# Changing Policy and Practice from Below: Community Experiences in Poverty Reduction

## • An Examination of Nine Case-Studies •

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## HOW ARE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
## IMPORTANT FOR DEVELOPMENT?
by
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Aid to institutions of civil society is becoming an increasingly important part of the development agenda. Located in the space between the family and the state, and promoting coordinated public action among their members and other citizens, civil society organizations have been celebrated most often for their role in promoting and protecting democracy.[i] Increasingly, however, their contributions to economic development and poverty reduction are also being acknowledged and supported.[ii]

A fundamental aspect of the operation of civil society organizations (CSOs) concerns the mediating role that they play between the individual and the state. Analysts have demonstrated empirically how both states and citizens can benefit when a dense web of civil society organizations can mediate the relationship between them. The performance of government programs is improved when, instead of interacting with citizens as atomized individuals, state agencies deal with organized community groups. Citizens derive greater benefits from government programs and from market opportunities when their individual efforts are organized and made more cohesive by CSOs.[iii]

Different kinds of mediation functions are involved, and a variety of organizations assist with performing one or more of these functions, as we shall discuss shortly. A common feature of CSOs involved in development relates, however, to their ability to tap into the talents and energies that exist among community groups and grassroots associations.

Analysts of development have focused traditionally on the resources and capacities that exist among state agencies, and the potential for voluntary and collective action by the poor themselves has been relatively ignored. Increasingly, however, studies conducted under the rubric of social capital are identifying the potential for mutually beneficial collective action that inheres in community groups and grassroots associations.[iv]

Social capital has been defined as those aspects of social organization, including networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.[v] Communities and groups that are closely united by bonds of trust and networks of mutual assistance are more likely to achieve superior development performance compared to other communities and groups where such norms and networks are weaker.

Social capital is a resource that is possessed at different levels by different communities. CSOs enable community groups to combine their social capital with other resources, and to deploy these resources productively in engagement with state and market agencies. By making available complementary resources – such as physical and financial capital, knowledge about state programs and market opportunities, and technological assistance – CSOs help to make communities' stocks of social capital more productive in terms of larger benefit flows.

Social capital has both a cognitive dimension – consisting of norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that *predispose* people toward collective action – and a structural dimension, composed of formal or informal roles and social relationships that *facilitate* collective action for achieving some common objective.[vi] Having a high level of social capital, a community is endowed with the capacity to tackle multiple tasks contributing to collective well being. But this capacity must be reinforced and complemented with other forms of capital – including physical, financial and human capital – in order to maximize its potential for delivering flows of benefits. Like a lode of rich mineral ore, social capital has mostly potential and not real value – until it is drawn on and combined judiciously with other resources.

These acts of drawing upon the stock of social capital and harnessing it together with other resources are performed in some circumstances by CSOs. Membership organizations and those emanating from the grassroots up are more likely to draw upon local traditions of coordination and cooperation, compared to other organizations that are set down from above.[vii]

One critical advantage that local-origin CSOs usually have over state-sponsored organizations concerns their ability to tap, effectively and legitimately, into societies' reserves of social capital. As good results are achieved with the help of collective action, social capital gets built up further, and traditions of cooperation for mutual benefit are further reinforced. Encouraging and facilitating these virtuous cycles of social capital mobilization provides an important reason behind the current concern with assisting civil society organizations.

While the roles played by CSOs in effecting social mobilization and harnessing of social capital are being increasingly well recognized, relatively little practical guidance is available, however, that can assist practitioners to convert expectations into grounded realities. How should plans and strategies be devised in any given situation that can assist in strengthening CSOs appropriately? The sub-field of development concerned with strengthening civil society is still relatively new, and few answers have been provided to deal with issues of practical concern.

Theory building in this new and emergent area will need to be inductive. Specific situations require far more attention to detail than theoreticians of civil society can usually provide, so deductive accounts are hardly sufficient for this purpose. Inductive accounts, based on the experiences of pioneering projects, will therefore provide a major part of the learning required to assist and guide future endeavors. It is useful and important in this context to bring together insights and lessons from the pioneers' examples – not merely to accord well deserved recognition to their efforts, but also to serve as a benchmark for future learning.

This volume of case studies has been put together with this intention of promoting mutual learning among those concerned with advancing civil society solutions for development and poverty reduction. Nine case studies, representing an equal number of projects and countries, have been selected from among a host of instructive and interesting experiences examined by the editors. Each case study leads the reader step-by-step through the various stages of its particular learning experience, elucidating how particular problems were satisfactorily resolved in a specific situation, and providing

insights about how similar processes and programs can be supported in other countries and contexts.

All of these cases report relatively recent experiences, mostly gained during a period in the 1990s. The brief analytical framework presented below helps to organize these individual experiences and insights.


**Civil Society Organizations and Poverty Reduction: What Functions Do CSOs Perform?**

The existence of a number of contending definitions complicates the task of identifying civil society organizations. For the purpose of this volume, we have selected a broad-based and relatively non-controversial definition that regards civil society as "the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a set of shared rules. It consists of a vast array of organizations, both formal and informal, including interest groups, cultural and religious organizations, civic and developmental associations, issue-oriented movements, the mass media, research and educational institutions, and similar organizations" (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995: 27).

Contending definitions of civil society presented by other authors are usually concerned about where exactly the boundaries should be drawn. Though little controversy exists about including grassroots groups, NGOs, universities, interest groups, and the media within the ambit of civil society, the inclusion of other groups, particularly private business, political parties, and kinship groups, provides ground for disagreement and dispute. This concern with analytical finesse is not very helpful in practice.

Which sorts of organizations qualify as CSOs is better determined in any specific context by considering the functions that particular organizations perform or do not perform on behalf of individual citizens. It is with respect to their inclinations and their effectiveness in performing these functions that specific organizations in any particular country can or cannot be classified as CSOs.[viii]

Broadly, there are three sets of functions that different CSOs perform to varying degrees:

1. Articulating citizens' interests and demands;
2. Defending citizens' rights; and
3. Providing goods and services directly, without recourse to state agencies.

A variety of organizations can help to serve one or more of these three defining objectives. Schemes of classification exist that differentiate among CSOs as membership vs. non-membership organizations; small, face-to-face organizations vs. large, subscription organizations; spontaneous vs. professionally managed organizations; grassroots vs. umbrella organizations; etc.[ix] Any of these types of organizations can be relevant, provided that it serves one or more of the three functions stated above, and many different types of CSOs are represented in the cases included in this volume.

The cases represented in this volume illustrate how CSOs mobilized community groups and helped them utilize their social capital for achieving sustainable development benefits of different kinds. Each case is useful for understanding how CSOs performed one or more of the three defining functions – articulating citizens' interests, defending citizens' rights, and providing goods and services directly – was undertaken in a specific situation.

Articulating citizens' interests and demands is important particularly in situations where state policies and the programs of government agencies do not take account sufficiently of needs of the poor or other vulnerable sections of society. Cases from South Africa, the Pacific, and Philippines included within this volume illustrate situations where civil society actors have mobilized sections of society and where government policies have changed based on the interests and demands voiced by these actors.

In South Africa in the late 1990s, even though a more democratic and representative government had replaced the apartheid state, many women and non-white males continued to live amid grinding poverty. A group of national CSOs got together to devise solutions to this problem. Acting in coordination with selected government agencies, they organized a series of Poverty Forums at different locations across this country, where the poor could come forward and speak about poverty as *they* experienced it in their everyday lives. Government policies have changed considerably to reflect the interests and demands that the poor have expressed at these forums. For the first time in this country, and perhaps anywhere in the world, policy makers are dealing with poverty in terms of the lived experiences of the poor. It is difficult to imagine how the interests of the poor in South Africa could have been equally well represented without the intervention of the concerned CSOs.

Political scientists have traditionally ascribed the function of interest articulation to political parties, but such parties are not always strong in developing countries, and even where they are strong, they do not always represent the interests of the poor. Providing voice to the poor is consequently a function that can very often be performed only by active and accountable CSOs. Particularly where it concerns situations of extreme social exclusion, for example, among indigenous populations or with people who live in remote and inaccessible areas, voicing interests and demands is a function that will often be better performed by area-based CSOs.

Both local- and national-level CSOs have been involved in performing these functions in the cases of Philippines and the Pacific presented in this volume. Additionally, these CSOs have also been defending the rights that have traditionally accrued to indigenous people of these countries and which were cast aside during decades of unaccountable and exploitative rule.

CSOs in the Pacific republic of Vanuatu have been actively involved in designing and implementing processes of local governance that combine together the strengths of traditional social bonds with the speed and efficacy of modern scientific techniques. Oral historians, the traditional keepers of land rights in parts of Vanuatu, are working alongside government technicians and trained local youth, who use the latest global positioning technology to conduct land surveys. While land boundaries are marked out by these technicians, land rights are adjudicated by a local council headed by oral historians. Land disputes, a cause of great social disruption during the past, have been

largely eliminated through this innovative combination of traditional institutions and modern technology. In the process, peoples' traditional rights to land have been restored and codified, and local institutions have been revived that can uphold these rights and adjudicate local disputes. Local, village- and community-level CSOs have worked in tandem with national CSOs and government agencies to bring about the mix of law, policy and procedures that have contributed to success in the island republic of Vanuatu and in the Cordillera region of the Philippines.

An important lesson that emerges from these experiences concerns the need to combine the resources and talents at the disposal of an array of organizations. The best results are achieved when CSOs work not individually and in isolation from other organizations, but when partnerships are formed among different types of CSOs, distinguished by sector and level of operation, and also between CSOs and government agencies.

Defending citizens' rights is an important theme in another group of cases that deal with post-conflict situations. In Guatemala, for instance, decades of unremitting civil war had resulted in tearing apart the social fabric and eroding whatever trust existed among citizens and the government. Civil society organizations played a critical role in this situation in reestablishing social trust, in setting up institutions that could defend the social contract, and in implementing programs that could bring citizens' rights to bear upon national policy and institution building.

Civil society actors involved in this effort were not always or necessarily in conflict with the government. A successful program was developed through restoring mutual confidence and building partnerships among CSOs and government agencies.

Accomplishing similar objectives was made much harder in Laos on account of the reluctance that this country's government had toward accepting any form of civic association that functioned outside and apart from the state. Defending citizens' rights to form associations in this context required a careful and balanced strategy. The advantages of civic associations were demonstrated carefully, without appearing to pose any significant threat to the government's authority, so that the risk of strong and adverse responses could be minimized. To succeed in this milieu, the strategy of strengthening civil society started small and built incrementally. Results accumulated from a succession of small-scale demonstrations provided leverage for seeking changes in policy at the national level. To a considerable extent, the strategy developed in Laos has worked successfully, at least through the initial stages of this necessarily long drawn-out process. The government is more permissive in its attitudes toward civil society organizations, and more projects are being taken up by CSOs of this country.

Defending rights quite often involves CSOs in performing monitoring and watchdog functions vis-à-vis government departments and donor agencies, keeping the personnel of these agencies honest about the objectives that they are mandated to pursue. Performing these functions sometimes brings CSOs into conflict with these government and donor agencies. More often, however, and with greater advantages all around, disputes and differences are resolved through a gradualist strategy, such as that of Laos.

Compromises arise based on the mutual learning that results from implementing small-scale experiments and pilot projects. The Ukraine case in this volume shows how

citizens' group experimented, initially on a small scale, with an alternative model of rehabilitation for handicapped children. Avoiding head-on confrontation with government officials – even when their aims were frustrated on occasion by heavy-handed bureaucrats – this group was later successful in getting the government to adopt its model for nationwide implementation.

Ratcheting up gradually has been key to the development also of other CSOs that have had to defend their vision and their programs from co-optation by government or donor agencies. Most donors proclaim themselves in favor of capacity-building and sustainable development, but their lending activities can result quite often in diminishing capacity and reducing the prospects for sustainable development. Particularly when a donor supports isolated and short-term projects and ignores long-term programmatic goals, capacity-building for sustainable development is likely to suffer in consequence. The Toco Foundation in Trinidad and Tobago provides an example of how donor agencies were persuaded to extend support toward long-term objectives.

In every one of the cases we have considered in this volume, and in nearly all cases of CSOs' involvement in poverty reduction activities worldwide, there is usually a concern for providing some goods or services directly, i.e., without recourse to the state. Quite often it is the case that CSOs start out with the objective of serving some basic need, such as drinking water in Laos or medical assistance in Ukraine, that is being poorly served by state agencies. It is usually true, however, that even when they start out with such limited objectives, CSOs get drawn into a wider arena, articulating interests on behalf of their members and/or defending their rights vis-à-vis the state. The table below indicates how each of the three sets of functions has been served by CSOs in different contexts.

**FUNCTIONS**

|  | CASE | Articulating Interests and Demands | Defending Rights | Providing Goods and Services |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asia | Philippines | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|  | Laos |  | Yes | Yes |
|  | Pacific | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Europe | Ukraine | Yes |  | Yes |
| Latin America | Trinidad/Tobago | Yes |  | Yes |
|  | Guatemala | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Africa | South Africa | Yes |  | Yes |
|  | Uganda | Yes |  | Yes |
|  | Mali |  | Yes | Yes |

**What Features Enable CSOs to Perform Their Functions Effectively?**

As mentioned before, a critical advantage that CSOs usually have over state-sponsored organizations stems from their ability to tap, effectively and legitimately, into societies' reserves of social capital. Among the cases considered in this volume, the one from Uganda provides a good illustration for this proposition. Farmers' groups, organized from below, and federated later into the Ugandan Cooperatives Association and the Ugandan Horticultural Association have been much more successful at mobilizing social capital than have the government-sponsored Village Councils, standardized across this country in compliance with administrative directions. Largely dissociated from local norms and values, these Councils have fallen prey in many instances to the unaccountable and self-serving deeds of their leaders. As the authors of this case study show us, the new administrative laws and systems of grievance representation are not well understood by villagers, many of who live quite far away, both physically and emotionally, from the formal legal system.

Organizations imposed from above – Village Councils, in this case – are usually unable to draw upon social capital as effectively as other organizations that are constructed from below. Being accountable to their hierarchical superiors, state-invoked local organizations are usually less able to tap into local traditions of cooperation and coordination. Standardization of administrative practices further diminishes the ability of such organizations to adapt themselves to variations in local customs and traditions.

Combining modern institutions with traditional norms and social customs can be more productive than decentralization that is driven by formal and codified rules alone. Highly formalized laws have served to diminish the favorable impacts of decentralization for most people of developing countries. Formal laws and courts remain quite inaccessible to people in villages, consequently they are powerless to take advantage of such decentralization schemes.[x]

The cases in this volume from Philippines and the Pacific illustrate the benefits in terms of utilizing social capital that can be gained by melding together traditional and modern

institutions. Neither traditional nor modern structures are entirely useful by themselves; rather, it is an appropriate combination of the two forms that is often best suited for the purpose of development. The importance of this combination can be understood by considering the two dimensions of social capital, cognitive and structural, that were mentioned above. While traditional institutions can be helpful for drawing on the cognitive dimension of social capital, the structural dimension is often better addressed – at least insofar as the tasks of development and growth are concerned – by establishing an appropriate and task-oriented local organization.

In the Philippines and the Pacific cases, while customary local leaders and oral historians provided the core around which the local organization was built, the organization itself was built from among new and technically competent elements of local society. In the Pacific, educated youth were trained to apply the new techniques of land surveying. Novel and useful ways of combining tradition with modernity have been pioneered in these two cases as CSOs not beholden to rigid official procedures have felt relatively free to experiment with bold and innovative ideas.

Another advantage of working closely with CSOs has to do, thus, with the ability of these organizations to develop innovative solutions through undertaking pilot projects on a small scale. Exceptions do exist, but state agencies tend by and large to develop standardized and uniform responses that are implemented with relatively little local adaptation across entire regions and countries. Formal rules and operating procedures often limit the flexibility that even highly motivated agency staffs have for adapting national programs to local circumstances. Especially when they work on a small scale, CSOs usually provide excellent laboratories for pioneering new methods and strategies in a relatively efficacious and cost-effective manner.

*Cerebral* in Ukraine and the Toco Foundation in Trinidad and Tobago provide examples of this kind of learning system approach to development. *Cerebral* has pioneered the development of new methods for rehabilitating handicapped children, not just physically but also economically and socially, and the Toco Foundation has pioneered models for promoting eco-tourism in a region where natural beauty is profuse but also very fragile.

Pioneering innovative approaches on a small scale is only a step toward success, however. It is important in addition to disseminate these approaches and to scale up the effort to make an impact for the vast numbers of poor and powerless citizens who live in these countries. *Cerebral's* model has now been adopted for nationwide implementation by Ukraine's government, and the Toco Foundation has been entering into collaborations with other CSOs and also with government departments to promote the spread of its strategy and approach.

Not all CSOs are able to scale up effectively the approaches that they have developed and which have worked well on a small scale. Quite often, CSOs and their external sponsors are not sufficiently sensitive to the need for maintaining healthy ties with government agencies. Though autonomy of action is often the motive behind choosing to remain aloof from government, this reduces the ability that any CSO has for exercising an effective influence upon the design of policy and large-scale national programs. Working in coordination with government agencies has its costs, no doubt, as Michael Als, the founder of the Toco Foundation, explains lucidly in this case study; but the advantages that Toco has derived from these associations appear to outweigh the costs.

Development works best, as remarked earlier, when the strengths available to different agencies can be combined together in mutually beneficial ways. Though CSOs are much better suited for drawing on social capital at the community level, government has the distinct advantage for mobilizing institutional resources at the regional and national levels. While we make a plea in this volume for supporting and strengthening civil society organizations, and while we use case materials to illustrate some ways in which these ends can be achieved in practice, we do not suggest that these activities should be undertaken at the *expense* of the state.

Combining the spread and reach of government with the depth and flexibility of CSOs is to our minds the most effective organizational method for achieving development objectives. We hope through this volume to generate more interest in the second, and relatively less well attended, of these two complementary aspects. That strengthening civil society is better accomplished through following a positive-sum approach – and not in some zero-sum manner, which views the state and civil society as adversaries, with the gains of one party being the loss of the other – is illustrated quite handily by each of the eight cases in this volume.

**UNDP and Civil Society Organizations**

The selection of cases represented in this volume draws upon UNDP's experience of working with CSOs in different parts of the developing world. While these organizations must themselves be given full credit for the remarkable achievements that many of them have recorded, UNDP does take pride in the fact that, to some extent and at some times, it was associated with the endeavors that have made these achievements possible.

The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) has been increasingly involved with non-governmental organizations, community-based associations, grassroots groups, and other organizations of civil society, especially during the last two decades. For the initial three decades since its inception in 1945, UNDP's partners had traditionally been governments and other UN System bodies. Since 1975, however, UNDP has progressively sought to enlarge and enrich its engagement with civil society actors as well.

Commitment by UNDP to strengthening civil society capacities has deepened since then. CSOs are increasingly being perceived to be innovative in meeting community needs, flexible in their implementation modalities, conscious of local traditions and circumstances, and cost-effective in service delivery. This change in awareness was reflected in 1986 when at the instance of UNDP's Governing Council a separate division, now entitled the Civil Society Organizations and Participation Programme, was established at UNDP headquarters and made responsible for enhancing UNDP's involvement with organizations of civil society.

The 1990's have proven pivotal for UNDP's approach toward mainstreaming engagements with civil society organizations. In part, this enlarged concern stems from the major outcomes and recommendations of pivotal international conferences organized under the auspices of the UN. Of particular importance was the World Summit of Social Development held in 1995 that called upon the international community,

including all actors of the civil society to "positively contribute their own share of efforts and resources" toward assisting with the global objective of poverty reduction. It is from this commitment that UNDP derives its mandate to expand its work with CSOs. The concept and practices of Civil Society Organizations are now firmly entrenched as an integral part of UNDP's work at country, regional, and global levels.

Collaboration with CSOs is an officially declared policy of UNDP's work. In 1998, an *Information Disclosure Policy* was adopted to ensure that all salient information on programmes and projects is made available freely to interested members of the public. Several CSO representatives have been nominated to sit on an oversight panel that assists with the implementation of this policy. UNDP has invited leaders of civil society to join with government planners and members of the private sector as well as other donors in preparing, implementing and evaluating programmes. To facilitate this process, UNDP has issued extensive operational guidelines in order that CSOs can be involved in all aspects of program design and management and not simply as downstream sub-contractors. CSOs participate in the formulation of Advisory Notes, Country Co-operation Frameworks, Policy Papers, and on local Project Appraisal Committees, that is, in all aspects of UNDP's work related to poverty reduction and sustainable human development. A committee comprised of CSOs, both North and South, is being set-up to consult with the Administrator and the Executive Board on key policy decisions.

There is need, however, for deepening this ongoing process. CSOs are as yet only peripherally involved in most countries in policy-making and governance activities. Increasing CSOs' involvement with the state and promoting mechanisms that facilitate co-operative relationships among state and civil society actors are goals that will acquire additional salience and commitment in the future.

By providing examples of successful collaboration in practice, it is hoped, the cases in this volume can contribute toward making such a transformation easier and more widely accepted. Chapter 2 through 10 of this volume present the experiences of a selection of CSOs that were assisted to a smaller or greater extent by UNDP. Chapter 11 concludes this volume by drawing together the lessons presented by the various cases.

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[i] The literatures relating to the roles played by such organizations in the "fourth wave" of democratizations are represented, for example, by Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter (1987), *Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour M. Lipset, eds., (1995), *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy,* Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

[ii] See, for example, Benjamin Barber (1995), *Jihad versus McWorld*, New York: Free Press; Francis Fukuyama (1995), *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity,* New York: Free Press; Rajni Kothari (1988), *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance,* Delhi: Ajanta Publishers; Elinor Ostrom (1996), "Crossing the Great Divide: Co-production, Synergy and Development," *World Development*, 24 (6); and World Bank (1997), *World Development Report: The State in a Changing World.* New York: Oxford University Press.

[iii] Useful theoretical and empirical accounts of these relationships are provided, for instance, in Steven J. Rosenstone and John M. Hansen (1993), *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America,* New York: Macmillan; and S. Verba, K. Schlozman, and H. Brady (1995), *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[iv] For instance, see Christian Grootaert (1998), "Social Capital, Household Welfare and Poverty in Indonesia," Washington, DC: World Bank, photocopy; and Anirudh Krishna and Norman Uphoff (1999), "Mapping and Measuring Social Capital: A Conceptual and Empirical Study of Collective Action for Conserving and Developing Watersheds in Rajasthan, India," Social Capital Initiative Working Paper #13. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

[v]  This definition of social capital is derived from Robert Putnam (1995), "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy*, January, 65-78.

[vi]  On social capital, in general, and its links with institutional performance, see Robert D. Putnam with R. Leonardi and R. Y. Nanetti (1993), *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy.*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; and James S. Coleman (1990), *Foundations of Social Theory*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. On the distinction between the cognitive and structural dimensions of social capital, see Norman T. Uphoff (2000), "Understanding Social Capital: Learning from the Analysis and Experience of Participation," in Partha Dasgupta and Ismail Serageldin, eds., *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective,* Washington, DC: The World Bank.  On the distinction between the stock of social capital and the flow of benefits, see Anirudh Krishna (2000), "Creating and Harnessing Social Capital," in Partha Dasgupta and Ismail Serageldin, eds., (op. cit.).

[vii]  Representative studies of this genre include Milton J. Esman and Norman Uphoff (1984), *Local Organizations: Intermediaries in Rural Development,* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Thomas Carroll (1992), *Intermediary NGOs: The Supporting Link in Grassroots Development*, West Hartford: Kumarian Press; and J. Farrington, A. Bebbington, K. Wellard, and D. Lewis (1993), *Reluctant Partner? NGOs and the State in Sustainable Agriculture*, London: Routledge.  Other organizations can also support social mobilization at the local level, these studies indicate, but only those externally imposed organizations can be successful in this respect that learn to be accountable to the local population (instead of to their hierarchical superiors) and that can thereby gain some degree of local legitimacy.

[viii]  This argument about considering civil society in terms of "what it *does*" rather than in terms of "what it *is*" is developed further and presented in Norman Uphoff and Anirudh Krishna (1999), which also elaborates further on the three functions performed by civil society organizations and by other organizations that act in support of civil society.

[ix]  These and other categories of CSOs are considered, for instance, by Neera Chandhoke (1995), *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory,* New Delhi: Sage Publications; Robert Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," *The American Prospect*, Winter, 34-48; and Sidney Tarrow (1994), *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

[x]  For an interesting and insightful analysis of administrative decentralization in South Asia and West Africa, see Richard Crook and James Manor (1999), *Democracy and Decentralization in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press. Examining the experience of decentralization in four separate countries, the authors argue in favor of combining tradition with modernity in future schemes of devolving power to the grassroots.

## Chapter 2

## PARTNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION: SOME LESSONS FROM UGANDA

by

Joseph Opio-Odongo and Charles Lwanga-Ntale

### Introduction: How Can Aid Lead To Empowerment?

Aid to civil society is a fashionable new theme in the current development discourse and many development agencies have become keen to extend their assistance to CSOs. While assisting CSOs is both welcome and long overdue, policies to deal with this sector need to be carefully thought out to suit the specific conditions of particular countries and individual organizations. Not all CSOs will benefit from the same kind of assistance. As more is being learned about the civil society sector, sharper and more finely targeted strategies become possible that can help to achieve better utilization of scarce program resources.

Two elements, specifically, will need to be considered while evaluating assistance for any specific CSO. In addition to the capacity that any organization has for achieving its specific objectives, the manner in which the organization has been founded will also need to be considered while evaluating an appropriate strategy of assistance. Organizations that have been induced from the outside – by government agencies, political parties, or as a result of donor conditions – will require a different portfolio of assistance compared with others that were formed spontaneously by their members.

Though capacity and genesis are often related to each other – strong capacity is associated quite often with spontaneously generated organizations – this is not always the case. Weak capacity can co-exist with spontaneous origin and strong capacity with induced origin. Paying attention to the specific circumstances of a CSO in terms of these two features, capacity and origins, will result in a better and more fine-grained strategy of assistance.

Internal capacity must be evaluated in terms of three features of an organization: (a) clarity of goals and strategy, (b) skills and resources for achieving these goals, and (c) ability to resist predatory encroachments by unfriendly outsiders. If an organization can successfully lobby and advocate for change while resisting capture or co-optation by outsiders, then member participation will result in individual and collective empowerment. Members of organizations that are not equally capable of achieving objectives or resisting co-optation will usually not be empowered to the same degree.

The second consideration for evaluating CSOs' operations relates to the genesis of any particular organization. Has the organization been created spontaneously by individual members or has it been induced by efforts directed from above. When organizations are created spontaneously, from below, they are likely to have greater internal coherence and thus be less vulnerable to manipulation, especially by non-members. Where outsiders have brought the organization into being, they usually dominate agenda setting and they can use financial support as a tool for ensuring compliance. Spontaneous

origins are associated usually with greater ability to resist predatory encroachments, though this need not always be the case, as we have remarked above.

Different kinds of organizations meet different social needs. And different organizations also differ with respect to capacity and origin. Assistance to civil society will therefore require a variegated strategy, incorporating specific elements directed towards different sectors of civil society.

We illustrate our contention regarding a variegated strategy with the help of examples drawn from contemporary Uganda. This country has gone through troubled times and close observers of its history will recall the disabling environment that existed in the past. A series of legislative reforms undertaken in the mid- to late-1980s have significantly altered the environment within which the private sector, civil society and non-governmental organizations operate.

Improvements in the environment have not been sufficient, however, to spur a rapid growth of capable CSOs. Many international agencies seem to believe that an enabling condition constitutes a sufficient condition for rapid development of the civil society sector, but this is hardly the case. As the following Ugandan examples demonstrate, something more is required in addition. What more is required to assist CSOs can be understood best by examining the conditions of specific organizations. What works for one CSO may not work for another, and undifferentiated assistance strategies are quite likely to be at least partly unproductive and wasteful. Our two criteria for classification – genesis and internal capacity – are useful, we suggest, for making a preliminary determination of the nature of assistance required by any CSO.

**Example 1.   Spontaneous Creation-Weak Organizational Capacity: The Uganda Cooperative Alliance (UCA)**

The cooperative movement in Uganda resulted from a protracted historical struggle waged by Ugandan farmers against exploitation by foreign commercial firms that dominated commercial agriculture. In the early 1910s, African co-operative groups were vexed by the obvious collusion between alien commercial entrepreneurs and the colonial state that resulted in banning Africans' participation in the more lucrative business of processing and marketing export crops. Their struggle was successful and African farmers organized into cooperative societies were permitted to engage in commercial cropping operations.

Nevertheless, the 1946 Co-operative Societies Ordinance, which legally formalized the operation of co-operatives in Uganda, gave the Registrar of Cooperatives excessive powers to control and to regulate co-operative societies. The African co-operative groups resented this interference in their internal affairs, and they organized to demonstrate their grievances. They negotiated effectively both with the colonial government at home and with the British Government in London. By the early 1950s, they succeeded in having the 1946 Ordinance repealed, which reduced the power of the Registrar of Co-operatives and helped to gain the participation of Africans in processing and marketing of cotton and coffee.

Despite this success in improving their external environment, weaknesses in internal capacity continued to undermine the effectiveness of cooperatives. A committee of

inquiry instituted in the 1960s revealed a number of unhealthy practices among cooperative societies. Vested interests working inside and outside these societies were restricting the admission of new members, avoiding holding business meetings and annual general meetings, manipulation elections, employing their relatives in co-operative society positions, granting liberal loans to friends and relatives, and not recovering amounts loaned to these persons.

The government introduced a new Cooperative Societies Act in 1970 ostensibly to control such devious acts. In reality, however, cooperative societies were once again placed firmly under the control of a government ministry. Instead of improving the situation, this move made it worse. State functionaries became a new cadre of vested interest groups that was interested more in their own personal welfare, and less in the welfare of members or the health of the organization.

Control by state functionaries and dominance by entrenched vested interests resulted in eroding even the little capacity that existed. Member participation in the affairs of their co-operatives simply provided a facade behind which co-operative leaders, staff of the government's Co-operative Department, and union officials pursued their personal interests, unhindered by compulsions of equity or empowerment. Many members abandoned societies in which they had lost faith.

Weak internal capacity had resulted in depriving members of control over their cooperative societies. Even though these societies were mostly spontaneously generated, as a result of member initiatives, they were vulnerable – on account of weak internal capacity – to predatory encroachments by unaccountable outsiders.

When the present government took power in 1986 and encouraged popular democracy and people's empowerment, the co-operatives saw it as a possible ally in their revival. The Uganda Co-operative Alliance (UCA) which had just been revived, following a turbid history since its formation in 1961, took advantage of the new political climate and it lobbied successfully for repealing the repressive 1970 Co-operative Act.

UCA launched a five-year cooperative development program, focusing on promoting human resources development and better accounting and financial management practices among its member societies. Policy analysis and research activities were also conducted in-house by the Alliance, which saw the newly enabling environment as an excellent opportunity to build up the capacities of its member organizations. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) provided resources for these programs.

However, the introduction of a liberalized macro-economic environment from 1987 presented both an opportunity and a threat to the UCA. Though it could now function free of the government's overbearing influence, it was faced with competition from private traders. Failure to market members' produce at competitive prices would mean a loss of market share and membership to the newly emerged private-sector operators. On the other hand, however, liberalized economic rules provided an opportunity for the more capable district unions to participate in export marketing, thereby generating additional financial benefits for the primary co-operative societies and for individual members.

