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ON THE ROAD BLOG

“Horn Please” and International Development Efforts

By [Vineeta Gupta](#) on January 24th, 2009 Category: [Blog](#), [South Asia](#)

Rajasthan, India — “Horn please” is the most common phrase one sees on vehicles while on the road in India. On my way to Rajasthan from Gujarat, I noticed it more than I would have before I started living in the US. It is funny, and at the same time it is a reflection of the differences in social fabric between the US and India. It is a problem in the US if you honk, and it is a problem in India if you don’t. Can you imagine a request of “horn please” from fellow drivers in the US?



Honk please

When undertaking socioeconomic development, international development efforts often fail to take into account the diversity and intricacy of the local context. The community is mostly engaged at the implementation stage. Effective participation at the conceptual and designing level is inadequate, if it occurs at all. With 17 major languages, over 840 dialects, diverse geography and cultures, a complex religious and political environment, and conflicting policies on international financial assistance, India poses a unique challenge to the international development community.

For me, it has been a fascinating journey to observe the development of NGO culture in India. There has been a tremendous transition since the late 1970s, when hardly anyone had heard of the term NGO, to 2009, when NGO, INGO, and CBO have become household words. Some of these entities have emerged out of the social justice movement in India, and many have been a byproduct of international development efforts. The outcomes of this change are as complex as the country.

Vineeta Gupta is GFC’s Program Officer for South Asia



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