distributor in Sri Lanka);
- Collaborating with the National University of Singapore to provide training on project management in Singapore;
- Training engineers on *Minor Irrigation Rehabilitation* for the Ministry of Economic Development;
- Conducting a workshop on *Funding Proposal Writing* for local authorities;
- Providing training on doing *Training Needs Assessment for Industries and Communities*; and *Building Partnerships with Employers for Training* for staff of the Colleges of Technology;
- Market survey on private higher education for Sri Lanka's Board of Investment; and
- Preparing the Initial Environmental Examination Report (IEE) for the proposed weir across the Kelani River for the extraction of water to the Seethawaka Industrial Park, Avissawella.

Although it has never managed grants, UNIC is interested, and confident that it can serve as an intermediary organization for managing grant making and implementation processes. UNIC has access to a large pool of Sri Lankan consultants from universities and the private sector. It is oriented toward setting-up and running new projects.

2. Resources Development Consultants (RDC)

Established in 1974 by Mr. Norman Weerasooriya who hails from a family of lawyers and business leaders in Sri Lanka, Resources Development Consultants (RDC) has grown steadily over the decades, diversifying its sectors, partnerships, consultants and project locations. RDC currently has around 50 full time staff persons. It's directors are mature professionals who have held high-ranking positions in government and the private sector. It claims to have completed over 500 projects in over 23 countries, such as, Mongolia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, India, Bhutan, Maldives, China, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Nepal.

RDC has a multi-disciplinary and multi-sector approach for supporting infrastructure construction projects as well as for providing improved social services relating to agriculture, education, health and environmental protection. RDC's database carries information on nearly 5,000 consultants, with Sri Lankans comprising 90% of the experts. "Foreigners take a long time to understand the country. Our advantage is that we have contacts island-wide and at all levels of government in Sri Lanka. There is a marked decrease in the use of foreign consultants in Sri Lanka now. For example, we are steadily replacing international team leaders with Sri Lankans" explains an RDC Director. These experts are drawn from Sri Lanka's universities, government departments, private industry and non-profit organizations. However, to design, plan and execute large scale construction projects requiring state of the art technologies, RDC needs to partner with overseas companies.

RDC offers the following services:

Planning and Preparation:

- Project identification and preparation
- Feasibility studies

- Preparation of Master Plans
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Technical investigations and studies
- Socio Economic Surveys
- Needs assessments
- Social and Environmental Safeguard's

Conceptual and Detailed Design:

- Conceptual and Detailed Engineering Designs
- Design Review
- Preparation of Tender Documents
- Evaluation and Award of Tenders

Implementation:

- Construction Supervision
- Project Management
- Transfer of Technology
- HRD and Training
- Establishment of Management Information Systems

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Baseline and Benchmark Surveys
- Establishment and Implementation of M & E Systems
- Social Impact Assessments (SIA)
- Mid Term and Project Completion Impact Evaluations

RDC demonstrates success in partnering and sub-contracting with large consulting firms based overseas. Its work often involves supporting contracts generated by donor (such as, the Asian development Bank, the World Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency) funded projects for the Government of Sri Lanka. For example, RDC provided the services of Team Leader / Community Development Specialist; Technical Specialist; Hydro-geologist; 3 Senior Technical Officers and 3 Financial Assistants for the Second Community Water Supply and Sanitation Project – Technical assistance for Project Implementation, Trincomalee and Ampara Districts, Sri Lanka.

RDC is has the capacity to work as an intermediary service provider managing grants processes. This would need setting up a new project. However, RDC's interest in pursuing this line of work would depend on scale and profitability. RDC is not interested in undertaking projects under SLR one million.

3. Strategic Inspirations (Pvt.) Ltd

Strategic Inspirations helps diverse organizations to achieve their goals. Organizations supported include NGOs, small and medium businesses, and government agencies. Strategic Inspirations was the brain child of Peter Rezel, an experienced management consultant in Sri Lanka. Strategic Inspirations was formally registered as a private limited company on 29th October 2007. Two members of Mr. Rezel's team who had worked with him previously, Dr. Udan Fernando and Ms. Rushika Kannagara are Board Directos. Also on the Board is Mr. Sunil Bastian - a senior development consultant and Research Fellow.

At present SIPL is a small entity with only 3 full time staff members. When carrying out an assignment, SIPL employs consultants and experts in specific fields, forms teams and works with teams to ensure successful and timely delivery to its clients. With a strong network of consultants within Sri Lanka. SIPL is adept at mobilizing and deploying teams to meet the needs of a particular project.

Achievements

- Strategic Planning - SIPL adopts a results based approach in crafting strategic plans, developing logical framework matrices with indicators at outcome and output levels. SIPL has helped over 25 organizations develop their Strategic Plans, such as, Habitat for Humanity Sri Lanka (HFHSL), Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL), International Alert, Sri Lanka (IA-SL) and the Sri Lanka Press Institute.
- Evaluations – When doing an assessment / evaluation or capacity study, SIPL does an in-depth analysis of the contextual background in terms of an organization's political, social, economic and ecological environments. The institution and its program / project success is assessed in terms of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness / impact and sustainability. Every effort is made to draw out the lessons learned from the intervention to avoid mistakes and carry forward successful actions. Evaluations done by SIPL include the Asia Foundation funded RESIST Program evaluation, the organizational Evaluation of South Asian for Human Rights (SAHR) , and evaluation of the YMCA Tsunami Response Program.
- Organizational Development – FLICT, YWCA, HIVOS funded Butterfly Peace Garden (BPG) in Batticaloa.
- Proposal Development - SIPL has experience in developing program / project concepts and in preparing project / program proposals in accordance with the guidelines of different funding agencies, such as, EU, UNIFEM, WUSC, Diakonia etc. Three organizations - IMADR Sri Lanka, Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust (NTT) and Helvitas were successful in winning EU bids based on proposals developed with the help of SIPL . SIPL also supported ZOA to develop a funding proposal to AusAid.
- Training and Capacity Building - SIPL has developed training expertise in the areas of program cycle management covering log frame analysis, organizational development, accounting and financial management and human resource management. Examples include training on Project Cycle Management and the LFA approach for Friedrich Ebert Stiftung funded Trade Union Partners, and customized Finance Training for program staff at NTT, a local grant making organization.

