

Capacity Development in Humanitarian Crises

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Content

1.	Preface	3
2.	Capacity Building for Local Community Organizations in Conflict-laden Context: Program of CWS in Aceh	5
3.	Capacity Development in Humanitarian Crisis	19
4.	Back from the trees	33

1. Preface

In February 2009 the first World Conference of Humanitarian Studies was held in Groningen, the Netherlands (see www.humanitarianstudies2009.org). PSO participated in the conference with a panel on Sustainable Capacity Building for Civil Society Organisation in Times of Crises. This document contains the three papers that were presented and discussed at this panel. The three papers look into capacity development from three different perspectives. The three papers are:

- *Capacity Development for Community Based Organisations in Conflict-laden Context, the programme of CWS in Aceh*

The first paper is from a Mirna Mutiara and her colleagues. All are southern practitioners working for Church World Services in Jakarta Indonesia. CWS is an INGO supporting local community organizations in Aceh.

In a crisis situation there is a tension between the humanitarian imperative to assist the primary stakeholders as fast as possible and the longer term requirements for sustainable capacity development. This dilemma is addressed in Mirna Mutiara's paper using field experiences. She discusses the experiences in Aceh Indonesia, which was hit by the Tsunami in December 2004. This disaster led to "a second Tsunami" of INGOs, who were competing for scarce local capacity to deliver their aid to the affected population. The situation was even more complicated because Aceh had been closed for many INGOs due to the long-lasting conflict. The paper reflects on the Capacity Development approach of the Church World Service (CWS) in order to support the capacity development of local grass root NGOs. The approach and its results is compared with other INGOs which used less developmental approaches in response to the Tsunami.

- *Sustainable Capacity Development in Crisis, Practice and Lessons Learnt for Strengthening Civil Society Organisations*

The second paper is from Rob van Poelje and myself. We are working for PSO in The Hague. PSO is an association of 54 Dutch INGO. It facilitates the Dutch member organizations and their partners in their learning and knowledge generation on the subject of capacity development.

The lessons learnt by PSO over the recent years are presented. PSO has used several instruments to support capacity development. In the paper Tukker and Rob van Poelje describe the various lessons learnt and recommendations as they have presented themselves over the past five years. They also offer insights in the trends of capacity development practice of the Dutch Member organisations of the PSO association and reflect on the extent to which the lessons learnt are being applied.

- *Back from the Trees, Capacity Development, Humanitarian Action and the Wider Challenge*

The last paper is from Ian Smillie, the author of *Patronage or Partnership, Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*. His latest books are *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World* (with Larry Minear, 2004) and *Freedom from Want* (forthcoming, March 2009). Ian, who is based in Ottawa, Canada, takes a helicopter view on the issue of capacity development and challenges some old habits.

The paper by Ian Smillie takes a much wider perspective. places the idea of capacity building for improved humanitarian delivery in the wider historical context of North-South relations. The paper reflects on the fact that rhetoric and action remain so far apart. Ian Smillie states "In pulling on the

thread marked “capacity building”, I find it attached to wider issues of humanitarian *purpose*, and to much ignored questions about how those suffering from the worst aspects of conflict are supposed to rebuild shattered lives and move forward into the broad sunlit uplands of sustainable peace and development. In that respect, the paper is as much about the need for transitional thinking as it is about humanitarian action, and about how – in emphasizing the latter and ignoring the former – outsiders may well assuage their own sense of obligation, outrage, pity and guilt, but do little to ensure that the need for their beneficence will not return.” In his paper Ian Smillie is giving northern organisations, both NGOs and their back donors food for thought regarding their own practice.

PSO is giving a high priority to capacity development of southern civil society organisations. The support to local capacity development is as important in situations of humanitarian crises as they are in a ‘regular context’ There are no easy solutions to the dilemma’s inherent to capacity development in humanitarian crises. If these were available they would have been implemented long time ago. I sincerely hope the papers will contribute self reflection and to future improvements.

A special thanks to Mirna Mutiara and Ian Smillie, who came all the way to the Netherlands to present their papers and share their knowledge and experiences at the PSO panel in Groningen.

Henk Tukker
PSO, The Hague
March 2009

2. Capacity Building for Local Community Organizations in Conflict-laden Context: Program of CWS in Aceh

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CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

2.1 BACKGROUND

An earthquake measuring 9.2 on the Richter scale that hit the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 created a devastating Tsunami that swept to the shores of Indonesia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka and even Somalia. Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam - NAD (commonly called Aceh), a northern province of Sumatra Island in Indonesia, was the first and most devastated region hit by the disaster. Aceh, that has pre-existing political/ security issues and had a handful of NGOs present before the disaster, became a huge international headline and evoked an outpouring of concern, action and financial assistance.

The estimated number of people that were killed in Aceh by the tsunami was 164,000 people and another 400,000 were made homeless¹, yet the real number who lost their lives will never be known. Meanwhile, the economic loss was estimated as being equivalent to the annual GDP of the province (Waizenegger, 2007, p.1).

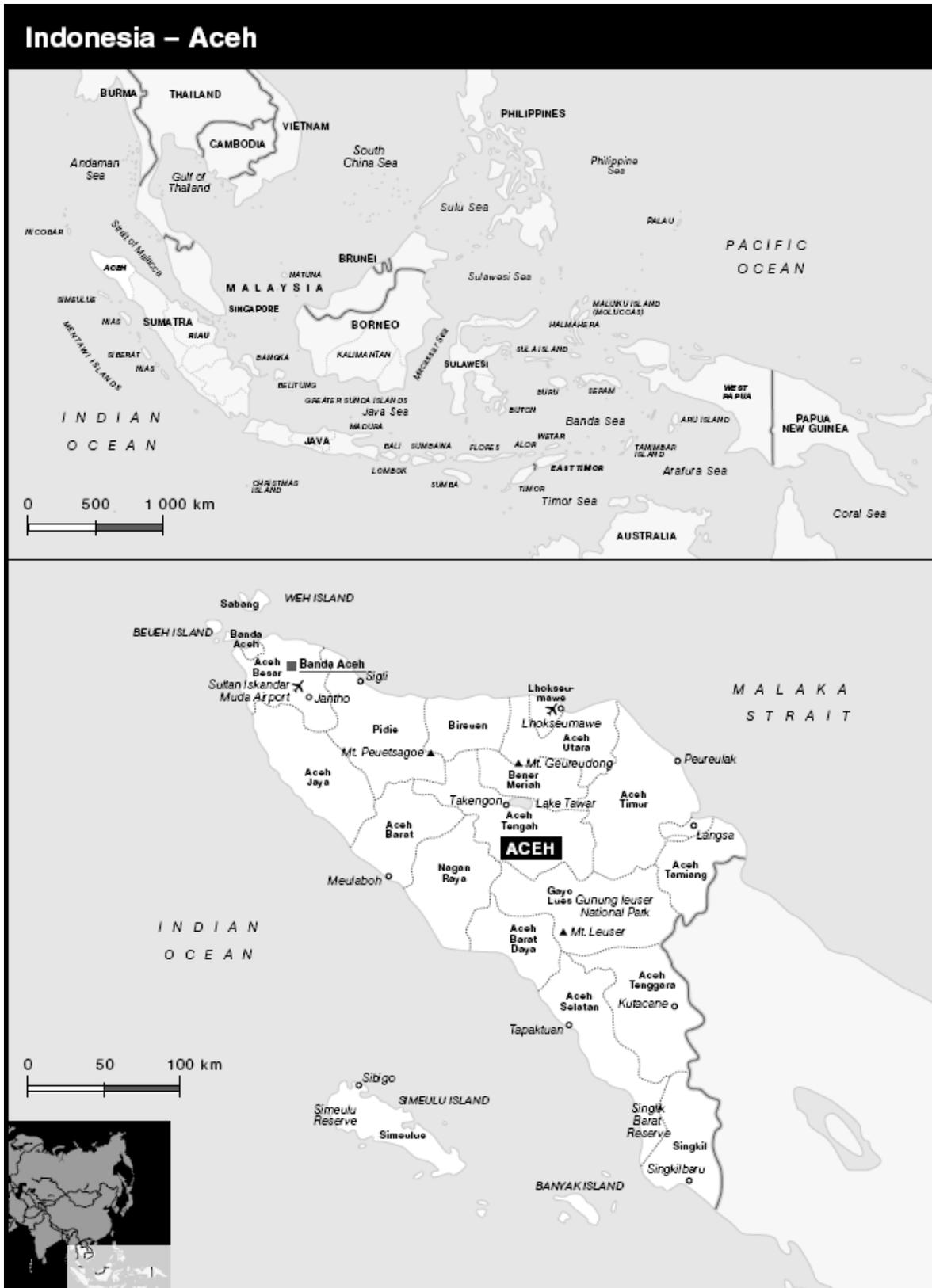
Before the tsunami: history of conflict...

Before the tsunami, Aceh was in the midst of a violent conflict that had killed around 15,000 civilians since 1976, news of which often failed to reach the outside world. (McCullough, 2005, p. 6). The conflict originated in a striving for independence due to the attendant feeling of being marginalized by the central government, in this case Jakarta, through the exploitation of Aceh's abundant natural resources which are primarily gas and oil reserves.

The dissenters grouped themselves under the leadership of Hasan di Tiro and established *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM, the Free Aceh Movement) in 1976 (ibid.: p.8) to operate the independence movement for Aceh. In the absence of a credible local elite through which it could govern the province and dampen the anger of the dissenters, Jakarta had relied on using the military and police for coercion and building patronage networks with local clients. The privilege given had been abused by the two state functions through local economic repression and human rights violations resulting in the armed conflict between the GAM and the military. The effect of the war was that everyone in Aceh was suspected by the military as a potential member of GAM. Consequently, the conflict had become as much about people who suffered violent death, disappeared, were tortured, raped and harassed by the military and GAM, as about economic grievances (ibid.: p. 20).

¹ *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2005, Chap. 4*

Picture 1 Map of Indonesia – Aceh



Source: McCulloch, 2005, p. 3

Post-tsunami and post-conflict nexus...

Throughout the 30 years of conflict, two peace attempts (Humanitarian Pause in 2000 and Cessation of Hostility Agreement in December 2002) failed. However, in August 2005, the Helsinki peace accord (known more commonly as MoU) was reached by the Government of Indonesia and the GAM. Apart from the unique nature of the MoU, the tsunami provided tremendous opportunity for the opening of Aceh to outsiders, thus pushing forward a peaceful resolution to the Aceh conflict. Several pieces of evidence, such as completion of peaceful local elections in December 2006, the return of economic activities to sub-districts and villages, and the declining incidence of violence² since the signing of the MoU have assured people that this attempt will not share the same fate as the previous two (Sukma, 2007, pp. 4-6).

Under this accord, the peace building moved forward alongside the post-tsunami reconstruction. The two processes rubbed along, but new challenges arose on account of the interaction. The government needed to sustain the peace process while giving their undivided attention to the post-tsunami reconstruction. At the humanitarian assistance level, the influx of aid organizations and the rise of civil society organizations, with 430 national NGOs supported by dozens of UN and foreign government agencies, as well as 124 INGOs active in Aceh in 2005, opened up a political space within Aceh. The space created mutual acceptance and collaboration that eased tensions between the government and the civil society while helping NGOs to strengthen and institutionalize (Waizenegger, op.cit, pp. 6-7). Up to this level, various documents describe the varied impacts of INGOs on local organizations. For instance Waizenegger (ibid.: p.7) describes the new potential for power in civil society that has been created in post-conflict and post-tsunami Aceh on account of the ties that the civil society has made with politically and financially powerful INGOs, some of which also bring commitment to raise and increase the capacity of social groups. However, an evaluation by TEC (2008, p.8) on Aceh raised concerns about the future intervention after the reconstruction - rehabilitation phase has ended, and peace-building process has set in. It then suggested examining the extent to which local organizations have regained their capacity to lead recovery and development in order to design future intervention that addresses both structural and conflict-based problems in Aceh. A field observation by Kenny (2005, p. 10) showed that community development methods used in the context of Aceh, where they exist, were only a small part of the activities of international agencies, despite their use of community development rhetoric. Receipt of funds and resources from INGOs committed to community development principles nearly always require similar formal bureaucratic processes and structures necessary for western NGOs to receive funds.

To contribute to the many observation studies as mentioned above, CWS hereby takes the implementation of its program in Aceh as a remarkable example. We will look at how the interaction between the post-tsunami situation and post-conflict process affected CWS' capacity building approach for the local partners in Aceh.