The UCA adopted a series of measures to deal with this situation. First, UCA encouraged district unions to allow some of their affiliated primary co-operative societies to trade directly with non-cooperative buyers of processed coffee. Unions that had good processing facilities took advantage of this initiative and gradually regained member loyalty. Because district unions faced difficulties in accessing working capital from local banks, this initiative meant providing better prices and timely payment to members.

Second, UCA lobbied government to allow co-operatives to enter export marketing. This initiative met with stiff resistance, particularly from state enterprises that continued to control the export trade in coffee and cotton. Through sustained advocacy, UCA achieved a breakthrough in 1990. To support this enterprise, UCA established Union Export Services Limited UNEX), a service organization of six district unions that initially took part in this new venture. UNEX made its first export sale of coffee in July 1990. Cotton unions eventually entered export marketing too, but the benefits of gaining the export trade were lower for cotton compared to coffee, perhaps because liberalization had been carried further for the coffee trade.

To further strengthen internal capabilities among its member societies, UCA organized a series of delegate conferences at which primary society members questioned district- and federation-level officials and demanded justification for the actions taken by these officials. To acquaint delegates fully with all facts relevant to these discussions, background notes were prepared by staff of the Co-operative College at Kigumba for use during the delegates' conferences. These notes included simple renderings of current and past financial statements. For the first time, members of primary cooperative societies began to feel some control over the affairs of their district union. No longer could members be taken for a ride.

As another measure of capacity building, UCA launched a Cooperative Development and Management Program and a Cooperative Food Security Project for primary marketing societies. These two initiatives are intended to restore member ownership and member control over organizational development. Specifically, the projects enable members and non-members in project areas to achieve both income- and food-security, thereby enhancing their capacity to withstand risks associated with price fluctuation and crop damage.

Not all problems have been solved, however, within the short period since the UCA began functioning in an enabling environment. First, significant power continues to remain in the hands of those who themselves are not producers. Second, information flows are still constrained among members and between members and management, thereby making it difficult for members to participate fully in decision-making and governance. Given these continuing weaknesses in internal capacity, the organization still remains vulnerable to capture by vested interests.

Even today, many village notables who are not themselves farmers, continue to dominate the committees of marketing co-operatives. Annual general meetings of primary marketing co-operatives are rarely organized. Consequently, members of many primary societies remain unaware of the operations that are conducted on their behalf.

Weak internal capacity and continued domination by a small group of vested interests are slowing down the further development of marketing co-operative societies. UCA has

made some efforts in this direction, and their higher earnings will spur members, it is hoped, into more active participation in the affairs of their cooperative societies. Much more needs to be done, however, to improve transparency and accountability, especially at level of primary societies. Member education and procedural reforms will need to go hand in hand with increasing members' incomes. Only when members have adequate control over office bearers will the UCA and its constituent cooperative societies become strong and self-sustaining organizations.

Assistance to these cooperative societies will need to be directed primarily toward building up these features of internal capacity. Promoting greater transparency and accountability within will be important for increasing effectiveness and resilience without. It is not so much financial or technological assistance that is required for these purposes; a more effective form of aid will be targeted toward improving the quality of participation. The specific aspect of capacity that is weak at this moment concerns the organization's inability to resist predation from the outside. Strengthening the organization will require installing procedures and practices that give rise to greater control and ownership by members.

**Example 2. Induced Creation-Strong Organizational Capacity: The Uganda Floricultural Association**

The Uganda Floricultural Association (UFA) began as an initiative by the Makerere University Farm, Kabanyolo, in the late 1960s, aimed at promoting commercial flower growing to capture the European markets, especially during winter. This initiative was consistent with the national policy for export diversification and it benefited from technical and financial support provided by the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD). Unfortunately, however, NORAD, like most development agencies, was compelled to leave Uganda during the Idi Amin era, shortly after its program of assistance had commenced.

Cut off from technical and financial support, the dedicated scientists of the University Farm nevertheless decided to push ahead. They focused on varieties such as alums, lilies and locally adapted chrysanthemums that proved relatively easy to nurture even without donor support. The leader of the floricultural section, Ms. Harriet Ssali, decided that only the development of an internal market in Uganda would help to preserve the gains that had been made. Their medium-term vision was to create a small but vibrant domestic market for flowers.

In 1978 they formed a partnership known as Bamuhalu Florist Shop in Wadegeya, a suburb of Kampala City, where they engaged in decorating weddings and other functions, providing flower arrangements for offices, banks and hotels, and arranging landscaping at offices and homes. They encouraged farmers associated with the Kabanyolo University Farm initiative and others to serve as out-growers for the Bamuhalu Florist Shop. As the demand for flowers increased, other florists' shops opened, and flower farming grew, albeit slowly.

A coordinated approach was now necessary to promote flower growing and marketing in Uganda. In the adverse political environment of Uganda at that time, it was virtually impossible to engage in any form of collective action without attracting repression from the military junta. The founders of the Bamuhalu Florist Shop nonetheless struggled to

preserve and enhance their technical and managerial skills and develop organizational capacity for capturing future business opportunities.

With the arrival of a new regime in 1986, the environment for collective action improved dramatically. Due to Uganda's macro-economic reforms, that liberalized exports and foreign currency earnings, prospects for revitalizing the floricultural industry became considerably brighter. Aggressive promotion of non-traditional export crops by government provided additional incentive to the group of flower growers. Technical and market information was made available by government agencies that were now keeping close track of developments in the foreign floriculture market.

The nascent UFA became a reality when it was registered in 1992 as a limited liability company. Though many Ugandan floriculturists were interested to associate together in order to deal collectively with problems faced in common – including, shortage of working capital, lack of managerial and marketing research skills, and inadequate handling facilities – a push for association was given by the Ministry of Agriculture. The activities of flower growers and florists were of great value to the government's export diversification objective. It was mainly in pursuit of this objective that the Ministry of Agriculture strongly encouraged these floriculturists to come together in a national association. Consequently, it is right to regard the UFA as an "induced" organization. Even though many founder members were flower growers and florists who had been in the industry for quite a long time, the association was itself formed on the demand and at the encouragement of the government.

UFA's mission is that of promoting floricultural production and marketing in Uganda and abroad. In order to become competitive, UFA has tried to rapidly build the technical and managerial capabilities of its members. In this context, it has organized overseas study visits to flower-growing countries such as Kenya, Holland, Germany and Israel. UFA has encouraged its members to access the best available technical expertise and it has promoted joint ventures with foreign floricultural firms.

Exposure to foreign floricultural industries, joint venture arrangements, and helpful sector policies have all contributed to the growth of Uganda's floricultural industry. Medium and large-scale flower production for export has increased, for instance, from nearly zero in 1993 to forty million stems in 1995, worth approximately US$ six million. UFA has successfully used annual flower shows, international trade fares and seminars for floriculturists to lobby government and donors to support UFA in its drive to enhance the growth and vibrancy of Uganda's floricultural industry.

UFA has also established partnerships with the Uganda National Farmers Association, the Private Sector Foundation, the Uganda Manufacturers Association, and the Uganda Investment Authority in order to enhance its organizational capacity. With the support of DANIDA and USAID, UFA is establishing a secretariat that will promote more coordination among its members, provide advisory and advocacy services, and strengthen collaboration with international partners. UFA also plans to establish an effective and efficient out-growers scheme with an effective cold-chain network that draws upon the Israeli experience.

UFA's growing organizational capacity, acquired in part through partnership with local and foreign organizations, is its greatest asset. Being more market-driven and with a

leadership composed of those who themselves are floriculturists, UFA has succeeded to enlist member participation in ways that engender empowerment. Member participation has been purposive and their involvement has been driven by the common motive to maximize profits.

In the short run, however, UFA members have to carefully monitor the implementation of ongoing joint ventures and the activities of expatriate personnel. The merits of these arrangements notwithstanding, concerns have been raised that most expatriate personnel do not want to impart their skills to local personnel for fear of being replaced. If such concerns are valid, they pose serious sustainability problems for UFA. On the other hand, if the proposed UFA secretariat is established and if it can perform to expectations, UFA stands a good chance of rapidly building member capacity. A strong and effective secretariat, backed by cohesive and articulate members, can also help the organization break free of the shackles imposed by government tutelage.

The partnerships that UFA has formed with local and foreign organizations can help to strengthen its marketing and negotiation capacities. In addition, growing internal coherence, arising among members who have a long experience in flower production, and who are fully involved with the associations activities on a day-to-day basis, is helping UFA avoid some of the vulnerability that is associated with induced organizational forms. Further support to such an organization can most effectively be directed toward increasing its members' skills for dealing profitably in international markets, while also enhancing the control that individual members have over their leaders' activities.

## Example 3.  Induced Creation-Weak Organizational Capacity: Local Councils in Uganda

A hierarchy of local councils (LCs) were brought into being after a new government came to power in Uganda in 1986. The LC system was introduced to enhance the participation of local communities in political decision making and to provide local political structures that could check the excesses of a centralized state. A hierarchy of LCs was instituted that runs from LC1 at the village level, representing 20 to 25 households on average, to LC5 at the district level. A series of laws have been enacted to empower the LC system and to assign responsibilities to the various tiers in its hierarchy

*Unlike Ugandan local governments of the past that have functioned mainly as appendages of the central government, the new set of local governments are, in principle and by law, empowered to promote democratic governance. The District Council is the supreme political organ in the district, with a popularly elected District Chairperson, who functions as the political head of the district. Making by-laws, formulating and approving annual budgets, selecting and implementing development projects, outsourcing services, raising loans, and mortgaging council property – all these are by law the exclusive prerogatives of the District Council. In addition, from 1993 on, the provision of primary education, primary health care, feeder roads, agricultural extension, hospitals, and secondary schools have all become the responsibility of the several tiers of local government.*

While the system assigns considerable responsibility to the local governments, they have not so far been assigned a commensurate amount of resources. The national government has so far devolved funds for expenses associated with salaries and running costs, while retaining all construction budgets and development scheme funds with itself. In financial year, 1996-97, for instance, only a quarter of the funds transferred to local governments took the form of unconditional grants that local councils could use to finance the schemes and projects they thought important and necessary. The balance of the funds transferred to the councils were meant to cover salaries and the costs of ongoing projects, approved and commissioned by the central government. This pattern of full responsibility with partial resource-sharing places local governments in a situation of dependence vis-à-vis the national government.

The mismatch between delegated functions and devolved finances has also placed local governments under a serious expenditure squeeze, sometimes compelling them to divert funds to other activities, which they consider to be of higher priority. Council officials often find themselves torn between complying with the central government's expenditure tracking system, on the one hand, and with the priorities and programs of District Councils, on the other.

The LC system is still very new and people as well as LC executives are still coming to terms with their newly acquired powers. Financial proprieties as well as rules of procedure have been breached by some LC executives. Carried away by their enthusiasm for "getting things done," some LC executives, particularly at lower LC levels, have paid scant regard to the rules of procedure. Tendering procedures have been flouted in some districts, and some councilors have awarded tenders to firms owned by themselves or family members. Notwithstanding the generally high level of performance by the District Service Commissions, there are indications that decentralizing the personnel system has promoted tribalism in some cases.

Paternalistic and unaccountable attitudes toward development are a heritage from Uganda's past, and much work remains to be done to convert participation into citizens' empowerment. In the LC system, citizens participate directly only at the LC1 level, i.e., at the village level. Higher-level representatives are elected indirectly, by electoral colleges constituted among councilors at the next lower level – so popular participation is confined really to the LC1 level alone. Even at this level, however, citizen participation has tended to end with elections. Though the Local Government Act 1997 provides that local government councils should meet at least once in two months, village councils have by and large avoided calling these meetings. Consequently, most villagers remain ignorant about the activities and plans of their councils.

Procedures do not exist that can ensure councilors' accountability to their constituents. Some village councilors have been heard to demand payment for services that they should provide free of charge. If such behavior is widespread, then participation will not lead to empowerment – unless citizens' and LCs' capacities are suitably enhanced.

Capacity building is most apparent at the LC5, or district council, level. In 1995, many district councils formed into an association – the Uganda Local Authorities Association – that negotiates with the Central Government on behalf of all its members, influences policy formulation, disseminates best practices among local governments, and provides other support services to its member councils. Association members have entered into

partnerships with NGOs, with private sector agencies, and with international donors in their efforts to mobilize additional resources.

To deal with the financial squeeze in which they find themselves, and in order to improve service delivery, many District Councils have undertaken administrative reorganization. Rakai District, for example, has reduced the number of departments from twenty-four to only eight. Some districts have adopted measures for full or partial privatization of services.

Service delivery has begun to improve in some districts. Four districts out of 49 now have approved integrated development plans, two have draft integrated development plans, nine have draft plans which however lack the input from lower councils, 25 are in the early stages of formulating their plans and five have not begun the process as yet.

A case in point is Rakai District where a District Development Programme is being supported by the Danish International Development Agency. Councillors of Rakai district place great emphasis on improving primary schools and health facilities. As a result of their efforts to garner more resources, and also due to public appreciation of the uses to which these resources are put, revenue collection in the district has increased from Shs. 280 million (US$0.23 million) in 1992- 93 to Shs. 450 million in 1993/94.

Despite these efforts by council staffs, it is apparent that decentralization has not so far resulted in the kind of active civil society participation that its architects had envisaged. Weak internal capacity has undermined participation and performance, particularly among the lower-level councils. At the district level, support by bilateral donors in terms of District Development Programmes, district capacity building initiatives by multilateral donors including UNDP, and capacity building support of the Decentralization Secretariat of the Ministry of Local Government have resulted in promoting better performance. More districts deserve such support if they are to improve upon service delivery and the mobilization of tax revenue. Districts of northern and eastern Uganda that have suffered from civil strife are particularly in need of such support.

It is at the lower levels of the LC system, however, that capacity-building programs are most urgently needed. Infrequent meetings at the village level constitute a serious set back to empowerment. Yet it is at this level where effective social and economic empowerment can make an impact on poverty. If they are not aware of the opportunities that exist in the external environment and if they are unable to avail themselves of these opportunities, most Ugandans will be by-passed by the climate of growth engendered by the new liberal macro-economic environment. LC1s are a useful channel for connecting people with opportunity – but they need to be strengthened internally before they can serve their constituents well.

The pilot program of the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) in Uganda, which tackles the problem of poverty through participation and enhanced local governance, is helping develop capacity, particularly at the intermediate levels of the LC system. It provides funds to support viable community development programs. Such support is needed most crucially, however, at the lowest levels of the LC system – the only levels of this system at which people can participate directly.

Financial assistance constitutes only one kind of assistance is required at the village council level, and it is not the most important kind. More valuable than financial resources will be those kinds of assistance that enable village councils to build capacity within themselves. It is relatively easy, given the procedures that exist at this time, for leaders of village councils to act in undemocratic ways. No doubt there are legal provisions that restrain arbitrary behavior on the part of village councilors – but most Ugandan villagers are unaware of these formal legal procedures. Codified formal laws exist mostly in books and not in the minds and everyday practices of these villagers.

Village residents in Uganda have their own time-honored sets of norms and values, but the formal laws of this country, as of most countries anywhere in the developing world, pay little heed to traditional custom. Traditional law remains neglected and suppressed. It is superseded by formal and codified law that is hardly ever explained and made real to people in villages. Consequently, they have nothing at hand with which they can hold their leaders accountable. And so leaders can get by acting arbitrarily and to their own personal advantage.

That this need not necessarily be the case is illustrated by the examples of Philippines and the Pacific, examined in other chapters of this volume. The difference in those two cases is comprised by the regard that was paid in these countries to revitalizing traditional structures and customs. Far from rejecting and replacing traditional structures, in the Pacific and Philippines these structures were brought centrally within the decision making processes. Development at the local level was given a boost by combining the coherence and strength of traditional structures with the effectiveness and versatility of modern technology and methods. While such a harmonious combination is not always possible to achieve in practice, the recurrent disregard of tradition tends to disempower citizens who are not yet well conversant with formal laws and legal procedures. This category comprises the bulk of rural inhabitants of most developing countries.

By-passing traditional norms robs most village residents of whatever social control they can exercise upon their leaders. While the Ugandan LC case illustrates the negative consequences of disregarding tradition, the other two cases mentioned above demonstrate the benefits that can be gained when customs and values are given due recognition in the development process.

**Lessons**

The main lessons that emerge from these three case studies are the following. First, even within an enabling environment, it takes considerable organizational capacity in order for any organization to capture existing opportunities. Organizational leadership and power-sharing arrangements will determine whether benefits will be shared equitably among all members. The performance of lower-level LCs and of primary cooperative societies within the UCA network indicate that democratic principles such as transparency and accountability can easily be undermined by structural conditions that perpetuate the dominance of vested interests. Tackling such structural problem seem to be a critical entry point for agencies that are interested in building organizational capacity. External partners could assist LCs in adopting appropriate internal processes and in improving the delivery of high-quality services.

Organizational capacity cannot be measured in terms of financial resources mobilized and numbers of vehicles and equipment owned by the organization. One critical element of capacity is a small cadre of competent, dedicated and well-remunerated staff. In terms of enabling the organization to gain a competitive edge and to strategically capture new opportunities for the benefits of its members, there is no substitute for competent and dedicated staffs who are accountable to the general membership of the organization, and not to particular individuals. The second critical element relates to engaged and well informed membership.

Even among organizations that are induced from above, such as the LCs and the UFA, the risk of being manipulated by partners and vested interest groups can be minimized if staff is competent and membership alert and engaged. Given its strategic role in generating export revenue for the country, UFA acquired sufficient clout to begin calling the shots rather than passively marching to the tune of government or donors. Similarly, District Councils that acquired capacity for improved service delivery become a force for the central government and other development agencies to reckon with, especially in respect of local development matters. None of these achievements would have been possible without a combination of internal democracy and external competence.

It is not correct, however, to uncritically extend the practices employed by these organizations to situations outside their particular social context. What worked for UFA and for the more successful LCs was as much the product of their internal efforts as of the social and political contexts within which these organizations functioned. Evaluating the social contexts of participation and empowerment is the first step for designing strategies for building capacity among civil society organizations.

Critical for citizens' empowerment are four fundamental conditions that must be satisfied. These are, in order, a win-win posture, accountability, self-supervision, and democratic norms. UCA's strategic use of the delegate's conference provides an example of an institutional innovation, which has begun to cultivate the culture of accountability and to make the principle of democratic control more meaningful to members of co-operative societies.

Because organizational structures tend to readily replicate the social structure of the incorporating society, if the social structures are less egalitarian, there is need for using participatory methods in ways that enable members to begin seeking major structural or institutional reforms within their organization. Additionally, since the integrity of leaders is important for upholding democratic norms, processes that promote transparency will need to be continuously reviewed and strengthened.

Finally, it is important that civil society organizations develop their own independent financial base. Dependence on government or on external donors does not augur well for sustainable organizational development. Capacity building certainly is a long-term process requiring commitment and staying power. The short time-horizon that most external development agencies have, and their quest for quick results, can become serious impediments to promoting participation and empowerment. Civil society organizations must work, therefore, to enhance resource mobilization so that they can support capacity building over the long term.

## Chapter 3

## THE WAR ON POVERTY FORUM:
## The South African Experience With Poverty
by
Vukani Mthintso & Jacqui Boulle for SANGOCO

### Introduction

South Africans face many challenges as they deal with the legacy of apartheid. Many indicators suggest that poverty and deprivation are widespread among the black and rural populations. The population census of 1996 found, for instance, that 96 percent of white households were served by piped water supply but only 27 percent of black households had access to these facilities. Many black South Africans are jobless and those who are lucky enough to find jobs are routinely underpaid. More than half of all employed black women are paid in amounts that are well below the official poverty line figure.

Faced with the inimical results of apartheid and prompted by a desire to improve the conditions of the poor, civil society organizations (CSOs) in South Africa converged in 1997 to forge a coordinated front against poverty. Piecemeal and uncoordinated efforts were failing to substantially reduce levels of poverty, they realized, and a concerted effort was required that would involve NGOs and government agencies working in coordination with one another.

In cooperation with South Africa's government and with international aid agencies, a partnership was developed by NGOs to wage a National War on Poverty. This partnership – the National War on Poverty Forum – has grown and it now coordinates the activities of over 2,500 participating organizations. It functions as a national platform for policy dialogue on all issues related to poverty. Members of the Forum work together to implement a single national agenda. They are all inspired by a shared understanding of the issues, and they combine their separate strengths to achieve their common agenda.

The process of getting such a large number of agencies to cooperate with one another was neither effortless nor automatic. Each agency had its own set of priorities. Like the nine blind men with the elephant, agencies concerned with development in South Africa had each seized upon one aspect of the problem. Even though none of them was addressing the aggregate problem, all agencies were convinced that the parts they dealt with were the most relevant ones. The effect of these partial and fragmentary agendas was made worse by the absence of any coordination among agencies. At meetings and other dialogues organized to discuss poverty-related issues, each agency was loud in the defense of its own vision and none worked in partnership with any of the others.

Even as these agency heads, government officials and CSO representatives, professed to speak in the name of the poor, the poor themselves had barely been heard or adequately recognized for their positive contributions. In the history of modern South Africa, as in most other countries of the world, no public forum had ever been organized

where the poor could speak out on their own behalf - and be heard attentively by the organizations that claim to work for their good. Deprived of any access to decision-makers, the poor are rarely able to influence economic and social policy decisions that impinge upon their livelihoods.

The National War on Poverty Forum set out to rectify these conditions of enduring poverty and helplessness. There were three parts to the strategy developed by the Forum. Hearing the poor speak out on their own behalf was the first and most important part. The second part consisted of designing policies and programs to address their concerns. NGOs, government and donor agencies, all were required to change direction. The third and still ongoing part entails implementing the programs that were designed in consequence of the public hearings. Much close coordination has been achieved among the agencies – government, CSO, and donors – that came together in the Forum. As a result of this nationwide exercise of public hearings a much more focused assault has been launched on poverty in South Africa. And because of close inter-agency coordination, much better results are being seen than were ever witnessed before.

For implementing the first part of the strategy, the lead was taken by SANGOCO, the South African NGO Coalition. A national campaign was organized in 1997 that consisted of a series of public hearings organized through the length and breadth of the country. The 'public', who spoke and were heard at these meetings, were the poor, mostly women, and nearly all located in rural areas. These public hearings – which went under the name of Speak Out on Poverty, or Speak Out, in short – were attended in large numbers by the poor. More than ten thousand poor persons attended the first set of hearings alone, and many others were represented by village groups and grassroots organizations.

For the first time in South Africa and perhaps in the world, the poor spoke out in public about what poverty meant to them. Their voices – their experiences, their ideas, their recommendations, and their proposals for policy reform – were not only heard and discussed; they are forming the basis of a new national action plan.

A much clearer idea has been gained by all concerning who the poor are and what they desire from public policy. What they desire is surprisingly little, it was learned; but even this little gives cause for great hardship and suffering. At one public hearing held in the Northern Province, Violet Nevri quoted an old adage that expresses the desire of most poor South Africans. "We want to be taught how to fish and given some equipment. We don't want to given fish to eat." It was further learnt that South African poverty has a rural and a gender dimension. Margaret Zulu of KwaZulu Natal summed up the plight of rural women: "Rural women do not usually work outside the household and scratch out a meager living from the soil. They do a lot of hard physical labor, and often they still do not get enough to eat. Some of them are widows, and others have been left by their husbands who have moved to cities in search of jobs."

The thousands of voices that were heard across the country during the Speak Out campaign have all been documented. These documents are now forming the basis for a more coordinated and better-informed assault on poverty. This action plan is not premised on statistical information and academic formulations alone but it is informed – and enriched – by the aspirations and the inclinations of the poor themselves.

Speak Out has promoted a common understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty among NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations. Instead of working separately and apart as they did previously, diverse agencies are coming together to forge a united front against poverty. In the process, a forum has been created where the poor can continue to give voice to their concerns, hopes and opinions. Policy makers and implementing agencies have been forced to pay heed to these voices. Where separate agendas could be formulated before, a single common agenda is now in place. Based on what was spoken out by the poor, a national action plan has been formulated. This plan is expected to be implemented through combining the specific strengths of particular agencies. The poor have set the agenda for poverty alleviation themselves. Any agency will find it difficult if not impossible to pursue any separate agenda.

**Background**

By 1997, "poverty" was the key focus of government as well as international agencies operating in South Africa in preference to "development" that was now regarded as less well directed toward the poor. Even as various organizations had made poverty reduction their main goal, however, each of them was pursuing different agendas. South Africa had a collective Reconstruction and Development Programme, attended by NGOs and government departments, but these agencies tended to implement poverty reduction programs in isolation from one another, each in an uncoordinated and fragmented way.

Recognizing that poverty reduction is everyone's responsibility, and that it requires the participation and cooperation of every sector, SANGOCO called a meeting of key actors to discuss methods for coordinating efforts for poverty reduction. This meeting was held in August 1997 and it brought together key umbrella agencies such as SANGOCO, the South African Council of Churches, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and the Homeless Peoples Federation. UNDP and the government Department of Welfare were also represented. It was at this meeting that an idea was born to launch a national War on Poverty Forum.

The long-term objectives of the War On Poverty (WOP) Forum included initiating and sustaining participatory policy dialogue on issues related to poverty reduction, and coordinating the work of different sectors and agencies, pooling resources, and thereby maximizing joint impact. The Forum wanted to initiate a common front against poverty but inter-agency coordination proved easier to discuss than to achieve in practice.

Some of the key players were not yet ready to cooperate with one another. In particular, cooperation between CSOs and government agencies attracted a lot of skepticism and hostility. Organizations like the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) and other civil society networks thought it a contradiction to work at the same time both in a watchdog and a partnership role with regard to government. It would take a series of individual and joint meetings to convince these organizations that they would all benefit by putting their full weight behind the Forum. Initially, however, the process was far from smooth.

Soon after the meeting of August 1997, civil society members of the WOP Forum wrote to the government asking to participate in preparing the Poverty and Inequality Report, an important policy document that was commissioned by the country's Deputy President. The official reply was cold and discouraging. "The report is almost complete," these NGOs were informed, "it is not appropriate to allow any fresh dialogue at this stage." Similarly, the high-profile national Truth and Reconciliation Commission also rejected NGOs' submissions on socio-economic rights. These representations were turned down on the ground that the Commission did not consider itself empowered to deal with the issues that the NGOs had raised. These and other bureaucratic pinpricks served to delay the task of inter-agency coordination.

These setbacks initiated fresh thinking by SANGOCO and other partners. SANGOCO was convinced that the structural inequalities inherited from apartheid would continue to plague South Africa for decades to come. Unless concerted action was taken to deal with this situation, basic social and economic rights – rights to education, land, housing, health services, etc. – would continue to be denied to the majority of South Africans. Taking concerted action meant getting all relevant agencies to share a common understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty. Government and NGOs could work together, it was thought, only when each subscribed to a common view about what was necessary, what was desirable, and what was likely to work.

It is usual though extraordinary in the realm of development policy that every agency has a view about poverty – but the views of the poor themselves are rarely heard. The situation in South Africa was no different. On the basis of partial evidence and preconceptions, perhaps, each agency had formulated its own discrete interpretation. Nothing, it was felt, was more likely to unlock these stereotypes than getting all these agencies together in order to hear the poor speak out on their own behalf. Once everyone had heard what the poor had to say, and especially when large numbers of the poor had spoken, from all regions of the country, a common agenda could be framed that would more meaningfully and more directly address issues that the poor regard to be important.

**The Poor Speak Out On Poverty**

The Speak Out hearings were designed to elicit the public's voice on all dimensions of poverty, to document and analyze these issues, and to develop a set of viable responses. The purposes informing the Speak Out exercise were the following: providing a platform to the poor for giving voice to their ideas and experiences, and having national policy makers hear these voices; reviewing the extent to which the legacy of apartheid has impaired and continues to hamper poor people's access to social and economic rights; assessing the extent to which government programs and those of NGOs are adequate for improving the conditions of the poor and vulnerable; and framing a set of recommendations directed toward improving policy design and program implementation.

The Speak Out hearings were planned to be held for one day in each province. At the insistence of local NGOs and grassroots organizations, however, this schedule of hearings was extended. A total of 35 day-long hearings were held in 29 locations across the length and breadth of South Africa from 31 March to 19 June 1998. A large number of local and national organizations were involved.

To maximize policy impact, important national organizations were assigned key roles. Since the South African Human Rights Commission has the constitutional mandate to monitor government's performance vis-à-vis the new constitution, SANGOCO invited this Commission to co-host Speak Out. Since poverty and inequality have a strong gender dimension, the Commission on Gender Equality was asked to appoint its commissioners. And since the church is committed to working with the poor, its leadership and congregations were invited to participate actively in this exercise. The Congress of Trade Unions also sent its representatives to these sessions as did a number of other national umbrella organizations.An aggressive advertising campaign was launched to publicize the schedule of hearings. Radio messages were used as the principal means to reach potential submitters, though other means, such as messages written on T-shirts, caps, mugs, etc., were also used.

The campaign largely relied on donations and contributions of a large network of people and organizations interested on eradicating poverty in South Africa, though a small amount of funding – R250,000 or $40,000 – were also obtained from the international donor community. In most cases, however, the local community took care of organizational expenses. For example in KwaZulu Natal, the premier of that province and the chiefs provided food for the participants in the hearings in Ulundi by slaughtering two cows from their personal kraal.

To facilitate easy access by all, public buildings such as community halls, churches and schools were selected as the venue for these hearings. Nearly three-quarters of all hearings were held in the rural areas. In each province, a local NGO was assigned primary responsibility for convening the hearing. This local NGO was required to work with other organizations in order to publicize the hearings and to mobilize the poor to attend in large numbers.

In preparation for the hearings, SANGOCO commissioned seven thematic background papers that dealt, respectively, with issues related to rural development and land matters; education; urban development and housing; welfare; economic development; environment; and health. These papers provided participants with quick summaries of policy issues related to each of these themes. Having reviewed the existing set of national policies, participants at these hearings were much better prepared to comment both on implementation failures and on policy reform.

Three mechanisms were put in place for the benefit of those who did not have the time or the resources to attend a hearing in person. First, SANGOCO leased toll-free telephone lines and staffed these with people conversant in each of the country's eleven languages. People were invited to make their submissions to SANGOCO over telephone. Provisions were also made for organizations and individuals to record their submissions on tape and to forward these to the Speak Out secretariat. Area NGOs assisted by providing resources for collecting these submissions and forwarding them to the secretariat.

As part of the process of expanding public discussion on poverty-related issues, a schools essay and picture competition was organized. Primary school children drew pictures depicting their personal experiences of poverty, and secondary school children wrote essays that dealt with various aspects of poverty. A private publishing house

sponsored prizes for these competitions. Photographs depicting poverty situations were collected and they were exhibited prominently at each hearing location.

As a result of these preparations and due to the widespread publicity generated by the local partners, large numbers of the poor came to each hearing, keen to participate at these sessions and to have their voices heard. A team of volunteers stood at the door collecting statements from the arriving public, asking individuals whether they would like to make a formal submission, and then selecting those submissions that were felt most useful for the purpose of stimulating public discussion. Selection was made using criteria including significance of the issue for other participants; maintaining a rough balance among presenters in terms of gender, age and place of residence (rural and urban); and willingness of the submitter to make a presentation in public. Approximately ten percent of those who submitted statements were called upon to make public presentations before the assembled gathering. Each presenter was given ten minutes to talk and 20 minutes were provided for questions from the audience and from the appointed commissioners.

