SHEP's International Partnership Policy

The Social and Health Education Project is an Irish community-based, voluntary, not-for-profit training and development organisation, established in 1974 and working in Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Waterford. SHEP entered into an International Learning Partnership in 2007 specifically with Sahakarmi Samaj. This Learning Partnership has grown and deepened over the ten years. This document sets out SHEP's policy for International Partnership to guide and support this work over the coming years.

Core Commitment & Understandings

The following are commitments and understandings which are fundamental to our work in International Partnership:

I. A critique of mainstream 'development' (neo-liberal modernisation) which allows unjust and unsustainable exploitation of a majority of the world's people, as well as of its natural resources.

II. A commitment to social justice and the achievement of similar levels of dignity, well-being, freedom and security by all people.

III. A recognition of the need to give priority attention to those who are marginalised, disadvantaged and vulnerable.

IV. A (humanistic) recognition of the potential of human beings to learn and develop through critical analysis of their experience and on-going 'praxis' (action/reflection).

V. A recognition that, once critically engaged, it is those directly concerned that are best (and most legitimately) placed to determine what is desirable and appropriate in terms of their development.

VI. A conviction that, once critically engaged and equipped with self-esteem and personal skills, people can take effective steps, both as individuals and through transformed relationships with others, to enhance their wellbeing, freedom and security. (Also, that they are responsible for doing so).

VII. An acknowledgement that, because people are often *not* critically engaged or equipped with adequate self-esteem and personal skills, they can think, feel and act in ways that are not constructive for themselves or for their communities.

VIII. An understanding that inappropriate development interventions can 'disempower' by undermining critical awareness, self-esteem and personal skills, along with a conviction that appropriate interventions can 'empower' by promoting these things.

IX. A recognition that there are usually valuable resources (natural, human, financial, infrastructural) available locally to support development action, even in disadvantaged communities, and that optimisation of these resources is important for both sustainability and autonomy.

X. A recognition that national and local government, as well as certain non-government institutions, have a role and a responsibility to create an enabling environment for

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community-led development, to provide fair access to necessary external resources, and to uphold legal protection of human rights.

XI. A recognition that humanity can be nurtured in all people, whether their starting position is that of 'marginalised' or that of 'oppressor', and that social transformation requires change on all sides.

Commitment to Marginalised Communities in Nepal

SHEP's commitment is to supporting the most marginalised communities in Nepal, particularly South West Nepal.

Commitment to Facilitation for Empowerment and Social Transformation (FEST)

The FEST (Facilitation for Empowerment and Social Transformation) approach has been developed by Sahakarmi Samaj, our partner in Nepal. SHEP's policy is to support the development and uptake of the FEST approach. The FEST approach which is based on a belief that people themselves can bring real change to their lives and that the role of a supporting NGO is to create an enabling environment. Within this approach, communities independently analyse problems, make plans, and implement responses appropriate to their situations.

FEST encompasses a distinctive range of strategic commitments

I. Prioritising the marginalised and disadvantaged
II. Combating dis-empowerment
III. Building deliberative capacity
IV. Building organisational capacity
V. Developing an enabling environment
VI. Promoting sustainability

FEST does not provide a blueprint to be directly replicated in all situations. Instead it suggests a range of understandings, values, and principles that must be respected in the design and implementation of programmes designed to bring about empowerment of the marginalised and wider transformation in society. Related approaches have been used by other organisations in other settings.

1. Prioritising the marginalised and disadvantaged
FEST practitioners use a range of tools to identify the most marginalised communities in their work areas, including stakeholder consultation, community screening and structured social analysis. They also establish close, trusting relationships with the people in marginalised communities by living in their neighbourhoods, visiting and getting to know the occupants of every household and sharing in the daily activities of community life. They ensure gender balance in the composition of their field teams in order to facilitate open communication with both women and men. They also learn and use local languages and show equal respect to people of all backgrounds (ethnicity, caste, etc.). Although FEST is primarily a group methodology, they make special provision (family/household mentoring) for people whose circumstances make it difficult for them to participate in group activities.

2. Combating disempowerment
A defining characteristic of FEST is that it makes use of skilled process facilitation as a primary development intervention. FEST practitioners refuse to be 'problem solvers' or 'agents of change' and

instead attempt to support those directly concerned to take on these roles on their own behalf. In order that marginalised people will be able to discover (or recover) their own power and potential, FEST practitioners avoid adopting a high profile. They live simply and avoid ostentation. From the outset, they also make it clear that they come with 'empty hands' (i.e. that they do not provide material/financial resources or specialist technical expertise). At the same time, they show interest and express confidence in community members and acknowledge and affirm the skills and resources they are able to access and deploy.

3. Building deliberative capacity

FEST practitioners bring community members together in groups and use various tools (social/resource mapping, community history, seasonal calendar) to engage them in group discussions. They explain and demonstrate through their own behaviour the norms of respectful democratic group interaction. These norms are captured in group contracts, which serve as reference points to guide ongoing development of effective personal participation and group deliberation. Critical analysis is stimulated through the use of Freirean 'pedagogy' (androgogy). Critical engagement is generally first secured through the use of 'codes' based on issues of concern to community members that have been identified through 'listening surveys'. 'Code' discussions then serve to deepen critical analysis, revealing the root causes of these issues and the extent to which they are amenable to change. Collective action to address these root causes is reviewed through ongoing monitoring and final evaluation, both of which generate learning that is used to inform subsequent action.