Apart from having commitment to live up to the ideal of capacity building and describing what has been done to achieve it, CWS would also like to present the challenges faced when trying to live up to the true meaning of capacity building.

² *Experience in the field witnessed, however, that some violence and harassment kept occurring such as robbery, kidnapping and other criminal actions which involved armed battles.*

2.2 THE SELECTION AND CAPACITY SETTING OF LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Premised upon the history of conflict, the majority of civil society organizations in Aceh emerged from the sectors of advocacy, human rights, livelihood or trauma counseling for conflict victims. However, their outreach and capacities were severely limited due to the repression caused by the protracted armed conflict between the GAM and the state. The military rule to which the Acehnese had been subjected to curtailed the freedom of association, assembly and expression (Scheper, 2006, p.14). During the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, the demand on local NGOs as implementing partners of tsunami programs was enormous, putting further severe constraints on those that had lost personnel and assets due to the disaster. However, a welter of new local organizations sprung up in response to the availability of funds and material aid. Before the tsunami, CWS had been present in Aceh since 2000 providing a livelihood program for poor Acehnese farmers through a local NGO called MAMAMIA.³ The livelihood program was practically completed when the tsunami struck Aceh in December 2004. CWS then requested immediate assistance from MAMAMIA to implement a tsunami emergency response and search for more local NGOs through which CWS could implement the whole emergency response program. Selecting from a huge number of local organizations and establishing local partnership in the midst of a calamity was extremely challenging for CWS. The selection criteria were, however, quickly established covering primarily the aspects of: length of existence in Aceh, vision and mission and depth of experience (capacity).

The experience from both the conflict and tsunami, as well as their practical consequences, affected local organizations profoundly in that social relations, attitudes and expectations changed. In his comment, Wiratmadinata (2006, no page number) points out that the influx of foreign agencies into Aceh has created a weakening of local NGOs or CSOs whose best staff members were taken away by big foreign projects. Further, Weizenegger (2007, p.7) explains that the pre-dominant top-down approach followed by many donors and INGOs impeded the full unfolding of the potential of local NGOs, in effect weakening their independence of action, with many becoming simple sub-contractors. There is some truth to the views expressed above, although they appear to embrace the assumptions that there was a sufficient number of local NGOs that existed in Aceh prior to the tsunami⁴ who had the capacity (and interest) in leading at least development and risk reduction in response to the disaster. As for CWS' intervention in the aftermath of the disaster, staff recruitment could have not been very strict in that almost any willing and able-bodied person was needed to take part in the relief assistance program. However, during the subsequent phases, there was a tight selection process where requirements were stringent. Proven community development and or technical skills as well as sufficient fluency in English became among the most predominant criteria. Reaching to this level, it had been quite difficult for members of Acehnese local NGOs to move to INGOs. In addition, throughout the intervention phases in Aceh, there were a lot of staff members of local NGO partners who remained loyal to their organizations for they realized that they could provide better accountability to communities than their foreign counterparts, thus keeping themselves just as a working partner for the INGOs.

3 MAMAMIA (*Yayasan Masyarakat Makmur Mitra Adil*) is a local NGO and an old player in Aceh. The main mandate since it was established is to serve the economic activities of Acehnese farmers. For around 6 months in 2002, CWS engaged MAMAMIA in a short emergency response for IDPs caused by the conflict.

4 Unlike in Yogyakarta, a city in Indonesia that was struck by a devastating earthquake in 2006, the intervention had been proved successfully outstanding for the help of a big number of well-managed and unsuppressed local NGOs that had existed prior to the disaster. CWS currently has been carrying out some programs in the area since 2006. For more reading about the recovery response in Yogyakarta please see "One Year After Java Earthquake and Tsunami: Reconstruction Achievements and the Results of Java Reconstruction Fund", 2007, by Java Reconstruction Fund (JRF).

In the search for agreed partnership mechanisms in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, there was surely a tendency on the side of the local NGOs in Aceh to be submissive to the working framework of perceived established and well-experienced INGOs. And there was also not sufficient time to set up a new middle-ground that could satisfy both parties in the emergency and relief phases. However, this did not always indicate the intention to retain such an unbalanced partnership. Right from the early intervention, CWS developed a partnership strategy in almost all intervention sectors. Unlike in most emergency and relief situations which favor direct intervention⁵, CWS had designed partnership with the local NGOs as the premise for building up their capacity in the long run. The top-down approach that is commonly assumed or found within INGO – local organization partnership was, by CWS, ironed out through a partnership agreement (indirect intervention to help beneficiaries) with defined rights and responsibilities for the two parties. It was also addressed by inviting all of the selected local NGOs to submit their proposal for program activities and strategies tailored to the local conditions.

Thorough pre-assessment was carried out before selecting the local partners⁶, with the main aim being on planning future capacity building activities that patch up any organizational and operational drawbacks they may have had. Such drawbacks included proposal design, financial and reporting management. For local NGOs assessed to be unfit as CWS partners, future invitation for them to CWS' capacity building activities separately designed for general empowerment of civil society organizations was made possible.

⁵ *There are some justifiable reasons however that direct intervention could be the most accountable approach during emergency and relief assistance. This is not discussed in this paper.*

⁶ *Interestingly, unlike most other INGOs operating in Aceh tsunami response, CWS never conducted a formal public meeting or joined one to invite local NGOs for partnership. Instead, from the four local NGOs interviewed, they encountered CWS in relatively informal ways: reference from other local NGOs and proximity of local NGO's office to CWS office.*

2.3 FITTING INTO THE DYNAMICS OF CONTEXT

CWS as one of the first international NGOs on the ground, currently has two offices in the region (Banda Aceh and Meulaboh), to provide humanitarian response programs for tsunami survivors in Aceh. The case in this paper is based on the over 3-year intervention in Aceh; January 2005 – July 2008. Throughout the intervention, CWS provided shelter, food and non-food items, water and sanitation, housing, livelihood, health and nutrition, psychosocial support and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). In order to deliver such varied assistance on such a massive scale CWS worked with local organizations, hereinafter referred to as local NGOs. Realizing the limited capacity of the selected local partners at that time, CWS had designed capacity building programs so that the assistance could reach beneficiaries efficiently and effectively. CWS brought no foreign experts into Aceh. Instead, it transferred experienced staff from other CWS field offices to Aceh and recruited new local staff (Acehnese) to increase and support CWS' familiarity with the contextual setting of Aceh in terms of language, local customs and networking.

What is capacity building (CB)?...

Capacity Building, hereinafter referred as CB, according to Chaskin, et al. (2001) as cited in Kenny (2005, p. 4), is essentially about strengthening community capacities to identify priorities and opportunities, to foster and sustain positive change. They also define it as the interaction of human capital, organizational resources and social capital existing within a given community, that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and maintain the well-being of that community. Going much deeper, Eade breaks down a CB approach into having three purposes: as means to an end, as process and as ends. As means CB is aimed at strengthening an organization to perform specified activities. The focus is likely to be on improving the links between the structure, processes and activities of the organizations receiving support, and the quality and quantity of their outputs and outcomes. As a process, CB is used as an approach to adapt to change and for internal reaffirmation that gives an organization both the resources to deal with challenges as they arise and the will to continue acting. The focus is on assisting the counterpart to become a more self-reliant and autonomous actor within a long-term alliance, or critical accompaniment to the donor and other relevant agencies. As ends, CB strengthens the NGO in order to survive and fulfill its mission, as defined by the organization. The focus is on the counterpart's organizational mission and the mesh between this, its analysis on the external world, and its structure and activities. Criteria for effectiveness will therefore relate to the extent to which the mission is perceived to be appropriate, coherent and fulfilled (1997, pp. 34-35).

Overall, in contrast to traditional donor-driven features of welfare and aid programs, CB ensures long-term self-management, local participation, control and knowledge. Kenny (op.cit., pp. 5-9) characterized the post-tsunami CB in Aceh as falling into three categories: as community development; as teaching skills and training; and as reconstruction without transferring skills or training. The last type, according to Kenny, is the most common type of 'capacity building' found in Aceh despite the preference of the Acehnese for the first category. This analysis is of course worth exploring further and the case of CWS' program in Aceh could tell the much deeper dynamics of how a CB approach was implemented in the field.

The kinds from CWS....

The CB that CWS has been giving to its local partners throughout Indonesia is, in its simplest term, primarily aimed at empowering the organizational and operational capacity of local partners to help CWS implement program objectives effectively and efficiently. However, this simple aim has never been rigid in real field practice.

In most other programs outside Aceh⁷, CB had reached the level where CWS enabled the local partners to reposition their working mechanism oriented towards community development and creating their own fundraising. In the case of Aceh, although CB was one of the program objectives right from the beginning of the appeal to the donor, not until relief assistance had been carried out did CWS begin to design and plan appropriate CB intervention. Most CB activities by CWS started to be seen in early 2006.

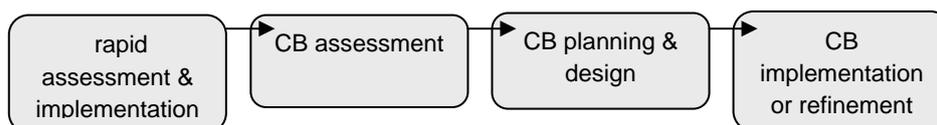
The program in Aceh presented a different challenge for CWS' CB effort for the local partners, in that the 'abnormal' situation (post-conflict & post-disaster) in the area limited the possibility of satisfying the ideal that most academics think CB is supposed to be. The model of CB described by several authors follows a conventional step of developmental intervention; the kind that CWS did not carry out right from the outset of the program implementation in Aceh.

Conventional Intervention of Capacity Building



The above sequence well suits a condition where intervention presence is planned well in advance, in that selection of local NGO partners is well assessed through a considerably long process. However, the CB intervention in Aceh followed more or less the following sequence:

CWS Intervention of Capacity Building in Aceh



The reverse pattern that CWS adopted changed the face of the otherwise usual intervention for CWS in the normal context of humanitarian assistance. The obvious weakness of this sequence is that expectation and fixing took place in the middle of the program implementation. Consequently, approaches adopted in the midst of the ongoing programs may have not been predicted and foreseen by the local NGOs from the very beginning of the partnership. A comment from the Director of Annisa Institution: *"We were frantic for a while with CWS....we implemented the program first and refinement came afterwards...."* (Husin, 2009: an interview)

⁷ From 2000-2008 CWS implemented a PILAR program which primarily focused on the development of the livelihood of poor communities. This program was implemented in various areas that were politically and socially stable, what we refer then as a 'normal' situation. Due to the considerable length of this program CWS had been able to establish sound partnership where understanding of needs went deeper than just unfolding the operational and organization weaknesses of the local partners. Through this program CWS was able to assist the local partners significantly to scale up to the level where some of them could raise their own fundraising and have a sound foothold in the community.

There are times when ensuring physical survival must take precedence over more consultative processes, and during the first six to ten months it was difficult to uphold principles ensuring that the response was based on assessed needs and effectively coordinated with other actors, including the local NGOs. During these times CWS implemented the program along with capacity assessment and monitoring the local NGOs, coupled with coaching and intensive accompaniment which can actually be regarded as early CB for the local NGOs.

CB engagement and how local partners feel....⁸

Prior to the tsunami, thus during the conflict era, local NGOs were engaged mainly with renowned players in the humanitarian sector⁹. Hardly had they heard INGOs that are operational and growing eminence in Aceh after the tsunami. It is understandable given that the political instability in Aceh hindered humanitarian players to intervene in the area despite its prolonged socioeconomic deprivation.

The local NGO partners interviewed revealed that the intervention from the foreign humanitarian organizations in Aceh before the tsunami did not require the extensive CB they experienced during the tsunami response. They gave various explanations for this; some of them stated that the considerable length of time of projects (non-emergency nature of pre-tsunami programs) they implemented in the pre-tsunami era allowed them to take corrective actions a number of times along the project course, if their capacity did not meet the requirement of the foreign partners. Others mentioned that the capacities they have now were not in dire need for pre-tsunami interventions due to lack of personnel, or high mobility of the local NGOs (some local NGOs did not have permanent offices and their staff could work from home due to conflict). Accentuating the capacity condition in pre-tsunami era the Director of PASKA Institution described: *"...so was the financial system.....one person could be the accountant and she was also a treasurer.....and there was also no auditor.....so we could work to our heart's content....a lot of overlaps as there were no monitoring...so now we have learned a lot to be professional."* (Haryani, 2009: an interview).