Between four and eight commissioners were selected from among participating organizations to officiate at each hearing. Every hearing was conducted in at least three languages and many extended to five, so that all who attended the hearings could understand fully the issues that were being discussed.

Cases presented at these hearings were divided up into those involving failures of implementation and others for which wider changes, including policy reform, needed to be considered. For the former set of cases, submitters were referred to a local NGO, a government department, or some other organization that could assist in resolving his or her problem. A list of required interventions was made up at the end of each day and the commissioners were responsible to ensure follow-up action by the agency that dealt with each of the issues reported on this list. Many of the problems that were presented at these hearings were resolved locally. At a hearing held in Messina, for instance, a farmer was subpoenaed by the Human Rights Commissioners for ill-treating his farm workers. At other places, information was compiled that led to improved service delivery by government line agencies. Referrals were made to legal experts in matters requiring miscarriage of justice. School boards in many areas were apprised of the need to include basic legal rights within their curricula.

After each hearing the organizing team wrote to every submitter in their own language, providing them with a summary of the hearing report and also including a list of local and national organizations that could be helpful in providing the assistance required by this submitter.

**The National Impact of Poverty Hearings**

Apart from issues that could be resolved locally, other issues that required changes in policy and program were collected from each hearing and compiled into documents arranged by thematic area. In all, over 10,000 submissions were collected and compiled, providing a rich resource base for anyone in South Africa concerned with poverty. All these submissions are available for inspection at SANGOCO's national office.

A full set of minutes was drawn up after each hearing and all submissions were translated into English. A full report was submitted to the Premier of each province and copies were also made available to national ministers and other key decision-makers. Reports were released within a month of holding the hearings. On 16 July 1998, the national report was released at a public ceremony held in Regina Mundi, Soweto, a place of great national significance to South Africans. The national report and a list of recommendations, constituting a national action plan for poverty reduction, were widely distributed. Specific reports were prepared dealing with each of the seven thematic areas listed above.

There is no doubt that this set of materials provides the latest and most comprehensive account of poor people's views and problems in South Africa today. The full findings are detailed in two reports: "The Peoples Voices" documents the submitters stories as narrated in their own voice, and "Poverty And Human Rights" examines the barriers encountered by the poor for accessing their constitutionally guaranteed rights.

All of these reports are in great demand from researchers, activists and policy makers. They are used to brief decision-makers both nationally and internationally. SANGOCO has been inundated with requests for information. Separate presentations have been made to the Churches Summit, the South African Local Government Association, the country's parliament, several government departments and agencies, a conference of judges, the donor community, international social and economic rights lobbies, and to follow-up poverty forums organized in some other countries in the west and south of the African continent.

Similar public hearings have been planned in other countries in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world. It does not require a great deal of money to conduct any such exercise. The entire Speak Out process has relied on contributions from participating organizations. It is through their dedication that Speak Out was able to achieve its success. Grassroots groups and other agencies concerned with poverty exist as well in other countries, so Speak Out can be organized almost anywhere.

Apart from gaining clearer ideas about the poor and their needs, Speak Out also helped forge a united front among agencies fighting against poverty. At the local level, NGOs, churches, and community organizations came together to mobilize people and to address their problems. At the national level, relationships were forged among a large number of organizations. Speak Out drew upon a range of people who worked as commissioners, organizers, submitters, and supporters. This has provided an army of people who can carry forth recommendations emerging from this process and translate these into a new paradigm of development practice in South Africa. The persons who functioned as commissioners at these hearings represent a range of organizations. Other organizations participated as submitters and presenters. The hearings promoted among all these organizations a common understanding of poverty in the country and a shared vision of how these problems can be tackled.

Speak Out was not without critics. When the hearings were launched some feared that they might result in raising the expectations of the poor without providing any assurance of relief. In reality, however, the expectations of the poor were so modest that we should all be ashamed they have not been met. People who spoke at the hearings were not expecting to receive highly paid jobs, company cars, or tarred roads. They were hoping

merely to have an opportunity to send their children to school, to be able to get water without walking for miles, to get their monthly pensions regularly and without delay or hassle, to get a tiny piece of land and have some security of tenure, and to feed their families. Paulina Machayi of the Northern Province spoke tellingly of these modest aspirations: "We need land that we and our children will be able to survive. Not vast tracts to raise cattle, but enough land to produce our own food and to survive."

Another concern raised was that people would expect speedy results. Speak Out went to great lengths to explain to people that there would be no immediate benefit. Yet people remained eager to tell their stories. The poor wanted to talk. They wanted to be heard. They wanted someone to show them the respect of listening to their voices. The last time most of them remembered having any interaction with government agents was during the 1994 election campaigns. At other times, government staff and political leaders appeared to have no time for poor rural residents. Lucky Lebenya of the Eastern Cape stated trenchantly: "If you are an ordinary person you do not know where to start looking for the Human Rights Commission. You see Barney Pityana (president of the Commission) on TV, but when you try and contact a commissioner, he doesn't come to the people. All the government structures are in towns."

For thousands of people the Speak Out on Poverty Hearings were their first opportunity to tell their story to someone who was willing to listen. People shed tears at the recognition of their problems. People were not asking for anything that was not already their right. The challenge is how to make these rights real. The real success of the hearings was that the issue of poverty reduction has been placed on top of the national agenda. And the voices of the poor have become the benchmark to assess the success of any anti-poverty initiative. Today wide ranges of people are measuring the success of such enterprises against the findings of Speak Out.

Reference to Speak Out can be found in various government strategy documents, including those of the Department of Water Affairs, the Department Of Welfare, the National Action Plan for Human Rights, and also in proclamations and statements issued by various NGOs and aid agencies. Obstacles to effective poverty reduction have been identified and people and organizations have been pressured into action to address these obstacles. Hundreds of organizations and individuals have been mobilized to action, providing a pool of activists for the next steps in the War on Poverty.

The hearings have also served as a catalyst for several local initiatives aimed at strengthening the hands of the poor. Several local groups have continued to meet and take action for addressing local problems. For example, in the Northern Province people from neighboring farms met and decided to start acting collectively in order to address farm workers' living and working conditions. They have continued to meet. In the Eastern Cape, pensioners have organized to address their concerns about regular and timely payments. Other groups are taking up issues related to rural-urban migration, the source of most urban poverty in South Africa as elsewhere.

 Recommendations emerging from the Speak Out on Poverty Hearings are being taken forward in a variety of ways. The War on Poverty Forum is working on putting together a National Plan of Action for Poverty Eradication. The Plan will distinguish critical areas and identify mechanisms of intervention necessary to deal with each of these areas. The Commission on Gender Equality, the Human Rights Commission, and the Public

Protector have all agreed to monitor the implementation of this plan.  Before Speak Out was initiated, government agencies and NGOs were all pulling in different directions.  Through participation in the WOP Forum a significant amount of information is now shared and joint initiatives are often undertaken.

**Next Steps**

Though Speak Out has served the important end of bringing agencies and individuals together to work on a common agenda of poverty reduction, this exercise needs to be broadened and made more continuous.   More people need to be involved, particularly larger numbers of the poor in all regions of the country.  Other significant actors also need to be brought within the War on Poverty Forum.

Speak Out tried to reach out to communities across the country.  Because of the organizers' limited resources, however, the hearings did not reach all people.  In many areas of the country, the poor remain unheard.  SANGOCO believes that reducing poverty can only be achieved by an active population that participates fully in attaining this goal.  SANGOCO and other partners will therefore need to expand and extend their efforts to reach more of the poor in all parts of the country.

In addition to formulating and implementing a National Plan, thus, the next phase of activity for the Forum will include a large component of social mobilization.  It is expected that every community and every province will soon have its own poverty forum, where ideas and strategies can be shared and plans implemented through partnership with concerned agencies.  To assist with this mobilization effort, the Forum will conduct a large-scale public awareness campaign.

Weak implementation capacity can impair the future work of the Forum.  The Forum remains at present exclusively a national body.  For activities to be managed effectively, they have to be located close to the grassroots, with the largest possible public involvement.  Extending the Forum's networks to provincial and local levels will thus assist also with organization building and implementation capacity.

At national and provincial levels, the Forum will have to be widened to include other significant actors.  The findings of the Hearings indicate the need for greater private sector involvement.  The private sector in South Africa plays a critical role not only in economic activity but also in shaping the socio-political environment.  The written evidence of Innocent Ngwenya of the Aids Sexuality Health Youth Organisation noted that "business persons are always negative. There is no persuading them to use their money for development.  But let them help because they are getting support from the community."  Members of the Forum regard it as critical to explore and implement mechanisms for bringing this sector on board.

Forum members have recognized that eradicating poverty can best be achieved through participatory partnerships as opposed to isolated initiatives.  In this context, SANGOCO's central role in the administration of the Forum may prove to be a shortcoming over the long term.  It is important to diversify responsibility among all partner organizations.  Opening provincial chapters and inviting other agencies to take up key organizational positions can go a long way toward diffusing responsibility, thereby ensuring the long-term health of the Forum.

Opening dialogue at the broader African regional level is another initiative being considered by the Forum. The entire sub-Saharan region continues to be an area of high poverty, yet regional dialogue has been very limited so far. There is no coordinated regional strategy for dealing with poverty. The Forum plans to open dialogue with interested partners in neighboring countries.

**Conclusions**

Plans to deal with poverty are made most often without involving the poor. Robert Chambers (1997) distinguishes between those whom he terms "uppers" and "lowers" in terms of development planning. Uppers – including aid professionals, government officials, NGO managers, researchers, academics, and the like – have usually decided what is best for lowers. The dominant reality of these uppers prevails even as plans are drawn that have to do with the lives and the livelihoods of lowers.

The South African initiative is directed toward reversing this unfortunate trend. By providing them with an opportunity to Speak Out on their own behalf, it seeks to involve the poor as central figures in determining their own destiny. No longer can plans be made without paying regard to what the poor have said – openly and in public.

In all parts of the country, organizations of the poor have mobilized to take part in formulating plans and monitoring their implementation. NGOs and government agencies do not any longer work in isolation. If inroads are to be made toward reducing poverty, partnerships and collaboration at all levels of society are critical to sustain. The Poverty Forum has initiated dialogue and supported the formation of such partnerships.

The poor of the country are better informed than before. They know where to go when they feel dissatisfied or neglected. This is no mean achievement in a country where until recently the vast majority of the population was disenfranchised and marginal. Speak Out has assisted in reversing this trend. Through the national Plan of Action a framework of poverty eradication has been agreed upon. The challenge remains for translating it into meaningful action at the local level.

## Chapter 4

## PEACEMAKING AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT-
## BIG PICTURES or SMALL PROJECTS:
## collaboration between UNDP and Civil Society in Mali
by
Robin Edward Poulton, Ibrahim ag Youssouf, and Mahamane Baby

There is no doubt that UNDP has had some success as a partner to civil society in Mali. Both in the resolution of the armed conflict in North Mali, and in many of its ongoing projects, UNDP works with and strengthens Malian civil society. Is this a series of coincidences ? Or is there an underlying strategy which guides UNDP Mali's activities into a coherent partnership with civil society organisations ? And does this partnership strengthen civil society organizations - or does UNDP reduce them to a status of dependants ? These questions merit exploration. We conclude that while there is a desire in UNDP to strengthen civil society, good will at the top is not enough.

In Mali, Village Councils chaired by the Chief form an important part of civil society, because their exercise of administrative power emerges from their place in the community.  Every head of family and each member of the senior age-group is automatically a part of the Council. This creates an interesting dichotomy, a creative tension and synergy between "modern" civil society (largely, although not entirely, a product of the urban environment) and "traditional" civil society (composed of village councils, hunters' associations, ecological protection and environmental-management units, age-groups for both men and women which have important functions in education and governance, initiation and mutual self-help.

Women hold a pre-eminent place in the family and clan structure, which is the basic unit of traditional civil society.  In the modern sector, women's ideas are seldom heard as stridently as those of their husbands and brothers, for instance,  in regional and national politics, which occupy a different social and political space. Changing times require changing habits, and a greater place for the female voice in socio-political debate.

In the short period since Malians regained the right of association (after the 1991 revolution which ended 23 years of military rule, the country has seen the emergence of ever-stronger women's groups.  Numerous women's NGOs have begun working, especially in rural areas, and particularly in education, health and family planning, and an increasingly wide network of health centres and savings banks is reaching deep into rural communities, where most women have never had an opportunity to learn to read.

The 1996 Peace of Timbuktu was negotiated by the combination of traditional and modern civil society. The Government made space for community leaders who came together for reconciliation. NGOs (both local and international) gave stimulus and encouragement, better communications and some funding. The Malian peace machinery worked successfully.  The United Nations did no more than add occasional drops of oil to the machinery, in order to help it turn more smoothly at certain key points.

This partnership between the UN and civil society - traditional and modern - in Northern Mali may have been partly chance or circumstance. We shall explore in the following pages not only how it worked, but also whether this success has influenced UNDP Mali's thinking about development practice. All donors claim to be helping grassroots beneficiaries; but donor officials, project managers and NGO leaders very seldom include them in the design stage of development programmes. Overheads, inefficiency and fraud (through over-charging for goods and services) eat up resources - to which add the cost of salaries and air-conditioned vehicles - and civil society is rarely strong enough, or organised enough, to impose better management and ideas on donors. In the following pages we ask: does UNDP perceive civil society as a useful or necessary partner in its work for sustainable human development and the eradication of poverty in Mali?

## Historical Background

Centralized government was one of the causes of marginalization (both economic and political) which led to the conflict in Northern Mali. Decentralization was the main premise for the successful negotiations which produced Mali's National Pact (signed by Government and armed movements on 11th April 1992); and it introduced an African form of participative democracy which finally brought peace to the nation, after the Malian government's *Concertations nationales* of August 1994 appealed to and mobilized civil society in every region to create a national consensus in favour of peace and reconciliation.

Centralization produces conflict, unless it has the power to suppress it.[x] The converse also seems to be true: participation in governance promotes harmony and the early resolution of conflicts. Virtually all governments in Africa adopted the repressive colonial model of government designed to maintain centralized control over the native population. In Mali the key figure in governance - the village chief *dugu tigi* - became subordinate to the uniformed *Commandant de Cercle* or *Sous-préfet*, often younger than his own sons, whose power (and frequently, abuse of power) was backed by the police and judicial arms of the State.

It is not usually the laws themselves that are abusive, but their application. Officials have discretion which they may use wisely, or corruptly. In areas far from the capital city, where villagers cannot read the laws written in a foreign language, what mechanisms might encourage officials to use their discretion in such a way as to ensure the rule of law? To use his discretion wisely, a government official must believe that abuse will be found out and sanctioned. Higher levels of education, literacy and information will ensure that people know their rights under the law: but in the short term we need to create countervailing power. While illiterate villagers may not have access individually to information or to influential people, groups of villagers may be able to gain access, especially if they act together in civil society organizaions. They may be partners of other organised groups (such as NGOs with roots in the capital city) and build a coalition against abuse by administrators, judges, policemen, forestry officials, tax collectors brought up under the one-party-state.

Such changes have been occurring in rural Mali after 1991. For instance, in the Mopti Region, local and international NGOs started working with local communities on issues related to land conservation. Through these programmes, they are changing the

abusive state-dominated practices of the previous military regime. Traditional environmental protection groups have been revived.,[x] and contracts have been established between villagers in neighbouring communities for joint management of forests, and protection and exploitation of water courses. This was made possible largely through the Near East Foundation in Douentza, whose Malian director Yacouba Deme has legal training.[x] A full-time lawyer Yamadou Diallo travels around on a motorbike, assisting local communities to draw up contracts and to register their associations in accordance with the right of association won in the 1991 revolution.

There is a new confidence in the rule of law in the Mopti Region. The presence of non-governmental organisations with trained cadres, who can read and interpret official French-language texts, has destabilised the exploitative oligarchy of local administrators. Judges have even been known to find in favour of civilians against the administration: something that was unheard of under the military regime, when the *Commandant de Cercle* was the judge's boss and they all belonged to the Party.[x]


**Reaching women**

The role of the mother in particular constitutes a vitally important part of family relations in Malian society. "African women occupy an almost -spiritual place in the family" explained the Sage of Bandiagara, Amadou Hampaté Ba to a UNESCO conference in 1992. "You may at a pinch disobey your father. But you can never disobey your mother." Women occupy a place in West African society, education and food production which is difficult for Westerners to understand. This explains the frustration of many African women with the western feminist movement and with their *"discours et slogans officiels"* as Adame Ba Konaré describes them in the Introduction to her monumental *Dictionnaire des femmes célèbres du Mali".*[x] Every Malian woman is respected as a mother from infancy. "Little mother" is one of the affectionate diminutives used to address small girls.

Western feminists ask questions about "property" and "inheritance" which have little meaning in a culture where land is communally owned, where the patriarch acts as general manager of the family enterprise. In the West, individuality is everything. In Africa it is nothing. One of the things which irritates Westerners is the apparent slowness with which community decisions are taken. There is always need for another meeting, but community decisions are always taken through consensus, and only after consultation with the mothers of the family. Women may not be visible at public meetings, but no decision may be taken, let alone implemented without their consent.

However, this role of women does not in any way reduce the disadvantages they suffer under Africa's gerontocracy. There is certainly need to change certain community functions, allowing for independent decision-making for women, especially for younger, economically-productive women, and make decision-making faster in order to integrate productively with the monetary economy. This brings out once again, the importance of civil society institutions for the promotion of sustainable human development.

**Strengthening the social economy**

The importation of inappropriate economic models is a major cause of African poverty. Tawfique Boutchiche of Morocco, at the *Francophonie* agency in Paris, believes that

*'We need to reflect on a truly African economic model. In Africa the communities need to take the economy in hand, for otherwise most of the population will be excluded. It is through the social economy that poverty will be reduced. In the West, entrepreneurs emerged through the banking economy; in Africa they come out of the social economy."*
*x*

**We define the social economy** as the economic image of civil society.  It is composed of all economically active associative, cooperative enterprises (including village associations, associations of livestock producers and fishermen, women's production groups, development NGOs, mutualist insurance, savings or credit groups, social enterprises (such as *groupements d'intérêts économiques* GIE), trade unions, and professional associations concerned with economic matters (such as the artisans' federation, the association of women traders). The social economy does not include private companies, nor does it include the non-economic organisations that are important components of civil society.

The social economy and the world of NGOs have tended to be dominated by mostly social programmes, such as health and education, and economic programmes, that can help raise family incomes directly have been given short shrift.  This is partly the fault of donors, including UNDP.

We should be looking for new mechanisms for getting civil society institutions away from dependence on small grants, and giving small-scale producers access to locally available bank credit.  This is particularly true for women's groups that are often excluded from donor-designed projects. With appropriate local currency amounts and reasonable credit terms, local groups will be able to mobilise savings, reduce their dependency on donors, and promote sustainable human and economic development.

**How UNDP became a partner of civil society in Northern Mali**

One hallmark of Mali's democratic third republic, has been the constant desire to consult with civil society. This is not simply a political gambit. With great patience, bridges were built to restore confidence and dialogue between the civilian and military parts of the Malian nation. There is a clear undercurrent of belief among Ministers and opinion leaders that West African democratic governance consists of more than western-style confrontational elections. As we saw earlier, debate and discussion are the very essence of West African governance, at least at the local level.

The August 1991 National Conference was the first and most important demonstration that the "palaver tree" tradition can be applied as well at the national level. Mali's National Conference gave instructions that a series of sectoral consultations should be held: the *Journées nationales du Monde Rural, les Journèes nationales du Monde Féminin, les Journées nationales de l'Education, etc.* They were open to all citizens and every region was represented. By 1994, the democratic government was bogged down in political wrangling with the opposition.  Once again, the traditional system of open discussions, the "palaver tree" system, was used.

The Regional Concertations of August 1994, side-stepped the Bamako-based cliques, mobilizing in their place the voice and wisdom of civil society in every Region:  local representatives of political parties, the public administration, traditional and religious

leaders, rural and urban associations, social partners and professional associations. Thereafter the leaders of civil society organizations became the brokers of peace, with some NGOs acting as catalysts.

The NGOs took as their starting point the weekly market where nomads and farmers meet and trade, and they created with the *Commisariat au Nord* a specific project *FAR-Nord* to promote reconciliation.[x] Meetings brought leaders of the armed movements together with sedentary and nomadic communities and religious elders to work out specific problems, such as how firearms might be controlled in each district, how goods might be assured safe conduct in order to restart commercial activities in the area, and how refugees could be integrated after five years of distrust and fear.  Issues that had been the exclusive domain of the earlier one-party state were now debated openly by the local community, which took over responsibility for mediating the use of land, water and pastures, and intervened successfully to reduce violence and armed robbery. Many participants said that this was the first time in history that they had met to discuss such issues without being manipulated from the outside.

Simultaneously, the process of demobilising armed combatants helped revive the social economy.  Grants to individual ex-combatants were grouped together to provide more substantial sums for investment. Additional money was invested by neighbours, who came forward to join the ex-combatants in creating a rice perimeter or in launching a livestock project such as the Elaket rice perimeter near Timbuktu, where 66 Arab ex-combatants are working together to farm 20 hectares (and becoming a development tourist attraction in the process).

Group action is natural in Malian communities.  The demobilization programme – or PAREM as it was termed – has helped promote a set of community projects.  This UNDP-supported programme is strengthening with the social economy.  By setting up and working with civil society organizations, it is building a basis for further development in the Malian countryside.  Everyone we spoke with agrees that only the United Nations could launch and run PAREM and manage the Trust Fund that supports PAREM. Only the UN is seen to occupy a position of neutrality.  Neither the government, nor any of the mediators or bilateral donors (nor indeed, the World Bank) is seen as "neutral and objective" in the same way as the United Nations Development Programme.  But this is not the entire story, as we shall see shortly. UNDP's partnership with civil society will succeed only if it is able to react in a flexible and decentralised fashion to the needs of the field.  In this respect, however, UNDP's endeavors – and also those of other donor agencies – fall considerably short of what is required and expected.

**Coordinating Assistance on the Ground**

Coordinating aid is never easy in Africa, even when a good and honest government is in place. As Mali moved from dictatorship through revolution towards democracy, the donors were often unhelpful. Some donors appear confused by the complexities of the new pluralistic Mali, and the multiple voices of civil society organizations. There are times when one wonders whether the representatives of Western democracies are not more at ease dealing with (and manipulating) African despots.

The same is generally true for NGOs. Broadly speaking, it is disappointing to observe the lack of commitment shown by the international donors and the NGO community in

Africa toward the goal of supporting and strengthening organizations of civil society. This disappointment extends to the majority of international NGOs who are generally far more concerned with their own expansion than with the strengthening of local civil society organizations. Yet sustainable development can only come through indigenous groups, and good governance can only be achieved if there is a strong civil society to maintain it.

Following upon the inter-Agency Mission of 1992, the donor round tables in Geneva (1994) and in Timbuktu (1995), and at the request of Mali's government, UNDP began to play a coordination role among the official donors in this country. Coordination did not extend, however, to NGOs or to civil society organizations in general. And coordination even among donor agencies did not always extend to projects on the ground.

Mostly small projects are supported by individual donors. However, small projects are not of use by themselves, unless they form part of a coherent long-term strategy. The traditional small-grant-based approach of the donor community will change, however, as Mali implements political decentralisation.

By May 1999, 682 rural communes will have elected Mayors and councils. These will be new development partners for official donors and NGOs. After 30 years of working with centralised governments, will international donors decentralise their approach and support the processes of decentralised decision-making?

**Supporting Decentralization**

The concept of "decentralisation" implies a transfer of power to the regions: this is not a "deconcentration" of administrative functions within centralised ministries, but a real transfer of decision-making to new political authorities. Regions must have power to plan and implement development decisions, power to choose between alternative development strategies. Donors are under pressure to develop new internal thought processes which puts civil society and local decision-taking at the top of the list, placing a high priority on helping local development associations. "Participative democracy" as practised under the "palaver tree" and in the Regional Concertations, needs to be given some real content.

Imported Western models of democracy cause as many troubles to Africa as benefits. Participative and decentralised consensual democracy has been working in Africa for thousands of years (probably before Europeans invented clothing to replace their war paint). Mali's policy of decentralisation is a conscious attempt to find a symbiosis between the democratic traditions of the community, and the modern nation state. The decentralised elected Communes will need access to human, material and financial resources. If the resources are available only through central government, Mali's decentralisation will be a dead letter, and the social economy will be starved of resources.

One noteworthy initiative was taken in this regard, starting in 1992. Launched by the Minister for Professional Training, Madame Fatou Haidara, it involves the creation of national volunteer corps (CVM: *Corps des volontaires du Mali*) along the lines of the US Peace Corps. Six years later, by early 1999, there are 300 volunteers working in the field. These volunteers are working with 600 local development associations,

specifically in areas which have been identified as containing the poorest pockets of society.[x]

The high cost of tertiary education has long been a contentious issue in Africa. The volunteer corps provides a means for taking skills learned in urban university institutes, and putting them at the disposal of communities where modern education and technical skills are lacking. The introduction of technical skills is one of the innovative features of this programme, one which we identify as reinforcing the social economy (and therefore strengthening the economic foundations of civil society). Volunteers train villagers to convert local fruits into syrups, which keep a long time and which are easy to transport. The 1998-99 month of Ramadan (which coincided with the New Year holiday) was a great month for syrup sales in the towns of northern Mali.

Other innovations of the CVM include techniques for smoking fish using less fuel wood, and extending cheese production to add value to the milk from the vast herds of cattle, sheep and goats which roam the Sahel. These are income-generating activities, which specifically benefit the women of these communities, are quite different from the usual small-grants programmes. The presence of the local volunteer adds a dynamic for partnership and associative life to the economic activity, and it avoids the negative impact of the "one-off grant," which is culturally inappropriate and might encourage dependency. Bringing the women together for training, production and marketing is a contribution to promoting women's solidarity – building their confidence and their economic power as a joint platform from which they will be better able to exert influence on decision-making in their communities.

In many other ways, however, UNDP and other donor agencies continue with their desk-bound and headquarters-oriented approach, organizing endless seminars and engaging countless national and international consultants, without really asking the question: what is valuable for the people concerned? What are their traditional means of organizing, and how can the activities *they* value be supported?

**Is UNDP better at working with women's organisations ?**

Since sustainable human development and the fight against poverty concern so directly the women of West African societies, we decided to look specifically at whether UNDP's Malian portfolio contains programmes which strengthen women's associations and women's capacity to organise and express themselves economically and politically. On the whole, our research shows a picture in terms of UNDP strategy towards women's civil society organisations which is more coherent than the rest of the portfolio. In particular we looked at micro-enterprise projects in Macina (in the delta area) and in Mopti region where the "multi-purpose platform" has a positive impact on capacity-building for women.

During 1997 UNDP supported four women's groups around Macina, for construction projects including wells, a brick oven, literacy centres and grain stores. UNDP's partnership almost certainly succeeded because of the presence of Moussa Ballo, a technician in the NGO Asiba programme,[x] who supported the women's associations on a weekly basis. Without such support, the women would have lacked both organisational advice and technical know-how, for sad to say, technical advice from the government development services is often poor in quality and expensive to purchase (even if the

price is taken in goats or chickens).  But once Ballo had helped them write up their statutes and calculate their costs, the women were able to visit UNDP. "They learned a lot by travelling to Bamako and negotiating funding with UNDP. And it really did strengthen civil society: the Macina women became a group, making and selling bricks. Later they created a savings bank with which they bought a grain mill and started rice growing. The second women's group broke up - not through the fault of UNDP, but because of manipulation by local government officials."

Ballo pointed us in the direction of another UNDP project : the multifunctional platform run by UNIDO and AFAR in Mopti Region.[x]  Using a simple diesel motor (which can also run on locally grown *pourghère* oil), the platform provides a number of services: grain milling, dehulling, welding, sawing, and at night the women's association can run it as an electrical generator. Stunningly original, this may be UNDP's most valuable development project in Mali. In the words of Zakiatou walet Haletine, a Malian woman who evaluated it:: "The project is a asset for Mali's policies of decentralisation, rural electrification and micro-enterprise development. If you take the village of Kotaka, for example, beside the Niger river, the platform is entirely run by the women, with a female miller who looks after daily maintenance. The management is excellent. On the other hand, in Niena village the platform has stopped working because of internal disputes. The men believe that the women of Niena need better training and functional literacy, if they are to get benefit from the platform."

Maybe the problem lies in the fact that the platform in Niena is equipped only for milling and dehulling. In Kotaka it is a tool for income generation and strong institution building. The women's association not only runs a mill, a dehuller, a welding unit and an electric saw; at night it charges car batteries and lights the whole village. The women collect a monthly fee from the owner of each electric light bulb. And the prestige! Kotaka has rigged up a mast 10 feet high above the village square. The single 60 watt bulb is not intended to light the square, it is meant to be visible at night to neighbouring villages which have not reached the modern age of electrical lighting ! Zakiatou believes that development happens "if you create and seize opportunities."  The women of Kotaka have seized their chance.

**CONCLUSION: partnership solutions on offer**

It was the internal resources of Malian society which produced the peace.  We have pointed to the important distinction between leaders of traditional civil society organizations and those of modern non-governmental organisations, many of which are urban-based. In the short term, modern NGOs are needed to support and strengthen civil society organizations in rural areas, which may otherwise rest inert. The newly decentralised structures of Mali challenge UNDP and other development agencies to develop new approaches for working much more strongly with NGOs and civil society at every level, in parallel with their ministerial partnerships. This does not mean "small grants" ! Nor does it mean working with certain international NGOs who compete with local civil society institutions. UNDP should expand its leadership role to NGOs and share its strategic vision for achieving long-term sustainable human development.

Short-term funding of three years or less, destroys development continuity and ensures that African NGOs are unable to develop into coherent development institutions. We believe that the UN should be developing long-term partnerships with certain key actors

in civil society and supporting the social economy, so that there can be a true exchange of experience and a mutual commitment. This is impossible when one side is kept in a position of short-term financial dependency. UNDP cannot work with everyone.   The agency will have to choose, and then show some real constancy in partnership. We believe that long-term commitments will strengthen UNDP's partners and introduce mutual accountability, reducing the gulf which exists at the present time between "elephant" funders and their dependent NGO "mice".

Such a long-term commitment to partnership could also overcome the problems of western-style financial accounts which have often, in the past, caused disappointments on both sides. We are in favour of modest long-term grants to cover the salaries and costs of community organisers (for which accounting is easy). In exchange, local NGOs should show that they can mobilize local resources: savings and credits, commercial bank loans, and match these with voluntary contributions and   collective efforts. Such mobilization would justify UNDP's continued support, while reducing dependency on external funding. This would also encourage NGOs to concentrate less on pleasing donors in the capital city, and more on fighting poverty in the regions – reversing the present project mode which forces Malian NGOs to become Bamako-based. Such new emphasis on local resources would be consistent with stated government policies in favour of decentralisation, and it would help work against centralising forces, which concentrate national financial and political resources in the capital city.

Evidence from Africa - including Northern Mali - suggests that the forces of centralisation are responsible for increasing the inequalities of wealth distribution, impoverishing the countryside and creating conditions for conflict.  Northern development models (whether derived from socialist or from capitalist sources) have proved inappropriate for Africa. African economies are structured quite differently from western capitalist economies. More attention will need to be paid to institutions that derive from local processes.