4. Building organisational capacity

FEST practitioners help community members to develop project planning skills (objective setting, task scheduling, resource deployment, allocation of responsibilities, monitoring and evaluation, etc.). They also provide trainings to promote the emergence of stable community-based organisations from informal community groups (e.g. group strengthening training; community facilitation skills training; leadership training). Further support and training is provided to enable established community-based organisations to collaborate through apex or network organisations at different levels. Ongoing mentoring and organisational development assistance is provided for these apex organisations. At all levels, organisational capacity is monitored through the use of self-assessment tools ('spider diagram'; 'group photo', etc.).

5. Developing an enabling environment

Whilst recognising the responsibility of all people (including the marginalised) to act in their own and their communities' best interests, FEST practitioners recognise that government and non-government actors have a responsibility (and sometimes a duty) to promote people's dignity, wellbeing, freedom and security. They therefore disseminate information about the respective roles and responsibilities of these actors and provide signposting support. They also build the capacity of community-based and apex organisations to engage directly with these actors through liaison, claiming established entitlements, proposal preparation and advocacy. Such engagement helps to transform their perception of, and behaviour towards, marginalised communities. FEST practitioners support this transformation by providing development education and organisational development training for relevant government and non-government agencies.

6. Promoting sustainability

The existence within marginalised communities of empowered people with an established capacity for action learning is considered a key requirement for sustainability in the FEST approach. The existence of strong, inclusive community-based organisations and networks is also considered important. FEST practitioners encourage communities to recognise the importance of enhancing and sustainably utilising their local resources. They also seek to promote linkage with effective and lasting government and non-government institutions from which marginalised communities will be able secure ongoing support into the future.

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FEST encompasses a distinctive process
A feature of the FEST approach is that it combines these practice elements in a clearly sequenced process. This has five advantages. Firstly, it gives new field practitioners a clear sense of the steps they must take to apply this unfamiliar methodology in practice. Secondly, it introduces new practice elements in a measured way, such that they are better understood (and subsequently replicated) by community members. Thirdly, it makes it easier to manage a FEST programme and to reconcile it with donors' funding cycles. Fourthly, it facilitates mutual learning between field teams who are advancing through stages of the process in different areas at the same time. Finally, it keeps everybody (practitioners and communities alike) focused on the time-bound nature of the special opportunity FEST represents and the consequent need a) to use it well, and b) to avoid a dependency relationship.

FEST requires distinctive people
The success of FEST depends more than anything else on the personal qualities of those who practice it. As well as advanced skills in process facilitation, work as a FEST practitioner calls for personal integrity, a belief in the potential of all and a firm commitment to social justice. FEST practitioners must be prepared to live simply among marginalised and disadvantaged people and to accept the challenges that can present for them and their families. They must also be willing to step aside from the status they may enjoy as a consequence of educational achievement or social standing in order to 'serve' and empower the marginalised. To identify and develop adequate human resources, FEST practitioners have developed important processes of staff selection and training. Structured organisational learning is also a characteristic of a FEST programme.

Learning Partnership: specific commitments

'Learning Partnership' Approach
SHEP 's model of partnership is a 'learning partnership' model – meaning SHEP is committed to learning from and with the partner organisation while imparting any relevant knowledge/skills that could be of help. This two-way process creates a lasting relationship where both organisations can work as peers to support community development. SHEP has opted for this partnership model believing that local communities and organisations which can better understand, represent and address local issues will allow for more effective and sustainable development.

SHEP's Learning Partnership approach is underpinned by a number of specific commitments:

     I.   Equality
     II.   Mutual respect for values and beliefs
     III.   Trust
     IV.   Capacity Building
     V.   Accountability

Equality
SHEP values equality between partners and trust is central to the relationship. This foundation of equality allows for honest communication, mutual accountability and the ability to recognise each other's constraints and resources. In our learning partnership, neither party will be viewed more or less superior or capable.

Mutual respect for values and beliefs
All partnerships between SHEP and other organisations will adhere to SHEP principles and goals. There must be sufficient common ground between partners in sharing values and beliefs for the partnership to flourish. The partnership must be able work towards a shared position on important

issues, including gender equality, respect for diverse identities and a belief that marginalised and poverty-stricken people are agents of their own development and should always have their fundamental rights respected. SHEP acknowledges and embraces the differences between cultures as an opportunity for both partners to learn and grow through the potential challenges they present.

Trust

SHEP recognises that trust is the key for successful long-term learning partnerships that allow for numerous possibilities of growth for both parties involved. SHEP acknowledges that trust is something to be earned and valued; it is also established over time. Such trust allows for both organisations to work to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities while also allowing for a space for people to decide on their own priorities. There is also an allowance for risk-taking and for learning from mistakes. This flexibility supports for mutual learning and honest sharing.

Capacity Building

A Learning Partnership is based on mutual commitments to capacity building: both partners commit to building each other's capacity: both commit to learning from each other in ways which develop civil society capacity to support the needs of marginalised communities.

Accountability

SHEP actively encourages accountability and transparency among partners, and full compliance with all legal and ethical obligations.

Long-term commitment to Sahakarmi Samaj

Our partnership policy position is to focus on our partner, Sahakarmi Samaj, and to commit to this as a long term developmental, learning partnership. While we remain open to the possibility of working with other organisations though our priority is supporting Sahakarmi Samaj**.**

Documentation

Our partnership policy position is to document all agreements with partners in Memorandums of Understanding(or Partnership Agreements) and/or Project Agreements/Contracts as appropriate.