There has also been an observed shift in working ethos among the local NGO staff. The consequence of massive disaster aid that descended suddenly on Aceh has shaped the minds of the local NGOs, affecting their orientation of assistance to the affected communities. The basic organizational attitude that rejects profound learning in favor of frantic activities was commonly found during the partnership. The local NGOs that were established way before the tsunami, thus in the midst of conflict, were composed of activists who worked purely for humanitarian purposes. Back then, with limited or no funding they kept assisting and empowering communities. In the aftermath of the tsunami, such spirit has been slowly diminishing. The 'non-traditional' management structure that was transferred obviously or adopted from the working mechanisms of INGOs has shaped the working ethos of members of some local NGOs. A comment from staff of PASKA institution: *"Before the tsunami we worked hard until late at night...dedicating ourselves to the needs of the community....and there was no overtime fee....we worked voluntarily.....no problem.....now it becomes an obligation to know how much overtime will be paid.."* (Nonong, 2009: an interview).

⁸ Information was mainly drawn from CWS Aceh's local NGO partners interviewed: Annisa, LPPM, PASKA and YPS Institutions on January 21, 2009. All these four NGOs were established before the tsunami.

⁹ From all staff of local NGOs interviewed three names came up: USAID, ICMC and IOM.

Another response from the Director of Annisa institution: *“Before (the tsunami).....whether there was funding or not we kept working for the community..... people work for the institution.....now (after the tsunami) they work for programs.....NGOs that have been established since the conflict era will likely continue working for the institution after any funding has ended.....but the new ones (local NGOs newly established right after the tsunami).....we are not sure.”* (Husni, 2009: an interview).

Further comment from the Deputy Director of LPPM: *“In conflict era our friends who established local NGOs are activists who see the real condition of the community...after the tsunami merely workers have emerged...the two (activists and workers) have different orientation...”* (Subuki, 2009: an interview).

During the partnership, CWS found that the local NGOs mainly lacked experience in project management, managing large funds and, most importantly, rapid assistance. However, both CWS and the local NGO partners were aware of their nonexistent experience in large scale emergency assistance prior to the tsunami. Overall, CWS provided a range of capacity building interventions that included, among others, the following activities: project design training, financial management, Participatory Research Appraisal (PRA), psycho-education training, seminar on HIV and AIDS for adolescents, trainings on health nutrition and sanitation for cadres, stress management, disaster education aimed at both adults and children, vocational skills development, Sphere training, Training of Trainers (ToT), small business development, Early Childhood Development (ECD) trainings and community groups strengthening. In comparison to what they had before the tsunami, the local NGOs stated that the types of capacity building they have since the tsunami are much more comprehensive and variegated in nature. Generally in Aceh, almost all staff of local NGOs, right from the director to the field officers, received trainings. Due to the large funds available from donors an accountant could even receive a PRA training, a thematic sector that an accountant couldn't have dreamt of prior to the tsunami era.

By more observation, the CB given by CWS can be categorized into what Kenny (2007) terms 'skilling and training'. From the analysis of our local NGO partners, all the trainings and teaching of skills given by CWS provide both short-term and long-term benefits. Those providing short-term benefits cover programmatic needs such as; logistics/procurement, livelihood, HIV and AIDS or psychosocial trainings. Trainings such as PRA, community group strengthening, monitoring-evaluation or organizational management, thus pertinent to local NGOs' relationship and accountability to the community, are considered as providing long-term use. CWS was also considered very careful in selecting staff for trainings. Pre-assessment carried out for CB ensured that staff of local NGOs had never received similar trainings from other donors. This method was employed to avoid replication and ensure fair distribution of skills and knowledge among the local NGO staff. However, there was a great deal of frustration experienced by CWS related to the retainment of enhanced capacity within the local NGO partners. The operation of hundreds of INGOs as well as the tremendous dynamics of humanitarian assistance in Aceh had created high staff turnover within the local NGOs. Staff members moved quickly from one project to another and from local organizations to international humanitarian bodies. This high mobility presented another challenge for CWS raising the question of whether with CB effort in local NGOs in Aceh during the massive relief and rehabilitation-reconstruction projects it would be possible to lay a foundation for building CB oriented towards community development or 'strengthening NGO to survive and fulfill its mission, as defined by the organizations' (Eade, op.cit, p. 35).

The financial training had been an interesting aspect of CB, though. All of the local NGO partners interviewed mentioned that trainings and the skills offered by CWS related to financial accountability

did not provide any room for them to flexibly adopt some of their existing financial practices. The whole CWS financial system process must be fully implemented within local NGOs' financial structure.

This raised some frustration among the staff as they had to abandon what they had been practicing in the old days. Stated by the local NGOs, other foreign partners imposed similar methods on them, but this did not last very long as the financial processes were gradually relaxed, accommodating to what the local NGOs had had. This flexibility took effect after there was recognition from the foreign partners that they just need to patch up the gaps found in the local financial process system.

CWS acknowledged that the 'tight' teaching of financial skills had become the 'obligation' of the local NGOs to adhere to through implementation. Responding to this, CWS emphasized that the issue of fraud had been prevalent in Aceh since the massive influx of funding into the area. A little flexibility could result in the 'opportunity' of misusing funding. Most of CWS' local NGO partners did not have financial standards that particularly manage huge funding as well as a mechanism that controls every penny spent. The experience from the field also tells that staff of local NGOs did not even know why such financial systems were important for the overall program accountability.

In the overall analysis of CB implementation in the whole project in Aceh, CWS' local partners viewed that the CB given, be it short-term or long-term in providing interests, has laid a foundation for them to be more professional, disciplined and design accountable engagement with their communities. They revealed that the CB experience with CWS, and also others INGOs, had been overwhelming but has given them priceless lessons on how humanitarian actions differ from one context to another. They have also learned that different CB approaches espoused in order to be more accountable can manifest in variegated ways.

When asked about the manifestation of CB they would like to have in the long run, the views expressed by interviewees were mixed. Some commented that there is a dire need for capacity to change the local community's mentality so that they would understand that the change comes from within and not from outside, in this case the donors. Others responded that capacity should be enhanced in the use of technical tools that can ensure accountability to the community. Such tools include PRA and monitoring-evaluation analysis. Another response emphasized the need for the training of trainers (ToT) so that the staff members of local NGOs can readily perform as ready-to-use assets. The common interest that the interviewees shared was the need for external agencies to equip them with strategies to sustain the organization's life itself. The strategies could include fundraising and networking.

A response from one of CWS' local partners: *"..for local NGOs....we have received almost all types of trainings, but the thing that has become the block is how to acquire capacity that could help sustain the operation of an organization.....like fundraising....because we cannot forever depend on international donors.....because actually all the local NGOs have their own unique capacities that can be developed further....and the strategies should be built to support those endogenous capacities....."* (Subuki, 2009: an interview).

Looking at the responses, it can be concluded that CB in the views of the local NGOs does not emphasize one distinct kind of purpose. Harkening back to Eade's division of CB, CWS' CB approach for local NGO partners in Aceh functioned as means, process and ends simultaneously. It is true that all the CB activities delivered were directed towards maintaining quality performance within the program implementation, it was used to ensure critical accompaniment during the partnership and at the same time it provided basic elements for the local partners to start analyzing their external worlds.

2.4 ANALYSIS AND LESSONS LEARNT

Ideally, as stated in numerous conceptual studies, CB practices for indigenous organizations, at their best, should promise long-term self-management, local knowledge, participation and control. Further, Kenny, in her research on tsunami response in Aceh, suggested that CB must draw on principles of community development or be people-based; it is essentially a form of endogenous development that begins with a commitment to community control (2005, p. 5-6). In reality, for CWS, plunging into emergency assistance in Aceh and moving through the relief and reconstruction phase, this approach was found difficult to implement as the intervention at the beginning did not place much emphasis on CB. Instead, funding and commitment were geared more towards concrete relief assistance like shelter, housing or water supplies, thus making CB inevitably merely a support system. When investment was limited at the beginning for the true meaning of CB; but by the time the situation was more conducive to implement CB, we were approaching the end of the project, and thus funding. The CB aspired to on the basis of Kenny's definition requires a long-term, focused and flexible approach as it privileges the community and participation, as well as profound analysis of the diversity of views and the existing power inequality in the community. Furthermore, formal and extensive consultation with the local NGOs, which are surely required if ideal CB is to be built, was unfeasible in the midst of immediate post-disaster, in the initial stages of a relief program and where capacity structures were obviously weak within the local NGOs. However, said conditions should not negate the principles of consultative planning, which CWS carried out at least from the start to build on imperfect beginnings.

Early conducive measures to realize CB approaches can be designed right at the outset of emergency assistance. In the case of Aceh, CWS built partnership (not contracting) with local NGOs and proposed CB intervention in the emergency appeal to donors, although it was not a high priority in terms of funding allocation. Unlike many humanitarian institutions found plunging into expensive direct implementation in most sectors during emergency and relief responses, CWS proved it possible to carry out a partnership with local NGOs right from early intervention.

With the obvious limited capacity of local Acehnese NGOs, a top down approach in implementing CB was undeniably implemented to ensure that the local partners were not left to their own devices with such a massive physical reconstruction effort, not to mention the issue of fraud prevalent in the area at the time of massive tsunami aid. Nevertheless, capacity assessment of local NGOs was carried out by CWS during the early implementation until the right phase to start CB activities was found. CWS learned, however, that the implementation of CB in the middle of the program created expectancy havoc. Perceived expectation built both by CWS and its local partners pertaining to CB at the beginning of partnership turned out to be different when the actual CB activities were implemented in the middle of the program. This lesson learnt has taught CWS, specifically for the emergency assistance context, to plan in advance how to share expectations of a CB approach at the beginning of partnership, before actual CB activities begin.

There are some CB activities seen by local NGOs as very useful but providing short-term benefits (such as logistics or procurement). However, long-established local Acehnese NGOs who had never partaken in such activities during the conflict era, valued them very much and could feel that the CB given had transformed the organizational works into much more professional ones. Therefore, to retain the skills and knowledge that serve short-term interests, there should be proper documentation established that functions as organizational guidelines or procedures for future use. The local NGO partners also appreciated the types of training that CWS provided, whether they were regarded as

giving short- or long term benefits, in that they have been able to respond to the tumultuous change in the aftermath of the tsunami and invest professionalism in the organization. This clarifies that the term 'capacity building' stems from understanding underlying differences between stakeholders about how CB is assumed to occur. The 'legacy' of a particular CB intervention conflates short-term outcomes and long-term impact that should be assessed not just by external agencies, but also the local NGOs who became part of the process of change.

After the conflict and tsunami, social relations and expectations changed within the Acehnese communities as well local NGOs. Therefore, it is suggested that CB intervention be given to local NGOs who have been committed to serving the community long before the disaster or crisis occurs, rather than to those merely established in response to emergency. As also stated by CWS' local partners, local NGOs in Aceh springing up right after the tsunami inclined to be short-term in operation, due to weak organizational structures and patronage from external resources: tsunami aid. Providing CB to such organizations may damage the possible long-term and trickle-down benefits that the CB activities can promise.

Most local NGOs in Aceh that were established before the tsunami have very strong commitment to serving the community. They were strong when funding was limited (in conflict era), they have been well aware of their roles since the pouring in of tsunami aid and they are prepared for whatever comes their way once the tsunami funding has wound down. These local NGOs, however, work for different missions and in different institutional mechanisms, all of which may not always support them in achieving the true meaning of CB. Capacity Building as ends, realizing local NGOs' full roles in society for future survival, requires transformational change within the local NGOs themselves, the kind of change that for many local NGOs would mean shaping their vision and mission. External agencies such as CWS need to be careful with this effort, although within the whole assistance itself CWS provided an entry point for the local NGOs, not just the people, to equip themselves in order to move towards community development. For the subsequent step, local NGOs are in a better position to respond developmentally than outside agencies. For CWS this means that we are only in a better position to unfold and understand the motivation of each local NGO partner and design what types of CB intervention needed by those local NGOs. This standpoint is premised by the fact that the local NGO partners regard the CB manifested in training and the teaching of skills just as conducive to building their long-term potentials as the community development kind of CB. To relate it to the culture of most long-established Acehnese local NGOs who have been very confident in their community development approaches due to the long experience in conflict context¹⁰, the resistance to position CB as ends could be high. Therefore the trainings and teaching of skills could be the most appropriate means built into the overall strategy to enable local NGO partners to make use of what they have learned for community development purposes. However, if CB is to be fully realized as ends in the whole intervention of emergency assistance context, a separate program of activity needs to be designed. This is of course in contrast to one of the caveats of CB approach stating that it cannot be seen as an independent or self-contained activity. (Eade, 1999, p.32). Going further, it is also worth noting how INGOs themselves, such as CWS, operate within the emergency and reconstruction-rehabilitation funding. For donors, if the emergency and recovery humanitarian assistance should support long-term development, a clear purview on how CB for local NGOs is placed within the project funding needs be developed. Adequate portion of funding allocation and principle methods of its implementation within emergency and relief appeals would substantially help INGOs plan well its application in the field.