In particular, the social economy is the natural source of development and innovation, the spawning ground for Africa's entrepreneurs.  Just as in the West it was the banking sector which stimulated growth, in Africa it is the social economy.  Sustainable human development in Africa requires investments and banking models which are favorable to the social **economy**. Our conviction that a strong civil society is essential for good governance is mirrored in the need for economic development strategies to be redirected towards the strengths of the social economy, rooted as it is in the indigenous structures and social associative processes which are the hallmark of African society.


**NOTES**

[x].    The War-torn Societies Project (WSP) of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) has shown that societies as diverse as Eritrea and Mozambique and Guatemala have identified decentralization among the priorities for reestablishing peace. This is the only point of convergence in their experiences of conflict. See the War-torn Societies Project Report, published in November 1998 by UNRISD, Geneva.

[x].     Run by the appropriate age-groups in the community under the supervision of the Council of Elders, the environmental police is known in the dogon languages as *ogokana* or *alamadio* according to locality. These groups have been encouraged and protected by NGOs working in the area including SOS-Sahel, GRAD, NEF, Care, Molibemo, AFAR, etc.

[x]. The Near East Foundation (NEF) has its headquarters in New York, where it is registered as a private voluntary organisation (PVO). More than most other northern non-governmental organisations (NGO) we have seen in Mali, the NEF is decentralised and works in partnership with both traditional and modern local civil society organisations to strengthen them as legally recognised institutions with effective socio-economic, political and environmental impact.

[x]. "The establishment of a democratic state that ensures civil liberties and the equality of citizens before the law, benefiting on an equal basis from the wealth of the nation without discrimination, and that guarantees the sharing of power among political parties, is the most effective way of fighting the suicidal phenomenon of armament and militarization of conflict. .... This is not only a question of sharing wealth and political power, but one of good governance.... managing the processes of integration into the nation state. It is the balanced management of ethnic diversity, of the tribal, linguistic and religious diversity so characteristic of Africa." William Eteki-Mboumoua, former Secretary-General of the OAU, head of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Mission on the Proliferation of Light Weapons in the Sahel-Sahara subregion, speaking in New York at the UNDP High-Level Consultation on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in West Africa, 21 October 1996: see the UNDP publication "Back to Basics: Post-Conflict Peace-Building in West Africa: Political and Development Initiatives, UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, New York 1997, p 46.

[x]. *Dictionnaire des femmes célèbres du Mali"* Adame Ba Konaré, Eds Jamana, Bamako 1993. Mme Konaré is a distinguished historian in her own right and was a leading member of civil society in the struggle against the military regime, before her husband was elected as President of Mali in June 1992.

[x]. Quoted on p 16 of the Monograph "Collaboration internationale et construction de la paix en Afrique de l'Ouest: l'exemple du Mali" by R.E. Poulton, Ibrahim ag Youssouf and Jacqueline Seck, UNIDIR 1999.

[x]. FAR-Nord (*Fonds d'aide pour la réconciliation et la consolidation de la paix dans le nord du Mali*) was created under the management of Norwegian Church Aid and funded (for a modest total of $76 000) by Norwegian, German, Canadian and Swiss development programmes in a most flexible way (with almost no formal accounts): see Robin E. Poulton and Ibrahim ag Youssouf *A Peace of Timbuktu*, UNIDIR, Geneva 1998, p 113-4. We quote below from our private discussions with Kare Lode, who coordinated many of the civil society meetings and who has himself written up the peace process: *Synthèse du Processus des Rencontres Communautaires*, Stavanger, Misjionshogskolens forlag, and Norwegian Church Aid, Oslo 1996; *Civil society takes responsability - popular involvement in the peace process in Mali*, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo 1997.

[x] UNDP is supporting the CVM as part of the fight against poverty - to the tune of $2.5 million over 3 years (other resources are estimated at $200 000 from communities which house the volunteers and $400 000 from the Government) These figures do not take account of the cost of training.

[x]. Asiba: *Assistance aux initiatives de base*, a programme started by the British volonteer programme with Christian Aid funding, supported by local NGOs and the Local Development Committee composed of administrative officials and technicians.

[x]. AFAR *: Association de formation et animation rurales* is a Malian NGO created by the staff of the ILO's Norwegian funded programme ACOPAM. The competent technical team is now an independent NGO with no more Norwegian funding. AFAR has therefore become thoroughly dependent on external funders, semi-paralysed by the necessity constantly to look for new external funding for survive. The AFAR example shows that the UN and the Norwegians have plenty of thinking to do in terms of strengthening civil society !

## Chapter Five

## REVIVING CIVIL SOCIETY IN GUATEMALA:
## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE
by
Andrew Russel

### The External Environment: Peace and Transition

On 29 December 1996, the final agreement for a "Firm and Lasting Peace" was signed between the Guatemalan government and guerilla leaders of the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG), thus ending 36 civil years of unremitting civil war. Over a hundred thousand persons had been killed and many thousands more were wounded. Thousands of families had been rendered homeless, and refugees and displaced persons accounted for a considerable share of the country's population of nine million persons.

The restoration of peace was the first step in a much larger process of rebuilding this war-torn nation. Decades of fighting had destroyed much of the social fabric holding people together in communities and as a nation. As Guatemalan fought Guatemalan on opposite sides of the civil war, social trust has eroded and the integrity of the nation has come under severe strain.

Though physical infrastructure suffered neglect due to the fighting, social infrastructure was the worse casualty. Civil war has set back the human development of the country by decades. Living standards have fallen sharply across the country. Many indigenous communities live in situations of extreme poverty. Levels of literacy, infant mortality, and life expectancy are among the lowest in the Central American region. The sheer brutality and repression unleashed by both sides has left emotional and psychological scars that will take generations to heal.

Peace had to be accompanied, therefore, with a series of related measures that would heal these scars and rebuild social and institutional capital in Guatemala. A critical part of this agenda related to reviving civil society. Many years of centralized, authoritarian rule and armed conflict had weakened the capacity of civil society groups to participate in governance at national, regional and local levels. Civil society leaders had often been targets of human rights violations during the years of civil war, and political violence had effectively smothered most forms of civic expression. The long history of aggression had generated a climate of fear and distrust and a tendency among people to resort to confrontational approaches for resolving conflicts.

Fitting in the narrow space of heavily contested political terrain, civil society organizations had continued to serve the collective aspirations of Guatemalan citizens. Among indigenous groups, especially, such as Mayans who make up half of the population and who carve out a precarious existence in remote upland areas, local organizations provided support services that are usually provided by the state.

Civil society leaders had also performed a critically important function in brokering peace in the country. By acting as intermediaries between the government and revolutionary

groups, civil society actors had helped to soften attitudes on both sides. They had facilitated informal linkages and promoted dialogue among the combatants – even in situations where lives were at risk. The central role played by civil society groups in the peace process was given formal recognition by the creation in 1994 of a national Civil Society Assembly. The government, along with the URNG, had approved the creation of this Assembly as part of a framework agreement for re-establishing negotiations. The Civil Society Assembly would serve throughout the negotiation process as a forum for discussing and reaching agreement on key issues, for designing specific proposals based on the agreements that were reached, and for reviewing implementation progress.

A multitude of civil society organizations (CSOs) were represented in the Assembly, including labor unions, women's organizations, indigenous people's groups, and human rights advocates. Extending representation to such a large swathe of civil society groups ensured that the Assembly would consider a wider set of concerns, and not merely those that the government or revolutionary commanders considered important. Because of its representative nature, thus, the Assembly provided a venue for legitimizing and carrying forward the peace accords and for implementing essential rebuilding tasks. The creation of the Assembly provided an opportunity for diverse civil society groups to participate directly in governance and national development.

Besides the humanitarian aspects of foreign support to local NGOs during the years of internal strife, one of the main objectives of such support had been to provide them with institutional support and space for developing democratic experiences. However, when peace broke out", they were not prepared for what peace had to offer. Few civil society groups were in a position to take any considerable advantage of this opportunity. Decades of repression, hostility, fear and distrust had severely impaired the willingness of civil society organizations to work alongside government agencies. Because civil war had pitted Guatemalans against each other, hostility and suspicion were rife even among CSOs. Restoring mutual confidence was an essential task. An opportunity to participate was therefore not enough. Additionally, capacity had to be built and bonds nurtured within and among participating organizations.[x]

While it was necessary to involve civil society centrally in the tasks of development and national reconciliation, it was not at all clear how CSOs should or could be engaged in a coordinated fashion by the international community. Relying on the most prominent CSOs, umbrella associations, for instance, could have resulted in exacerbating mutual tensions.

This case study recounts how a program was developed that assisted with the task of reviving civil society organizations in post-civil war Guatemala. Engaged with the peace process in Guatemala from a very early stage,[x] UNDP played a key role in designing and implementing this program. It has acted in coordination with other international agencies, with the national government, and with umbrella associations of civil society actors, so UNDP cannot alone claim credit for the successes of this program or blame for its mistakes. It is too early, in any case, to present any complete reckoning of successes and failures. What are important to recount, however, are the processes that guided this initiative. UNDP sought to learn from past experiences in El Salvador and other post-conflict situations. The effort is cumulative and ongoing, and the lessons from

Guatemala can be helpful, we expect, for designing an even more thoughtful and refined approach in other situations, elsewhere in the world.

**The internal environment: A Three-Stage Program for Identifying, Assessing and Assisting Civil Society**

The peace accords signed in 1996 looked beyond the cessation of hostilities and considered an ambitious agenda for achieving long-term stability and democracy in the country. Framework agreements were signed in diverse related areas, including land rights, indigenous people's rights, demobilization and the role of the army, and judicial and fiscal reform. CSOs were to play important roles in each of these areas. While the intentions expressed in the peace accords and in meetings of the Civil Society Assembly were admirable and quite comprehensive, severe constraints arose in implementing these intentions. Government agencies had withered alongside NGOs during nearly four decades of ferocious fighting. While rebuilding state agencies' capabilities was an important part of the agenda, an equally important part related to reviving the capacities of CSOs.

Early in the peace process, UNDP foresaw this need to strengthen the participation of CSOs. The continued active participation of civil society was necessary, it was felt, not just to guarantee the meaningful implementation of the peace accords, but also to build public support for a new culture of negotiated and non-violent conflict resolution. Despite their own relatively weak organizational capacities, CSOs would continue to play an important role in Guatemala. For articulating citizens' demands, for guaranteeing their rights, and also for the direct provision of social services, CSOs of several different types would need to be identified and supported.

While CSOs will play such important roles in any post-conflict situation, and will therefore need to be given support and encouragement, their role in Guatemala is augmented on account of the special circumstances of this country. Distrust and lack of confidence are especially strong among marginalized groups because of the repression and neglect that they have historically faced from the state. Along with indigenous people, other historically marginalized groups, including uprooted populations, women's groups, and human rights advocates had to be involved for implementing specific aspects of the broad-based peace accords.

Though it was armed with a specific mandate to help rebuild CSOs in Guatemala,[x] UNDP also had to cope with several liabilities. First, the organization had limited experience at that time of working with CSOs, in general, and with Guatemalan CSOs, in particular. Lack of formal mechanisms for directly providing financial or technical assistance have constrained UNDP in the past from working in cooperation with non-governmental, private-sector and community-based organizations. Prior work with uprooted populations had resulted in establishing some working relations with a few Guatemalan CSOs, but additional outreach was needed.

Second, a particularly skewed relationship has characterized even this limited experience of assistance to CSOs. The traditional vision, common within UNDP and other international agencies, regards CSOs as cost-efficient implementing agencies, who are not quite partners of the donor agency, as governments are, but who work more in the nature of contractors of some downstream and partial aspects of project

implementation. Such a partial and constraining view is clearly not appropriate in the context of a process of building peace and reconciliation. This view needed to be expanded to embrace the concept of a partnership of equals on many levels, including policy dialogue and analysis, information sharing, emergency response, and coordination of international assistance.

Third, while it was necessary to support the strengthening of Guatemalan civil society, care was needed to ensure that these interventions served to unite rather than fragment the CSO community. To begin with, it was necessary to achieve coordination within the community of international agencies. More often than not, separate agencies have tended to follow their own separate paths, which results in fruitless duplication and wastage of scarce resources.

Finally, UNDP was hampered to an extent by its traditional role as a partner of the government. Though the primary objective of its intervention was to build trust amongst different sectors of civil society and between civil society and state agencies, UNDP was itself not unquestioningly trusted, particularly by civil society actors. Many CSO leaders viewed UNDP – quite correctly given its past performance – as a partner of the government first and foremost, and of CSOs later, if at all. The perception of UNDP as pro-government in a society polarized by war, where civil groups had actively resisted the government in many cases, meant that confidence building between UNDP and civil society was an essential first step. Credibility also needed to be built with other donors, especially international NGOs that viewed UNDP as a relative latecomer to the process of peace and reconciliation.

Confidence was needed on all sides to overcome distrust, to promote broad participation, and to move away from old strategies of confrontation to new ones of engagement and cooperation. Despite its lack of exposure and despite its tradition of working closely with government authorities, UNDP mapped out a strategy to build bridges to Guatemalan civil society. During this period the UNDP management team grew to include a number of staff with previous experience working with civil society and an openness to undertake such a strategy.

This strategy has developed in three chronologically distinct though connected stages that are related, respectively to:

- Identification,
- Assessment, and
- Cooperation.

Identification of civil society organizations was a crucial first step before assistance could be considered. What were the contours of civil society in Guatemala? What were the different types of CSOs that functioned in various parts of the country? Who were their members, and what sorts of activities did they engage in? How did the various CSOs relate to one another?

Most usually, international agencies have tended to work with umbrella organizations of CSOs. While umbrella groups can help to simplify an international agency's relations with civil society, it is important to recognize that these may not represent the interests of all the important sectors. As well the often very disparate views held by the members of

such groups can lead to never-ending political discussions and considerable delays in launching and implementing projects and programmes.

In any case, an understanding of the correlation of forces is vital before undertaking activities with any specific branch of civil society. Care must be taken to ensure that scarce international resources are used to promote alliances rather than to create competition and institutional jealousies.

Providing opportunities for all CSOs to engage with the process was also important for UNDP to gain legitimacy as a neutral party. It could not be assumed at the start that all CSOs would automatically regard UNDP's role as legitimate – or even that such a role would by definition be benign. Well-intentioned interventions in national processes by a neutral, international agency can often result in producing distortions. This does not mean that intervention should not be pursued, but rather that it should be pursued carefully. In Guatemala, for instance, confidence building was the single most important objective. It was necessary in this context to spread the net widely and to allow every Guatemalan CSO an equal chance of representing its claims to international assistance.

The work of identifying and classifying CSOs was pursued through preparing a national directory. Resources for this exercise were made available from the Partners In Development program, a pilot UNDP scheme that provides a sum of $100,000 to selected country offices for undertaking projects in collaboration with CSOs. Program resources were to be used as seed money for the formulation of larger programs to benefit civil society and as a basis for mobilizing resources from other sources. In Guatemala, the work of directory preparation served exactly this purpose.

In 1995, after consultations with the *Foro de Coordinaciones de ONG de Guatemala* and the *Mesa Nacional Maya*, two umbrella groups that served as selection committees for PDP, the work of directory preparation was launched. Three small grants were provided from out of the PDP funds. Two of the three, totaling US$ 50,000, were utilized by one of the member organizations of the *Foro* for developing and maintaining a national CSO directory and database.

The objective was to use the directory and database as a relatively straightforward confidence-building activity, an initial experience that could be then used as the basis for taking on more complicated tasks with civil society as a partner. It was by nature an inclusive project. Any group that wanted to be included in the directory could fill out a simple and standardized form, copies of which were widely distributed throughout the country. Details provided on these forms helped to classify the listed organizations by thematic area and by organization type.

The exercise of directory preparation served a dual purpose. First, it helped the CSO community to learn about itself. Second, it helped raise awareness among government agencies and in the donor community about the existence of a wide variety of CSOs that were working in a large number of thematic areas. Existing CSOs were mapped with the help of the directory, and the tasks remained of assessing their respective capacities. Once identification and assessment were completed, the tasks of assistance and strengthening could begin.

Assessment of individual CSO's capacities – strengths and weaknesses – was the next step in mapping civil society in Guatemala. The organizations that were charged with the work of directory preparation were simultaneously also responsible for developing a methodology for participatory needs assessment. This exercise of assessing needs and estimating capacities was implemented among all Guatemalan CSOs represented in the directory.

The assessment phase of the project was managed by the *Foro*, which was made up of a large number of the major CSOs representing every sector other than those organizations working on human rights issues. The *Foro* selected one of its own member organizations to act as the implementing agency and were responsible for devising the methodology and selecting a pool of Guatemalan experts to conduct the research. In all, the entire process took about a year to complete and a total of three hundred CSOs were involved. Additionally, and in keeping with the specific mandate to work with human rights NGOs, a separate set of consultations were undertaken with these groups. These groups and their capacities were also mapped and they provided the basis of another set of capacity building projects. At the end of both exercises, the contours of the CSO sector in Guatemala were quite clearly mapped out. It was known, for instance, which CSOs were involved in which thematic areas, what their respective strengths were, and what needed to be done to build capacity in respect of any particular thematic area or type of organization.

Given the special position of indigenous peoples in this country, a separate sub-project was launched to map capacity among indigenous people's organizations. A part of the seed capital was provided to the *Mesa Nacional Maya de Guatemala,* an umbrella group of indigenous development organizations. These organizations decided to use the resources to undertake a participatory evaluation of the needs of Mayan communities, which was executed by one of its member organizations. The results of this evaluation served as a basis for securing additional project resources for capacity building and development planning. A sum of US$130,000 was made available from special UNDP resources, and technical training was provided from the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Completion of the directory and of the needs assessment exercise took a little more time that was expected originally, in part because additional consultation was necessary with human rights groups. The Guatemalan directory of CSOs is a living document is to be updated regularly to reflect changes in the CSO sector.

Cooperation: The preparatory steps of identification and assessment have led, quite naturally, to the third step: cooperation. Cooperation is much better targeted and more equitably distributed than could have been possible had the two prior steps not been completed satisfactorily. Detailed proposals for capacity building and project assistance were compiled on the basis of this information, and the stage was now ready for donor agencies to come forward with assistance.

To assist with the tasks of classifying and preparing a shelf of projects that donor agencies could select from, sixteen priority areas were identified for institutional strengthening. The sixteen identified areas covered a comprehensive array of needs related both to raising overall administrative capacity and also to specific thematic areas that required immediate remedial action.[x]

A broad invitation was made to CSOs to submit projects that addressed one of the sixteen areas and UNDP and MINUGUA eventually approved over twenty separate institutional strengthening projects for funding. Most of the projects were related to a key thematic aspect of the peace accords, such as human rights, indigenous rights, land transfer procedures, and popular participation in national development. Over US$500,000 were raised in the first tranche of donations from bilateral donors [the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, as well as the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which were used to support capacity building activities in the sixteen priority areas.

These initial projects were modest interventions that served as learning experiences. Mistakes could be made at a relatively low cost. When full implementation of the peace accords began, however, these and other experiences had provided UNDP and the CSOs with sufficient experience and credibility to be able to act with greater speed and confidence in response to more urgent and complex needs of society. By undertaking these initial activities with civil society in an open and transparent fashion, UNDP tried to avoid antagonizing its government counterparts, thus further legitimizing its function as an impartial, honest broker.

During the past four years, the government as well as international agencies have gained knowledge of and credibility among Guatemalan CSOs. UNDP in particular has obtained a greater institutional knowledge of the CSO sector, as civil society partnerships are forged through different programs of support to the peace process. Simultaneously, CSOs have benefited from increased access to the government. They have become partners in policy formulation, particularly as it relates to implementing various clauses in the peace accords.

A comparison of UNDP's project portfolio in Guatemala today compared to four years ago demonstrates a fundamental change in the approach to working with civil society organizations[x]. The concept of a civil society focal point within the Office is no longer relevant, since all programme officers deal with civil society on a daily basis. A growing number of international agencies now work with a myriad of CSOs who are regarded not just as implementing agents but as full partners in the common task of supporting the peace process. In particular, UNDP´s partnership with women's groups may have been crucial to some of recent gains linked to the implementation of the Peace Accords. UNDP has also secured time for regular radio programmes on issues related to sustainable human development and the peace process, which provide a frequent outlet for the views of representatives of civil society.

 A UNDP project to produce a series of national reports on human development indicators is formally executed by the government, but civil society representatives help to review and monitor these activities. The project has become a very interactive and participatory exercise involving both universities and civil society organizations.

Civil society representatives on the Technical Commission overseeing the resettlement of uprooted populations now work alongside government staffs to review and endorse the projects taken up for these purposes. UNDP played a decisive role in nurturing the first example of co-management between the government and civil society, an

experience that was later built upon in establishing the other commissions defined by the peace accords.

An external evaluation of UNDP's outreach activities was undertaken in 1997. To enhance learning, the results of the evaluation were shared with the CSOs themselves, with the government, and with the donor community, including international NGOs. The growth in civil society participation in a variety of areas related to the peace accords, including demobilization, land issues and judicial reform, has been quite remarkable – even though just three years have elapsed since peace was restored.

**Lessons**

A number of lessons emerge from the Guatemalan experience that could serve as benchmarks for designing approaches in other post-conflict countries. Though the program in Guatemala is still ongoing and it is far from complete, some lessons have been learned in the early stages of this process.

First, this experience illustrates that the amount of resources invested is not as important as the type of intervention undertaken, especially where the goal is one of building mutual confidence. A relatively small amount of resources, US$100,000, were enough to start the program for identification and assessment of Guatemalan CSOs. A strategy of assistance could be designed more productively once the contours of civil society had been mapped. Rushing in with a large amount of project assistance would have been counterproductive in this situation. Relying on the small numbers of CSOs that were known at the start would have served only to distort the process and it could give rise to charges of bias and favoritism. Starting out in a small way helped, therefore, in building the foundations for later large-scale assistance. Using a smaller amount of financial resources initially also helps to lower the stakes for all parties. By keeping expectations low and by maintaining a low profile, UNDP could maintain relationships with a large number of CSOs and it could sustain these relationships even when things did not go as planned.

Second, it is important to remember that the donor community should practice what it preaches. Coherence of approach and coordination among donors are vital to establish. Contradictory or overlapping interventions waste precious money and erode the credibility of all involved. The international community cannot promote the building of consensus among internal actors when its own members cannot reach consensus among themselves.[x]

Finite capacities and resources imply that donor agencies cannot work with all CSOs and in all sectors. For UNDP and the rest of the international community, the Guatemala peace accords serve as a constant frame of reference. It is often hard for a Country Office to say "no", but this is a skill that is constantly practiced.  A process of reflection accompanies programming decisions as to the potential impact of the initiative on furthering the specific human development and governance goals of the peace process.

Third, deciding on priority sectors and identifying appropriate organizations to serve as primary contacts can help to simplify and rationalize the limited interventions of external agencies. In Guatemala, donor agencies chose to work not only with the largest umbrella group but also with other CSO coalitions that were working on specific aspects

of the peace accords, such as demobilization and the return of refugees and displaced persons. This flexible approach – fostering alliances on specific issues while recognizing the heterogeneous nature of civil society – served to widen the impact of international agencies' intervention in Guatemala.

Fourth, flexibility can pay large dividends. Throughout the post-war period, UNDP has worked to develop the capacity to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, using its scarce resources as "seed" and "bridging" resources, to help initiate activities and overcome implementation bottlenecks. Often this includes "bridge" funding, to help maintain momentum with respect to crucial aspects of peace accords, the until wealthier but slower funding institutions complete their own approval processes. NGO implementation, direct UNDP execution and other innovative modalities have provided UNDP with the means to move very quickly when necessary.

Fifth, the importance of partnerships has become widely accepted. "No agency can go it alone" is a guiding principle used not just by UNDP but by the whole international community in the development and implementation of international cooperation for the peace process. A number of bilateral and multilateral agencies have come to view UNDP as a provider of a wide array of development services. The Nordic countries, as well as the Netherlands, have been particularly enthusiastic participants in this form of "active multi-lateralism". Often the projects deal with politically sensitive issues, including civil society participation, where UNDP's political neutrality is a highly valued asset.

Finally, the most important goal of the intervention was the process itself, of building confidence on different levels, between international agencies and CSOs, among different CSOs, and between CSOs and the government. Since decades-old attitudes need to be modified and softened, this process of building trust requires a sustained effort undertaken over a long period of time. It is difficult, therefore, to measure impact over the course of a single project's life span. For the future, it is suggested, project evaluations should include indicators that measure progress in building mutual confidence among the various parties involved in a nation's development effort. In post-conflict situations especially, promoting a shift from confrontation to negotiation and engagement is the most important achievement. Such intangible measures are rarely included in program evaluations, however, suggesting that severe shortcomings exist in the traditional tools that are used to measure project impacts.

**Next Steps**

UNDP and its partners in the Guatemalan program are continuing to keep watch over a strategy that has seen encouraging results in the three years since implementation began.

The process is not free from problems, however. For instance, the growing confidence and capacities of organizations representing Mayan and other ethnic groups has not been matched by increased sensitivity to their concerns by government agencies. One high ranking Guatemalan official described the situation as having trained the "pitcher" (the indigenous organizations) to prepare and present high-quality project proposals for strengthening indigenous rights, without having trained the "catcher" (the mostly non-indigenous officials and politicians who make and implement public policy).

To address this gap, UNDP's work in Guatemala has been expanded to include dialogue between indigenous and ladino (non-indigenous) leaders. To facilitate dialogue, UNDP has helped the indigenous representatives in the different peace commission to be better prepared for active participation, through technical assistance[x]. Work was also initiated to sensitize and train government officials at the national, departmental and municipal levels. To make the learning process more attractive, this program offers mayors, governors and other government officials a diploma in inter-cultural policies. In view of the approaching national elections, leaders of the political parties have also been brought into these discussions of indigenous rights. It is obvious that much effort will be needed from both the "catcher" and the "pitcher" to overcome centuries of exclusion of the indigenous population. Known by its Mayan name Q'Anil (which means ¨seed¨), this UNDP project has been a unique experiment in building a platform for interaction between the indigenous civil society and the government in developing public policy.

UNDP in Guatemala remains committed to strengthening its alliances with civil society, and it will continue to draw together the largest number of actors that are needed for sustaining peace and reconciliation in this country. Recently, this outreach effort has been extended further to include the Guatemalan private sector. After decades of war and exclusion, sustaining peace and human development will require a long-term, sustained effort from Guatemalans in all walks of life. Like the civil society sector, long neglected in donors' strategies for international development, the private sector, too, represents a set of national capacities that have been overlooked. In Guatemala, a strategy is being devised that can draw the energies of the private sector to assist with the task of national development. Once again, as before, building mutual confidence and assessing mutual strengths are tasks that must come before financial assistance is advanced. Once a targeted strategy is at hand, financial resources can be utilized to maximum advantage.

Most recently, UNDP is promoting greater participation by civil society in the dynamics surrounding the donor Consultative Groups and on issues related to the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters and also within the electoral process (the last initiative enjoys the full support from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal).

Today, in 1999, the response to Hurricane "Mitch" has proven again that Central American civil society is a vibrant, resilient force for change and development. Our experience in Guatemala has only served to bolster our will to continue to seek out partnerships with civil society, as our best bet for fostering continued transformation in the region.

**How could participation in the peace process by specific CSOs be promoted without giving rise to mutual recriminations?  How could financial assistance be apportioned in a fair manner without creating distortions within the CSO community? How could partnerships be built to make best use of the capacities that existed?  Which CSOs could be relied upon to undertake rebuilding tasks with respect to particular thematic areas?**

x  The Secretary General of the United Nations was invited in early 1994 to appoint a Representative to mediate the peace negotiations. The UN Secretariat sought from an early stage to foster a coordinated approach to the UN involvement in the peace process and invited member agencies of the broader UN system, including UNDP, to form a multi-disciplinary team of technical advisors to assist the UN moderator, Jean Arnault.

x  Under a global agreement on human rights, signed in 1994, the United Nations was provided with a specific mandate to strengthen non-governmental organizations. Its involvement in strengthening CSOs had started earlier, in the late 1980s, in the context of support provided by the international community to populations that had been uprooted by the Central American wars. Under the framework of the International Conference on Refugees in Central America (CIREFCA) and in projects aimed at specifically at refugees and displaced persons, UNDP began to develop initial experiences working with CSOs in this region. UNDP's direct involvement in mediating the peace process also helped to open the door to continued collaboration with the United Nations Verification Mission (MINUGUA) during the implementation phase of the peace accords. In early 1995, a Joint MINUGUA/UNDP unit was created to promote institutional strengthening among government as well as non-government organizations.

x  The 16 areas were :
   1. NGO participation in the reconstruction and development process;
   2. Strategic Planning;
   3. Management capacities (including management of change);
   4. Project management (including impact assessment);
   5. Financial administration and management;
   6. Organization and human resource management;
   7. Thematic and regional co-operation;
   8. Methodologies for community development;
   9. Development of information systems;
   10. Negotiation, lobbying, alliance-building and conflict resolution;
   11. Legal and judicial issues;
   12. Gender training;
   13. Ethnic issues;
   14. Popular education;
   15. Investigation/research methods;
   16. Mental health services.

x   Please see Annex 1 for a full list of UNDP´s current portfolio of programmes with CSO participation.

x  In El Salvador, for instance, the UN did not inform the World Bank and the IMF about the peace accords, and the latter set of institutions did not take the peace process into account while drawing up their programs of economic assistance. As Alvaro de Soto and Graciana del Castillo indicate in their 1994 article, Obstacles to Peace building, "it was as if a patient lay on the operating table with the left and right sides of his body separated by a curtain and unrelated surgery being performed on each side." In Guatemala, the World Bank and the other international financial institutions were brought in as advisors, along with UNDP, from the earliest stages of the peace negotiations.

x   Guatemala has the world's largest and most extensive UNV programmes. Most of the volunteers work within civil society.

UNDP-GUATEMALA: COMPREHENSIVE LINKS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

1.  Justice and public security
- **Lobbying (UNDP/Sweden)**
- **Impunity (UNDP/Sweden)**
- **Agrarian and environmental legislation (UNDP)**
- **Building a new Civilian Police (UNDP/Sweden/Soros Foundation)**
- **Penitentiary system (UNDP/Sweden)**
- **Popular education on justice (UNDP/Sweden)**
- **Alternative methods of conflict resolution (UNDP/Sweden)**
- **Gender and justice (UNDP/Sweden)**
- **Small grants programme on justice and Human Rights (Norway)**

2.  Electoral participation
- **Promotion (Sweden)**
- **Study of voter abstention (USAID, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden, UN/Department of Electoral Assistance)**

3.  Environment
- **Management and protection of protected areas, RECOSMO (GEF, UNDP/Netherlands)**
- **Small grants projects (GEF)**
- **Renewable energy (GEF)**
- **Forestry and rural development (UNDP/Netherlands)**
- **Sustainable development network (UNDP/GEF)**

4.  Indigenous issues
- **Developing public policy (UNDP/Sweden/Norway/Denmark/Netherlands)**

**5.**  Women and Gender
- **Women's' National Forum (UNDP/Denmark)**
- **Women of the Civil Society Assembly (UNDP/Denmark)**
- **Indigenous Women's Attorney (UNDP/Denmark)**
- **Displaced populations (UNDP/Denmark)**

**6.**  Displaced populations
- **Technical commission**
- **Trust fund (Japan, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland)**

**7.**  Natural disaster prevention and mitigation (**UK, Canada, Malaysia**)

**8.**  Volunteerism (UNV)
- **Coalition of five international and 17 local volunteer organizations**

**9.**  Human Development Report
- **Universities, think tanks, NGOs**

10.  Sustainable Human Development
- **Training workshops for journalists (UNDP)**
- **Radio programmes, involving personalities and representatives of civil society**

11.  Vision Guatemala
- **Building scenarios for the future (UNDP, USAID, Sweden, Netherlands, Soros Foundation and Private sector)**

12.  Fiscal Pact
- **Dialogue between and among political parties and civil society on tax reform (Netherlands, IDB, Denmark, Sweden)**

13. Private sector dialogue
- **Dialogue on Social responsibility**
- **Strategic alliances in support of sustainable human development (Netherlands)**

14. Demobilization and integration of ex-combatants
· **Training, employment, small enterprise (Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark)**

# Chapter 6

## WOMEN AS CATALYSTS OF CHANGE:

## Revitalizing Traditional Institutions in the Cordillera, Philippines

By

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## Introduction

Traditional institutions in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) of the Philippines have for generations served the indigenous people of this area in their struggle against a predatory state. For decades, as local residents have organized to resist the depredation of their forest and mineral resources at the hands of outsiders, their traditional institutions have stood at the forefront of this struggle. Pillage of natural resources – first by Spanish and then by American colonizers, and later, after national independence, by cronies of the Marcos regime – was held in check only because traditional institutions were strong. Local institutions, such as the *ator, dap-ay,* and *ob-bfo* (indigenous cooperative groups), the councils of elders, and the *bodong* (peace pact systems between adjacent communities), served the Cordillerans well in their contest against a distant and unsympathetic state. Would they work as well, however, when conflict turned to cooperation?