- Human Resource Management – SIPL has assisted many organizations in job profiling, developing Terms of Reference/job descriptions, recruiting senior staff, establishing performance appraisal systems, developing and rationalizing compensations systems, etc. Some of SIPL’s clients include: Staff Compensation Scheme for HFHSL, International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) and Berendina. SIPL helped to fill the Executive Director position at TISL NTT, and Finance Director and Grants Administrator positions for ICES.
- Accounting and Financial Management – SIPL assists organizations in developing and implementing financial and accounting systems, implementing financial planning control systems, financial management information systems and carrying out internal audits and internal reviews. Examples include developing financial management systems for Vertite Research, Good Practice Group, National YWCA, and carrying out monthly and quarterly financial reviews for NTT, Verite Research, Civil Rights Movement (CRM), and the Peace building and Development Institute Sri Lanka (PDISL).

Future Aspirations

In response to shrinking donor funds, SIPL is tapping new funding sources. SIPL believes that engaging the corporate sector via CSR programs is a way to create effective public, private, civil society partnerships for community based development. SIPL is also supporting the start-up of Sri Lankan foundations to harness philanthropy for development. SIPL has worked with the philanthropic Esufally family (the owners of the Hemas Group of companies) to set-up a foundation to meet national development needs. SIPL is also working with the Amalean Family, owners of the MAS Group of companies to help them in a similar exercise.

Given its organizational capacity building experience and its links with Sri Lanka’s consulting communities, SIPL is very interested in becoming an intermediary for funding and managing grants programs. There will be a learning curve, but SIPL is confident it can be successful as a grant management intermediary.

4. Programme in Alternative Training (PALTRA),

(June 19, 2012, interview with Saman Hamangoda, Executive Director)

When entering the PALTRA office, one steps directly into a busy work room adorned with large posters emblazoned with footprints, photographs of trainers and trainees in action and banners spelling out “A Search for Alternatives” in Sinhala, Tamil and English. Several desks and chairs are clustered untidily in the center of the room flanked by book cupboards. A half-opened suitcase lies on the floor with trainer’s props. On one poster greetings are spelled out in a medley of Sinhala and Tamil letters.

PALTRA was formed in 1997 in response to an initiative by three donors: Bread for the World, Germany, ICCO Netherlands and Christian Aid, UK. Dr. Udan Fernando took the lead and invited several community development practitioners and human rights activists, such as, Anita Fernando, Lalith Abeysinghe and Peter Rezel to design a comprehensive training of trainers

(TOT) program. A broad approach was taken to cover many subjects relating to the theories, history, practical experiences and contexts of change management. The training program ran for one year, devoting 3-5 days a month to mastering one learning module per month. About 25 subject matter specialists, some from universities, did the training initially benefiting principally the staff of the three funding organizations. Shorter courses (each running for four months) were designed subsequently and opened to others on a fee-levying basis. “A weakness in the change management program is that we tried to cover many subjects instead of focusing on one subject” reflected Saman Hamangoda.

Between 2002 and 2004, the PALTRA managers had “long conversations” with the donors who finally decided to stop funding PALTA in 2005. The donors said that their training needs were fulfilled. But it is possible that disenchantment with the nation’s Peace Process was a big reason for donor pull-out too. “We could have closed down or decided to become self financing organization. We chose the second option as the way to go forward” explained Hamangoda. PALTRA changed its name from Programme for Alternative Training to Partners in Alternative Training in 2007. It is registered as a limited company under the Company Act No. 07 of 2007. It is also registered as an Institute for the provision of Tertiary Education/Vocational Education under the Tertiary and Vocational Educational Act No. 20 of 1990.

PALTRA wants to be “alternative” in its local capacity building approaches and participatory methods. It seeks to help Sri Lankan organizations to think critically and independently about their missions and actual work instead of looking to meet the priorities of donors. It is interested in learning and disseminating new knowledge to its partners and clients.

Today, PALTRA has eight full-time staff members. Six staff work as trainers and develop training materials in Sinhala, Tamil and English. The majority of PALTRA’s seven board members are experienced trainers and educators specializing in organizational development and change management. PALTA has 20 on-demand associates forming a pool of trainers. In 2011 PALTRA annual turnover was roughly seven million rupees. Mid-way in 2012 PALTA has already earned nine million rupees.

In 2005, PALTRA trained 11 INGOs, 10 LNGOs (local) and three government institutions. In 2005-7, PALTRA worked as a Consortium member supporting certified training and coaching programs for conflict transformation and peace building organized by GTZ’s FLICT program. In 2007-8, PALTRA conducted a Financial Management training program in collaboration with Christian AID. In 2007-10 PALTRA responded to training needs of the disaster management programs supported by JICA and the Disaster Management Center in Colombo.

PALTRA is reputed to be an organization which is highly dedicated to helping its partner and client organizations. Hamangoda is interested in PALTRA becoming a grants management intermediary. If not, PALTRA will certainly be able to help train grantee organizations. However, in a separate conversation, Priyanthi Fernando, the Executive Director for the Center for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) wondered whether becoming a management intermediary would destroy the free thinking, spontaneous and flexible character of small organizations, such as, PALTRA. True to its mission, CEPA would rather not become a conduit for donor funds.