¹⁰ *Although in some local NGOs, in their programs, very limited participatory philosophy or practices are apparent.*

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3. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

**Practice and Lessons Learnt on
Strengthening Civil Society
Organisations**

Henk Tukker and Rob van Poelje

PSO Paper presented at the
World Conference on Humanitarian Studies
Groningen, February 2009

3.1 Introduction

This paper summarises the current practice and lessons learnt from five years PSO support to capacity development of civil society organisations in crises. During these five years the PSO association has financed pilot programmes and offered a platform for reflection and learning through the organisation of seminars, conferences, collective learning trajectories and action research. The present paper is an attempt to summarize the insights documented in the many evaluations and reports that resulted from these activities. It presents the perception of the authors that will at a later stage be subjected to discussion with the concerned member organisations.

In section one we give a brief overview of the instruments PSO has used over the past five years. The use of these instruments has led to the reports and papers that are the main sources for the present paper.

In section two we describe the various lessons learnt and recommendations as they have presented themselves over the past five years. Section three offers insights in the trends of capacity development practice of the Dutch Member organisations of the PSO association. In the last section we describe the future directions for support in times of crises.

3.2 PSO Instruments for capacity development: the sources of lessons learnt

The overall objective of PSO is to contribute to the quality of the cooperation between Dutch development organizations and their partners, and reinforce the contribution of an independent social civil society to community development and poverty alleviation. Learning is a central issue.

In order to reach its objective PSO uses four interlinked instruments to support sustainable capacity development:

1. Facilitating learning on capacity development by individual member organisations.
2. Financing capacity development programmes in the south.
3. Supporting innovation initiatives.
4. Collective learning on capacity development issues.

These instruments are applied to “regular” contexts and also to the context of humanitarian crises, both caused by conflicts or natural disasters. The four instruments are interlinked and the lessons from one instrument often feed into another. Cross fertilisation finds place at various levels.

Instrument 1 Facilitation of learning of individual member organisations

PSO facilitates member organisations to learn from the capacity development support in practice. The member organisation identifies a challenge in their organisation and together with PSO a process of learning is developed to address the issue. These processes give PSO insight into the practice of its member and the challenges each member faces. The result will contribute to learning. For example PSO supports War Child in developing a system for learning together with its partners.

Instrument 2 Financing of programmes

PSO funds programmes at the request of Dutch member organisations. The programmes support capacity development of their southern partners and allow the members to systematically learn from the implementation. PSO has a separate fund for capacity development in humanitarian assistance. Financing is strategically aimed at quality improvement. PSO is in constant dialogue with the member organisations on quality of their programme. Over the last five years PSO funded more than 200 programmes on capacity development in crises. The programmes were aimed at strengthening the relief and rehabilitation capacity of CSOs. They included the financing of disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction and peace building. Examples are: ZOA Capacity Development in Northern Afghanistan, in which community based organisation were enabled to work for rehabilitation; the Tear programme to strengthen their partner in the Democratic Republic of Congo to participate effectively in rehabilitation; and the ICCO support to disaster preparedness capacity of ACT partners in Indonesia. The documentation (for internal use only) such as mid-term reviews, final reports and evaluation are an important source for learning.

Instrument 3 Innovation

PSO funds initiatives of the Dutch member organisations that aim to improve the processes or programmes with their southern partners in an innovative way. For example the community based Peace Building supported by partners of IKV/Pax Christi in Iraq. The lessons learnt of the most successful innovations are shared in workshops and through the website.

Instrument 4 Collective Learning

Together with the member organisations PSO identifies common issues on capacity development that merit being the object of joint reflection. With member organisations collective learning is organised either through single events or through a longer trajectory. Also, PSO facilitates action research of the member organisations. Examples are a workshop on the lessons from the Tsunami evaluation, a collective learning trajectory on Capacity Development of CSOs in Fragile States, and action research through a peer review of five members on Partnership in Crises Related Interventions.

An additional source of learning is the survey PSO carried out among its member organisations involved in humanitarian assistance in 2006. The survey looked, among other issues, at the realities of capacity support in crises. The results of the survey were used as inputs for the PSO policy modification¹¹. Additional information was obtained through the field trips and visits to the partners of member organisations by PSO staff members.

¹¹ *Capacity Building in Humanitarian Aid PSO 2007-2010, PSO 2007*

3.3 Lessons learnt within the PSO association

What were the key lessons drawn from all these programmes and learning events?

3.3.1 Strategic lessons learnt

There is always local capacity

There is always local capacity although it can be very weak and the space for civil society organisations very limited. In crisis situations, caused by either conflicts or natural disasters, the normal tension between institutional and humanitarian imperatives is highlighted.¹² Proper identification and assessment of the local capacity is crucial if one wants to find a balance between efficiency and empowerment. The capacity of organisations such as social service NGOs, religious based NGOs, Community Based Organisation or social networks is often underestimated. Humanitarian assistance can build on these local capacities. Crises can be a constraint for capacity development of local civil society organisations, but also create opportunities, such as access to funding, knowledge and expertise.

Differentiate between short-term and long-term strategies

When strengthening capacity of local organisations in fragile environments it is valuable to differentiate between short and long-term strategies. Capacity development in a 'regular context' requires long-term commitments. In crisis situations the immediate humanitarian needs often require capacity to respond quickly, e.g. the ability to distribute relief items to the most affected population in a short time-frame. Without a long-term strategy for development of the capacity, civil society organisations might be disempowered at the end of a crisis rather than strengthened.

Capacity development needs a wide perspective to be sustainable

Northern NGOs have become aware of the pitfall of limiting capacity development to training in skills which are needed to fulfil their own accountability requirements. Too often capacity development is limited to training on project cycle management and financial management. Essential elements of sustainable organisational development are neglected: e.g. the capability to relate (network with other organisations) and to create adequate operating space, and the capability to adapt and self-renew in an ever changing context. For sustainable capacity development of civil society organisations all aspects count and a wider perspective is required.

Partnership relation as a key issue

The quality of the relationship between northern and southern civil society organisations determines the room for external support to local capacity development. The peer review of five Dutch NGOs concludes that there is "ample reason that partnership is viable in crisis situation too. (...) The added value that partnership has in development situations, in terms of reach, effectiveness and capacity building, also holds in crises situations. Especially when working partnerships are already in place, these offer an effective starting point for responding to disasters and conflict" (Van der Haar and Hilhorst 2009).

¹² Gomèz p 25

Long-term commitment to a partner relationship is important for successful sustainable capacity development. Smooth transition of Dutch NGO support from relief to rehabilitation and development and vice versa enables the development or continuation of long-term capacity development strategies. The long-term relation also provides the potential to support and develop the disaster preparedness capacity. Therefore in high risk area's both southern and northern NGOs (and their back donors) should give greater priority to preparedness for future crises.

Capacity building should be taken beyond the level of individual organisations: the challenge is to look at effective ways to strengthen the civil society sector as a whole. In view of the often noted problems with coordination in emergency and post-emergency situations, a stronger domestic civil society sector could contribute to the effectiveness of aid (Hilhorst en Ter Haar, 2009). Institutional development of the sector is also important in crises situations.

The potential of an international partnership to develop joint north-south capacity for advocacy and lobby on common issues is often not exploited, although many southern NGOs are interested in working on this issue.

Local Development NGOs in Southern India, which had a long-term development relationship with Dutch NGOs could shift their priorities quickly to relief when the Tsunami hit the coastal areas. Mutual trust enabled fast release of funds from the Netherlands for assessment and initial relief. Strong NGOs with a clear vision, mission and constituency have the potential to manage large relief and rehabilitation programmes. Their capacity to plan and manage large programmes with the participation of target groups (in crises situation as important as in regular development), combined with their capability to account to external donors, make them an important actor. Earlier support to capacity building for development pay off in delivering relief services. Intermediate NGOs can play a role in short-term support to enhance the relief capacities, e.g. skills training in Sphere Standards and facilitate linkages with other actors. In high risk areas it pays off to prepare these organisations for disaster response in advance.

Southern capacity development requires northern learning

Contributing to capacity development in the south puts high demands on Dutch NGOs. Supporting capacity development in the South requires learning in the Netherlands. It requires critical reflection on one's own approaches and internal organisation. At present, quality improvement is stimulated through sharing knowledge and experience in so-called collective learning trajectories and other meetings. In addition there was a need for a broader orientation in which science and practice are linked. This has led to a strategic cooperation between PSO and Disaster Studies of Wageningen University. One of the outcomes of this cooperation is a peer review of partnership in crises-related interventions by five Dutch Organisations. An additional lesson learnt from this peer review is that looking into each other's practice can be an effective tool for mutual learning from one another's crises related interventions.

3.3.2 Methodological lessons learnt

Approaches for 'a regular development context' can be applied in fragile environments

Approaches, tools, and instruments for capacity development, which have been designed for "regular contexts" can be used in fragile environments as well. The Civil Society Index developed by Civicus or the model for Integrated Organisation Management from the Management Development Foundation were found to have their merits in fragile environments, e.g. in countries as the Democratic Republic of

Congo or Afghanistan. However, it is essential to adjust and adapt these tools for the specific context of fragile environments. E.g. in the dynamic environment of fragile states there is a need for more frequent up-dates of organisational assessments and of context analyses than in a “regular context”. Testing of other approaches, tools and instrument for quick assessments and analysis remains very relevant. For instance, there is a need for further development of instruments that stimulate participation of local CSOs in crisis situations.

Flexibility in Capacity Development

In fragile conflict and post-conflict environments, capacity development approaches must be flexible. The fast changing context requires CSO to play different roles at different moments. Northern NGOs and their back donors should provide space for these changes. The process of translating policy into strategy and then into operational interventions must be short to allow for this flexibility. Guiding principles grounded in quality systems combined with ex-post audits become an important alternative to linear intervention chains. Tools that have been developed for complex regular development situations may be of great use to crisis situations. PM&E tools that focus more on processes and relationships, and more on what is actually happening than on predetermined indicators merit being studied more systematically.

Potential role of intermediate organisations

The Tsunami response in Southern India showed that Intermediate NGOs with the knowledge and experience in national disaster response can play an important role in strengthening local development of NGOs in disaster response and enhance coordination and links with local government. This role can be both short-term for strengthening the immediate capacity for disaster response and long-term in strengthening the disaster preparedness capacity for potential future disasters. The potential role of intermediate organisations needs further exploration.

3.4 Current practice of Member Organisations

How do Dutch NGOs shape their capacity development in crises? What are their priorities, and what are the important trends? To what extent do they apply the lessons learnt?

Partnership instead of field offices

Most of the PSO member organisations have signed the Code of Conduct of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement on Disaster Relief. The first article is that “the humanitarian imperative comes first”. Therefore, for most PSO members direct aid to people affected by crises has the highest priority and most resources are allocated to this purpose. However, article six of the Code of Conduct states “We shall attempt to build disasters response on local capacities”. It is a firm statement towards working, whenever possible, with local organizations as partners.