Democratizing reforms initiated after 1986 put an end to the gruesome zero-sum game between local residents and outside interests. A new dialectic of cooperation between the state and local communities was introduced with the passage of new laws. Provisions of law included within the 1987 Philippines Constitution, the Local Government Code of 1991, and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 recognized indigenous residents' rights to all resources available within their ancestral domains. The Cordillera's resources were to be mined no longer for the exclusive benefit of privileged outsiders. Acting through representative councils, local residents were to be the sole arbiters of all future developments within their ancestral domains. Staffs of government agencies and local government units were to assist local councils in demarcating traditional boundaries and drawing up development plans.

In place of conflict and mutual resentment, a new collaborative relationship was expected to arise between state agencies and local institutions. Empowering local councils and forging collaborative institutions with state agencies were delicate matters, however, not easily accomplished by legal mandates alone. Space for local autonomy had been created by waging a relentless struggle against an unfriendly state that had most often sided with outsider interests against the local communities. The new opportunities offered by local autonomy provided a welcome respite. In theory, these laws enabled traditional leaders to participate actively in shaping the future for their communities. In practice, however, much needed to be done before these laws could be implemented to the benefit of local communities.

While local energies could more easily be engaged with the help of traditional institutions, these institutions were hardly well equipped for the tasks of regional

development and inter-agency cooperation. In conflict with state agencies for several generations, local institutions were often also in unfriendly situations with one another. Pressures from a declining resource base had resulted in residents of one area transgressing into the territory of others. Numerous local feuds festered, waged by traditional institutions on both sides, as each attempted to protect and extend their ancestral domain.

Revitalizing traditional institutions, and redirecting their energies toward creative rather than destructive purposes would require a major effort involving attitudinal change and capacity building. Change would come not all at once, but gradually, in a series of incremental steps leading to the build up of capacity for autonomous local planning and regional development.

The critical change agents in this process were to be the women of the area. Hitherto disempowered and marginalized in local institutions that were led, in the main part, by men, women provided the critical new input, breaking deadlocks where these existed, encouraging the consideration of new options, and creating space for more open and participatory methods of local decision-making.

Women volunteers trained by project staff have, in turn, led training sessions conducted among community groups and local government units, and they have helped villagers prepare their ancestral domain development plans. Priorities for development drawn up by traditional councils have benefited from the advice of skilled technical specialists made available by government agencies and NGOs. Women have played the role of mediator and they have helped to forge close linkages among different community groups and between these groups and government agencies.

Through the intervention of these women volunteers, peace has been restored in the villages of the Cordillera. More than 2,000 peace pacts have already been signed between local communities and more peace pacts are being negotiated. Signing a peace pact implies agreeing upon a clear boundary demarcation; the first step before any long-term resource use and development plan can be drawn up. Communities that have demarcated their boundaries after resolving all disputes have simultaneously also formulated resource use and development plans that have attracted considerable resources from diverse funding agencies. Women volunteers trained by project staff have taken a lead role in mapping resources and in preparing resource-use and development plans.

Empowering women has served as a useful means for this process and also as a valuable end in itself. Within the space of a few years since the program was launched, women of this area have contested elections, in the process succeeding to several important positions; they have launched campaigns against social evils, such as drunkenness and drug addiction; and they have promoted economic enterprises, such as cooperative stores, that have added to their families' resources. Their newfound sense of capability and purpose is enabling women of this area to branch out into other arenas of social and economic reform.

A new dialectic of development, centered on cooperation among neighbors, government agencies, and NGOs, has started to creep upon what was once an embattled people, fighting to protect their rights and ownership to their ancestral domain. These

developments are far from complete. The process continues as we write our experiences, and new and more important lessons will be learned as it unfolds. What is important to recount, however, are some of the early steps in this process. We present these steps below in the hope they might contribute to the ongoing cross-fertilization of ideas across the developing world.

**Historical Background**

The Cordillera Administrative Region – composed of Baguio City, Abra, Kalinga, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao and Mountain provinces – is located in the highlands of Luzon in the northern part of the Philippines. It is home to over 1.25 million people, of whom more than ninety percent are indigenous people, belonging to seven major ethnolinguistic groups. While the area is richly endowed with thick forests and plentiful minerals, the people who live here are among the poorest in the entire country.

For as long back as they can remember, people of the Cordillera region have been deprived by outsiders of claims to their area's resources. First, the Spaniards sent in expeditions for mapping and exploiting these resources. Americans took their place after 1898 when the United States invaded the Philippines and defeated the Spanish fleet. The Mining Act of 1905 opened public lands to exploitation by American citizens, and prospectors came in droves to the Cordillera in search of its fabled gold. Huge proliferations of mining claims were exploited in the region, with no benefits accruing to the original inhabitants. Timber was needed for the mine tunnels, and other foreign exploiters cornered large-scale logging concessions.

The exploitation of the region's mineral and natural resources continued unabated even after the Philippines gained its independence from America. In the 1970s, close to 200,000 hectares of prime forestlands were granted for logging and pulping operations to the Cellophil Resources and Cellulose Processing corporations. Spread over five provinces, these were the largest logging operations anywhere in the country, and they were owned, not surprisingly for those times, by a crony of Ferdinand Marcos. Other cronies controlled the mining operations. Some of the world's biggest producers of gold, silver and copper at that time were located in Benguet province. But mining like logging brought no benefit to the indigenous people though depriving them of their precious inheritance. Miners lived in squalor and mining towns drew a bleak picture with little to show for the great wealth that was extracted from the land but dead rivers and stripped mountains.

Almost anything that was done in the name of development brought only costs to the local residents and very little benefit. A project to build a series of dams along the Chico River was planned that would have inundated several villages in Kalinga and Mountain Province, destroying the livelihoods of thousands of local residents. Even though they would be the principal victims of this decision, that may or may not have benefited others, local residents were never once consulted by their political leaders. Vicious double standards of social justice enabled one set of persons to get rich even if that meant destroying other people's livelihoods.

With the realization that they were being treated as no more than squatters on their own land, residents of the Cordillera region organized in protest against the state. As protest mounted, popular resistance was met with military might. The bitter opposition that

started in 1974 came to a head with the murder of a Kalinga chieftain who led the defense of ancestral domains against depredation by outsiders. Macli-ing Dulag's death at the hands of a government soldier intensified people's resolve to fight against the dams and against all forms of development aggression. Their relentless struggle forced the suspension of the dam project in October 1981. But miners and loggers continued their exploitation of the region and its inhabitants.

Armed conflict flourished with the incursion of large numbers of government military and para-military forces into this area. Many young Cordillerans joined hands with the New People's Army, the militant wing of a growing Communist Party of the Philippines. The conflict saw fellow Cordillerans fighting each other. "When all the wealth is gone, the exploiters would be gone as well. Only the people will be left to pay the price," predicted an elder from Abra.

Armed conflict in the hills and jungles of the Cordillera was complemented by legal battles in the courtrooms of Manila. In the legal arena, students and professionals led a campaign that was aimed at granting formal recognition to the Cordillerans' ancestral domain claims. Oppressed and silenced for many years before, the campaigners gained ground rapidly after a popular revolution toppled the Marcos government in 1986.

Representing their case before the Constitutional Commission of the revolutionary government of Corazon Aquino, these legal activists won many important victories. The rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands and natural resources were upheld and they were written into the new constitution that guaranteed regional autonomy for the Cordillera and for other ethnically distinct regions. These constitutional guarantees provided the basis for other enabling laws, such as those mentioned above.

The process was hardly free from conflict, however, as vested interests combined to challenge the rights of indigenous people. One such conflict concerns the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) that was enacted in October 1997. Business groups that were unwilling to part with any share of authority to indigenous inhabitants combined to file a petition with the Supreme Court, challenging the constitutionality of this law. The matter is still pending decision with Supreme Court as of the time of writing. The fate of the IPRA shall determine the future legal framework of ancestral domain recognition.

In general, however, the tide was turning in favor of indigenous people's rights. In 1992, the National Unification Commission was created during the administration of President Fidel Ramos. It was charged to identify the root causes of the armed conflict and it organized nation-wide consultations for this purpose. The Social Reform Agenda and other peace initiatives were launched as a result of the Commission's findings. This was the new democratic government's way to right historical wrongs and to pave the way for national reconciliation.

Following on the heels of these developments, and inspired by legal activists who continued to apply pressure, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources issued an administrative order in 1993 that sought to protect, identify and delineate areas occupied by indigenous peoples. The order provided for the issuance of a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claims to eligible groups. Though it falls short of legal title, which can be granted only when the IPRA becomes effective, the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim provides partial remedy. Obtaining such a certificate confers

upon indigenous peoples the right to participate in all decisions that affect land and natural resources within their ancestral domain. The order stipulates that without the prior approval of area residents no development project or commercial venture of any kind can be introduced within any area that has been certified as ancestral domain.

As a result of all these national and local initiatives, more Cordillerans are actively participating in governance and development. Though some groups, like the extreme left, continue to attract a handful of members who do not wish to work in collaboration with the government, most local and cause-oriented groups are now forging cooperative linkages with government agencies. Umbrella organizations, like the Cordillera Peoples Forum and PANCORDI (described later), have become strong and they serve as important bridges between comunity institutions and the national government.

In the *barangay* or village communities, traditional institutions still serve as the foundation for responsive and accountable local administration. Their strength and coherence has been challenged in the past with the introduction of formal structures of local governance. However, the new Local Government Code of 1991 marks an attempt to combine the strength of tradition with the benefits of modernity. It provides for strengthening and revitalizing these institutions and at the same time it aims adapting their purposes toward resource management and development. A critical part of this agenda of revitalization starts with the issuance of a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim.

**Implementing Regional Autonomy**

Once a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) is issued by the national government's Department of Environment and Natural Resources, local residents can exercise greater control over natural resources within their ancestral domains. For gaining such a certificate, however, area residents have to clearly demarcate the boundaries of their ancestral domain – after settling claims among themselves and also with their neighbors. Formulating a sustainable long-term resource management plan is another requirement before domain recognition is granted.

Until boundaries are clearly drawn and management plans developed, ancestral domain rights remain latent. While the new legal provisions protect area residents against exploitation by outsiders, these protections do not come into effect until such time as local residents have put their own house in order. They must resolve disputes internally, among themselves and with their neighbors, they must agree upon a common vision for their future, and they must develop plans that qualified (and sensitized) government staff approve after technical examination.

A local institutional base is required that has the legitimacy and the capacity to perform all of these functions. At the outset of the regional autonomy initiative, local institutions in the Cordillera were weak and in disarray. Fighting against the government and also against each other for years on end, these institutions were hardly well equipped to handle the prize they had won through their struggle. Modifying their objectives and adding to their capacity, through measures aimed at capability building and skills training, have equipped them better to interface with government institutions. These new skills and objectives have been acquired in most cases without diminishing the coherence and appeal that these indigenous institutions have for their members.

Some small-scale initiatives had already been started to achieve these ends even before the new laws came into operation. Indigenous people's organizations and local leaders had taken it upon themselves to become intermediaries in peace negotiations among government troops and local militants. Women had played key roles in this process, serving as messengers between warring groups and as pacifiers during heated debates. They had gathered food to serve during peace negotiation that would sometimes go on for as long as forty-eight hours. As a result of these activities, the women of the area had gained confidence in their own abilities and also greater respect among their menfolk. They were proud of their part they had played in restoring peace and they were eager to take up a larger role in the ongoing reconciliation process.

One of the NGOs, the Cordillera People's Forum, had started assisting with the process of delineating *bogis* or ancestral domains. Five pilot areas had been selected for this purpose in different parts of the Cordillera. Other NGOs were not slow to follow, and by 1995, an umbrella group of NGOs was formed at a congress held in Baguio City. The Pan-Cordillera Women's Network for Peace and Development, or PANCORDI, was formed as a coalition of women's groups comprised among different ethno-linguistic groups of the Cordillera region. These non-government organizations were active in campaigning for peace and in arranging the cessation of hostilities between government and rebel troops.

These prior and preparatory steps assisted with the formidable task of marrying the strength of tradition with the promise of modernity. Land, it was recognized very early on by PANCORDI's members, was key to all future peace and development. The foremost task of development was thus to gain speedy and equitable recognition of ancestral domain rights. In this task its women volunteers would play key catalyst roles, encouraging or forcing all other players to come around. Following up on the pilot schemes launched by the Cordillera People's Forum, PANCORDI members conducted five ancestral land congresses, starting in 1996. They also organized public consultations at various locations in the region to discuss the implications of the national government's Social Reform Agenda.

As a result of these pilot schemes and following from public consultations with members of the Cordillera Peoples Forum, a three-part Ancestral Domain Advocacy Program was taken up by PANCORDI.[x] The first phase began in July 1995 and it ended with the preparation of a sourcebook on ancestral domain laws. PANCORDI's members were mobilized for ancestral domain advocacy. Working closely with local communities, these activists became aware that while some national laws upheld and promoted customary understandings, others stood directly in contradiction of local conceptions of right and wrong. Laws that were oppressive and contrary to customary laws were distinguished in the sourcebook from others that would promote a healthy blend of tradition and modernity.

The second phase of the program consisted of an eighteen-month long initiative that was intended to culminate with the delineation of all ancestral domain areas, followed by the preparation of Ancestral Domain Resource Management Plans (ADRMPs) for these areas. Performing both of these tasks in any location would imply complying with the requirements stipulated for ancestral domain certification. Once such a certificate was obtained and the ADRMP was prepared, approved and adopted for any community, the

third phase of the program could be launched, involving local communities in implementing the development plans they had drawn up.

Phase II of PANCORDI's women and ancestral domain project provided direct support for *bogis* or ancestral domain claims delineation and indigenous resource management planning in five municipalities. One project site was chosen in each province.[x] For each site, a local team was trained for undertaking activities involved in this phase. The project provided for one community organizer-researcher for each area. In addition, each local team was assisted by three or four community volunteers, especially when the workload was heavy, for instance, when maps were being drawn to demarcate separate ancestral domains.

Community organizers and researchers were identified from among active members of the women's networks organized earlier by PANCORDI and CDF. A three-week long training session commenced this phase of the project. Training was designed to equip the community organizers and researchers with new skills related to data gathering and map-making. By the end of this period, each of the five community teams was able to facilitate map-making; they had some practice in organizing a community planning exercise; and some experience with collecting preliminary data on traditional land classification and boundary demarcation. More hands-on training was to follow as the teams left to take up work with the first set of communities. In addition to acquiring technical skills, the training session also enabled participants to arrive at a shared understanding of the project and its objectives. This understanding was to stand these women workers in good stead as they went to work in different parts of the Cordillera.

Infiltrating all-male domains represented by the traditional *ators* was never an easy task for women organizers, particularly at the start of the project. The stone platform where the *ator* meets traditionally for ritual purposes and to deliberate on war and other matters is traditionally off-limits to women. But in Sadanga, Mary Foy-os, Chairperson of PANCORDI, made inroads into the *ator's* all male-domain when she initiated dialogues to repair broken peace pacts with other villages. It helped that Mary is the descendant of a village elder. These initial incursions by women opened up space for others to perform more challenging roles in community affairs.[x]

Almost the first act that the community organizers took up was to organize Village Women's Consultative Councils and to strengthen those that previously been created by PANCORDI's' organizers. Through these councils, women could participate in community decision-making. Technical work groups and municipal federations of women volunteers were established at the municipal level to coordinate organization and boundary demarcation at the village level. Municipality-level organization was important, particularly because ancestral domain boundaries often cross over village lines. The municipality groups would therefore play a key role in resolving disputes among villages within their jurisdictions.

Public opinion was divided concerning the program of ancestral domain certification. Given their historical experience with government and its laws, many residents were wary of working with the laws of the national government. Certain sections of the local population, including some NGOs, promoted the idea that no proof should be needed to establish ancestral domains. The writ of traditional councils should prevail over outsiders, including government staff, who had in the past only assisted in despoiling the

region and its resources. Sticking with such attitudes would clearly have meant derailing the entire process. Land congresses and consultations were convened in each municipality to clarify policies and laws related to ancestral domains. These public consultations, following soon after other public sessions, have helped to air suspicions and to clarify doubts. This was necessary in order to build a consensus around the process of ancestral domain certification.

After the intent of the exercise was made clear to all participants, an intensive research phase followed that was led by the trained community researchers, nearly all women. Each community team gathered documentary proof on land ownership. Genealogies were prepared for each of the major clans to document the passage of traditional rights across generations. Changes in traditional boundaries were documented. Initiatives were then taken to address boundary disputes. Often this required inter-group meetings to recall historical agreements among ancestors so as to resolve disputes locally. In Abra, the Luba Women's Federation initiated the dialogue on boundary conflicts among the Maeng tribes found in the municipalities of Tubo and Luba. In Balbalan, land and peace congresses were convened. Similar efforts were made for Sadanga and Hungduan, where there were boundary conflicts with a neighboring municipality.

In areas where land disputes were satisfactorily resolved and where maps showing boundaries were prepared, project staff followed up by organizing communities for the task of preparing their resource management plan. Preparing the ADRMP, or ancestral domain resource management plan, relied on an analysis of current and past land use, and it drew upon baseline data relating to environmental, socio-cultural and economic conditions, that was also compiled by the women organizers.

Women's networks took the lead in mobilizing community participation and they involved a wide cross-section of local residents – including elder citizens, peace pact holders, religious leaders, women, youth, and local government staffs. Several workshops, training sessions, resource mapping exercises, and other activities were organized in each pilot area to assist with the task of plan preparation. These efforts resulted, for example, in the preparation of the Balbalan Ancestral Domain Resource Management Plan in Kalinga Province. Other ancestral domain resource management plans were drawn up for each of the involved municipalities.

While results differ from place to place, on the whole, women's initiatives have worked everywhere to improve the functional interplay between national law and local custom. The process promoted the evolution of new rules and mechanisms for community management. Peace pacts among communities proved to be viable living traditions that were given fresh life due to the activities of the women volunteers. Women's active participation further promoted their role in the community decision-making processes.

**Some Early Results**

Tangible as well as intangible gains have been reported from various project locations. While the tangible gains – development plans drawn up, Ancestral Domain Claims obtained, and economic benefits harnessed – are important for sustaining people's enthusiasm for the project, it is the intangible gains, in terms of capacity building, that will help them achieve larger benefits in the future.

Once they have received their ancestral domain certificates (and especially when they will obtain native title, if the Supreme Court clears the IPRA), local residents are in a better position to implement development plans of their own design. They are also in a much stronger position to resist encroachments by outside interests. The municipalities of Luba, Sadanga, and Balbalan have started implementing their resource management plan and they are mobilizing external support for undertaking projects that they have identified.

The people of Sadanga have successfully resisted the entry of Newcrest/New Mont, a mining company that wanted to conduct explorations for large-scale mining operations in the province. The exercise of greater control over the ancestral domain and its resources averts potential physical, economic and cultural displacement, which were the roots of social unrest in the Cordillera.

Alternative models of development have arisen as people of different areas have asserted their separate visions for the future. Residents of several municipalities, including Balbalan, Tanudan, and Tinglayan in Kalinga Province, and Bakun in Benguet Province, have influenced local government to grant permits for micro-scale instead of large-scale mining, and to micro-hydroelectric and irrigation projects within their ancestral domain area. They have also proposed tramlines for transportation in place of road construction through fragile forests. They are planning to institute a program of education and training that allows such concerns to be shared among themselves and with a larger group of area residents.

Peace and better governance have also followed from the same process. Newly empowered villagers have initiated dialogue with the military and with rebel groups. Revitalized local institutions have asserted the supremacy of civilian authority by putting armed groups under the jurisdiction of customary local laws. In Sadanga, the peace pact system and the community development process resulted in neutralizing armed groups, which have since retreated from this area. The process has reinforced the recognition of the traditional peace pact system as a means of maintaining peace.

A large part of the reason for this new confidence and assertiveness at the local level lies in the manner in which the project was implemented. The project was carried out as a partnership among the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, units of local government, traditional leaderships, area NGOs, and local people organized into municipal women's networks. Closer ties among all these actors facilitated a climate of support and mutual trust that is now observably crossing over to affect other arenas of public action.

Drawing up and implementing the ADRMP has become a continuing process and opportunity for action and interaction. Local government units are working in partnership with traditional structures. The technical working groups and women's networks that were formed to achieve ancestral domain certification have become venues for uniting women's organizations in different parts of the Cordillera. Exchanges among these groups serve to disseminate lessons and to reinforce positive experiences. Planning workshops become occasions to deliberate upon other locally important issues, such as what to do about mining operations; how to achieve formal recognition for traditional peace pacts; and other common concerns ranging from planning garbage disposal systems to discussing economic options.

The project has promoted women's roles in local governance both directly and indirectly. Many women participated in training and advocacy campaigns, which gave them a chance to develop their talents and to exercise leadership and management skills. These opportunities enabled women to gain confidence, where before they had hesitated to voice their opinions, perhaps because they have low levels of formal education.

The illustrations appended at the end of this chapter were prepared by participants of a self- evaluation workshop organized at La Trinidad, Benguet on June 29, 1998. They indicate the far-reaching changes that have occurred in women's views about how they can influence community affairs. The pictogram depicts a woman, represented by a bird that leaves its cage for a new world where she, together with others, can bloom and become a productive member of society.

**Lessons**

Decentralization and local autonomy are widely thought to be good for development. But decentralizing authority for development tasks is not likely to be very successful unless capable local institutions exist that can perform these functions effectively. Transforming traditional institutions to play these roles is a possibility that has only very rarely been explored.

Traditional institutions – such as indigenous cooperation groups, peace pact systems, elders, and mediators – are important forms of social organization in many parts of the developing world. Historically such groups have enforced social sanctions and prevented social disarray, thereby knitting members together into units for mutually beneficial collective action. As their relevance for economic production and social insurance has been overtaken by newer organizations, including those implanted by modernizing states; many traditional institutions have fallen into disuse. This weakening of traditional institutions is surely tragic – they have assisted people to act in cooperation with one another, and therefore embody important forms of social capital. But such a decline has often been regarded as unavoidable – traditional institutions and their leaders are too often unable or unwilling to take up new tasks instead of old. Adaptation and modification that are required to turn from old concerns to new ones are often too considerable to be accomplished successfully.

It is rare, thus, to find traditional institutions taking an active role in regional development activities. It is equally rare to see such institutions working closely in cooperation with technical personnel of government agencies. How were adaptation and modification accomplished? How have attitudes been altered successfully, both among traditional leaders and among staff of government agencies? Can a similar approach work as well in other countries and regions? To the extent that transformation and revitalization have been achieved successfully here, the Cordillera Administrative Region project provides an example showing how traditional social capital can be redirected toward activities related with autonomous self-development. It indicates as well the critical roles that women can play within this process.

The ancestral domain advocacy program of PANCORDI will continue to work in these directions. In the next step, it is planned to federate traditional institutions upward from

the *barangay* or village level to the municipal and the provincial levels. Representatives from such bodies organized at different levels will come together to constitute the regional body that will function as the apex traditional institution of the Cordillera. This regional body will continue to implement mechanisms that foster closer linkages between customary laws and practices, on the one hand, and formal government systems, on the other.

It is when the formal and the traditional systems work closely together that the best results can be achieved. And it is a blend of capacity and legitimacy that can bring people to participate wholeheartedly in development enterprises. But getting the two sets of systems to actually work together takes a long process involving repeated orientation, consultation, and continuing education. The Cordillera project provides one example of how such beneficial linkages can be achieved in practice.

## Chapter 7

## THE TOCO FOUNDATION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

## By

## Camille Granger and Michael Als[x]

## 1.    Introduction

The Toco region lies in the coastal northeastern part of Trinidad. It is populated by approximately six thousand persons, most of whom follow the traditional occupations of fishing and agriculture. The area is sparsely served by roads and other infrastructure facilities, so few economic opportunities are available for residents to enhance their incomes. Average household incomes are under US$300 per month, among the lowest in the country, and poorer households subsist on much less.

With its beautiful beaches and forest areas, however, Toco in the late 1980s was fast becoming a pleasure spot for rich tourists from the interior of the country. Speculation in property was rife and many beach houses were planned for construction. The incursion of vast numbers of outsiders threatened the fragile eco-system of the area. Long-term residents were alarmed at the pace of growth they foresaw and also at the speed with which usually somnolent government agencies were constructing roads and ferry services to facilitate this growth.

While the growth of tourism was threatening in one respect, it also provided new opportunities for creating employment and raising income levels in the region. How to take advantage of these new economic opportunities – and how to do so in a sustainable and ecologically friendly manner – this was a major issue facing residents of the Toco region in the early 1990s.

Though individually many Toco residents were concerned about these issues, collectively they were unable to fashion any coordinated response. Lacking organization, they were unable to articulate issues among themselves or to devise any suitable and coordinated strategy to deal with a fast-developing situation. Most residents of the region were quite poorly informed. Newspapers and radio broadcasts from inland Trinidad were barely concerned with local issues, and no local forums existed where residents could meet to exchange views and information.

The Toco Foundation (TF) developed as a community-based organization to deal with this situation. The Foundation promoted dialogue among residents of the Toco region – without trying to hand down any readymade solutions to the problems they were facing. It provided a venue where people could come together to voice their opinions and ideas, and where strategies and programs could be developed based on the ideas expressed by all.

After devoting an initial period of nearly three years to discussion, dialogue, and organization building, members of the Foundation launched several inter-connected projects beginning in 1994. These are described below in Section 3. National and international funding agencies have found TF's integrated approach to project

formulation extremely attractive. Consequently, TF has received significant grant funding from UNDP, from the British, Canadian, Dutch and German government agencies, and also from a host of government ministries.

Aid has not, however, dictated the priorities of the Foundation. Rather than following the preferences and fashions in vogue among donor agencies, TF's members have usually charted their own path. Based on the needs expressed in ongoing dialogues among themselves, members have proposed project ideas that they have themselves developed. Their overall objective – promoting development that is both ecologically and humanly sustainable – has been transparently visible to funding agencies, and quite a few agencies, including UNDP, have forged long-term and open-ended partnerships with TF.

Project financing has given way before programmatic support. Projects are not conceived as stand-alone or time-bound enterprises. Rather, each project of TF is integrally knit together with all of the others. As we describe below in Section 3, successor projects have built upon the gains of earlier projects. Skills developed and capacities built in one enterprise are used as inputs for follow-up initiatives.

A number of other community-based organizations function in this region, but it is the approach and philosophy of the Toco Foundation that set it apart in a class by itself. Three key features describe this approach – harmonious development of people and their environment, using projects to derive long-term and sustained income gains, and developing individual and institutional capacities to tackle more and newer tasks. These aspects of TF's work are developed in the sections that follow.

## 2. Background and Origins

"The Toco Foundation resulted from hundreds of conversations by dozens of people on the coast, both those who belong there and those who do not belong there. Several intellectuals and academics from the capital, Port of Spain, were also involved at the start, and many still provide professional services when we request them."

"It took us about two years to organize what people call our constitution and how they wanted it structured. And it took us around the same amount of time to design the seven projects that the Toco Foundation felt could and should develop around the ideas that came from our various discussions."

"It was decided that we would have a very strong position on environmental protection and awareness. This didn't come about by people being particularly conscious of the environment. It was just that people felt that their place should be kept in a certain condition; they were keen to keep out those outsiders who did not have a love for the place. And they were keen also to preserve the natural beauty of their region and to welcome those tourists who were willing to learn about their environment and to protect it while enjoying its charms. So the idea of an eco-tourism project grew naturally from these discussions with people of the region and from other discussions we had with UNDP and technical specialists."

"The other point has to do with social mobilization and social development. This program was really designed by the women of Toco, which is not surprising, since about 250 of

our 300 members are women. And it is not by coincidence that that is so. We think that the more socially conscious persons in the Toco community are its women – old women and young women alike. In the case of the Toco Foundation, five of the seven people on the management committee are women. It is not easy sitting there and presiding. The first set of projects we took up had a strong focus on helping these women become financially secure and increasing their confidence and their ability to interact with people and businesses outside the region."

"These and other projects did not start with assistance from various funding facilitators, as some people believe now – it didn't start that way. It started with people having their own ideas about themselves. It also started with approaching several government agencies for assistance and not getting any help at all, and then deciding that we had to find out what was taking place, and who had some of the resources we needed. We had a lot of trouble at the start, finding out how different funding agencies work and convincing them that ours was a useful approach. It helped us in understanding something about the processes required for our own empowerment."

**Project Development and Benefits Achieved**

For the first three years since it was formed in 1991, an informal group, led by Michael Als, held several rounds of discussions with Toco residents and drew up its plans and strategy. In 1994, after registering the group a NGO and appointing its first management committee, applications were sent out among funding agencies. In 1995, over one hundred thousand TT dollars (approximately US$17,000) were donated toward training and equipment for a project aimed at increasing income-earning opportunities among TF's mostly women members. The German and Canadian embassies provided the largest part of the resources, and smaller contributions were provided by the British High Commission and the Royal Netherlands Embassy

Other projects were proposed later, as the organization articulated its long-term plans. Today, seven different projects are being undertaken by TF, and many more are being implemented in partnership with other area NGOs. Additional project ideas are being developed by members who meet regularly to discuss plans and review progress.

Membership of TF does not come free of obligations. A registration fee of 25 TT dollars is paid by every joining member – a not inconsiderable amount in a poor rural community, especially when no immediate benefits are promised in return. Members are also required to make labor contributions for every project they propose and from which they receive any benefits.

Projects are not meant to provide a free ride to members. Rather, they are a vehicle through which ownership and sustainability are built. Resources invested in a project are expected to provide returns by way of salaries for committee members and staffs hired for this project. Sustainability is a central consideration while designing projects. Such a continuous and sustained approach to project implementation has been found most attractive among TF's donor agencies. Consequently, a succession of projects have been taken up by TF, some of which are described briefly below.