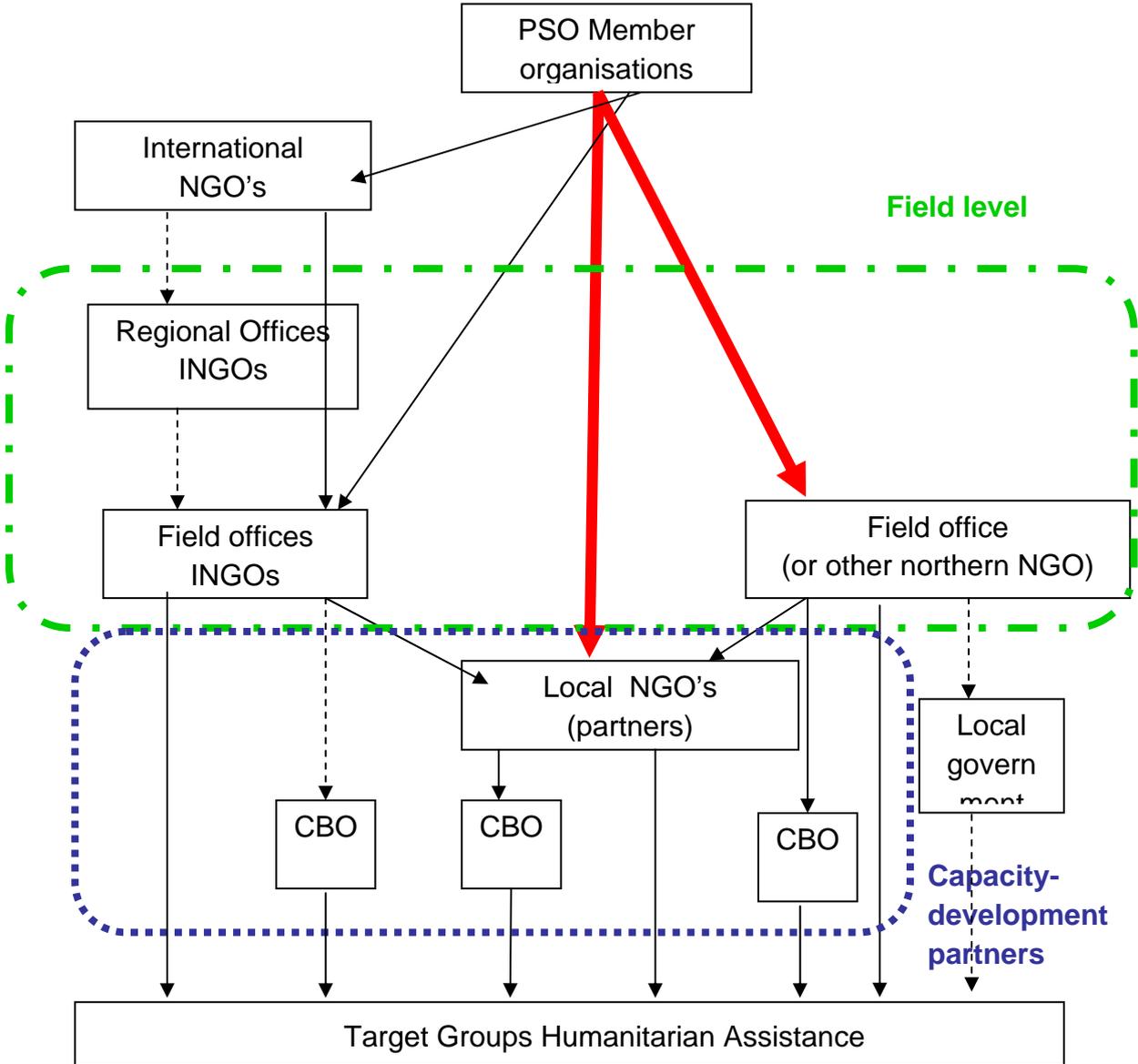
In addition to direct support, all PSO member organisations have identified support to capacity development of their partner organisations as a priority area. Working with partner organisations in the South is a reality for most PSO members. Compared to five years ago, when a small number of organisations were still directly working with the affected populations from out of their field offices, all PSO member organisations are now mostly working through partners. Working with partner organisations and channelling assistance through partners has become the core of their activities.

ZOA Refugee Care has made the most significant change in this respect. It has been recognized that the effects of field presence by PSO members must time and again be carefully considered from both the relief and the sustainability angle. So the lesson that “there is always local capacity” seems to be applied.

There are major differences in the way member organisations channel their support. Figure 1 illustrates how funds are channelled through the chain. It also illustrates the target organisations for capacity development of PSO. A few of the members also target local government agencies for capacity development.

A number of PSO members have field offices that work directly with community based organisations. Capacity development of civil society organisations is strengthening the community structures. National staff in field offices work directly with formal and informal organisations at the community level.

Figure 1 Financial chain of humanitarian assistance of PSO member organisations



The majority of the PSO member organisations have partnership relations with NGOs at the national and provincial levels. Their capacity development efforts prioritise these partner organisations. These NGOs are often rightly referred to as civil society organisations if one defines civil society as the arena not belonging to the state, the market, where people associate to advance common interest¹³. Oosten¹⁴ (2008) however, in his study on Civil Society in southern Afghanistan concludes that many of the NGOs in the provinces of Uruzgan and Kandahar do not have a constituency and should rather be referred to as social entrepreneurs than as civil society organisations. This is relevant if one intends to strengthen capacities that go beyond delivering services and e.g. include lobbying and advocacy for social change.

From Human Resource Development to Organisational development and beyond

The majority of the members' support to capacity development in crises is in the area of their partners' human resource development. Training of the staff in project cycle management and financial management are the most frequent subjects. This was again confirmed in the peer review of five Dutch NGOs on partnership in crises (Haar van der and Hilhorst 2009). These are also the areas which are required by the donor organisations and their back donors for financial management and accountability. Smillie states in *Partnership or Patronage?*¹⁵ (2001) "Capacity building is a central issue in partnership in crisis-related interventions. A recurring issue regarding capacity building is who sets the agenda and for what purpose. Capacity building may become a means to control partners' adherence to standards and financial accountability, and it has been suggested this has more to do with disciplining organizations to become good partners than to help them to realize their own goals".

In spite of this emphasis on human resource development, we are witnessing a clear trend among PSO members to take a wider perspective on capacity development, even in crises-related interventions. Support to organisational development and institutional development is getting more priority in policies and programmes. When the focus shifts from relief to rehabilitation, there is more attention for sustainable capacity development. Most member organisations realise that the sustainable recovery of the affected population is only possible if the capacity of local organisations is strengthened as well. Being embedded in the civil society environment, they are in a better position to harmonise with other organisations. Supporting them in developing and realising their own policy will assure they maintain their position within the institutional context. So we can conclude that the lesson on the importance of "taking a wider perspective than just training" is gradually being adopted.

Strengthening partnership relations, joint learning through monitoring and evaluation systems

Hilhorst, T. and Jansen B. (2005) note that the term partnership is most frequently used for relations where INGOs fund local NGOs to perform humanitarian work. The relationships take different shapes and vary in intensity. They give the following examples to denote the diversity:

1. A contractual agreement based on a tendering procedure where local organizations simply implement a job for which the parameters are fixed by the donor. No capacity building is involved; the bidders need to prove they possess the required capacities for the job.
2. A short-term incidental project applied for by a local NGO engaged in relief or rehabilitation. Functional capacity building may be part of the project.
3. A longer-term partnership whereby the northern NGO commits itself to support an organisation on a long-term basis, possibly including a trajectory of capacity building.

¹³ Heinrich, V.F. (2007) *CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society, Volume I Country Profiles USA*

¹⁴ Oosten, van, H (2008) *Enhanced Community Capacity for Peace Building and Development, A research to the functioning of civil society in the provinces of Kandahar and Uruzgan in Afghanistan*

¹⁵ Smillie, I (2001) *Patronage or Partnership; Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises, USA*

4. A long-term partnership where the parties engage in a horizontal relationship in which the partners (ideally) have a say in the policies and decision making of the northern NGO as much as the other way around.

Relationship number 1 is rarely applied by Dutch NGOs, while number 4 is seldom realised in practice. The majority of the humanitarian assistance is performed under relationship 2 and 3. All PSO members are moving from relationship 2 to 3. The more the focus of a programme moves from relief to development, the more the relations moves towards relation 3 or even 4. There is trend to develop and apply systems of joint learning from monitoring and evaluation, for example the development of common agreed criteria for effective partnership.

More disaster preparedness and prevention

PSO member organisations are giving more and more priority to disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction and conflict prevention in high risk areas. All those involved in relief and rehabilitation give also priority to strengthening the capacity of their partner organisation in preparedness and prevention. There is strong lobby of Dutch NGOs to influence the Netherlands Government in order to put preparedness and prevention higher on the agenda. Most of the member organisations have difficulties in raising funds for preparedness and prevention.

More reciprocity and joint reflection/learning

There is a trend among member organisations to reflect jointly on common issues, to share experiences, knowledge and lessons learnt. An example is the workshop to discuss the outcome of the TEC evaluation (Tsunami) and its implications for quality improvement. Organisational learning is more and more embedded in the organisations and the need to learn in the North is commonly recognized.

Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

Van der Haar and Hilhorst (2009) in *Partners in Crises*; "There is a lack of theorizing about protracted crises with more and less violent or critical periods or with natural hazards compounding the crisis. The intervention models of aid remain based on a dichotomy between relief and development, though practice shows that there are many ways in which relief and development efforts are already linked." Linking relief, rehabilitations and development has indeed been a reality for the member organisations in their priority countries. All PSO member organisations provide sustainable capacity development support only in priority countries. In the case where these organisations support relief or rehabilitation outside their priority countries they tend to fund only short-term incidental projects. In priority countries the support is more likely to be more long-term and the 'gap issue' in the link relief-rehabilitation-development is less likely to be an issue.

3.5 Future Directions

The PSO member organisations are facing many challenges in their efforts to support the capacity development of civil society partners. At the level of individual organisations many lessons are learnt. The joint reflection and exchange with peers and other actors in the chain does not get enough attention and the lessons that do trickle through are not always acted upon. There is a clear need for methods and instruments that enable mutual learning at all levels in the chain, from target groups up to the back donor.

A first step would be the review of the present Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation systems and processes that are geared towards results and accountability, in order to create more space for joint reflection and learning. In this respect, PSO itself is already reviewing and refining its own monitoring and evaluation systems to better facilitate learning at all levels in the chain.

A second step would be the adaptation of tools that are available for complex regular development situations to be used in crisis situations. Here we think of participatory research on rapid (self)assessment tools for fragile institutional contexts and local organisational capacity. In 2009 PSO will organise action research with member organisations and their partners.

Next to these two steps, PSO will continue to facilitate learning on capacity development in humanitarian crisis. The peer review of partnerships as organised by PSO and Wageningen offers ample opportunity for follow-up.

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Annex: Working definitions

What do we understand by capacity?

Tired of being over-used as an euphemism that refers to little more than training, Potter and Brough (2004) offer a pyramid of nine separate, but interdependent components that together determine whether capacity exists or not. They reason that instrument and tools can only be used if the human capacity exists; people's skills can only be effectively used if the staff is motivated and the organisation infrastructure is available; people and organisations can only function if the underlying institutional structure, systems and roles are well defined and broadly accepted. In schedule:

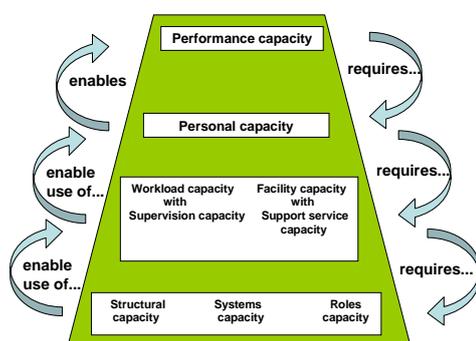


Fig. 1: The pyramid of effective capacity

In the PSO practice until 2008 this has meant that the capacity development efforts of its members have been evaluated as to their appropriateness in a given context and their attention for the interrelatedness of human resource development, organizational development and institutional development.

Capacity development in a chain model.

A second important concept is the capacity development chain. Development of communities is facilitated by community based organisations, which in turn are supported by local NGOs, who in turn have relationships with international NGOs, who are supported by their sponsors and subsidizers. PSO has the ambition to assure the quality within this chain. It has used its donor status to build up a sound understanding of the dynamics of the capacity development chain. Analysis of these dynamics has revealed that as a model for humanitarian assistance it has its merits, but that as a model for sustainable capacity development it is often too simplistic and exclusive.

And which capacities do we deem important?

PSO has developed criteria for the quality of a civil society organisation and criteria for the quality of the relationship between the partner organisation and a PSO member organisation.

On the basis of an ECDPM study¹⁶, five organizational capacities have been suggested that together constitute the basis for a typical civil society organization:

¹⁶ Engel, P., Keijzer, N. and Land, T.