*Women's Action in Development Project (WADP)*

This project was taken up with the intention of enabling women of the region to supplement household incomes. As the economy of the area was expanding, especially with the growth in tourist traffic, new opportunities were becoming available. To enable women of the region to take advantage of these opportunities, a project was developed to provide training in new skills and to give loans for purchasing equipment and raw materials.

Courses were conducted by experienced professionals in the following specialized areas: food preservation, *tirite* (a craft that uses dried and bleached branches of a local plant for producing decoration pieces), *batik* (colorful, patterned cloth work), straw work and, significantly, tour guiding and environmental protection. Products and services were identified that were likely to be in demand among tourists, and training was organized for developing a local capacity to cater to this demand. In addition to technical training, seminars were also organized to develop business management skills among budding women entrepreneurs.

From the funds provided by donor agencies, production units were set up initially in the homes of participating women. In 1997, when TF built its own Community Center, all production facilities were moved into this center, and some new ones added, including processing equipment, a solar dryer, and a deep freeze.

Salaries to specialist production and marketing staff are paid from out of proceeds from the sale of products. Orders are regularly received in large quantities for the local sweets, preserved products, and local wines that are manufactured by the WADP facilities. The project also owns and runs the cafetaria located at the TF community center, and it pays rent for the space that it occupies. The project's managers have plans for opening a day-care center to look after children of the women who work here and also for other working mothers of the northeastern coast. In all 60 women are members of the WADP project. Average household incomes have increased among these women by as much as TT$1,000 per month.

*Eco-Tourism Project*

Women trained by the WADP project have played a major role in implementing the eco-tourism project, illustrating the integrated and holistic nature of TF's work. The eco-tourism project is directed toward gaining local residents a share of the revenues accruing from the fast-developing tourist trade – and to do so in a way that conserves and protects the local environment. The TF group involved with this project has developed tourism sites that help to increase awareness of the environment among visitors to the region. Simultaneously, incomes are generated for TF members who are involved as tour guides and site supervisors. Low impact on the environment, and productive use for sustained financial rewards – this is the motto of the organization.

Initially, TF received permission from the national Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine resources for developing three eco-tourism sites, including the Tompire and Narango river basin, the Simon Kayay Rock Formation in Cumana, and T-Bay in Sans Souci. A three-year business plan was developed with the advice of the UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme, which also provided most of the resources for this project. The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute has also provided a small grant.

TF wanted grant funds to support this project. UNDP's selection committee insisted, however, that since these funds were to be used for income-generating activities by TF, the organization should be given a loan for this purpose, and not a grant. The amount given to TF, it was suggested, should be passed on to its members as a loan, attracting six percent annual rate of interest. Unused to the idea of recovering loan installments from its members, TF initially resisted this suggestion, but it was agreed, later on, to try out the idea as a pilot program.

"We were negotiating – and they were very tough negotiations, I can assure you – with UNDP. I have a long history of negotiating and I put it down as one of the toughest negotiations I have had, even as a trade unionist. One of the ideas that came from the UNDP was that instead of giving us grant money, they would give us a loan facility. We were very upset about this proposition and said that these people didn't really understand development at all. Being small we got an interest-free loan and we started giving out small loans – TT$2,000 and $5,000 – under some very rigorous conditions. But we had to set up and outline some principles so we established a six percent return on the capital we lent – quite favorable in our view, but quite unfavorable according to the people who thought the rate was too high. They thought that it was free money and didn't understand "why you had to go and add so much interest." We had to explain administrative costs. The fact is, however, that this loan is now something that is generating an enormous capacity on the coast as well as awareness about business and about self, community and organization. And now it is clear to us that we will be looking in a short while for maybe a few hundred thousand dollars more for basically the same activities."

Repayments have been timely and regular, and many more TF members have benefited in the second stage – when amounts recovered from a previous lot of beneficiaries have been used to make fresh loans to other members. Members are happy with the rate of interest, which is about half of what commercial banks charge for similar loans.

Members involved in the eco-tourism project have received training in environmental consciousness, tour guiding, and duties related to the work of lifeguards, game wardens, and turtle protection. All training courses were intended to provide members with two types of skills and knowledge: those related to conserving the environment, and others related to the business aspects of the tourism industry.

The group began preparation of the Simon Kayay Rock Formation area: clearing the site, constructing or resurfacing trails, putting up toilet and sanitary facilities, erecting signs, and distributing promotional material. Four different management units were formed, and each unit was made responsible for a specific site. Encouraged by the success of the earlier projects, the government has now allotted three more sites for TF to develop.

Leatherback turtles are an important aspect of Toco's natural heritage. The northeast coast of Trinidad provides one of the few remaining nesting sites for this endangered species. Arranging viewing opportunities for tourists forms one part of TF's work in this area. Protecting turtles from inadvertent fishing is another important part. Nearly 200 leatherback turtles die every year from getting trapped inside fishermen's nets. Working alongside research scientists and other area NGOs, TF has been implementing a turtle protection program that comprises redesigning fishing nets and rescuing trapped turtles.

At the moment 26 TF members are involved in eco-tourism and environmental protection activities. Six members are involved full-time in these activities, deriving an average monthly income of TT$1,000 per person (ecotourism) and TT$500 per person (environmental protection) from this involvement.

*Using Communications Effectively: Toco Talk and Radio Toco*
Very early in its existence, TF established "Toco Talk," a community newspaper, managed and put together by regular TF staffs. The idea behind having a community newspaper was to generate a spirit of self-awareness among area residents while also mobilizing them as a community. Before this newspaper was established, there was nothing in Toco that could enable its residents to share concerns, learn about each other's problems and activities, and engage in dialogue with each other. Establishing the newspaper successfully was, therefore, a masterstroke of communications and social mobilization strategy. It was not, however, an easy task to accomplish. There was some assistance from the UNDP Small Grants Programme, which helped crystallize the idea and bring it to fruition."

"Toco Talk was one of the first things, the first ideas – and we had to struggle with a lot of people to make them understand that a community-based paper was a concept that had to be supported."

Inspired by the success of the newspaper project, TF and the donor agencies that supported its long-term strategy decided to implement a more ambitious communications project. In 1996, Radio Toco was inaugurated as a community radio station, staffed by trained TF members. Despite its remote location and low population density, Toco was the first community to receive a broadcast license from the government.

"Equipment required for the radio station was acquired with the help of assistance provided by UNESCO, UNDP and the Trinidad and Tobago Citizens Agenda Network (T&T CAN!). T&T CAN! did not advocate any particular agenda of its own. It regards itself as a group of facilitators dedicated to encouraging a wide variety of civil society groups to come together and identify core common concern that can form the elements of a legitimate Citizens Agenda."

Though start-up costs were provided by these agencies, running costs are expected to be raised entirely by TF from out of its own funds. Salaries were paid initially from funds provided by WADP, which was doing well enough financially that it had a small surplus available to lend to sister TF projects – illustrating one aspect of the integration that exists among TF's different projects. Within its first year of operation, however, the radio station became self-sustaining; enough revenues were derived from advertising to meet some part of the running costs. With further revenues being generated from advertising, it is expected that these operations will become fully self-financing within a few years.

The success of the Radio Station, has encouraged TF members to take on another communications challenge. "Eastern Voice," a newspaper started jointly by UNESCO and the government in 1997, was handed over in 1998 for TF to manage. The third issue of Eastern Voice, the first to be produced by the TF, has attracted as many as 31 advertisements from businesses along the coast. Toco Talk has been merged with

Eastern Voice and six persons are employed full-time in managing this new and larger paper. Eastern Voice personnel are also being trained in radio broadcasting by Radio Toco staff.

The TF's use of the media has helped significantly in changing attitudes along the coast. Upcoming training programs are widely advertised, progress and results of projects are disseminated among area residents, and funds obtained from different agencies are also widely publicized. People all along the coast and in the rest of the country are kept continuously informed about what is happening at the Toco Foundation. Members are happy to see the fruit of their work being appreciated across the country

*CAREC Peer Counseling*
The spread of AIDS is causing considerable concern in Trinidad and Tobago as in other industrialized and developing countries. In cooperation with the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), TF commenced a pilot program in 1998, that is proving to be one of the most efficiently run projects for AIDS prevention in this country.

Peer counselors have been trained to advise young people about safeguards and methods for preventing AIDS/ HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. These counselors go from house to house and from school to school, talking to young people. They also make presentations to community gatherings, which are delivered at TF's community center and at other places where young people gather together at frequent intervals.

Six counselors are engaged in this activity. Each counselor receives a monthly salary of TT$1,250, which is fair compensation for their mostly part-time work. They are employed by the Toco Foundation and they work in St. David county. Networking in and out of St. David continues and the Toco group is considered by CAREC to be a model for replicating in other parts of this region.

*The Victoria Pritchard Community Resource Center*
A newly built community center has started to function as TF's permanent home. It is the administrative center for all of TF's operations, and it is equipped with fax and telephone facilities and with internet access. Funding for the center was provided in part by UNDP. Another part of the funding was made available from resources generated internally by TF.

The Foundation provides full-time employment to 36 people, most of whom are housed in the community center. Production facilities owned jointly by members of the women's development project are also housed at this center. The center provides a central place for TF members and other area residents to meet. Most of all, it is a visible sign of collective achievement that TF members treasure and which helps bind them even closer together.

Other projects are being implemented in collaboration with other area NGOs. TF has always been open toward collaborating with other agencies. A number of alliances have been struck up, and an extensive network of partnerships has been formed to assist with the goal of environmentally-friendly development of the Toco region.

In 1998, a meeting of all concerned partners was convened at TF's newly inaugurated Community Center. The Toco Convocation was organized by TF in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank, UNDP, and the Trinidad and Tobago Citizens Agenda Network. An agenda for the future was developed in consultation with assembled partners. NGOs, donor agencies, and government department staff met together to define the roles that each would play for the sustainable development of this region. Attendees were taken into the homes of villagers to see at first hand the problems that the people of this region were facing in their everyday lives. In keeping with its philosophy of self-help, a registration fee was charged to all attendees cover the costs of the convocation – even government ministers were not spared from paying these fees.

## 4.     Lessons and Next Steps

The Toco Foundation has grown rapidly since its foundation in 1994. In terms of its major objectives – developing opportunities for raising the incomes of area residents while protecting the natural environment against uncontrolled tourist growth – TF has achieved considerable success.

Conventional projects – income generation, micro-credit – have been taken up alongside unconventional ones – eco-tourism, AIDS prevention. As the organization has striven to articulate its vision into concrete programs and projects, members of the organization have collectively and individually derived considerable tangible and intangible benefits.

Tangible gains have been achieved in terms of incomes raised and assets constructed. But the intangible gains are the more important ones to be achieved. An organization has been built that is accountable to its members and responsive to their needs, and that facilitates coordinated actions to achieve collective benefits for all. Starting with members' needs and aspirations, TF has assisted in the formation of numerous project groups that have enabled members to work together for common benefit. Its concern for human and environmental sustainability provides some assurance that the gains achieved in the first five years of TF's existence will be carried forward as well into the future. As important as the income gains that have been achieved from these projects are those changes in attitudes that have gone together with increased confidence and self-expression.

"Contact within the last year or two with a whole range of people, working at different levels, has opened the eyes of the people. What is happening now – changes in ideas and attitudes – is happening as a result of that networking, both national and international. Sometimes I pass and I hear that there is a meeting in the community center, and I'll ask what meeting is that? "The Merle Hodge organization – working women – are holding a session on domestic violence." And I don't know anything about it. What is happening now is that all this interaction is taking place between people. Not only the women's organizations but also farmers' organizations and others are meeting and discussing issues. Culturally, there are many things that we need to settle in this country and that is why contact and interaction with people is so critical. What has clearly happened now is that new attitudes and ideas have developed and started to take root among the people."

TF's long-term and programmatic approach to development has been appreciated by its partner agencies. Members of the Foundation continue to earn incomes from project ventures long after external funding has come to an end. Donors have been happy to see how the resources provided for one set of activities have been multiplied both by members' own contributions and through serving as inputs into successor activities.

Women trained under the WADP project have served as guides and entrepreneurs for the eco-tourism project. The surplus generated by these women entrepreneurs provided some of the initial resources required by Radio Toco. The radio, in turn, has served to popularize the Foundation's training programs. Everything meshes with everything else. An integrated approach to development has been fashioned in which the individual components are all knit together closely in synergy with one another.

The Toco Foundation's experience has inspired the emergence of a host of other community-based organizations in the region. Instead of treating these organizations as competitors, however, TF's members have sought to build partnerships with them. They have supported the formation of these groups and they have assisted them in building relationships with donor agencies. As result of this outreach effort, a well-knit network of NGOs has appeared in the Toco region.

"Many local groups have come asking us to attend their meetings and to give them advice about their activities. They had come to us before, and we had told them that we couldn't come to them, but we could give them a copy of our constitution. We had spent two years studying and developing our constitution and maybe they could also find it of some use. In many cases, ours is the structure that area organizations have adopted. It took us a long while, two years, to develop our constitution, but in the last meeting with these groups, they told us, 'well, you took two years to discuss this constitution but it took us two days to realize that what you discussed is what we want.'"

"Toco Foundation handled the negotiations for the St. David Handicraft Association when they received forty thousand dollars from the Canadian Embassy. We handled negotiations for about four or five groups that did not have the ability and the facility, and who were terrified by town people and foreigners. We had to go and let them meet these people and see that they could meet and talk with them and sit down in their meeting."

Relations with state agencies are characterized by a mix of cooperation and conflict, hardly extraordinary for an independently-minded community-based organization that opts to hew its own separate path. In many instances, a relation of mutual assistance has been achieved. Government ministries have, for instance, allotted lands for TF to develop as eco-tourism sites. In return, TF has done an excellent job of conserving the environment and for spreading environmental awareness among people. Both sides are quite happy with the results of their mutual association. In other cases, however, the relationship is less cozy and potentially conflictual.

"At present, everyone we talk to is completely opposed to the road that the government plans to build between Blanchisseuse and Matelot. No one lives there, really, besides birds, animals and trees, who have been there since before Christopher Columbus, and it is our view that that is part of the national patrimony and it should remain so. Perhaps some hiking trails could be built, but not roads. We say fix the existing roads in Trinidad before thinking about building new highways. So much of the environment is at risk of

being destroyed in the process. We ask if six highways are built in Trinidad, what effect would that have on eradicating poverty? So, from the environmental standpoint and from the social standpoint, we will have some very serious conflict with the state. And yet we still need to have a relationship with the state about the land they are going to give to us, the buildings that we need from them, and so forth."

Though the development of TF and of its program in the previous five years have all been greeted by commendable results, both tangible and intangible, relations with the state might provide some cause for concern in the future. Another cause for concern might arise from the organization's thinly dispersed leadership. Despite the fact that decisions are taken mostly in a collegial manner, and despite the existence of separate project management committees for each different project, leadership at the top of the organization continues to be vested within a relatively small group. Diversifying leadership and enabling other, especially younger, members to occupy positions of importance will assist with the future growth of this organization. Both of these concerns are not serious enough immediately, however, to detract in any way from the organization's excellent performance. We mention these here to suggest issues that might require some more attention in the future.

## Chapter 8

## LAOS: BUILDING LOCAL MODELS FOR A NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY
### By
### UNDP/Laos and Kanna Baran

### 1.    Introduction: History and Background

Lao PDR is a land-locked mountainous country of 4.6 million people, with the lowest population density in all of Asia. About 1.9 million people live in remote rural areas, where the incidence of poverty is 53%, double that of urban areas (24%). Subsistence, slash-and-burn agriculture is still prevalent in these remote areas, and economic transactions still take place within the barter economy. 1.5 million people of the country's 4.6 million have no access to health services and almost half the population lives without access to safe drinking water.

The country is still recovering from the effects of over 30 years of war that ended in 1975. The processes of reconstruction and recovery have to contend with virtually non-existent infrastructure and very inadequate government services. Nearly half a million people left the country around 1975, including many who were the most qualified and experienced. 30,000 Laotian refugees who were living in camps in Thailand are even now being repatriated and sent back to especially designated villages. The country is very vulnerable to natural disasters, and floods and droughts occur with equal frequency. Every year, emergency assistance is received from the World Food Programme and other international agencies.

Reconstruction and resettlement are constrained by the difficulty that the country's government faces in consolidating its hold over the entire country and in integrating different ethnic groups into a nation. Inequitable income distribution between regions and ethnic groups makes the task of national integration difficult. Groups that live in the remote mountainous parts are the most deprived in an economic sense, and they are also the ones among whom militant groups are most active.

Civil society organizations could perform a number of necessary functions, especially in among remote rural areas that are poorly provided with infrastructure and government services. However, the government of the country discourages the formation of such organizations. While a number of international NGOs function in the country, there is an almost complete absence of indigenous NGOs. The Government of the Lao PDR has been very cautious about letting its citizens form voluntary even though the constitution of this country provides for a right of free association. In practice, it remains virtually impossible to register a voluntary organization.

UNDP and other concerned international agencies have intervened in this respect with the government of the Lao PDR but no legal framework has yet been approved that enables registration of and action by national CSOs. It is the hope of these agencies that such a framework might be considered more favorably by the government once a number of people-centered development programs have been successfully implemented. As its ability for service provision and demand articulation increase, civil

society will start to take its legitimate place in national policy formulation and governance. Until that happens, however, international development assistance agencies must concentrate their efforts on developing suitable exemplars of people-centered development.

With this longer-term strategy in mind, and in the context of a country that is riven by poverty and lack of government services, UNDP and other agencies have been extending support for people-centered development programs. Of particular importance are those programs that have been taken up among the ethnic populations of remote and mountainous regions.

These projects have aimed not only at providing essential services and at achieving sustainable livelihoods for local people – hard enough goals to achieve in themselves – they are also expected to provide templates of civic organization that can be emulated in other parts of the country. The larger goal requires a long-term effort to build civil society from the grassroots.

Special care has been taken in each project area to build co-operative linkages between government agencies and local communities. While cooperative relationships are useful everywhere, they are especially necessary in countries and regions where the government is unkindly disposed toward voluntary organizations. Much attention has also been devoted toward building linkages between community leadership and staffs of government agencies. Efforts have also been required to rebuild links between national and local government agencies that had been weakened by long years of war and the poor quality of communications and other infrastructure available to these remote mountainous parts.

These national and local contexts form the backdrop for evaluating a project for providing safe drinking water among 14 rural communities in Long Sane district of the Saysambone Special Zone. A study of this project provides an illustration of the approaches that were developed to build local residents' capacities and to forge beneficial linkages among government and civil society organizations. The direct results of this project have been quite impressive on their own account; additionally, they are serving as a means to build an enabling environment for other civil society endeavors, elsewhere in this country.

## 2.	The Drinking Water Project in Upland Laos

Scarcity of water for both drinking and irrigation purposes is a central part of everyday life among the ethnic communities the Saysambone Special Zone. Shortages of drinking water force the women of this area to spend a large amount of time travelling to distant sources that are unreliable and often unsafe. As the population has grown, and as women have had to travel further afield in search of water, marginal and polluted sources have started being tapped. Vulnerability to disease from unsafe water is compounded by inattention to basic hygiene. Many in the area have fallen victims to infectious diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, infectious hepatitis, and typhoid fever.

The project piloted a new approach aimed at providing clean water and improving hygiene and sanitation practices among rural communities. The new water supply

schemes were supported to a considerable extent by labor inputs, cash contributions, and local raw materials provided by the communities themselves. Supplementary support in the form of technical and financial assistance were made available by the National Center for Environmental Health and Water Supply (NEW), the lead national agency seized with responsibility for water supply and environmental health. The project also drew financial support from UNDP. The work of building local organizations was coordinated by the United Nations Volunteers working in this country.

Community-managed water supply schemes have been implemented successfully in other parts of the developing world. What is new in the Laos approach is a pattern of organization that makes for sustainable management along with equitable sharing of costs and benefits. This demand-driven approach has made it possible for all households to participate as equal partners in the community's enterprise. Each household is fully aware of all costs and benefits associated with the project, and each is able to select a level of service that it needs and that it can afford. Consequently, popular participation is a continuous and everyday affair, not confined to monthly meetings or special seminars. Forms of social organization developed in the project serve as useful forerunners for the larger effort of building civil society organizations in this country.

Water supply schemes were to be installed initially in 14 villages, all of which are remotely located, having no reliable road access. 950 families who live in these villages are among the poorest in the district. The project had the following immediate objectives: installing community-managed water supply systems in these 14 villages; training 20 Village Hygiene Volunteers, all women, who would be responsible for providing basic health, sanitation, and hygiene services in these villages; conducting health surveys to assess conditions related to health and sanitation; and organizing hygiene awareness campaigns in all 14 communities with the objective of improving local practices related to sanitation.

Implementation began with a series of meetings organized in each village by national UN volunteers assisted by staff from the government agency. Several rounds of consultations were held among each community before collective agreement was achieved regarding the design of a suitable water supply system and patterns of cost sharing. The first round of meetings began with considering the need for a new water supply system. Villagers' willingness to contribute for such a system was also assessed at this time.

Villagers were encouraged to meet among themselves and hold discussions about obligations and benefits that would be attendant upon participating in a water supply project. UN Volunteers acted as facilitators for these sessions. Without attempting to influence the decisions that were taken by the village community, the Volunteers assisted in organizing these sessions and presenting issues for discussion.

Having discussed and agreed among themselves to assist in this effort, villagers charged technical staff with the task of preparing an initial design. Technical specialists from the district's Health Division carried out a feasibility study for each village, identifying, in particular, the source of water that was most suitable for each village. Their analysis indicated that seven villages could avail themselves of water from springs and mountain streams located at a height above the village. PVC pipes could be

installed to carry this water down by gravity flow to points selected by villagers. Similar gravity-flow systems were already in existence in two villages. All that was needed in their case was to upgrade system capacity to meet the requirements of a larger population. Gravity-flow schemes were not found feasible in the remaining villages, and local wells were recommended in their case.

When the exercises of source identification and preliminary design were completed, a village meeting was held to discuss these findings. Village discussions revolved around the likely efficacy of the new schemes, locations for new water points, costs associated with alternative locations, appropriate methods for allocating costs among villagers, and forms of local organization that could assist with this effort.

Costs were subsidized by the project to the extent that it paid for technicians' salaries and the cost of all non-local inputs, including pipes, cement, and the hire of machinery. On their part, however, communities were responsible to arrange for all unskilled labor and all local raw materials, such as earth and locally made bricks. These local costs were apportioned among households in proportion to the levels of service delivery for which they had opted.

Communities and households were encouraged to select the level of services they desired. The more they were willing to contribute toward the scheme, the higher the level of service they could avail. Local costs were thus divided equitably though not equally among all households in a village. Clusters of houses that commonly opted for a higher level of service, for example, having an exclusive stand-pipe erected for their locality, were asked to pay a proportionately higher share of the costs.

A chart showing different levels of service provision – wells, standpipes, community taps, private taps – and their associated costs was circulated among all households and groups, so villagers could assess for themselves the costs and benefits of different levels of service. The higher the level of service that was provided to any household or locality, the higher was their assessment for water fees.

This approach made individual household members equally responsible for decision-making. It was no longer possible for any small group of traditional leaders to act in isolation by themselves. Each household had an incentive to participate and to be fully informed about all aspects of the scheme. People became aware of what was being offered, the costs and benefits attached to each option, and the roles that were expected of them for operating and maintaining the system.

There are as many monitors of these water supply schemes as there are consumers. Since all households have been involved in selecting their preferred level of service, each has become acutely aware of the costs incurred at various stages of construction and system development. As a consequence, costs are kept to a minimum and any unnecessary or wasteful expenditure attracts public debate and criticism.

Households in the 14 Laos communities must not only contribute their share of construction costs; they are also liable for paying water fees that are used to defray the costs of system maintenance. They must perform their share of community labor required for cleaning the tanks every month and for protecting the watershed areas from

human and animal wastes. Committees elected by the villagers are responsible for collecting these fees and maintaining the systems they have installed.

A system of nested local organizations has been introduced among these communities, starting from individual households and going up to include the entire village. At each level of organization, members discuss and decide upon the level of services that they want and are willing to pay for.

Though all households participated in making key decisions, construction activities were overseen by a Village Development Committee (VDC). Every village elected a committee that would be responsible for organizing construction activities and operating and maintaining the schemes in future. At least one member of every village committee was a woman, who would be responsible additionally for promoting improved hygiene practices in the village. Election of a village committee ensured that a formal organization existed that could interact with technical staff, manage the water system, mobilize local contributions, organize the work force, and later operate and maintain the system.

Project staff organized regular training sessions on different subjects to assist committee members perform their functions. The basic aim of training was to enhance members' knowledge, skills and capabilities such that they could deal with day-to-day issues and also unforeseen problems that might arise while implementing the water supply project. Training was provided not only in the technical aspects of water supply but it related also to various aspects – such as budget preparation and financial management, strategic planning and leadership, and the conduct of elections – that were required to build a strong and durable community organization.

Community-based problem-solving structures that were developed in this process have helped additionally for tackling problems associated with poor sanitation and hygiene. Village Hygiene Volunteers trained by project staff were responsible for initiating public discussions on these issues. With the active involvement of other community members, these Volunteers have been successful in introducing improved hygiene practices among their fellow villagers.

Hygiene awareness training courses were conducted at village- and district-levels. Health surveys in each village were carried out by District Health Workers and Village Hygiene Volunteers. The results of these surveys were discussed with committee members. A special meeting of the village was organized to discuss these findings and to find solutions for the problems that had been identified. Various issues were discussed, including protection of water points from animals and pests, providing adequate drainage, etc. The entire effort was coordinated toward improving conditions of hygiene and sanitation in these villages, if only a little at a time.

3. **Progress and Results**

Installing a new water supply system was a slow process. A lot of preparation time was required before construction could get under way. First, a comprehensive work plan had to be formulated with the active participation of the entire community. All households had to agree on the level of service that the village and each participating household would obtain; costs were divided in the same proportion as service levels.

Agreements also had to be reached on dividing construction activities into parts that were separately the responsibility of technical staff and of village committee. A principle of comparative advantage assisted in this division of responsibility: tasks that were more technically complicated were assigned to the specialists, and the rest were undertaken by the village committees. To establish good working relationships it was necessary to divide responsibilities clearly and to record these agreements in the form of formal contracts.

Tasks for which the village committees were responsible had to divided further among individual households. Detailing how many laborers each task would require was a complicated assignment, made more complicated by the fact that farmers would be unable to devote much time during busy periods of the agricultural cycle. It would be difficult, for instance, to expect a farmer to perform his share of construction labor at harvest time, just when his maximum attention was needed in his fields. Technically specialized tasks had to be dovetailed with other tasks in ways that would suit the schedules of both farmers and technicians.

These issues of detailing and scheduling took up a lot of time in the early phases of project implementation. It was good, however, that time was taken out at the start to arrive at clear understandings among all participants. As construction commenced, some people attempted to renegotiate these agreements. In some cases, people objected to the location of taps and stand-pipes when the schemes were nearing completion. Committee members and project staff refused to allow for the delays and setbacks that redesigning the schemes would entail, especially at such a late stage. They took the view that since everyone had earlier had ample opportunity to comment on the layout of the pipes and taps, there was no reason now to restart the process and redesign the scheme.

Scarcity of technical staff also served to cause delays and setbacks. Very few technicians and skilled workers were available within Long Sane District. The district's Health Division delegated one technician, one other technician was seconded from another UNDP project in an adjoining district, and two technicians were engaged as private contractors. Services of just four technicians were hardly sufficient for a scheme of construction that was spread over 14 separate communities, mostly located in hard-to-approach areas.

Mistakes were bound to be made, thus, as communities tried their hand, often for the first time, at designing and constructing water supply schemes. Designs were often prepared in a rough and ready fashion. Some of the schemes were found to suffer from technical defects, such as differences in levels between reservoirs and pipes, inadequate capacity, etc. Often materials were not procured in the right quantities, giving rise to delays in the construction schedule.

Quite severe problems were faced in a few villages. At the Sam Khone-Phone Lao village, water had to cross Nam San River through metal pipes, but no adequate attachment system was included in the design, nor in the list of materials. At Done Hom village, the new reservoir was found to be in a low spot and it had to be raised another one meter, filled with earth that had to be transported from a distance. At Nam Ying village, the supply pipe had to come down a steep and rocky slope, where it could not be buried underground. The plan had not provided for the full distance over which durable

metal pipes were required to be laid. Consequently, much time was spent to revise the budget, to contact suppliers, negotiate prices, organize transport, and re-assign tasks among supervisors and other villagers.

Additional resources were required to rectify these errors. Knowing that they were not being cheated by any unaccountable outsiders, residents paid for these additional costs, if not willingly, then collaboratively and with no lingering suspicion. Building a united vision and a sense of direction for the community through village consultations helped district-village leaders, workers and people to work as a team directed to achieving a common objective. This consultative process created an environment where people felt they were part of the process and where they wanted to work together, often doing more than was asked for or expected.

Most villages succeeded in completing the construction work within three months' time. The fast pace of work in the face of technical uncertainties was mainly on account of the high levels of motivation and participation by the village people, who contributed their labor, time and resources generously and tirelessly for this effort.

The impact of the project has been most obvious on the work of the women. The daily grind of fetching water for their families has been made remarkably lighter. Women now have more time to spend on other tasks within the family or on the farm, and perhaps, even for themselves. Already in many villages the number of vegetable gardens has increased significantly, which has had considerable advantages for household nutrition and family's economy. In Nam Ying village, where water is abundant, overflow water has been diverted to nearby paddy fields.

Volunteers teams have produced "health-danger maps" in these villages, indicating locations that contain dangers to human health, such as mosquito breeding areas, places where water is polluted by animals or by human waste. Areas surrounding water reservoirs, wells and taps have been finished nicely with small drainage canals or pathways. Villagers have constructed fences around wells, taps and reservoirs to protect them from animals and to prevent children from falling in.

Although the awareness building campaign and planning workshops that were initiated had good results down to the level of the VDC members, it has been a big challenge to reach the individual level. In spite of the fact that rules and regulations have been drafted by the people themselves, many still do not understand the importance of good sanitation around the taps. In some cases, people who used to boil water before drinking have now stopped doing so because tap water looks so clear and safe enough to drink straight away.

Progress in changing hygiene-related behaviors has been slower, thus, than progress in installing the hardware for the water supply schemes. Especially where plentiful supplies of clean water have been received, people have been hesitant to alter their inherited patterns of everyday life. Not surprisingly, energies saved over from the water gathering effort have been directed toward economic ends, such as using surplus water for growing vegetable gardens and irrigating rice crops.

The Village Volunteers are persisting in their efforts. Backed by continuing support from the district health staff and from the UN Volunteers, they continue to involve fellow

villagers in considerations of improved practices. Indications that behaviors will change are already visible in some communities. Many families are already installing flush latrines in their houses. High and presently unaffordable prices discourage others who have also realized the need for better sanitation.

## 4. Lessons and Next Steps

The process of installing a water supply scheme has enabled communities of the Saysambone Special Zone to develop strong and effective local organizations. Through debate and discussions among themselves, communities have developed clear and transparent rules that allowed users to select the service level, technology and stand-pipe locations that best fitted with their needs and resources. Much as Ostrom (1990) has examined for the case of managing common lands, communities that have built and that are continuing to maintain water supply systems in upland Laos have also developed clear understandings about individual responsibilities and collective rights. A strong sense of ownership has developed for the water supply systems among community members who have all contributed time and labor for this enterprise. Collection of water fees has also helped develop not only the willingness to maintain the system, but also the ability to do so.