A balanced approach to monitoring and evaluating capacity and performance. A proposal for a framework European Centre for Development Policy Management (December 2007)

- Capability to produce development results (or relief and rehabilitation) : *What results should we achieve in order to satisfy our target groups and donors? Did we? How? Why?*
- Capability to relate and create adequate operating space: *What space/relationships should we uphold to be able to achieve our objectives? Did we? How? Why?*
- Capability to self-organise and act: *What should we be good at in order to act efficiently and effectively? Were we? How? Why?*
- Capability to adapt and self-renew: *What internal or external trends/factors should trigger internal and/or network change and innovation? Did we respond to these? How? Why?*
- Capability to achieve coherence through vision and strategy: *What, When, with Whom, How?*

Over the past years PSO policy has stressed the importance of developing sustainable partner capacities much like the five mentioned above. A question that will be addressed in 2009 is whether these five capabilities are appropriate as a framework for CSO development in all contexts.

As for the quality of a relationship between CSOs, PSO has learnt that a call for ownership and participatory decision making does not suffice. Inspired by Fowler (2001) in its new PM&E system, to be introduced in 2009, PSO intends to operationalise the following dimensions of partnership and power :

- The relevance of a relationship to both partners.
- The dignity and mutual respect in the process of role definition.
- The integrity between the partners.
- The mutual transparency within the relationship.
- The equity in responsibilities within the relationship.
- The compliance to mutually agreed expectations.
- The harmony in the relationship.

4. BACK FROM THE TREES

Capacity Building, Humanitarian Action and the Wider Challenge

(Ian Smillie)

Abstract

Where humanitarian action is concerned, money, decision making and accountabilities still lie firmly in the hands of international organizations, with local organizations – where they exist – often relegated to the sidelines. Capacity-building rhetoric goes hand-in-hand with the vexed concept of “partnership”. Northern donors and Northern implementing organizations need competent local partners, so where competence is found wanting, all doors are marked “capacity building”.

This paper places the idea of capacity building for improved humanitarian delivery in the wider historical context of North-South relations, and it proposes some uncomfortable explanations for the fact that rhetoric and action remain so far apart. The paper is as much about the need for significantly better transitional thinking as it is about humanitarian action, and about how – in emphasizing the latter and ignoring the former – outsiders may well assuage their own sense of obligation, outrage, pity and guilt, but do little to ensure that the need for their beneficence will not return.

Introduction

The literature on capacity building has increased exponentially in recent years. Whole organizations now exist with the sole purpose of understanding the subject and applying it to those whose capacities are deemed wanting. All donors, not just some, but *all*, speak of their capacity building objectives, mandate and projects. International humanitarian organizations recite a capacity-building mantra reminiscent of 19th century missionaries carrying The Word to heathen lands. An army of organizations whose capacities are weak – some Northern but mostly Southern – awaits the healing powers of the capacity builders who will end their days of confusion.

But all is not well in capacity-building land. Where humanitarian action is concerned, money, decision making and accountabilities still lie firmly in the hands of international organizations, with local organizations – where they exist – relegated to the sidelines. Using cinematic terminology, the international agencies are the stars: they are well paid, they get top billing, they are in most scenes and all close-ups. In some cases, local organizations have supporting roles, but in many they are little more than extras: without lines, without credit, paid only at scale.

The capacity-building rhetoric goes hand-in-hand with the vexed concept of “partnership”. Northern donors and Northern implementing organizations have come at long last to a realization that they can’t do everything themselves, much as they have tried, and much as many would like to continue doing. They need partners, and the partners should, if at all possible, be competent. Like “partnership”,

however, the word “competent” is a house with many rooms, and where competence is found wanting, all doors are marked “capacity building”.

This paper places the idea of capacity building for improved humanitarian delivery in the wider historical context of North-South relations, and it proposes some uncomfortable explanations for the fact that rhetoric and action remain so far apart. In pulling on the thread marked “capacity building”, I find it attached to wider issues of humanitarian *purpose*, and to much-ignored questions about how those suffering from the worst aspects of conflict are supposed to rebuild shattered lives and move forward into the broad sunlit uplands of sustainable peace and development. In that respect, the paper is as much about the need for transitional thinking as it is about humanitarian action, and about how - in emphasizing the latter and ignoring the former - outsiders may well assuage their own sense of obligation, outrage, pity and guilt, but do little to ensure that the need for their beneficence will not return.

If you are looking for a paper on how capacity building might be improved, therefore, this would be a good place to stop reading. This paper digs a lot deeper than that, into the overall relationship between those on the edge of existence and those who would help. In the paper I will revisit some of the emergencies I have seen at first hand - Biafra, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Sierra Leone - and I will offer some reflections about what I see as a need for the humanitarian community of organizations to step back from the trees and to see the larger forest in which it has been working.

Patronage or Partnership?

Eight years ago, I edited a book called *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*.ⁱ The book examined the issue of capacity building through the eyes of authors with personal experience of six emergencies: Bosnia, Haiti, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Guatemala and Sierra Leone.

Much had been written during the 1990s about the need to build local capacities in emergency and post-emergency situations. Good intentions notwithstanding, outsiders appeared to have great difficulty in working effectively with local organizations - civil society, NGOs, community organizations, local government authorities - during humanitarian emergencies. And when they did, the relationship was more often one of patronage than partnership. For the local organization it was more often about following the instructions of others than about meeting its own objectives. Five years, even ten years after the emergencies in Sri Lanka or Sierra Leone or Mozambique began, local organizations seemed no better able to cope with humanitarian work than when they started. The book sought to find out in specific cases if this was true, and if it was, why? Was it because local organizations were congenitally deficient? Was it because outsiders know best, or because they did not know enough? Was it because the urgency of saving lives pre-empts all other considerations? Or was it something else?

The book came to a number of conclusions. The first had to do with the nature of civil society in a Southern setting, with problems of neutrality and impartiality, and with a question about *why* international humanitarian agencies might want to engage and strengthen civil society during an emergency. Partnerships are obviously, in part, about getting the immediate humanitarian tasks done more effectively and efficiently than might be the case if outsiders were doing it alone. But it is surely also about helping to create the preconditions needed for a war-torn country to return to some sort of civility, and about the creation of transition opportunities that can take over as the emergency phase ends.

With the protraction of so many emergencies, the idea of quick response and early exit has become, largely, a thing of the past, and local partnerships make eminent programming sense in basic service delivery. The bigger question for international humanitarian agencies is whether they are willing to go further in developing civil society for its own sake and for the more social and political roles it might play in helping to return a country to normal, creating social buffers that might prevent a resurgence of conflict. If they *are* willing to go further, then these issues must be addressed explicitly. And obviously the job cannot be done carelessly, because too much is at stake.

The enormity, however, of the operational challenge involved in the engagement of civil society by outsiders cannot be overstated. One of the most basic operational issues has to do with the capacity of outsiders to influence the capacity of others. The transfer of information is a relatively simple matter, but effective skill development is something else. Providing information about how to drive a four wheel vehicle or operate a computer does not necessarily convey the skill to do so. The *knowledge* required for decisions about *where* to drive the vehicle or what to use the computer for is a much higher level of capacity – one based on information, but also on experience and judgment. Changing attitudes, a very critical element in building local capacities to work in some emergencies, may be extremely difficult, but altering *behaviour* – at an individual and at an organizational level – is likely to be even more problematic. The greater the extent of the desired change in capacity, the greater will be the difficulty and the time required to accomplish it.

And there is an important “lesson learned” that appears at the end of every discussion about capacity building, one that seems to need relearning with every new emergency. Fundamental changes in capacity are not likely to be much advanced by people with a weak understanding of the social and historical context in which they are working, who do not speak the local language, and who think primarily in terms of dispensing two-day workshops.

Corruption, Results and Cash

Lack of local capacity= is often a euphemism used by international agencies to avoid the word ‘corruption’. This word is not actually used much in humanitarian circles, but it lurks just behind the scenes and is always a problem when high-value commodities are on the move. It is perhaps unfortunate that the issue of corruption is so seldom addressed openly, because although everyone knows it is a problem, the absence of dialogue gives the impression that there are no ways of dealing with it, except for expatriates to retain full control. This sets up unpleasant and inaccurate images about who is honest and who is not. Rather than dealing with the issue openly, however, discussion is buried in metaphor, and operational practice becomes mired in rules and regulations that may reduce the possibility for corruption, but which make local organizations even more vulnerable to charges of incompetence.

Writing about Sri Lanka, Arjuna Parakrama says: *“Documentation, accounting and reporting systems, which are invariably imported from First World contexts are seldom modified or made appropriate to the language, environment and exigencies of the local situations. The failure of imported accounting and reporting systems in a given community is a failure precisely of these systems and not of the community’s ability to use them. Sri Lanka is singularly plagued by the inability of its donor community to understand this simple truth, and to work towards creating user-friendly systems, compatible with ground conditions and skills available within the communities themselves.”*ⁱⁱ

A further problem has to do with *results*. Many donor agencies today, quite rightly place much more emphasis on results than on inputs and outputs. For example, reducing child mortality in a camp is more important than the means used to do it. Old emphases on measuring, for example, how well an inoculation programme was managed have changed in favour of a hard look at whether the inoculations actually accomplished their purpose. This makes sense. But where capacity building is concerned, the most important results will inevitably be long-term in nature. They will be harder to correlate with a specific intervention. Relief agencies, after all, are mostly expected to save lives, not so much to build the capacity of local organizations to do so. And so, in accountability terms, capacity building is bound to get short shrift.

And then, of course, there is the political economy of humanitarian assistance: who gets what, and why. The Red Cross, World Vision, CARE and others of the large international humanitarian organizations receive funding from two sources. The first is the institutional donor, whose support always comes with strings. It will be tied to specific emergencies, and often to specific aspects of the emergency. The time frame will be short, often limited to six month tranches, and the overheads will invariably less than what is needed to do the job well. NGOs are “expected to bring something to the table”. This is donor-speak for justifying low overheads, and for the totally incorrect assumption that overheads can be pried easily from the hands of \$50 donors. Institutional donors occasionally work through local organizations, but most find the transaction costs high. Locals, therefore, must work through the internationals. The extras and the supporting actors are hired, paid and managed, not by the producer, but by the stars of the film.

The second source of funding for international humanitarian organizations is that \$50 donor. Tens of thousands of small donors in Europe and North America are the true lifeblood of the humanitarian enterprise. They are its conscience, and they are the only thing standing between most humanitarian organizations and their total instrumentalization by donor governments. But the \$50 donor is almost completely inaccessible to Southern organizations, which on their own are in most cases bereft of any domestic philanthropy.

The generous Northern \$50 donors also come with strings. They will give generously for a tsunami, but not for the Congo. They give for Ethiopia because it is on CNN and there has been a rock concert, but they do not give for Sierra Leone because it barely made the news. They gave for Somalia when it was in the headlines, but now they don’t: if it isn’t on television, it isn’t happening.

They give in order to save lives; they do not want to see their money “wasted” on administration and bureaucracy, and they are certainly not interested in covering overheads on work that CARE or Oxfam or World Vision might do for UNHCR or WFP. And it goes without saying that if you put out an explicit appeal to build the capacities of local organizations, you will get nothing.

Preliminary Conclusions

All of this suggests one of two possible approaches to the question of capacity building. The first is that international humanitarian agencies should stick to their knitting and ‘save lives’ rather than build anyone else’s capacity to do so. The problem is that in a world beset by conflict, limited resources and unmet demand, this approach hardly makes sense. In this business, we need all hands on deck.

The second alternative, however, is not much better: someone else should do it. This, in effect, is what humanitarian purists – the so-called Dunantists – argue for: “someone else”. They mistrust those who would lead them beyond the purest of humanitarian action into human rights, peacemaking, reconstruction or long-term development. The only salvation, they believe, for humanitarian action in a world where humanitarianism is under siege, not just from Wilsonian capacity builders, but from militaries and politicians eager to subvert and instrumentalize good works, is a retreat into humanitarian fundamentalism: neutrality, impartiality and independence in aid of only one thing - protecting and saving lives.

This return to fundamental humanitarian principles would deal with local civil society and other local bodies as they are, putting them to work as and where they can add value, but not engaging in anything like the mandate creep that an organic kind of capacity building might suggest. So yes, if they can drive trucks and keep tally as they hand out food, by all means engage them. And if it takes a two-day training program to acquaint them with the WFP Way, or the UNHCR Way, or the MSF Way, then by all means do it. But do not be sidetracked into the long, costly and results-obscuring business of building their capacities for long-term peacemaking or policy dialogue or reconstruction or development.