There was a strong emphasis in this project on demand-driven approaches. Technical options were not foisted on communities, as they often are by technical specialists, but communities were assisted to select the options they wanted and which they could afford. This element of choice in the selection of technology constitutes one important lesson from this project.

Analysts of development have frequently remarked that sustaining project benefits becomes more likely when communities feel a sense of ownership for the project. A good way of developing a sense of ownership is through requiring communities to provide some part of project resources. Providing a share of project costs gives communities a right to participate in all decisions and to veto decisions they do not like. Technical staffs of government agencies are often not moved simply by senior officials' instructions to encourage community participation. Communities that can withhold resources required by technical staffs are most likely to acquire the right to influence project decisions. Providing a share of project resources offers one way of conveying this right to communities.

What the Laos water supply project illustrates in addition is the manner in which cost-sharing schemes are best implemented. By providing communities with a menu of options, related to alternative cost and benefit packages; by facilitating discussions among them about the relative merits of each option; and by involving communities in implementing the options and designs they have selected -- by following methods such as these, a strong sense of community ownership was developed in Laos.

The project supported a learning-by-doing process of developing individual capacities and strengthening local management capabilities. Participation of local residents in project design was essential for strengthening institutional capacity. Formal training supplemented the gains in capacity that accrued from hands-on involvement at all stages of implementation. These gains in capacity and confidence will stand them in good stead and the mechanisms of collective problem solving that they have developed

will help them tackle other problems, related to other development needs and opportunities.

As of the moment of writing, however, no new projects are in the pipeline that can draw upon the talents and capacities developed within the communities associated with the water supply project. Such lack of follow-up is typical of a project-centered approach to development. Participation and organization building are celebrated as 'best practice' by most national and international development agencies. Most of these agencies are equally content, however, to abandon the organizations they have helped to build and to terminate participation unilaterally. When project financing comes to an end, most donor agencies simply pack their bags and walk away from the people with whom they have been keen (as they proclaim) to build a productive relationship. Capacities and collective resources built up in the course of project implementation are left to erode and fall apart -- until another project comes along, at some unknown future time, which may once again generate local enthusiasm and harness local capacities -- and once more abandon them and let them erode. This stop-go cycle of project-centered development represents a critical limitation that inheres in the operating procedures of many development assistance agencies.

To alleviate this problem in the Laos case, it was attempted to build linkages between community organizations and government agencies that would survive beyond the period of project financing. To some extent, the project has been successful in this objective. Staffs of government agencies continue to assist community leaders for maintaining the water supply systems that were built. Given the paucity of resources, such as means of transportation, that are available to these staffs, it is difficult for them to comply with any regular or strict schedule of maintenance.

More important in the context of Laos, the community water supply schemes have served to demonstrate the potential and the efficacy of relying on civil society organizations for undertaking crucial development tasks. Government agencies have seen that they can work alongside community organizations. Many more development projects have been taken up relying on community-based organizations. Projects taken up in different parts of this country include developing village rice banks, building community-managed minor irrigation schemes, income-generating activities for women, etc. Where once the government denied CSOs any opportunity to participate in governance and development, today it is more open to CSO involvement in at least the second of these two tasks. As more demonstrations are built and more CSOs gain strength in other parts of this country, it is likely that their scope of action will also expand. In the meanwhile, the incremental strategy continues to carve out small gains, each of which contributes in its own small way toward securing an enabling environment for CSOs of this country.

## Chapter 9

## TRADITIONAL STRENGHTS AND MODERN TECHNOLOGY: EXPLORING AND BUIDLING SYNERGY IN THE PACIFIC

**By**
**Jeff Liew**

### Introduction

Along with several other Pacific Island nations, Vanuatu and Tuvalu endorsed the "Suva Declaration on Sustainable Human Development in the Pacific" in 1994, committing their governments to promoting development strategies that would put people first. The Suva Declaration was adopted in a landmark meeting organized by UNDP and regional agencies. Ministers and senior officials represented at this meeting recognized that growing income inequalities in the region were eroding the Pacific way of life and proving economic growth to be illusory for most citizens. The Declaration was aimed at promoting more inclusive, equitable and participatory development that would be sustainable, both socially and in terms of the environment.

Soon thereafter, in 1995, the joint UNDP/UNOPS Regional Equitable and Sustainable Human Development Programme (hereafter ESHDP) was approached by Pacific Island governments for help in translating these objectives into viable plans for achieving results on the ground. ESHDP worked in partnership with 12 Pacific Island countries to fulfill this mandate. Specifically, this involved undertaking situation analyses and organizing practical demonstrations of people-centered development in each participating country. Demonstration programs were developed in response to the specific needs of people in each country and community. In a significant reversal of the usual approach to development planning, a bottom-up approach was taken to identify problems and to devise solutions. Solutions were developed with the common consent of all participants and they were implemented through establishing close collaboration among governments, NGOs, and community-based organizations.

The ESHDP team began this work by conducting a series of meetings at the community level. Representatives of area NGOs and concerned government agencies attended these meetings along with members of local communities. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of current development issues and to identify areas of greatest concern to the local population. The processes used, the results attained, and the lessons learned from these initiatives are illustrated in the following case study from Vanuatu.

Long festering land disputes were settled in Vanuatu following the implementation of an innovative methodology for registering land rights that combined robust and well-regarded local traditions with the best that modern science and technology had to offer. Oral historians – the keepers of the land records traditionally – were organized to work in partnership with technicians, including both government specialists and trained local youth, who used sophisticated global positioning systems for mapping and registering land boundaries. Legitimacy and ease of access provided by a traditional system was married harmoniously to the speed and efficacy of modern technology.

Civil society actors have played a major role along with government agencies in developing these harmonious combinations of tradition and modernity that are serving as the basis for appropriate institutional development and policy reform for these areas. Because these laws and policies, underwritten by locally constructed institutions, are seen by the people to be "theirs" as much as the government's, individuals and groups throughout these countries are committed to ensuring their successful translation into practice.

These new policies and institutions did not develop overnight nor were they transplanted readymade as "best practices" from some other country or part of the world. Rather, they have evolved in slow sequence, as a result of learning accruing from each previous step in the process. Following a participatory process has resulted in developing a larger and more widespread set of stakeholders who expect to be served by these institutions and policies, efficiently and transparently – and for a long time to come.

A participatory process may be slow to develop, which is why it is sometimes seen askance by bureaucrats and politicians concerned to have quick results. However, the gains that accrue, in terms of stakes developed and range of options considered, will in general outweigh these initial start-up costs of participation. If development success is measured in terms of long-term and sustainable gains – as it almost certainly should be – then short-circuiting the process of community consultations and participation is a retrograde step.

The Vanuatu project reviewed below indicates how an open-ended process of discussion and community involvement resulted in unearthing a root problem that was impeding all previous development efforts in this country. A set of solutions were developed that brought together elements of tradition and modernity in a locally-appropriate combination that is legitimate and effective and easily accessible by all citizens, and not just those who are better educated or better connected.

**Background**

Known earlier as the New Hebrides, the Vanuatu Republic consists of over 80 small islands, spread over an area of 12,200 square miles, and having a population of 172,000 persons. The islands are variously of volcanic and coral origin and their topography varies from low coastal plains to rough mountainous and heavily forested areas in the interior. A very wide dispersal of human settlements adversely affects development efforts in this country. The government's capacity to deliver basic services equitably is severely constrained by the distance between villages and the rough terrain makes travel and communications both difficult and expensive.

The land and the sea provide the country's major economic resources. Since there are few minerals and little potential exists for widespread industrialization, agriculture remains the basis for subsistence of more than 80 percent of the population. The ni-Vanuatu have a tradition of agriculture-based village life, organized in small, close-knit communities, with authority resting in the traditional chief.

The rural areas where most people live were largely neglected during the period of colonial rule. A policy of extraction where possible and abandonment where necessary

characterized the colonial government's attitude toward these areas. This legacy has resulted in a severely inequitable distribution of services. Administrative centers in Port Vila and Luganville are provided with high-quality education, health care, transport and water facilities, while rural communities enjoy none of these benefits.

In 198O, following a period of nationalistic struggle, much of which centered on land issues, the New Hebrides achieved independence and became the Republic of Vanuatu. A Provincial Government Act was passed that was intended to devolve greater authority upon provincial governments, particularly in relation to development matters. However, since no mechanisms were put in place to increase citizens' involvement in decision-making, provincial governments proved to be not much better than the national government in responding to the needs and aspirations especially of rural residents.

## Process and Objectives

ESHDP's intervention in Vanuatu was aimed at engaging vulnerable communities in the tasks of identifying the root causes behind persistent livelihood security problems. At the start, the team focused its efforts upon villages threatened by environmental degradation, particularly those located in sensitive watershed areas. The government provided the team with a list of environmentally vulnerable locations, and after visiting these sites, team members selected the Lolihor Watershed area in North Ambrym for initiating a participatory people-centered demonstration project. Processes and methods piloted in this area were to provide the foundations for initiating similar projects elsewhere in the country.

The initiative was organized as a partnership among the ESHDP team, the National Planning and Statistics Office, the Department of Local Government, and local NGOs and community-based organizations. A three-person core team was formed consisting of a UNDP community development specialist and two government department representatives.

A participatory approach was developed to involve communities in discussions of cause and effect related to livelihood security issues. An open-ended methodology was adopted that resulted from team members' acute awareness of limitations in participatory approaches that are primarily sector-focused and that do not regard people's well-being as the basic unit of analysis. While such narrow approaches can help to construct communities' "wish lists" related to sectors such as water, sanitation, health and education, they are rarely helpful for identifying underlying issues and examining the root causes of problems.

An open-ended community profiling and project identification exercise was undertaken among villages and settlements in the selected area with the objective of assessing people's overall state of well being. There was no prior agenda and no lists of questions were formulated in advance. The idea was simply to arrive at a common understanding of problems and to involve all residents in this exercise. All development jargon was omitted and activities were focused simply and directly toward assisting people to consider their collective well being in several interconnected areas, such as health, employment, education, inter- and intra-clan relationships, etc.

It was considered extremely important that the process remain respectful of local customs. For instance, permission was always obtained from the village chief before any discussions were taken up with community members. "After talking with the *rengrengmal*, our high chief," recounts Sali Atel, a 45-year old man from Fanrareo village, "the project team recruited me as a member. My task was to help the team clarify what villagers were actually saying when they responded to questions from the team, and to help villagers put their questions to the project team."

Communities divided themselves into different sub-groups representing different concerns and problem areas. All members of the community were encouraged to take part in these discussions. "I remember I was chosen by the church group in our village, Ranon, to join the discussions," says Nelly Tafeo, a mother of four children and wife of village elder, Billy Bong. "Since few other women were willing to speak out, the project team member in our group saw to it that I must also have my say on the matter being discussed." Each sub-group considered current problems from a historical viewpoint and evaluated alternative scenarios for the future. It took approximately three days for villagers to complete these participatory analysis and planning activities. On the final day of the community meeting, people began to discuss plans for the future.

Core team members moderated the process where necessary but they did not attempt to dominate or steer the discussions. Since they had no personal stakes in the outcomes, they intervened only to carry the process along. Nonetheless, communities were frequently suspicious of their motives. Some expected immediate announcements of project packages, so team members were often required to reiterate that they did not bring any development "cargo" with them or have any undisclosed agendas or any preconceived projects to implement.

It was hoped that through this involvement people's ability to make sound development choices would increase and mechanisms to foster micro-level participation would begin to emerge. The project team believed that the emergence of local-level decision-making bodies with a capacity for managing local development efforts would provide communities with a basis for sustainable development. Projects and programs identified in this process could be implemented by these local bodies, with supplementary assistance and support provided by government agencies and external donors. Along with identifying local people's needs and development aspirations, therefore, the project aimed at constructing grassroots-level institutions that would mediate between local people and state agencies and that could function as appropriate vehicles for implementing future development ventures.

**Unearthing the Obstacle: Land Disputes As the Core Problem**

It was hardly clear at the start that land and land-related issues would come to occupy center-stage. As the process unfolded, however, it soon became clear that an early resolution of land issues was essential. "In those days, people involved in land disputes would destroy each other's crops, damage water tanks, and prevent the building of more classrooms and clinics. They would fight with each other rather than talk about settling their boundary claims," recounts John Masing, a youth leader in Fanla village. It became obvious to both the team and the villagers that unless land rights were securely recorded to the satisfaction of all concerned, no other development problems could be addressed effectively.

The fundamental nature of the land problem became clear once communities became engaged with the participatory process and when they started expressing themselves freely and fearlessly. People throughout the area stated that *haryelyelan tone ruan gerwuten* (changing for a better life) would be impossible until each family had enough land to produce sufficient food.

Members of the core team learned that ownership of more than <u>80 percent</u> of cultivable area was disputed. They also discovered that most religious and political differences amongst clans and villages in this area stemmed from this basic conflict that lay at the root of continuing poverty and livelihood insecurity.

The problem arose, the core team learned, when land alienated to the government during the colonial period was handed back to indigenous landowners following independence in 1980. In the intervening two hundred years, much of the oral history associated with land ownership had been lost. Since boundaries had never been formally recorded or titles registered – not even by the colonial government – oral histories were all that people could rely upon for staking claim to a particular piece of land.

"With their lands granted to government and to foreign planters, and with the keepers of the tradition disregarded and their services unutilized," explains Chief Tokon Sam, "oral histories had been almost forgotten." Land rights had not been recorded during nearly two hundred years that the country remained under foreign occupation. The traditional authority of village chiefs had eroded under successive British and French administrations, but nothing was put in its place that could uphold land rights.

As a result of this situation, most arable land in Vanuatu was under some form of dispute and remained underutilized and unproductive. Huge tracts of arable lands were lying barren and unplowed, while a large and growing number of families had insufficient land for meeting even their basic survival requirements. Land is the principal economic asset in this area, where nearly all households derive their incomes from agriculture. When rights to land are disputed, as they mostly were in this area, families do not know today where they will farm tomorrow.

Robbed of livelihood security in this manner, many families had started moving on to higher slopes and marginal lands, and many had made their way into the country's rich virgin rainforest. This was hard and often dangerous work, no doubt, but the fear of eviction was less in remote mountainous areas compared to the richer lands in the plains. Increasing encroachments, it was estimated, would result in destroying all remaining rainforest in less than ten years.

Everyone was losing out but no one could fashion a solution, at least not individually or independent of the government. Legions of prior development programs carried out in this area had failed to come to grips with this underlying problem. Conflicts over land were not only denying many families a capacity for earning a better livelihood; they were also undermining the sustainability and local ownership of many community projects. For example, one village's water pipes were ripped out by residents of another because they crossed over disputed land. A health clinic was not maintained and infrequently used

since it was located on disputed land. And an apparently viable modern farming project was abandoned for the same reason.

From time to time in the past, the government had sent in land survey teams but these officials were usually greeted with suspicion and often chased away by villagers, sometimes violently. Villagers mistrusted the government's motives and suspected that land survey and registration might result in further alienation, as they had in the past, or in increased taxes.

**Devising an Appropriate Solution**

How could the basic problem of land rights be tackled in this climate of distrust? Hostility existed not only between villagers and the government, but also among different villages and clans. Though a number of project ideas had been generated at each village meeting, participants were commonly of the view that no other development enterprise could be undertaken profitably without first resolving land disputes. But resolving this deep-rooted issue was no easy matter.

"After late-night discussions with the team, we realized the need to form an organization consisting of representatives who were trusted by the people and who could bring their fears and concerns to bear upon the problem at hand," tells Pastor Lincoln William of the local Presbyterian Church. "Team members encouraged us to agree on procedures for decision-making and mechanisms for solving collective problem."

Such mechanisms would ensure that local control was maintained and accountability fostered. Most villagers highlighted the need for closer cooperation among villages located within the Lolihor Watershed area. Participants recommended and their chiefs accepted the need for setting up a Local Development Council (LDC) that would be responsible for such inter-village coordination and planning. Each village selected two or three people to represent them on this body, and officer bearers of the Council were elected by the assembled village representatives. The primary mandate of the LDC was to assist in the planning and implementation of area development initiatives as identified during the community profiling and analysis activities.

Given the level of trust that had been established with communities through the earlier needs assessment and participatory planning exercises, the ESHDP team started to work alongside the newly established LDC and it provided this council with assistance in areas relating to project management and negotiations with donors and government agencies. These are roles that the ESHDP team continues to play today.

The first and most important initiative taken up by the LDC concerned regularization of land rights. During the village discussions that had preceded the LDC's formation, it had emerged that though customary systems of settling land conflicts and traditional keepers of ownership history had become dormant, they could still be brought to life. Chiefs – who were traditionally expected to resolve land disputes and who used to have the final say on all such matters – still existed and were well respected in most villages. Decades of colonial rule accompanied by growing factional conflicts among villages and clans had eroded the chiefs' authority. But these people remained and their traditional roles could and should be revived – this was the view favored by most villagers.

Villagers held the view that the formal systems, which the government was seeking to implement, were too complex and confusing for them to understand. These systems would further reduce people's control over their land. They recommended that a system be implemented that was based on modifying the well-understood and highly regarded indigenous arrangements.

Given the high degree of sensitivity and emotion surrounding land issues, it became clear the ESHDP team had an important and delicate mediating role to play in this process. A project was prepared in consultation with village chiefs, landowners, other villagers, and government agencies, such as the Department of Lands and Survey, which were centrally concerned with these issues. This project had four phases that were developed sequentially. Each successive stage was developed in response to the learning that was acquired in the previous phase.

A Social Investigation Phase started the project. Local volunteers and other resource persons were mobilized to assess area residents' attitudes regarding different aspects of the land problem. Attitudes were surveyed relating to traditional beliefs and practices, registration and documentation, land use patterns, and appropriate methods for transfer and disposal of land. What systems of land records would villagers prefer, and with what methods would they feel most comfortable and secure? This information was elicited through public interviews; it was carefully documented, and analyzed by the project team and volunteers.

Once this basic information had been compiled and analyzed, an Intensive Training and Community Mobilization Phase was kicked off. Communities and leaders were mobilized to enter into dialogue with government agencies regarding specific procedures to be followed for land survey, registration, and settlement of disputes. Who would be responsible for each of these activities and how would they conduct themselves? A group of18 national and local community organizers attended the theoretical and practical training sessions organized by the core team. They went on to train villagers in the techniques and methods that would be followed for survey and registration.

Local survey teams were trained to assist government technicians and traditional chiefs, both of whom were crucial to this process. While government staffs performed the technical side of the work, surveying land and recording boundaries with the help of sophisticated equipment; responsibility for assigning rights over newly recorded lands lay primarily with the village chiefs.

In order to demystify the technology and to bring it closer to the people whom it was supposed to serve, landowners and other interested villagers were selected for technical training. A total of 140 village residents served as technical resource persons on behalf of clans, villages, and groups (including religious, youth and women's groups).

To explain the process involved to everyone concerned, community assemblies were organized at frequent intervals in villages. Villagers assembled at these meetings were kept informed of the goals and strategies of this initiative and they were encouraged to organize themselves into local committees that would help to coordinate project implementation. Local theater groups were involved and they conducted special drama performances throughout the region. The subject of these performances centered upon land and the process that was underway to resolve an ages-old problem. These plays

generated much discussion and public support for the resolution process from the outset.

The third phase of the project was the most technologically intensive. Villagers who had been trained during the previous phase worked alongside specialist government staffs for implementing the Land Survey and Registration Phase. Combined teams of specialists and village representatives trained by government surveyors in the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) units and other sophisticated equipment went on to plot village and individual land boundaries. It was felt that the use of such scientific equipment would make for quick and accurate records, so that the momentum of enthusiasm built toward the project and its goals could be maintained and carried forward.

Involving government surveyors and villagers together in joint survey teams proved to be a cost-effective way of working in this rugged, remote and difficult terrain. Local participation also helped in overcoming the long history of hostility and suspicion of government officials. The technical surveys comprised one part of this task of recording land rights. The other part consisted of assigning land rights to specific groups and individuals. Village teams were selected by the LDC and organized by the core ESHDP team for the purpose of coordinating the assignment exercise in each village. The customary oral historian, who was now also required to record all decisions on paper, headed these village teams. These teams sat with each clan and village, listened to their stories, and carefully recorded the history of land that emerged at these meetings.

The last part of the project consisted of a Conflict Resolution Phase. While most land assignments have been decided by common consensus, some are still the subject of dispute. It would have been surprising, indeed, if such had not been the case. In anticipation of this need for conflict resolution, the core team brought villagers together at each of the previous stages to discuss problems as they arose and to devise resolutions as they thought just and appropriate. Conflict resolution was, thus, a continuous part of the process besides being also its final phase. This stage of the project is nearly complete. It has involved bringing all stakeholders together to discuss and agree on the apportionment and use of land. These agreements are then recorded and endorsed by the local chief.

**Results and Scaling-Up**

Communities in the Lolihor Watershed area have been able to reach agreements about the use and apportionment of land to specific families. Village consensus was endorsed by the traditional chief and recorded, both by the oral historian and by the government teams. Survey teams, trained and led by a government surveyor but also including village representatives, used global satellite positioning equipment to peg out the boundaries that were decided for each family. These records are now stored in a central computer system at the Department of Lands and Survey. Land disputes are now mostly a thing of the past in the Lolihor area.

Some shortcomings remain that will have to be addressed as capacity and resolve strengthen and grow. Though they are much more securely vested with land rights, villagers are still unable to use their lands as collateral for loans. Legal and contractual mechanisms are simply not in place in Vanuatu to facilitate these kinds of transactions.

Some villagers want to wait for the government to deal with these matters, while others wish to take them into their own hands and find appropriate local solutions.

These and other problems affecting collective well being continue to be debated actively within village councils and area forums. Established in the course of project implementation, these local institutions have outlived the project, serving as a viable means for addressing multiple local needs and aspirations. What has been put in place is a local capacity that can assist villagers in dealing with diverse problems and opportunities as these arise.

The approach piloted in the Lolihor area has been found useful as well for other parts of the country. Procedures for resolving land disputes and recording land rights developed in the Lolihor area are being replicated in four other watershed areas. Villagers of the Lolihor area have been employed as trainers and project workers in these follow-up projects – a useful way to multiply the skills developed in the pilot phase.

This project illustrates that so-called "unsophisticated" communities with little formal education can control local affairs responsibly. They can make sound decisions, and they can manage these affairs well – if they are given the opportunity, along with necessary support. Potential exists among all rural communities to become managers of their own affairs. But developing this potential and bringing it to fruition requires considerable amendments in traditional methods of project implementation.

Extensive discussion is required to fully explore the history of a problem and its current manifestations and to reach consensus on the most appropriate course of action. This process can be tedious and it requires great patience on the part of project staffs. It is important that facilitators do not rush people through the process. This can be quite a different way of working for many people, so ongoing training is required.

Participatory processes that are concerned with getting local residents to "buy into" preconceived programs are rarely capable of identifying problems; even issues that are of fundamental importance to area residents get obscured when participation is controlled in this manner. By contrast, the open-ended and inclusive process developed in Vanuatu was capable of involving large sections of the local community in speaking up about the problems that affected them deeply.

This project also demonstrates the immense importance of understanding how local traditions can be combined with modern methods to effect sustainable solutions. Despite the considerable efforts of the school, the church, and the cash economy and in spite of increasing exposure to western lifestyles and values, a significant number of people in the developing world continue to respect traditional beliefs and practices. When development projects ignore this fact, it is to everyone's detriment.

In the Vanuatu case, it was only as a result of the community assessment process that the critical land issue was revealed, and it was only when traditional methods were considered that an acceptable solution could be devised and implemented. Land is the foundation of the local economy and it has always been the primary basis for social security. The Vanuatu government had realized the problem and it had sent in its surveyors earlier to do something about these issues. But it was not until communities

began to freely explore the land issue among themselves that the underlying problems were detected and appropriate solutions identified.

The use of customary processes for resolving conflict further reinforces the relevance and effectiveness of traditional knowledge. It can provide solutions to modern day problems – giving currency to the wisdom of looking within for answers, rather than blindly emulating foreign models. Such processes must now become firmly embedded within responsive and responsible local institutions to ensure that sustainable solutions continue to be devised in the future. The construction of the Local Development Council and the revival of community discussion forums augurs well in this respect for future development efforts in Vanuatu.

# Chapter 10

# CEREBRAL:
## A Grassroots Initiative for Assisting Children with Cerebral Palsy in Ukraine

**By**
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## Introduction

Virtually no social and economic support systems existed in Ukraine in the early 1990s to deal with the problems faced by disabled children and their parents. Government officials had no time for the handicapped, and hardly any official support was provided that could make life easier for these citizens. The state was in withdrawal following the transition from communism, state agencies were being rolled back, and their budgets were severely restricted. Civil society, too, was hardly strong or capable of taking any sustained initiative of its own. CSOs were banned by law during the long period of communist rule. Recently emerged from this period, people of Ukraine rarely considered any agency apart from the state to be relevant for providing social services. With neither state nor civil society in a position to deal with them effectively, a host of social and economic problems were besieging the citizens of Ukraine.

It was not just the weakness of structures that impaired citizens' capacities to deal with these problems. As the other cases in this volume indicate, citizens can and have combined their energies and resources to fashion coordinated responses to collective problems. The special problem in Ukraine concerned its citizens' lack of familiarity with civic action. Having relied on the state for most of two generations to provide all forms of social support, not many Ukrainians were inclined to consider acting on their own behalf. Attitudes among state agencies were also not supportive of self-help by citizens' groups. Most bureaucrats considered social support activities as being entirely within the state's domain and outside that of society. Legitimizing citizens' initiatives – among government officials as well as among citizens themselves – was therefore the first hurdle that any determined CSO would have to cross.

The first set of CSOs to start operating in this environment were bound to have an especially difficult time. The case of *Cerebral* – a voluntary organization set up to deal with the problems of handicapped children – illustrates the difficulties involved in setting up CSOs in countries where civil society has historically been quite weak. The founders of this organization had no easy time finding support from either state or society.

Support by external actors, including UNDP, was helpful in this context both in terms of improving the external environment and for building capacity internally within the organization. UNDP's intervention has been critical especially at times when the organization found itself dealing with hostile government bureaucracies.

It is difficult to blame particular departments or specific individuals for not supporting a civil society organization in this situation. Attitudes and beliefs inherited from the past had made it difficult for most Ukrainians, including government officials, to think of CSO

initiatives as legitimate. The first set of CSOs in this country would have to play the difficult role of pioneer and trailblazer. What *Cerebral* has accomplished must be measured, therefore, not simply in terms of its direct achievements – numbers of handicapped children assisted, cerebral palsy centers opened, and so forth – equally important is the contribution this organization has made toward opening space for other CSOs to function and to be respected in this country.

**Background: Disabled Citizens in Ukraine**

Disabled and infirm citizens have never had an easy time in Ukraine. Public authorities have paid little heed to their special concerns. Roads, sidewalks, public transportation, stores, schools and theaters have not been adapted, for instance, to facilitate access by people in wheelchairs. Virtually no assistance has been provided by the state by way of social rehabilitation or employment support programs.

Disabled persons were supposed to be given financial support by the state. Employers were required by law to provide equal employment opportunities to the handicapped and to make working conditions suitable for their employment. But these laws were implemented half-heartedly and in part, largely because society's concern for the handicapped was hardly well developed.

Employers, including state agencies, felt little compassion or compulsion to hire handicapped persons. Legal provisions existed but they were not strictly enforced, as in many other countries of the world. A small amount of financial assistance was given to those among the disabled who were aged sixteen or older, though families with younger children were given no assistance at all. The raging inflation of the late 1980s reduced such financial aid drastically in real terms. During the early 1980s, aid to handicapped individuals amounted to just a little less than most middle class persons earned; at the end of this decade, their stipends amounted to less than a tenth of average middle class earnings, placing them squarely below the official poverty line.

The state was also responsible under its laws for providing medical care, assistance for social rehabilitation, guidance and career counseling, etc. Unfortunately, however, governmental officials responsible for their implementation mostly ignored these laws. Not a single rehabilitation center existed in all of Ukraine. Deprived of specialized treatment and denied the chance of an adequate education, career opportunities were foreclosed for nearly all children who had the misfortune to contract cerebral palsy in Ukraine.

Though a new constitution was adopted in 1990 by the independent state of Ukraine, no new provisions were enacted that could alleviate the misery of its handicapped citizens. No single ministry, department or agency was exclusively or primarily responsible for providing assistance to handicapped persons. Falling between several different government agencies, each relatively unconcerned, the laws – inherited from communist times – remained as poorly enforced as before.

To a large extent, these laws were not enforced strictly because there was little support in society for the objectives that these laws represented. Attitudes toward disabled children were unhelpful, to say the least, and parents often regarded handicapped children as a punishment from heaven. In many cases, fathers had abandoned these

children, leaving mother and child to fend for themselves.  A growing number of disabled children were to be found begging on the streets of Kyiv.  School authorities were known to have turned away children who were visibly handicapped.  A few kindergarten and special-purpose schools were set up for disabled children but even these also did not accept cases of advanced cerebral palsy.  No social awareness programs were ever considered for implementation.

Physical isolation combined with social neglect and official apathy to make the life of a cerebral palsy child an agony of despair and suffering in Ukraine.  Children with physical or mental disabilities were raised in almost total isolation in this country, and they had almost no chance to communicate with others of their age group.  Typically, fathers would leave such families amid constant psychological stress and disabled children were brought up in single-parent households.

**Making a Start**

Remenik Lia, an electrical engineer by training, and herself the mother of a handicapped child, determined to do something to remedy this sorry situation.  She abandoned her high-paying job, and devoted her efforts to securing a future for her fourteen-year old daughter and other Ukrainian children who suffered from cerebral palsy.  Lia made contact with other families and a small group of parents was formed at the start.  Taking the name of *Cerebral*, this group of parents grew into a mass movement that has succeeded not only in putting together the physical infrastructure for rehabilitation and training but also, and more important, in changing public attitudes and official policies toward the disabled.  Handicapped children trained by this group are finding gainful employment in the public and the private sectors.  Instead of being derided and ignored by society, they are creative and self-reliant individuals, who derive both compassion and respect from their peers.

Getting to this point was no easy ride for the group.  To start with, members of the group met with government officials and asked for more vigorous implementation of the laws that existed.  This small group of concerned parents met with mayors and with other public officials, but their efforts were to prove of no avail. Officials were prone to pay little heed to a group that had no official status and no mass following. In a country where thousands of citizens were undergoing the trauma of political transition and economic dislocation, public officials had their hands full with more pressing and immediate concerns.  They were unable or unwilling to do anything more than to hear the group out and file its concerns away for some later and less troubled time. Efforts to lobby parliament to enact a new set of laws proved equally unhelpful.

Lia and her associates decided that they have to do something on their own.  Starting in whatever small way was possible with their combined resources, they aimed at developing a model of action that would serve to demonstrate the need and the benefits of policy reform.

In early 1989, the group, now grown to include eleven parents, enlisted the services of a rehabilitation therapist working at an orthopedics institute in Kyiv.  Each of these parents had a child between two and fourteen years of age who suffered from cerebral palsy and even more from lack of any social and community support systems that could help make life more tolerable and enjoyable.  Most of these parents had exhausted all available

opportunities and found no relief; and now they had banded together to create new ones by themselves.

Little did they realize at that time, their troubles had only just begun. There was an acute shortage of trained professionals in the country who were competent to deal with rehabilitation therapy. The one trained professional who was available, and with whom the group made contact, was the only trained specialists in the entire Kyiv region. Parents from all over the Ukraine brought their children for treatment to his poorly equipped basement office located in a small space made available by a local institute. Encouraged by the skill and dedication of this therapist, the members of Lia's group joined their efforts to locate and rent a suitable space where better quality care could be provided to their children. To attain the legal status that was necessary for the group to rent or lease a building, they registered themselves as a voluntary organization, taking the name and title, *Cerebral*.

## Mapping a Strategy

The group found that they had to start by collecting information related to the magnitude of the problem that they had vowed to resolve. Hardly any records existed that could reliably indicate the number of children in the Kyiv area who suffered from cerebral palsy. Despite the fact that each case of cerebral palsy was required by law to be documented by hospitals and clinics, no such records were maintained in practice. Group members found hospital records to be incomplete and outdated and altogether unreliable. Children who had died continued to be retained on these records, while many among the living found no mention whatsoever.

To identify the scope of *Cerebral's* actions in the future, its members conducted a census of afflicted children in the area of Kyiv. Relying on volunteer efforts by the initial set of eleven members, this task took a little over a year to complete, and result was well worth the time invested. Instead of fifty or a hundred suffering children, more than a thousand children were identified -- 1,522 children to be precise -- in Kyiv city who suffered from cerebral palsy. The problem was much larger than had ever before been realized, too large, anyhow, for just one trained professional to handle all by himself.

The group of eleven parents began to make regular contact with the parents of each afflicted child. They discovered that while some parents were only interested in receiving financial assistance, most parents sincerely wanted to help their child but they faced large number of problems and obstacles. Even if they had the money to take their child to hospital – and most parents were having a hard time during this period of economic dislocation – few trained doctors and hardly any specialized facilities were available to care for handicapped children. Public transport was not designed to ease access by handicapped persons, so taking the child to hospital was a major enterprise, not to be undertaken frequently or regularly.

As the membership of *Cerebral* grew with each new contact that was made, a strategy was developed that would help deal with these problems gradually and in step. The first task was to find a place to locate the one trained therapist who was available in all of Kyiv and to stock this facility with the equipment he required.

Even this seemingly straightforward task was not easy to accomplish. Each time the group rented some building and commenced its work at that place, a bureaucrat would appear at their doors armed with an eviction notice. Three times the group found a different location and three times bureaucrats from the Ministry of Public Health closed down the small rehabilitation centers that these parents had managed to create. It was not that these bureaucrats were hostile in particular to *Cerebral* or to its activities; unfamiliarity with CSOs was the basic cause of all these actions which led, in many cases, to an overly strict application of the rules.

*Cerebral's* members refused to be cowed down by these thoughtless and hurtful actions. They consistently bounced back after being trampled down by the government. Because they knew that no one else would fight on behalf of their children, members of *Cerebral* retained fortitude in the face of adversity. Eventually and with help provided by its international donor agencies, *Cerebral* was able to tide over these initial difficulties.

Through this time of struggle, *Cerebral's* membership was continuously increasing. Other parents joined with the organization, along with doctors, nurses, counselors, and ordinary citizens, all of whom were inspired by *Cerebral's* leadership and objectives.

While finding a permanent home for the organization was the first goal of the organization, staffing it with a cadre of dedicated and skilled professionals was an equally important objective. Though a number of doctors had pledged to provide their services free of charge, few among them were experienced in treating cerebral palsy cases.

Treatment could not consist of medicines alone, as the group soon realized. It was equally important to attend to the social and emotional needs of the child. An integrated and well-balanced model of rehabilitation was necessary, but no such model was available anywhere in the Ukraine. To find guidance for their own efforts, *Cerebral's* members were forced to look abroad. Fortunately, the organization could draw upon the professionals in its ranks. Persons who were already well versed in medicine, for example, could most readily learn through interaction with professionals in another country.

Alla Soloviova, a medical doctor and a member of the organization from the very beginning, went to Canada to study the methods that were being employed in that country to improve the quality of life of similarly afflicted children. She stayed in Canada for six months and she trained with Toronto University. Soloviova's visit to Canada was sponsored by Osvita, a Canadian aid agency.

In Canada she understood that injections and drugs are not the main treatments for children afflicted with cerebral palsy. Physical rehabilitation had to be complemented by social rehabilitation, a need only very poorly understood in Ukraine at that time. She visited hobby clubs and other places where such children could spend time in the company of their peers. Children played and studied together in these centers, and their parents also found a place to meet with others who could readily understand their needs and share their concerns. The mutual support networks that developed at these integrated centers were as important to the development of the child as the medical advice and physical therapy that were provided.

Soloviova shared her experiences with other *Cerebral* members and they decided to create similar integrated child development centers in the Ukraine. Drawing upon the Canadian example and also that of some other countries, *Cerebral's* membership began to implement its own vision of an integrated physical, social and occupation rehabilitation program for cerebral palsy children.

**Projects and Activities**

Attracting funding from the private sector and from international donor agencies, *Cerebral* started to translate its vision into reality. Shell International Gas provided the largest part of the funds for the first children's center set up by *Cerebral*. This facility, which started with an initial intake of just ten children, was designed to look like a typical kindergarten. It was a place for treatment and also for recreation. In the child's mind the center was associated less with calipers and injection needles and more with games and friendship, so they came willingly and joyfully to attend. Parents of these children also attended at the centers. Gradually then formed themselves into a mutual support group. Most became dedicated members of the organization that was providing renewed hope for their children and succor to their own tired bodies and souls.

A woman who came to the organization in 1990 to seek treatment for her daughter, Lena, provides an example of such dedication. Her situation was rather typical of Ukraine at that time. The young girl, Lena, could not sit upright though she was already four years old; her father had left the family; mother and child had very little money to live on; consequently, the mother was in a state of utter despair. After joining with *Cerebral*, however, she found other mothers in the same situation as herself with whom she could share her worries. The center provided her with a safe haven, where she along with Lena could learn to stand on their feet and develop faith in their own abilities. These experiences gave her the power to live, and she determined to share her faith with others. Participating actively in organizational activities for three years, she was later made responsible for a new *Cerebral* center, becoming regional manager for Pechersk District.

Lena, her daughter, learns to draw, and her teachers think she is talented enough to earn her living as a painter. It is hard to say what fate would have befallen mother and daughter without *Cerebral's* help, though it is clear that without this support and encouragement, their lives would have lacked stimulus and challenge.

There is an endless supply of examples, each one representing the life story of some member of *Cerebral*. Children with cerebral palsy and their parents found friends and a support system in this organization and most cannot imagine their lives now without it. In addition to being treated by skilled professionals, most children are also learning vocational skills that will equip them with the capacity to earn their own livelihood, independently and with respect.

In the space of a few years, *Cerebral* has expanded to ten centers located in different Kyiv districts. More than 600 children attend at these centers, which provide regular employment to 60 trained professionals, dealing with different aspects of treatment and rehabilitation.

**Scaling-Up**

Expanding its operations was relatively easier than starting these operations in the first place, lending support to the adage, "nothing succeeds like success."  After the first center had become operational, the organization held demonstrations and exhibitions of children's artwork to raise awareness of its work among the people of Kyiv.  As public support grew for *Cerebral's* activities, government agencies also started taking more interest in its activities.  To canvass support among them, the organization invited key officials to visit the center and review its achievements for themselves.

One of the most influential persons who visited the center and later became a keen supporter of *Cerebral's* work was the wife of the country's President, Mme. Ludmilla Kuchma.  Mme. Kuchma headed the Ukrainian Foundation for Children, so her help was as useful for attracting funds as it was for influencing government policy.

With its experience in establishing and successfully running the first set of centers, *Cerebral* was now in a position to advise the government on social policy related to handicapped children.  Officials who had seen *Cerebral's* work at first hand were quite willing to listen to its members' advice – far more willing than they had been earlier when the same members were just launching their enterprise.

Based on the experience of the early centers a model was developed to support a network of integrated children's centers to be set up in all of the Ukraine, starting with the Kyiv region.  *Cerebral's* members joined with other interested experts, including doctors and teachers to work out this model, whose stages parallel the life and development of a cerebral palsy child.

The model as developed by this group has four connected parts:

• Medical services to assist physical rehabilitation and develop basic motor skills;
• Social services to assist the development of communication skills and to enable a child to function well in society;
• Vocational development, including professional training, guidance and counseling, and career planning; and
• Hobby clubs and excursion trips for children and families.

Quite a large amount of financial support was required to implement these rather ambitious plans.  It was clear that the government could not by itself provide all of the required resources, so *Cerebral* went out to seek financial assistance from international organizations.  The following facilities and projects have been implemented with the help of the aid that has been received.

Network of Social Rehabilitation Centers  This project, supported by UNICEF, resulted in the establishment of ten branch centers in different districts of Kyiv.  612 children of Kyiv attend these centers regularly.  Medical equipment supplied by UNICEF enables *Cerebral* to treat such a large number of children and more who are joining every day.  The plan of work in these centers follows the model that was developed initially for the first center.  Treatment is complemented by social activities and mutual support groups provide parents with the physical and emotional supports they need.  The children get a

chance to communicate with their peers in the clubs and discos that form part of these integrated centers.

Identifying Employment Opportunities   To assist with the task of helping cerebral palsy children find employment in the future, *Cerebral* enlisted the help of sociologists from the National Academy of Sciences.  They conducted an extensive survey to identify the career paths that were open for people suffering from varying intensities of cerebral palsy.  They spoke to employers and also to disabled persons who were employed or who wanted to take up employment.

About 30 percent of all disabled individuals are able and willing to take up full-time employment, their data showed, a number that is roughly equal in all countries, developed and developing.  Positions that require extensive use of computer skills are preferred by most disabled persons and also by potential employers.  Other popular choices include psychological services, and careers in commerce and the arts.

Disabled people were unable to occupy the positions they wanted and which they could fill with capacity if not distinction because professional training programs did not exist that could support their ambitions and because prevailing social attitudes militated against the employment of handicapped persons.  *Cerebral* disseminated the results of this survey along with its recommendations to policy makers and employers' associations throughout the country.  This report proposed that local governments improve education and career planning facilities for the disabled, establish psychological and career counseling services for them, and reduce the tax burden on companies that hire disabled persons in specified numbers.

A working model had already been developed by *Cerebral* in its own centers, so it could suggest these policy recommendations without attracting any charges of being impractical and unrealistic.  With additional support from UNICEF, *Cerebral* offered computer training programs at its centers, not just to cerebral palsy children but also to a larger group of children and adults with disabilities.  Dozens of unemployed individuals with disabilities were able to develop their professional skills and find gainful employment in government and the private sector.

"Together for Development" Project    The most difficult part of *Cerebral's* agenda consists of changing social attitudes.  Though some change is apparent that has accompanied the visible success of this organization's work among the handicapped, the burden of the past still weighs heavily on the minds of most Ukrainians.

A number of initiatives have been launched by *Cerebral* to deal more actively with people's prejudices against the handicapped.   One such initiative consists of establishing a network of hobby clubs for youth and young children.  Rather than being restricted to handicapped children, such centers are open to all children, handicapped or not, and they provide opportunities for these two groups to meet and interact with one another.  Handicapped children learn that they are not, after all, so different from other kids; and non-handicapped children develop sensitivity toward the concerns of their less fortunate peers.  A new generation of Ukrainians is being developed through this project, supported by the International Renaissance Foundation, that will share none of the ill-informed opinions of the previous generation.

*Cerebral* has also taken an active role in reforming national policies and laws relating to the handicapped.  In conjunction with Mme. Kuchma, the President's wife, *Cerebral* convened a meeting of the four key government ministries and local governments where it presented its agenda for reform.  This meeting, held in Kyiv in June 1998, also provided a venue for *Cerebral* to acquaint officials from different Ukraine regions with the results of its work.  Many local governments have expressed interest in developing similar facilities in their regions, and some have already commenced constructing centers.

By the end of 1998, the Kyiv city administration had earmarked funds for the first set of six day-care centers for children with nervous system disabilities.  Not surprisingly, they chose to emulate the *Cerebral* model at these centers.  Other regional and local administrations are expected to follow suit.  Meanwhile, *Cerebral's* own network is expanding and two more centers will start functioning in Kyiv before the start of the new millenium.

**Lessons and Next Steps**

*Cerebral's*  example shows that a grassroots organization can successfully create a working model of social reform.  Starting out only with what they had among themselves, a small group of concerned citizens has within the space of a few years established a network of integrated rehabilitation centers that have served to secure and enrich the lives of cerebral palsy children and their families.  This organization has grown in this time and it now plays an important role in all policy matters related to the needs of the handicapped.  *Cerebral* is consulted regularly by legislators and government officials and it intervenes effectively in policy debates.

Much remains to be done, however.  Laws and government policies are still less helpful than *Cerebral* requires them to be, so legal reform continues to be a key organizational goal.  There is still a shortage of doctors and therapists with specialized skills related to treatment of the handicapped.  The network of integrated children's centers is growing faster than anyone had expected at the outset, though much slower than is required to cater to all of Ukraine's regions and cities.

All these achievements must be seen, however, in the context of severe economic stress that this country has been undergoing for the last several years.  Seen in this background, *Cerebral's* achievements are indeed remarkable, all the more so for the fact that it was citizens who took it upon themselves to remedy a situation their government seemed incapable of handling.

Being disturbed by an issue is not enough, their example illustrates, civil society organizations must act if they are to make a significant difference.  In doing so, they provide an example that other concerned groups can emulate.  Especially in countries where civil society is weak, and where government agencies are not accustomed to sharing space with CSOs, such actions can also serve to legitimize citizen-sponsored action more generally, thereby helping to improve the environment for CSOs at large.

## Chapter 11

## HOW CAN COOPERATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
## BE MADE MORE PRODUCTIVE?

### Anirudh Krishna

### Three Tasks of Strengthening Civil Society Organizations

Along with physical, financial, natural and human capital, social and institutional capital are also important for achieving development objectives and reducing poverty. Social capital refers to features such as norms, networks and social trust, that promote cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit. Institutional capital refers to those organizations and rules of the game that variously facilitate or obstruct the deployment of other forms of capital for achieving individual and collective purposes.

One important form of institutional capital existing in any society is comprised by its networks of civil society organizations (CSOs). Because they help in making connections between communities and their institutional environment, CSOs perform a crucial mediating role, bringing community-level social capital to bear upon societal objectives. Citizens who for lack of institutional connections are cut off from market opportunities and state programs are less capable of improving their livelihoods. Those who are better connected with the state and with the market are relatively better placed for improving their situations.

Civil society organizations can provide these essential connections between individuals and communities, on the one hand, and state and market agencies, on the other. Where CSOs are strong and capable, the tasks of development and poverty reduction can be much better served. Where they are weak or few in number, much needs to be done toward improving the connections that exist between individual talents and available opportunities. Social capital can remain latent and under-utilized in those countries and regions where CSOs are weak, and individuals and groups may be deprived of opportunities to derive full benefits from the resources they possess.

Three types of tasks are usually associated with supporting CSOs for the purposes of development and poverty reduction. Depending on the situation existing in any country or region, one or more of these tasks will constitute the main thrust of the support program.

- Helping engender a conducive environment,

- Enhancing internal capacities among CSOs, and

- Building bridges among CSOs and between CSOs and state organizations.

First, the environment must be conducive to the formation of citizens' action groups and other forms of non-state social mobilization. Situations such as those that existed within formerly communist countries are hardly conducive to voluntary collective action organized outside the purview of the state. In other states and at other times too,

citizens have faced obstacles in organizing for civic purposes. In many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, citizens have been discouraged by administrative action from organizing together in civic associations. Strengthening CSOs in these countries requires first engendering a climate that is conducive to the formation of such organizations. Liberalizing laws and rolling back the encroachments of the state on civic space will help in these situations to engender an environment where CSOs can emerge and grow.

The second aspect of strengthening civil society involves enhancing the performance capabilities of individual CSOs. Even given an enabling external environment, CSOs will not be able to perform their mediating functions effectively and efficiently unless they are competent, both technically and managerially, and unless strong bonds unite their members. CSOs that are not capable of staying abreast of state programs and market opportunities and which do not have the capacity to translate these opportunities into advantages for their members will most likely end up facing retrenchment and loss of membership. They will contribute little toward the goals of development and poverty reduction. Aid to civil society in these situations will need to be directed toward training and skills development and toward the implementation of pilot programs that help strengthen the bonds of membership and increase organizations' internal coherence.

Discerning the nature of the situation in any country relating to these two aspects – i.e., whether or not the environment is conducive to the formation of CSOs and how capable individual CSOs are internally – can serve to provide a preliminary assessment of the types of assistance required in that country. Aid programs in a country where the environment is less than conducive can focus upon efforts to liberalize the laws. Programs in other countries can to a greater extent concentrate on improving CSOs' internal capabilities.

In practice, however, both aspects will usually have to be addressed simultaneously in most cases. Improving the external environment is rarely possible unless civil society organizations have the capacity to act in support of such an environment. Donor agencies can assist to some extent in opening up space for civil society, but domestic CSOs will have to shoulder responsibility equally for monitoring and protecting this space. Watchdog and oversight functions will need to be performed by capable CSOs that will also need to be active for defending rights and articulating demands.

Maintaining an enabling environment will therefore require having strong and articulate CSOs. Equally, enhancing internal capacities is rarely fruitful until the environment enables these capacities to be engaged productively and in sustained manner with the diverse tasks required for poverty reduction. The objective of assisting civil society must be directed, thus, toward both these aspects: simultaneously helping to make the environment more enabling, while also enhancing internal capacities. The extent to which each of these functions will feature in the support program will depend upon the specific situation in any country.

Though facilitating an enabling environment and enhancing internal capabilities are regarded usually as the two principal axes of a support program, a third and equally relevant task is suggested by the cases considered in this volume. Poverty reduction is best accomplished, these cases show, when the capacities and resources of a multiplicity of organizations are combined together in mutually productive ways. In

addition to developing their internal capacities, a program of support for CSOs will also consider developing productive links among different organizations.

Social capital, harnessed by CSOs, will need to be brought into alliance with other forms of capital, physical, financial or natural, that are available with state or market agencies. In the domain of development and poverty reduction, thus, the third task of strengthening civil society will consist of building productive linkages between and among CSOs and government agencies.

The cases presented in this volume help to illuminate how each of these three tasks – engendering a conducive environment, enhancing internal capabilities, and building productive linkages – can be accomplished in practice.

**Facilitating an Enabling Environment**

An enabling environment exists when there are laws and policies and also institutions of governance that facilitate the productive engagement of civil society actors in the tasks of governance and development. The environment is more conducive for such productive engagement when:

- Laws and policies encourage (or, at least, do not discourage) citizens to form and to participate actively in CSOs, and

- Institutions of governance are available that promote the active participation of civil society actors in formulating policies and implementing plans for poverty reduction. These institutions provide the space for civic action, and they constitute a forum where civil society perspectives can be brought to bear upon policy formation at various levels.

Our cases reflect how both of these concerns can be addressed in some ways through programs of assistance to civil society organizations.

Laws and state policies obstructing the formation of CSOs have been reformed, for instance, in Laos, through the actions of CSOs backed by donor agencies. Many communities in Laos remained disconnected from state programs and from market opportunities, however, largely because they were poorly served by a very thin network of CSOs. Communities were hampered as a result in deploying their resources, including their social capital, toward enterprises that could help reduce poverty in these regions. Poverty in most regions went hand-in-hand with a weak CSO network, yet the government of this country, perhaps because of a recent history of war and civil conflict, was unwilling to embrace any growth in the infrastructure of civil society.

It would have been counterproductive in this situation to pressurize the government to change its views – many borrower countries have accepted such conditions under duress only to reverse them at a later time when financial pressures have abated. A more thoughtful and long-term productive strategy was devised that relied, instead, on allaying government leaders' fears through demonstration projects organized on a small scale and in cooperation with government agencies. An enabling environment was fostered – at a relatively gradual pace, no doubt, and developing in slow increments –

but ratcheting upward continually and in relatively little danger of collapsing or falling back.

Laws and policies have been amended, similarly, in Vanuatu, through the actions of civil society agents.  Highly formalized legal codes introduced during the period of colonial rule and kept in operation by the post-independence government were regarded by many rural residents as illegitimate and difficult to access.  These laws remained unimplemented even as land disputes proliferated and violence broke out between villagers and among communities.

Intervention by CSOs was instrumental in developing and instituting an innovative new system of land management that was backed simultaneously both by traditional norms and by government procedures.  Villagers and government agencies, at loggerheads with each other for years on this issue, were brought together by civil society actors to forge a cooperative and effective response to the situation.  A viable new institution was created following this process, which relied on melding the legitimacy that inheres in traditional systems with the efficacy that is promised by modern technology and management methods.

The Vanuatu case along with the case from Philippines suggests that what constitutes an appropriate institution will look different among different cultural contexts.  In particular, institutions will need to be developed that are at the same time both (a) legitimate in the eyes of area residents, and (b) effective at performing the tasks of poverty reduction.  Traditional institutions are still regarded as legitimate in many parts of the developing world, though introducing elements of modernity often helps to enhance their effectiveness for reducing poverty.  Bringing these two sets of structures closer – traditional and modern, local and national – is quite often a helpful strategy for constructing appropriate institutions. Developing such institutions in any given context will therefore require paying attention to the specifics of the particular situation.

In Philippines, for instance, the rights of indigenous people had been derogated for generations because no institutions existed that could help them forge beneficial linkages with external agencies, both state and market. National-level civil society actors pressurized the government into passing a series of new laws and policies that recognized the traditional rights of these people over all lands in their ancestral domains. To implement these laws and to assist residents of the Cordillera region to manage land and natural resources within their ancestral domains, new local institutions were set up that meshed traditional village institutions together with government agencies at the local level.  Peace and stability in this region are much better founded today as a result of this marriage of local practice with national policies and government programs.

The South African case illustrates another form of institutional innovation.  A united front of national-level CSOs combined their resources in this country to erect institutions that would involve the poor directly in discussions of poverty-related programs and policies.  Their program of action consisted of identifying the poor, discerning their concerns, and facilitating nationwide debate to discuss these problems and their likely solutions.  Along with civil society actors, national policy makers were also involved in hearing and reacting to the voices of the poor.  As a result of these endeavors, policies related to poverty reduction have become much better focused on concerns that the poor regard to be important, and better coordination has been achieved among government agencies

and CSOs in designing and implementing programs.  Most important, an institution has been established that is accessible to the poor and that involves them in large numbers in policy discussion.

Inappropriate institutions, including unhelpful rules and procedures, constitute a large part of the disabling environment faced by poor and vulnerable groups in developing countries.  Banking rules, for instance, that were developed for the most part among industrialized countries, require collateral to be provided in the form of cash or material assets.  Since they are not able to provide such collateral readily, credit is not available to the poor, even for undertaking well-conceived and profitable enterprises.  Reforming institutions is necessary in these situations to serve the needs of the poor.  As the examples of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Bank Rakyat in Indonesia show in the case of credit, institutional innovation is often key to making a significant dent on poverty.  The cases in the present volume illustrate how the task of appropriate institutional development can be facilitated in different situations through identifying and supporting suitable CSOs.

## Enhancing Capabilities among CSOs

Facilitating an enabling environment through reforming laws and policies and promoting appropriate institutional development forms one part of the agenda for supporting civil society.  A second part is comprised of programs aimed at enhancing capabilities within individual CSOs.

Capacity within a CSO has two related parts: (a) cohesiveness, and (b) professional skills.  The first aspect – cohesiveness – is related to the ability of an organization for retaining the allegiance of its members and involving them to the greatest possible extent in the objectives and tasks of the organization.  The second aspect – professional skills – is important for achieving these objectives in practice.

These two aspects of capacity are most likely to be interrelated.  Unless organizations have professionally skilled leaders and members, they will find it difficult to engage productively with their external environment to achieve the goals they have set for themselves.  Under-achieving organizations might find their membership dwindling.  Without skills, therefore, coherence might suffer.  Conversely, the best of skills might prove useless where members do not act cohesively in support of their more skilled associates.  Highly skilled leaders will quite often not succeed in obtaining the best results unless their efforts are backed by members who act cohesively in support of the organization's objectives.

Skills and cohesiveness – the two aspects of organizational capacity – are likely, therefore, to be closely related in practice.  Capacity-building programs will need to take account of each of these two aspects.  Most donor agencies have usually regarded only one of these aspects – professional skills – as relevant for their support programs, and many have neglected to take account of the other aspect, relating to the long-term health of the supported organization.  While professional skills will certainly need to be developed – including technical and financial skills, skills related to lobbying and advocacy, and also managerial skills – and while these are important to improve the effectiveness of any CSO; the support agency will need to remain watchful that these

skill-building efforts do not result in detaching one part of the membership (the skilled ones) from the rest (the less skilled ones).

Unless skills and leadership are broad-based within the organization, and unless more skilled members remain accountable to their less skilled companions, cohesiveness and legitimacy may suffer, resulting in organizational decay and loss of membership. The Uganda case shows, for instance, that when only the leaders of the Village Councils were trained to understand and apply government rules, and when other members lacked any such knowledge, the Councils became instruments for furthering leaders' personal ambitions. Not many villagers in Uganda feel strongly bound to their Council, as Opio-Odongo et al. show in Chapter 2, and hardly any Council has served as an effective mediator between the state and the people.

Programs to build capacity will therefore need to be more integrated in nature, taking a long-term view rather than focusing exclusively upon immediate results. Capacity-building cannot be a one-time effort but it needs to be followed through consistently. Unfortunately, however, many donor agency procedures, including project-based financing, have the effect of artificially restricting the time-horizons of field personnel. Many donors are unwilling to consider the benefits that accrue from long-term capacity-building exercises. Consequently, capacity-building either gets short shrift in many donor agency programs, or it is restricted to the development of specific technical skills, without considering the overall health and coherence of the organizations. That this need not necessarily be the case, however, is illustrated by the example of the Toco Foundation in Trinidad and Tobago, where donor agencies, including UNDP, have committed funds toward supporting a long-term program for area development.

Building long-term capacity for undertaking development tasks of different kinds is helped by knowing the range of capacity that exists and which can be built upon. Too often, however, donor agencies and government officials are not aware of the different CSOs that are operating in any country or sector. Far from knowing the strengths and abilities of these organizations, many officials are not even aware of their existence.

Mapping civil society in terms of organizations and capabilities proved to be very helpful in the Guatemala case. The process developed in Guatemala had three distinct stages that were concerned, respectively, with identifying CSOs, with assessing their respective capacities, and with designing programs to enhance these capacities. This systematic progression resulted in developing a methodology that can be usefully adapted for implementing capacity-building programs in other parts of the developing world.

Following any such process requires making considerable investments of time and money, but the payoffs in terms of knowledge gained and capacities generated more than compensated for these costs in Guatemala. A range of CSOs were identified that were able and willing to work in particular sectors. Projects were designed that could make best use of existing capacities while also seeking to enhance these capacities. This process resulted in achieving a good match between objectives and capacities. Most usually, however, the reverse process is followed. Projects and objectives are decided without considering available capacity, and the resulting mismatch gives rise to all-too-frequent failures of implementation.

Capacity-building in the Ukraine and in Laos also formed part of a long-term program that was aimed simultaneously at reforming state policies and at engendering a more conducive environment. Pilot programs were put together in these cases that could be used to demonstrate the advantages of particular organizational forms and technical interventions. A model for treating handicapped children was successfully piloted by *Cerebral*, the CSO concerned with this case, and it was made available for adaptation across the country.

In Laos, similarly, building capacity within the CSO sector required demonstrating first that CSOs could work effectively without inviting the hostility of the government. Persuasive results derived through building up the internal capacities of the first set of assisted CSOs proved helpful at a later stage in improving the environment for CSOs in general. Enhancing internal capabilities and fostering a conducive environment, each of these two tasks was made easier by undertaking the other one successfully, illustrating what was said earlier about the three basic tasks being interrelated.

In Laos as well as in Ukraine, in Guatemala, and in Trinidad and Tobago, the best results were achieved when CSOs were brought into cooperative relationships with state agencies. Strengthening CSOs quite often requires facilitating such constructive engagements among state and civil society actors.

**Building Bridges**

Civil society organizations will sometimes find themselves in conflict with the state – to preserve space for civic actions, to defend rights, etc. – but conflict is not the only form of relationship that CSOs can or should have with the state. The cases in this volume illustrate a range of situations where productive exchange and partnerships between state agencies and CSOs resulted in multiplying the benefits that either side could have achieved by acting in isolation from the other. Bridges also need to be built among different CSOs, so that capacities can be combined in mutually supportive ways.

Building bridges has many advantages in terms of advancing development and reducing poverty. Individuals get provided with more information and better access to government programs, so they are able to derive greater benefits from these programs and from the opportunities that are provided by engaging with the state and the market. Simultaneously, government agencies are able to draw upon citizens' energies, resources and talents for devising and executing national development plans, so these plans are enriched and made more productive. These mediating functions can be performed much better by CSOs that are involved in productive engagements with government agencies and with each other.

The advantages – for development and poverty reduction – of CSOs entering into cooperative relationships with state agencies are illustrated by many of the cases in this volume. In the Trinidad and Tobago case, for instance, an eco-tourism project was developed by the Toco Foundation working in tandem with the Ministry of Agriculture. Legal claim to protecting and developing public lands was provided through this association with a government ministry, and techniques of conservation and management appropriate for the local region were developed by the members of the Toco Foundation. Combining agency strengths provides the best reassurance that the tasks of poverty reduction will be addressed using the most suitable means available.

Following a principle of comparative advantage is helpful while allocating tasks among the partner agencies. In some cases, government agencies are better positioned for scaling up new methods and practices for use in large areas in the country, while community organizations have the advantage in terms of adapting this innovation to deal with variations in local conditions. Combining the wide reach of government with the local depth possessed by area-based CSOs can serve as an effective organizational strategy in these situations. *Cerebral's* example from Ukraine provides one illustration of such a strategy.

Quite often, complex technical tasks are better undertaken by staffs of government agencies and intricate issues of collective organization are more competently dealt by CSOs, though this is not always the case. In the Laos water supply project, for instance, a government agency, the National Center for Environmental Health and Water Supply (NEW), arranged technical and financial assistance for the project. It was implemented, however, by local organizations that were constituted by village residents. Villagers elected office-holders from among themselves, and they held these officials accountable on a day-to-day basis for all matters connected with project management.

Similarly, in the Philippines, the project for ancestral domain development was implemented by the government's Department of Environment and Natural Resources acting in coordination with community and village leaders. Resources available with the government agency, including financial and technical resources, were combined with communities' assets in the form of social capital and other locally held resources. The resulting merger of community and local government institutions has provided the residents of this area with a reliable and sustainable forum for collective decision-making.

Strategies of assistance will vary and modes of combining agency strengths will differ, however, from situation to situation. A quite considerable body of lessons and illustrations emerge from the small number of cases included within this volume. Plans and strategies represented in these cases can be adapted for use in a variety of circumstances. More lessons will result and more discussion will be generated when other persons and agencies share their experiences within the community of development professionals.

Promoting civil society solutions constitutes a relatively new response to long-standing problems of development and poverty reduction, and instructive experiences need to be shared in order to promote mutual learning among the concerned professionals. This volume of case studies is intended to serve as a step toward promoting such learning. We take this opportunity to invite analysts and practitioners to share their insights and to contribute additional cases that can form part of a continuing exercise of understanding and assisting civil society organizations.

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