Of course these two alternatives are not mutually exclusive. Humanitarians could stick to their knitting and someone else could build capacities that go beyond delivering food. The problem is that far too often there *is* no “someone else”; there is nobody there at all when the UNHCR truck drops people off at their ruined village. That truck, those people, their village and their future are evanescent metaphors for the compartmentalization that plagues all international assistance, but it is one that is especially problematic for humanitarian actors, because they, ultimately, are the ones driving the truck.

Do they know it’s Christmas? Who thinks they should?

There is perhaps another way of looking at the question of capacity building in the context of humanitarian action. Perhaps the international humanitarian enterprise as it exists today is not actually the outcome of a long tradition ingrained in most religions, something that takes its present-day universalist cue from the young Henri Dunant on the battlefield at Solferino. Perhaps it is something much more modern, something embedded in a powerful, self-centred and almost purely Western ethic and its technological handmaidens, television and the Internet.

Perhaps it is something, in fact, that has no particular interest in building local capacities because it is so rooted in its own limited historical perspective and its own values that it cannot see beyond the end of its self-referencing and all too self-righteous nose.

There was a time in the not so distant past when there was only a handful of what we today call humanitarian organizations. There were few human rights organizations, and reporting on war and famine was selective, rarely first hand, and rarely up to date. International affairs were the business of diplomats, sometimes of businessmen, and if required, of the military. Of course there have been international non governmental humanitarian organizations for 150 years or more, and human rights activists were famously responsible for ending slavery and King Leopold's hold on the Congo. Additional humanitarian NGOs emerged from World War I, the Spanish Civil War and World War II. But the modern humanitarian age probably dates only from the second half of the 1940s with the creation of the United Nations in 1945, UNICEF in 1946, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the drafting of the fourth Geneva Convention in 1949 – "*relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*" – and the creation of UNHCR in 1950.

The speedy evolution and articulation of what looked to be a universal ethic on human rights and humanitarianism coincided with the advent of television and the jet age, and of a new generation in the West who believed that war and bigotry, racism and human rights abuse were not just relics of their own past, but problems that could soon be eradicated elsewhere. The sudden end of colonialism added to the optimistic belief in a new kind of world order: during the 1950s, 12 colonial territories gained independence, and in the following decade the colonial flag was lowered in 50 colonies and dependencies.

But independence often came at a price, as the colonial borders that had corralled disparate ethnicities, religions and traditions were tested. Less than 20 years after the passage of the Fourth Geneva Convention, television carried Biafra into the living rooms of the West, and the age of full-blown modern humanitarian activism was born. Nordchurchaid, a consortium of Scandinavian church organizations, mounted an airlift that flew an incredible 2,945 relief flights into Biafra between August 1968 and March 1970.ⁱⁱⁱ After the Berlin Airlift, this was probably the largest relief airlift in history. But unlike the Berlin Airlift – which had been mounted and managed by governments and their air forces – this one was conceived and managed entirely by private humanitarian organizations.

The world's first rock concert – the Concert for Bangladesh – was not far behind, in the summer of 1971. Given that some of its most prominent organizers, including Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton, are still performing, it is easy to forget that 1971 was a decade closer in time to the end of World War II than it is to 2009. It is easy enough to forget that the anti-Vietnam War protests of the late 1960s, the Paris riots and the Prague Spring were completely new and unforeseen phenomena in the West, and to forget that the civil rights movement, the women's movement and other changes were not just ground-breaking for the West, they changed Western assumptions about the rest of the world.

As the moral atmosphere in the West changed, there was a flowering of organizations working in international development, human rights and emergency assistance. Tens of thousands of Peace Corps volunteers, along with their British, Canadian and European counterparts pitched up in the most remote corners of what had, by the mid 1960s, become widely known as the "third world". Even in emergency situations, where once diplomats held sway and the military could clear the battlefield of outsiders, things had changed. Biafra had shown that anyone could take part. Anyone and everyone could do *something*. And it was often no longer enough to make a donation to UNICEF or Oxfam. Anyone and everyone could start their own organization and get money directly to those in need, avoiding the perceived bureaucracy and wastage of older, more established agencies.

In creating Band Aid and Live Aid around the 1984-5 Ethiopian famine, Bob Geldof epitomized Western feelings of anger and moral obligation, but he also did something else. He said that he would ensure that the money went directly to those in need, and would not be ripped off by the bureaucratic humanitarian establishment. There is an enduring image of Geldof, standing in the doorway of an executive jet the following year, somewhere in Africa, wearing a Tuareg turban and shouting orders to minions, or reporters or groupies somewhere off camera. Of course the jet had been donated, but it cost someone a lot of money, money that was spent on Bob Geldof and his ego, and not on the needy he spoke so eloquently about.¹⁷

But that didn't matter, and it doesn't matter to the architects and engineers who come out of the woodwork after each major disaster peddling new, cheap, and usually experimental housing for the victims of war; or the grannies and students with inflatable dinghies and barrels full of used eyeglasses, heading off to the war or the famine or the tsunami in search of people to help. In this regard, Bosnia was something of a watershed: it was the first major modern humanitarian emergency that European do-gooders could drive to, and drive they did.

I recall a visit to a Bosnian organization in Sarajevo about a year after the fighting had stopped. The city was in ruins, but it was at peace, and people were trying to put their lives together. The Bosnian "organization" I was visiting was essentially a shelter, a place where women who had lost their husbands could stay with their small children until they could re-establish themselves. The shelter was managed by a young woman who had been studying cartography before the war began. As the fighting slowed, she wanted to help and she needed work, and in the course of events, she met some German women who had driven to Sarajevo from Dortmund. Six ordinary German women, shocked and appalled by what they were seeing on television, had decided to do something. They loaded their cars with money and relief goods and set off. The hostel had become their NGO, and for a while they made the trip back and forth on a regular basis.

My afternoon visit was badly timed. Except for the young Bosnian manager, the residents were all out for the day. Bad news had arrived during the morning. The body of the husband of one of the women had been found, and the manager – really only a girl – would have to deal with this in the evening. And then at lunchtime, two of the ladies from Dortmund had arrived unexpectedly, and told her that they would soon end their assistance. The shelter, they said, had to become "self-sustaining" because they could no longer raise money for it in Germany. They would try to keep some funds flowing for three more months, they said. The young former cartography student would soon be on her own with a houseful of distraught women and small children. The relief phase of the conflict was over.

Meanwhile, across town, a larger Bosnian women's organization, Bosfam, was struggling to figure out how it would survive after being dropped by its major benefactor, the British NGO for which it had been eponymously named. And a group of Bosnian NGOs, reflecting on capacity building, begged for an end to classes being given by the EC and well-meaning international NGOs that repeatedly taught them how to create a mission statement, and how to design a logical framework analysis.

¹⁷ Geldof did, in the end, give much of the money he raised to mainline humanitarian organizations. And to his great credit he did learn that there was more to righting the unequal relationship between rich countries and poor countries than food aid. But in 1984, the most predominant ethics in play were anger and pity, and the most obvious manifestation was DIY charity.

A Forest

Too often outsiders lack cultural insight, historical perspective, language skills and time. But perhaps more importantly, what outsiders have consistently lacked in the 40-odd years since Biafra – at least insofar as it might build and institutionalize local capacities for self-help, is a serious understanding of the difference between the world view they bring to an emergency, and those prevailing among the people they seek to assist. Concepts of human rights, neutrality, impartiality, gender equality and the “brotherhood of man” run headlong into the political economies of ethnic allegiance, ignorance, superstition, religion, contradictory concepts about a government’s responsibility to protect its citizens, and the kind of poverty and desperation that negates almost every one of the ten commandments.

We dismiss the impact of colonialism as irrelevant to current predicaments, often speaking of it as little more than an excuse for bad governance. But we forget how rushed the colonial leave-taking was, and we forget about how weak the remaining institutions were. We forget, or never knew, that the very first discussions about the possibility of independence for the Belgian Congo began *less than 12 months before the event*. We forget that the anti-colonial wars in Portuguese Africa lasted for almost 20 years before independence was “granted” to shattered territories where education and health care had, at the best of times, been almost non-existent, and where those taking up the reins of government had no relevant experience whatsoever.

There is almost complete amnesia regarding the Cold War decades, when proxy conflicts between East and West played themselves out in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and where any kind of “governance” would be supported by the great powers as long as it suited their strategic ends. And so monsters like Mengistu Haile Mariam, Siad Barre, Samuel Doe and Joseph Mobutu – each associated with humanitarian catastrophe – received lashings of foreign aid from benefactors who turned a blind eye to their crimes. And behind the best known of these tyrants, there was a legion of lesser known villains: a horde of dictators and even an emperor among France’s client African states, a coven of villains in the erstwhile British Empire, and a small battalion of US-supported dictators in Latin America.

Foreign aid, sold to taxpayers on development and humanitarian grounds, has always been used as well for political, commercial and strategic purposes. Even countries with few apparent geopolitical axes to grind have misused aid (or at least have used it for purposes that have seldom been made explicit to taxpayers). In 1969, for example, an internal memo was circulated in the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

It suggested that Canada’s motives for providing development assistance should fulfill three objectives, in the following order:

- “First would be the political objective to establish within the recipient countries those political attitudes or commitments, military alliances or military bases that would assist Canada or Canada’s western allies to maintain a reasonably stable and secure international political system;
- A second objective might be the establishment of markets for Canadian products and services;
- A third objective might be the relief of famine and personal misery.”^{iv}

Canadian taxpayers might not have been aware of this hierarchy of motives, but many recipient governments certainly were. And many of their successors are still struggling with the wreckage and the debt that remains as a legacy of those times. Liberia, a country that had never known what might be called a competent and fairly elected government, had by the end of 2007 built up debts of almost \$4 billion, the highest debt-to-population ratio in the world. Two billion dollars in debt was owed to the World Bank, the IMF, and the African Development Bank, \$1 billion to the Paris Club of creditor nations, and \$1 billion to commercial banks. It took the IMF almost two full years after the country's first genuinely democratic elections in 2005 to get to a stage where it could begin to write this debt off – not exactly a rush job for a collection of institutions with a record of sub-prime lending to incompetent governments and blood-soaked dictators.

It is little wonder, if Western humanitarians and the taxpayers who support them don't have the full picture, that citizens of developing countries – beset by generations of bad government, war, poverty and disease – take refuge in what works for them: family, village, ethnic allegiance and religion. It is not surprising that they fail to see the world in the same way as the big-hearted Northerners who arrive bearing gifts, and who may well be gone tomorrow. It is not surprising that local organizations, whether community based or even something looking more like a Western NGO, do not always have the "capacity" for systems thinking, for policy dialogue, for long term planning or for anything that might faintly resemble financial sustainability.

And so, even if they do have a better understanding of the local society, culture and language than outsiders, even if they could become longer-term players in meaningful relief and the transition to development, too often they are contracted for menial service delivery tasks that outsiders cannot or will not undertake. Speaking of Sierra Leone at the height of its conflict in the 1990s, Thomas Turay writes about the capacity-building efforts of half a dozen international NGOs. He describes a scene in Bo in 1999: "Now there was Oxfam, Action Internationale Contre la Faim, Médecins sans Frontières and Africare to name a few, as well as several church organizations. I saw NGO vehicles everywhere. World Vision had a fleet of vehicles and bikes. It was difficult not to notice them. If you went to the Black and White Restaurant, you could see dozens of vehicles parked outside at lunchtime. The presence of many international NGOs and few local NGOs was in my opinion a sign of weakness in the local capacity building processes that many international organizations claimed to be enhancing."

He goes on to describe "mistrust between the international 'food pipeline' agencies and local organizations. The local organizations in my opinion were basically 'errand boys' – their main role being to distribute food and take insults from hungry and angry internally displaced persons who frequently accused them of misappropriation. When food supplies dried up, the local NGOs that had been engaged in such food distribution became redundant, and were their targets for accusations of fraud."^v

This experience from the 1990s is restated with depressing frequency in article after article in the July 2007 issue of *Forced Migration Review*, whose theme over 67 pages was "Enhancing Southern Capacity: Rhetoric and Reality". The subtitle says it all.

The Continuum

And then there is the vexed question of what *ultimately* happens when the food supply dries up, and the six ladies from Dortmund drive away for the last time. There has been a lot of academic ink devoted over the past decade and a half to “transitions” and the need to make links between relief and development. For a time the concept of a “continuum” held sway: first there would be emergency assistance, then reconstruction assistance, then development assistance – like an assembly line with different agencies working on problems as they evolved. The idea of a continuum emerged from the typical response to a fast-onset natural disaster. First the cyclone relief, then rebuilding, then on to longer term development and perhaps disaster preparedness. But complex emergencies don’t work that way. They are often slow to develop, and they may last a decade or more. The civil war in Sri Lanka is now 20 years old, depending on how you date its inception. Planning an “exit strategy” or a transition to peace may be impossible, but is there no opportunity through any of it for reconstruction and development?

It is now more generally understood that in complex emergencies, relief and development can take place simultaneously, and that in fact they should. In many cases, however, the reality is quite different. The relief establishment has a terrible habit of arriving late and speaking of exit strategies almost from day one. If they overstep their limited humanitarian mandate they are accused by their funders and competitors of mandate creep. Little systematic attention is paid to reconstruction in the wake of the emergency phase, and the development agencies that are supposed to pick up where others leave off may never arrive at all.

In fact the idea of linking relief and development is almost irrelevant in the real world of “forgotten emergencies”, many of which receive little or no international attention and succour until it suits the geopolitical interests of countries with money. The list of forgotten emergencies is almost as long as the list of these that have been “remembered”: Ethiopia, Cambodia for years, Afghanistan before 9/11, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone for almost eight years; Liberia, Angola for much of its 20-year war; Rwanda during its greatest need, the Western Sahara, Burundi; Haiti where donors historically run hot and cold; Somalia, ignored, invested and then abandoned to jackals. The Congo.

In almost every case after the humanitarian establishment finally did become involved, it was as a substitute for political action. And in almost every case, there was an arbitrary moment where the emergency was deemed to be over, and the relief agencies began packing their bags, whether development organizations were there or not. The best that could be hoped for in many cases was a DDRR program – the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of combatants; possibly a “truth commission” of some sort, and in a very small number of cases, a war crimes tribunal or a handful of ICC indictments.

DDRR programs are the lazy man’s way of dealing with ex-combatants. And if donors are lazy, they are unlikely to be very effective. In the typical DDRR program, money and training are given to people who have perpetrated violence. This might be a necessary evil, but many of these training and “reintegration” programs only keep dangerous men busy for a few months with half-baked training and false promises while the relief agencies depart and the government attempts to regroup.

An evaluation of a large 1994 DDDR program mounted by USAID in Haiti found that after all of the training given to 4,867 members of the disbanded army, only 304 men had actually found jobs. The reason given was that “lack of progress in other areas” had prevented the Haitian economy from taking off as planned, with a resulting shortfall in jobs. It might be asked what genius had planned for the Haitian economy to grow at such a rate that it would require 1,790 new auto mechanics all of a sudden, or 602 former thugs with some kind of computer training. But questions like that were almost beside the point, the evaluation said, because employment was only “a tertiary objective of the program (and in some ways more a hope than a goal).”^{vi} The main objective had been to keep the former soldiers out of trouble while U.S. peacekeepers were on the ground in Haiti.

This is either the worst kind of cynicism in action, or it is a fraud. Perhaps it is both, but the results were predictable enough. The peacekeepers and the relief workers left, the supposedly “reintegrated” men were soon back on the street, and a few years later the cycle of violence, relief and peacekeeping started all over again.

Common sense might have predicted this, but common sense sometimes needs academic reference, and in this case it comes from an authoritative source. A major 2003 World Bank publication on war and development policy found that, “the typical country reaching the end of a civil war faces around a 44 percent chance of returning to conflict within five years. One reason for this high risk is that the same factors that caused the initial war are usually still present.”^{vii}

There is obviously more to it than that, however. The study, headed by Paul Collier, went on to note that the original impetus for aid was post-conflict recovery. The World Bank’s original name was the Bank for Reconstruction and Development and its first task was to help restore the European economies after World War II. Apparently this impetus was not misguided: aid has a crucial role in post-conflict recovery. Yet aid policy as it has evolved over the past half century has evidently lost this original insight. Aid during the first post-conflict decade is insufficient, and it is also mistimed, coming in when the intuitional capacity to use it well is not yet in place and tapering out just as it should be surging in. The donor community can surely do better.”^{viii}

Surely

But there are a few necessary precursors to change, and some of them have to do, tangentially, with the concept of capacity building. The weak, fragile and failed states of Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus need sustained peace. Emergency assistance is not enough. They need solid assistance for reconstruction, good governance and long-term development. This requires donor coordination, always in short supply, and it means that donors must *share* the burden, ensuring that more difficult areas or less attractive sectors are not neglected. It means that civil society must be reconstructed, and institutions must be created that can get beyond loyalties to tribe, ethnicity and religion. This will take time – at least a generation, if not more. It will take money. It will require international organizations with mandates and structures that transcend the relief and development stovepipes. And it means that donor countries will have to lift their eyes up from the ground in front of them and start thinking about long-term generational results.

On this point it is worth listening to an organization called Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA), the fourth largest implementing partner of UNHCR in Africa. It is Thomas Turay’s plea of a decade ago that outsiders stop treating local organizations as errand boys. “Donors need to be more accountable,” the organization says, “not just in the amounts that are given, but in the manner in which funds are

allocated. Financial support for capacity building should not be based on the needs of programme delivery alone. In order for an organization to enhance its institutional capacity, it is necessary that its core structural funding requirements are also met.” AHA complains bitterly about the UNHCR overhead limit of 5%: “a crippling restriction for the running of any NGO, not to mention those intending to expand and develop. This has a direct impact on the ability of African NGOs... to meaningfully address their institutional capacity building needs.”^{ix}

So there it is: outsiders rushing to the rescue with truckloads of band aids, engaging errand boys to assist with the dirty work at low wages (as outsiders have always done in the “third world”), and when they stumble, pointing out how the locals have no “capacity”, which in turn justifies a continuation of business as usual.

Conclusion A

Things will never change. The growing number of genuine capacity-building programs currently in play cannot buck the tide of humanitarian do-gooders who want to manage all the “helping” themselves – whether they are professional relief agencies or rock stars or grannies with barrels of eyeglasses. While they bemoan their instrumentalization by calculating governments eager to use them as proverbial fig leaves to veil political inaction (and there is a direct continuum here from Biafra through to Darfur), what can one say? The beat goes on.

So the questions usually asked about outsiders have to do with better coordination, more accountability for money, greater efficiencies, higher standards of delivery. These may not be bad questions, but they are not enough, and they are not the right ones if we want to get at the nub of the relationship between outsiders and “locals” in a world where many conflicts, especially the most protracted ones, have their roots in older, longer and less felicitous relationships between North and South: trade restrictions, debt, the Cold War, colonialism, slavery.¹⁸ At the start of the 21st century there is something so fundamentally flawed in the concept of Northern relief agencies still galloping to the rescue when there is an African emergency that it beggars description. The operating concept is usually one of obligation, but among the missing descriptors are guilt and pity – words as completely absent from the humanitarian lexicon as another one: responsibility – not a responsibility to protect, but underlying responsibility for the disaster.

The humanitarian connection is passionate, but it is shallow. The real challenge has to do with *preventing* conflict, and by this I do not mean peacebuilding workshops and the like. I mean serious attention to the social, economic and political issues that have stunted development in conflict-prone countries for three centuries. The failure in this is not a humanitarian failure; it is a failure of the overall engagement between North and South. And humanitarians cannot isolate themselves from this bigger picture.

For this to change in any serious way, the basic aspects of humanitarian need, development and governance must be *comprehensively* addressed in countries slipping into or emerging from war. Clear links must be made between relief, reconstruction and long term development, and those who provide it.

¹⁸ “Let’s at long last stop using slavery as an excuse for Africa’s problems,” a prominent economist recently told me. “It has no relevance to the issues of today.” While the scars of slavery may not be obvious in Africa, they are certainly visible in almost every facet of social and economic life in Arkansas, Mississippi, Watts, Harlem and the south shore of Chicago. They may not be so visible in Africa, but that does mean they don’t exist.

This requires a commitment to coordination that would go far beyond the polite minimalism that prevails at the United Nations or the OECD. And it means that local organizations wanting to transcend the narrow confines of their time and place must be identified and turned into champions rather than errand boys. If there are two of them today, there must be fifty of them tomorrow.

But that isn't going to happen. It requires money that is not available. It requires changes in every kind of relationship between North and South, especially in the terms of trade that currently prevail. It requires understanding and patience, neither of which are available in the rush of an emergency, or in the donors' hunt for "better performers" in the wake of the five failed development decades over which they have presided so smugly. It requires the sublimation of donor and organizational egos, the very money-spinners that keep development assistance and the humanitarian machine in motion.

In December 2008, in the midst of one of the worst global food crises in a generation, WFP found itself with guaranteed donor pledges of only \$500 million for the year ahead, 90% of it tied to Darfur. The organization had requested \$5.2 billion from donor governments, and the short answer – at the same moment that hundreds of billions of dollars were being dumped into bailouts for banks and automobile manufacturers – was no.

We can't even plan properly for emergency assistance.

Conclusion B

Self interest will save the world. Narrow self interest has always propelled the relationship among and within nations, but in the West, there has been a recognition, sometimes grudging and not always well operationalized, that narrow self-interest must be modified in the broader social interest. We learned long ago, for example, that the creation of social safety nets costs less in the long run than revolution and peasant uprisings. We have organized transfer payments so that have-not areas of our countries can enjoy the same basic standards of service as the more wealthy. This was at least part of the impetus behind the creation of the European Union: to ensure that all member countries benefit from rising social and economic standards and that (by the way) the wars of two and a half millennia can be permanently relegated to history.

Industrialized countries have not yet understood that self interest *properly understood* – as de Tocqueville described it 175 years ago – would extend this concept to the rest of the world. China and other countries in Asia have wrested their development away from colonialists, do-gooders and two-faced Western trade negotiators. But others have not been so successful, and many have become little more than poverty-stricken relief cases: the Balkans, the Caucasus, parts of the Arab world, much of Africa.

There was a time when national borders could actually halt the movement of people from these places. That no longer works. Desperate people take planes and boats and trucks across borders. Many walk; some run. And it has become evident in recent years that pollution and global warming do not stop at national borders, nor do disease or terrorism.

These problems cannot be fixed by invasion, whether by soldiers or humanitarians. They require a more fundamental, comprehensive, long-term approach. They need bonds that are based on mutual trust, and these can only come with time, resources, and the commitment of people to serious and

long-term, open-ended capacity building; to enduring *relationships* rather than the condescending “partnerships” of today. If the problems are not fixed, pollution, terrorism, pestilence, plague and war will follow as surely as night follows day. Humanitarian action is a necessary but completely inadequate answer. Self interest *properly understood* – not humanitarian agencies – will save the world.

Perhaps, even in this rather utopian conclusion, the tense should not be so confident. Perhaps the operative tense is future conditional. Perhaps the conclusion should be that self interest properly understood *could* save the world.

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NOTES

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- ⁱ Ian Smillie (ed.), *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*, Kumarian, Bloomfield CT, 2001
- ⁱⁱ Arjuna Parakrama, “Means without End: Humanitarian Assistance in Sri Lanka”, in Smillie, *Patronage or Partnership, op cit*, pg. 121
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hugh Lloyd, Mona Mollerup and Carl Bratved, *The Nordchurch Airlift to Biafra 1968-1970*, Folkekirkens Nødhjælp, Copenhagen, 1971, pg. 147
- ^{iv} CIDA, “Background Paper for Development Assistance Policy Review Conference, 16-18 May, 1969”, quoted in David R. Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide: A History of CIDA and Canadian International Development Assistance*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo Ontario, 1998, pg. 88
- ^v Thomas Mark Turay, “Sierra Leone: Peacebuilding in Purgatory” in Smillie, *Patronage or Partnership, op cit*, pp 166-7
- ^{vi} Ian Smillie, *Relief and Development: The Struggle for Synergy*, Thomas J. Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, 1998, pg. 10
- ^{vii} World Bank, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington 2003, pg. 83
- ^{viii} *Ibid.* pp. 158-9
- ^{ix} Naomi Pardington and Melanie Coyne, “Strengthening Southern Protection and Assistance Capacity”, Africa Humanitarian Action, 2007, <http://www.africahumanitarianaction.org/uploads/Forced%20Migration%20Review%20Article%20Final.doc>